

Community Mentoring Program

*Watkins Mill Elementary School
Montgomery Village, Maryland*

Watkins Mill Elementary School forged an alliance with Enterprise Rent-A-Car and the National Association of Security Dealers (NASD) to match mentors with teacher-identified students. Including community members, 13 adults worked with 35 students on reading-comprehension strategies and social skills. These partnerships strengthened the school's bond with the community and gave the students involved valuable interactions with caring adults.

Through team meetings, teachers identified the students who would benefit most from the program and requested parental consent for student participation. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) chair contacted the businesses to meet with representatives and identify potential mentors. The businesses encouraged their employees to spend time mentoring the students. In addition to the academic benefits, the mentoring program gave students the opportunity to talk to adults about their concerns, hopes, and dreams.

The ATP trained the mentors. This process included setting up a schedule, establishing office procedures for security purposes, and providing copies of the *Montgomery County Public Schools Mentor Handbook*. ATP members highlighted important points in the handbook and distributed general reading comprehension quizzes along with children's magazines to initiate reading comprehension activities and stimulate discussion.

As a result of the mentoring program, teachers noticed that the students used read-

ing strategies to improve their comprehension. Parents appreciated the adult interactions available to their children, and the students looked forward to time with their mentors. One parent reported, "My son gets so excited when he knows his mentor is coming. He says they have fun together." "It's cool when she comes. She reads to us and we talk about what she's read. It's fun!" said one student. Another student explained, "My mentor reads to us when we eat lunch and we talk a lot. It's great to have her to talk to." The mentors also found their interactions with the students enjoyable, particularly seeing increases in students' self-esteem.

Watkins Mill plans to expand the Community Mentoring Program by extending the 30-minute sessions to 60 minutes and by adding more mentors so that greater numbers of students can be part of smaller groups.

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