

The Seedling Mentor Program

2024 – 2025



AUTHOR

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AN EXTERNAL PROGRAM EVALUATION
REPORT COMMISSIONED TO MEET
REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR



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The Seedling Program

The Seedling Mentor Program

Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events in childhood that can affect a child's health and well-being well into adulthood. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) identified parental incarceration as one of the ten core ACEs under the category of "household dysfunction." It is included because having a parent incarcerated often leads to:

- Parental separation and loss of attachment
- Emotional and psychological stress
- Economic hardship
- Social stigma and isolation
- Disrupted living arrangements or entry into foster care

These factors can have long-term effects on a child's brain development, emotional regulation, academic success, and overall health — similar to other ACEs like abuse or domestic violence.

While exact up-to-date figures for all of Texas are unavailable, reports from The Texas Tribune and the Casey Foundation in 2018 estimated 477,000 children in Texas spent part of their childhood with a parent who was incarcerated. That number translates to approximately 7% of the state's child population overall. However, a significant disparity exists with nearly 24% of Black children, 11% of Hispanic children, and 4% of White children in the United States experiencing the incarceration of a parent by age 17 (Turney, 2023). These figures highlight a significant racial disparity in exposure to parental incarceration, with Black children affected at roughly six times the rate of White children.

Based on research (Texas-based and in general), children with incarcerated parents tend to face specific burdens including...

Economic hardship often occurred through the loss of income and many families report difficulty meeting basic needs like food, rent, or utilities.

Emotional and mental health impacts included separation trauma (e.g. feelings of loss, abandonment, anxiety, depression), behavior issues, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Education related challenges exhibited by lower academic achievement, greater school absenteeism, and disciplinary issues.

Social and family instability caused by changes in caregivers, loss of parental support, and social isolation.

Long-term risks with an increased likelihood of involvement with juvenile justice and poorer mental and physical health outcomes over time:

About the Seedling Mentor Program

Almost 20 years ago, 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, 2024–2025

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 helped determine participant outcomes. The Seedling Mentor Program served 506 mentees in the 2024–2025 school year. However, academic outcome records only were available for mentees enrolled in Austin Independent School District (AISD, $n=333$), Del Valle Independent School District (DVISD, $n=70$), and Hays Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD, $n=34$).

The program evaluation employed a matched comparison group design. In this design, an additional group of students was selected based on similar characteristics—such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school enrollment. This allowed the program evaluation to examine results for participating students with those of a comparable group who did not receive the intervention. Not all mentees and comparison students had complete data on which to report; student counts may vary throughout the analyses. Refer to Appendix A for more information.

Understanding Significance

When analyzing data, researchers and stakeholders often seek to determine whether findings are statistically significant. Statistical significance testing helps assess whether an observed result is likely due to chance or reflects a meaningful relationship or effect. Several factors influence statistical significance, including sample size (the number of cases analyzed), variance (the spread of scores within a distribution), skewness (the degree to which data cluster on one side of the mean), and kurtosis (the extent to which a distribution deviates from a normal, bell-shaped curve). With larger sample sizes, even small differences may reach statistical significance.

To better understand the magnitude or practical importance of a finding, researchers also report effect size. A large effect size indicates a result with practical significance, while a small effect size suggests limited real-world implications. When comparing means, Cohen's d (1988) is commonly used, with thresholds of 0.2 for small effects, 0.5 for medium effects, and 0.8 or greater for large effects. For categorical data, Cramer's V provides a similar measure of association strength, ranging from 0 to 1. Common interpretation guidelines are:

$V = 0.1\text{--}0.3$: small association

$V = 0.4\text{--}0.5$: medium association

$V > 0.5$: large association

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

Seedling Participants, 2024–2025

Seedling Mentor Program participation remained stable.

Overall, total of 506 children attending 139 schools across central Texas were served in active mentoring matches in Seedling’s Mentor Program during the school year (Figure 1). Most Seedling mentees (66%) attended schools in Austin ISD, and 34% of Seedling students were served across other districts in the 2024–2025 school year (Figure 2). The Seedling Mentor Program actively made matches in 63 schools in AISD, DVISD, and HCISD and one charter school district. Ongoing mentoring support was provided for 131 (26%) mentees who relocated to 76 additional schools across the greater Austin area (Table 1). School changes for many mentees were often influenced by family pursuit of affordable housing.

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

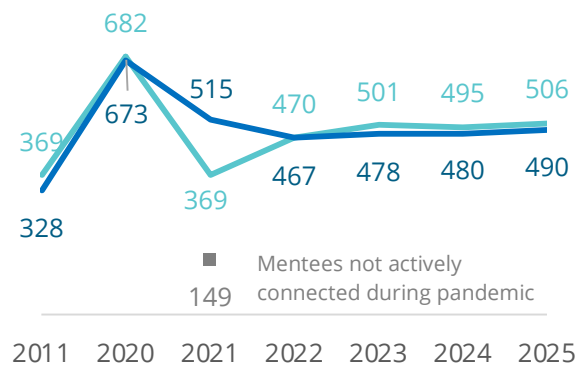


Figure 2. Most mentees were enrolled in Austin ISD than in other districts.

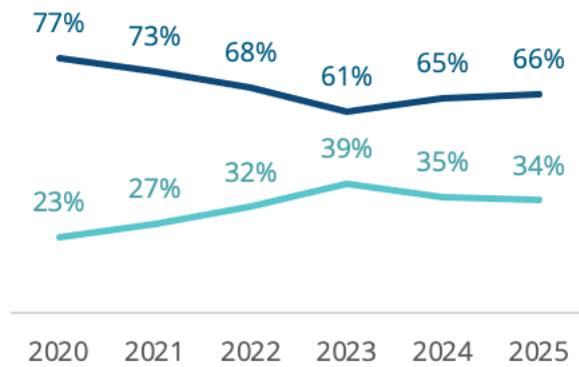


Table 1. The Seedling Mentor Program serves mentees in 139 Central Texas schools.

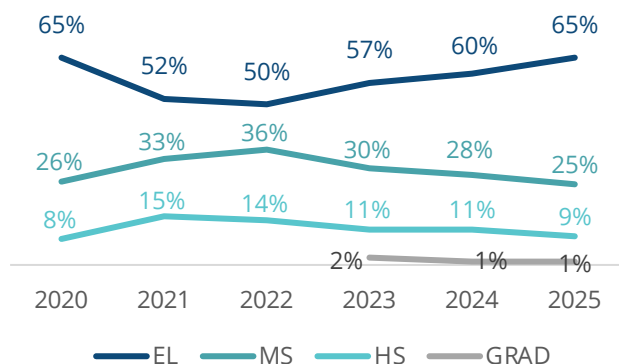
In 63 schools, staff actively made and supported mentoring matches.	# of schools	In 76 schools, staff supported existing mentoring matches.	# of schools
Austin ISD	49	Austin ISD	25
Hays Consolidated ISD	6	Other charter schools	15
Del Valle ISD	5	Pflugerville ISD	13
Austin Achieve Charter Schools	3	Other Central Texas ISDs	12
		Del Valle ISD	6
		Hays Consolidated ISD	5

Source. Seedling Mentor program records, 2024–2025. Notes. “Other charter schools” include Austin Achieve, KIPP Texas Public Schools, Austin Can Academy, Harmony Public Schools, IDEA Public Schools, Montessori for All, and Texas Empowerment Academy. “Other Central Texas” ISDs include schools in Manor, Round Rock, Bastrop, Georgetown, Leander ISD’s.

Most Seedling mentees (65%, n=327) were enrolled in elementary school in 2024–2025, with the proportions of mentees in middle (25%, n=126) and high (9%, n=46) schools declining in 2024–2025. These proportions of mentees enrolled at each school level were similar to those in the 2019–2020 school year (Figure 3). Eighty-seven percent of mentees matched for the first time were in the elementary grade levels. Seedling staff also continued to serve 7 former Seedling mentees after high school graduation.

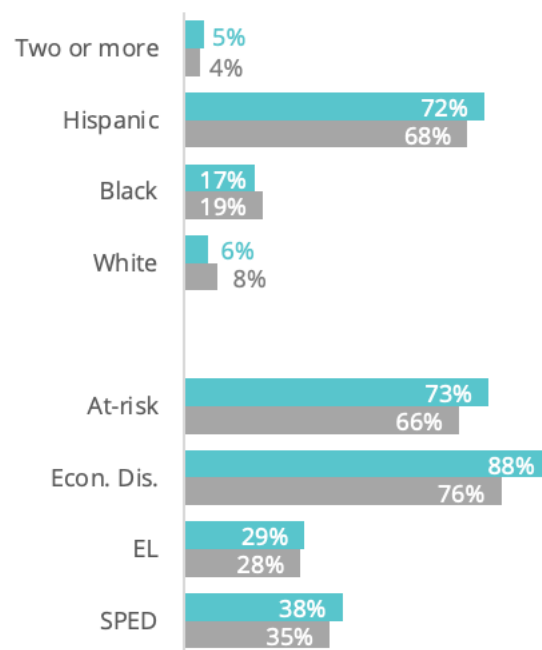
Consistent with prior Seedling evaluation findings and national research, 94% of mentees were categorized as minority and low income (Figure 4). In 2024–2025, a greater proportion of Seedling mentees were classified as at-risk and economically disadvantaged compared with the previous school year. The term *economically disadvantaged* refers to students eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. For 2024–2025, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) extended the timeline for districts to update this indicator through January 2025. This extension may have improved the accuracy of identifying students who met eligibility criteria. An *at-risk* designation encompasses factors such as parental incarceration, homelessness, health, and financial challenges, and it is likely that instances of parental incarceration are underreported by school personnel in state data.

Figure 3. The proportion of Seedling mentees who were enrolled in elementary school increased in the 2024–2025 school year.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2011–2025.

Figure 4. Greater proportions of Seedling Mentees were categorized as at-risk and economically disadvantaged in 2024–2025 than in the prior school year.



Sources. Student program participation and school enrollment records, 2023–2025.

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.

The Six Core Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™ 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. These elements include:

Recruitment – Attracting mentors who are a good fit for youth needs and program goals.

Screening – Ensuring youth safety and mentor suitability through careful background checks, interviews, and reference checks.

Training – Preparing mentors to build effective, supportive, and developmentally appropriate relationships.

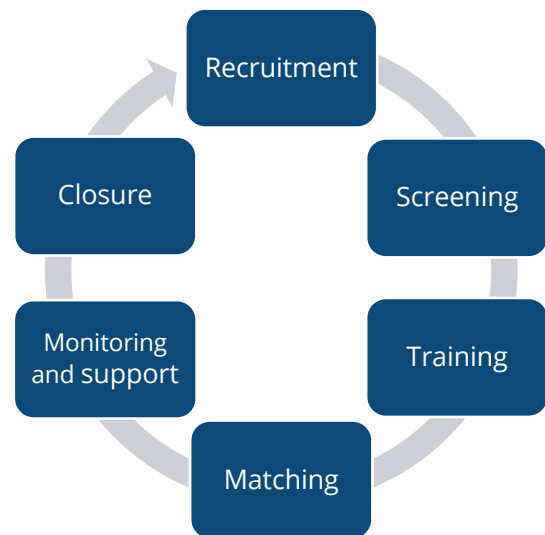
Matching – Pairing mentors and mentees based on compatibility to foster trust and engagement.

Monitoring and Support – Providing ongoing supervision and guidance to strengthen and sustain relationships.

Closure – Helping mentors and mentees bring their relationship to a positive, planned conclusion.

Overall, these practices have been shown to promote safety and consistency; increase program effectiveness, enhance outcomes in youth confidence, academic engagement, and social-emotional growth; and ensure sustainability by maintaining mentor commitment and organizational credibility.

The Six Core Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™



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

"The Mentor Director was hugely supportive; I felt very comfortable going to her with questions, especially at the beginning of the school year. This year was by far the smoothest mentoring experience I've had while at Seedling."

Seedling Mentor, May 2025

Implementation Context in 2024–2025

In 2024–2025, the Seedling Mentor Program introduced enhancements to service delivery. The program successfully recruited and retained mentors to serve students in AISD and other school districts. This success was supported by proactive staff outreach and strong partnerships with community organizations such as Accenture and CapMetro (new), Google (continuing), and Austin Bergstrom Airport (continuing and expanded). While many employers continued to face time constraints for mentoring, Seedling broadened outreach to companies that encourage community volunteerism. To enhance mentor retention and child safety, Seedling added two part-time interviewers to their staff—retired AISD counselors—to conduct pre-orientation mentor interviews to improve mentor reliability and fit. These interviews complemented existing criminal background and reference checks. All mentors completed background checks through both Seedling and AISD systems.

The 2024–2025 school year also presented challenges with mentee recruitment. On several campuses, new or overextended school contacts had limited capacity to identify students for matching. Seedling Mentor Directors continued efforts to strengthen relationships with and support for those school contacts. Moving forward, Seedling will work with district administration staff to build stronger relationships with principals at struggling campuses and may pause partnerships with schools unable to support program needs.

Implementation Outcomes

Consistent with reports from prior school years, mentors and school contacts reported positively about Seedling Mentor Program implementation practices. 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 initial stages of becoming a mentor were very well done. I appreciated the in-person interview to get to know me better. And, I felt like the orientation/training was incredibly helpful and informative.”

Seedling Mentor, May 2025

The mentor recruitment process is important to the success and sustainability to the Seedling Mentor Program. A diverse mentor pool helps match students with individuals who align with their unique needs and interests, increasing the likelihood of strong, lasting relationships. Recruiting well-suited mentors from the outset supports higher retention and ensures a steady supply of mentors to offset natural turnover over time.

Approximately 30% of Seedling mentors (n=147) were recruited in 2024–2025 and participating in the program 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* (78%) or *mostly satisfied* (22%) with the recruiting process. They also were *extremely* (91%) or *mostly satisfied* (9%) with their new mentor interview. All new mentors also highly rated the orientation process and reported being *extremely* (86%) or *mostly satisfied* (14%). Ninety-one 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.

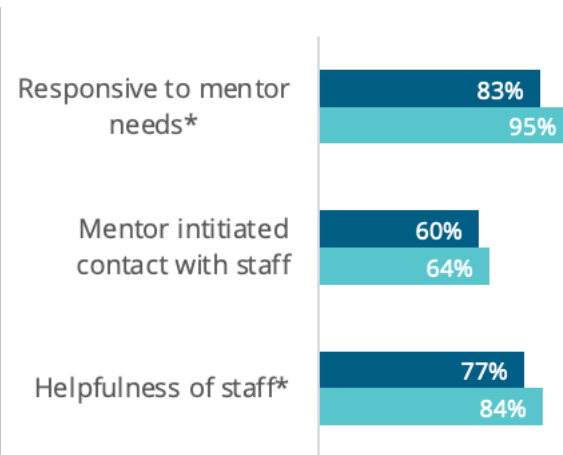
Mentor training provided mentors with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to effectively support their mentees. Most mentors (95%) used articles and videos provided by the Seedling Mentor Program to support their mentoring experience, and 73% reported resources were *extremely* or *mostly helpful*. However, only 40% of mentors responding to the survey attended one or more online training events on variety of topics. Limited time availability was most often the reason preventing mentors (77%) from participating in training sessions. Thirty percent of mentors reported they felt well-prepared and did not need additional training.

Overall, mentor support provided by Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts was highly rated by 92% of Seedling mentors in 2024–2025 (Figure 5).

Most mentors described Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts as supportive and helpful in their mentoring experiences. Mentor Directors were viewed as more responsive and helpful than School Contacts, likely because they are dedicated Seedling staff without competing school duties, whereas School Contacts often serve as campus counselors with multiple responsibilities. Just over half of mentors reported initiated contact with their Mentor

Directors and/or School Contacts during the year. With ongoing support, mentors are better able to understand their mentee’s background and support their individual needs. Properly

Figure 5. Most mentors reported Seedling Mentor Directors and School Contacts to be supportive.



Source. Seedling Survey of Mentors, May 2025

supported mentors are more likely to make a positive impact on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall development.

In addition to the support provided by Seedling Mentor Directors, School Contacts offered campus-level monitoring and assistance for mentoring relationships. They played a key role in the matching process, using their personal knowledge of students to pair them with suitable mentors, and provided ongoing support as needed (Figure 6). During the school year, 72% of mentors reported that their School Contacts were extremely or mostly helpful.

Providing closure at the end of a mentoring relationship helps participants reflect positively on the experience (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). At the time of the spring Mentor Survey, 75% of mentors planned to continue their mentoring relationships into the next school year. Of those not planning to continue mentoring, 85% had formally closed their relationships.

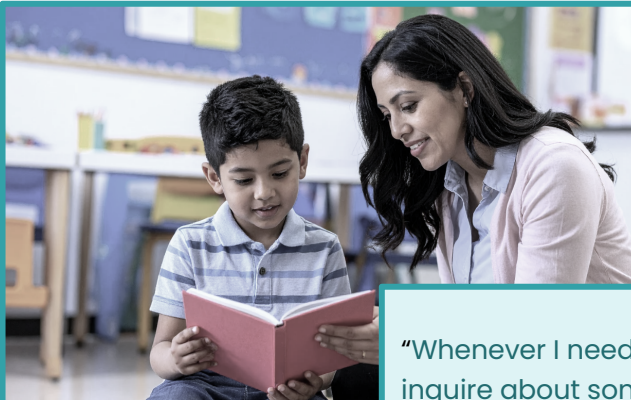
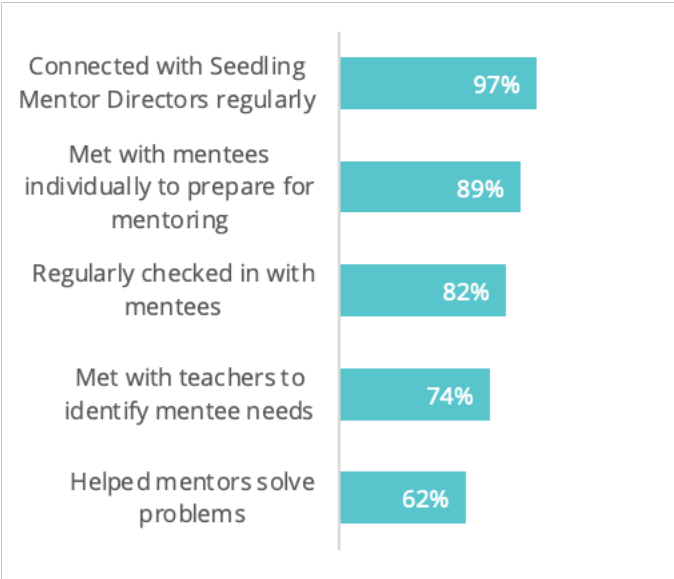


Figure 6. School Contacts monitored and supported mentoring relationships on their campuses in a variety of ways.



Source. Seedling Survey of Mentors, May 2025

“My Mentor Director has always been very helpful with providing me with information regarding the mentor on my campus. If I have any questions, she always answers me in a promptly.”

“My Mentor Director is wonderful and goes above and beyond to ensure schools are supported.”

School Contacts, May 2025

“Whenever I needed assistance or just wanted to inquire about something, [my Mentor Director] was always available to help. Having that kind of support allows things to work out smoothly between my mentee and myself.”

Seedling Mentor, May 2025

Seedling Mentoring Relationships

Effective practice for mentoring is designed to yield high-quality relationships.



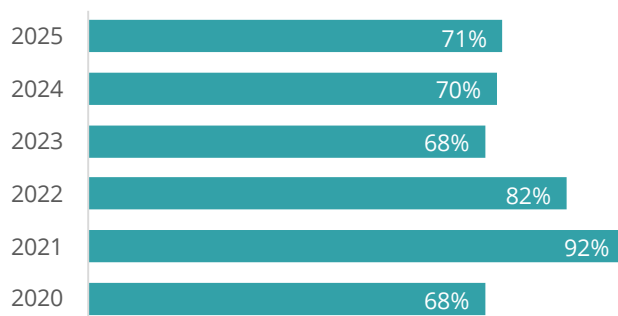
Characteristics of Quality Mentoring Relationships

Although each relationship is shaped by the unique needs of the mentee, effective mentoring relationships typically demonstrate the following characteristics:

- 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.

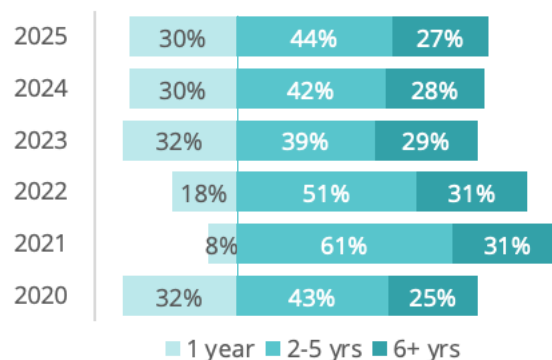
Many mentors offered consistent and dependable support over time, fostering enduring mentoring relationships. During the 2024–2025 school year, Seedling staff supported 490 mentors who worked with one or more children during and/or across school years. Approximately 71% of mentors in 2024–2025 had participated in previous years (e.g., 2023–2024 or earlier), reflecting an increase from 68% who returned in 2023–2024. On average, Seedling mentors served the program for four years, with individual tenures ranging from one to 20 years (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7. The Seedling Mentor Program maintains a high mentor retention rate.



Source. Seedling Mentor Program Records, 2024–2025.
Note. In 2020 and 2021, new mentor recruitment was limited as the program adapted to post-pandemic protocols in schools.

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

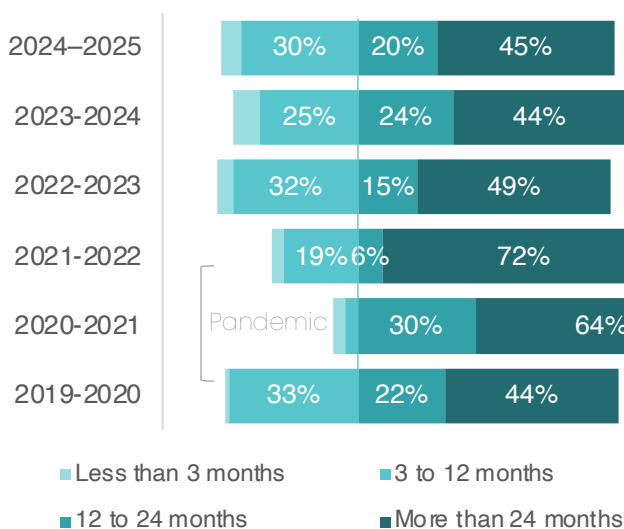


Source. Seedling Mentor Program Records, 2024–2025
Note. In 2020 and 2021, new mentor recruitment was limited as the program adapted to post-pandemic protocols in schools.

Longer-term mentoring relationships provide more meaningful and consistent support to students, contributing to improved academic, social, and emotional outcomes. In the 2024–2025 school year, mentees may have been matched with one or more mentors across school years; the average duration of the current mentoring relationship was 2 years and 6 months (Figure 9). This average exceeds the national average mentoring duration of 12 months (MENTOR, 2015). Thirty-five percent of mentees were newly matched during the 2024–2025 school year. By year’s end, mentoring relationship lengths ranged from one month to 12 years.

The duration of mentoring relationships differed significantly by school level. Elementary mentees were significantly more likely to be first-time participants and had shorter relationships than middle and high school mentees (Figures 10a and 10b). This pattern likely reflects Seedling’s emphasis on early identification of eligible students and frequent caregiver–school interactions in the lower grades. Effect size analyses indicated a small program effect (Cramer’s $V = .263$), suggesting that the difference is primarily due to early program entry and matching practices.

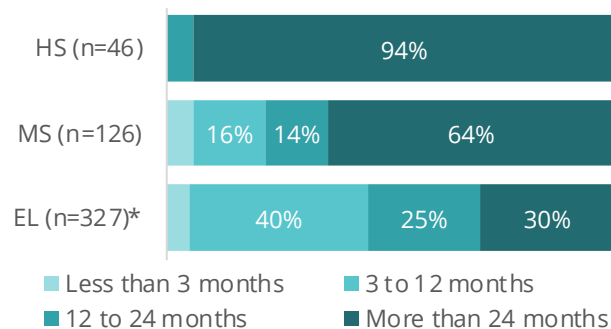
Figure 9. Most Seedling mentees were in mentoring relationships for more than one year.



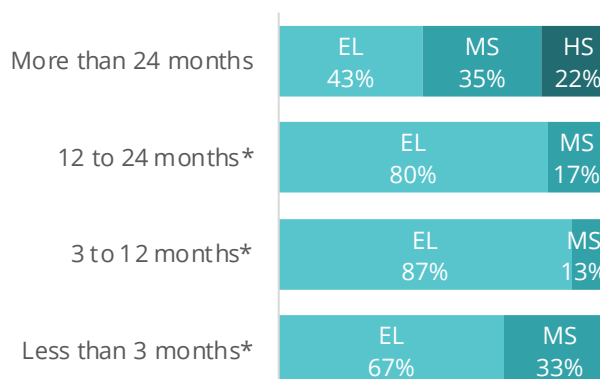
Source. Seedling program records, 2024–2025

Figures 10A and B. Elementary mentees were significantly more likely to be first-time participants.

A. Percentage Within Level



B. Percentage Within Program Length Category



Source. Seedling program records, 2024–2025.

Notes. * $p < .001$, Cramer’s $V = .263$

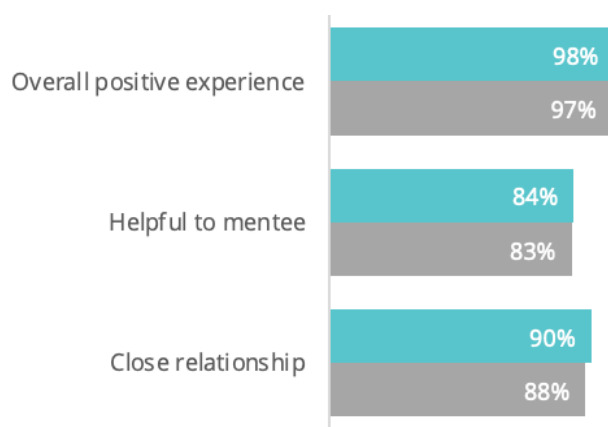
Initiating mentoring relationships early can yield more enduring benefits for a child's personal and academic growth (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2013; Lampley & Johnson, 2010). Early childhood represents a critical stage for cognitive and social development, and students who form positive mentoring relationships are more likely to build confidence, feel supported, and strengthen skills such as goal setting and problem-solving. Mentoring in the early grades also establishes a strong foundation for continued learning and success in later years. Beginning mentoring relationships early allows for longer engagement and sustained support, which can enhance long-term positive outcomes for students.

"It has been a true joy to watch my mentee develop over the years. She has become positive and optimistic, young woman with lovely social skills and is excited about school and learning opportunities. I look forward to meeting with her every week. From the way she reacts, I feel like she does too. She has said that she would like to continue meeting with me after she graduates next year."

Mentor, May 2025

Consistent with previous years, most mentors expressed positive perceptions of their mentoring relationships (Figure 11). Ninety percent reported feeling close to their mentees, and 84% believed their time together was beneficial. Overall, 98% of mentors rated their Seedling mentoring experience as excellent or good.

Figure 11. Most Seedling mentors felt close to their mentees and reported the relationship to be a positive experience in 2024–2025, and their perceptions were similar to mentors reporting in 2023–2024.



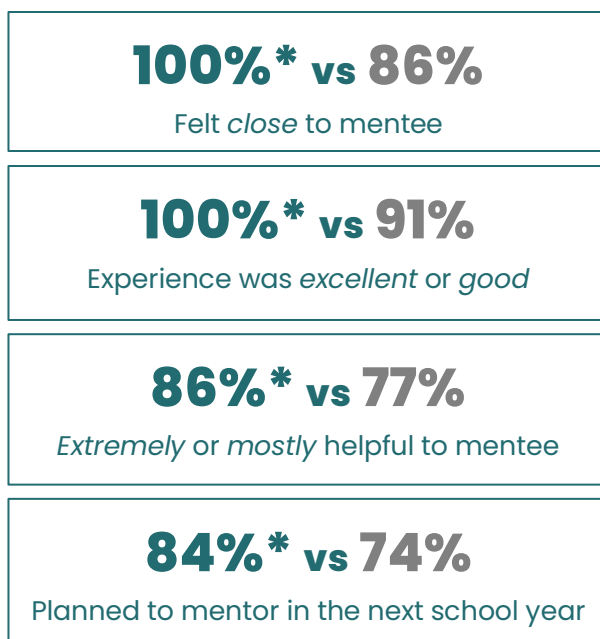
Source. Seedling Mentor Survey, 2025.

"I feel like I've seen so much growth in my mentee over the past year, and I have really enjoyed how our relationship is deepening after 2 years. She really enjoys our time together. A few weeks ago, she was telling me she couldn't believe we had only been matched for 2 years because she felt like it had been way longer than that!"

Mentor, May 2025

Further analysis showed that mentors who met weekly with their mentees were significantly more likely to report positive perceptions of their mentoring relationships. These mentors felt closer to their mentees, viewed the experience as more helpful, rated it more highly overall, and were more likely to continue the relationship into the next school year than those who met less often. Regular, consistent meetings appear to strengthen mentor–mentee connections, reinforce positive behaviors, provide stability, and enhance school engagement, thereby increasing the overall 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, 2024–2025.

Notes. *p<.001

Relationship Closeness

Feelings of closeness in youth mentoring relationships are among the most powerful predictors of positive outcomes for mentees.

Mentees' feelings of closeness and connection are central to building trust, communication, and emotional support within the relationship. Mentee feelings of closeness contribute to enduring mentoring relationships that have a meaningful and lasting influence on a mentee's personal and academic development.

Source. Herrera et al., 2007; Shenk et al., 2019.

Closeness within mentoring relationships can positively influence mentee engagement, motivation, and resilience. Mentees who felt connected to their mentors were more likely to take guidance seriously, participate actively, and work toward achieving their goals. This sense of connection also supported emotional resilience, helping students develop skills to manage stress, overcome setbacks, and persist through academic and personal challenges.

Source. Rhodes & Lowe, 2009; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010.

Mentees who described their mentoring relationships as at least “somewhat close” were more likely to experience positive academic outcomes. Relationship closeness was a stronger predictor of academic success than either match status or duration. Positive academic outcomes included improved attendance, fewer disciplinary actions, and higher overall academic achievement.

Source. Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2015.

Seedling mentees reported strong, positive mentoring relationships. Most mentees reported their mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying (Figures 13 and 14). These positive perceptions were consistent across grade levels and regardless of how long mentees had participated in the program. Overall, elementary mentees tended to have slightly higher average ratings than middle and high school mentees, the differences were not statistically significant. Program length appeared to have a moderate influence on emotional engagement and satisfaction; however, further analysis indicated this was largely due to a greater proportion of middle and high school mentees within this category reporting lower levels of emotional engagement and satisfaction. Detailed Mentee Survey Results are presented in Appendix E.

Figure 13. No matter how many months they had been mentored, most Seedling mentees indicated their mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying.

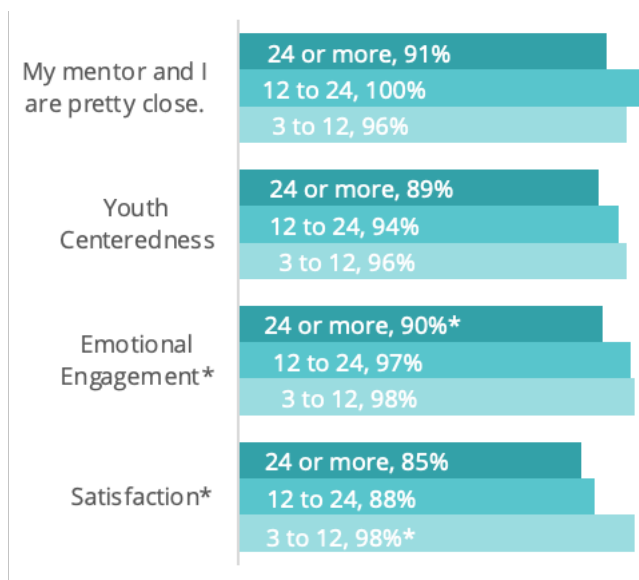
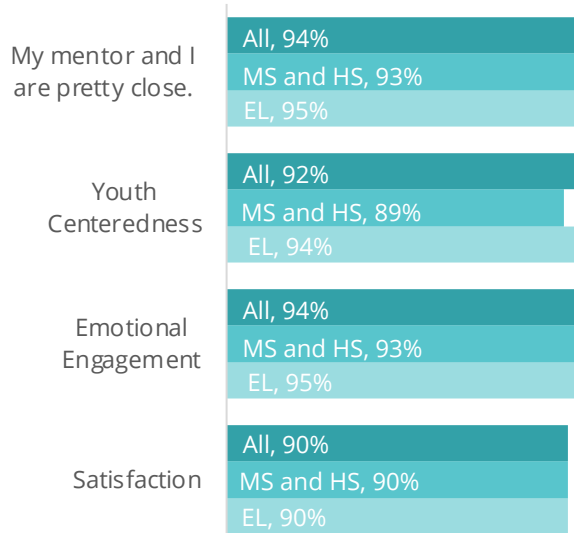


Figure 14. Across school levels, most Seedling mentees indicated mentoring relationships were child-focused, emotionally engaging, and satisfying.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2024–2025

Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .01$. Average response score reflects combined ratings across questions on a 4-point scale, and scores of 3 or above are considered positive.

“My mentor is caring and kind. She is like a second mother to me. She is more than a mentor, she is family.”

Seedling Mentee, May 2025

“My mentor has been with me for a very long time and is nice and kind. I hope that she will be able to see me next year.”

Seedling Mentee, May 2025

In an analysis of open-ended responses, Seedling mentees expressed deep appreciation for mentors who were kind, caring, and consistently supportive. They most valued mentors who listened attentively, understood their problems, and helped them feel better when they are sad or stressed. Many noted that spending time together—whether playing games, talking, or celebrating special occasions—made their mentoring relationship fun and meaningful. Mentees also appreciated mentors' reliability, thoughtful gestures, and shared interests, which strengthen their sense of connection. Several described their mentors as trusted friends or even like family, emphasizing the strong emotional bonds formed through empathy, consistency, and genuine care.

Nearly all mentees expressed complete satisfaction with their mentors, emphasizing that *nothing should change*. The few who offered suggestions primarily wished for *more time together* or *additional activities*, reflecting their strong attachment and enjoyment of the mentoring relationship.

"We do a lot of things and projects and build, write, talk about things. He's pretty nice and chill. I want to do it again next year."

Seedling Mentee, May 2025

"The best thing about my mentor is that we get along, and we do what we both want to do like play uno and draw."

Seedling Mentee, May 2025

Why Mentees Liked Their Mentors

Kindness, Caring, and Support

Most mentees described their mentors as *kind, nice, caring, and supportive*. Many said their mentors listen attentively, understand their problems, and helped them feel better when they were sad or stressed. Several mentees mentioned that their mentors "make me happy" and "believe in me".

Listening and Understanding

Mentors *listened without judgment and understand what mentees are going through*. Mentees appreciated being able to talk about their feelings, problems, and personal experiences.

Fun and Playful Interaction

Many mentees said they enjoy *playing games* (like Uno, Guess Who, or Legos) and *doing fun or creative activities*. Mentors were often described as *fun, funny, and creative*.

Thoughtful Gestures

Several mentees mentioned that mentors bring *small gifts or snacks* for special occasions such as birthdays or holidays. These gestures made mentees feel remembered and valued.

Consistency and Reliability

Mentees expressed appreciation for mentors who *always show up*, visit regularly, and *spend quality time* with them. Some noted they have been matched for a long time and hope the relationship continues.

Shared Interests and Connection

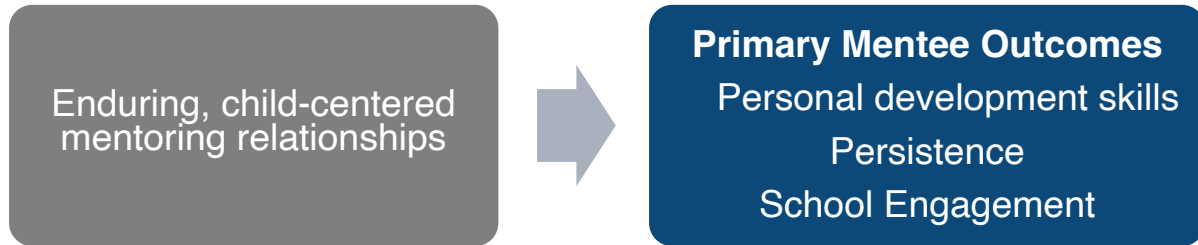
Mentees enjoyed having mentors who *share common interests* (such as sports, dancing, or animals) which made the relationship feel genuine and relatable.

Emotional Impact and Trust

Several mentees described their mentors as *like family or a second parent*. They said they feel they can *trust* their mentor completely and *tell them anything*.

Primary Mentee Outcomes

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



Personal development skills, persistence, and school engagement are especially vital for children with incarcerated parents, who often face emotional, social, and economic challenges (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012). Skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and problem-solving help them manage difficult emotions and situations effectively. Persistence enables them to continue striving toward goals despite adversity, while strong school engagement supports academic success and opens pathways to future educational and career opportunities—helping to break the cycle of disadvantage. These outcomes can vary notably between elementary and secondary students due to developmental, social, and educational factors (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Lam, Wong, Yang, & Liu, 2012). Behavioral engagement tends to be stronger in elementary school, as younger students are generally more responsive to classroom routines. In contrast, middle and high school students experience greater self-awareness and peer influence, which can lead to decreased compliance and engagement with school expectations.

On Seedling Mentee Surveys, most mentees positively rated their personal development skills.

Mentees across grade levels and lengths of program participation reported similar perceptions of their personal development. For example, most agreed with statements such as “I use ways to calm myself down” and “I say no to friends who want me to break the rules.” When analyzed by program duration and school level, mentee ratings on these items were consistent (Figures 15 and 16). However, ratings related to persistence and school engagement were somewhat lower overall.

“My mentee seems to share major life events with me very openly. She lets me know when she is upset about interactions with her friends and is excited about every opportunity she has to spend time with her dad. We mainly talk about what has been going on in her life each week.

Seedling Mentor, May 2025

Figure 15. Mentees responded more positively to items related to their personal development skills than to items about their persistence or school engagement, regardless of how long they had participated in mentoring.

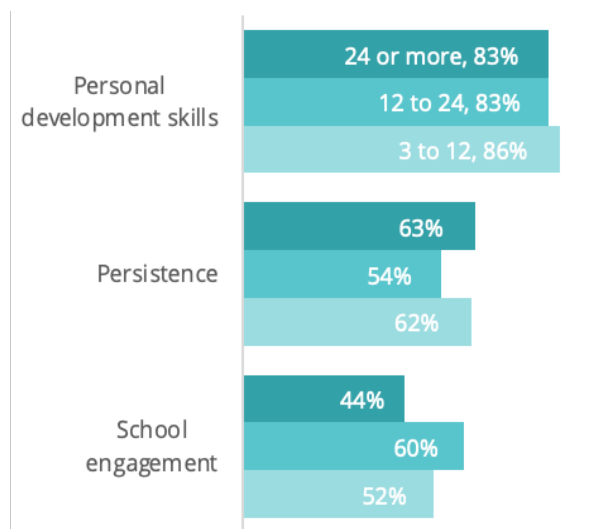
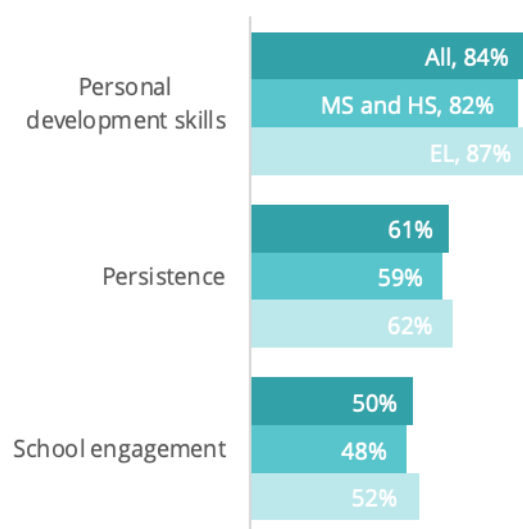


Figure 16. Most mentees responded positively about their personal development; however, ratings of persistence and school engagement were significantly lower for mentees in elementary, middle and high school.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2024–2025

Notes. Average response score reflects combined ratings across question groups on a 4-point scale, and scores of 3 or above are considered positive.

In addition to examining the identified primary outcomes for Seedling Mentees, mentee feelings of hope, social acceptance, and resilience were also considered. These feelings help children of incarcerated parents manage emotional and social challenges and build the capacity to thrive despite adversity (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Hope promotes optimism, social acceptance reduces isolation, and resilience strengthens perseverance through hardship. These qualities vary by developmental stage—elementary students tend to show greater optimism, while older students face increased self-awareness and peer influence. Support from caring adults such as parents, teachers, and mentors is essential in fostering these strengths across all ages.

Mentee feelings about hope, social acceptance, and resilience, others were mixed across program participation groups and school levels (Figures 17 and 18). Significant differences in perceptions were found among program participation levels and grade level groups on items pertaining to their feelings of hope (e.g. *I am doing well.*) and resilience (e.g. *I bounce back*). Analyses indicated the differences were likely the influence of school level. 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 19).

Figure 17. Mentee perceptions of hope, social acceptance, and resilience were mixed across program participation groups.

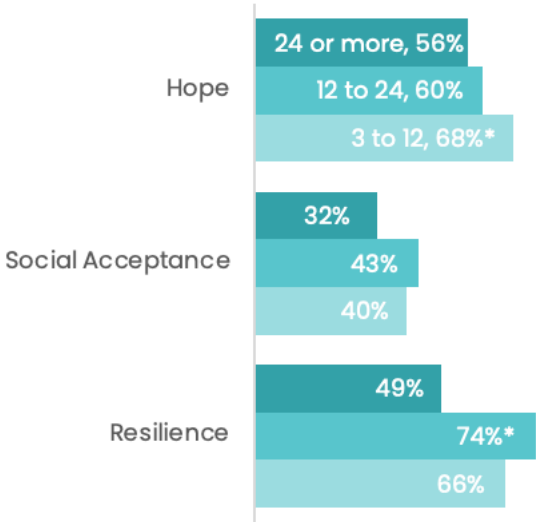
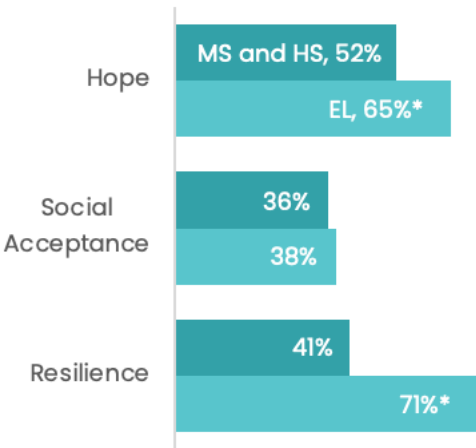
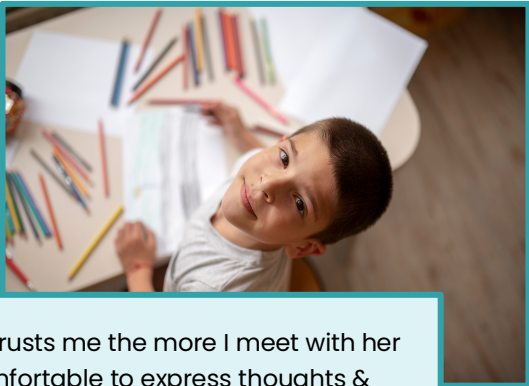
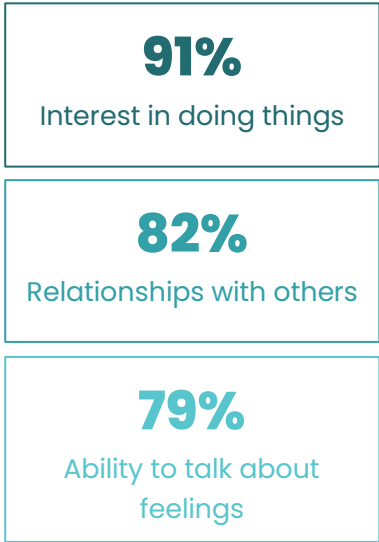


Figure 18. Mentee perceptions of hope, social acceptance, and resilience were mixed between school levels.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2024-2025
 Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .001$. Average response score reflects combined ratings across questions on a 4-point scale, and scores of 3 or above are considered positive.

Figure 19. High percentages of Seedling mentees reported very or some positive changes in their interests, relationships, and ability to talk about their feelings.



“I feel she trusts me the more I meet with her & feels comfortable to express thoughts & feelings.”
 Seedling Mentor, May 2025

“It took time for us to grow our bond, to learn how to talk to each other...It took her time to trust me, to test boundaries, to see what I would allow. She had less of an attitude as the year went on and has really begun to open up.”
 Seedling Mentor, 2025

“We have developed a safe and fun relationship. She knows she can talk to me and/or just play with a ball or play games.”
 Seedling Mentor, May 2025

Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2024-2025

Secondary Mentee Outcomes

Primary mentee outcomes may lead to positive school outcomes.



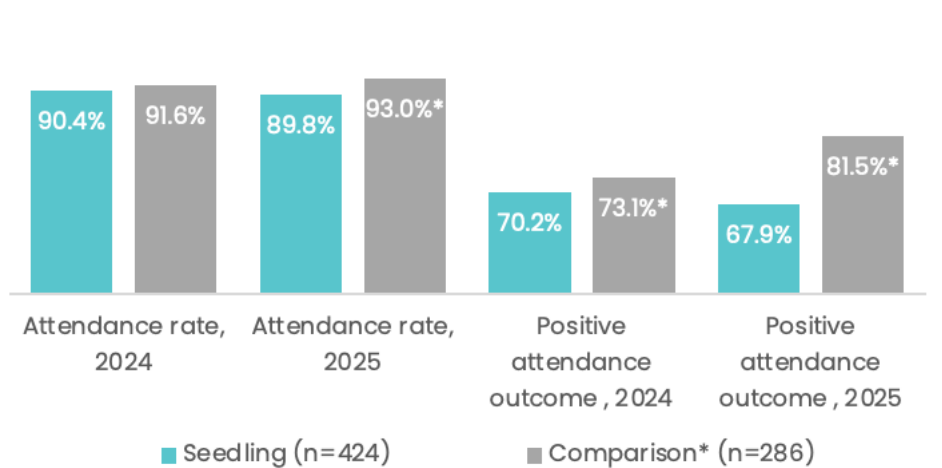
Research shows that mentoring positively influences children with incarcerated parents, especially in improving school attendance, engagement, and behavior. Mentored children tend to attend school more regularly and have fewer behavioral issues than their non-mentored peers (Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois, 2015; Jucovy, 2003). Similarly, Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) found that emotional and educational support through mentoring is linked to better school discipline and academic outcomes for these children.

Mentee Attendance Outcomes

In 2024–2025, overall attendance rates for Seedling mentees declined from the prior school year and were significantly lower than for the matched comparison group enrolled in the same schools. However, the overall attendance rate for Seedling mentees was close to the desired target of 90%, reflecting a minimum level of consistent participation needed for students to keep up academically and stay engaged in school. Almost 68% of Seedling mentees experienced positive attendance outcomes, with attendance rates exceeding 90%, (Figure 20). Compared to the matched group, a significantly lower proportion of Seedling mentees had attendance rates exceeding 90%.

Effect size calculations indicated a small but meaningful differences between the two groups—large enough to be noticeable and important, but not so large that it explained all of the variation in the overall outcomes for Seedling mentees and the comparison group. Further analyses revealed middle and high school students and Black students were significantly more likely to experienced lower attendance rates—patterns that may reflect broader social and systemic challenges affecting school attendance.

Figure 20. While the overall average attendance rate for Seedling mentee was close to the program target of 90%, it was significantly lower compared to those of a matched comparison group.

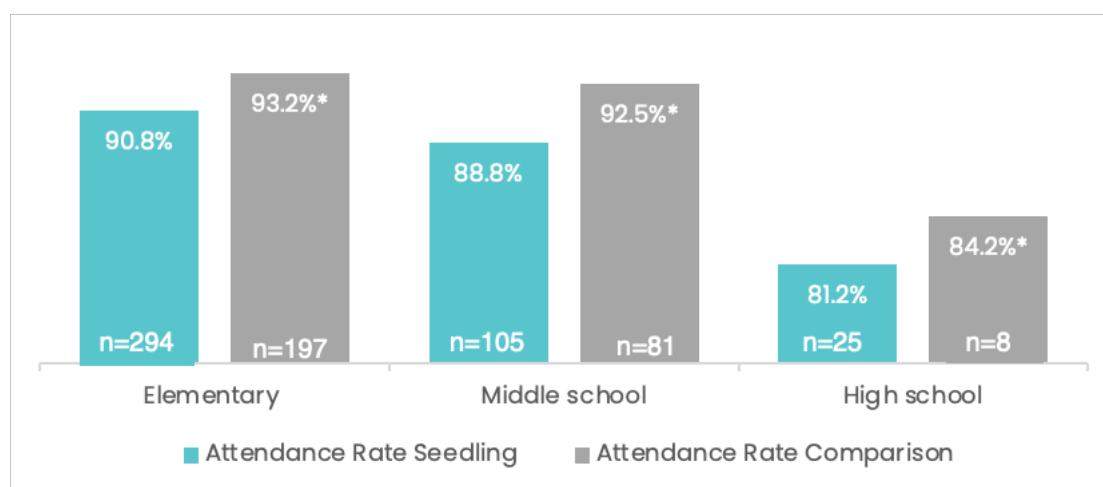


Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024–2025.

Notes. * ($p < .001$), Cramer's $V = (.150)$. Comparison group students only include students enrolled in AISD. Attendance data were not provided for comparison group students in HCISD or DVISD in 2024–2025.

Significant differences were found in the average attendance rates across school levels and between the Seedling mentees and the matched comparison groups (Figures 21 and 22). In terms of overall positive outcomes defined by an attendance rate of 90% or greater, results also were significantly different between the groups. School level was found to be a substantial influence on attendance rates.

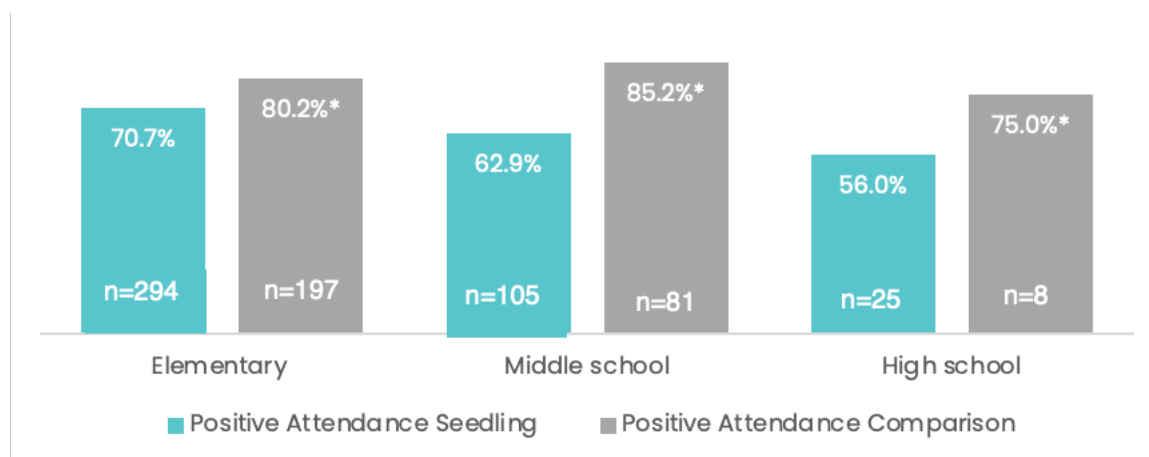
Figure 21. Significant differences were found in the average attendance rates among school levels and between the Seedling mentees and the matched comparison groups.



Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024–2025.

Notes. * ($p < .001$), Cramer's $V = (.150)$. Comparison group students only include students enrolled in AISD. Attendance data were not provided for comparison group students in HCISD or DVISD in 2024–2025.

Figure 22. There were significant differences found in the overall positive attendance outcomes among school levels and between the Seedling mentees and the matched comparison groups.

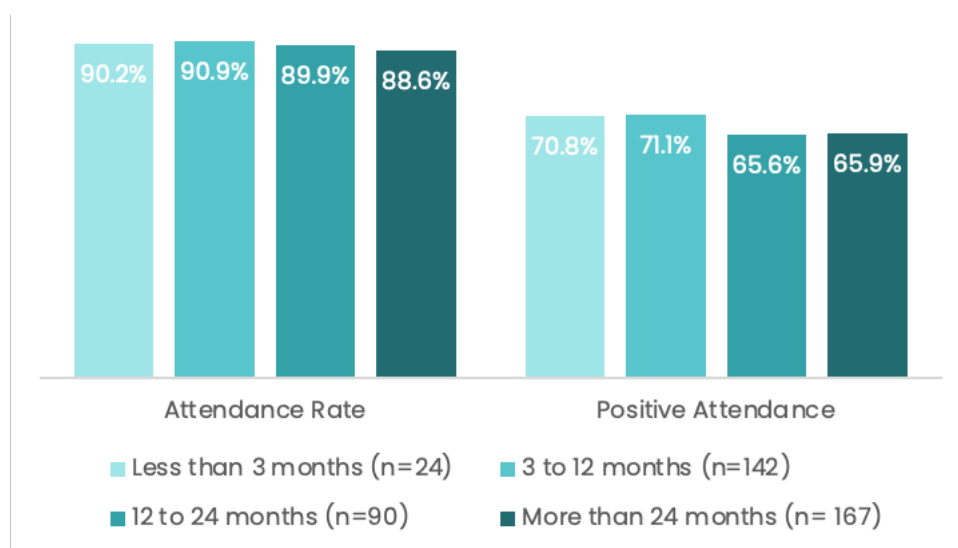


Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024–2025.

Notes. * ($p < .001$), Cramer's $V = (.150)$ and Cohen's $d = (.309)$. Comparison group only includes students enrolled in AISD. Attendance data were not provided for comparison group students in HCISD or DVISD in 2024–2025.

Attendance outcomes were similar among Seedling mentees based on their length of program participation (Figure 23). Mentees who had participated for 3–12 months and 12–24 months showed slightly greater attendance rates and positive attendance outcomes (i.e. attendance rates greater than 90%) compared to mentees participating for longer periods of time. These differences also were influenced by the relationship between school level, as mentees participating for a year or less were primarily in the elementary grades.

Figure 23. Attendance outcomes were similar among Seedling mentees based on their length of program participation; these outcomes were influenced by school level.



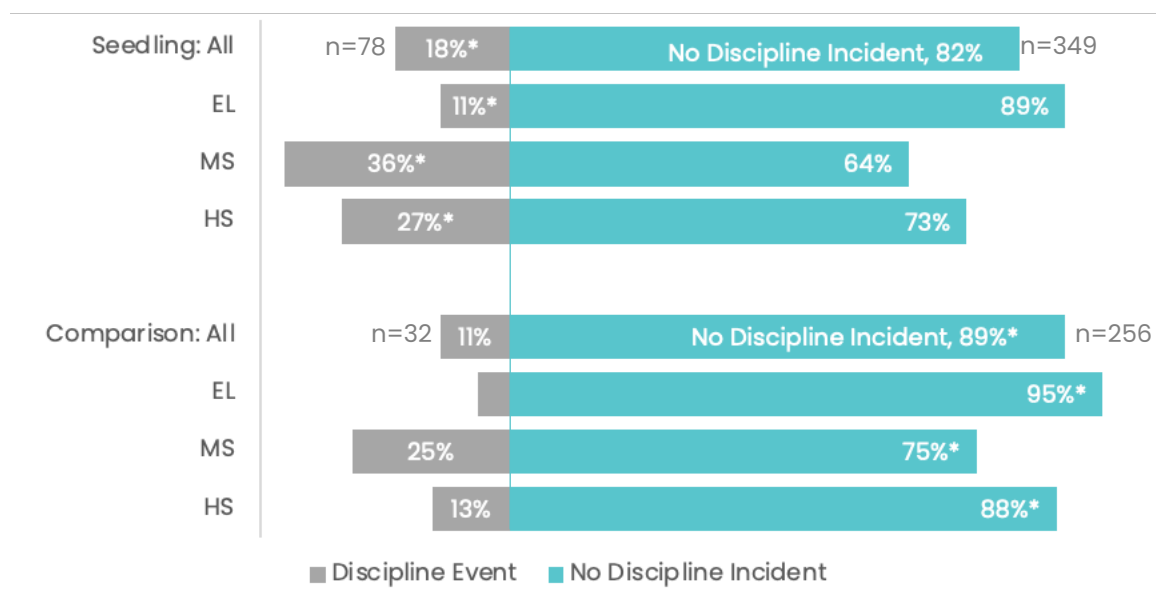
Source. District attendance files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024–2025.

Mentee Disciplinary Outcomes

In 2024–2025, most Seedling mentees experienced positive discipline outcomes (82%), meaning they did not experience a disciplinary incident at school. However, the percentages of Seedling mentees who had a disciplinary referral were significantly greater than those of the matched comparison group (Figure 24). Effect size calculations also showed a small but meaningful difference between the two groups. Analysis of disciplinary outcomes for Seedling mentees based on the length of their program participation also revealed significant differences among the groups, and effect size calculations revealed these differences were largely attributable to influences of school level (Figure 25).

While a greater proportion of Seedling mentees had disciplinary referrals, the average number of incidents were similar for Seedling mentees and comparison group students. This was true across school levels and length of program participation (Figure 25).

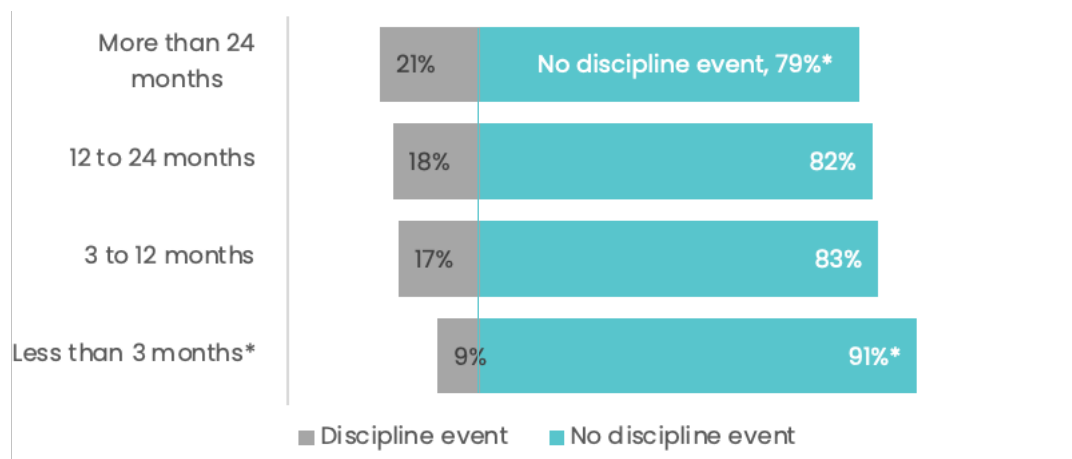
Figure 24. Most Seedling mentees experienced positive discipline outcomes, however significantly greater percentages of Seedling mentees had one or more disciplinary incidents than did the matched comparison group.



Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024–2025

Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = (.144)$.

Figure 25. Analysis of disciplinary outcomes by length of program participation revealed significant differences among Seedling mentee groups, with effect size calculations indicating these differences were largely influenced by school level.



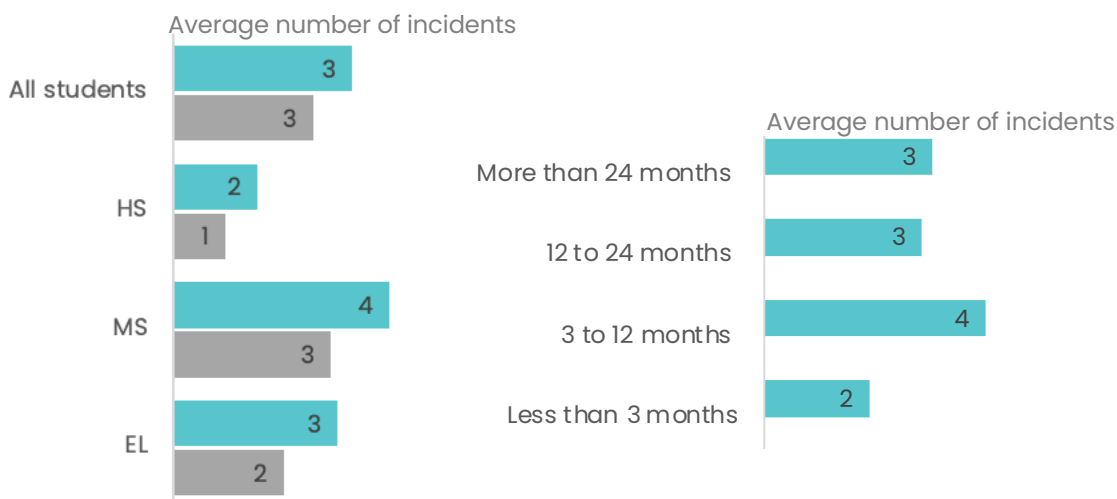
Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024-2025

Notes. *Statistically significant at $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = (.144)$.

While a greater proportion of Seedling mentees had disciplinary referrals, the average number of incidents were similar for Seedling mentees and comparison group students. This was true across school levels (Figure 26). Both groups with disciplinary incidents, Seedling mentees and the comparison group students, had an average of 3 referrals. The number of disciplinary referrals for Seedling mentees ranged between 1-18 incidents, and the number of referrals for comparison students ranged between 1-11 events.

The types of offenses were similar between Seedling mentees and the comparison group (Figures 27 and 28). Most offenses were not categorized as serious and requiring removal from the instructional setting. While greater proportions of Seedling mentees experienced removal from their regular instruction settings (e.g. primarily in the form of in school suspension or ISS) than did comparison group students, the difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 26. The average number of disciplinary incidents were similar for Seedling mentees and comparison group students and across the length of program participation.



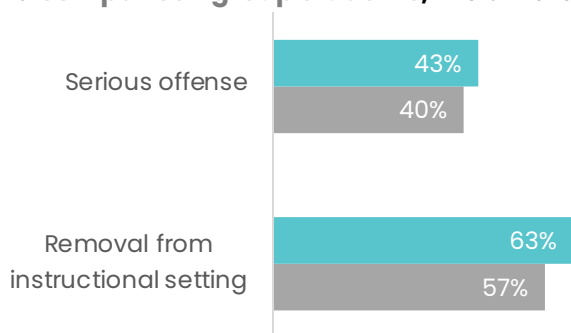
Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024-2025

Figure 27. The top 5 types of disciplinary incidents for Seedling mentees and the matched comparison group were similar.

Seedling	Comparison
1. General referral or disruption	1. General referral or disruption
2. Physical aggression with a student	2. Possession or use of Marijuana/THC
3. Possession or use of Marijuana/THC	3. Insubordination
4. Fighting	4. Fighting
5. Class cut	5. Rude to adult

Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024-2025

Figure 28. While greater proportions of Seedling mentees experienced removal from their regular instruction settings (e.g. primarily in the form of in school suspension or ISS) than did comparison group students, the difference was not statistically significant.

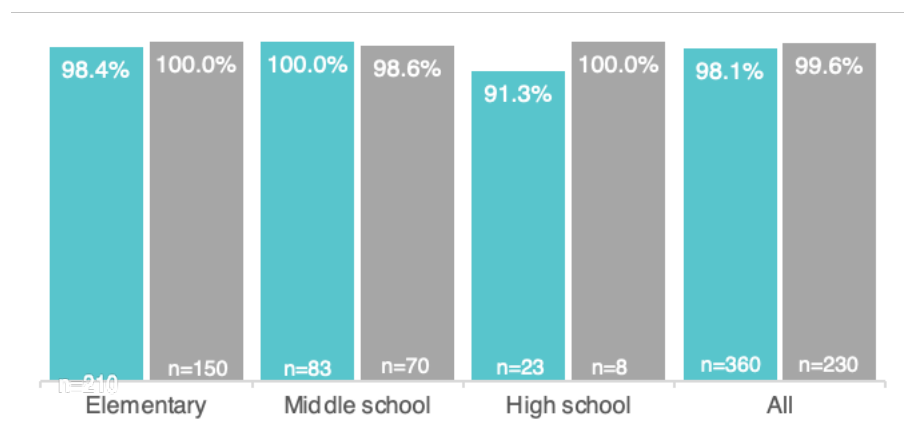


Source. District discipline files provided by Austin, Hays, and Del Valle school districts, 2024-2025

Mentee Grade Level Promotion Outcomes

Among students enrolled at the end of the school year, most mentees met grade-level promotion or graduation requirements in 2024–2025, with overall promotion rates comparable to the matched comparison group (Figure 29). Although a smaller proportion of high school mentees (91.3%) met promotion criteria compared to comparison students (100%), the difference was not statistically significant due to small sample sizes. Promotion rates were also consistent across mentees with varying lengths of program participation (Figure 30). Effect size analysis indicated a small association (Cramer's $V = .155$) between promotion outcomes and school level.

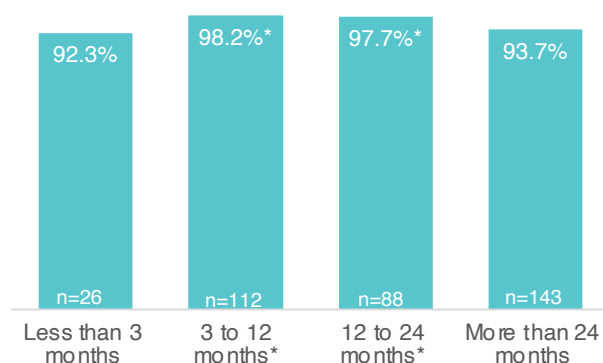
Figure 29. Most mentees met the requirements for grade level promotion or graduation in the 2024–2025 school year, and their overall promotion rates were significantly greater than those of the matched comparison group.



Source. District promotion and graduation files provided by Austin Independent School Districts, 2024–2025

Notes. Cramer's $V = .155$, Students not enrolled at the end of the school year were not included in this analysis because grade level promotion could not be determined for students not finishing the school year.

Figure 30. Seedling mentees who participated in the program from 3 to 24 months had significantly greater promotion rates than did the other groups.



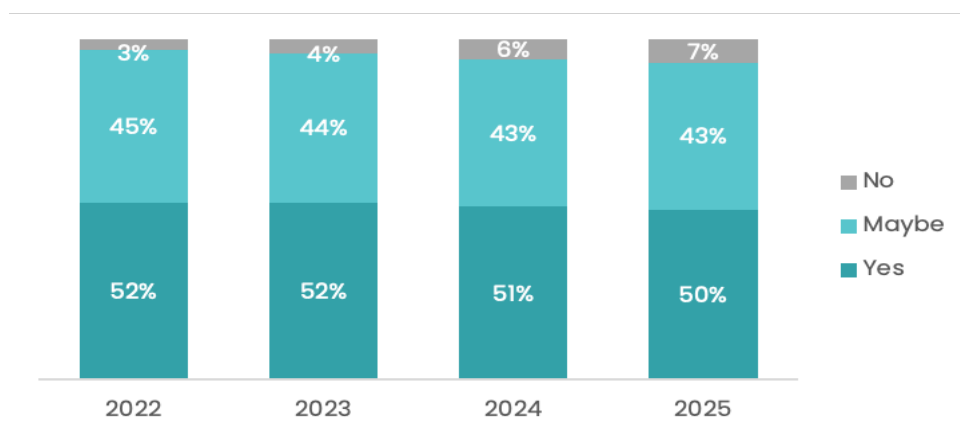
Source. District promotion and graduation files provided by Austin Independent School Districts, 2024–2025.

Seedling Mentee College and Career Outcomes

Fifty percent of Seedling mentees intended to enroll in college, and 43% of Seedling mentees reported they were still considering the possibility. College enrollment intentions for Seedling mentees have remained stable year to year (Figure 31). In the 2024–2025 school year, the Seedling Mentor program also supported seven mentees after high school graduation in navigating their college and career endeavors.

College aspirations motivate students to work toward long-term goals, leading to stronger academic engagement, higher educational attainment, and improved career opportunities. Encouraging college-going mindsets early in life helps build self-belief, resilience, and pathways to upward mobility (Ou, and Reynolds, 2014).

Figure 31. Half of Seedling mentees reported plans to attend college, and 43% of Seedling mentees reported they were still considering the possibility.



Source. Seedling Mentee Survey, 2018–2025

The path to college and career readiness varies for each student, reflecting their individual interests, strengths, and future goals. However, it is important that all mentees meet the state’s College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) criteria, which indicating preparedness for postsecondary education, the workforce, or military service. Students may be categorized as CCMR by

- Meeting specific criteria on assessments like the SAT, ACT, or TSIA2,
- Earning credit for College Preparation courses and/or 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.

Complete analyses of college readiness data could not be completed for Seedling mentees in the 2024–2025 school year, as there were less than 5 mentees categorized as a high school senior. High school Seedling mentees with available CCMR data were in primarily in grades 9–10 (n=33) and grades 11–12 (n=15). However, 29 eighth-grade mentees also were eligible to begin taking college admissions exams required for dual credit coursework in high school and were included in this summary.

District records submitted for Seedling mentees in grades 8–12 indicated few were completing college and career preparation steps. Seven Seedling mentees across grades 8–12 had taken the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA). The TSIA is a state exam that measures students' readiness for college-level coursework in reading, writing, and math. The TSIA is often used to determine eligibility for dual credit coursework or to meet College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) requirements. Less than 5 Seedling mentees had taken college credit earning classes or earned industry-based certifications.

Without adequate support, children with incarcerated parents face greater risks of poor educational outcomes, limited career opportunities, and continued cycles of incarceration. Providing college and career preparation can greatly improve their future prospects and help break these generational patterns.

Measuring Overall Program Outcomes

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

In years prior to 2024–2025, the Seedling Mentor Program evaluation used an index score—a composite measure that combines multiple variables to represent overall outcomes. For each area, data were analyzed to determine whether mentees demonstrated a positive result, and a total score from zero to five was assigned based on the number of positive outcomes. A score of zero indicates no positive outcomes across measures, while a score of five reflects positive outcomes in all areas. Index scores are valuable for summarizing complex data into a single, interpretable measure, allowing for clear comparisons and a holistic understanding of program impact.

In 2024–2025, outcome measures pertaining to resilience were added to the index score based on the existing research base and Seedling program goals. Resilience helps children with incarcerated parents adapt to family disruption, manage emotional distress, and remain engaged in school, reducing the likelihood of negative behavioral and academic outcomes (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Turney, 2014). The total score now ranging from zero to six was assigned based on the number of positive outcomes. A score of zero indicates no positive outcomes across measures, while a score of six reflects positive outcomes in all areas. It is desired that Seedling mentees experience positive outcomes in four or more areas (i.e. at least half of the measures). Direct comparisons of the newly revised index score with prior years are not possible. However, index scores from previous evaluations are presented for contextual reference.

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.

***Resilience.** 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%.

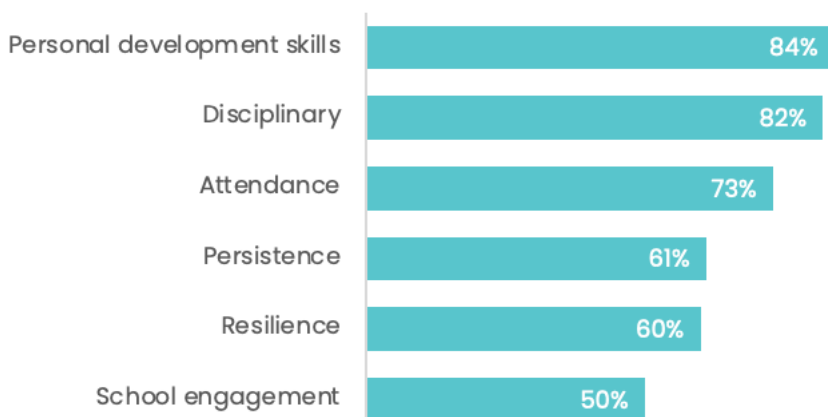
Disciplinary. A positive discipline outcome was defined as having no disciplinary incidents during the school year.

Consistent with methods in prior evaluations, mentees in grades 3 and above were selected through a stratified random sample to participate in the Seeding Mentee Survey. This subset of mentees who completed the survey and who also had reported attendance and discipline data were used to examine overall program outcomes. Overall, 161 Seedling mentees from Austin (76%), Del Valle (19%), and Hays (6%) school districts were included because they had all data points needed for the index analysis.

Overall Mentee Outcomes

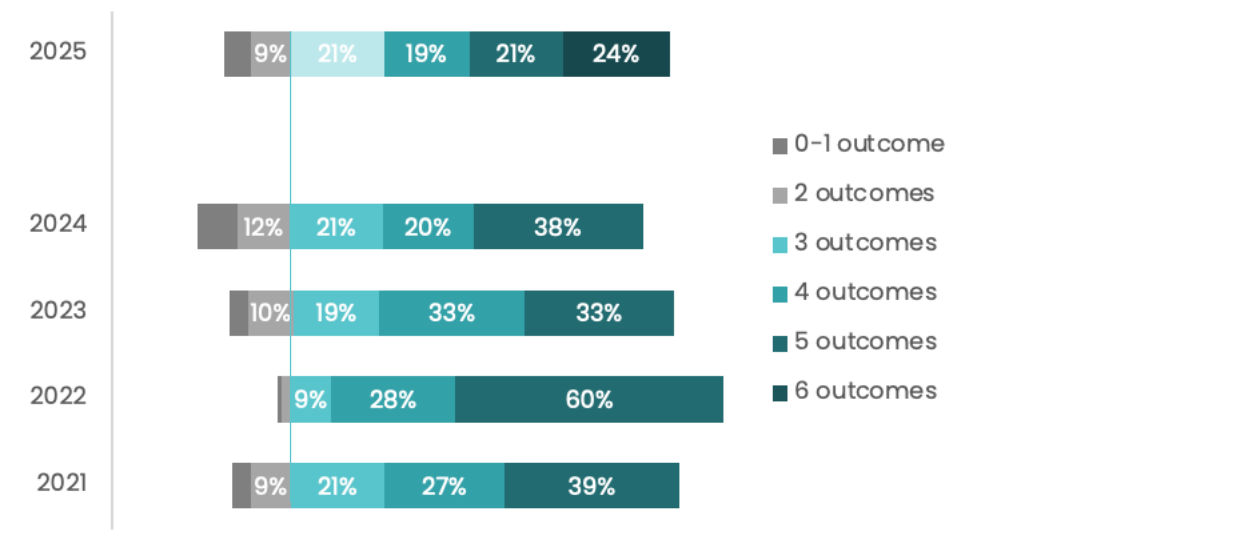
Across outcome measures, most Seedling mentees demonstrated positive results. The highest proportions of positive outcomes were observed for personal development skills, discipline, and attendance (Figure 32). Fewer mentees, however, reported positive feelings pertaining to persistence, resilience, or school engagement. In the 2024–2025 school year, 64% of Seedling mentees included in the index analysis had four or more positive outcomes on selected measures, and 85% experienced three or more positive outcomes (Figure 33).

Figure 32. Most Seedling mentees experienced 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, 2024–2025.

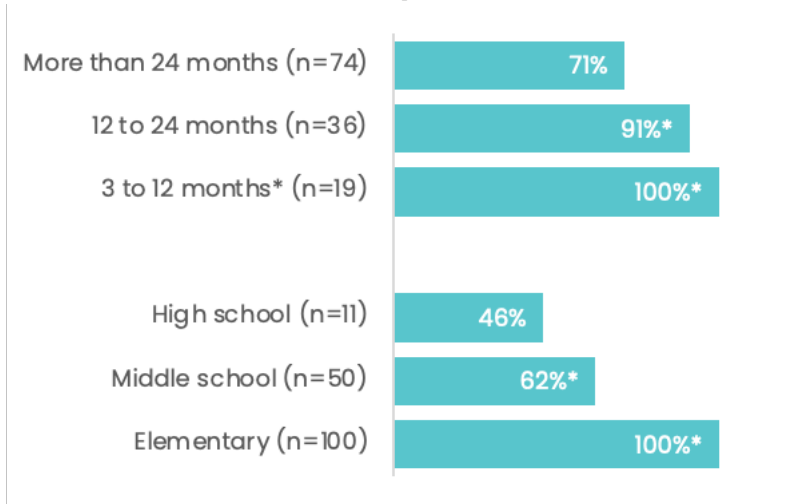
Figure 33. In 2024–2025, 85% of Seedling mentees included in the index score analyses experienced three or more positive outcomes.



Source. Seedling mentee survey responses and district attendance and discipline files, provided by Austin, Del Valle, and Hays ISDs, 2024–2025

A significantly greater proportion of Seedling mentees who were participating in first years of the program experienced at least three or more positive outcomes compared to mentees who participated for more than 2 years (Figure 34). Effect size analyses indicated a medium program association with these results (Cramer’s $V=.375$) with school level likely being an influence on outcomes. Similarly, significantly greater proportions of mentees in the elementary and middle school levels experienced at least three or more positive outcomes compared to mentees in high school. Again, effect size calculations indicated school level was likely a strong influence on outcomes (Cramer’s $V= .559$)

Figure 34. significantly higher proportion of Seedling mentees in their first two years achieved three or more positive outcomes compared to those with longer participation, with differences influenced by school level.



Source. Seedling mentee survey responses and district attendance and discipline files, provided by Austin, Del Valle, and Hays ISDs, 2024-2025.



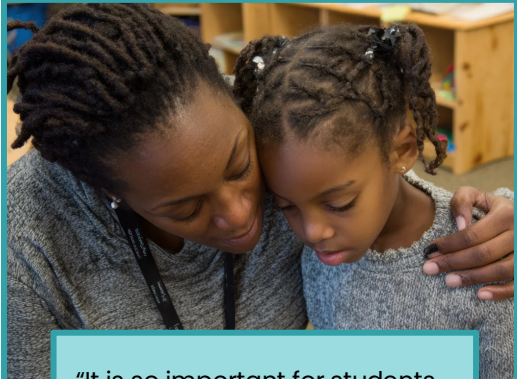
“Watching her progression this year has been incredible, from being a little weary of me in the beginning to excitedly greeting me every week and asking me to come twice a week, it’s been amazing!”

Mentor, May 2025



“When I have something going on, he listens to my problems.”

Mentee, May 2025



“It is so important for students to have the attention of at least one adult in their lives.”

School Contact, May 2025

Program Evaluation Summary

Mentoring plays a critical role in reducing the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences linked to parental incarceration.

The 2024–2025 evaluation of the Seedling Mentor Program highlights continued success in fostering meaningful mentoring relationships, social-emotional growth, and academic stability among participating students.

Program Implementation: Consistent with prior years, program implementation remained strong and aligned with the Core Elements of Effective Practice.

Mentoring Relationships: Mentees experienced strong, trusting, and enduring relationships with their mentors. High satisfaction and emotional closeness were reported across all grade levels and match durations.

Primary Outcomes: Mentees demonstrated growth in personal development skills, including persistence, school engagement, resilience, and self-awareness. These outcomes reflect the program's positive influence on emotional and behavioral well-being.

Secondary Outcomes: Average mentee attendance rate was 89.8%, similar to comparison group peers. Discipline: Most mentees had no disciplinary incidents during the school year. Promotion/Graduation: The majority of mentees met grade-level promotion or graduation requirements at comparable rates to their peers.

Index of Outcomes: Across all measures, most mentees achieved positive cumulative outcomes. School level emerged as a moderate factor influencing these results.

College & Career Readiness: While many high school mentees have not yet begun formal college or career preparation, this remains a key opportunity area to support future educational and professional success.

In conclusion, the Seedling Mentor Program continues to deliver high-quality mentoring relationships and measurable positive outcomes for youth. Strengthening college and career readiness efforts will further enhance long-term success and help break cycles of disadvantage for students impacted by parental incarceration.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Description of Methods and Index Scores

For the 2024–2025 program evaluation, activities closely mirrored those conducted in previous years, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Surveys completed by Seedling mentees, mentors, and school contacts provided insight into program implementation quality, mentoring relationships, and mentee outcomes. The Seedling Mentee Survey captured mentees' perceptions of relationship quality, school engagement, academic confidence, social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, hope, resilience, and college aspirations. Additional data on program participation, school enrollment, and mentee demographics were collected to describe participants and their engagement in the program. Student attendance, discipline, grade promotion and graduation rates, and postsecondary preparation were also analyzed to assess participant outcomes.

College and career readiness data for Seedling mentees at the high school level were examined to support ongoing program development for Seedling mentees in high school and two years beyond graduation. Data elements included test participation in college admission exams (e.g. TSIA and the SAT), along with dual credit course and Career and Technical Education (CTE) completion indicators.

The Seedling Mentor Program served 506 mentees in the 2024–2025 school year. However, due to district and school staffing and database limitations, academic outcome records only were provided for mentees enrolled in Austin Independent School District (AISD, n=333), Del Valle Independent School District (DVISD, n=70), and Hays Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD, n=34). and a matched comparison group from AISD (n=333).

The program evaluation also employed a matched comparison group design. In this approach, a separate group of students was selected based on similar characteristics—such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school enrollment—to those of program participants. This design strengthens the ability to link program participation with observed outcomes by comparing participants to a comparable group who did not receive the intervention. However, generalizability of the findings may be limited, as Austin ISD (AISD) was the only district with the staffing capacity and expertise to randomly select a matched comparison group (n=). Therefore, outcomes reported for the comparison group apply only to AISD students and reflect the educational and community context of that single district.

While study participants were matched as closely as possible; it was not possible to identify 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

In year prior to 2024–2025, the Seedling Mentor Program evaluation used an index score—a composite measure that combines multiple variables to represent overall outcomes. For each area, data were analyzed to determine whether mentees demonstrated a positive result, and a total score from zero to five was assigned based on the number of positive outcomes. A score of zero indicates no positive outcomes across measures, while a score of five reflects positive outcomes in all areas. Index scores are valuable for summarizing complex data into a single, interpretable measure, allowing for clear comparisons and a holistic understanding of program impact.

In 2024–2025, outcome measures pertaining to resilience were added to the index score based on the existing research base and Seedling program goals. Resilience helps children with incarcerated parents adapt to family disruption, manage emotional distress, and remain engaged in school, reducing the likelihood of negative behavioral and academic outcomes (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Turney, 2014). The total score now ranging from zero to six was assigned based on the number of positive outcomes. A score of zero indicates no positive outcomes across measures, while a score of six reflects positive outcomes in all areas. It is desired that Seedling mentees experience positive outcomes in four or more areas (i.e. at least half of the measures). Direct comparisons of the newly revised index score with prior years are not possible. However, index scores from previous evaluations are presented for contextual reference.

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.

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 2025

To elicit feedback on program implementation and outcomes for the 2024–20245 school year, School Contacts at Seedling supported schools (N=65) were asked to complete a program survey. In May 2025, 60% of the school contacts completed a survey. Twenty-one 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 9.08% 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?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	83%	88%	82%
Somewhat	7%	7%	8%
No	2%	0%	0%
Unsure, I did not use it.	7%	5%	10%
2. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each month during the year?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	73%	79%	63%%
No	27%	14%	25%%
Unsure, I did not know my Mentor Director.	0%	7%	12%
3. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each quarter during the year?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	97%	100%	97%
No	3%	0%	3%
Unsure, I did not know my Mentor Director.	0%	0%	0%
4. How helpful was the Seedling Mentor Director to you this year?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	78%	80%	71%
Mostly helpful	15%	15%	21%
Somewhat helpful	7%	5%	8%
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?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	95%	85%	84%
No	5%	15%	16%
6. When you initiated contact with the Seedling Mentor Director, were they responsive to your needs?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely responsive	92%	94%	88%
Mostly responsive	8%	6%	12%
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?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely satisfied	85%	70%	76%
Mostly satisfied	15%	25%	21%
Somewhat satisfied	0%	5%	3%
Not at all satisfied	0%	0%	0%
8. How were prospective mentees most often identified for participation on your campus? (Select all that apply)	2023	2024	2025
Referral from a teacher	66%	65%	74%
Referral from a parent or caregiver	37%	48%	50%
Student self- identification	32%	23%	18%
Program information distributed through classroom or school communications (e.g., online faculty or parent meetings, emails)	32%	23%	18%
9. How do you introduce Seedling's Mentor Program to caregivers ?	2023	2024	2025
Meetings with caregiver (e.g., online or in-person)	34%	35%	35%
Phone conferences with caregiver	73%	65%	65%
Family communications (e.g., parent/caregiver letters, emails, school website)	54%	53%	82%
10. Why do caregivers decline the program?	2023	2024	2025
Reluctance to inform the child of the parent's true whereabouts	33%	32%	39%
Fear of others finding out, stigmatizing the child	23%	14%	32%
Fear of school interference	13%	5%	13%
Mistrust of the Seedling program or idea	8%	5%	0%
Child does not want to participate.	23%	27%	24%

11. When matching a student with a new mentor, how do you determine the best fit?				
	2023	2024	2025	
Personal knowledge of the student	83%	72%	84%	
Student interest survey, Seedling School Contact Guide	34%	35%	29%	
Information from student's teacher	27%	28%	32%	
Other student interest survey	7%	8%	3%	
12. How do you prepare mentees for the mentoring experience?				
	2023	2024	2025	
I met with the mentee individually.	95%	75%	89%	
I met with a small group of mentees.	0%	5%	5%	
I provided information to the mentee and their family.	54%	63%	43%	
I worked with the mentee's teacher.	27%	23%	19%	
I did not provide specific preparation for mentees.	5%	8%	3%	
13. What do you do if a mentee wants to quit the mentoring relationship?				
	2023	2024	2025	
I met with the mentee to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	91%	83%	79%	
I met with the mentee's family to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	29%	31%	30%	
I met with the mentee's teacher to discuss reasons for leaving the program.	15%	23%	24%	
I helped the mentee and mentor to close the match relationship.	29%	31%	39%	
I did not do anything if a mentee chose to leave the program.	15%	6%	9%	
14. When a Seedling match transfers to your school, do you introduce yourself?	2024 Beginning of the year transfer	2024 Transfer during the year	2025 Beginning of the year transfer	2025 Transfer during the year
Always	45%	60%	58%	48%
Most of the time	5%	20%	11%	14%
Some of the time	8%	6%	11%	22%
Never	5%	14%	19%	16%

15. What **methods do you use to monitor** the quality of the Seedling mentor/mentee relationships?

	2023	2024	2025
Regular check in with mentees	76%	80%	82%
Hearing from mentors when they have a problem	80%	65%	66%
Hearing from mentees when they have a problem	68%	50%	63%
Regular check in with mentors	56%	55%	44%
On-going communication with Mentor Directors	49%	50%	42%
Feedback from teachers	32%	23%	37%
Conversations with mentee's caregiver	17%	20%	16%
I do not monitor the Seedling relationships	0%	5%	3%

16. **How often do you check in** with mentees during their mentoring relationship?

	2023	2024	2025
Once a quarter or more	73%	85%	63%
Once a semester	17%	5%	24%
Only when a problem surfaces	7%	8%	13%
If no problem surfaces, I do not check in.	2%	3%	0%

17. Overall, **how helpful** are the mentoring relationships to mentees at your school?

	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	85%	70%	66%
Mostly helpful	15%	28%	34%
Somewhat helpful	0%	3%	0%
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?

- The one-on-one, trusting adult relationship is the heart of the program.
- Students benefit from consistent attention, compassion, and support from mentors.
- Mentors provide a safe, caring space for students to talk and feel valued.

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

- Expand outreach and eligibility,
- Enhance communication and coordination, and
- Increase mentor availability—especially bilingual mentors and meeting space access.

Appendix C: Seedling Mentor Survey, Spring 2025

Seedling mentors completed a comprehensive survey to provide feedback on program implementation and mentee outcomes for the 2024–2025 school year. A web-link to the survey was emailed to 490 mentors with verified email addresses in May 2025, and 44% (n=216) responded. The confidence level is 95% with an 4.89% margin of error. Of those responding, 31% 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?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	37%	26%	31%
No	63%	74%	69%

New Mentors

2. How frequently do you refer to the New Mentor Orientation Manual?	2023	2024	2025
Frequently	1%	3%	6%
Sometimes	36%	28%	32%
Rarely	46%	49%	45%
Never	17%	21%	17%

3. Please select the primary reasons why you do not use the New Mentor Orientation Manual (select all that apply).	2023	2024	2025
I feel I am totally proficient.	44%	62%	39%
I am too busy.	25%	15%	18%
I have misplaced the manual.	6%	23%	11%
It is not relevant.	0%	8%	5%
Other	31%	0%	43%

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

5. Did you receive articles emailed by Seedling staff??	2023	2024	2025
Yes, I received the articles/videos and read all of them.	37%	35%	34%
Yes, I received the articles/videos and read some of them.	58%	61%	62%
Yes, I received the articles/videos but did not read any of them.	3%	3%	3%
No, I did not receive the articles.	2%	1%	2%

6. Overall, were the articles helpful to you?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	23%	26%	22%
Mostly helpful	53%	47%	51%
Somewhat helpful	22%	25%	25%
Not at all helpful	2%	2%	1%

All Mentors

7. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each month during the year?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	84%	81%	89%
No	16%	18%	11%

8. Did you and your Mentor Director communicate each quarter during the year?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	92%	90%	89%
No	8%	10%	11%

9. How helpful was the Seedling Mentor Director to you?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	58%	60%	63%
Mostly helpful	31%	25%	21%
Somewhat helpful	7%	10%	14%
Not at all helpful	2%	2%	1%
I do not know. I never interacted with the Mentor Director.	2%	3%	1%

10. During your mentoring experience this year, did you contact a Seedling Mentor Director for assistance?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	67%	58%	63%
No	33%	42%	36%

11. When you initiated contact with your Mentor Director, were they responsive to your needs?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely responsive	88%	87%	87%
Mostly responsive	8%	8%	8%
Somewhat responsive	3%	3%	5%
Not at all responsive	1%	2%	1%
12. Overall, as the Seedling Mentor Program facilitated connection between mentees and their mentors, how supported did you feel in this process?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely supported	67%	70%	73%
Mostly supported	25%	22%	18%
Somewhat supported	7%	6%	7%
Not at all supported	1%	2%	1%
13. At the school where you mentored, was the School Contact helpful ?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	57%	54%	73%
Mostly helpful	22%	19%	18%
Sometimes helpful	19%	16%	7%
Not at all helpful	7%	9%	1%
Does not apply. I mentored at an unofficial campus.	2%	2%	1%
14. During your mentoring experience this year, did you request assistance from the Seedling School Contact?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	66%	63%	61%
No	32%	35%	37%
Does not apply. I mentored at an unofficial campus.	2%	2%	3%
15. When you initiated contact with your School Contact, were they responsive to your needs?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely responsive	64%	66%	62%
Mostly responsive	17%	18%	22%
Somewhat responsive	14%	12%	14%
Not at all responsive	5%	4%	2%

Seedling Mentor Training

16. Did you attend any of the monthly online training sessions?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	40%	48%	40%
No	60%	52%	60%

17. If you did not attend a monthly training session, please tell us why you did not participate .	2023	2024	2025
I cannot be away from work twice in one week.	31%	30%	36%
I cannot attend sessions during the lunch hour.	32%	41%	42%
I prefer reading about the topics in an electronic newsletter.	27%	25%	28%
I have online fatigue.	10%	11%	13%
I feel well-prepared and do not require additional training.	23%	24%	30%
I do not think the topics are relevant to my situation.	5%	6%	7%

18. I would be more likely to attend a training event if...	2023	2024	2025
Training sessions were held on a weekday evening.	27%	23%	18%
The training topics were relevant to my situation.	21%	21%	10%
Training sessions were held on Saturday morning.	12%	16%	14%
I feel well prepared and do not require additional training.	27%	34%	41%

19. As a result of the monthly training sessions I attended, I feel more confident in the mentoring experience.	2023	2024	2025
Extremely confident	73%	53%	48%
Mostly confident	26%	42%	42%
Somewhat confident	1%	5%	8%

Seedling Mentor Experience

20. How often were you able to connect with your mentee this year?	2023	2024	2025
Weekly	82%	82%	83%
Every other week	13%	14%	11%
Once a month	3%	3%	4%
Less than once a month	2%	1%	2%

21. How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?	2023	2024	2025
Excellent	45%	51%	60%
Good	47%	42%	32%
Fair	8%	7%	8%
Poor	1%	1%	1%

22. When I spend time with my mentee, we most often engage in:	2023	2024	2025
Talking/listening	84%	85%	88%
Playing games/ art or craft activities	71%	73%	81%
Discussing problems/processing feelings	31%	33%	38%
Supporting academic development	17%	14%	19%
Reading	7%	6%	12%
Engaging in outdoor activities or physical activities	12%	15%	14%

23. My mentee and I are pretty close .	2023	2024	2025
Very true	39%	47%	50%
Sort of true	49%	42%	39%
Not very true	11%	11%	10%
Not at all True	1%	0%	1%

24. Do you believe that your time together was helpful for your mentee?	2023	2024	2025
Extremely helpful	35%	39%	44%
Mostly helpful	48%	47%	40%
Sometimes helpful	16%	12%	14%
Not at all helpful	1%	1%	1%

25. How do you rate your overall experience with Seedling's Mentor Program?	2023	2024	2025
Excellent	69%	75%	89%
Good	28%	21%	19%
Fair	2%	3%	2%
Poor	0%	0%	0%

26. Do you plan on continuing your relationship with your mentee next year?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	82%	79%	75%
No	6%	7%	7%
Undecided	11%	13%	18%

27. If your mentoring relationship ended, how did you close the relationship ?	2023	2024	2025
With a visit	44%	72%	60%
Sent a letter	19%	6%	20%
I did not close the relationship.	6%	22	20%

28. If you cannot continue your current mentoring relationship, would you be interested in mentoring another child ?	2023	2024	2025
Yes	56%	37%	60%
No	19%	53%	33%
Undecided	25%	11%	7%

Appendix D: Seedling Student Survey, Spring 2025

To assess mentoring relationship quality and outcomes for the 506 mentees who were served by the program in the 2024–2025 school year, a stratified, random sample of Seedling mentees (n=215) 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 a 3.61+ % 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 1

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

Part 1: Mentoring Relationship Quality	2023	2024	2025
My mentor helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me.	97%	98%	91%
My mentor is always interested in what I want to do.	99%	100%	96%
My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things.	90%	91%	86%
It helps me when my mentor gives me suggestions about things I should do.	97%	96%	94%
I wish my mentor spent more time with me.	88%	82%	85%
When I am with my mentor, I feel important.	95%	96%	94%
I tell my mentor some things because my mentor will not tell other people.	88%	89%	87%
When I am with my mentor, I feel happy.	98%	98%	98%
My mentor comes to see me when he or she is supposed to.	96%	96%	88%
When I am with my mentor, I feel satisfied.	96%	96%	93%
When something is bugging me, my mentor listens while I talk about it.	97%	97%	95%
My mentor and I are pretty close.	94%	98%	94%
Youth centeredness, positive responses overall	96%	95%	92%
Emotional engagement, positive responses overall	94%	92%	94%
Mentee satisfaction, positive responses overall	90%	93%	90%

Seedling Student Survey, Part 2

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

Personal Development Skills	2023	2024	2025
I use ways to calm myself down.	85%	85%	70%
I say “no” to friends who want me to break the rules.	91%	88%	76%
During my school day, I am aware of when my feelings change.	93%	91%	80%
If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.	82%	69%	54%
At my school, I often notice how others are feeling.	88%	88%	75%
Overall percentage of positive responses	86%	76%	84%

Persistence	2023	2024	2025
I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.	89%	87%	68%
I feel successful in my schoolwork.	88%	88%	69%
I can reach the goals I set for myself.	89%	90%	69%
I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated.	88%	83%	63%

School Engagement	2023	2024	2025
I like to come to school.	79%	75%	56%
I enjoy doing my schoolwork.	69%	69%	52%
My homework helps me learn the things I need to know.	78%	75%	52%
My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways.	77%	79%	59%
I have fun learning in my classes.	84%	82%	58%
My teachers connect what I am doing to my life outside the classroom.	70%	75%	65%

Seedling Student Survey, Part 3

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

Hope	2023	2024	2025
I think I am doing pretty well.	80%	79%	78%
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.	81%	81%	74%
I am doing just as well as other kids my age.	71%	72%	66%
When I have a problem, I can come up with a lot of ways to solve it.	64%	72%	66%
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.	74%	72%	70%
Even when others want to quit, I know I can find ways to solve the problem.	72%	72%	70%

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

Social Acceptance	2023	2024	2025
I am always doing things with a lot of kids.	82%	80%	76%
I wish that more people my age liked me.	57%	39%	54%
I find it hard to make friends.	74%	71%	43%
I would like to have more friends.	69%	67%	52%
I am popular with others my age.	48%	54%	61%
I have a lot of friends.	70%	68%	81%

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

Mentee Resilience	2023	2024	2025
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	88%	76%	75%
I do not have a hard time making it through stressful events.	72%	81%	76%
It is not hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	73%	75%	75%
I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	73%	75%	73%
It does not take me too long to get over a challenge in my life.	72%	78%	70%

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...	2023	2024	2025
Interest in doing things	95%	93%	91%
Relationships with others	86%	88%	82%
Ability to talk about your feelings	77%	79%	79%

I will go to college after high school.	2023	2024	2025
Yes	52%	51%	50%
Maybe	44%	43%	43%
No	4%	5%	7%

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