

## A success story just outside Detroit

A mentorship program's \$200 incentive for academic achievement is successfully motivating students in a district located in the heart of the declining automotive industry.

Wayne-Westland Community Schools is a district of 11,800 students, 67 percent of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Located about 20 minutes west of Detroit, families in the district saw their economic struggles worsen during the recession. "We had more at-risk students, lower achieving students, and general student apathy," says Sean Galvin, executive director of the mentor program, called Champions of Wayne. "Most students didn't have much to celebrate."

Champions of Wayne was created in 2009 by a school psychologist, who mentored a handful of students and engraved their names on a four-foot trophy if they achieved an academic goal.

Administrators wanted to expand the program, and contacted 1974 alumnus Richard Helppie, who works in venture capitalism, for funding. The school initially planned to provide a stipend toward higher education as an incentive for reaching a goal. "But if you take the average ninth-grader and tell them they might get some money when they are 18, it won't motivate them," Galvin says. "[Helppie] said he would support the program financially if the money went directly to students."

Another alumnus who runs a staffing company became a second sponsor soon after. The program started with 50 students and one mentor in 2009. Today, almost 700 students and 130 mentors participate.

Students can sign up on their own, and staff can identify others who would benefit from the program and recommend them to Galvin. A favorite teacher, counselor, administrator or coach can act as their mentor, or Galvin can assign them one. Students then set a goal—for example, to raise a 2.0 GPA to 2.5 by the end of the semester. They sign a contract, and schedule time to work with their mentor to reach the goal.

Galvin provides mentors with research-based best practices each week, but leaves the schedules and tactics up to the individual. Some mentors eat lunch with their students each week. One mentor drove his student, prior to graduation, to interview at Harvard, where he is now a sophomore.

At the end of the semester, the students who reached their goal attend an awards banquet, and receive a \$200 check.

### Improved grades

The district measures success not only by goal attainment, but by overall improvement. Over 66 percent of students participating in Champions of Wayne have improved their grades. The percentage of students in grade 9 passing all classes has



*A Champions of Wayne student receives her award for reaching an academic goal at a large ceremony at the end of the year.*

increased from 30 percent in 2009 to 66 percent in 2012. And grade 11 participants have higher ACT scores than their nonparticipating peers.

"The building culture is better, and students are seeing mentors and teachers more as helpful and encouraging rather than as cops looking to punish them," Galvin says.

Galvin recommends interested administrators start small mentoring programs, reaching out to a few teachers and at-risk students and then expanding slowly. Locating successful alumni who want to sponsor students can also build support, he adds.

"A majority of the students who achieved their goals as part of Champions said they initially signed up because of the money," Galvin says. "But once they started to experience success and take pride in their work, by the end of the semester it was about achieving the goal and doing something they didn't think was possible." —A.D.

### DID YOU HEAR?

In 2014, career pathway programs received

# \$107 million

in federal grants.

Source: USA Today

### DID YOU HEAR?

**Students who attend schools that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Breakfast Program had higher achievement scores in math, science and reading than students in schools that do not participate.**

Source: University of Iowa