

4 Kids Response to National Group Mentoring Research

The objective of this analysis is to apply the national research findings on Group Mentoring to the work 4Kids does in the school system. We believe by combining our proven SEL curriculum with the benefits of a community based group mentoring program it shows —

“The whole is greater than the sum of the parts!”

4Kids and Leadership Academy is an idea whose time has come!

P1 — Summary

Group mentoring shows that the ability to help adolescents feel safe, and grow in confidence translates to positive outcomes including, behavioral, emotional and academic. Giving youth a sense of ‘belonging’ and a sense of ‘group identity’ increases their attachment to the community leading to changes in attitude which impact their overall performance yielding greater measures of health and well-being. When the mentoring occurs in school through formalized programs with intentional opportunities for two-way interactions between the mentors and mentees or among the mentees, there is clear documentation of effectiveness.

P2 — Value of Group Mentoring

The 4Kids Leadership Academy is a mentor based program engaging an entire grade level in order to build community and student agency. Training students to realize their personal value alongside of value of others in their peer community, equipping them to take responsibility for their attitudes and actions, and to see their potential as contributors to the greater community are demonstrated outcomes. Where measures have been undertaken, decreases in behavioral referrals, student suspensions and absences have occurred. Additionally, positive gains in academic achievement are seen with notable growth in subset populations.

It is the ability to share meaningfully in a safe context that allows students a place for transparency, that facilitates personal growth while promoting ‘belonging’ and optimally informed peer support. Additionally, our outcome tracking system allows for early detection of various risks to learning or healthy development. It is especially effective as these can be recognized and referred to appropriate supports very early in a students career. Mentors serve both as supporters of kids and bridges to additional interventions.

P4 — Group mentoring capitalizes on positive potential of integrating adult mentors with peer processes

4Kids Leadership Academy is designed to accomplish this and more. Using a strategy that purposefully employs social and emotional learning (SEL) development within the curriculum 4Kids goals meet both *the original and new* CASEL standards.¹ With group mentoring, we implement authentic partnerships between families, caregivers and the community while developing the five areas of SEL competency. Additionally the curriculum develops in students, a mindset of hope, resiliency or the demonstration of

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grit and determination, and healthy habits for life. This results in well adjusted students with greater likelihood of academic success, as well the ability to apply core competency life skills that will help them succeed in life. They learn to take responsibility for their personal development while building relationships with fellow students. This then extends to their ability to foster healthy personal interactions at home and in the greater community, optimally the world at large.

P7 Conclusions

Optimally 4Kids Leadership training will expand to include touch points from grades 6 to 12 so that the habits and changes that occur will be 'life-long' changes. The opportunity for robust community involvement with youth through ongoing service initiatives designed to impact the greater community will build a culture shift not only in educational systems but in the greater community. The actualization of 'The Beloved Community' a phrase popularized by Dr, Martin King is the intended outcome.

P8 Optimizing around constraints, leads to creative solutions.

Knowing the importance of *consistency and spontaneity* the 4Kids approach responded to the schools request, creatively implementing a 3 day per week, 27 week long curriculum for 6th graders that fits well with the standard school schedule. Using a hybrid model where students work in larger groups with one to two mentors twice a week and in small group setting (1 to 4/5 ratio) once a week has helped us to effectively provide multiple types of opportunities. Applied learning opportunities offer creative hands-on challenges while a carefully sequenced curriculum takes students through a growth sequence leading them to be purposefully contributing community members. Additionally students are identified for tiered interventional support that is in addition to the classroom meetings. Ensuring consistency and stability is key to success in working with adolescents.

P8 The role of an effective mentor. Who is best?

4Kids responds to this dilemma by engaging the entire community! Our mentors range in age from 17 to in their 70's. The intent is to expose the kids to a broad range of perspectives from people with vastly different life experiences. Typical classes include all age ranges of male and female mentors. From grandparent types to college students there is a gamut of styles and experiences represented in the mentors. Optimally as we grow our work to additional grade levels, the students themselves will rise up to become 'peer mentors.' A summer camp training program for these is envisioned.

P10 Community support can supplement and augment

In a climate where families are increasingly at risk, the positive role model of a caring mentor can help compensate for troubled home situations. 4Kids mentors have been described as 'the parents of school.' In an age when kids are meant to be moving toward independence while not yet being quite prepared, supplementary adult guidance is very welcomed.

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4Kids mentors are trained to be people who help kids understand what they need to know and might not understand. They are good listeners asking the right questions so the answers to life's challenges are being worked out by kids with a mentor looking on. Small group peer to peer conversations taking place under the guidance of an adult is optimal for growing adolescents.

Trained to be non-judgmental in their responses, the mentors invite kids to become critical thinkers setting life goals and expectations for themselves. By intentionally becoming a community of support for all students, it leads everyone to a feeling of safety and belonging even in the face of difficult circumstances at home.

P10 Mentor characteristics

Screening for mentors with healthy levels of inner strength and wisdom is important as we seek to model what we are anticipating all in our community to become. Holistic development of our Best-Self Potential, mind, body and spirit is encouraged. Training in empathy and intercultural sensitivity is key to ensuring successful relationships develop. Mentors model the outcomes desired by analyzing the core content of curriculum and preparing ahead of time in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The use of mutual 'challenges' that are part of the applied learning outcomes. This fosters growth between mentors and mentees as well as self-efficacy in both groups.

P11 Optimal group size

Optimal mentor group sizes in the 4Kids model are 1 mentor to 4 or 5 students. This provides the best opportunity for kids to share and truly be heard. It builds trust between kids and adults, alongside of healthy peer relationships. In addition there is a Classroom Leader present who can co-facilitate in a small group as needed. They are there to manage engagement and be overall observers noting both progress and/or difficulties of individual students.

P11 Optimizing beneficial results – two facilitators

When mentors are present there are two 4Kids facilitators present and available to any particularly needy group, the classroom leader and the individual group mentors. Additionally the classroom school teachers are present to help facilitate. The goal is to keep watch over everyone's engagement in their small group. Occasionally as we see someone having a difficult day (either a mentor or a student) the classroom leader will intervene. This could mean they join into the group discussion or they draw a student into a one to one discussion or take them out of the setting altogether. The goal is for everyone to feel heard, loved and cared for at all times.

P12 Two types of interventional processes

Developing interpersonal skill sets that enhance an individual's ability to relate to others, both older mentors and peers is important in building effective citizens. The personal

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validation trained through the 4Kids curriculum builds both self esteem and inter-personal communication skills. Developing the ability to interact in diverse community is key to thriving in today's intercultural world. We are intentional about developing these skills. Likewise it is important that kids be trained to think and analyze various situations in order to build their social-cognitive skills. Small group discussions around a carefully formatted curriculum allow for all of this to take place. Our goal is to ensure all kids are being coached to grow as healthy balanced thinkers recognizing our sometimes innate tendency toward bias and self-promotion. We want to see everyone 'build the other up' as they concentrate on becoming their best at the same time! Rising up to higher potential together is our goal

P12 Maximizing positive effects

Thinking about your own growth experience helps us see we learn both from good and bad examples. However to move forward, a positive purposeful community surrounding you especially in the adolescent age group is essential!

Group management is accomplished by front end observations, and review of student self-report assessments. Effort is made to keep kids with observable behavioral problems separated but yet an integral part of the greater student community. This ensures equal opportunity and equal expectations. We find students rise up to become leaders when given the opportunity from a community mentor who is not aware of their previous behavioral histories and background.

P12 Young people are faced with two challenges; independence and community

Adolescents face multiple challenges in their development. Today this is made more difficult by the external pressures that can trip us up in culture. Poor examples surround us, social media portrays them as inviting. There is a compelling call to choices that are counter-productive in the long run. Establishing boundaries and norms for oneself is more difficult than ever.

While kids are moving from dependence on their parents and into a life of meaningful relationships with others, local community members can model and help them build positive choice making strategies and like-minded peer networks. Group mentoring is one of the most effective ways to ensure healthy development of youth in all circumstances.

Our curriculum is purposeful to cause contemplation of how to frame one's life choices while modeling appreciation for others to do the same. With a structure based on our nations foundational truths of Life, Liberty, Justice, Safety and Happiness for all, we help kids to have common goals with an appreciation for the individual's right to choose their own life path. The tension between living with individual freedom and building a healthy, safe community for all is a paradox we tackle directly.

P13 Curriculum

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The 4Kids curriculum is designed to allow kids to think clearly about themselves in relationship to others and the world in general. They identify issues and role play through problems common to students. It intentionally seeks to help kids build and foster self-awareness and social awareness harnessing skills for responsible decision making, self management all while building interpersonal relationship skills.

Within small groups, mentors have the ability to allow conversations to center on the curricular topic or current presenting issues from their group as appropriate. The mix of a curricular approach that allows participant disclosure of relevant issues maximizes the outcomes. Material is relevant both to the immediate student population and the current issues of the day.

P13 Other interventions

The truth is adolescents struggle in mighty ways to feel appreciated, heard and like they belong. It is in the mentor groups that true belonging, being heard, and having the opportunity to dialogue in a safe space under supervision is accomplished. Using an SEL based curriculum with an emphasis on becoming valuable contributing citizens makes for an unusual combination of positives facilitating maximum development.

P13 Positive relationships

Important recognition should be given to a mentor's ability to speak directly to a student's value and potential when they are in a mentoring relationship. This is unlike a parent or a teacher and is regarded differently. It fosters hope and often contributes toward a decision to try harder. Our goals are to instill a Mindset of Hope, followed by skills for self developed Grit and Determination, alongside Habits and LifeSkills effective in today's climate. Belief in self and the will to apply perseverance to one's self development has a direct result in positive educational outcomes. Numerous studies prove self-efficacy leads to improved academic outcomes.

P14 Emerging evidence explains the connection to desired outcomes

Problem solving skills with direct relation to life application coupled with a clear call to be valuable as a contributing citizen are hallmarks of the curriculum and approach of 4Kids. Self-efficacy begins with belief in one's potential. As this is coupled with belief in *everyone's potential* a mutually supportive peer community results. These are core principles we embrace and instill through our mentoring.

Understanding that belonging and growing closer relationally fosters both self-efficacy and the desire to participate effectively in other aspects of life explains why our mentoring program *increases the desire to be in school and translates to better academic results*. Self-advocacy as well as peer-advocacy are strengths we seek to instill in all students.

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P23 Strengthening supports in community helps everyone

The overlapping value of relationships between mentors and mentees, peer to peer and finally mentor to mentor is critical to bridging gaps between parents, grandparents, and general community members and their resources to schools.

As we learn more about each other and the needs, we can become a mutually benefitting community.

For adults to model the expectation of being a contributing community member and growing all others in a lifestyle of service will increase the safety and well being of all. This facilitates a community care based approach to helping kids grow!

P23 Applied Research yields significant benefits

Informed by research and evidence based practices from the fields of growth mindset, behavioral skills training for schools, grit, resiliency, brain based learning and the cross section of psychological adolescent development with pubescent spirituality we have developed a unique approach to SEL training. Using community based mentoring coupled with proven methods of youth development, we see success in areas of student habit formation and general well being. This leads to success in school and in life.

Our goal is to partner with districts and schools and continue exploring how best to marry resources while meeting the needs of students, helping them to develop and thrive holistically. Believing the trust resultant through mentoring provides early identification of many issues that unheeded develop on into major mental health crisis, we are proactively intervening to build bridges to a bright future.

P23 Partnering with professionals

Partnerships with professionals in fields of psychology, education, adolescent development, through several universities has allowed us to arrive at a unique curriculum particularly suited to this day. Realizing youth trauma, and growing mental health needs are just two of the realities facing our communities, becoming an informed bridging partnership is our goal.

P24 The infusion of evidence based educational interventions is key for today

For more information on this innovative approach this may be helpful resources. Newest research suggests that trained mentors can serve in a quasi professional role like a para-professional as far mental health is concerned.

[Mentoring experts Liz Raposa and Jean Rhodes](#)

P24 Program planning key, yet embracing flexibility matters

The perfect blend between a planned sequenced curriculum and an approach that adapts to the changing environment is key. Mentors trained to realize when a detour in small group discussion is needed to accommodate someone's individual needs is critical. In particularly difficult situations, immediate intervention — in cooperation with

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the counseling staff at school is the outcome. This level of responsiveness is invaluable in creating trust and a caring atmosphere for growth!

P24 Group mentoring and ideal size groups

4Kids mentors meet weekly with kids for 24 weeks over the course of a school year. Typically over this period of time, the child will have two different group mentors. The group size strives to be a 1 to 4/5 ratio so that there is comfort in the size of the peer to peer relationships. Depending on need there may be other activities offered, sometimes to the whole community. Sometime to more at risk students group. Discussion and collaboration with the school team typically brings the best experience to all.

P26 Research based tracking

Optimally tracking students through graduation and providing multiple touch points with the core content will become a component of our work. Currently we are establishing a research relationship in partnership with the University of Kentucky.

With national research suggesting the viability of mental health interventions will be perhaps be best accomplished through trained mentors in school, our work appears to be at the launch point of an evolution in group based mentoring.

P26/27 Group Mentoring — a source of safety and belonging!

Creating a safe place within a school, yet beyond its normal structure allows for a mentoring relationship with a 'non-authoritarian' adult figure to facilitate student growth. By negating the 'power differentials' that naturally occur in school between students and their 'authorities' while maintaining a clear expectation of respectful behavior 4Kids delivers the benefit needed for maturing kids! The ability for kids to freely offer self disclosure to their peers helps them gain a greater confidence in their abilities to speak and interact with others. The intent is that this provides the perfect environment for SEL initiatives to take root.

A true sense of belonging — of becoming part of a greater whole — is the specific goal and outcome of the 4Kids curriculum.

P27 If all we accomplished was connecting kids it would be worth it — but there is so much more!

Here is a link to an overview of our work:

[The 4Kids Story](#)

In the following videos the kids themselves describe their learning and the value of mentors:

[Why Leadership Academy is Important.](#)
[Why Mentors are Important!](#)

¹ The current CASEL-SEL framework is posted on the 4Kids website. [LINK](#)