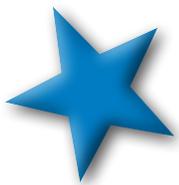
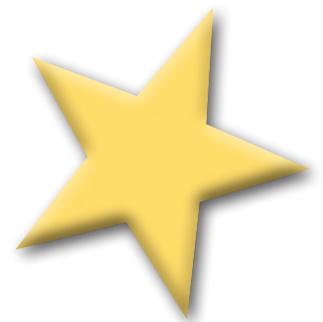




Monica Christy, eighth grade science teacher, discusses Zach's progress and ways to improve his grades during an individual mentoring session.



Partnership for Progress



BY DARYL SIMON

NOW IN ITS SEVENTH YEAR, Take Two, Own Two: Teacher to Student Mentoring at Shue-Medill Middle School in Newark is showing how a regularly scheduled mentoring program can remarkably transform the academic performance of at-risk students.

Take Two, Own Two is a teacher-student mentorship program designed to make high-risk students feel more at home in the classroom by intervening behaviorally and academically. The guiding idea behind the program is that when students have an environment that is inviting, encouraging, welcoming, and comforting, they will achieve higher academic success.

Because of innovation, passion, uniqueness, and strength of the program, Take Two, Own Two has been named a 2017 Superstar in Education.

Approaches like Take Two, Own Two are important because the more time students are in the classroom, the better the learning outcomes will be. In schools that have high rates of behavior referrals, student performance rates decline. The Shue-Medill Middle School staff noticed high

referral rates in 2010, and decided action was necessary; thus Take Two, Own Two was born. This program is designed to combat high referral rates by pairing individual teachers or faculty with two students for the course of a school year. These connections add to a student's sense of belonging, and increases their desire to be in school and achieve success.

Since the program's inception, over 500 students have been mentored by Shue-Medill teachers. The results of the program are astonishing. The data collected has shown behavioral referral numbers decreasing over time, as well as state standardized testing scores for reading and math indicating visible growth. Shue-Medill has had a reduction in suspension rates overall since the implementation of the Take Two, Own Two program. This reflects suspensions schoolwide, not just those for students participating in the program, proving that students in the program are making a positive impact on overall school climate.

The mentorship program first identifies high risk students. Faculty members then select students who are in their classes with whom they currently

Superstars in Education

have, or are willing to develop, a relationship. The teacher then meets with their mentee to set up meeting times, goals, and incentives for achieving set goals, such as reward certificates and positive phone calls home. Depending on the level of need, students and teachers meet daily or weekly to go over behavior, academics, and/or attendance. The program provides resources to participating teachers and faculty to help them achieve success with their mentees. Suggested activities to complete with students include goal setting, lunch breaks together, playing ball, practicing study skills, and tutoring.

Mentee Jakir Graves says, "When I didn't have a mentor, I was doing really poorly. Last year, I had 24 misbehavior referrals. This year I have four. My mentor helps me go over my grades and stay focused. Having a mentor gives me a safe place."

What makes this initiative special, according to RTI Coordinator Dr. Christina James, is how the program focuses on student advocacy and social/emotional learning, which then leads to more attention on academic improvement. "Many students come to school every day with a back story that interferes with their learning and they need to be taught the skills to manage their anxieties, fears, etc.," she says.



Eighth grade English teacher, Sara DeFlaviis, spends time with Nyghee in the library at Shue-Medill School.

When asked about the program, over 80% of students surveyed in 2015 responded that they would want to continue participation in the program. Additionally, over 80% of students surveyed that same year believed that the point card, an element of the program to help track progress and success, was helpful to control behavior in the classroom.

Of all of the standards of measurement observed, the impact on student academic success is the most impressive. Social and emotional skills improved upon through this program are fundamental to access academic information and build on classroom performance. Students learn to use social and emotional learning to access curriculum and standards, then achieve success, both behaviorally and academically, in the classroom.

When asked how it feels to be named a 2017 Superstar in Education, Dr. Christina James says, "Shue is honored to have won this prestigious award. Our program is making a difference and we hope this award helps us spread what we are doing. Every student is one caring adult away from success, and this program shows that!" ■

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