Group Mentoring: A Strategy for Attaining Positive Youth Development

Dr. Kenneth Jones

University of Kentucky
Cooperative Extension Service
College of Agriculture Food and Environment

Introduction

A key component to personal development is for youth to have positive, on-going relationships with adults.

These experiences can:

- Create a naturally-occurring atmosphere where youth can identify and bond with adults;

- Allow adults to play a role in creating an environment that fosters engagement in learning;

- Provide opportunities for youth to develop new skills in and out of school.

Goals for the Day/Objectives

- Understanding the Role of Mentoring as a Youth-Adult Relationship
- Capacity-building strategies for Mentoring
- Best practices for effective programming

Positive Youth Development:
What are the Necessary Resources?

- Affirming relationships

- Positive peers

- Opportunities for skill development

- Services (within schools/communities)

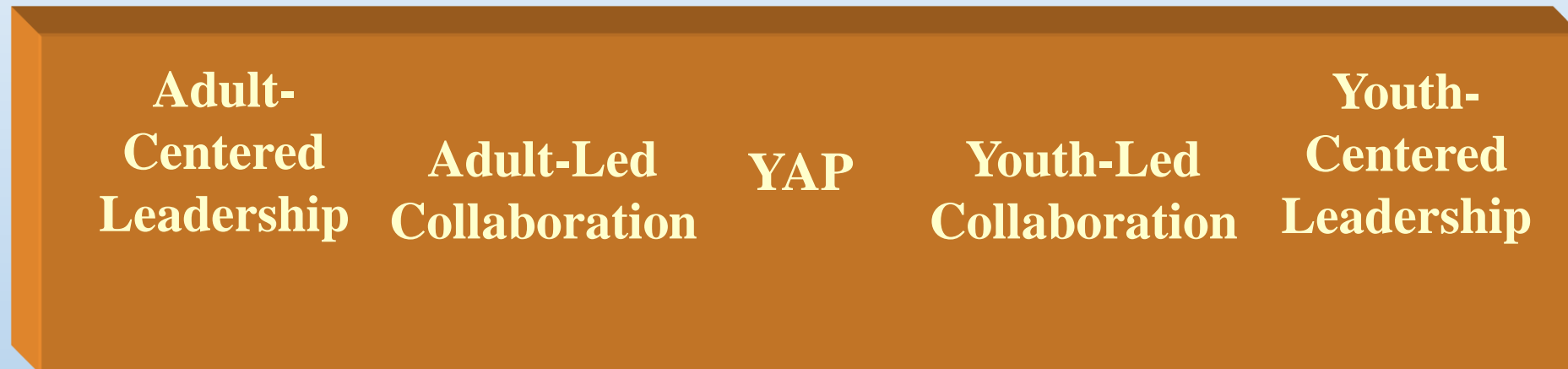- Support & support systems

- CARING ADULTS

Background

- According to the America's Promise Voices Study (2005), one in four youth indicated not having enough caring adults (parents, coaches, teachers, etc.) in their lives.

- Mentoring interventions have provided evidence in promoting academic success (Nunez, et al., 2013; Rhodes, 2008).

Background

- Mentoring approaches should meet the needs of both youth and adults, while assuring safety and positive outcomes (Mentor, 2015).

- Attracting and engaging appropriate target audiences whose skills and motivations best match the goals and structure of the program is key (Mentor, 2015)

Continuum of
Youth-Adult Relationships

Adult-Driven ←——————————————→ Youth-Driven

Adult-Centered Leadership | **Adult-Led Collaboration** | **YAP** | **Youth-Led Collaboration** | **Youth-Centered Leadership**

Source:
Jones, K.R. & Perkins, D.F. (2005). Determining the quality of youth-adult relationships within community-based youth programs. *Journal of Extension*, 43(5).

QUESTION

How would you classify mentoring?

- ❑ Adult- Centered Leadership
- ❑ Adult-Led Collaboration
- ❑ Youth-Adult Partnership
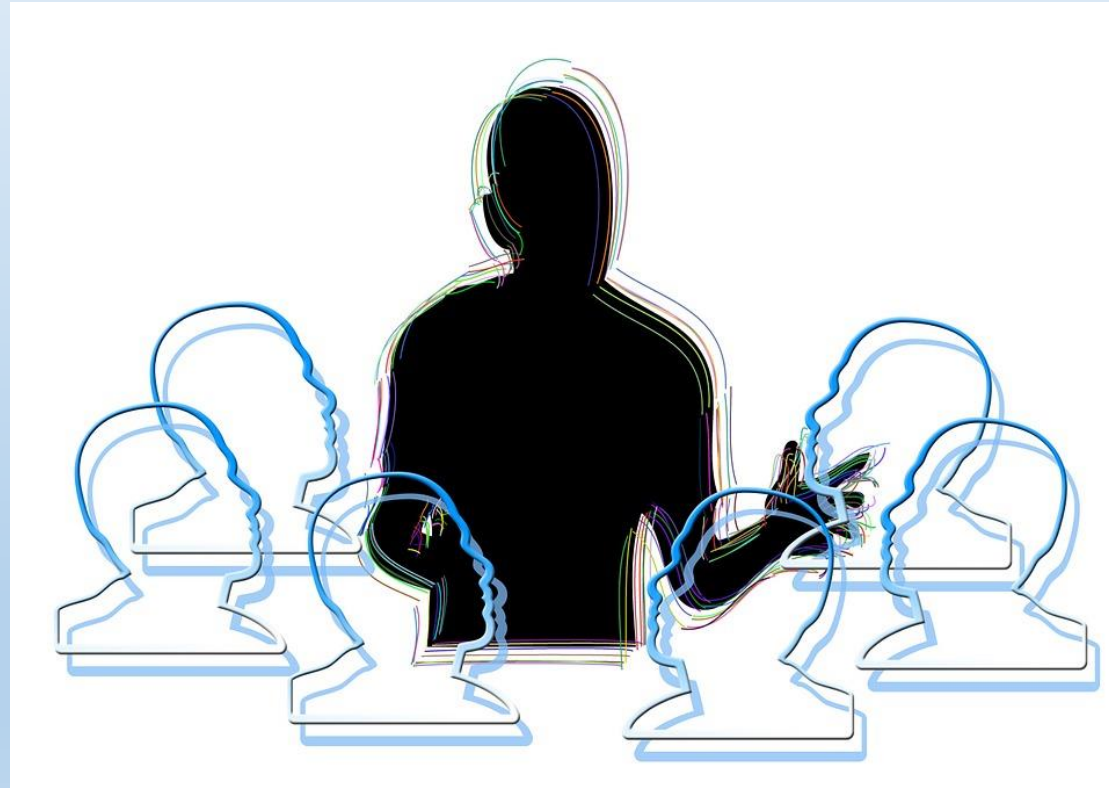- ❑ Youth-Led Collaboration
- ❑ Youth-Centered Leadership

Types of Mentoring Models

- One-on-One
- Group
- Team mentoring
- Peer mentoring
- Online mentoring
- Site-based
- Community based

The Program
Reading Writing & Rewards

Purpose and Goals

The goals of this project were to:

1. Determine the impact of a group mentoring program on the academic progress of elementary school students.

2. Examine how participation in a group mentoring program impacts students' attitudes toward school.

3. Assess the benefits youth receive from interacting with positive adult mentors.

The Issues at Hand...

- Limited flexibility

- Limited number of adults serving as mentors

- Few Resources

- Community Partners with vested interests

- Youth in need of adult support

Methodology

Selection of Participants

<u>Youth Participants</u>

- A purposive sample of fourth and fifth grade students
- Identified by school officials (i.e., teachers, administration)
- About 75% were academically at-risk
- Parental permission required to participate

Methodology

**Selection of Participants**

Adult Participants (Mentors)

- A total of 32 mentors participated over the course of three (3) years
- Screening – Public School Background checks
- Attending orientation and training
- Asked to commit for 1 year; about 30% were involved all three years

Methodology

Instrumentation
- Surveys
- Focus group
- Semi-structured interviews with school personnel

Maximum Number of students= 79
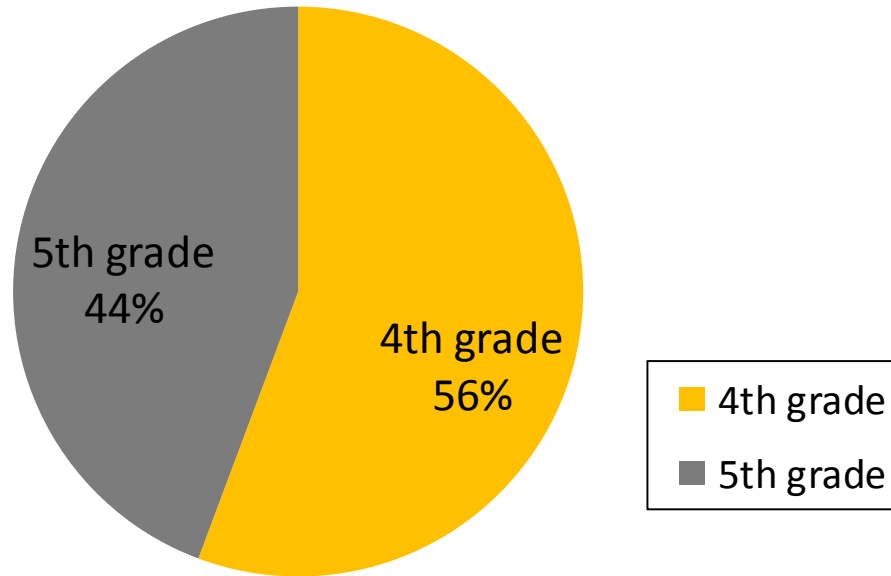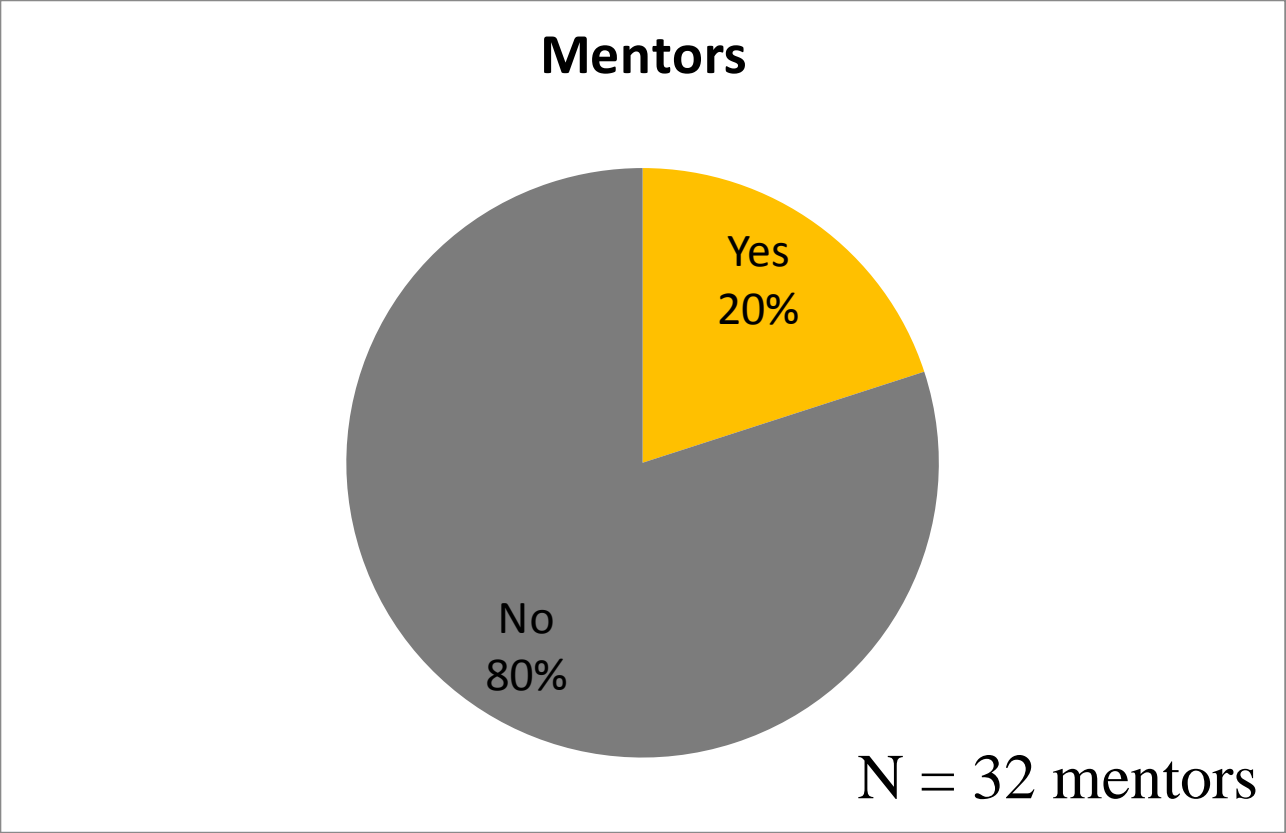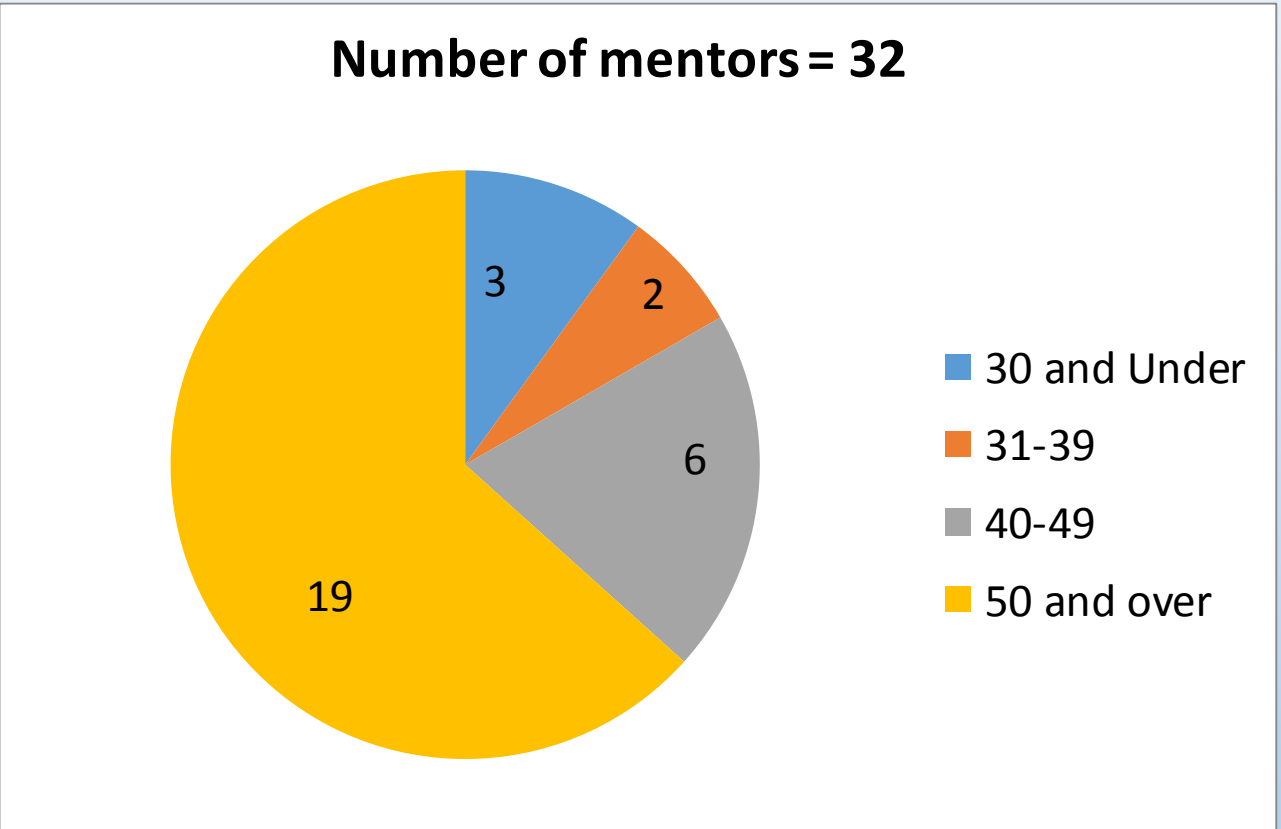

2012-2015

Gender
35 female
44 male

Race/Ethnicity
46 Black
23 White
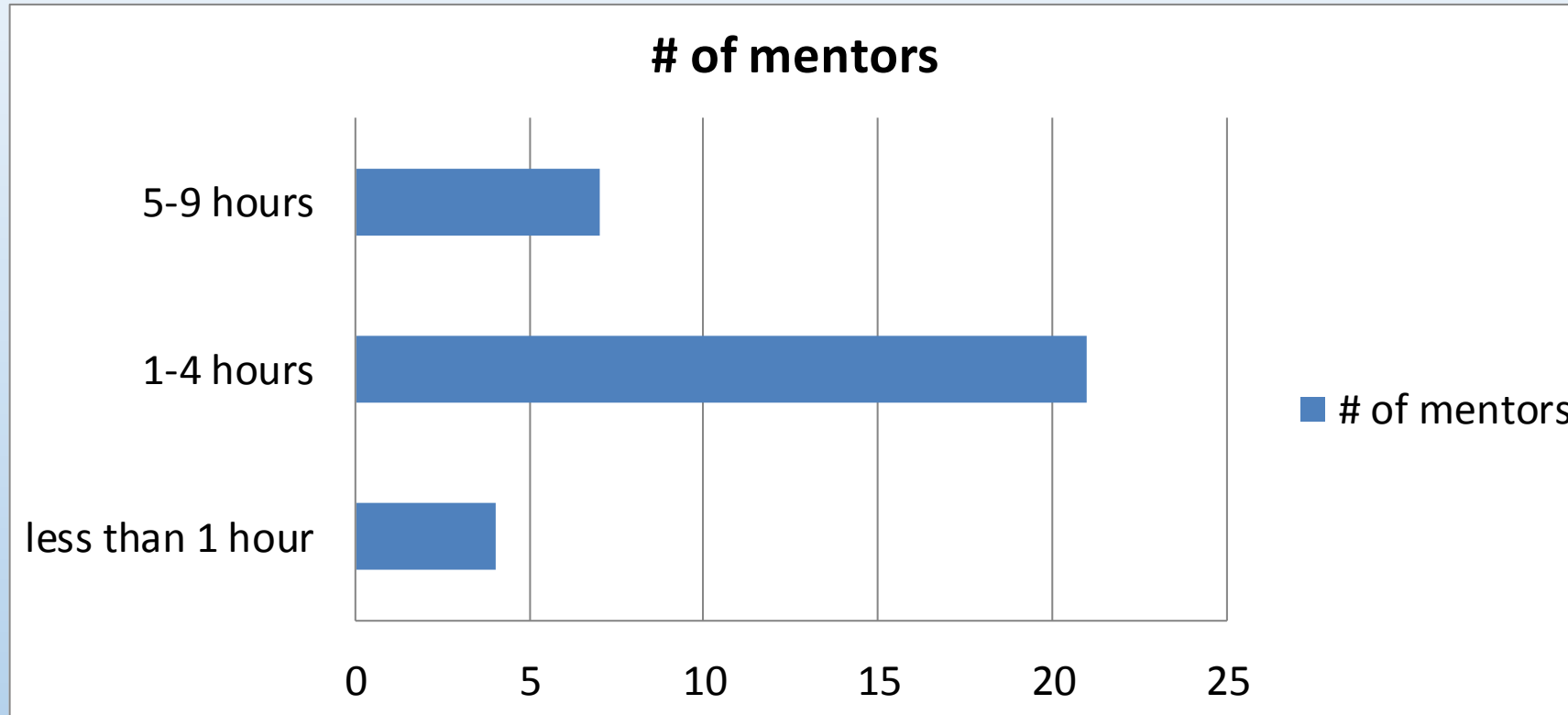1 American Indian
9 Other
14 Hispanic

First time serving as mentors

Mentors

Yes
20%

No
80%

N = 32 mentors

Age Range of Mentors

Number of mentors = 32

- 3 — 30 and Under
- 2 — 31-39
- 6 — 40-49
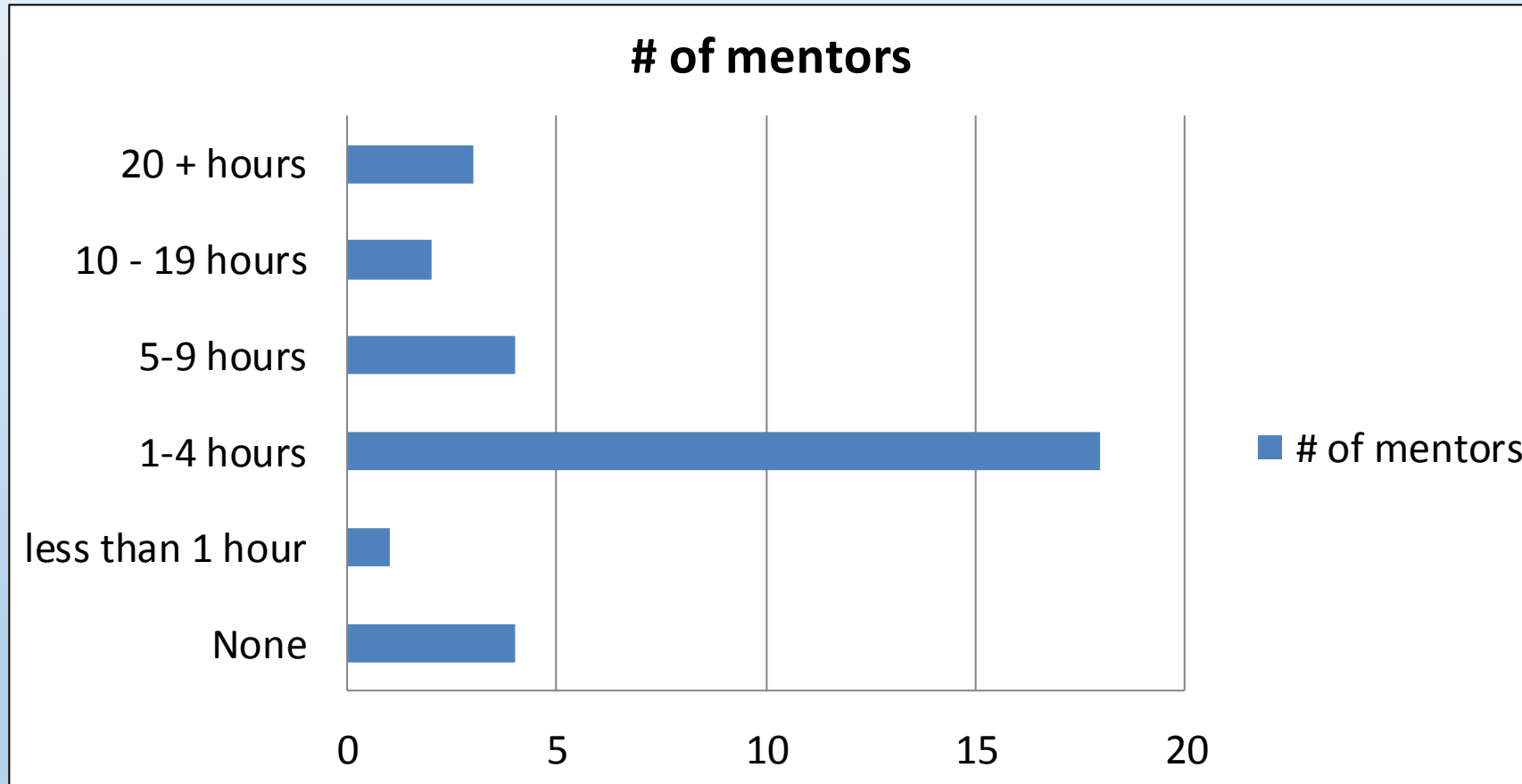- 19 — 50 and over

Number of hours mentors volunteer with RWR per month

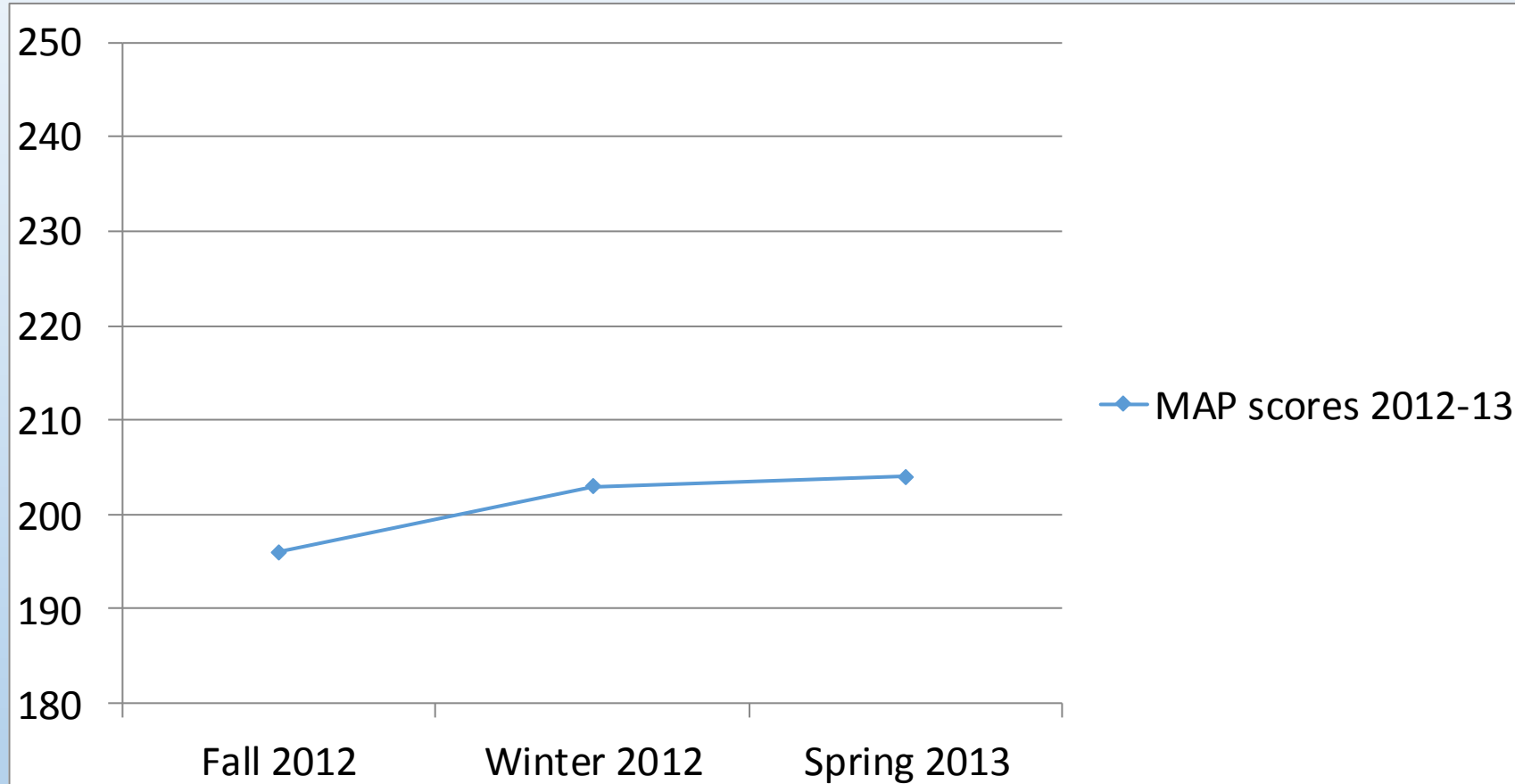# Number of hours mentors volunteer for other community events/programs per month

Youth Responses – Focus Group

- "Being smart is cool" (male student)
- "….loved the mentors!" (all students agreed)
- "This program helped me like school" (male student)
- "The men took time off to work with us…they were like fathers." (male student)
- "I like reading…it helps me imagine things." (female student)
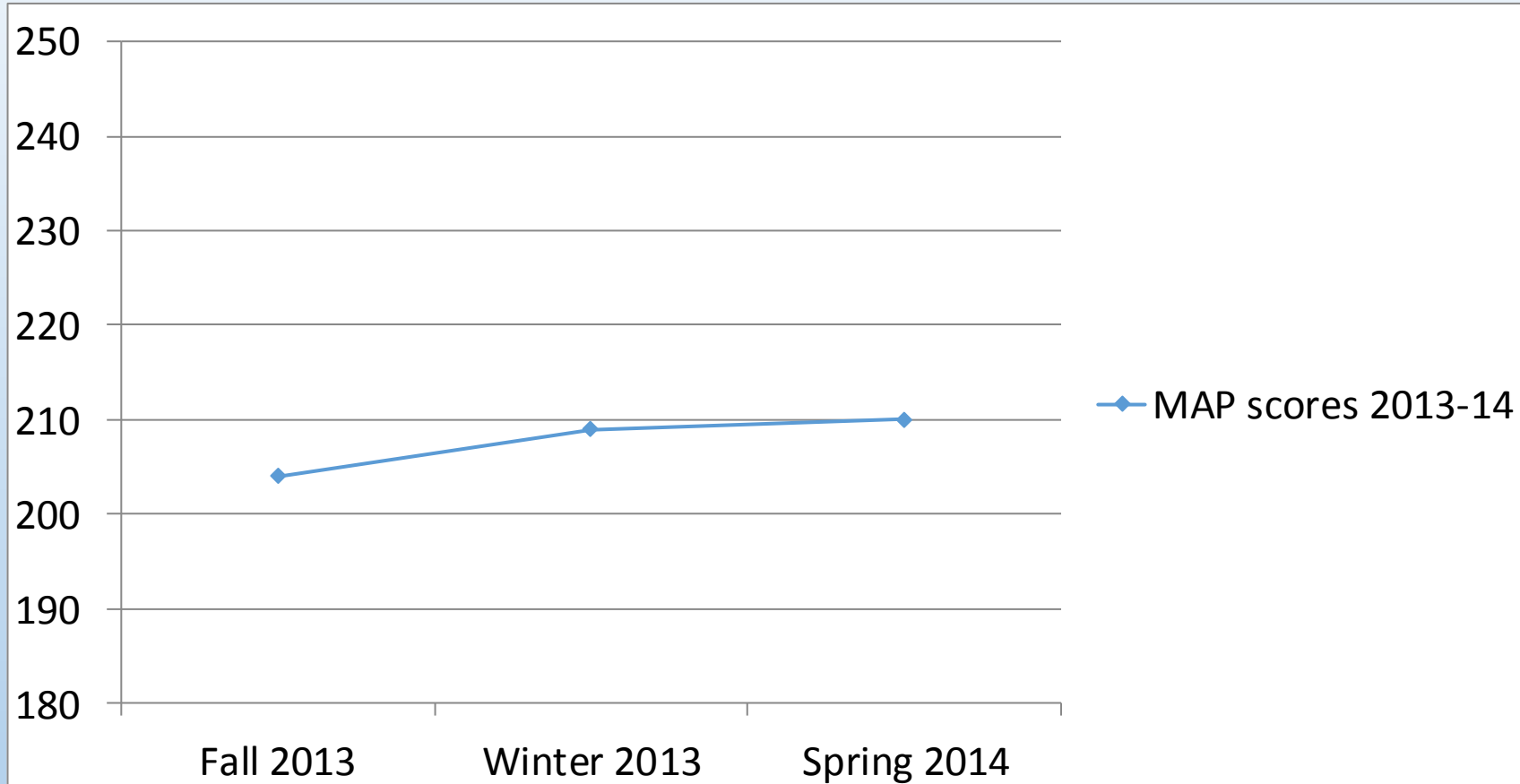- "I can learn about what I want to be." (male student)

Themes generated from youth focus group discussion

- increased interest in school
- Affinity towards reading
- Relationship with mentors
- Value of the future/careers
- Desire to become better students
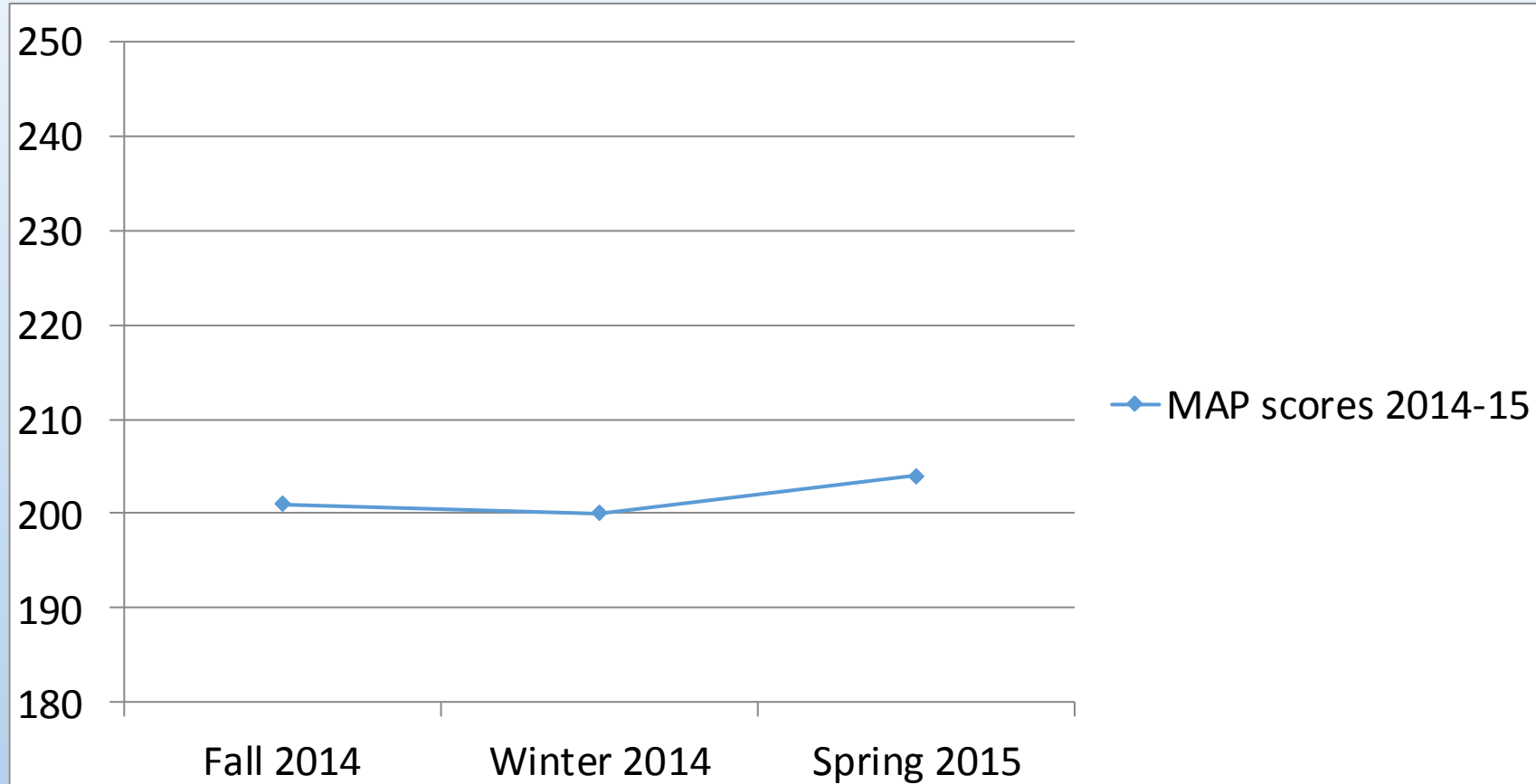
Student Test Scores 2012-13

Motivation for Adult Mentors

- "I want to help students understand and value the importance of reading and writing and be there to support the students in their educational pursuits."

- "It's important to give back to the community and help close the achievement gap."

- "This is a way for me to spend time with kids in need."

- "I believe in helping students to reach higher goals."

- "I benefited from caring adults as a youth."

Common Themes from Mentor Responses

- Opportunity to influence youth
- Community engagement
- Educational value
- Sense of Pride

Summary of Group Mentoring Project

- Amount of books read increased

- 50% of students increased their reading - from 1 book per month to 1 book per week

- Mentors formed relationships that extended beyond the literacy program

- Teachers reported improved behavior of participants

Benchmarks Achieved Through Group Mentoring

- Minimum frequency of at least twice per month
- Process in initiating the mentor-mentee relationship
- Monitoring
- Support
- Closure

Summary

Benefits of the group mentoring model included:

- Less reliance on a significant number of mentors
- Students interacting with several positive adults during the program
- Mentors connecting with/getting to know a number of youth
- Students increased program participation
- Encouraged positive peer interactions (healthy competition)
- Although youth perceptions of academics (reading, writing) remained average at best, participating in the mentoring program aided youth in becoming more positive towards school

Group Mentoring Benefits

- May increase the retention rate of quality mentors
- Youth can help recognize top mentors
- Ideal for episodic volunteers who are looking to give back
- Minimize paperwork
- Useful for targeting specific groups (youth at academic risk, youth with incarcerated parents)
- Minimize transportation issues
- Promotes instrumental relationship (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010)

Conclusion

- Mentors indicated a comfort level with the group mentoring approach

- Adults were inspired to serve as mentors primarily through intrinsic motivation
  - A desire to give back what was given to them
  - Committed to helping youth reach their goals
  - Obligation to the community service

Promising Practices and Best Strategies

- Offer adequate training for mentors
- Offer orientation for mentees and parents
- Consider group mentoring as part of a larger more comprehensive program
- Acknowledge exceptional mentors and mentees
- Don't disqualify mentors based on 1-on-1 match credentials; Same rules for 1-on-1 mentoring may not apply – college students or transient (Episodic) volunteers may work out fine in this capacity
- Consider groups in need and not just individual youth
- Make instructional relations a part of the process
- Aim for Youth-Adult Partnerships, but be content with a positive relationship

Recommendations

- Continue to enhance mentoring programs by:
    - Being creative in the recruitment of mentors and mentees
    - Provide opportunities that are suitable for mentors

- Generate more evidence on ways to intentionally develop intimate, closer bonds that are found in one-on-one relationships.

- Cost benefit analysis of group mentoring programs must be more closely examined