My Brother’s Keeper – Mentoring Initiative

Why Would We Be Interested in Mentoring Programs?
Research demonstrates that school age children who participate in mentoring programs almost always see positive results. Specifically, children who participate in mentoring programs tend to be more likely to complete high school, attend college, and report personal life satisfaction (The Principals’ Partnership, n.d.). McDaniel, Yarbrough, and Besnoy (2015) argue that mentoring programs can also serve as a safe haven for students that provides a nurturing environment to support their growth. The research on mentoring programs has decades of evidence that can inform us of the characteristics of successful mentoring program frameworks as well (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). The various forms of mentoring, whether academic, career, or social emotional, can all be vital components to any mentoring framework that is conceptualized.

Other large urban cities have seen success with school-initiated mentoring models. New York City has a city-wide mentoring program that is initiated by their public school district that matches high school students with mentoring organizations throughout the city based on needs and interests of the student (New York City Mentoring Program [NYCMP], 2014). They have been using this model since 1983, and according to their 2012-2013 school year results, 97% of students who have participated in the program have graduated from high school and attended college (NYCMP, 2014).

Based on this evidence, it is expected that a mentoring framework that coordinates the various mentoring organizations in the city of Milwaukee is a logical next step in supporting our students, especially students of color. Improving the access to effective mentoring programs for our students could be imperative to addressing the six focus areas, described below, with success.

Background:
My Brother’s Keeper is a federal initiative led by the White House which encourages communities to implement a coherent cradle-to-college and career strategy for improving the life outcomes of all young people to ensure they can reach their full potential. Milwaukee Public Schools accepted President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper challenge in 2014 and since then, has worked with local MBK stakeholders to meet the spirit of the six focus areas of the initiative:
1. Attending School Ready to Learn
2. Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade
3. Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career
4. Completing College Education or Training
5. Entering the Workforce
6. Reducing Violence and Providing Second Chances
Discussion:
Mentoring is one of the major tenants of MBK and one of the ways to help young men succeed in the six focus areas. Increasing mentoring opportunities for MPS students has been a priority of Superintendent Darienne Driver since her arrival.

In the summer of 2015, a large group of stakeholders met to discuss mentoring and how we can reach the goal of having a mentor for every child that wants one. From that large group a small coalition was formed which began to meet on a regular basis to brainstorm and figure out what needs to be done in our community to close the mentoring gap. That coalition included MPS, the City, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Milwaukee, Community Advocates, the Milwaukee Bucks, and the Center for Self-Sufficiency.

The discussions led to the realization that Milwaukee and Wisconsin does not have a mentoring network, like many of our peer states. Most mentoring networks are an organization or entity that serves as a clearinghouse or umbrella network for organizations that perform mentoring in the community and provide technical assistance and coordinated placement and recruitment of mentors to local organizations.

The group decided that developing a network of this nature should become a priority in Milwaukee and of the coalition. To make this a reality, the coalition developed a survey for local mentoring organization to gage capacity and to inventory the needs of the organizations. 27 organizations responded to the survey, and the major takeaway is that there is a current waitlist of nearly 800 children waiting for mentors in these organizations. The results of the survey are contained in appendix 1.

As National Mentoring Month in January 2016 approached, the coalition decided to convene local mentoring stakeholder organizations to galvanize them to become engaged in the effort to develop the mentoring network, and to increase awareness and excitement of mentoring in the greater community. As the coalition began planning of the event, the White House took notice, and decided to send Broderick Johnson, Staff Assistant to the White House and Director of the National MBK Initiative to attend and participate in the event and activities for the day.

The forum and surround events were held January 14, 2016. Broderick was able to visit Clarke Street School the morning of the event and had the opportunity to interact students and engage them in a discussion about their future. He then served on a panel to kick off the forum which included Dr. Driver, Mayor Barrett, Amy Chionchio, and Bucks legends Bob Lanier, Marques Johnson, and Giannis Antetolounmpo. At the conclusion of the panel, two breakout sessions were held, one included an opportunity for the engagement of select youth on a personal level about mentoring, and the other was a discussion with mentoring organizations about their needs and the mentoring landscape in Milwaukee.

The event was attended by well over 200 people and local coverage of the forum was wide within the community.

Next Steps:
The coalition will be meeting to review data from the survey and feedback from the forum to help guide the work and discussions moving forward. Although there is no current mentoring framework or infrastructure in place, the coalition will work expediently to develop this and flesh out what the mentoring network will look like. We will employ the help of the MPS Department of Research to assist with national best practices around mentoring (they have
already begun looking into the successes of other cities and school districts) as well as the Center for Youth Engagement and Community Advocates in this process.

Our goal will be to have a product in place for the 2016-17 school year that helps to address the mentoring community’s capacity issues.

In the coming months the group hopes to accomplish the following:

- Debrief about the forum and use the feedback from the event and survey to guide our work moving forward.
- Add additional voices and perspectives from the community to the coalition.
- Produce a write-up about the landscape and what the network may look like.
- Develop the network and work with local stakeholders to make the network a reality.

References


Appendix 1
Mentoring Survey Results Overview

27 local mentoring agencies responded to the Milwaukee Mentor Network survey. From the responses, the combined number of youth mentored in Milwaukee annually is about 80,000. The number of volunteer mentors annually is over 5,000.

- The majority of agencies receive youth referrals from the parent/guardian, school, or a social worker.
- There are approximately 800 youth waiting for a mentor through the reporting agencies.
- The greatest need is for male mentors, one-to-one mentors, and small group mentors.
- The top two desired youth outcomes for reporting agencies are academic improvement and increased social skills.
Appendix 2
Photographs from the Mentoring Forum

Photo 1: Broderick Johnson with students and staff from Clarke Street School

Photo 2: BMO Harris Bradley Center prior to the Mentoring Forum
Photo 3: Mentoring Forum breakout session with youth attendees

Photo 4: Dr. Driver speaking with youth during the mentoring forum

Photo 5: Panel discussion with local leaders at the mentoring forum

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