REPORT

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools

Focus on Mentee-Mentor Relationships

The 10th Grade Implementation of iMentor's College Ready Program

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November 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank our colleagues at the Research Alliance who helped guide our analyses of the iMentor College Ready Program and prepare this report. In particular, James Kemple and Adriana Villavicencio offered thoughtful guidance throughout the development of the report. Chelsea Farley and Shifra Goldenberg helped us tighten out arguments and refine our writing, to make the report accessible to multiple audiences.

We would also like to thank Mike O'Brien, CEO of iMentor, for his openness to an independent research study and learning from our findings. Jim Lauckhardt, the Managing Director of Research and Evaluation at iMentor, and his team offered continued data support and thoughtful input about how our work might best inform iMentor's programming. We thank Jim for his close read of an early draft and his insight into how to provide a more useful report. We would also like to thank iMentor and school staff for taking the time to participate in interviews as part of the evaluation.

Much of this report depends on student survey data, and we would not have had such high-quality data without the efforts of iMentor's Jana Chandler and Cherika Wilson, who led the survey process. Jana, Cherika, and the survey administration team at Ewald & Wasserman, in particular Lisa Wasserman, were a joy to work with. Surveying thousands of students across eight schools requires preparation, organization, and flexibility. Their help in data collection was essential.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are over 5,000 mentoring programs in the United States. Typically, these programs match individual youth with a volunteer mentor, aiming to foster a caring relationship between the two that will ultimately support the mentee's development (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentoring programs share the goal of creating close bonds between young people and adults, often providing an important source of emotional support for the mentee (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Spencer & Rhodes, 2005). Approximately a quarter of all U.S.-based mentoring programs take place in a school setting (Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois, 2010). Commonly, school-based mentoring programs strive not only to create close pair bonds, but also to improve student achievement (Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois, 2010).

A growing body of research documents that relationships between adults and young people can indeed improve youth's odds of success. Nagaoka et al. (2015) describe adult (and peer) relationships as necessary foundations for students' development. Studies of mentoring programs have found that a high-quality mentoring relationship is vital for producing positive effects. For instance, Bayer et al.'s examination of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring found that students who had a close relationship with their mentor made significant academic gains, while those who did not saw little improvement (2013).

The iMentor College Ready Program combines school-based mentoring with technology and aspects of whole school reform. The program strives to create strong relationships between low-income youth and college-educated mentors—relationships that it hopes to leverage to help students develop the mindsets, skills, and knowledge necessary to enroll and succeed in college.

iMentor's approach is distinctive for several reasons: First, few mentoring programs have embraced technology as fully as iMentor, which uses online communication as the main form of contact between students and mentors. Second, iMentor attempts to serve *all* students at participating schools, whereas other mentoring programs typically serve only a subset of students. Third, the program includes a College Ready curriculum that is taught during the school day; it is unusual for a mentoring program to have a curricular component that is taught like an elective class during school.

To learn more about the process and efficacy of iMentor's approach, the Research Alliance for New York City Schools is conducting a mixed-methods evaluation of the College Ready Program in eight New York City high schools. The evaluation is

examining iMentor's roll-out and implementation in these schools, as well as its impact on a range of outcomes related to students' preparation for college. This report is the second in a series from our evaluation. The first, *Bringing Together Mentoring, Technology, and Whole School Reform: A First Look at the iMentor College Ready Program* (2015), examined the College Ready Program's early implementation and preliminary impacts for 9th grade students.

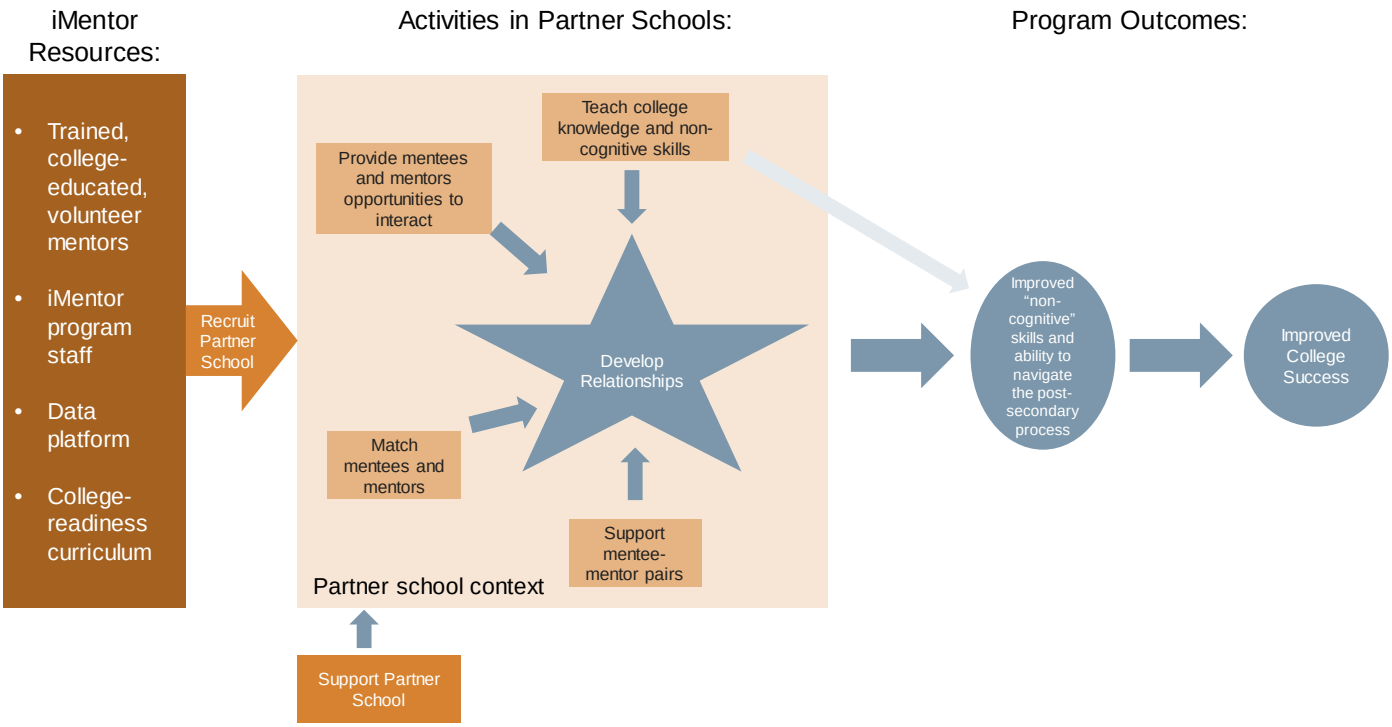
iMentor's leaders theorize that the development of close mentee-mentor relationships is the primary outcome of interest for 9th and 10th grade students, providing the foundation for college readiness, application, and enrollment work to take place in 11th and 12th grade. Therefore, this report focuses on the development of these relationships, as well as the overall quality of program implementation for 10th graders. The report aims to uncover which specific program activities are most closely linked to the development of strong mentee-mentor relationships. Understanding whether some activities have a closer connection to relationship development will be useful for iMentor as it continues to refine its programming, and may also offer valuable insights for other mentoring and youth development initiatives. To this end, we explore links between the *quantity* of various program activities and the development of close relationships.

More broadly, the report seeks to document notable strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the College Ready Program across the eight schools in our study. This information is important for identifying opportunities to improve the program, and will provide context for interpreting our upcoming exploration into iMentor's impact on student outcomes, such as academic achievement and non-cognitive skills (e.g., growth mindset and task persistence).

iMentor's Theory of Action

Figure 1 on the next page presents iMentor's theory of action.[1] Our evaluation uses iMentor's theory of action to understand how the program's key activities are expected to influence relationship development and, ultimately, students' college readiness and success. In the following pages, we briefly describe the core resources and activities that appear in iMentor's theory of action. Later chapters in the report examine the extent to which the early parts of the theory are playing out as intended.

Figure 1: iMentor's Theory of Action



iMentor provides a range of supports and resources in each partner school. Specifically, the iMentor College Ready Program provides:

- **Trained, college-educated, volunteer mentors.** iMentor recruits mentors through corporate volunteer programs and general marketing and advertising, asking potential mentors to commit to working with a student for a full four years. After applying to the program, mentors must pass a background check and attend a two-hour training, during which they are introduced to iMentor's program model and learn about expectations for mentors (e.g., emailing their mentee weekly and attending events monthly).
- **iMentor program staff (Program Coordinators, Program Assistants, and Program Directors).** iMentor hires staff to work with each partner school. Program Coordinators (PC) are assigned to a particular school, where they are responsible for matching students with mentors, teaching the iMentor curriculum, planning and running events, and supporting pairs. Large schools might have a PC for each grade. Every PC is supported by a Program Assistant (PA), who is responsible for a number of administrative duties (e.g., tracking student and mentor event attendance). Program Directors supervise and support

multiple PCs and manage relationships between iMentor's central office and school leaders.

- **Proprietary data platform.** iMentor has developed software used by mentees, mentors, and iMentor staff. Mentees and mentors mostly use the platform to email one another, and PCs use it to monitor and support pairs. For example, the platform tracks and shows PCs how long pairs have been matched, how often they send emails to one another and how many times they've met. About once a month, the platform also asks students and mentors to state on a scale from 1 to 10 how close they feel to one another. PCs examine the data to identify struggling pairs, and then talk to their Program Director about potential interventions. PCs also use the platform to track these interventions, including number of hours of contact with pairs.
- **College-readiness curriculum.** iMentor has developed a college readiness curriculum for 9th through 12th graders focused on helping students develop a specific set of non-cognitive skills (e.g., growth mindset, critical thinking, and task persistence) and knowledge iMentor has identified as important for college enrollment and success. The curriculum outlines activities and goals for each iMentor class, as well as monthly events related to the curriculum. Each class period focuses on a specific skill with a lesson plan that includes an introduction to the skill (sometimes a video) and time for students to email their mentor (responding to a prompt related to that skill). Mentors also receive a prompt meant to guide a response to their student's email. The lessons are clustered into units that last about four weeks. Following each unit, iMentor holds an event for each partner school where mentees and mentors participate in a culminating activity related to the unit's lessons.

The four types of resources described above are provided to every iMentor partner school. iMentor recruits partner schools that serve low-income students, looking particularly for principals who are committed to including iMentor in the school's culture. Partner schools appoint a staff member (administrator, guidance counselor, or teacher) to serve as a point person for iMentor within the school.

In each partner school, iMentor engages in **four key activities**:

- **Matching mentees and mentors.** All students in cohorts participating in the program are placed into an iMentor class that is led by an iMentor PC. During the first few weeks of class, PCs encourage students to join the program and be matched to a mentor. To join the program, students must return a signed

permission slip from their parent or guardian allowing them to participate in iMentor. Then, students fill out a form about their interests. iMentor matches mentors and mentees based on gender and shared interests using a computer-based algorithm. The algorithm suggests multiple potential mentors for each mentee, and the PC uses their discretion to determine the best match.

- **Supporting mentee-mentor pairs**. One of the PCs' main responsibilities is to support mentee-mentor pairs. They do so using a case management model (described in Chapter 3). iMentor expects PCs to (1) check in with each mentor at least five times a year to inquire about how the mentoring relationship is going and (2) send weekly group emails to mentors with updates about school and iMentor activities. As described above, PCs monitor pair interactions using iMentor's proprietary platform and maintain a list of pairs who may need additional support. This support may include one-on-one conversations with students, sending text message reminders to mentors, or offering in-depth advice to mentors about nurturing the mentoring relationship.
- **Teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills**. PCs teach a weekly class that is part of students' regular school day. During these classes, the PC conducts a short lesson from the iMentor curriculum, and then students email their mentor about the day's topic.
- **Providing mentees and mentors opportunities to interact.** Students and mentors interact through structured weekly emails and monthly in-person events organized and led by PCs.

Together, these activities are designed to build strong relationships between mentees and mentors. iMentor believes that students who have close relationships with mentors will be better able to learn the iMentor curriculum, and in turn, improve their non-cognitive skills, increase their college knowledge, succeed in the college application process, and ultimately graduate from college at higher rates. Mentors may also serve as personalized college readiness coaches, offering advice, guidance, assistance for students as they apply to college, and sometimes summer jobs/internships.

This report examines the implementation of these four key activities for 10th grade students and explores the relationship between each activity and the closeness of mentor-mentee relationships. In the next chapter, we outline our data collection and analysis strategies, and describe the eight schools in our evaluation. Chapter 3 describes iMentor's implementation for 10th graders during the 2014-2015 school

year, including the extent to which the key program activities met iMentor's established benchmarks for implementation. In Chapter 4, we assess how interactions between mentees and mentors are associated with the closeness of their relationships, with a focus on the four key activities in the iMentor theory of action. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes our conclusions and describes the next phase of our evaluation.

CHAPTER 2: STUDY METHODS, DATA SOURCES, AND DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

This report focuses on students who were in 10th grade during the 2014-2015 school year in the eight NYC high schools participating in our evaluation of iMentor's College Ready Program.

The report draws on both qualitative and quantitative data to answer the following research questions:

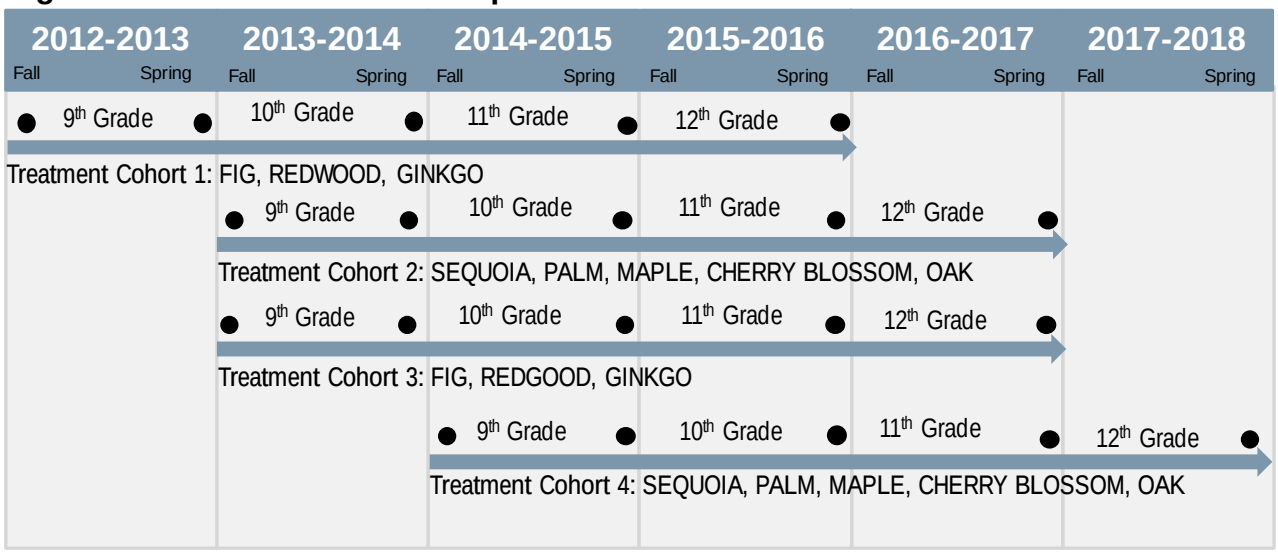
- Overall, across schools, how was iMentor implemented for 10th graders during the 2014-2015 school year?
- How did program implementation vary between schools?
- How were certain program activities (and the quantity of each activity) associated with the strength of mentee-mentor relationships?

This chapter describes the eight schools participating in our evaluation, as well as the methods we used to examine overall implementation, fidelity to iMentor's model, and the closeness of mentor-mentee relationships.

Evaluation Timeline

Our evaluation is tracking two cohorts of entering 9th graders at eight NYC high schools. As shown in Figure 2 on the next page, iMentor's rollout in these schools was staggered. Fig, Redwood, and Ginkgo began the program in the 2012-2013 school year, and Sequoia, Palm, Maple, Cherry Blossom, and Oak started in 2013-2014.[2] In each school, our evaluation will track two consecutive cohorts of students for their full high school career. This report uses data from the 10th grade cohort in all eight schools during the 2014-2015 school year.

Figure 2: Timeline of iMentor Implementation in the Evaluation Schools



● = Survey Administration

Evaluation Schools

In 2014-2015, the iMentor College Ready Program was being implemented in 15 schools across the City. Eight of these are participating in our evaluation.

The eight evaluation schools share a similar organizational history and supports (see Table 1 below). All are part of the same school support network, which is known for providing a high degree of support to its schools, including leadership development and data coaching. They are all relatively new, having opened between 2001 and 2009. In keeping with the City's strategy during that time, they are also relatively small; in the 2011-2012 school year, they enrolled an average of just over 300

Table 1: Schools Participating in the Evaluation

School Name	Year Opened	Borough	Admission Criteria
Cherry Blossom	2009	Manhattan	Limited Unscreened
Palm	2008	Brooklyn	Screened
Redwood	2007	Brooklyn	Limited Unscreened
Ginkgo	2003	Manhattan	Screened: Language & Academics
Sequoia	2002	Bronx	Screened
Fig	2001	Manhattan	Educational Option
Maple	2001	Bronx	Limited Unscreened
Oak	2001	Bronx	Educational Option

Source: Data provided to the Research Alliance by the NYC DOE. **Note:** All school names are pseudonyms.

students, compared to about 550 in other NYC high schools (see Table 2 below). The schools are spread across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. They have varied admission criteria, representing three of NYC's eight high school admissions methods: three screened schools, which admit students based on academic, and possibly additional, criteria; three limited unscreened schools, which do not look at academic criteria, but give priority to students who express interest in the school, and two educational option schools, which create an academically diverse environment by admitting 16 percent academically low-achieving students, 16 percent high-achieving, and 68 percent from the middle range (Nathanson et al., 2013).

At the time we selected schools for our study, the demographics of students in the evaluation schools differed somewhat from the rest of NYC high school students. In

Table 2: Demographics of iMentor Evaluation Schools and All Other NYC High Schools, 2011-2012

	Evaluation Schools	Other NYC High Schools[a]
Gender (%)		
Female	54.0	51.3
Male	46.0	48.7
Race (%)		
Latino	55.0	43.3
Black	38.4	38.4
White	2.4	7.5
Asian	2.7	9.5
Receive special education services (%)	12.8	15.0
English language learners (%)	19.7	12.7
Poverty[b] (%)	81.1	72.0
8th Grade academic performance[c]		
Math scaled score[d]	663.6	670.6
English Language Arts scaled score[e]	641.9	647.4
Chronic absentees (%)[f]	31.0	26.4
Students per school	326.5[g]	553.7
Total number of schools	8	460
Total number of students	2,612	254,706

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data provided by the NYC DOE.

Notes: [a] Any school serving students in grades 9-12, other than those in District 79 or District 75 and specialized high schools. [b] Includes students who turned in their free or reduced price lunch form and those who did not turn in their form but attend a school that receives universal free lunch. Many students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch do not turn in their forms, therefore including universal programs is a more accurate measure of poverty. [c] Slight discrepancy between the calculated number of students based on the listed average school size and the total number of schools is due to rounding. [d] Math Scaled Scores range from 430 to 790 with a standard deviation of 58. [e] ELA Scaled Scores range from 480 to 775 with a standard deviation of 47. [f] Chronic absentees are students who are absent for more than 10 percent of the school days in a year. [g] Based on size of 9th grade during the 2011-2012 school year. The other characteristics in the table represent school-wide measures.

2011-2012, prior to iMentor's implementation, on average, schools in our evaluation enrolled a slightly higher percentage of female students, due to the inclusion of one all-girls school in the study. Evaluation schools also enrolled a higher percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs), on average, compared with other NYC high schools. This is partially because one school in our study is an inclusion ELL school, in which over 70 percent of students are ELLs. Like most NYC high schools, the student population in evaluation schools was predominantly Black and Latino. Compared to all other NYC high schools, however, iMentor schools had a greater proportion of Latino students and a lower proportion of White and Asian students. The evaluation schools also had a higher proportion of students who live in poverty.

iMentor schools enrolled students who had academic characteristics roughly similar to other NYC students. Based on their 8th grade test scores, 9th graders who enrolled in evaluation schools had comparable, but slightly lower, academic achievement levels vis-a-vis students in other NYC high schools. Lastly, students in evaluation schools were also more likely to be chronically absent (i.e., absent for more than 10 percent of the school days in a year).

While these eight schools are generally comparable to the average NYC high school, and lessons that emerge from the study may well be relevant to other City schools, it is important to recognize that this is a non-representative sample, which limits our ability to generalize outside these eight schools.

Methods Used for This Report

Interviews

We interviewed each school's iMentor point-person (i.e., a teacher or administrator tasked with helping integrate iMentor into the school), six of eight PCs (two declined to participate[3]), and the three PDs who manage the PCs in the eight schools. We transcribed these interviews and coded the transcripts in an iterative process to identify recurring themes. (Details on qualitative analysis methods can be found in Appendix B.) These data helped us understand what each core component of iMentor looks like in practice, and identify some successes and challenges that schools encountered when implementing the program.

Programmatic data and surveys

We also analyzed programmatic data from iMentor's proprietary platform and student and mentor surveys from the eight schools. Programmatic data provide information about how much of each key activity students received, while surveys provide insight into mentors' and students' perceptions of the program and mentoring relationships.

By leveraging both quantitative (programmatic) and qualitative (interview) data, we were able to gain a multi-faceted understanding of how the iMentor program functioned across the eight evaluation schools.

iMentor's Core Metrics

We also assessed the degree to which each school's implementation of the College Ready Program matched iMentor's expectations for how each of the key activities should be implemented. These expectations are codified in iMentor's "Core Metrics" rubric, which was developed by iMentor based on the staff's expertise. In some cases, we modified the metrics slightly for our study. For example, one of iMentor's expectations is for mentee-mentor pairs to attend six iMentor events per year. For our study, we are interested in how iMentor works for *all* students in partner schools—not just students who were successfully matched. Therefore, we calculate this school-wide benchmark based on *eligible students*, not just *mentee-mentor pairs.* In this report, if at least 65 percent of eligible students (not just matched students) in a school attended at least six events, we consider this high fidelity to iMentor's model. If at least 50 percent of matched students met the benchmark, we consider this moderate fidelity. If fewer than 50 percent of matched students attended at least six events, we conclude that the iMentor events were not implemented with fidelity to the model in this school. We use these core metrics to assess three of the program's four key activities (matching mentees and mentors, teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills, and providing mentees and mentors with opportunities to interact). We did not have the data needed to assess if the program reached its goals for supporting mentee-mentor pairs.

Together, our implementation data give a holistic view of how iMentor was implemented in these eight schools for 10th graders in the 2014-2015 school year, and which areas of implementation may need the most attention moving forward.

Overall, our implementation study aims to provide insight into how the program operates in different school contexts and an opportunity to learn from experiences across schools.

Exploring the associations between implementation measures and mentee-mentor relationship development

Lastly, we tested the relationship between participation in specific aspects of the program and the development of strong relationships between mentees and mentors. We constructed a linear regression model that used measures of mentee-mentor interaction (i.e., emailing, event attendance, texting, and talking on the phone) to predict the strength of mentee-mentor relationships. We used multiple measures of relationship closeness, including student responses to survey questions about how close they are to their mentors and whether they have a positive or negative relationship with their mentor, as well as monthly ratings of closeness provided by students and mentors (via iMentor's online platform). See Appendix C for more details on the regression models.

Data Sources

The analyses in this report are based on a number of data sources:

Survey Data (Students and Mentors): Students in iMentor schools take a baseline survey in the fall of 9th grade (before they are matched with a mentor) and complete a follow-up survey each spring for the next four years. The student survey contains over 100 items, including measures of non-cognitive skills, as well as details about their background that cannot be obtained from administrative data (e.g., parent education level). Mentors take a baseline survey when they are matched with a mentee and then another survey for the next four subsequent springs. The mentor survey has over 60 items, including questions about mentors' relationships with their mentee, demographic information, their career, and their satisfaction with iMentor. Student survey response rates were above 80 percent and mentor survey response rates were above 50 percent. See Merrill et al. (2015) for the specific items, constructs, response ranges, and internal consistency of the student survey. See Appendix A for specific items, contructs and ranges for the mentor survey. Student and mentor survey administration and initial processing are managed by an external firm, Ewald & Wasserman.

Programmatic Data: iMentor collects data from mentees and mentors via a proprietary online platform. Mentees, mentors, and iMentor staff all have a password-protected account on the platform. For mentees and mentors, the iMentor platform is largely a place to send and receive emails, fill out surveys, and receive and respond to iMentor event invitations. iMentor staff use the platform to enter and access information about student participation in iMentor classes, emails sent and received as part of the program, and iMentor events. The Research Alliance uses iMentor platform data to identify the number of pairs that were matched and sustained for the entire year, the number of iMentor classes held at each school, as well as the amount of pair email interaction and event attendance.

Interview Data: Each year, we interview a subset of iMentor and school staff. For this report, we conducted interviews with each 10th grade iMentor point person and six of eight PCs (two declined to participate). We also interviewed the three Program Directors who work with the eight evaluation schools.

Administrative Data: The study draws on administrative data provided by the NYC Department of Education to examine student demographic characteristics and 8th grade test scores.

CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTING KEY COLLEGE READY PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

This chapter describes how iMentor and the evaluation schools implemented the four key activities of the iMentor College Ready Program. As outlined in iMentor's theory of action, the four activities are (1) matching students and mentors, (2) supporting mentee-mentor pairs, (3) teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills, and (4) providing opportunities for mentee-mentor pairs to interact.

We begin by describing the implementation of and participation levels for each key activity across all eight schools. When available, we look at the degree to which implementation met iMentor's benchmarks for student exposure to iMentor programming. We found that, overall, the four key activities were implemented with varying levels of success.

Later in the chapter, we examine implementation of each activity at each participating school, as compared to iMentor's expectations for participating schools. These analyses will allow us to consider how each school's unique blend of staffing, students, routines, structures, and resources may have affected the implementation of iMentor in that context. In short, we found that all eight schools met the benchmark for number of classes held, and some—but not all—evaluation schools were successful at reaching iMentor's benchmarks for matching students. However, all schools struggled to reach iMentor's standards for pair interaction (i.e., emails between mentors and mentees and event attendance).

Implementation Across Evaluation Schools

Key activity 1: Matching students to mentors

iMentor's goal is to match 95 percent of all students in participating schools with a mentor for their entire high school career. The school-wide model and the length of the relationship are unusual in the mentoring field. Many programs focus on at-risk youth or students who self-select into a mentoring program, and many only require a one-year commitment from mentors. iMentor faces a considerable challenge in trying to recruit and train sufficient numbers of college-educated volunteer mentors who can commit to a four-year long mentoring relationship.

The challenge is even more daunting because iMentor seeks to create a *good* match in each mentor-mentee pair. To help facilitate good matches, iMentor uses an

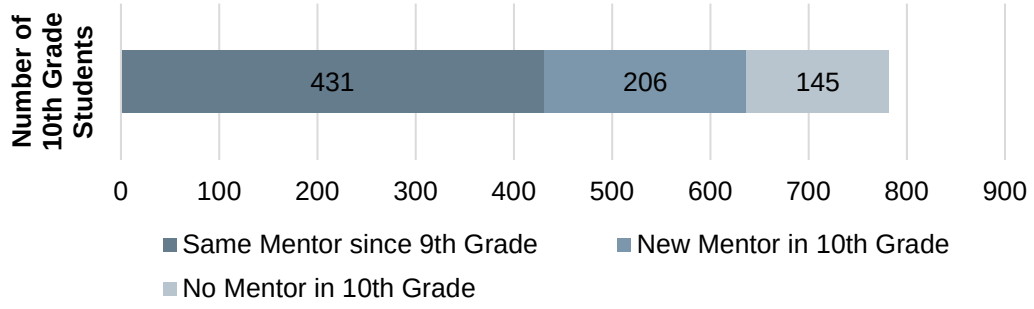
algorithm-driven system that uses mentee and mentor online applications to identify potential matches based on shared interests and experiences. iMentor also bases matches on gender—male students are always matched with male mentors, and female students with female mentors.

Most pair matching occurs during the fall and winter of students' 9th grade year. In 10th grade, students are only matched if they are new to their school or if the mentee and/or mentor have asked to end the relationship. In the 2014-2015 school year, out of 672 pairs of 10th graders at the eight evaluation schools, 152 relationships ended (23 percent). Of these, 125 (82 percent) were at the request of the mentor. The most common reasons mentors provided for ending the relationship were: moving away (48), scheduling conflicts (24), and an inability to meet program requirements (27). Eight mentors stated they had an "unsatisfactory experience" with iMentor. In total, 27 students ended the relationship. The main reasons students provided included academic/behavioral problems (11) and resistance to the program (13).

When a mentor initiates the end of a mentoring relationship, the PC has a conversation with the student—sometimes also with the departing mentor—to try to ensure that the student doesn't feeling abandoned. These students are rematched with new mentors. When a student ends the relationship, it is often because they can't or don't want to be part of the program. If students improve in their school work and behavior or embrace the program, they may be rematched.

Figure 3 illustrates the number of students in the 10th grade and the status of their mentee-mentor relationship. Of the 782 10th graders in the eight evaluation schools, 637 (81 percent) had a mentor in the fall of their 10th grade year; and 145 (19 percent) did not. Of the students who had a mentor in the fall of 10th grade, 68 percent had the same mentor as in 9th grade and 90 percent remained matched for the entire school year.

Figure 3: Number of Matched 10th Grade Students, 2014-2015



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

We also examined whether matched and unmatched students differed in notable ways. We found that students who were not matched in the fall of 10th grade had much lower attendance than students who were matched—unmatched students missed, on average, 27 more days than matched students. This finding is not surprising, because students who are frequently absent are more difficult to engage in the program, including the basic task of distributing and getting back the forms needed to assign them a mentor.

For most students, iMentor has met the challenge of providing mentors. By having matches for 81 percent of all 10th graders, iMentor is approaching its lofty standard of a 95 percent match rate.

Key activity 2: Supporting mentee-mentor pairs

PCs support mentees and mentor pairs using a case management model, which is a process often used in social work and health care to track client needs and supports provided. It consists of conducting a needs assessment, monitoring, service planning, case conferencing, and reassessment (HRSA, 2001).

PCs continuously monitor the quantity of pair interactions using iMentor's online platform. They are also required to maintain "focus lists" of mentor and mentee pairs that need additional support and attention. PCs often hold "case conferences" with other iMentor staff to brainstorm ways to help struggling pairs.

PCs keep mentors apprised of important issues in their mentee's life. For example, PCs send weekly newsletters to mentors with information about school events, such as upcoming exams. PCs also contact individual mentors with information specific to their mentee, such as a particularly difficult day at school, or to remind them to email their mentee. Mentors reported a high level of satisfaction with the support they receive from their PC. On a scale from 1 ("very unsatisfied") to 4 ("very satisfied"), on average, mentors ranked their satisfaction with the support they receive from their PC at 3.25.

PCs also provide informal coaching to mentees and mentors. One PC described how they help mentees and mentors understand each other's perspective:

> *Talking to mentors on the phone a lot, giving them background on things that their mentees are saying in class, encouraging the mentees a lot to come to events and understanding where the mentors are coming from when they can't [attend events]… It's usually helping to put it in perspective, so when the mentor is just angry or frustrated*

> *with the student who is not coming to class, who doesn't have the same drive that they felt they had in high school, it's talking about other life experiences that the mentees are going through or really just trying to bring them back to where they were in high school, or helping them find the similarities first, or helping them find the small successes.*

As this quote reveals, adult mentors and teenage students may sometimes be puzzled by each other's behavior. Having a dedicated adult who knows both people in the relationship and acts as a translator or bridge between them can quell potential conflict—and may help the pairs stay together longer.

Key activity 3: Teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills

PCs teach the iMentor curriculum during a weekly class that is programmed into students' school schedule. Typically, PCs give a 10-15 minute lesson (length varies depending on how long the particular school's class periods are), and then students use the rest of the period to email their mentor.

The 10th grade iMentor class focuses on topics designed to help students (1) build interest in and excitement about college and potential careers and (2) develop iMentor's target non-cognitive skills. See Figure 4 below for a full list of topics in the 10th grade curriculum.

Figure 4: iMentor 10th Grade Curriculum Topics

Setting goals	Identifying potential careers
Building soft skills	Practicing self-promotion
Developing critical thinking skills	Building excitement about college
Building college-going identity and connecting career interest to college	Assessing high school growth and identifying leadership opportunities

After the lesson, students log into iMentor's proprietary software to access their emails. By the time they get to class, students should have received an email from their mentor. The mentee prepares a reply to this email, beginning with a "high" and "low" experience about their week and then responding to the substance of their mentor's last note. Then, students usually receive a few prompts related to the day's lesson. For example, after the critical thinking lesson, students were asked to read

two paragraphs about school uniforms, make arguments both *for* and *against* school uniforms, and then provide their real opinion about school uniforms. The prompts offered specific sentence starters such as "The impact of students wearing uniforms is…"

PCs described a mismatch between the amount of time they have to introduce and discuss the day's theme with the breadth of the topics themselves. One PC described the problem:

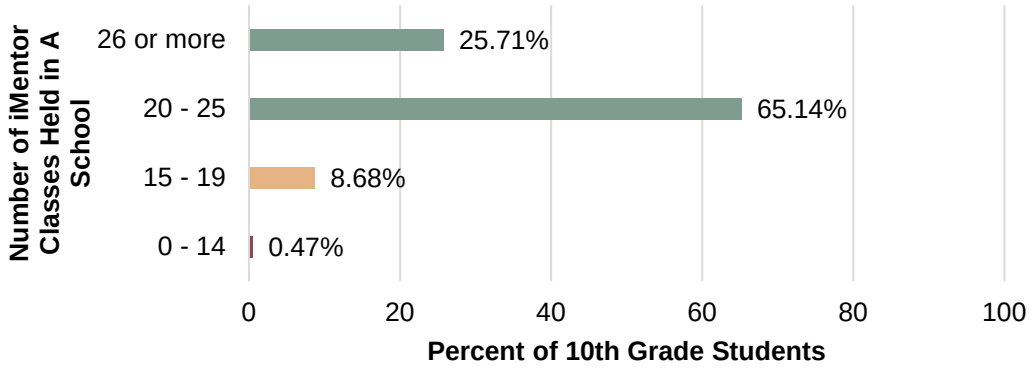
> *I basically have 10 to 15 minutes to give a lesson in order to give each kid enough time to write an email… how much can we really build critical thinking in that time frame?*

Some topics may be better suited for iMentor's class structure than others. For example, it might indeed be possible to generate excitement about college through a short introduction, which can be built upon through emailing with a mentor. On the other hand, while the iMentor curriculum includes four classes (including four chances to email with mentors) and an event on critical thinking, PCs seem to find it difficult to effectively teach the topic in the allotted time.

Our data do not allow us to measure the quality of lessons or PCs' teaching. In the 2014-2015 school year, iMentor piloted a PC teaching evaluation rubric, based on the Danielson framework (the teacher evaluation rubric used in New York City's public schools) and the iMentor curriculum. PDs visit classrooms and use the rubric to assess teaching and provide feedback to PCs. iMentor is revising the tool during the 2015-2016 school year; in future reports, we hope to use scores on the revised version to assess instructional quality.

The one measure we do have to assess whether the iMentor curriculum is being delivered as designed is the number of iMentor classes that students had the opportunity to attend (note that this is not student attendance—it is number of times a given section met). Figure 5 on the next page shows the number of classes iMentor students had the opportunity to attend. iMentor's goal is for all sections to meet at least 20 times (indicated by the green bars in the figure), and sections that meet at least 15 times (indicated by the orange bar) are considered to be approaching expectations. Offering fewer than 15 classes is considered not meeting expectations (indicated by the red bar). We found that 99 percent of all 10th grade students had the opportunity to attend at least 15 classes, and over 90 percent were offered at least

Figure 5: Number of Classes Offered to 10th Grade Students, 2014-2015



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

20 classes. In fact, a quarter of students had the opportunity to attend 25 or more classes.

Overall, schools held enough classes to cover the 10th grade iMentor curriculum, but our interviews demonstrate that the iMentor curriculum may be too ambitious. The PCs suggested that some of the topics they were supposed to teach in a short period needed more time. However, we have little systematic information about what happens *during* the class, or even how many classes students actually attend.

Key activity 4: Providing pairs with opportunities to interact

iMentor's goal is to create strong relationships between mentees and mentors, and to position mentors as supportive adults who can help their mentee apply to and succeed in college. To build this relationship, mentees and mentors are supposed to interact through weekly emails along with in-person meetings at monthly events. iMentor is unusual in the mentoring community in its reliance on email as a key mechanism for developing close relationships, with relatively little in-person contact. Thus, learning about how much interaction actually happens through emails and events is an important contribution to mentoring research. (In the next chapter, we will continue learning about this unique approach by probing the links between emails and event attendance and the development of strong relationships.)

Note that the analyses in this section are based on *matched* students—they do not include 10th grade students without a mentor.

Emails

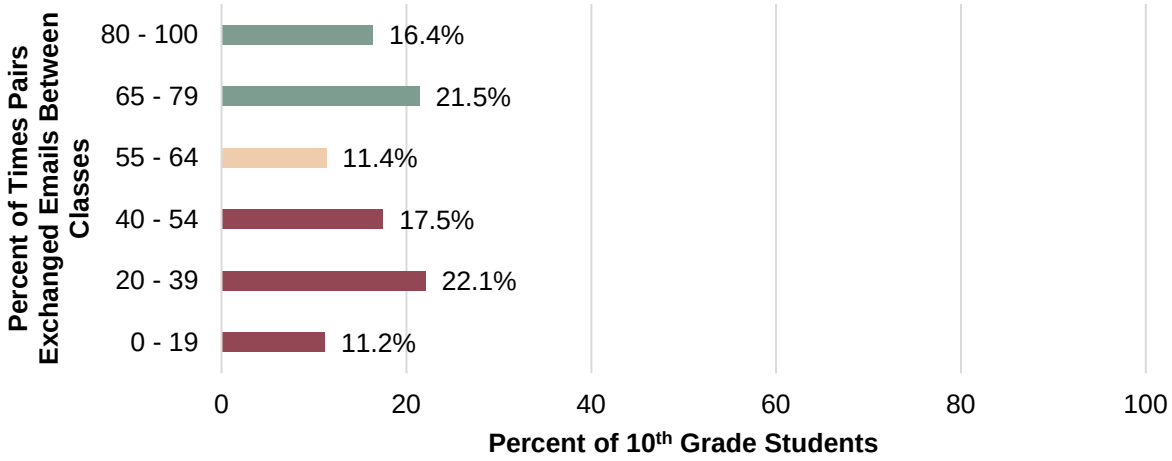
We found that the quantity and quality of pair email interactions varied widely. In interviews, PCs described the challenge of getting students to respond to the prompt when writing the weekly email to their mentor. One PC explained:

> *Some kids would follow the prompts we would give them. Some kids would really push back and not follow them at all, and even after I would say, "Come on, do this." For kids who I just really want them to communicate with their mentor, I'm happy if they write anything.*

Indeed, the 10th grade mentor survey also indicated that students did not always respond to email prompts. Forty-five percent of mentors who responded to the survey reported that their mentee "never" or "rarely" responded to the prompts.

Figure 6 below illustrates the wide variation in the quantity of emails exchanged between mentees and mentors. iMentor's goal is for pairs to exchange emails in the time period between two iMentor classes 65 percent of the time. We found that 38 percent of 10th grade mentee-mentor pairs met iMentor's standard (indicated by the green bars). Pairs who exchanged emails at least 55 percent of the time were considered to be approaching iMentor's goal (indicated by the orange bar); 11 percent of pairs fell into this category. This means that just over half of pairs were far from iMentor's standard for the quantity of emails between students and mentors (indicated by the red bars).

Figure 6: Percent of 10th Grade Pairs Exchanging Emails Between iMentor Classes, 2014-2015



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

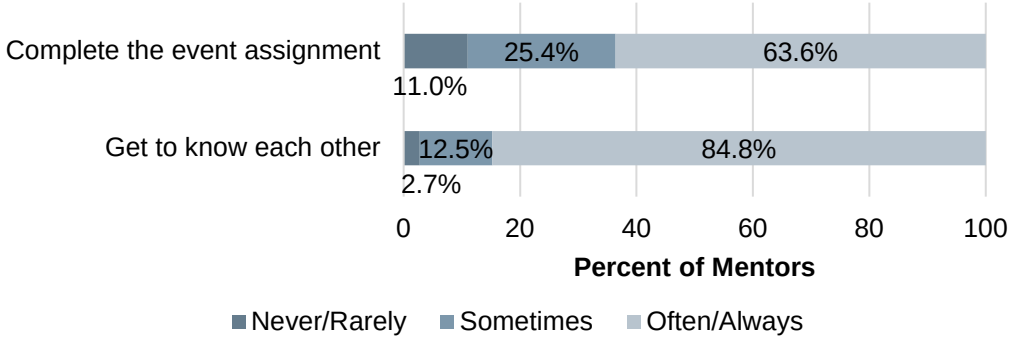
In recognition of the challenges in meeting email goals, iMentor has developed and started to implement a new cloud-based interface called Canvas to replace the email prompts. On Canvas, instead of sending emails, students work on projects online, and mentors respond to students' work. For example, students might create a poster representing potential careers they would like, and mentors can comment on the images and text. Canvas also provides a chat function for students and mentors. As our evaluation continues, we will track students' activities on Canvas and compare their engagement with project-based learning to their engagement with emails.

Events

Once a month, each iMentor school holds a two-hour event for mentees and mentors, focusing on a current topic in the iMentor curriculum. Events start around 6:00 p.m. to accommodate mentors' work schedule. Events consist of planned activities along with discussion prompts and worksheets for pairs to complete together. For example, an event related to the critical thinking portion of the curriculum included a 10-minute icebreaker followed by a 20-minute activity where mentee-mentor pairs had to describe a professional baseball game to a group of aliens. This was followed by a debate activity, and concluded with a debrief. iMentor staff provided supporting materials for each part of the event.

Mentors who responded to the survey reported that, at events, they both accomplish the curricular tasks and get to know their mentees. Figure 7 below shows that about two-thirds of mentors who took the survey reported that they worked with their mentee to complete the iMentor event assignment. Over 80 percent of mentors reported that they "Often" or "Always" got to know their mentee better at events.

Figure 7: 10th Grade Mentors' Response to the Question "When My Mentee and I Attend Events, We…"



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

Less than 3 percent said that they "Never" or "Rarely" got to know their mentee at events.

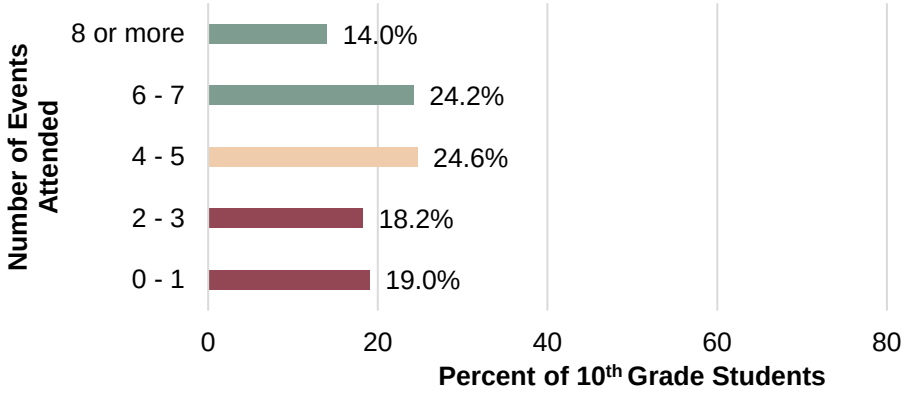
iMentor expects each student to attend at least six events per year. Figure 8 below illustrates that 37 percent of students with mentors met this expectation (indicated by the green bars). An additional 24 percent of matched students attended four or five events, which is considered approaching iMentor's expectations (indicated by a yellow line). The remaining matched students—almost 40 percent—attended three or fewer events.

All of the PCs and school employees we interviewed described events as the place where mentees and mentors develop strong relationships. One iMentor point person explained:

> *It's very refreshing to see the adults interacting with the students and the students get[ting] excited about seeing this person. It's sort of like it's an uncle or an aunt. It's really good. Also [iMentor] make[s] it very attractive. It's not like we're just sitting there and talking. There are exercises. They get to do scavenger hunts. They have to fill out a document and create something together, and there's stuff that's related to their—the curriculum and to the classes and the emails that they have sent.*

Given how important PCs and school staff consider events, it is unfortunate that more students are not attending the expected number of events. As we found for 9th grade iMentor students (see Merrill et al., 2015), the timing of events (in the evening) remains an obstacle to student attendance. In addition, school staff and PCs reported less enthusiasm from students this year than the 9th grade year. They described 10th grade as an "awkward" year for iMentor: It is not the first time students are meeting

Figure 8: Number of iMentor Events Attended by Matched 10th Grade Students, 2014-2015



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

their mentors, but college application activities have not started yet. School staff reported that it was more difficult to convince students to attend events in the 10th grade; they expressed hope that the 11th grade focus on college will re-engage students.

One strategy iMentor staff uses to make up for missed events is providing other opportunities for mentees and mentors to meet informally: mentors can join mentees for lunch at school or at a school activity on a Saturday. These informal meetings can also provide additional time for pairs to spend together, even if they haven't missed official events.

Overall, school staff, iMentor staff, and mentors saw events as one of the most important aspects of the College Ready Program. Therefore, it is troubling that while 80 percent of students saw their mentors at least twice over the school year, most students did not meet iMentor's goal of attending at least six events. As the events become more closely linked to college applications and readiness, it will be interesting to see whether attendance and staff perceptions of student enthusiasm improve.

Informal interactions

With parental consent, students and mentors can communicate by phone or text message outside of official iMentor interactions. Sixteen percent of students who completed the student survey said they talk to their mentor on the phone, and 50 percent reported texting with their mentor. Thirteen percent reported both talking on the phone and texting. It is important to note that we do not know how often students text or call their mentor, or the substance of these communications.

Implementation Variation Between Schools

In addition to iMentor's implementation goals for each student who has a mentor (described above), iMentor's Core Metrics also include school-level implementation goals. Because iMentor is a whole school reform, for this analysis we look at how many 10th grade students in partner schools (whether or not they had a mentor) met iMentor's goals. For example, above we discussed iMentor's goal of having each *student* attend at least six events. Likewise, iMentor's goal is for each *partner school* to have at least 65 percent of its students attend at least six events.[4] Table 3 on the next page lists the full set of school-level iMentor goals, and Table 4 shows how iMentor performed at each of the evaluation schools with respect to these school-level goals.

Table 3: iMentor College Ready Program School Implementation Benchmarks

	Matching students with mentors	Teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills	Supporting pairs[3]	Providing pairs with opportunities to interact	
Benchmark	**Matches Made (%)**	**Classes Held (#)[2]**	**N/A**	**Frequently Email (%)[4]**	**Attend At Least Six Events (%)**
Meeting Expectations (Green)	Enroll at least 95% of eligible[1] 10th grade students in iMentor	School holds at least 20 iMentor classes	N/A	At least 65% of students and mentors are frequently emailing pairs[5]	At least 65% of students and mentors attend at least 6 events
Approaching Expectations (Yellow)	Enroll at least 75% of eligible 10th grade students in iMentor	School holds at least 15 iMentor classes	N/A	At least 50% of students and mentors are frequently emailing pairs	At least 50% of students and mentors attend at least 6 events
Not Meeting Expectations (Red)	Enroll less than 75% of eligible 10th grade students in iMentor	School holds fewer than 15 iMentor classes	N/A	Less than 50% of students and mentors are frequently emailing pairs	Less than 50% of students and mentors attend at least 6 events

Table 4: Fidelity to School Implementation Benchmarks, by School

	Matching students with mentors	Teaching college knowledge and non-cognitive skills	Providing opportunities to interact	
School	**Matches Made (%)**	**Classes Held (#)**	**Email Frequently (%)**	**Attend At Least Six Events (%)**
Ginkgo	84.4	27.7	19.3	22.4
Fig	78.5	25.8	22.6	28.0
Redwood	66.2	27.8	13.5	12.2
Maple	82.5	22.9	36.7	31.7
Cherry Blossom	77.8	21.5	35.0	29.1
Oak	71.4	30.2	32.7	29.6
Sequoia	96.1	28.0	44.3	54.6
Palm	96.4	23.7	45.5	40.0
All Schools	81.5	25.9	30.8	31.1

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data.

Notes: [1] Eligibility is defined as being a first-time 10th grader enrolled in the school as of October 20th. These tables include matched *and* unmatched 10th grade students. [2] We plan to incorporate a benchmark for pair support in future reports. [3] There is more than one section of the iMentor class per grade in each school; this represents the average across sections. [4] Emails are usually sent weekly, but there may be an exception if the iMentor class does not meet for more than a week. For example, if the students have vacation one week, then they can send emails with their mentor over two weeks. [5] A frequently emailing pair is one where mentees and mentors email each another following 65 percent of the classes. For example, if 20 classes were offered, a frequently emailing pair would send each other emails after at least 13 classes.

Table 4 shows that, overall, iMentor was better able to meet its school-level standards for matching students with mentors and number of classes held than for emailing rates and event attendance. iMentor met its expectations for matching students with mentors at two evaluation schools, approached expectations at four schools, and missed the benchmark at two schools. In addition, iMentor held enough classes at all the schools to meet iMentor's expectations. On the other hand, no schools exceeded or were approaching the email benchmark, and just one was approaching expectations for event attendance. (iMentor does not have a standardized and measurable benchmark for pair support at the school level.)

Furthermore, Table 4 shows that iMentor implemented the program with higher fidelity to the model in some schools than others. For example, at Sequoia and Palm, iMentor met expectations for matching students with mentors and number of classes held. These two schools also had the highest email rates and event attendance rates. On the other end of the spectrum, iMentor had the lowest implementation levels at the Redwood School, which had a low match rate and the lowest email and event attendance rates.

Because our evaluation only includes eight schools, it is difficult to empirically link specific school characteristics with implementation outcomes. However, it is worth noting that the two schools with the strongest implementation also had the highest attendance rates. Students at these two schools had an average attendance rate of 89 percent, whereas the other six schools had an average attendance rate of 78 percent—a difference that translates to nearly 20 school days. School attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in the iMentor program, because the class takes place during school hours; this is also the time when PCs encourage students to email their mentor and to attend events.

Of course, other factors could influence how well iMentor implements the program at particular schools. For example, school staff and PCs suggested that the extent to which school leaders were invested in iMentor varied across schools. Some were strong advocates for iMentor, attended events, and encouraged teachers to support the PCs; other school leaders did not play this role. Please see the first report from our evaluation, *Bringing Together Mentoring, Technology, and Whole School Reform* (2015), for further discussion of factors that could influence the different implementation of iMentor across schools.

Discussion

This chapter examined the implementation of the four key activities that make up iMentor's College Ready Program and highlighted some differences in implementation between schools.

Overall, we observed that students were matched with mentors at a high rate (81 percent of students in the eight schools had a mentor as of the end of 10th grade), and schools were indeed holding iMentor classes at the rate expected by the program designers. We also found that mentors and mentees are communicating via email, meeting at events, and contacting each other informally—albeit at lower levels than iMentor would like. Many students and schools are not meeting iMentor's standards for emailing with mentors and attending events.

When we looked at iMentor' school-level benchmarks, we found that because of the challenges with emailing and event attendance, iMentor did not meet all four benchmarks for implementing the College Ready Program at any particular school. At a few schools, iMentor did meet the benchmarks for matching students and delivering classes, and at several others, implementation approached these benchmarks. However, at almost all schools, students were neither emailing their mentor nor attending events frequently enough. At two schools, iMentor implementation failed to meet the program benchmark in three of the four areas assessed.

iMentor is aware of some of the challenges described above. In response to the information about low email rates, iMentor is introducing Canvas, a new online platform focused on project-based learning to replace pair emails. To our knowledge, iMentor is not changing the timing or structure of its events.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PAIR INTERACTIONS AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The previous chapter illustrated that most 10th grade students in the iMentor College Ready Program were being matched with mentors, that mentors reported being well supported, and that students generally had the opportunity to attend iMentor's weekly class. However, we found that many students were not interacting with their mentor via email and events as much as iMentor intends. In this chapter, we begin to explore the implications of this finding by examining how the quantity and type of mentee-mentor interactions are associated with the strength of the mentoring relationship. Specifically, we explore whether students who emailed their mentor more frequently, attended more events, or texted/talked on the phone with their mentor had a closer relationship with their mentor than their peers who engaged in less of these activities.

We first describe our measures of mentee-mentor relationships, and then present findings from statistical models we used to determine if there are associations between the quantity and type of pair interactions and relationship closeness.

Measuring Relationship Closeness

We use two main data sources to measure students' and mentors' perspectives on their relationship: iMentor's annual student survey and data from iMentor's proprietary online platform.

The iMentor survey students take each spring includes questions about how they feel about their mentor. It asks students to agree or disagree with statements about positive aspects of the relationship, such as, "My mentor and I talk about how to solve problems," and "I look forward to the time I spend with my mentor," as well as negative ones, such as, "My mentor and I get upset or mad at each other" and "my mentor and I make each other feel stupid." As shown in Table 5 on the next page, students' average response to the positive questions was 3.3 (out of 4). For the negative questions, the average rating was very low, with an average response of 1.3 (out of 5), indicating that students have few negative feelings toward their mentor.

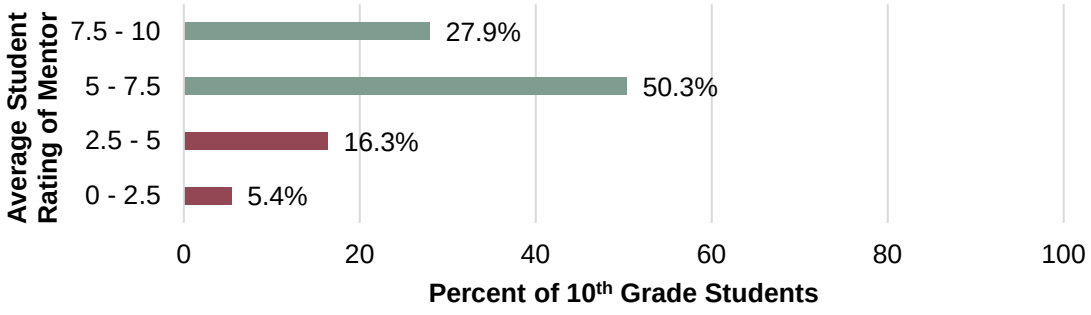
In addition to the annual survey, every month, students and mentors are asked (via the iMentor online platform) to specify, on a 1 to 10 scale, how close they feel to one another. Table 5 also shows the average responses to these questions from the 2014-2015 school year, and Figure 9 shows the distribution of average responses. The average student rating of mentees, over the school year, was 6. Figure 9 shows that almost 80 percent of students gave their relationship with their mentor an average rating above 5, and about 30 percent rated their relationship with their mentor, on average, above 7.5. We use these different measures of close relationships in our statistical models to test how key iMentor activities are associated with developing close relationships.

Table 5: Closeness of iMentor 10th Grade Students and Mentors, 2014-2015

	Average
Monthly Relationship Rating (1-10)	
Mentee Rating of Mentor	6.3
Mentor Rating of Mentee	7.3
Student Survey Reports	
Positive Relationship Quality (1-4)	3.3
Negative Relationship Quality (1-5)	1.2
How Close Do You Feel to Your Mentor? (%)	
Not Close At All	3.3
Not Very Close	8.2
Somewhat Close	47.9
Very Close	40.6
Sample size	539

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the iMentor student survey.

Figure 9: 10th Grade Students' Average Monthly Rating of Closeness with Mentor, 2014-2015



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the iMentor student survey.
Note: This figure is based on the average ranking students gave to their mentor over the course of the year.

How Are the Amount and Type of Mentee-Mentor Interactions Associated with Relationship Strength?

We used the four measures of relationship closeness described above (i.e., student survey questions about positive relationships, student survey questions about negative relationships, average student ratings of mentors, and average mentor rating of students) to assess whether the amount and type of student-mentor interactions are associated with the closeness of the mentoring relationship. We looked at associations between each of these measures and four types of pair interactions: number of events attended, how often students and mentors emailed one another, if students texted with their mentors, and if students talked to their mentors on the phone. We applied statistical controls that accounted for differences between schools, because, as described in the previous chapter, the schools in our evaluation had different levels of implementation and different student characteristics.

It is important to note that we assessed *associations*, not causality. We cannot be sure whether pair interactions drive relationship closeness, or vice versa, or if both are really connected to some other pre-existing characteristic of students—e.g., those who are most likely to participate fully in the program may have strong social skills and be better able to develop relationships. Still, we believe that these analyses are useful because a central part of iMentor's theory of action is the idea that the program activities lead to strong relationships, which later provide a basis for preparing students for college success.

Our findings are presented in Table 6 on the next page, which shows the estimated association between the types and amounts of interactions and each measure of relationship closeness. We see that informal interactions (i.e., texting and phone calls) had the strongest association with relationship closeness. Texting and talking on the phone were associated with having a closer relationship across all four measures. Students who texted their mentor, on average, gave their mentor a .7 higher rating (on a scale of 1 to 10) than students who did not. On the survey, students who texted reported a more positive relationship (.4 higher, on a scale of 1 to 4) than students who didn't, and a less negative relationship. Both of these results were statistically significant. Talking on the phone with a mentor was also associated, to a statistically significant degree, with a stronger relationship, based on all of our measures.

Table 6: Associations Between Mentee-Mentor Interactions and Relationship Closeness

	Relationship Closeness							
Interactions	**Mentee Rating**		**Mentor Rating**		**Positive Relationships**		**Negative Relationships**	
Events								
Total events attended	0.25	***	0.20	***	0.05	***	0.01	
Met iMentor event benchmark	0.01	***	0.01	***	0.00	**	0.00	
Emails								
Percent of time emails exchanged (out of possible exchanges)	0.02	***	0.01	***	0.001		0.00	
Met iMentor email benchmark	0.01	***	0.01	***	0.001	*	0.00	**
Other Interactions								
Pair talked on phone	0.41	*	0.67	***	0.17	*	0.21	**
Pair texted	0.71	***	0.71	***	0.36	***	-0.18	***
Sample size	537		537		547		547	

Sources: Research Alliance calculations based on iMentor programmatic data, iMentor student surveys, and data from the NYC DOE.

Notes: This table includes students from the eight evaluation schools who were matched with a mentor during the 2014-2015 school year. *** = p<.001; ** = p<.01; * = p<.05.

The number of events attended also had a statistically significant, positive association with relationship closeness. For every additional event a student attended, their average rating of their mentor increased by .25, their mentor's average rating of the relationship closeness increased by .20, and the student's responses to survey items about positive aspects of the relationship increased by .05. We can also put this finding in terms of iMentor's benchmark for event attendance (i.e., the goal to have each student attend at least six events). On average, a student who attended six events gave their mentor a .5 higher closeness rating (on a 1 to 10 scale) than a student who attended four events.

We found a weaker association between emailing and relationship closeness, which is perhaps not surprising, given the challenges related to emails described in Chapter 3. We found that for every five percentage points higher rate of emailing (about one more email a year), the average mentee rating of their mentor increased by .10. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to focus on whether more substantive emails had a stronger link to relationship development.

Discussion

Our preliminary look at the links between pair interactions and relationship closeness provides some interesting insights and raises many questions. For example, informal communication between students and mentors had the strongest association with relationship closeness. Does this suggest that informal communication strengthens relationships, or that pairs who are close are more likely to text or talk on the phone? Could pairs strengthen their relationship by starting to text or talk on the phone? These questions could be answered through an experiment: iMentor could identify pairs that are not texting/talking on the phone, encourage some of them to begin doing so, and then compare changes in the closeness of those pairs with others who do not text or talk on the phone.

We also see that attending events appears to have a stronger association to relationship closeness than sending emails. Again, this aligns with findings from our interviews, which suggested that relationships are developed most strongly when mentees and mentors meet in person. However, we cannot say whether pairs send more emails and students attend more events because they are closer to their mentor, or whether they develop closeness through those activities. Alternatively, we could be witnessing a "virtuous cycle," where pairs that are close attend more events, which in turn makes them even closer.

As our evaluation progresses, we will continue to investigate associations between iMentor's key activities and the quality of relationships between students and mentors.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

According to the developers of the iMentor College Ready Program, the most important outcome for 9th and 10th grade participants is to develop strong relationships with their mentors, which will lay the groundwork for the college readiness and application work to come in 11th and 12th grades. Therefore, this report, which focused on iMentor's implementation in 10th grade, examined whether iMentor is being implemented as designed, as well as how student interactions with mentors are associated with the development of strong pair relationships.

The report focused on implementation of the College Ready Program's four key activities: matching students and mentors, supporting mentee-mentor pairs, teaching non-cognitive skills and college knowledge, and providing opportunities for pairs to interact. Overall, we found that iMentor schools succeeded in matching a high proportion of students with mentors and keeping those students matched over the entire year. Mentors also felt well supported by iMentor. However, while all eight schools held enough classes to meet iMentor's benchmarks, our interviews that PCs felt the curriculum didn't allow enough time to introduce complex topics. And, mentors and mentees did not interact as intensely as iMentor planned.

We also analyzed the association between type and quantity of interaction and four measures of relationship closeness. We found that some activities were more strongly related to closeness than others. Specifically, mentors and mentees who texted/talked on the phone appeared to have the strongest relationships. Event attendance was also associated with closer relationships, while emailing was associated to a lesser degree. As mentioned in the prior chapter, we cannot say whether engaging in these activities *caused* pairs to become closer. Further research—such as an experiment comparing relationship closeness for pairs who are asked to start texting and those who are not—could shed more light on this question.

The students participating in our evaluation of iMentor's College Ready Program are now moving into 11th and 12th grades. As our work continues, we will examine how students in iMentor perform on key outcomes, such as non-cognitive skill development, college knowledge, and the ability to navigate the post-secondary process, compared to similar students without the program. We will also look at whether closer relationships between students and mentors are predictive of greater improvements on these outcomes.

Past research has shown that a close relationship with an adult mentor can act as a vehicle to improve students' academic outcomes and help students develop important life skills. Through this evaluation, we plan to see if the activities in iMentor's College Ready Program can foster this type of strong relationship—and sustain it over four years—and whether these relationships help students build the skills and knowledge they need to be ready to enroll and succeed in college.

Notes

[1] A theory of action is a visualization that illustrates how programs are thought to accomplish their goals, including program inputs, activities, and desired outcomes.

[2] Schools are represented with pseudonyms to keep their identities confidential.

[3] We made multiple attempts to schedule interviews with these two PCs. Both expressed a strong disinterest in participating. Neither PC returned to iMentor after the 2014-2015 school year, and they declined to participate in any iMentor-related activities, including our evaluation.

[4] It is important to note a difference between how iMentor calculates its Core Metrics and the benchmarks in this report. iMentor measures school-level implementation based on the proportion of *mentee-mentor pairs* at a school who meet the benchmark out—they do not include students who weren't matched with an iMentor mentor. The Research Alliance is studying iMentor as a whole school reform; therefore, for our school implementation benchmarks, we look at the proportion of students who meet the benchmark out of *all* eligible students, even those who were not matched.

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