

What is the community challenge?

A large and growing body of research shows that relationships between adults and youth, such as those formed in mentoring programs, can improve youth's odds of success.

What is the promising solution?

The iMentor program creates strong relationships between low-income youth and college-educated mentors to help students develop the mindset, skills, and knowledge necessary to succeed in college. The program has four key activities: (1) matching mentees and mentors, utilizing an algorithm that uses shared interests and gender as match determinates; (2) supporting mentee-mentor pairs using a case management model; (3) teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills; and (4) providing mentees and mentors opportunities to interact.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: College Ready

Grantee: New Profit

Subgrantee: iMentor

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Low-income high-school youth

Community Served: New York City

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of iMentor's College Ready Program by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools began in 2012 and finished reporting in 2018. This mixed-methods evaluation examines the College Ready Program's impact on a variety of outcomes at the end of students' scheduled 10th grade year, and updates previous analyses of the program's implementation in eight New York City high schools.

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of SIF, iMentor engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate its College Ready program. The Research Alliance for New York City Schools conducted an implementation and impact evaluation of College Ready to assess its impact on a variety of outcomes at the end of students' scheduled 10th grade year. This report also updates previous analyses of the program's implementation in eight New York City high schools. Main findings include the following:

- Researchers observed small, significant, positive effects on a few student outcomes most closely tied to iMentor's 10th-grade programming, such as developing a resume, researching career paths, and planning to attend college, as well as critical thinking and internal resilience ($p < 0.05$ in all cases).
- The iMentor College Ready Program does not appear to improve 10th graders' academic performance or school attendance, which researchers indicate is reasonable, considering the relatively small impacts uncovered for the less distal outcomes discussed in the previous bullet.
- Students reported relatively high levels of closeness with their mentor, and many of the mentees who report feeling close did not meet participation goals. This may suggest relationship closeness, rather than participation in iMentor activities, is more important in achieving the program's intended outcomes.

Notes on the evaluation

The report notes that schools have struggled to meet implementation goals. While many schools were successful in matching students, others struggled with preliminary matches and with matches ending. No school met iMentor's goals for pair interaction, as measured through email exchanges and event attendance. Even so, students reported relatively high levels of closeness with their mentor, and many of the mentees who report feeling close did not meet participation goals. This may suggest relationship closeness, rather than participation in iMentor activities, is more important in achieving the program's intended outcomes. Researchers note that the impacts uncovered in this study are small and unlikely to make the kinds of changes in students' lives that iMentor aspires to. However, it is important to consider that iMentor is a four-year program, and this analysis focuses on 10th grade students, who had access to only two years of iMentor in their schools. Impacts may increase as students approach college age and become more engaged in college readiness activities.

It is also important to note that reviewers had difficulty assessing iMentor's evaluation design given that the technical appendices referenced in the report were not included. Without this information, reviewers could not determine if the study adequately addressed threats to internal validity and this led to the preliminary level of evidence determination.

How is iMentor using the evaluation findings to improve?

Next year, iMentor will analyze the College Ready program's impacts on 11th graders. For iMentor, 11th grade marks a shift toward more college-going activities, which may allow evaluators to uncover stronger program impacts. Based on the results of the current evaluation, researchers also plan to continue investigating the role of relationships in attaining positive outcomes; and they will assess new potential areas of impact, including eventually examining iMentor's effect on high school graduation and college enrollment.



Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Designs: Comparative interrupted time series design (CITS) to assess school-level differences between treatment and comparison schools, and a "lagged cohort" research design to assess student-level differences between treatment and comparison students within the treatment schools.

Study Population: Low income high school youth

Independent Evaluator: Research Alliance for New York City Schools

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.