



# Effectiveness of a combined tutoring and mentoring intervention with ninth-grade, urban Black adolescents

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Interventions; Academic Achievement; Academic Performance; School; Mentoring; Mentorship; Caring Adult; Transition; High School; Dropout; Tutoring

### POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong, Supportive Friends & Families  
Education, Training & Apprenticeships

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

### SOURCE

Academic

**“...a positive relationship with a caring adult can provide some key support needed for the successful high school transition of ‘at-risk’ youth” (p. 209).**

## 1. What is the research about?

This research looks at the effectiveness of a tutoring and mentorship program for Black youth living in low-income areas as they enter ninth grade. It is a response to concerns about the high dropout rate in the USA. The decision to leave school is a complex one, based on multiple factors, including family situation, community, and the school itself. According to a 2011 review of USA statistics, Black students are 1.5 times more likely to leave high school than White peers; living in low-income neighborhoods, poor academic achievement, and not engaging in school-related activities are all also related to higher dropout rates.

The transition to high school is a crucial time; a large portion of students who fail ninth grade eventually leave school without graduating. The researchers were interested in how to best support students during this vulnerable transition period, especially those at greater ‘risk’. While both tutoring and mentorship have been used to increase success in school and reduce dropout rates in the past, few studies have examined both as equally important components. The goal of this study was to learn about the effects of a combined tutor/mentorship program on success in school, educational behaviour and attitudes, and how supported students felt during their transition to high school.

## 2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place at a public high school in a major urban city in the Midwestern United States.

## 3. Who is this research about?

The youth in the study were 118 ninth-grade students, 99% of whom identified as Black, primarily from low-income families.

## 4. How was the research done?

This study compared the academic performance (GPA) of two groups of students: those who were part of the tutor/mentorship program and those who weren’t. Each student in the program was paired with a tutor/mentor and tutoring/mentoring happened after school four afternoons per week. Each month, tutor/mentors and students also went to workshops and programs together.

To test change over time, both groups had to complete questionnaires at the beginning and end of the tutor/mentor program. These questionnaires asked about students’ attitudes towards school and level of engagement, how supported they felt, their sense of personal control over their lives and decisions, and their level of

persistence. The results of these questionnaires and the change in students' GPAs were statistically analyzed to find out if there were any meaningful changes over time, as well as to find any differences between the two groups by the end of the school year.

### 5. What are the key findings?

The GPAs of students in the tutor/mentorship program increased during the school year as a result of participating in the program, while the GPAs of students not in the program decreased during the same period. Since not doing well academically is a known risk factor for early school leaving, a combined tutoring/mentorship program could help lower the number of students who leave school without graduating. In addition, students in the tutoring/mentorship program felt more supported by family, friends, and their school to complete high school and further their education. Finally, the results showed that having a positive relationship with a caring, trusted adult, such as the tutor/mentor, can provide important support for successful transition into high school, in a way that tutoring support alone cannot.

### 6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This research illustrates the importance of positive adult mentorship and support for youth when they are moving from elementary to high school. Interpersonal support may be as important as academic support to make sure young people succeed in school, and the combination of both is likely to provide more benefit than either individually, particularly for youth facing multiple barriers. This study also highlights the importance of taking a systemic approach to identify young people who may require the most support in advance. This allows enough time to prepare resources, complete administrative tasks, and develop rapport and meaningful relationships between mentors and mentees, ensuring no young people are left behind.



Somers, C.L., Wang, D., & Piliawsky, M. (2016). Effectiveness of a combined tutoring and mentoring intervention with ninth-grade, urban Black adolescents. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 32*(3), 199-213. DOI: 10.1080/15377903.2015.1136719