

The Seedling Mentor Program

2023 – 2024



AUTHOR

Karen Looby, PhD

AN EXTERNAL PROGRAM EVALUATION
REPORT COMMISSIONED TO MEET
REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR



AUTHOR

Dr. Karen Looby

Researcher and Program Evaluator

Dr. Karen Looby is an experienced researcher and program evaluator. She has more than 30 years of experience in public education as an elementary school teacher, administrator, professional learning facilitator, researcher, and program evaluator. She has conducted program evaluations for public school and non-profit programs focusing on student, staff, and organizational outcomes. Karen often serves in an advisory capacity for local, state, and national projects, including Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), the National Student Clearinghouse Pilot Project, the Austin Chamber's Direct to College Achievement Plan and the American Evaluation Association (AEA). She earned degrees in elementary education, curriculum and instruction, and educational administration from Texas A&M University and holds certifications for school principalship and superintendency.

Contact Karen at karen.looby@me.com or <https://www.linkedin.com/in/karen-looby-004b3772>

The Seedling Mentor Program

Program Context, 2023–2024

Even though schools appear to have returned to business as usual, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have long lasting effects on schools around the country in 2023–2024 (Lewis and Kuhfeld, 2024; Malkus, 2024; and Macias, 2024). Schools still face staffing shortages, increased student absenteeism, and higher rates of student misbehavior. Lengthy school closures and remote learning resulted in significant learning loss for many students. Disparities in access to quality education during the pandemic widened achievement gaps between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While students still work to catch up academically, they also may be recovering from the disruption to their social and emotional development.

The pandemic may have exacerbated existing challenges for children with incarcerated parents. These children who were already at higher risk for emotional and psychological difficulties faced unique hardships due to the pandemic. They encountered increased economic hardships and housing instability. They also may have experienced disrupted support services (e.g. social services and mentoring); heightened depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues; and academic setbacks, affecting their cognitive and emotional development.

This program evaluation report details the work of the Seedling Mentor Program in the 2023–2024 school year as it provided a caring mentor for children with an incarcerated parent. The context of parental incarceration along with the long-lasting effects of the pandemic should be considered in the interpretation of the evaluation findings.

About The Seedling Mentor Program

In 2005–2006, Seedling’s Mentor Program was formally conceptualized to provide support, encouragement, information, and a nonjudgmental adult for children separated from a parent because of incarceration. From the beginning, the program has been based on effective school-based mentoring research. Trained volunteer mentors committed to developing stable, long-term relationships serve as the cornerstone of this school-based mentoring program.

Research has shown the caring, consistent presence of an adult friend to be a major protective factor in building resilience among at-risk youth. These mentors not only provide encouragement to go to school but also consider choices to develop individual strengths, resilience, achievements, and hopes for the future. Most importantly, Seedling mentors provide compassion and companionship to children who are often in high-risk situations.

Seedling’s Vision

All children in Central Texas who have an incarcerated parent will have the opportunity to thrive.

Seedling’s Mission

Seedling mitigates the impact of parental incarceration on children in Central Texas through school-based mentoring.



The Seedling Program Evaluation, 2023–2024

Program evaluation is a systematic process used to assess the design, implementation, and outcomes of a program.

The evaluation process provides objective evidence that can inform decision-making; specifically, areas where a program is working well and where improvements are needed.

The evaluation explored three major questions:

1. Was the program implemented with fidelity?
2. What were the outcomes for participating mentees?
3. Did Seedling mentees experience similar or better outcomes than a matched comparison group?

Methods

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data were used in this evaluation study. Program participation, school enrollment, and mentee demographic data were used to describe the mentees. Student attendance, discipline, and survey responses also were used to determine participant outcomes. The Seedling Mentor Program served 495 mentees in the 2023–2024 school year. Academic outcome records only were available for mentees enrolled in Austin Independent School District (n=321), Del Valle Independent School District (n=56), and Hays Consolidated Independent School District (n=36). Not all mentees had all survey and/or academic outcomes data on which to report, student counts may vary throughout the analyses.

The program evaluation also used a matched comparison group design. In this approach, an additional group of students were selected for study based on similar student characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school enrollment. The comparison group provides the opportunity to examine outcomes for program participants in contrast to a comparable group who did not receive the same intervention.

Understanding Significance

When data are analyzed, researchers and stakeholders want to know if the findings are “significant.” Statistical significance calculations help quantify whether a result is likely due to chance or to some factor of interest. Various factors can influence the determination of statistical significance: sample size (i.e., how many cases were included in the analysis); variance (i.e., the spread of scores within the distribution); skewness (i.e., the degree to which scores might be clustered on one side of a central tendency and trail out); and kurtosis (i.e., the extent to which the distribution of scores departs from a bell-shaped curve). When a sample size is large, small differences can be found to be statistically significant.

Effect size may also be reported to explain the magnitude of the effect. A large effect size means that a finding has practical significance, while a small effect size indicates limited practical applications. When measuring differences in means, Cohen’s d criteria (1988) are used to determine small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large effects (0.8 or greater). Cramer’s V also is a measure of substantive significance, much like effect size, and it measures how strongly two categorical fields are associated. Cramer’s V ranges from 0 to 1. To interpret Cramer’s V, the following approach is often used: $V = [0.1, 0.3]$: small association, $V = [0.4, 0.5]$: medium association, and $V > 0.5$: large association.

Details about the program evaluation methods are provided in Appendix A.

Seedling Participants, 2023–2024

Seedling Mentor Program participation remained stable.

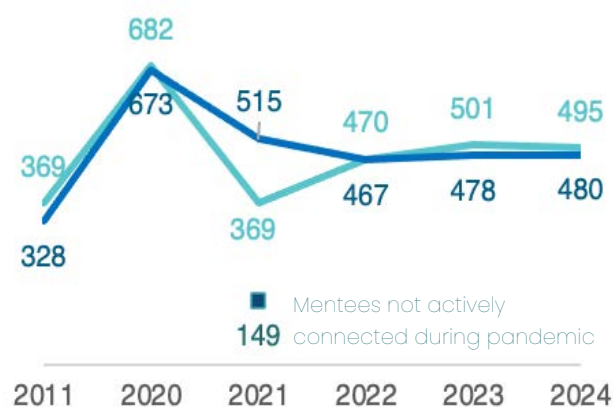
Overall, total of 495 children attending 136 schools across central Texas were served in active mentoring matches in Seedling’s Mentor Program during the school year (Figure 1).

Approximately, 31% of the mentees (n=151) were served by the program for the first time.

While most Seedling mentees (65%) attended schools in Austin ISD, the proportion of students served across other districts decreased slightly, from 39% in the 2022–2023 school year to 35% in the 2023–2024 school year (Figure 2). The Seedling Mentor Program actively made matches in 3 school districts (i.e., Austin, Del Valle, and Hays) and one charter school district (i.e., Austin Achieve). School enrollment for many participating mentees is often influenced by family pursuit of affordable housing, and ongoing mentoring support was provided for 138 (28%) mentees who relocated to 6 additional school districts and multiple charter schools across the greater Austin area (Figure 3).

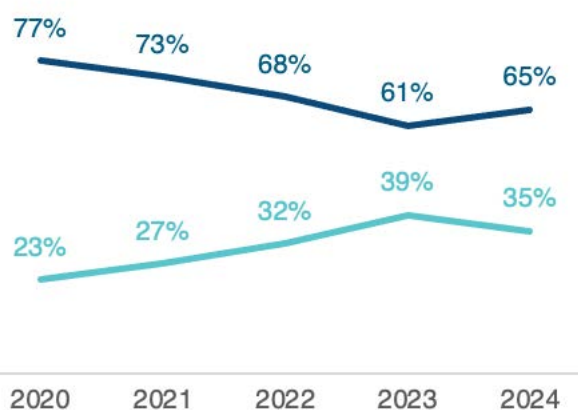
Most Seedling mentees were enrolled in elementary school in 2023–2024, and the percentages of mentees enrolled in middle schools decreased slightly compared to the prior school year (Figure 4). Eighty-three percent of mentees matched for the first time were in the elementary grade levels, and a small percentage of former mentees were served after high school graduation.

Figure 1. Seedling mentor and mentee program participation remained stable.



Sources. Seedling Mentor program records, 2011–2024.

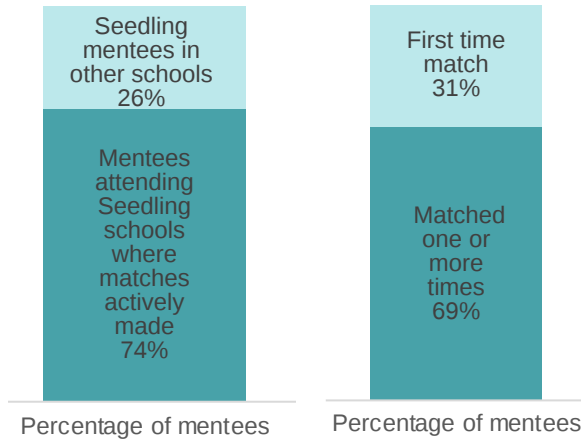
Figure 2. Most mentees were enrolled in Austin ISD than in other districts.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2011–2024.

Note. School and district enrollment was captured at the end of each school year and students may have enrolled in one or more districts during the school.

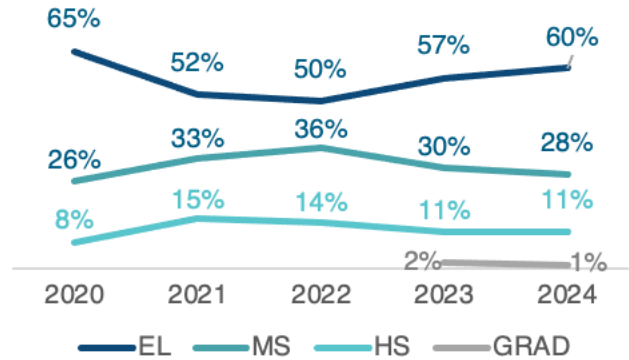
Figure 3. Most mentees were enrolled in schools where the Seedling Mentor Program actively made mentoring matches, and 31% were newly matched in 2023–2024.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2011–2024.

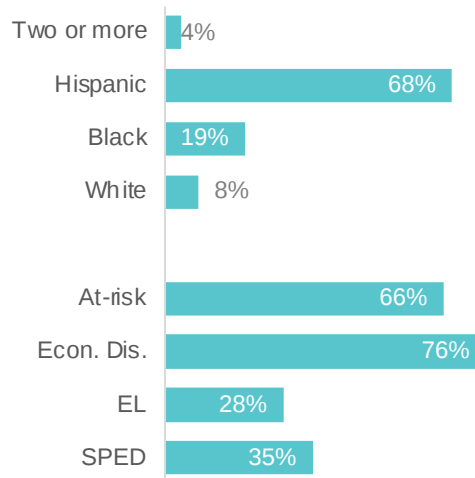
In line with prior Seedling evaluation findings and national statistics, most mentees were minority and low income (Figure 5). Approximately, 76% of Seedling mentees were categorized as economically disadvantaged, a decline from 88% in the prior year, and 66% were categorized as at-risk. The percentage of mentees categorized as economically disadvantaged is likely underreported as FitzSimons and Hayes reported a decrease in school meal participation following the loss of offering universal free meals at school during COVID-19. An at-risk designation includes factors includes parental incarceration, homelessness, health and financial issues, domestic violence and more. It is likely that parental incarceration may not be recorded by school personnel for state reporting.

Figure 4. The proportion of Seedling mentees who were enrolled in elementary school increased in the 2023–2024 school year, and percentages of mentees enrolled in middle and high schools decreased.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2023–2024.

Figure 5. Most Seedling Mentees were Hispanic and categorized as economically disadvantaged.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2023–2024.

Notes. “Economically disadvantaged” indicates the child was eligible for the federal free and reduced priced lunch program.

Seedling Mentor Program Implementation

The Seedling Mentor Program follows MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring.

This model centers program practices on research-informed standards for building and supporting quality youth mentoring programs and provides guidance for program staff, so they can ensure the quality of programming over time.

The Six Core Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™



Source. Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring, 4th Edition (2015).

Implementation Outcomes

In 2023–2024, mentor recruitment and staffing for Seedling school partners remained a concern. Approximately 47% of School Contacts were new to or temporary in their positions at Seedling schools where mentoring matches were actively created. The learning curve related to their roles and responsibilities in a new position could have impacted the discovery of potential mentees and overall support of mentoring matches. Mentor employment often impacted mentor recruitment and retention as job changes required relocation and/or changes in availability.

Even with these challenges, mentors and school contacts reported positively about the training and support they received throughout the school year. Highlights are described in the following section and detailed results from the Seedling School Contact Survey are provided in Appendix B, and the Seedling Mentor Survey results are provided in Appendix C.

The mentor recruitment process is important to the success and sustainability to the Seedling Mentor Program. A diverse pool of mentors helps

ensure that students are paired with individuals who can meet their unique needs and interests. This increases the chances of creating long-term, positive mentor-mentee relationships. Recruiting the right mentors from the start increases retention rates and provides a stable supply of mentors to account for turnover that happens over time.

"The Mentor Director was very supportive in guiding me through a few issues that popped up with my mentee. She provided recommendations and resources that helped figure out the solutions."

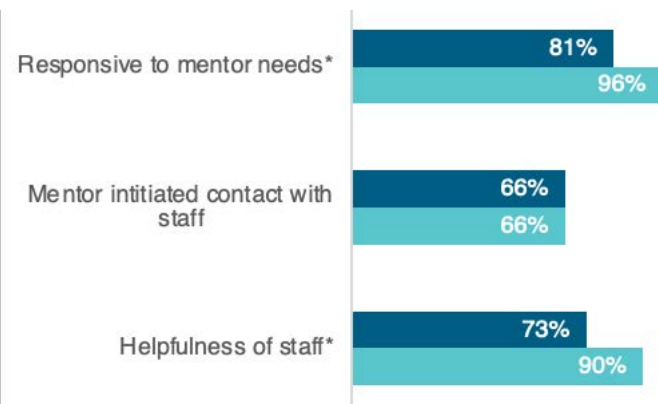
"Seedling Mentor, May 2024"

In the 2023–2024 school year, approximately 30% of Seedling mentors (n=142) were participating for the first time. New mentors completed required program orientation, specialized training sessions and were supplied with support materials developed for new mentors. New mentors responding to the mentor survey were *extremely* or *mostly satisfied* with the recruiting (93%) and orientation processes (98%). Ninety-eight percent of new mentors were *extremely* or *mostly satisfied* with the support they received from their Mentor Director as they were connected to their mentees. About 38% of the new mentors referred to their new Mentor Orientation Manuals throughout the year for support in addition to a variety of resources to use that included newsletters, articles, training sessions and online videos.

Mentor training is a vital component of school-based mentoring programs because it equips mentors with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to effectively support their mentees. Most mentors (95%) used articles and videos to support their mentoring experience, and 76% reported resources were *extremely* or *mostly helpful*. However, only 42% (n=200) of mentors attended one or more online training events on variety of topics. Limited time availability (32%) and mentor time spent away from work (31%) prevented mentors from participating.

Overall, mentor support provided by Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts was highly rated by 92% of mentors in 2023–2024 (Figure 6). Most mentors communicated regularly with their Mentor Directors and/or School Contacts. They reported Mentor Directors and School Contacts to be supportive and helpful to their mentoring experience. Seedling Mentor Directors were reported to be more helpful and responsive than School Contacts by mentors. It should be noted that the Mentor Directors were solely employed by the Seedling Mentor program without other school responsibilities competing for their time and attention.

Figure 6. Most mentors reported Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts to be supportive.



"Seedling mentors help support students throughout the school year in ways that the mental health team/social workers do not always have the ability to do "

Seedling Mentor, May 2024

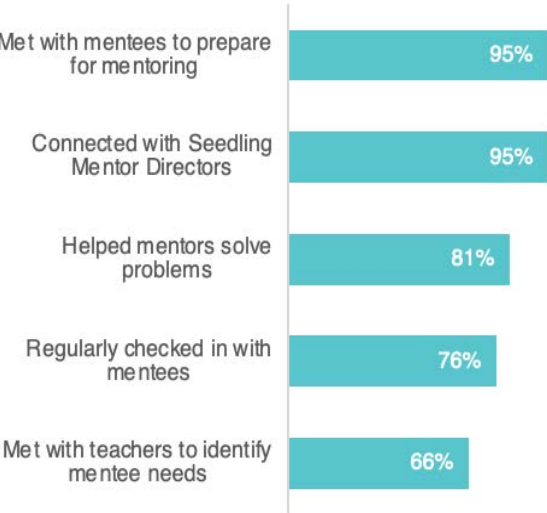
Source. Seedling Survey of Mentors, May 2024

Ongoing mentor monitoring and support ensures that mentors are well-equipped to effectively guide and support their mentees throughout the relationship and address challenges as they arise. With ongoing support, mentors are better able to understand their mentee’s background and support their individual needs. Properly supported mentors are more likely to make a positive impact on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall development.

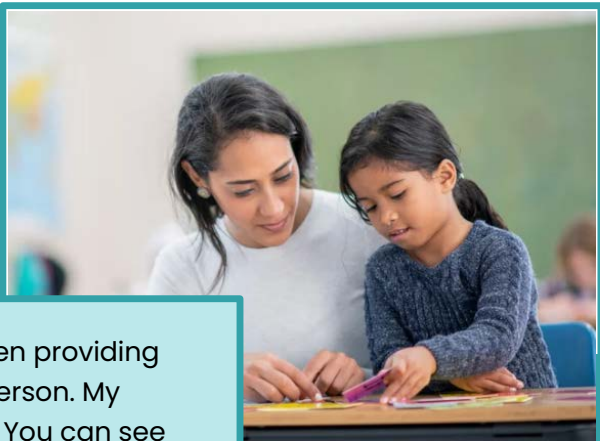
At the campus level, School Contacts provided monitoring and support for Seedling mentoring relationships. School Contacts were integral to the matching process and used their personal knowledge of the student to match them with a mentor. They also monitored the mentoring relationships and assisted mentors as needed.

Closure provided at the end of a mentoring relationship helps to ensure the participants can reflect on the experience positively (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). This is especially important for mentees who have been let down by other relationships with adults and may be susceptible to negative feelings resulting from poor relationship endings. At the time of the Mentor Survey in the spring, 82% of mentors were continuing their mentoring relationships into the next school year. For those who were not continuing the relationship, 93% of the mentors had closed the relationship.

Figure 7. School Contacts monitored mentoring relationships on their campuses in a variety of ways.



Source. Seedling Survey of Mentors, May 2024



“The most valuable mentor contribution has been providing students with a positive, reliable, caring, adult person. My students love spending time with their mentors. You can see how excited they get and how special they feel. It’s been a positive addition to my student's school experience.”

School Contact, May 2024

Seedling Mentoring Relationships

Effective practice for mentoring is expected to yield high quality relationships.



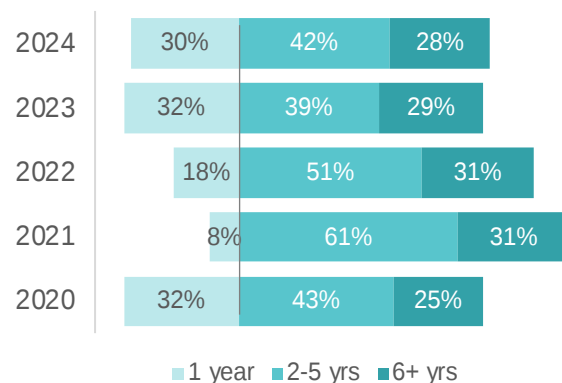
Mentoring Relationship Characteristics

Researchers (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009) have identified key characteristics of successful mentoring relationships. While mentoring relationships differ depending on the needs of the mentee, effective mentoring relationships include

- enduring relationships;
- consistent, reliable contact;
- strong emotional connections and feelings of closeness;
- a youth-driven, approach to mentoring;
- and mentors who are understanding, supportive, and who challenge their mentees.

Many Seedling Mentor Program relationships were enduring, and many mentors provided consistent, reliable support over time. In the 2023–2024 school year, Seedling staff supported 484 mentors who mentored one or more children during and/or across school years. Approximately 70% of Seedling mentors who mentored in the prior year returned to the program again in the 2023–2024 school year, an increase from 66% who returned in the 2022–2023 school year. Seedling mentors served the program for four years on average, and their years of service ranged from one to 19 years (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Most Seedling mentors mentored more than one school year.



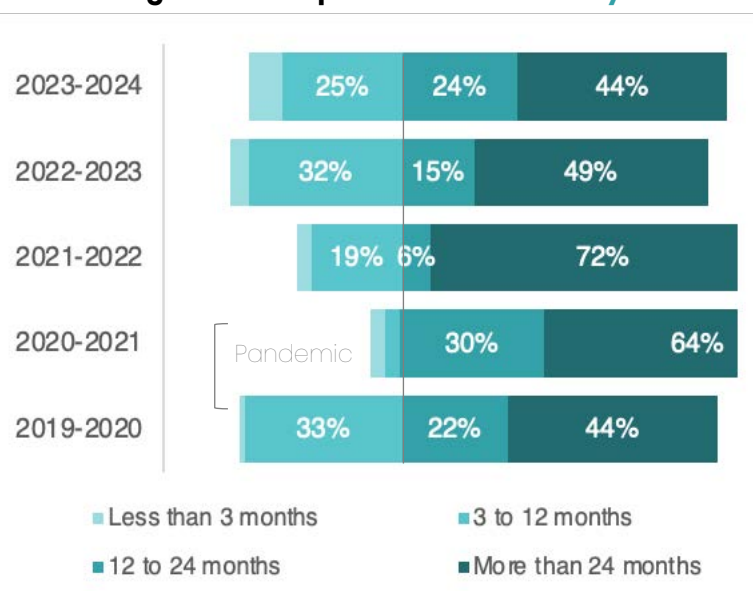
Source. Seedling Mentor Program Records, 2023–2024

The longevity of Seedling mentoring relationships is important because longer-term relationships tend to provide deeper, more meaningful support to students yielding better academic, social, and emotional development outcomes for the mentees.

On average, mentees in the 2023–2024 school year had participated in the Seedling Mentor Program for approximately three

years. They may have had one or more mentors across school years and the average length of the mentoring relationship in which a mentee and mentor were currently matched was 2 years and 1 month (Figure 9). The average Seedling match length exceeded the national mentoring relationship average of 12 months (MENTOR, 2015). Thirty percent of Seedling mentees were matched with a mentor for the first time in the 2023–2024 school year. At the end of the school year, mentoring relationship lengths ranged from one month to almost 10 years.

Figure 9. Most Seedling mentees were in mentoring relationships for more than one year.



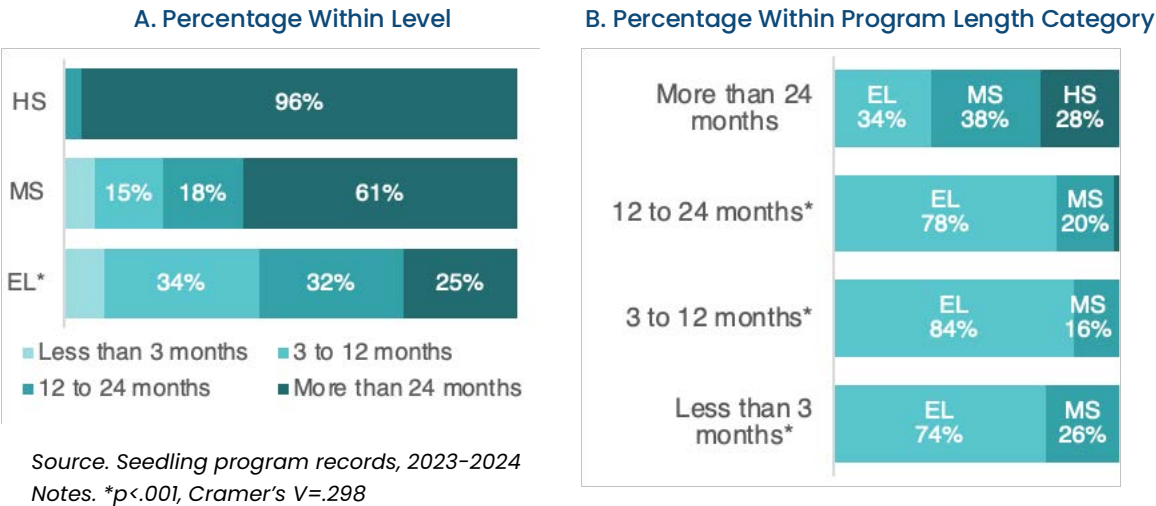
Source. Seedling program records, 2023–2024

The duration of mentoring relationships varied significantly based on school level.

Significantly more mentees in elementary school were participating in the program for the first time, or given their younger ages, were more likely not to have participated in the program for as long as their middle and high school counterparts (Figures 10 a and b). This may have been influenced by Seedling’s practice of identifying children eligible for the program as early as possible, and the interaction between caregivers and school staff may be more frequent in the earlier grades. Effect size analyses confirmed a small program effect on the length of mentoring relationships (Cramer’s $V=.298$) that is likely due to the identification of program eligibility and focus on matching new mentees with a mentor at an early age.

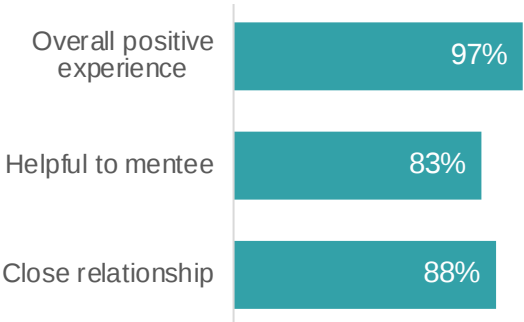
By starting early, mentoring programs can have a more profound and lasting effect on a child's personal development and academic journey (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2013; Lampley & Johnson, 2010). Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive and social development. Students who develop positive relationships with mentors are more likely to build self-confidence, feel supported, and develop key skills such as goal setting and problem-solving. Additionally, mentoring in the early grades helps build a strong foundation for future learning, essential for success in later grades. Thus, starting mentoring in early grades allows for a longer mentoring relationship, and the support over a longer period increases the likelihood of sustained positive outcomes for the child.

Figures 10A and B. Most Seedling mentees in the earlier stages of their relationships were in elementary school.



Similar to prior years, most mentors reported positive perceptions of their mentoring relationships (Figure 11). Eighty-eight percent of mentors felt they were close to their mentees, and 83% of mentors believed their time with their mentees was helpful. Ninety-seven percent of mentors rated their overall Seedling mentor experience as excellent or good

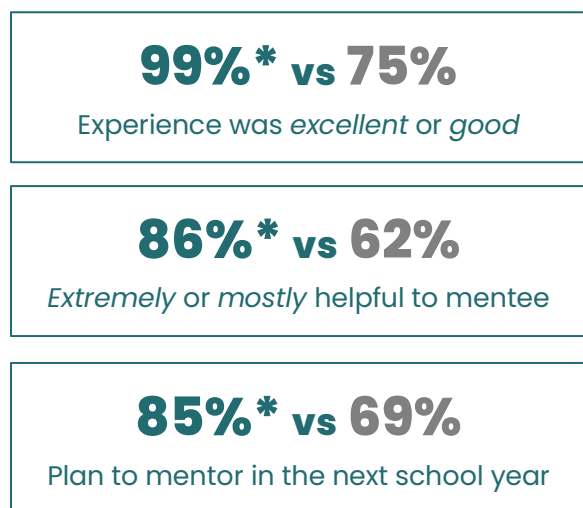
Figure 11. Most Seedling mentors felt close to their mentees and reported the relationship to be a positive experience.



Source. Seedling Mentor Survey, 2024.

Further analyses revealed mentors who met weekly with their mentees were significantly more likely to believe the mentoring experience was helpful to their mentees, highly rate the mentoring experience overall, and plan on continuing the mentoring relationship in the next school year than were those who met less frequently. The frequency of mentor meetings plays a significant role in building a strong, supportive relationship between mentor and mentee. Regular contact helps reinforce positive behaviors, provides stability, enhances school engagement, and ultimately maximizes the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.

Figure 12. Compared with mentors who met less frequently, mentors who met weekly with their mentees were significantly more likely to report ...



Source. Seedling Mentor Survey, 2023–2024
 Notes. * $p < .001$ and Cramer's $V = .196$ to $.344$.

Relationship Closeness

Relationship quality is the foundation for allowing the positive benefits of the mentoring experience to unfold, and mentee feelings of closeness and connection are critical in this process. Feelings of closeness are the underpinnings of trust, communication, and emotional support. Feelings of closeness also are thought to lead to enduring mentoring relationships that have an important and lasting impact on the mentee's personal and academic development (Herrera, et al., 2007, Shenk et. al, 2019).

Closeness in mentoring may influence mentee engagement, motivation, and resilience (Rhodes & Lowe, 2009; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). Mentees often experienced greater engagement and motivation, as they were more likely to take advice seriously, participate actively in activities, and strive to meet their goals. Closeness also fostered emotional resilience. When a student felt connected to a mentor, they were more likely to develop the skills needed to cope with setbacks, manage stress, and persevere through challenges, both academically and personally.

Mentees were more likely to experience positive academic outcomes when they reported their mentoring relationships to be at least "somewhat close" (Bayer, Grossman, and Dubois, 2015). Relationship closeness was a stronger influence than both match status and match length as predictors of academic outcomes. Academic outcomes may include school attendance, disciplinary actions, and academic achievement overall.

Seedling mentees also reported quality mentoring relationships. Overall, most Seedling mentee respondents responded positively to survey items indicating their mentoring relationships were emotionally engaging, child-focused, and satisfying (Figures 13 A and B). Seedling mentees answered similarly about whether their mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying, regardless of how long they had participated in the program. Similar proportions of elementary and secondary level mentees also reported positively about their mentoring relationships. While elementary level mentees had slightly greater average response scores across survey items than their middle and high school counterparts, there were no statistically significant differences. However, school level did have an influence of relationship quality, with a medium effect size. Mentee Survey Results are provided in Appendix E.

“My mentee sees me as a trusted confidant, but more importantly a friend. We have fun together. He’s a kid with anxiety, and he always leaves happier than when I found him, so that’s great.”

Seedling Mentor, May 2024

Figure 13 A. Seedling mentees answered similarly about whether their mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying, regardless of how long they had participated in the program.

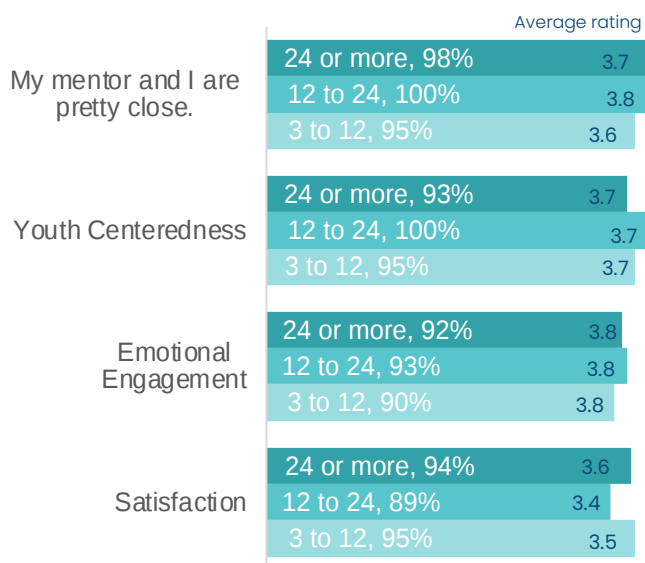
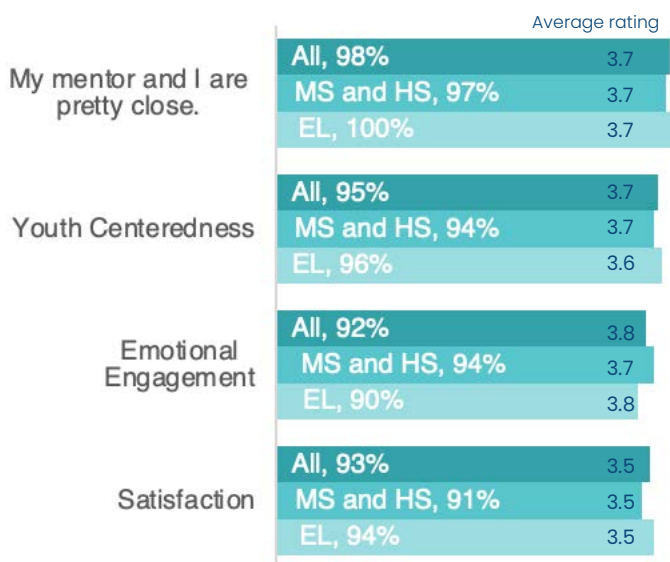


Figure 13 B. Across school levels, most Seedling mentees indicated mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2023–2024

Notes. Cohen’s $d = (.437 \text{ to } .516)$ and Cramer’s $V = (.149 \text{ to } .413)$. Average response score reflects combined ratings across questions on a 4-point scale, and scores of 3 or above are considered positive.

Primary Mentee Outcomes

Enduring and child-focused mentoring is expected to result in positive personal outcomes for mentees.



Personal development skills, persistence in school, and school engagement are particularly important for children with incarcerated parents due to the unique emotional, social, and economic hardships these children face (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012). Personal development skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and problem-solving are critical as they enable them to manage feelings of anger, sadness, or confusion in healthy ways. Developing persistence in the school setting also helps the children navigate multiple layers of adversity. Perseverance refers to continued effort and determination to reach a goal and work at it until it is accomplished. Overall school engagement is critical for children with incarcerated parents to open doors to future educational and career opportunities. By staying engaged, they increase their chances of completing high school, pursuing higher education, and finding stable employment, thus breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

It is important to note that these outcomes can differ significantly between elementary and secondary-aged students due to developmental, social, and educational factors (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Lam, Wong, Yang, & Liu, 2012). Behavioral engagement is usually stronger in elementary school, with younger students being more compliant with classroom routines. Students in middle and high school also are going through significant developmental changes and may experience increased self-awareness and peer influence. This may influence their behavioral engagement, and older students may become more defiant or disengaged from school rules.

Primary mentee outcomes were measured through the Seedling Mentee Survey. Seedling mentees responded to questions about personal development, persistence, school engagement, hope, social acceptance and resilience. More information about the Seedling Mentee Survey questions used to measure these constructs are provided in Appendix E.

Overall, most mentees positively rated their personal development skills and persistence in school (Figures 14 A and B). When examining their ratings by length of program participation and school level, mentees in these respective categories rated these survey items similarly. Mentee ratings of school engagement were lower overall. Elementary level mentees rated school engagement significantly greater than mentees in middle and high school. Analyses also indicated the presence of a medium effect size on school engagement, which is likely the influence of school level. Multi-year responses to mentee survey questions pertaining to personal development, persistence and school engagement are provided in Appendix E.

“My mentee and I have a lot of fun during our lunches together, but he never wants to talk about personal issues. The reason I know I’ve had a meaningful impact is because his teacher and counselor have told me about the positive transformation, they’ve seen in him and have attributed it to the time I spend with him.”

Seedling Mentor, May 2024

Figure 14 A. Responses to questions about school engagement were rated significantly lower by mentees participating for more than 24 months, largely due to their school level.

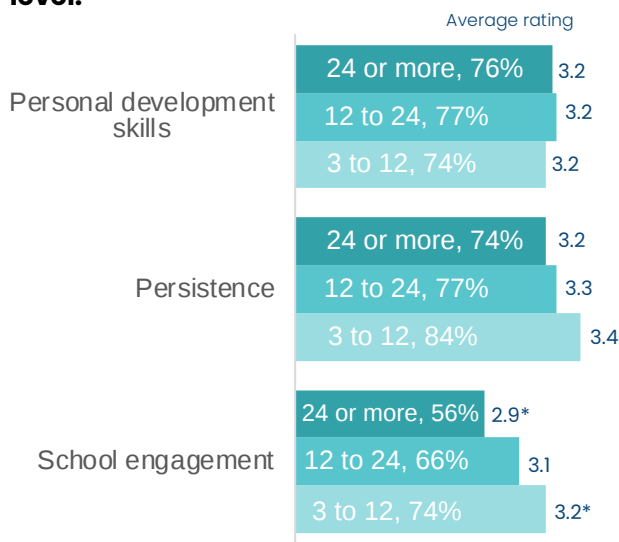
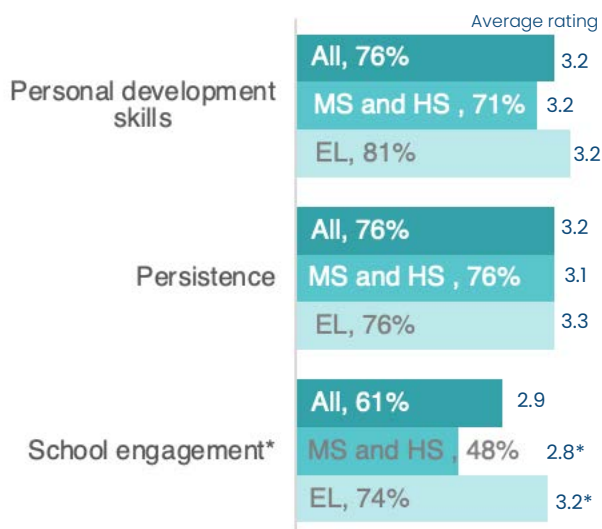


Figure 14 B. Most mentees responded positively about their personal development and persistence; however, ratings of school engagement were significantly lower for mentees in middle and high school.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2023–2024

Note. * ($p < .001$), Cohen’s $d = (.618)$, Cramer’s $V = (.357)$

Feelings of hope, social acceptance, and resilience help children of incarcerated parents overcome the psychological and social challenges that come with their unique situation, offering them pathways to thrive in the face of adversity (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Hope gives them the belief that things can get better, even in difficult situations. Children with incarcerated parents often face social stigma and isolation, which can lead to feelings of shame or rejection. When children feel accepted, they are more likely to seek help from friends, mentors, or counselors, which can mitigate feelings of isolation. Children with strong resilience (e.g. the ability to find a positive way forward when something difficult or traumatic has happened) are better equipped to handle the long-term impact of parental incarceration. They are more likely to persevere through difficult times, increasing their chances of achieving academic success, maintaining mental health, and building a stable future.

Feelings of hope, social acceptance, and resilience can differ between elementary- and secondary-level students due to their developmental stages, experiences, and social contexts. Younger children often possess a more innocent view of the world while adolescents in secondary school experience increased cognitive development and self-awareness. While not all elementary or secondary students will fit these general trends, the support and guidance of parents, teachers, and mentors can play an important role in fostering hope and helping students manage their feelings and aspirations throughout their personal and educational journey.

"My mentee loved playing games with me. I think our relationship was helpful, in that, I was an adult who was there just for that child -- to give attention and spend our time in ways they wanted to spend it."

Seedling Mentor, May 2024



"My mentee talks to me about her classes and worries about not being on grade level; she also talks to me about some of the conflicts and "drama" that she experiences with her classmates. I believe she finds it helpful to talk to an adult about these issues"

Seedling Mentor, May 2024

While many mentees highly rated their feelings about hope, social acceptance, and resilience, others were not as positive (Figures 15 A and B). Response ratings were mixed across program participation groups and school levels, but they were not found significantly different. Analyses indicated the presence of a medium effect size in each area, which was likely the influence of school level. Mentees in middle and high school had a greater range of scores on questions about hope which contributed to a lower overall average in this area. High percentages of Seedling mentees also reported positive changes in their interest in doing things, relationships with others and ability to talk about their feelings (Figure 16).

Figure 16. High percentages of Seedling mentees reported *very or some positive changes* in their *interests, relationships, and ability to talk about their feelings*.

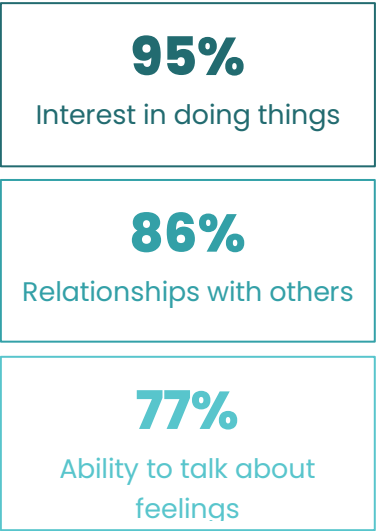


Figure 15 A. Response ratings about hope, social acceptance, and resilience were mixed across program participation groups; however, they were not significantly different.

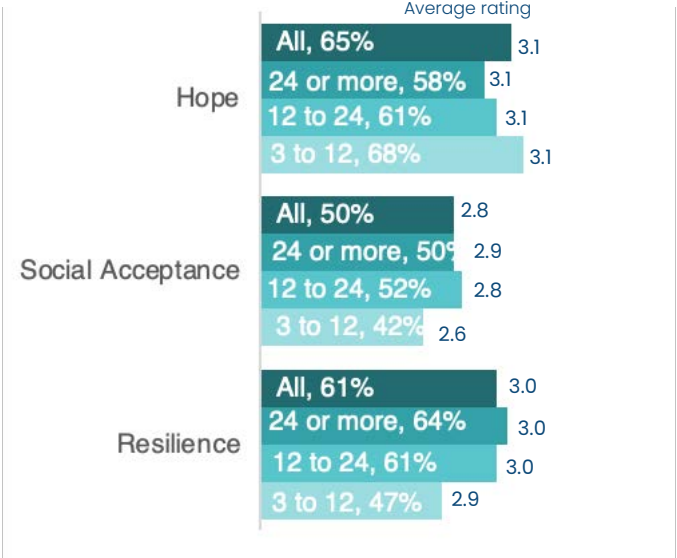
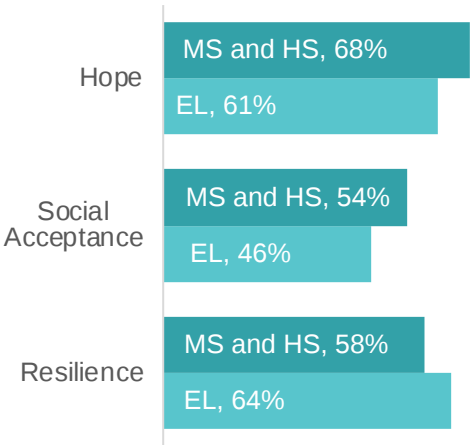


Figure 15 B. Response ratings about hope, social acceptance, and resilience were mixed between school levels; however, they were not significantly different.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2023–2024

Notes. Cohen’s $d = (.618 \text{ to } .6388)$. Average response score reflects combined ratings across question groups on a 4-point scale, and scores of 3 or above are considered positive.

What I like best about my Mentor...

"My mentor is really fun to be around and changes my mood if I'm mad or bothered."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

"My mentor is creative and comes up with new games with the ball!"

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

"My mentor has followed me to every new school."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

"My mentor is fun to talk with and gives honest opinion on what I tell her."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

"My mentor listens really, really well, unlike other people who just want to talk."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

"My mentor cares about what I do and what I'm going through."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024

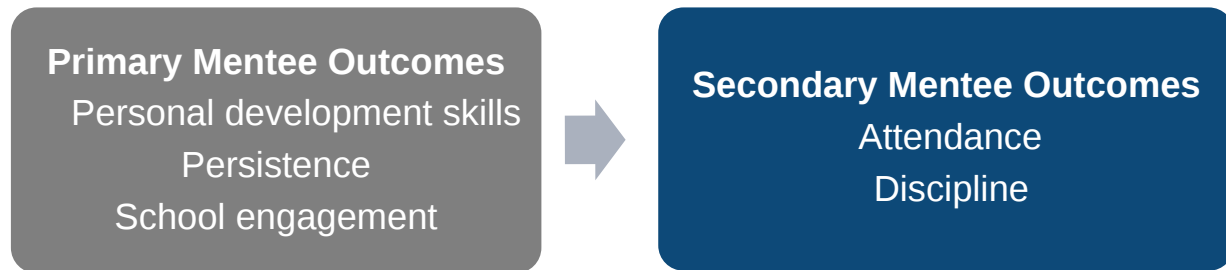
"To me, my mentor is family, and when I have a family member that loves and cares for me this much, I just never want it to go."

Seedling Mentee, May 2024



Secondary Mentee Outcomes

Primary mentee outcomes may lead to positive school outcomes.

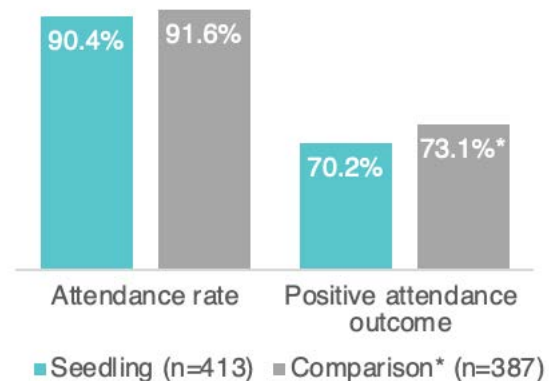


Studies have found mentoring to have a positive impact on children with incarcerated parents, particularly in areas like school attendance and behavior. Mentoring helped children with incarcerated parents improve their school engagement, attendance, and behavior. Mentored children often showed higher rates of school attendance and fewer behavioral incidents compared to their peers without mentors (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2015; Jucovy, 2003). Murray, Farrington, & Sekol (2012) also found that children with incarcerated parents who received emotional and educational support often had improved academic outcomes.

Mentee Attendance Outcomes

Overall attendance rates for Seedling mentees (90.4%) were similar to the matched comparison group (91.6%) enrolled in the same schools. Seventy percent of Seedling mentees experienced positive attendance outcomes, with attendance rates exceeding 90%, a significantly greater percentage than mentees in the prior year (64.0%) (Figure 17). Compared to the matched group, a significantly lower proportion of Seedling mentees had attendance rates exceeding 90%. Effect size calculations revealed a large program association with this outcome which might be explained by the at-risk status of Seedling mentees whereby chronic absenteeism is a factor.

Figure 17. Seedling mentee attendance rates were similar to those of a matched comparison group, however a significantly greater percentage of comparison group students had attendance rates of 90% or higher.



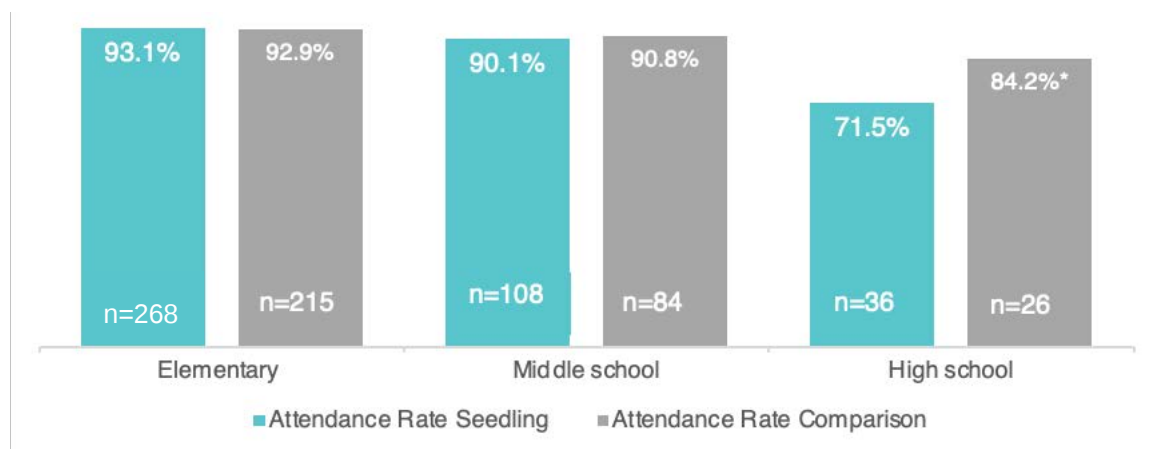
Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2023-2024

Notes. * ($p < .01$), Cramer's $V = (.707)$.

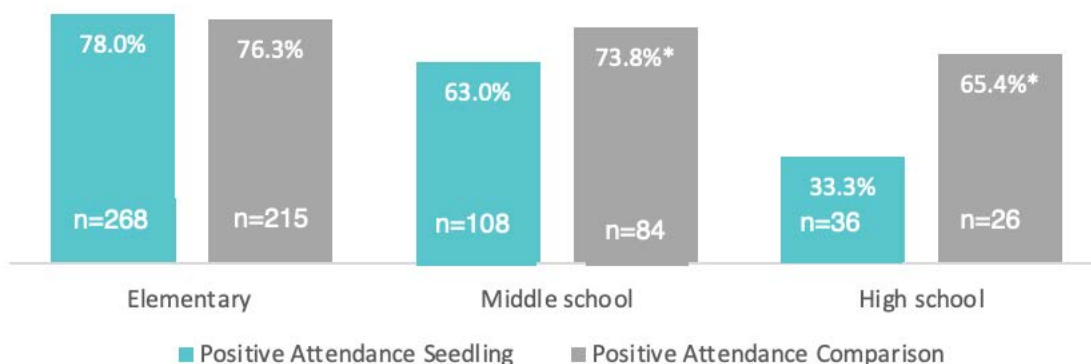
Attendance rates were similar for Seedling mentees and the matched comparison group, with exception of students at the high school level (Figures 18A and B). In terms of overall positive outcomes defined by an attendance rate of 90% or greater, results were similar for students at the elementary level. However, significant differences in the rates of chronic absenteeism (<90%) were found between the groups at the middle and high school levels.

Figures 18A and B. There were significant differences found in the average attendance rates and overall positive attendance outcomes among school levels and between the Seedling mentees and the matched comparison groups.

A. Attendance rates



B. Positive Attendance Outcome (Rate > 90%)

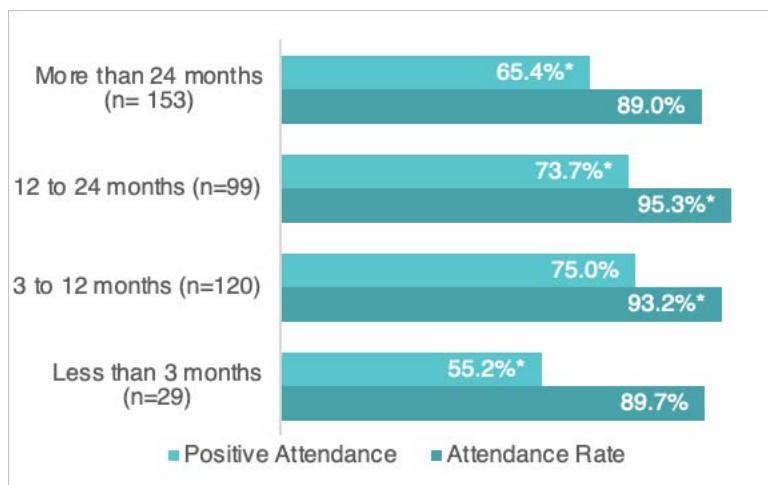


Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2023–2024

Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Significant differences in attendance outcomes also were found for Seedling mentees based on the length of their participation (Figure 19). Mentees participating in the program for 3 to 12 months and 12 to 24 months had significantly greater attendance rates, and a greater proportion experienced positive attendance outcomes than did the other groups. These differences were influenced by the relationship between school level and length of participation.

Figure 19. Significant differences in attendance outcomes were found for mentees based on the length of their participation.



Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2023–2024

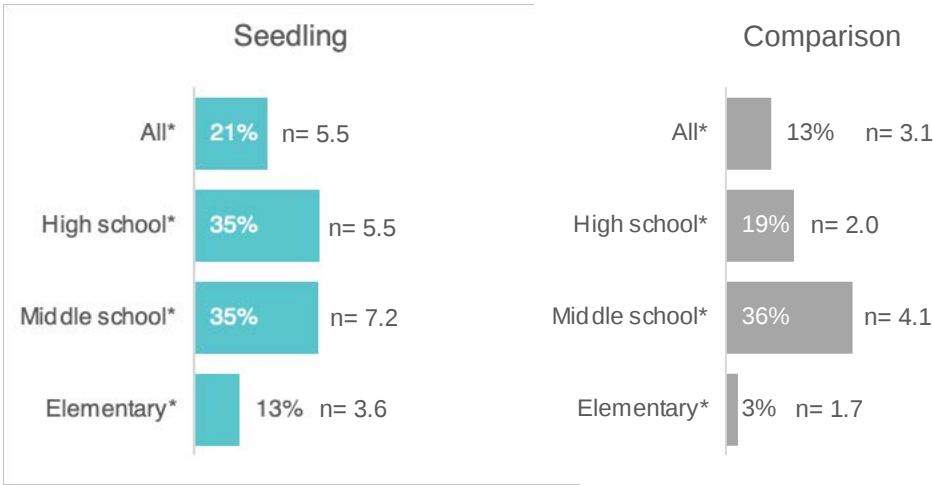
Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Mentee Disciplinary Outcomes

Most Seedling mentees experienced positive discipline outcomes (79%), meaning they did not experience a disciplinary incident at school. However, significantly greater percentages of mentees overall had one or more disciplinary incidents than did the matched comparison group (Figure 20). Significant differences also were found between the groups at the elementary and secondary school levels. Students in the middle and high schools were more likely to have a disciplinary incident and a greater number of incidents. A significantly greater percentage of mentees who participated in the program for more than 24 months had disciplinary incidents than did mentees who participated for lesser amounts of time (Figure 21). However, it should be noted that most of the mentees in the group were in the middle and high school levels. Effect size calculations revealed a large program association with the number of disciplinary events which might be explained by the developmental challenges of Seedling mentees in middle and high school.

The types of disciplinary incidents and the frequencies in which they happened for Seedling mentees and the matched comparison group were similar across all groups (Figure 22). Most incidents were categorized as discretionary, meaning resulting actions were at the discretion of the school's administration. The actions taken in response to disciplinary incidents were similar for both groups as well. Approximately, 20% of Seedling mentees and comparison group students experienced home suspension, and 18% experienced in school suspension.

Figure 20. Significantly greater percentages of Seedling mentees had one or more disciplinary incidents than did the matched comparison group, and the average number of incidents were significantly greater for Seedling mentees.



Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2023–2024
 Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .001$, Cramer’s $V = (.147)$, Cohen’s $d = 5.290$.

Figure 21. Significant differences in disciplinary incidents were found for mentees based on the length of their participation.

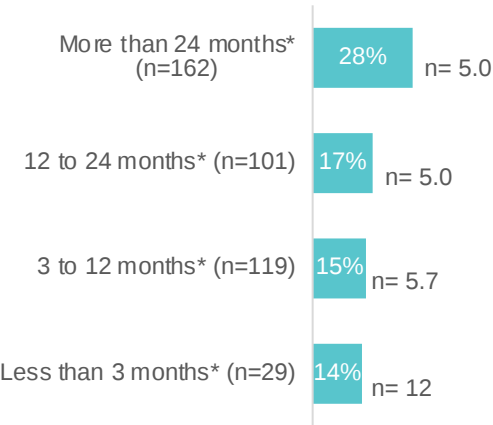


Figure 22. The top 5 types of disciplinary incidents and the proportion of all incidents in which they happened for Seedling mentees and the matched comparison group.

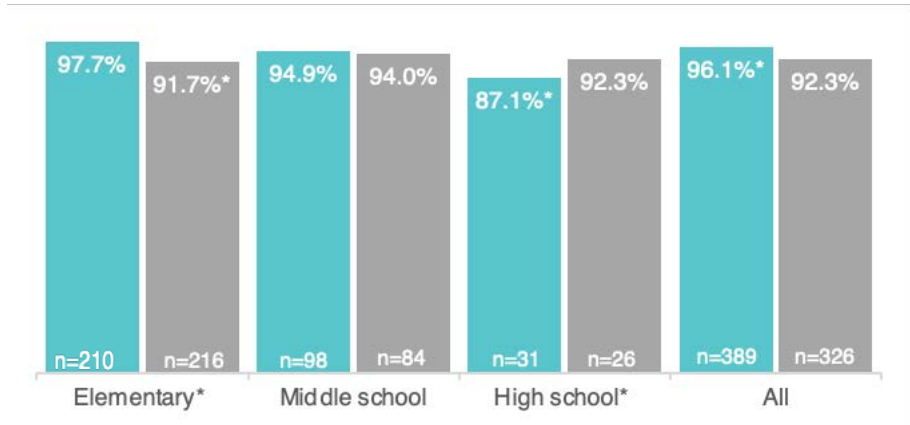
Seedling	Comparison
1. Referral, 15%	1. Referral, 18%
2. Disruption, 12%	2. Disruption, 17%
3. Rude to adult, 11%	3. Aggression with student, 15%
4. Fighting, 9%	4. Fighting, 8%
5. Insubordination, 8%	5. Insubordination, 8%

Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2023–2024
 Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Mentee Grade Level Promotion Outcomes

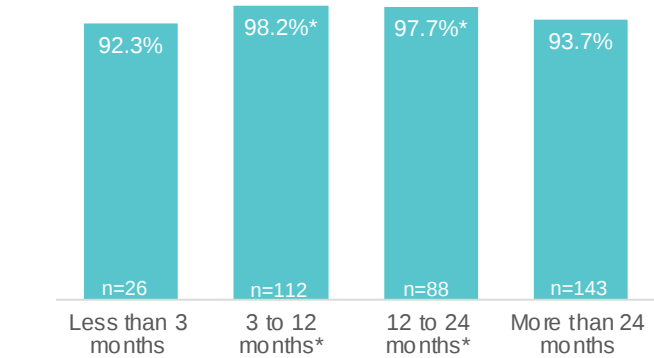
Most mentees met the requirements for grade level promotion or graduation at the end of 2023–2024 school year, and their overall promotion rates were greater than those of the matched comparison group (Figure 23). Seedling mentees at the elementary level had significantly greater percentages promoted to the next grade level than the comparison group. Mentees at the high school level had significantly lower promotion rates than did their peers in elementary and middle school and the matched comparison group. Effect size analyses indicated a small association (Cramer’s V =.152) related to the school level of the students. When grade level promotion was examined by length of Seedling program participation, groups participating from 3 to 24 months had significantly greater promotion rates than did the other groups (Figure 24).

Figure 23. Most mentees met the requirements for grade level promotion or graduation in the 2023–2024 school year, and their overall promotion rates were significantly greater than those of the matched comparison group.



Source. District promotion and graduation files provided by Austin Independent School Districts, 2023–2024
Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Figure 24. Seedling mentees who participated in the program from 3 to 24 months had significantly greater promotion rates than did the other groups.



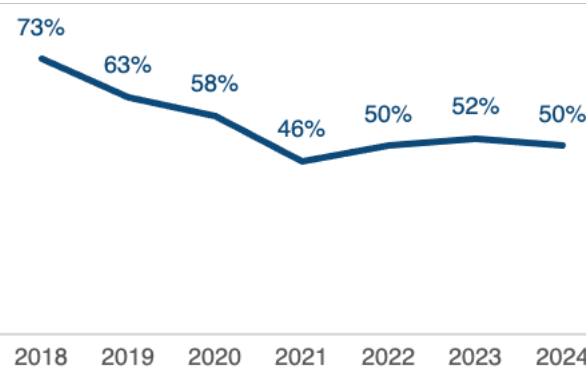
Source. District promotion and graduation files provided by Austin Independent School Districts, 2022–2023

Seedling Mentee College and Career Outcomes

College and career preparation is critically important for children of incarcerated parents due to the unique challenges these children face. Without the proper support, children with incarcerated parents are at higher risk for poor educational outcomes, limited career opportunities, and cycles of generational incarceration. Preparing these children for college and careers can significantly enhance their future prospects and break these cycles.

College enrollment intentions for Seedling mentees are stabilizing after a decline since 2018 (Figure 25). The Seedling Mentor program began to address college and career preparation for middle and high school mentees in the 2021–2022 school year through mentor training focused on how to have college conversations and encourage their mentees to begin thinking about preparing for their futures after high school graduation. In the 2023–2024 school year, the Seedling Mentor program served eight mentees after high school graduation to support their college and career endeavors.

Figure 25. College enrollment intentions for Seedling mentees are stabilizing after a decline since 2018.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2018–2024

The path to college and career readiness is unique to each individual, based on their interests, aptitudes, and goals for the future; however, it is important that all mentees have met the state's College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) component. This designation indicates graduates' preparedness for college, the workforce, or the military. Students may be categorized as CCMR by

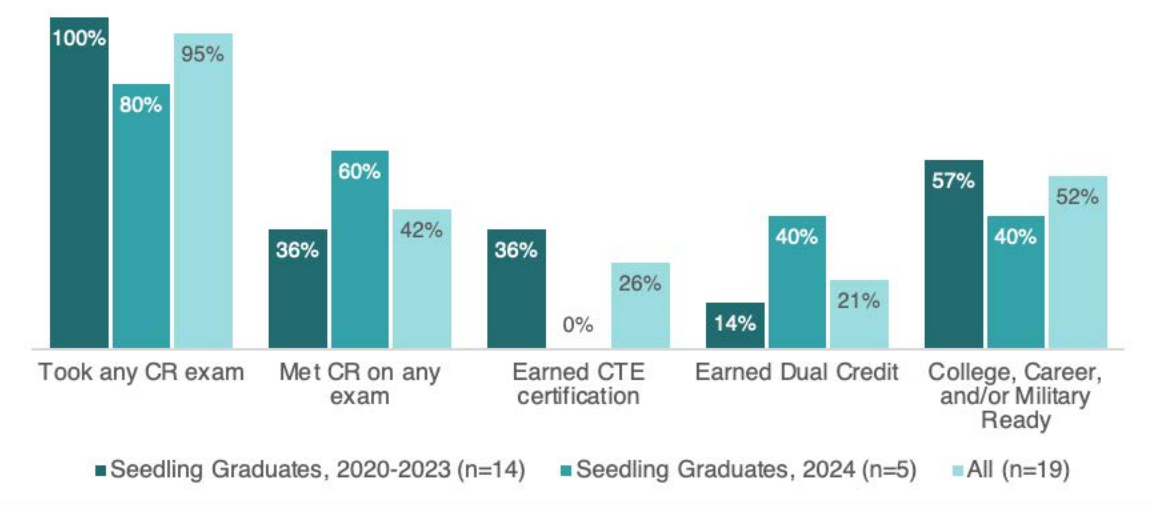
- Meeting specific criteria on assessments like the SAT, ACT, or TSIA2,
- Earning credit for College Prep courses,
- Earning Dual Credit,
- Earning an Advanced Placement (AP) exam score of 3 or higher,
- Earning an associate's degree while in high school,
- Completing an aligned sequence of CTE coursework and earning the culminating Industry-Based Certification, and/or
- Enlisting in the United States Armed Forces or National Guard after graduation.

While data for analysis is limited due to the low number of mentees who were actively participating in the program the year that they graduated and the district’s ability to report college readiness information, it is important to note that most Seedling mentees from Austin ISD engaged in various college and career preparation steps (Figure 26). Approximately half of these Seedling mentees were categorized as college, career, and/or military ready when they graduated from high school. Taking a college admissions exam (e.g. the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), SAT and/or the ACT) was the most common step completed by the mentees. However, many of the mentees were not meeting the college readiness thresholds on these assessments.

College readiness assessments are not only required for college enrollment, but also are needed to take college credit earning classes while in high school. Dual credit is a system in which an eligible high school student enrolls in college course(s) and receives credit for the course(s) from both the college and high school. Some Seedling mentees are choosing to participate in this program which can help students reduce the overall costs of college. Dual credit courses also provided early exposure to college level expectations.

Career technical education (CTE) also provides students with the academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary to succeed in future careers and develop skills they will use throughout their careers. Students in CTE course may choose to earn certification in their area of study so they may directly enter the workforce after high school with greater earning potential.

Figure 26. Most Seedling mentees in Austin ISD took a college admissions exam before high school graduation.



Source. District college readiness data provided by Austin ISD, 2020-2024

Measuring Overall Program Outcomes

An index score helps to summarize overall program outcomes explored in the evaluation in a holistic way.

The Seedling Mentor Program evaluation includes an index score that is a composite measure of variables, or a way of measuring a construct using more than one measure. In each area, data were analyzed to determine whether the mentee had a positive outcome. Then, a total score was assigned based on the accumulation of positive outcomes. This a total score ranged from zero to five. A zero would indicate the mentee had no positive outcomes found on any measure of interest, and a five would indicate they had positive outcomes on every measure. The following variables were used in the development of an index score created to describe outcomes for Seedling mentees.

Index scores are a powerful tool for summarizing complex data into a single, understandable measure. They simplify the interpretation of multiple variables, allow for easy comparison, provide holistic assessments, and are versatile across many fields. Whether used for tracking progress, making decisions, or conducting research, index scores offer an effective way to turn complex, multi-faceted information into actionable insights.

Measuring Overall Program Outcomes

Program Implementation Outcomes

Personal Development Skills. Response scores for all items pertaining to personal development on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

Persistence. Response scores for all items pertaining to persistence on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

School Engagement. Response scores for all items pertaining to school engagement on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

Academic Outcomes

School Attendance. A positive outcome in attendance was defined as having an attendance rate greater than 90%.

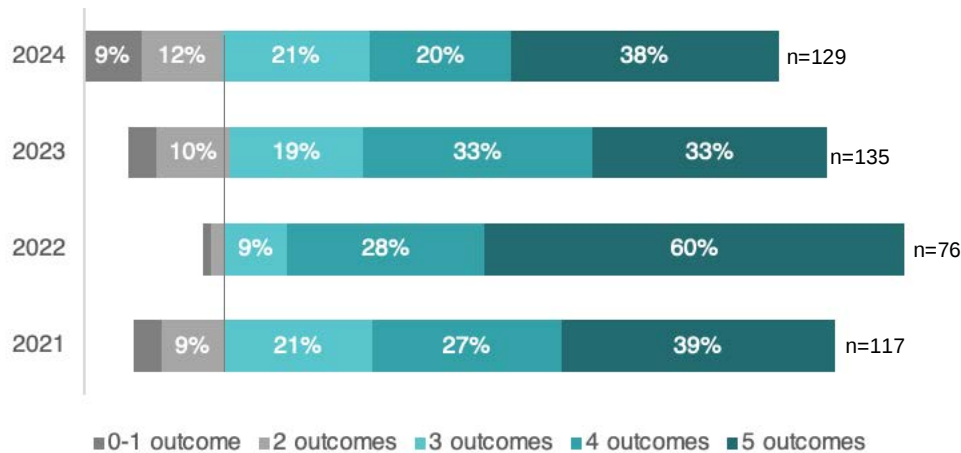
Disciplinary. A positive discipline outcome was defined as having no disciplinary incidents during the school year.

In the 2023–2024 school year, mentees in grades 3 and above were selected through a stratified random sample to participate in the Seeding Mentee Survey. Mentees who completed the survey and who also had reported attendance and discipline data were used to examine overall program outcomes. Overall, 129 Seedling mentees from Austin (78%), Del Valle (12%), and Hays (10%) school districts were included in this evaluation of outcomes and had all data points needed for the index analysis. Random sampling helped to minimize bias by providing an unbiased population representation. Each mentee had an equal chance of selection, reducing the risk of systematic over- or under-representation. The confidence level is 95% with an 7.4% margin of error.

Overall Mentee Outcomes

Overall, 79% of Seedling mentees included in the index analysis had three or more positive outcomes on selected measures, and 91% experienced two or more positive outcomes (Figure 27). In the 2023–2024 school year, the percentages of mentees who had few positive outcomes (i.e. 0 or 1) continued to increase, more than in any other year. However, it should be noted that mentees used in the 2021–2022 survey and before were collected through convenience sampling rather than random sampling, possibly introducing sample and selection bias. Further, researchers are finding that the pandemic continues to affect the attendance and discipline outcomes for students in schools across the nation (Malkus, 2024).

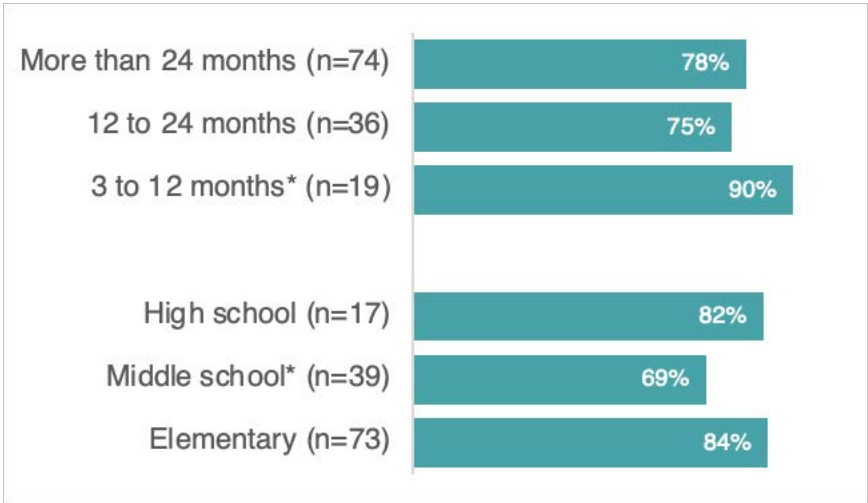
Figure 27. Most Seedling mentees experienced 3 or more positive outcomes across personal and academic measures.



Source. Seedling mentee survey responses and district attendance and discipline files, provided by Austin, Del Valle, and Hays ISDs, 2023–2024

A significantly greater proportion of Seedling mentees who were participating in the program in their first year experienced at least three or more positive outcomes compared to mentees who participated for more than one year (Figure 28). In the 3-to-12-month program participation category, 80% of the mentees were in elementary school. Significantly greater percentages of elementary and high school mentees experienced at least three or more positive outcomes compared to mentees in middle school. Effect size analyses indicated a medium program association with these results (Cramer’s $V=.317$) with school level likely being an influence on outcomes.

Figure 28. A significantly greater proportion of Seedling mentees who participated in the program in their first year experienced at least three or more positive outcomes compared to mentees who participated for longer periods, and these differences were influenced by school level.



Source. Seedling mentee survey responses and district attendance and discipline files, provided by Austin, Del Valle, and Hays ISDs, 2023–2024



“I try to provide stability and consistency for her. To be a loyal mentor that has interest in mentee’s well-being.”
Mentor Survey, May 2024



“He is funny and nice. He is a good person and has been with me since 3rd grade.”
Mentee Survey, May 2024



“We have bonded. As she said, we are sort of like family.”
Mentor Survey, May 2024

Program Evaluation Summary

Mentoring can be critically important in the mitigation of potentially negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences resulting from the trauma of having an incarcerated parent.

The 2023–2024 evaluation of the Seedling Mentor program revealed multiple positive program outcomes for mentees. Consistent with findings from prior school years, many mentees experienced positive personal outcomes, and their academic performance was often close to their peers (e.g., attendance, discipline). Program evaluation highlights follow.

1. Program Implementation: Seedling follows the Core Elements of Effective Practice, and the program was implemented consistently across all sites.
2. Mentoring Relationships: Mentees experienced high-quality, long-lasting relationships. They were focused on the mentees who felt close to their mentors and felt satisfied in the relationship. This was true for mentees at all levels and durations of time.
3. Primary Outcomes: Mentee perceptions of their personal development skills, persistence, and school engagement were very positive.
4. Secondary Outcomes: Most mentees had attendance rates similar to a matched comparison group, and the average mentee attendance rate was 90.4%. Most Seedling mentees did not experience a disciplinary incident at school. Most mentees met the requirements for grade level promotion or graduation at the end of the school year, and their overall promotion rates were similar to those of the matched comparison group.
5. Index: Most Seedling mentees experienced positive outcomes, and there was a medium effect-size across measures, regardless of how long they have participated.
6. College and Career Readiness: College and career readiness supports provided for high school aged mentees is needed, as many are not engaging in preparation steps which could improve life-long outcomes for Seedling mentees.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Description of Methods and Index Scores

For the 2023–2024 program evaluation, many of the evaluation activities were consistent with those conducted in prior years, and a variety of qualitative and quantitative data were used in the evaluation study. Seedling mentees, school contacts, and mentors completed program surveys designed to determine the quality of program implementation, describe mentoring relationships, and identify mentee outcomes. The Seedling Mentee Survey results were examined to elicit Seedling mentee perceptions of mentoring relationship quality, school engagement, academic self-confidence, social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, hope, resilience, and college intentions. Program participation, school enrollment, and mentee demographic information was collected to describe the mentees and their program participation. Student attendance, discipline, grade level promotion/graduation, and postsecondary preparation and outcomes data also were used to determine outcomes for program participants.

College and career readiness data for Seedling mentees at the high school level were analyzed to support ongoing program development for Seedling mentees in high school and two years beyond graduation. Data elements included test participation in the ACT, SAT and/or TSI and dual credit course completion indicator.

The Seedling Mentor Program served 495 mentees in the 2023–2024 school year. Academic outcome records were only available for mentees enrolled in Austin, Del Valle, and Hays Independent School Districts for the 2023–2024 school year at the time of this report, and a matched comparison group from each district.

The program evaluation also used a matched comparison group design. In this approach, an additional group of students are selected for study based on similar student characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school enrollment. The comparison group provides the opportunity to show stronger link between the program intervention and outcomes in contrast with a comparable group who did not receive the same intervention.

Study participants were matched as closely as possible; however, it was not possible to create a large enough group of comparison students based on parental incarceration status. Thus, the comparison group was likely not exposed to the trauma of parental incarceration or experiencing its effects.

A variety of data analyses were employed in this evaluation and are described below.

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics help describe or summarize data in a meaningful way that enable patterns in the data to emerge. Descriptive statistics are very important in providing a visual picture and interpretation of the data. Some descriptive measures that are commonly used to describe a data set are frequencies, percentages, means, and minimum or maximum values of the variables. Descriptive statistics do not, however, allow us to make conclusions beyond the data we have analyzed.

Inferential statistics. Inferential statistics are concerned with making predictions or inferences about a population from observations and analyses of a sample. Inferential statistics enable us to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data alone. The following analyses were utilized in this study:

Analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA refers to statistical tests used to analyze the differences between group means. ANOVAs are used in comparing three or more means for statistical significance.

Chi square. The Chi Square statistic is commonly used for testing relationships between categorical variables (e.g., Seedling or non-Seedling) to answer the question of whether the groups in question differ significantly based on a single characteristic (e.g., a survey response).

T-tests. The t-test is a statistical test that is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the mean or average scores of two groups. A t-test asks whether observed differences between the outcomes of interest for the student groups were greater or lesser than expected only by chance.

Effect Size. While statistical significance shows that an effect exists in a study, effect size may also be reported to explain the magnitude of the effect. An important advantage of using effect sizes is their independence from sample size, as they can express the size of an effect regardless of the size of the study. A large effect size means that a finding has practical significance, while a small effect size indicates limited practical applications. When measuring differences in means, Cohen's d criteria (1988) for small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large effects (0.8 or greater) are used throughout the report.

Cramer's V is a measure of substantive significance, much like effect size, and it measures how strongly two categorical fields are associated. Cramer's V ranges from 0 to 1 where: 0 indicates no association, and 1 indicates a perfect association between the two variables. To interpret Cramer's V, the following approach is often used: $V \in [0.1, 0.3]$: small association, $V \in [0.4, 0.5]$: medium association, and $V > 0.5$: large association.

Seedling Program Index Score

To holistically describe program outcomes for mentees in years past, an index score was created to summarize program and academic outcomes explored in the evaluation. An index is composite measure of variables, or a way of measuring a construct using more than one measure. In each area, data were analyzed to determine whether the mentee had a positive outcome. Then, a total score was assigned based on the accumulation of positive outcomes, and a total score ranged from zero to five.

In the 2023–2024 school year, mentees in grades 3 and above were selected through a stratified random sample to participate in the Seeding Mentee Survey. Mentees who completed the survey and who also had reported attendance and discipline data were used to examine overall program outcomes. Overall, 129 Seedling mentees from Austin (78%), Del Valle (12%), and Hays (10%) school districts were included in this evaluation of outcomes and had all data points needed for the index analysis. Random sampling helped to minimize bias by providing an unbiased population representation. Each mentee had an equal chance of selection, reducing the risk of systematic over- or under-representation. The confidence level is 95% with an 7.4% margin of error.

Program Implementation Outcomes

Personal Development Skills. Response scores for all items pertaining to personal development on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

Persistence. Response scores for all items pertaining to persistence on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

School Engagement. Response scores for all items pertaining to school engagement on the Seedling Mentee Survey were averaged. An average score 3 or greater was considered positive.

Academic Outcomes

School Attendance. A positive outcome in attendance was defined as having an attendance rate greater than 90%.

Disciplinary. A positive discipline outcome was defined as having no disciplinary incidents during the school year.

Appendix B: Seedling School Contact Survey, Spring 2024

To elicit feedback on program implementation and outcomes for the 2023–2024 school year, School Contacts at Seedling supported schools (N=67) were asked to complete a program survey. In May 2024, 63% of the school contacts completed a survey. Thirty-seven percent of the School Contacts responding to the survey were in their first year of supporting the Seedling Mentor Program. The confidence level is 95% with an 9.12% margin of error. An acceptable margin of error used by most survey researchers typically falls between 4% and 8% at the 95% confidence level. It is affected by sample size, population size, and percentage.

Survey Results

1. Does the Seedling School Contact Guide, provided to you by Seedling, support your efforts in implementing the Seedling Mentor Program for mentees enrolled in your school?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	87%	83%	88%
Somewhat	0%	7%	7%
No	0%	2%	0%
Unsure, I did not use it.	13%	7%	5%
2. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each month during the year?		2023	2024
Yes		73%	79%
No		27%	14%
Unsure, I did not know my Mentor Director.		0%	7%
3. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each quarter during the year?		2023	2024
Yes		97%	100%
No		3%	0%
Unsure, I did not know my Mentor Director.		0%	0%
4. How helpful was the Seedling Mentor Director to you this year?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	87%	78%	80%
Mostly helpful	9%	15%	15%
Somewhat helpful	4%	7%	5%
Not at all helpful	0%	0%	0%
I do not know. I never interacted with the Mentor Director during this time.	0%	0%	0%

5. During the school year, did you contact the Seedling Mentor Director for assistance at any time?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	96%	95%	85%
No	4%	5%	15%
6. When you initiated contact with the Seedling Mentor Director, were they responsive to your needs?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely responsive	95%	92%	94%
Mostly responsive	4%	8%	6%
Somewhat responsive	0%	0%	0%
Not at all responsive	0%	0%	0%
7. What is your overall satisfaction with being a School Contact for the Seedling Mentor Program?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely satisfied	68%	85%	70%
Mostly satisfied	27%	15%	25%
Somewhat satisfied	4%	0%	5%
Not at all satisfied	0%	0%	0%
8. How were prospective mentees most often identified for participation on your campus? (Select all that apply)	2022	2023	2024
Referral from a teacher	30%	66%	65%
Referral from a parent or caregiver	9%	37%	48%
Student self- identification	30%	32%	23%
Program information distributed through classroom or school communications (e.g., online faculty or parent meetings, emails)	4%	32%	23%
9. How do you introduce Seedling's Mentor Program to caregivers ?	2022	2023	2024
Meetings with caregiver (e.g., online or in-person)	0%	34%	35%
Phone conferences with caregiver	70%	73%	65%
Family communications (e.g., parent/caregiver letters, emails, school website)	22%	54%	53%
10. Why do caregivers decline the program?	2022	2023	2024
Reluctance to inform the child of the parent's true whereabouts	27%	33%	32%
Fear of others finding out, stigmatizing the child	17%	23%	14%
Fear of school interference	9%	13%	5%
Mistrust of the Seedling program or idea	9%	8%	5%
Child does not want to participate.		23%	27%

11. When matching a student with a new mentor, how do you determine the best fit?	2022	2023	2024
Personal knowledge of the student	73.9%	83%	72%
Student interest survey, Seedling School Contact Guide	28.1%	34%	35%
Information from student's teacher	39.1%	27%	28%
Other student interest survey	8.7%	7%	8%

12. How do you prepare mentees for the mentoring experience?	2023	2024
I met with the mentee individually to prepare for the mentoring program	95%	75%
I met with a small group of mentees to prepare for the mentoring program	0%	5%
I provided information to the mentee and their family to prepare for the mentoring program.	54%	63%
I worked with the mentee's teacher to prepare the mentee for the mentoring program.	27%	23%
I did not provide specific preparation for mentees entering the Seedling Mentor Program.	5%	8%

13. What do you do if a mentee wants to quit the mentoring relationship?	2022	2023	2024
I met with the mentee to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	64%	91%	83%
I met with the mentee's family to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	5%	29%	31%
I met with the mentee's teacher to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	0%	15%	23%
I helped the mentee and mentor to close the match relationship.		29%	31%
I did not do anything if a mentee chose to leave the program.	5%	15%	6%

14. When a Seedling match transfers to your school, do you introduce yourself?	2023 Beginning of the year transfer	2023 Transfer during the year	2024 Beginning of the year transfer	2024 Transfer during the year
Always	62%	65%	45%	60%
Most of the time	19%	16%	5%	20%
Some of the time	11%	11%	8%	6%
Never	8%	8%	5%	14%

15. What methods do you use to monitor the quality of the Seedling mentor/mentee relationships?	2022	2023	2024
Regular check in with mentees	82%	76%	80%
Hearing from mentors when they have a problem	55%	80%	65%
Hearing from mentees when they have a problem	57%	68%	50%
Regular check in with mentors	48%	56%	55%
On-going communication with Mentor Directors	53%	49%	50%
Feedback from teachers	10%	32%	23%
Conversations with mentee's caregiver	29%	17%	20%
I do not monitor the Seedling relationships	0%	0%	5%

16. How often do you check in with mentees during their mentoring relationship?	2022	2023	2024
Once a quarter or more	68%	73%	85%
Once a semester	23%	17%	5%
Only when a problem surfaces	0%	7%	8%
If no problem surfaces, I do not check in.	9%	2%	3%

17. Overall, how helpful are the mentoring relationships to mentees at your school?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	77%	85%	70%
Mostly helpful	23%	15%	28%
Somewhat helpful	0%	0%	3%
Not at all helpful.	0%	0%	0%
I do not know.	0%	0%	0%

18. What are the most **valuable contributions** of the Seedling program on your campus?

- Stable and nurturing relationships with a caring adult over time
- Individualized, encouraging, and supportive attention to students in need
- Positive role models for mentees who were trained in empathy and compassion

19. What would **improve** the Seedling Program on your campus?

- Additional mentors and identification of eligible students to be served
- A place for mentors and mentees to meet that would encourage meaningful interactions
- Consistency of mentors in coming to see their mentees and communicating when they will not be able to come

Appendix C: Seedling Mentor Survey, Spring 2024

Seedling mentors completed a comprehensive survey to provide feedback on program implementation and mentee outcomes for the 2023–2024 school year. A web-link to the survey was emailed to 446 mentors with verified email addresses in May 2024, and 62% (n=275) responded. The confidence level is 95% with an 3.59% margin of error. Of those responding, 26% were mentors who just completed their first year in the mentoring program.

Survey Results

1. Is this the first year you have mentored for Seedling?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	18%	37%	26%
No	82%	63%	74%

New Mentors

2. How frequently do you refer to the New Mentor Orientation Manual?	2022	2023	2024
Frequently	7%	1%	3%
Sometimes	33%	36%	28%
Rarely	45%	46%	49%
Never	14%	17%	21%

3. Please select the primary reasons why you do not use the New Mentor Orientation Manual (select all that apply).	2022	2023	2024
I feel I am totally proficient.	33%	44%	62%
I am too busy.	17%	25%	15%
I have misplaced the manual.	50%	6%	23%
It is not relevant.	17%	0%	8%
Other	0%	31%	0%

4. Please indicate how satisfied you were with the following activities:	2022	2023	2024
	Extremely or mostly satisfied		
New mentor recruitment	100%	93%	94%
New mentor orientation	91%	98%	99%
Support from Mentor Director in the first few weeks of match	96%	94%	88%

5. Did you receive Seedling's newsletter, The Mentor Minute , emailed by Seedling staff??	2022	2023	2024
Yes, I received the articles/videos and read all of them.	59%	37%	35%
Yes, I received the articles/videos and read some of them.	32%	58%	61%
Yes, I received the articles/videos but did not read any of them.	5%	3%	3%
No, I did not receive the articles.	5%	2%	1%

6. Overall, was The Mentor Minute helpful to you?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	49%	23%	26%
Mostly helpful	35%	53%	47%
Somewhat helpful	16%	22%	25%
Not at all helpful	0%	2%	2%

All Mentors

7. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each month during the year?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	66%	84%	81%
No	34%	16%	18%

8. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each quarter during the year?	2023	2024
Yes	92%	90%
No	8%	10%

9. How helpful was the Seedling Mentor Director to you?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	58%	58%	60%
Mostly helpful	25%	31%	25%
Somewhat helpful	7%	7%	10%
Not at all helpful	0%	2%	2%
I do not know. I never interacted with the Mentor Director.	4%	2%	3%

10. During your mentoring experience this year, did you contact a Seedling Mentor Director for assistance?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	66%	67%	58%
No	34%	33%	42%

11. When you initiated contact with your Mentor Director, were they responsive to your needs?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely responsive	81%	88%	87%
Mostly responsive	15%	8%	8%
Somewhat responsive	3%	3%	3%
Not at all responsive	1%	1%	2%
12. Overall, as the Seedling Mentor Program facilitated connection between mentees and their mentors, how supported did you feel in this process?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely supported	65%	67%	70%
Mostly supported	24%	25%	22%
Somewhat supported	9%	7%	6%
Not at all supported	2%	1%	2%
13. At the school where you mentored, was the School Contact helpful ?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	51%	57%	54%
Mostly helpful	18%	22%	19%
Sometimes helpful	19%	19%	16%
Not at all helpful	5%	7%	9%
Does not apply. I mentored at an unofficial campus.	2%	2%	2%
14. During your mentoring experience this year, did you request assistance from the Seedling School Contact?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	57%	66%	63%
No	38%	32%	35%
Does not apply. I mentored at an unofficial campus.		2%	2%
15. When you initiated contact with your School Contact, were they responsive to your needs?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely responsive	64%	64%	66%
Mostly responsive	22%	17%	18%
Somewhat responsive	13%	14%	12%
Not at all responsive	1%	5%	4%

Seedling Mentor Training

16. Did you attend any of the monthly online training sessions?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	38%	40%	48%
No	62%	60%	52%
17. If you did not attend a monthly training session, please tell us why you did not participate .	2022	2023	2024
I cannot be away from work twice in one week.	34%	31%	30%
I cannot attend sessions during the lunch hour.	42%	32%	41%
I prefer reading about the topics in an electronic newsletter.	33%	27%	25%
I have online fatigue.	24%	10%	11%
I feel well-prepared and do not require additional training.	34%	23%	24%
I do not think the topics are relevant to my situation.	12%	5%	6%
18. I would be more likely to attend a training event if...	2022	2023	2024
Training sessions were held on a weekday evening.	37%	27%	23%
The training topics were relevant to my situation.	30%	21%	21%
Training sessions were held on Saturday morning.	21%	12%	16%
I feel well prepared and do not require additional training.	36%	27%	34%
19. As a result of the monthly training sessions I attended, I feel more confident in the mentoring experience.	2022	2023	2024
Extremely confident	74%	73%	53%
Mostly confident	24%	26%	42%
Somewhat confident	2%	1%	5%

Seedling Mentor Experience

20. How often were you able to connect with your mentee this year?	2023	2024	
Weekly	82%	82%	
Every other week	13%	14%	
Once a month	3%	3%	
Less than once a month	2%	1%	

21. How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?	2022	2023	2024
Excellent	46%	45%	51%
Good	46%	47%	42%
Fair	8%	8%	7%
Poor	0%	1%	1%

22. When I spend time with my mentee, we most often engage in:	2022	2023	2024
Talking/listening	90%	84%	85%
Playing games/ art or craft activities	68%	71%	73%
Discussing problems/processing feelings	36%	31%	33%
Supporting academic development	20%	17%	14%
Reading	8%	7%	6%
Engaging in outdoor activities or physical activities	13%	12%	15%

23. My mentee and I are pretty close .	2022	2023	2024
Very true	40%	39%	47%
Sort of true	48%	49%	42%
Not very true	12%	11%	11%
Not at all True	1%	1%	0%

24. Do you believe that your time together was helpful for your mentee?	2022	2023	2024
Extremely helpful	34%	35%	39%
Mostly helpful	42%	48%	47%
Sometimes helpful	18%	16%	12%
Not at all helpful	0%	1%	1%

25. How do you rate your overall experience with Seedling's Mentor Program?	2022	2023	2024
Excellent	68%	69%	75%
Good	28%	28%	21%
Fair	5%	2%	3%
Poor	0%	0%	0%

26. Do you plan on continuing your relationship with your mentee next year?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	78%	82%	79%
No	11%	6%	7%
Undecided	10%	11%	13%

27. If your mentoring relationship ended, how did you close the relationship ?	2022	2023	2024
With a visit	50%	44%	72%
Sent a letter	4%	19%	6%
I did not close the relationship.	47%	6%	22

28. If you cannot continue your current mentoring relationship, would you be interested in mentoring another child ?	2022	2023	2024
Yes	62%	56%	37%
No	11%	19%	53%
Undecided	26%	25%	11%

Appendix D: Seedling Student Survey, Spring 2024

To assess mentoring relationship quality and outcomes for the 495 mentees who were served by the program in the 2023–2024 school year, a stratified, random sample of Seedling mentees (n=214) in grades 3 and above were asked to complete a program survey at the end of the school year. In total, 165 randomly selected mentees (77%) completed the survey. The confidence level is 95% with an 3.59% margin of error. An acceptable margin of error used by most survey researchers typically falls between 4% and 8% at the 95% confidence level. It is affected by sample size, population size, and percentage. Random sampling allows researchers to generalize about a specific population and reduce bias. Using statistical techniques, inferences can be made about the population without having to survey or collect data from every individual in that population.

The Seedling student survey had multiple parts. Part 1 of the survey used questions from the Measuring the Quality of Mentor–Youth Relationships Survey developed for the evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies. Part 2 of the survey contained questions formerly asked on the AISD Student Climate survey to assess students' perceptions of personal development skills, classroom engagement, academic persistence, and college intentions. Part 3 of the survey contained questions from Snyder's Children's Hope Scale (1997), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) designed by Smith et.al. (2008) to assess the ability to bounce back, and the Big Brothers Big Sisters Youth Outcomes Survey. Generally, a mean response of score 3 or above was considered positive.

Seedling Student Survey, Part I

Percentages reflect combined ratings of very or sort of true on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Part 1: Mentoring Relationship Quality	2022	2023	2024
My mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me.	97%	97%	98%
My mentor is always interested in what I want to do.	99%	99%	100%
My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things.	95%	90%	91%
It helps me when my mentor gives me suggestions about things I should do.	97%	97%	96%
I wish my mentor spent more time with me.	88%	88%	82%
When I am with my mentor, I feel important.	97%	95%	96%
I tell my mentor some things because my mentor will not tell other people.	84%	88%	89%
When I am with my mentor, I feel happy.	97%	98%	98%
My mentor comes to see me when he or she is supposed to.	97%	96%	96%
When I am with my mentor, I feel satisfied.	95%	96%	96%
When something is bugging me, my mentor listens while I talk about it.	97%	97%	97%
My mentor and I are pretty close.	97%	94%	98%
Youth centeredness, positive responses overall	98%	96%	95%
Emotional engagement, positive responses overall	96%	94%	92%
Mentee satisfaction, positive responses overall	97%	90%	93%

Seedling Student Survey, Part 2

Percentages reflect combined ratings of “a lot of the time” or “sometimes” on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Personal Development Skills	2022	2023	2024
I use ways to calm myself down.	89%	85%	85%
I say “no” to friends who want me to break the rules.	86%	91%	88%
During my school day, I am aware of when my feelings change.	91%	93%	91%
If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.	69%	82%	69%
At my school, I often notice how others are feeling.	87%	88%	88%
Overall percentage of positive responses	95%	86%	76%

Persistence	2022	2023	2024
I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.	88%	89%	87%
I feel successful in my schoolwork.	88%	88%	88%
I can reach the goals I set for myself.	91%	89%	90%
I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated.	87%	88%	83%
Overall percentage of positive responses	94%	81%	76%

Student Engagement	2022	2023	2024
I like to come to school.	81%	79%	75%
I enjoy doing my schoolwork.	68%	69%	69%
My homework helps me learn the things I need to know.	77%	78%	75%
My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways.	81%	77%	79%
I have fun learning in my classes.	86%	84%	82%
My teachers connect what I am doing to my life outside the classroom.	73%	70%	75%
Overall percentage of positive responses	80%	61%	61%

Seedling Student Survey, Part 3

Percentages reflect combined ratings of “most of the time” or “much of the time” on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Hope	2022	2023	2024
I think I am doing pretty well.	66%	80%	79%
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.	77%	81%	81%
I am doing just as well as other kids my age.	67%	71%	72%
When I have a problem, I can come up with a lot of ways to solve it.	68%	64%	72%
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.	63%	74%	72%
Even when others want to quit, I know I can find ways to solve the problem.	63%	72%	72%
Overall percentage of positive responses	74%	69%	68%

Percentages reflect combined ratings of “very true” or “sort of true” on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Social Acceptance	2022	2023	2024
I am always doing things with a lot of kids.	86%	82%	80%
I wish that more people my age liked me.	58%	57%	39%
I find it hard to make friends.	53%	74%	71%
I would like to have more friends.	55%	69%	67%
I am popular with others my age.	64%	48%	54%
I have a lot of friends.	86%	70%	68%
Overall percentage of positive responses	82%	50%	54%

Percentages reflect combined ratings of “strongly agree” or “agree” on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Mentee Resilience	2022	2023	2024
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	78%	88%	76%
I do not have a hard time making it through stressful events.	60%	72%	81%
It is not hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	72%	73%	75%
I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	76%	73%	75%
It does not take me too long to get over a challenge in my life.	75%	72%	78%
Overall percentage of positive responses	70%	60%	61%

Percentages reflect combined ratings of “very positive” or “some positive” on a 4-point scale and are considered positive.

Since you have started meeting with your mentor, have there been any changes in your...	2022	2023	2024
Interest in doing things	96%	95%	93%
Relationships with others	91%	86%	88%
Ability to talk about your feelings	85%	77%	79%

I will go to college after high school.	2022	2023	2024
Yes	52%	52%	51%
Maybe	45%	44%	43%
No	3%	4%	5%

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