REPORT

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools

Mentoring, Technology, and Social and Emotional Learning

Findings from the Evaluation of iMentor's College Ready Program

Lisa Merrill

August 2020

NYU STEINHARDT

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Executive Summary

Earning a college degree is widely recognized as the most reliable pathway to economic stability (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). But we know from a wide range of research that access to college is neither easy nor equitable, and that traditionally underrepresented students (including low-income students and Black and Latino students) continue to matriculate and earn degrees at disproportionately low rates (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Black & Coca, 2017; Kane, 2004). We know, too, that the solution to these challenges cannot be found solely in the classroom (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman et al., 2006). Indeed, there is a growing consensus that college success relies on a concert of academic and social emotional learning (SEL) skills (Farkas, 2003; Farrington et al., 2012; Durlak, et al., 2011), strong guidance during the college application process (Roderick et al., 2008; La Rosa et al., 2006), and financial, academic, and social support throughout college (Kuh et al., 2006).

What is less clear is the specific types of programming that can effectively close the opportunity gaps. Mentoring programs represent one promising area, with a large body of research showing that relationships between adults and youth, such as those formed in mentoring programs, can improve youth's odds of success. The iMentor College Ready Program combines school-based mentoring with technology and aspects of whole school reform in an effort to boost students' college readiness. The program matches low-income youth with college-educated mentors and focuses on helping them develop close relationships through online communication and monthly in-person events, held over the course of students' four years of high school. In turn, iMentor believes these relationships help students develop the mindsets, skills, and knowledge necessary to reach and succeed in college.

In 2010, the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) awarded a grant to iMentor to support a rigorous evaluation of the College Ready Program. iMentor engaged the Research Alliance for New York City Schools to conduct a mixed methods evaluation of the program in eight New York City high schools. The study included about 1,600 students who received iMentor programming and comparison students who did not have access to iMentor. Our evaluation assessed the implementation of iMentor in the eight study schools and its impact on students' social and emotional learning, academic outcomes (like attendance and progress toward high school graduation), college going activities, and transitions to college. This summary highlights key

findings and lessons from our study. Please see the full report and appendices for more details.

Key Findings

Schools struggled to implement iMentor's College Ready Program as designed.

The eight schools in our evaluation generally did not meet iMentor's benchmarks for program implementation, and implementation levels declined over time. On average, students were more engaged in 9th and 10th grade than they were in 11th and 12th grade. While most students were matched with a mentor across the four years of the study, they generally did not interact with their mentor as frequently as iMentor would like.

Despite these challenges, iMentor produced small, positive changes in students' critical thinking and self-advocacy skills.

iMentor accomplished an important goal by matching students with a mentor and providing ways for them to interact. Students also had access to the weekly iMentor class, which focused on teaching important SEL competencies. Our findings show that, after four years of implementation, iMentor had a small positive effect on two of the nine SEL outcomes we measured, critical thinking and self-advocacy—both of which may provide an important foundation for navigating transitions to college and a career. Other SEL skills, such as growth mindset, task persistence, and initiative, did not improve as a result of the program.

iMentor did not increase participation in college and career activities.

iMentor provided students with opportunities to engage in college and career activities during class, such as writing a resume and filling out college applications, as well as during events (including visits to college campuses). Our results suggest that many NYC students are engaged in these kinds of college and career activities. The high levels of participation among comparison students left little room for iMentor to add value. We found that iMentor students were more likely to compare financial aid packages, which could help students assess the costs of colleges they might attend. Many schools reported that iMentor took the place of prior college access programming, and, at times, was working alongside other college-focused supports.

iMentor improved high school graduation rates.

Our analyses found no statistically significant impacts on students' attendance rates or credit accumulation throughout high school. However, iMentor students were about 8 percentage points more likely than comparison students to graduate. The increase in high school graduates was driven mostly by students earning a Local Diploma—a less rigorous option that allows students to graduate with lower scores on the required New York State Regents exams.[1] These findings suggest that iMentor may be particularly helpful for students who are struggling academically; without the support that iMentor provided, fewer of these students would have graduated at all.

We also looked at iMentor's impact on students' college enrollment, which is one of the program's central goals for participants. The differences between the iMentor and comparison students were not statistically significant but were in a positive direction. For example, iMentor students were about 3 percentage points more likely to enroll in college than students in the comparison group, with most of the increase concentrated in two-year institutions.

Students with stronger relationships experienced larger gains.

Our exploratory analyses found that students who felt very close to their mentors had large, statistically significant growth on all the SEL competencies we measured and some college activities. This suggests that increasing the proportion of students with stronger relationships might be promising strategy to enhance iMentor's impact. In contrast, we did not find that students who had higher levels of participation in the program (e.g., attended more events or communicated with their mentor more often) had larger impacts.

Moving Forward

Not many new, innovative programs submit themselves to a rigorous, public evaluation. iMentor's engagement and interest in the evaluation prompted some important programmatic improvements. For example, iMentor began hiring PMs with more classroom experience and reorganizing how iMentor staff interacted with school leaders, after our research found challenges in some of the weekly classes and wide variation in the levels of collaboration between iMentor and school staff. iMentor also revamped its online email system to include a chat feature after our research showed that students found the prior system outdated, and that informal communication (like texting) was associated with stronger relationships. While these

changes presented some challenges for evaluating iMentor's impact (with programming becoming somewhat of a moving target), it is encouraging that iMentor was able to adapt as program staff learned more about what was working well and what needed to be improved. In retrospect, the program may not have been ready for a rigorous impact analysis. More formative research, aimed at assessing and improving implementation, could have provided valuable information to hone the program model early on.

Over the seven years of this evaluation, the implementation and impact data raise important questions regarding iMentor's theory of action. The evidence generally doesn't show a relationship between iMentor activities and anticipated outcomes. The fact that student engagement is not strongly related to relationship development and that students who meet iMentor's engagement goals do not show larger impacts raises questions about the program model. Should iMentor invest in different activities that might lead to increased closeness and strengthening students' SEL? For example, iMentor staff reported that field trips (like ice skating) were particularly useful for nurturing closeness. Should mentees and mentors do more events of this kind? Perhaps there are other iMentor activities that we did not measure that contribute to students feeling close to their mentors and strengthening their SEL skills? In particular, it is possible that the work of the PM, which we had relatively little data on, is especially important for fostering closeness. It may also be that closeness is a function of the quality of the match—we suspect that some students and adults are more likely to be close with another because of who they are, not because of the activities they engage in.

Consistent with the literature, our study highlighted that whole-school mentoring interventions are difficult to implement and that school-wide impacts are often hard to achieve. We encourage iMentor and other programs to continue to investigate how a blend of technology-based communication and in-person meetings can be leveraged to foster close mentoring relationships and, ultimately, better student outcomes. In response to their own learning and this evaluation, iMentor has been conducting focus groups with PMs, students, and mentors to gather their perspectives about how to develop strong relationships. We look forward to seeing how their program evolves given this information and how they can continue to inform the mentoring field.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Earning a college degree is widely recognized as the most reliable pathway to economic stability (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). But we know from a wide range of research that access to college is neither easy nor equitable, and that traditionally underrepresented students (including low-income students and Black and Latino students) continue to matriculate and earn degrees at disproportionately low rates (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Black & Coca, 2017; Kane, 2004). We know, too, that the solution to these challenges cannot be found solely in the classroom (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Heckman et al., 2006). There is a growing consensus among policymakers, practitioners, educators, and researchers that college success relies on a concert of academic and social emotional learning (SEL) skills (Farkas, 2003; Farrington et al., 2012; Durlak, et al., 2011), strong guidance during the college application process (Roderick et al., 2008; La Rosa et al., 2006), and financial, academic, and social support throughout college (Kuh et al., 2006).

What is less clear is the specific types of programing that can effectively close the opportunity gaps. A large and growing body of research shows that relationships between adults and youth, such as those formed in mentoring programs, can make an important difference for young people. In Foundations for Young Adult Success, Nagaoka et al. (2015) describe relationships with supportive adults as a necessary underpinning for students' development. Studies of formal mentoring programs, most notably Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), have demonstrated a variety of benefits for youth, including reducing risky behavior (e.g., drug and alcohol use), boosting school attendance, and improving academic attitudes and performance (DuBois et al., 2018; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002, Herrera et al. 2007; Bayer et al., 2013). These studies also highlight the importance of close relationships between mentors and mentees. For example, in a follow-up with students who participated in BBBS, Dubois et al. found that those with close mentoring relationships had a lower likelihood of juvenile arrest and greater emotional and social well-being.

Building on mentoring's substantial evidence base, the iMentor College Ready Program seeks to improve students' college readiness through an unusual combination of school-based mentoring, technology, and aspects of whole school reform. The program matches low-income youth with college-educated mentors and aims to help them develop close relationships through online communication and monthly in-person events, held over the course of students' four years of high school.

iMentor believe that these relationships, coupled with a weekly iMentor class, can help students develop the mindsets, skills, and knowledge necessary to reach 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 one of the primary forms of contact between students and mentors. Second, iMentor attempts to serve all students at participating schools, throughout their high school career; mentoring programs typically serve only a subset of students, and often for a shorter period. Third, the program includes a College Ready curriculum, taught by iMentor staff during the weekly class; it is unusual for mentoring programs to have a curricular component implemented as part of the regular school day.

In 2010, the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) awarded a grant to iMentor to support a rigorous evaluation of the College Ready Program. iMentor engaged the Research Alliance for New York City Schools to conduct a mixed methods evaluation of the program in eight New York City high schools. The study included about 1,600 students who received iMentor programming, as well as large group of comparison students who did not have access to iMentor. We designed our evaluation to answer the following key questions:

1. To what extent did the iMentor evaluation schools implement the College Ready Program with fidelity to the program model?
2. What are the effects of iMentor on academic outcomes that are likely precursors to students' college success, such as grades, credit accumulation, Regents test scores, on-time high school graduation, and college enrollment?
3. What are the effects of iMentor on students' non-academic outcomes, such as building and maintaining strong adult relationships, college aspirations, and navigating the post-secondary process? To what extent do the overall effects of iMentor on students' outcomes depend on the relative intensity and quality of various components of the program?

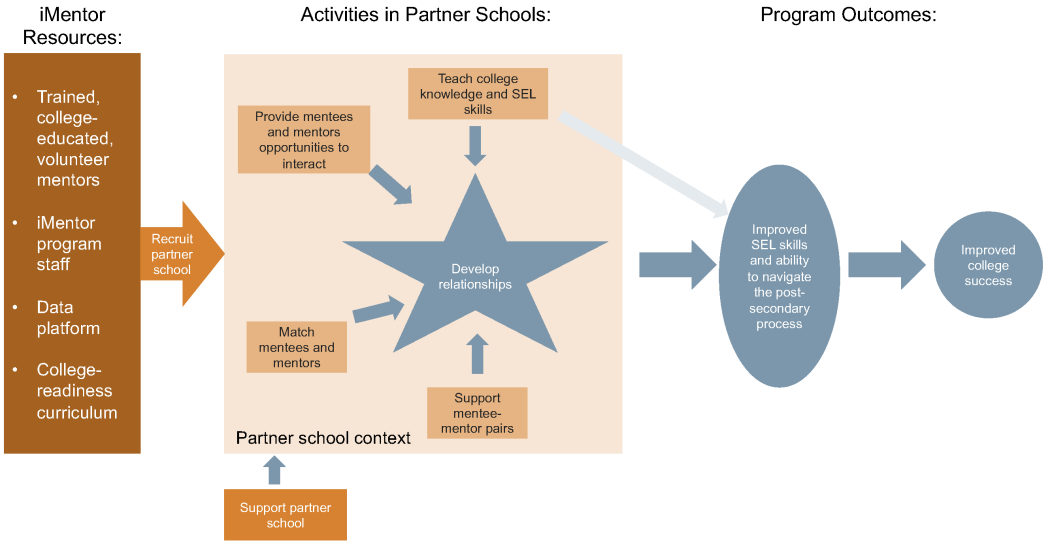
The Research Alliance worked with iMentor to develop a theory of action for the College Ready Program. This theory then served as the basis for our data collection and our analysis of how well the program was implemented in the study schools and how it influenced students' college readiness and college enrollment. We collected data related to the key program activities outlined below and conducted student surveys, as well as interviews with program staff, annually. We were able to link

information from these sources with administrative data from the New York City Department of Education, including data about student demographics, attendance, grades, test scores, high school graduation, and college enrollment. Together, this information allowed us to develop a comprehensive picture of iMentor's implementation in schools and its effects on students during the evaluation.

iMentor's Theory of Action

In the following pages, we briefly describe iMentor's theory of action. Later chapters in the report examine the extent to which this theory played out as intended in the eight schools we studied.

Figure 1: iMentor's Theory of Action



As shown in Figure 1, iMentor provides a range of supports and resources to facilitate the implementation of the College Ready Program in each partner school. These include:

- **Trained, college-educated, volunteer mentors.** Through corporate volunteer programs and general marketing and advertising, iMentor recruits volunteers who commit to mentoring a student for 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.

- **iMentor program staff.** iMentor hires Program Managers (PMs) for each partner 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 PM for each grade. Every PM is supported by additional iMentor staff who are responsible for event logistics. Program Directors supervise and support multiple PMs and manage relationships between iMentor's central office and school leaders.

- **Proprietary data platform.** iMentor developed software that is used by mentees, mentors, and iMentor staff. Mentees and mentors mostly use the platform to connect online with one another, and PMs use it to monitor and support pairs. For example, the platform tracks and shows PMs how long pairs have been matched, how often they connect online, 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. PMs examine these data to identify struggling pairs and then work with their Program Director to develop interventions. PMs also document these interventions, including the number of hours of contact with pairs, on the platform.

- **College-readiness curriculum.** iMentor created a college readiness curriculum for 9th through 12th graders focused on helping students develop specific SEL skills identified as important for college enrollment and success, such as growth mindset, critical thinking, and task persistence. The curriculum outlines activities and goals for each weekly iMentor class, as well as monthly events related to the curriculum.

These resources and supports 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.

Leveraging these supports and resources, iMentor engages in **four key activities** in each partner school:

- **Matching mentees and mentors.** During the first few weeks of iMentor's class, PMs encourage students to join the program and be matched to a mentor—joining requires students to return a signed permission slip from

their parent or guardian. After this has occurred, students fill out a form about their interests. iMentor matches mentors and mentees based on gender and shared interests using a computer algorithm. The algorithm generates multiple potential mentor matches for each mentee, and the PM uses their discretion to determine who will be the best fit.

- **Supporting mentee-mentor pairs.** One of the PMs' main responsibilities is to support mentee-mentor pairs. They do so using a case management model (described in Chapter 2). iMentor expects PMs 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, PMs monitor pair interactions using iMentor's proprietary platform and maintain a list of pairs who may need additional support. This support can 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 social and emotional skills.** PMs teach a weekly class that is part of students' regular school day. During these classes, the PM conducts a short lesson from the iMentor curriculum, and then students email or post about the day's topic. 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 connect online with their mentor, generally with a prompt related to that skill. Mentors also receive a prompt meant to guide a response to their student's email or post. The lessons are clustered into units that last about four weeks. Following each unit, iMentor holds an event where mentees and mentors participate in a culminating activity related to the unit's lessons.
- **Providing mentees and mentors opportunities to interact.** Students and mentors interact through iMentor's online platform and monthly in-person events organized and led by PMs. On the platform, students are asked to respond to a series of questions or prompts related to that day's lessons. At least once a week, mentors respond to their mentee's email or post. Mentors may also serve as a personalized college readiness coach, offering advice, guidance, and sometimes summer jobs/internships, as well as assistance for students as they apply to college.

iMentor theorizes that these four activities will foster strong relationships between mentees and mentors. Close relationships are, in turn, expected to help students learn the iMentor curriculum, improve key social and emotional skills, increase their college knowledge, and navigate in the college application process. These outcomes are expected to provide a foundation for students to enroll and succeed in (ultimately graduating from) college.

This report builds on findings described in more depth in previous publications. ***Bringing Together Mentoring, Technology, and Whole School Reform (2015)*** provided a detailed description of the four key components of the iMentor College Ready Program and assessed the early implementation of these program elements against specific benchmarks established by iMentor. The report also presented a first look at iMentor's effects on 9th graders' outcomes. ***Focus on Mentee-Mentor Relationships (2016)*** described the implementation of iMentor and how specific types and quantities of interaction between mentees and mentors were associated with the closeness of their relationships. It found no links between email frequency and closeness; a small, positive relationship between in-person meetings and closeness; and a stronger, positive relationship between texting and closeness. ***iMentor's College Ready Program (2017)*** focused on the implementation and impacts of iMentor's College Ready Program for 10th grade students. This report documented a few small effects on students' social and emotional learning, but no impact on academic performance. It also began to examine whether students who reported feeling very close to their mentor had stronger outcomes than those who did not, and whether students who met iMentor's goals for participating in various program activities had stronger outcomes than those who did not participate as fully.

We extend this analysis in the current report—the final report from our iMentor study. In the pages that follow, we summarize our findings about the College Ready Program's implementation and examine its effects on key student outcomes. We focus particularly on students' 12th-grade outcomes in order to assess the program's cumulative impact over four years. (In the appendix, we present the effects of the iMentor program in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade). In exploratory analyses, we consider whether students who participated more fully or felt closer to their mentor experienced larger impacts from the College Ready Program. We conclude with some implications of this study for both iMentor and the field at large.

Chapter 2: Assessing the Implementation of iMentor

This chapter presents our findings about how iMentor's College Ready Program was implemented in the eight evaluation schools. As outlined in the theory of action, iMentor Program Managers (PM) lead the implementation of the program in partner schools. Each PM serves about 100 pairs of mentees and mentors—which is generally either one or two grade levels, depending on the size of the school. The PM is responsible for managing the relationship with the school leadership and staff and delivering the four main program activities: (1) matching students and mentors, (2) supporting mentee-mentor pairs, (3) teaching SEL skills and college knowledge through the iMentor class, and (4) providing opportunities for mentee-mentor pairs to interact. According to iMentor's theory of action, if students engage with these program elements, they will be more likely to have close relationships with their mentor, strengthen their SEL skills, and ultimately reach and succeed in college.

Our evaluation assessed the implementation of the College Ready Program via interviews with PMs as well as an analysis of program data provided by iMentor. Drawing on these sources of information, we were able to develop a rich picture of the implementation of each key activity across all eight schools. We followed students for all four years of high school. When available, we used specific benchmarks set by iMentor to assess the degree to which implementation met the organization's aspirations for student exposure to key program elements.

We found that students' participation in key activities varied widely within and across schools. Some students were heavily involved in iMentor programming, while others hardly participated. Most of the evaluation schools were relatively successful at reaching iMentor's benchmarks for matching students, particularly in the early grades. All schools struggled to reach iMentor's standards for pair interaction (i.e., online interaction between mentors and mentees, and event attendance). Notably, student participation levels declined over the four years of the program, suggesting that most students were getting less exposure to iMentor as they progressed through high school.

Overall, our findings highlight that evaluation schools did not consistently hit iMentor's benchmarks for program implementation. Furthermore, for some program elements, we lacked the data needed to make a thorough assessment (for instance, we know how many iMentor classes were offered in each school, but not how many

students attended each class). Taken together, our findings raise questions for iMentor about the need for different kinds of program data, about whether schools might benefit from additional support and guidance around implementation, and about the extent to which current program benchmarks are feasible for schools to meet. Later chapters of this report examine the relationship between implementation benchmarks and student impacts, providing useful evidence to guide the continued development of iMentor's College Ready Program.

Below we summarize findings about the implementation of each key activity in the College Ready Program. We also explore the next step in iMentor's theory of action, by investigating students' perceptions of "closeness" in their mentoring relationship. More details about this analysis are available in our previous reports, particularly *Focus on Mentee-Mentor Relationships* (2016).

How Were the College Ready Program's Key Activities Implemented?

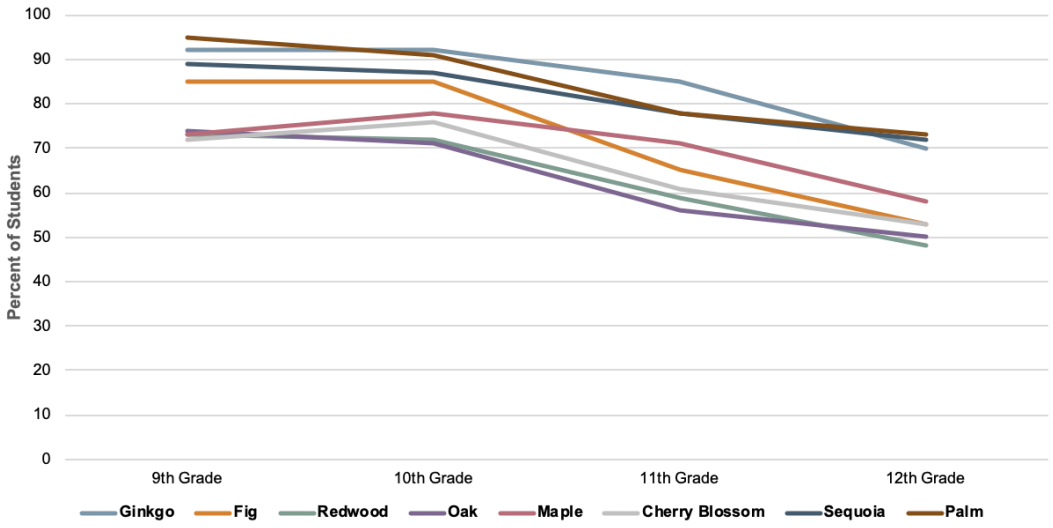
Key Activity 1: Matching Students to Mentors

Each school year, iMentor's goal is to have over 75 percent of students matched with a mentor by December 31st. Figure 2 below illustrates the proportion of students matched in each school for each year. (Throughout this report, the schools are each represented by a pseudonym to keep their identities confidential.) Almost all schools exceeded iMentor's benchmark in the 9th and 10th grade. However, there was distinct decline in match rates over time. In 11th and 12th grade, five of the eight schools fell short of iMentor's matching benchmark.

As noted above, iMentor aspires to have students stay matched with the same mentor for all four years. In the evaluation schools, this proved to be an elusive goal. We found that only 20 percent of students were matched for all four years with the same mentor. The average match length was a little over two years—short of iMentor's aspirations, but considerably longer than the average match length reported by other school-based mentoring programs (e.g., see BBBSA, 2018). iMentor tracks why matches end, and the data show that mentors are more likely than mentees to end a match. The most common reasons that mentors end their match are that they move, have scheduling conflicts, or otherwise feel they cannot meet the requirements of the program. The most common reasons mentees end a match are that they move or transfer schools, have academic or behavioral problems that preclude participation,

or they just do not want to be matched with a mentor anymore. When a mentor departs, PMs, sometimes along with the departing mentor, have a conversation with the student to try and prevent the student from feeling abandoned or rejected by the mentor. The PM then works to re-match these students with new mentors.

Figure 2: Percent of Students Matched with a Mentor by December 31, Over Time, by School



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

Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20th.

Key Activity 2: Supporting Mentee-Mentor Pairs

Unfortunately, the data available to investigate the quality and quantity of support provided to mentor pairs is limited. However, interviews with PMs over all four year suggest that a great deal of attention and time was paid to helping mentors and students develop close relationships.

PMs support mentoring pairs using a case management model, which is a process often used in social work or health care to measure and track client needs and support. It consists of a needs assessment, monitoring, service planning, case conferencing, and reassessment (HRSA, 2001).

PMs use iMentor's online platform to continuously monitor the extent to which pairs are interacting. They are also required to maintain "focus lists" of pairs that need

additional support and attention (e.g., because the mentor and mentee are not interacting frequently enough). PMs often held "case conferences" with other iMentor staff to brainstorm ways to help struggling pairs.

PMs also strive to keep mentors apprised of important issues in their mentees' lives. They send weekly newsletters to mentors with information about school events, such as upcoming exams. They also contact individual mentors with information specific to their mentee, such as a particularly difficult day at school, or to remind them to connect online with their mentee.

Systematically capturing the PMs' pair-support activities is an important next step for iMentor's data collection. PMs are a linchpin in the program and, with more complete data on their actions and activities, iMentor might have better insight into program challenges and promising strategies to maintain relationships with students, mentors, and schools.

Key Activity 3: Teaching Social and Emotional Skills and College Knowledge

While we do not have data on how many classes individual students attended, we do know the number of iMentor classes held each year in each school. Most schools met iMentor's benchmarks for classes held, offering enough sessions to implement the iMentor curriculum as designed.

PMs teach the iMentor curriculum during a weekly class that is programmed into students' school schedules. In a typical class, PMs give a 10-15 minute lesson (length varies depending on how long the school's class periods are), and then students use the rest of the period to engage in an activity and interact with their mentor via the online platform.

In each grade, the iMentor curriculum had a distinct focus. The 9th grade class focused on developing relationships and building SEL skills. The 10th grade class focused on building interest in and excitement about college and potential careers. The 11th grade class focused on college knowledge, such as learning about financial aid and different types of colleges, while the 12th grade class focused on the college application process and selecting a college to attend. Together the curriculum explicitly taught each of the SEL skills iMentor seeks to influence, as well as key steps in the post-secondary process. Event activities were designed to support the curriculum.

Tracking students' attendance in the iMentor class is an important next step for understanding students' engagement in the program. As described below, many students are not reaching iMentor's standards for pair interaction. It will be important to determine whether this is because they do not attend classes or because once in the class they are not accomplishing the task. These are two very different issues to address, and unearthing root causes of the problem can help iMentor make adjustments aimed at improving students' engagement.

Key Activity 4: Providing Pairs with Opportunities to Interact

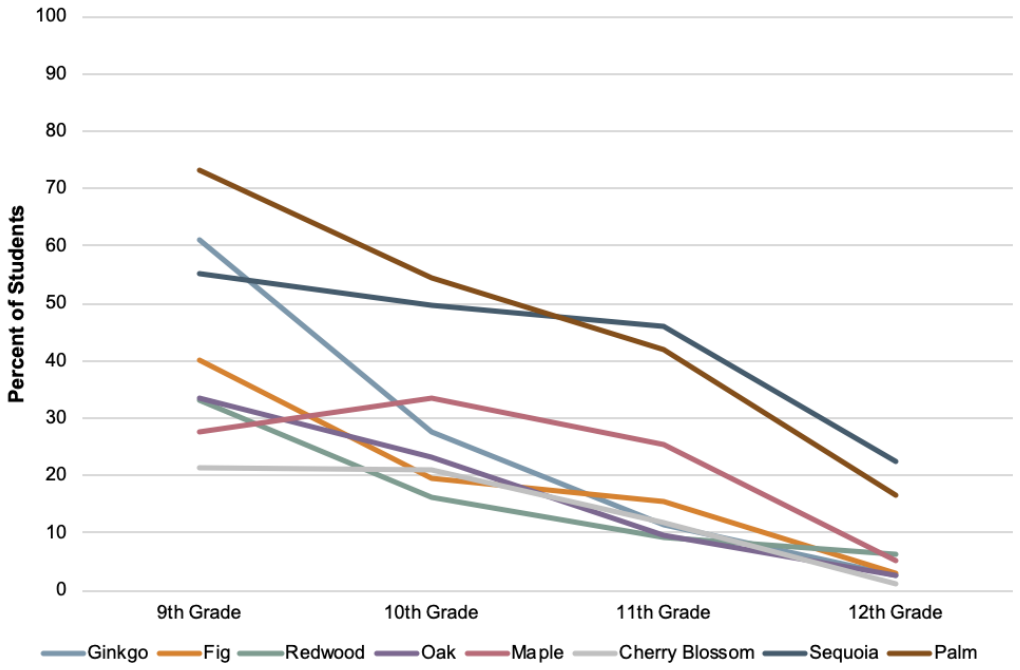
In this section, we summarize findings about students' interaction with their mentor, online and at in-person events.

Online interactions

As noted above, students are prompted to email or post online during their weekly iMentor class. Mentors are expected to respond before the next class meeting. This online communication often includes discussions related to the content presented in that week's iMentor class, as well as general check-ins (e.g., the high and low points of a student's week). For the purposes of our study, we considered all online communication, regardless of the content, to be an interaction.

iMentor's goal is for student and their mentors to interact online at least 55 percent of the class sessions. We found that students and their mentors generally did not interact this frequently and had less and less online communication over the course of the program. Figure 3 illustrates substantial declines in online communication at all study schools, as students progressed through high school. By 12th grade, less than a quarter of students, across schools, were interacting online with their mentors as frequently as iMentor would like.

Figure 3: Percent of Students Who Met iMentor's Benchmark for Online Interaction, Over Time, by School



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

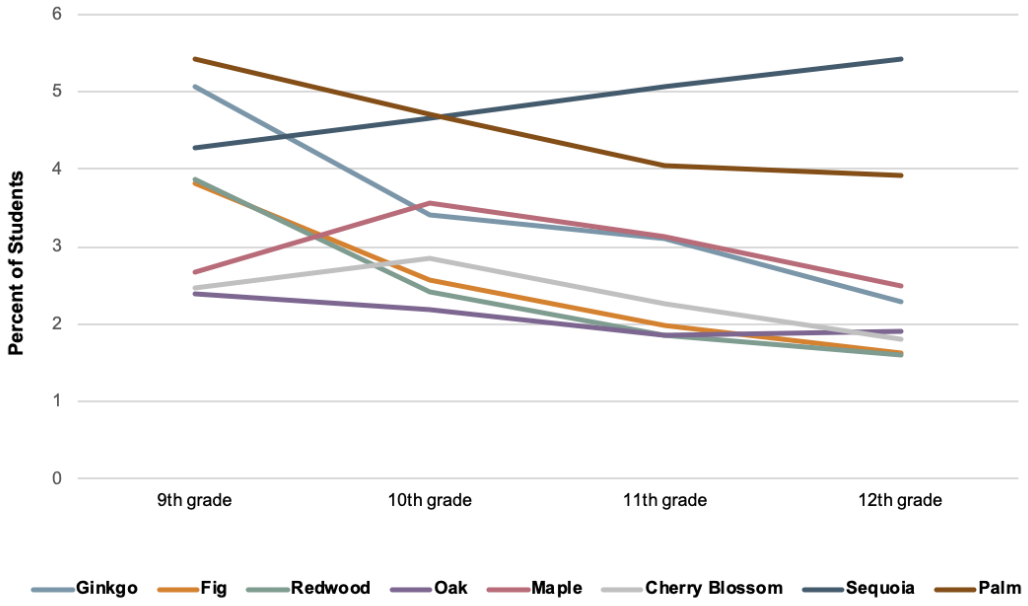
Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20th. iMentor's benchmark for online interaction is for mentors and mentees to communicate with one another via iMentor's online platform online at least 55 percent of class sessions.

Events

Students can meet their mentor in-person at monthly iMentor events. Each event focuses on a current topic in the iMentor curriculum. Typically, events are held at partner schools and start around 6:00 p.m. to accommodate mentors' work schedules. Events consist of planned activities that often include discussion prompts and worksheets for pairs to complete together. Some events are held on college campuses in 11th and 12th grades. In some cases, informal or re-scheduled events can make up for missed larger events and provide more time for students and their mentors to connect. In our previous reports, we discussed feedback from mentors, PMs, and school staff, who described the events as a vital opportunity for pairs get to know each other better and develop stronger relationships. We also noted that the timing of events may be a barrier to attendance for some students who need to go home after school or who participate in extracurricular activities during the late afternoon and evening hours.

iMentor's goal is for each student to attend six events over the course of a year. Figure 4 illustrates how many events students attended, on average, in each study school over time. For most schools, we see a notable decline in event attendance as students moved through high school. However, one school proved to be an exception, with students attending an increasing number of events each year. We do not know why this school had such a divergent trend, but analyses from past reports suggest that it could be due to a high level of buy-in and support from the principal. Overall, across most schools and years, students attended an average of four events or fewer annually—short of iMentor's goal.

Figure 4: Average Number of Events Attended by Students, Over Time, by School



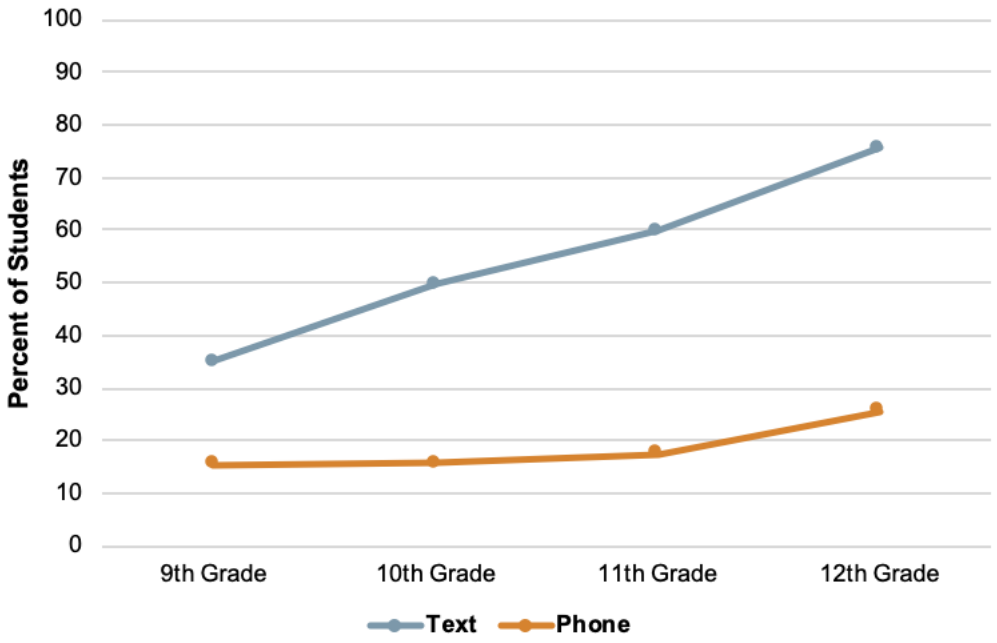
Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the iMentor platform.

Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20.

Informal Interactions

With parental consent, students and mentors can communicate by phone or text outside of formal iMentor interactions. These interactions are not tracked by iMentor, nor are they part of the iMentor theory of action. But, given that these kinds of informal interactions may say something about the strength of the mentoring relationship, the Research Alliance decided to ask about them on the annual student survey. As shown in Figure 5, there was an increase over time in the percentage of students who reported texting and talking on the phone with their mentor. This is an interesting departure from the patterns of declining program participation—particularly declining rates of online communication—described above.

Figure 5: Percentage of Students Who Report Texting and Talking on the Phone with Their Mentor, Over Time



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from student surveys administered in the spring of each school year as part of the iMentor evaluation.

Notes: The response rates for the survey declined overtime as described in Appendix A. In 9th grade, 2,113 students responded to the survey (a response rate of 92 percent), and by 12th grade 1,438 students responded to the survey (a response rate of 69 percent).

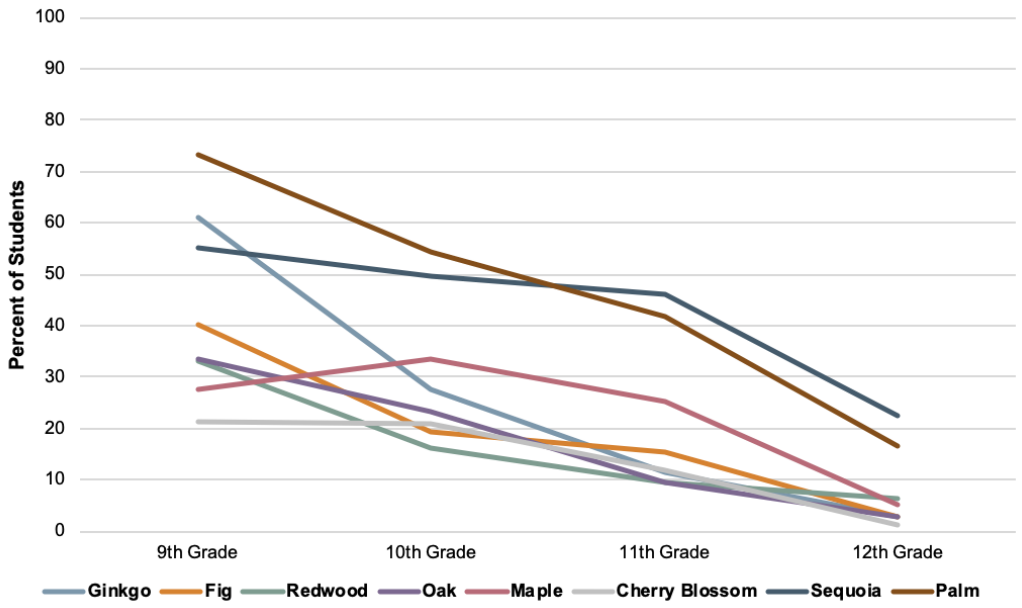
As Figure 5 illustrates, a relatively small and consistent percentage of students reported talking on the phone with their mentor in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades (between 15 and 18 percent); this increased slightly—to 24 percent—in 12th grade. The proportion of students who reported texting was higher and grew steadily over time. In 9th grade, 35 percent connected with their mentor via text, and by 12th grade, three quarters of survey respondents reported that they text with their mentor.

This raises some interesting questions about students' preferred modes of communication. It is possible that some students are texting with their mentor instead of emailing or posting to the online platform. However, it is important to note that the information about texting is only available for students who took the survey, and these students might have been more likely than non-survey-respondents to communicate with their mentor in this way. In addition, response rates for the survey declined somewhat over time (from about 92 percent in 9th grade to 69 percent in 12th grade); if students who were more engaged the program were also more likely to complete the survey in later years, this could account for some of the growth in students' reports of calling and texting with their mentor. Finally, we do not know how often students texted with their mentors, or the substance of these texts or phone calls. Despite these caveats, we think the observed increase in informal communication with mentors is intriguing and warrants further investigation.

Overall Implementation

As shown in Figure 6 below, looking at all of iMentor's benchmarks for student participation together (i.e., whether they were matched with a mentor, the number of iMentor classes held, the number of events attended, and the frequency of online communication between mentor and mentee), we found a decline over the four years of our study. In 9th grade, 53 percent of students were engaged in iMentor activities at the levels outlined in iMentor's benchmarks. By 12th grade, just 9 percent were. Much of that decline was driven by the drop-off in online communication and event attendance in most schools. These findings provide good reason for iMentor to continue looking at variation between schools, and over time across schools, to learn about factors that are associated with stronger implementation. iMentor may also want to reconsider some of its engagement goals, particularly in the later years of high school, in light of how few schools were able to meet the established benchmarks.

Figure 6: Average Percentage of Students Who Met iMentor's Engagement Goals, Over Time, by School



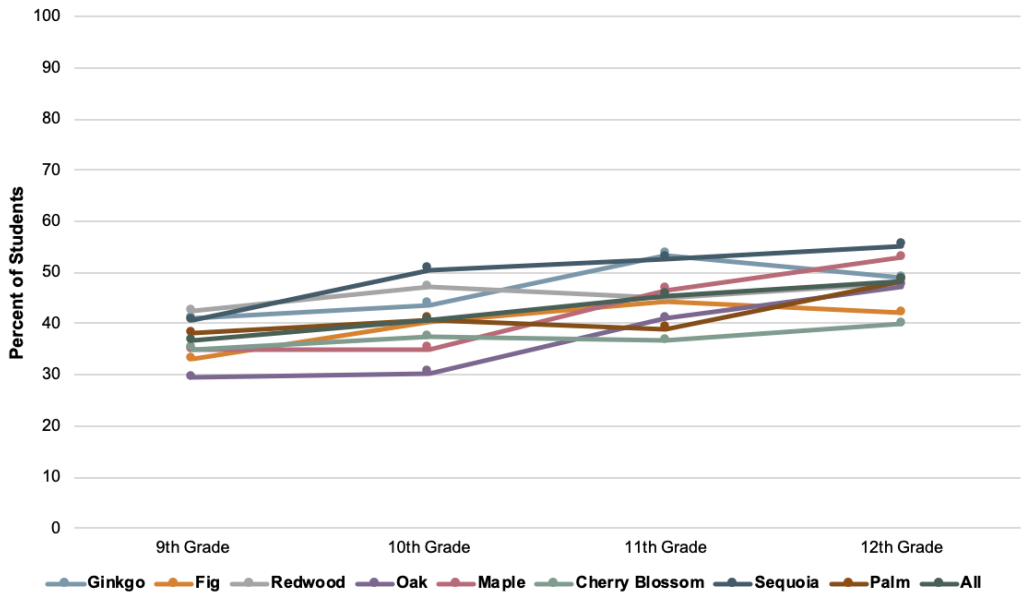
Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the iMentor platform.

Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20th.

How Close Did Students Feel to their Mentor?

As shown in the iMentor theory of action on page 3, all of the activities described above have two objectives: The first is to develop close relationships between mentees and mentors, and the second is to help students develop knowledge and skills that promote college and career success. To assess the extent to which the first objective was being met, the annual survey (conducted in the spring of each school year) asked students to describe how close they feel to their mentor. They could respond with: "Not close at all", "A little close", "Somewhat close", and "Very close.[1]"

Figure 7: Percentage of Students Who Reported Feeling "Very Close" to Their Mentor, Over Time, by School



Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the student surveys administered in the spring of each school year as part of the iMentor evaluation.

Notes: The response rates for the survey declined overtime as described in Appendix A. In 9th grade, 2,113 students responded to the survey (a response rate of 92 percent), and by 12th grade 1,438 students responded to the survey (a response rate of 69 percent).

Figure 7 shows the proportion of students who felt "Very close" to their mentors over the course of the program in each school. In contrast to the implementation measures described above, we found that more students were feeling "Very close" to their mentor as the College Ready program matured. At the end of 9th grade, 37 percent of students reported feeling "Very close" to their mentor; by the end of 12th grade, this had increased to 47 percent. This pattern is different from the one seen with online interactions and event attendance, both because the trend overtime here is positive for each school, and because there is much less variation between the schools. Like the information on informal communication, the data about closeness is dependent on students' responses to the survey; however, sensitivity analyses indicate that the trend over time is not biased due to response rates.

Summary

Overall, our results show that implementation across the eight study schools varied widely and generally did not meet iMentor's benchmarks. iMentor students did not participate in key activities—including online communication with their mentor and event attendance—as much as they were expected to. Furthermore, implementation levels declined as students progressed through high school. This was true even for match rates (i.e., the percentage of students matched with a mentor), which were initially relatively high but dropped in 11th and 12th grade. These low levels of participation suggest that students may not have been able to reap the benefits of the program that are outlined in iMentor's theory of action.

That being said, the results demonstrate that measures of closeness, which the iMentor theory sees as a short-term outcome of program participation, increased over time, even as program activity was decreasing. These findings are puzzling. If the results followed the theory of action, we would expect declines in closeness that mirror those in engagement. Our prior research, however, has cast some doubt on these connections. In our 10th grade report, for example, we found that the amount the online interaction between students and their mentor generally did not predict relationship closeness; event attendance had a small positive effect on closeness. So, it is possible that some students are developing a close relationship with their mentor despite low levels of participation in key activities.

In the next chapter, we describe the impacts of iMentor on students' SEL and academic outcomes. Given challenges with implementation, it would not be surprising to find that the impacts of iMentor are muted. In addition to the overall impacts of the program on all iMentor students, we will also present the results of an exploratory analysis focused on two subgroups: students who engaged intensively in the program, and students who reported having very close relationships with their mentor.

Chapter 3: Assessing the Impact of iMentor on Student Outcomes

The previous chapter described the iMentor College Ready Program and its implementation in the eight study schools. We examined the first part of iMentor's theory of action, including the extent to which students met thresholds for participation in the four key program activities, and how close students reported feeling with their mentor. Our findings showed that most students did not participate fully enough to meet iMentor's implementation goals. Yet, by senior year, about half of the students reported a very close mentoring relationship.

In this chapter, we look further out in iMentor's theory of action, examining the cumulative impact of the iMentor College Ready Program at the end of students' four years of high school. Specifically, we assess iMentor's impact on students' social and emotional skills, college- and career-related activities, college aspirations, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment. In this analysis, we compare the outcomes of students who had the opportunity to participate in iMentor with similar students who did not have that opportunity, as described in greater detail in the appendix.

The main findings presented here focus on the average impact of iMentor across all students. We also report the results of an exploratory analysis to see whether higher levels of participation in the key program activities or close relationships between mentors and mentees were associated with stronger outcomes.

Students' Social and Emotional Skills

iMentor's theory of action proposes that students will develop important SEL skills, as a result of both learning about them directly during the iMentor class and "practicing" them in their relationship with their mentor. To assess whether the program did in fact influence these outcomes, we examined iMentor's impacts on nine SEL competencies (see the textbox on page 20 for details). We found small, positive effects on two of these SEL skills.

Table 1 describes the results for students' SEL competencies at the end of 12th grade. We focus on the 12th grade because theoretically the impacts should be largest after four years of programming. This analysis compares students who were in cohorts who received four years of iMentor with previous cohorts of students in the same school who did not have access to iMentor programming.

The SEL Outcomes We Assessed

- **Social Support,** which measures perceived support for college and future goals from non-relative adults, and the presence of adults that serve as positive role models (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997).
- **Task Persistence,** which measures students' ability to maintain effort, even in the face of discomfort or a lack of immediate success (Walker & Arbreton, 2004). It is made up of eight items like, "If I can't do a job the first time, I keep trying until I can."
- **Personal Initiative,** which measures students' ability to complete tasks on their own volition. It is made up of three items like, "I finish my homework without being reminded."
- **Critical Thinking,** which measures students' problem-solving ability. It is made up of five items like, "I try to get all the facts before trying to solve a problem" (D'Zurilla & Maydeu Olivares, 1995).
- **Hope and Optimism,** which measures excitement about the future. It is made up of eight items like, "I can see possibilities in the midst of difficulties."
- **Curiosity and Love of Learning,** which measures students' orientation to new situations and knowledge and is made up of four items like, "Everywhere I go, I am out looking for new things or experiences."
- **Growth Mindset,** which is the belief that intelligence is changeable and that performance increases with effort (Dweck, 2006). The survey specifically measured Internal Growth Mindset, a three-item construct that assesses the extent to which students tend to ascribe responsibility for their actions and success to themselves, as opposed to external factors, with items like, "My own efforts and actions are what will determine my future" (Richards et al., 2002).
- **Help Seeking,** which measures the extent to which students would ask for help if they were struggling in class. It consists of five items like, "If I were having trouble understanding the material in class, I would ask someone who could help me understand the general ideas."
- **Self-Advocacy,** which measures the extent to which students engage in self-promotion by pointing out their abilities and competencies to others (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). The construct is made up of four items like, "I talk proudly about my experiences."

Table 1: iMentor's Impacts on 12th Grade SEL Outcomes

Student Outcomes	iMentor Students	Comparison Students	Estimated Difference	
Social Support (0-5)	3.3	3.3	0.0	
Task Persistence (1-4)	3.3	3.3	-0.1	
Personal Initiative (1-4)	3.2	3.1	0.0	
Critical Thinking (1-4)	3.2	3.1	0.1	*
Hope and Optimism (1-4)	3.3	3.3	0.0	
Curiosity and Love of Learning (1-4)	3.2	3.2	0.1	
Growth Mindset (1-4)	3.1	3.1	0.0	
Help Seeking (1-5)	3.8	3.8	0.0	
Self-Advocacy (1-5)	3.7	3.5	0.2	*

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the student surveys administered in the spring of their 12th grade year, as part of the iMentor evaluation.

Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20th who responded to a 12th grade survey. In 12th grade 1,438 students responded to the survey. * Denotes statistical significance at the 5 percent level.

Table 1 shows statistically significant differences between iMentor and comparison students for 2 of the 9 SEL outcomes we measured. The largest difference was for Self-Advocacy, which captures the extent to which students engage in self-promotion by pointing out their abilities and competencies to others (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Our survey collected information on these outcomes by asking students to agree or disagree with statements like, "I talk proudly about my experiences." We also found a small effect on Critical Thinking, which measures students' problem solving ability. For this outcome, the survey items included statements such as, "I try to get all the facts before trying to solve a problem" (D'Zurilla & Maydeu Olivares, 1995). These results imply that students' Self-Advocacy and Critical Thinking abilities improved as a result of the program. The other seven outcomes did not show any statistically significant impacts. In addition, counter to the idea that impacts would get larger as students progressed through high school, these findings were generally consistent across grade levels (see Appendix C for more details).

College and Career Activities

During iMentor classes and events, students are exposed to activities that are designed to promote college enrollment and interest in careers. For example, some activities involved researching college majors and careers and/or writing the common application essay. In the student survey, we asked both iMentor students and non-iMentor students about their participation in various college- and career-related activities. As shown in Table 2 on the next page, we did not see many differences between the two groups. Both sets of students appear to be participating in these activities at high rates. For example, over 90 percent of students in both the iMentor and the comparison group reported going on a college visit in NYC. These findings are consistent with findings from our qualitative research, which highlighted that most iMentor study schools had other college readiness programs available to students—sometimes simultaneously (see a list of these programs in Appendix E).

Table 2: iMentor Impacts on 12th Grade Post-Secondary Activities

Student Outcomes	iMentor Students	Comparison Students	Estimated Difference	
Researched possible career paths	89%	89%	0%	
Developed a resume	82%	80%	3%	
Researched colleges	96%	96%	0%	
Participated in a program/special event on a college campus	61%	58%	4%	
Visited a college campus in NYC	92%	91%	1%	
Visited a college campus out of NYC but in NY State	70%	74%	-3%	
Visited an out of state college	50%	51%	-2%	
Completed common application	74%	67%	7%	
Researched a college major	91%	92%	0%	
Participated in an SAT/ACT prep class	66%	69%	-3%	
Took a practice ACT/SAT test	85%	86%	-1%	
Spent time on your own studying for ACT/SAT	69%	70%	0%	
Financial aid activities				
Filed a FAFSA	88%	86%	2%	
Applied for a scholarship	57%	57%	0%	
Submitted a SAR	59%	52%	7%	
Compared financial aid offers	77%	72%	5%	*
College application activities				
Taken the SAT/ACT	89%	90%	-1%	
Taken on or more AP course	53%	54%	-2%	
Sat in on a college course	60%	60%	0%	
Made a college list	83%	77%	5%	
Completed and submitted an application to CUNY	92%	92%	0%	
Completed and submitted an application to a non-CUNY college	75%	74%	0%	
Applied to college	95%	96%	-1%	

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the student surveys administered in the spring of their 12th grade year, as part of the iMentor evaluation.

Notes: Sample includes all students on each school's 9th grade roster as of October 20th who responded to a 12th grade survey. In 12th grade 1,438 students responded to the survey. * Denotes statistical significance at the 5 percent level.

Transitions to College

The ultimate outcome of the iMentor College Ready Program is supposed to be college success. Over the years, we have measured the impact of iMentor on key predictors of college success, including students' rates of being on-track for high school graduation, test scores, and attendance. Our prior analyses found that iMentor did not have a measurable effect on any of these college precursors (see Appendix D for details).

Table 3 summarizes the findings from analyses that assess iMentor's impact on 12th-grade academic outcomes. In keeping with analyses from prior years, we found no statistically significant impacts on students' attendance rates or credit accumulation. We also examined high school graduation rates, by assessing the percentage of students in the original 9th grade cohort who went on to earn a high school diploma within four years. Likewise, we used the 9th grade cohort as a base for determining college enrollment rates (i.e., the percentage of 9th graders who graduated from high school within four years and enrolled in college the following fall).

As shown in Table 3, iMentor students were more about 8 percentage points more likely than comparison students to graduate from high school. The increase was concentrated among students who earned a Local Diploma. Local Diplomas are a less rigorous option that allows students to graduate with lower scores on the required New York State Regents exams.[2] Our findings suggest that iMentor had a meaningful positive impact on students' high school graduation rates, particularly among students who were struggling academically and at risk of not graduating at all.

Finally, we looked at iMentor's impact on students' college enrollment. The differences between the iMentor and comparison students were not statistically significant but were in a positive direction. For example, iMentor students were about 3 percentage points more likely to enroll in college than students in the comparison group, with most of the increase being seen in two-year institutions.

Looking more closely at these findings, we see that the iMentor impacts are driven by stagnant—and in some cases, declining—outcomes in comparison schools. This means that during the period of our study, the comparison schools did not improve or performed slightly worse over time. iMentor schools, on the other hand, did much better on helping students earn a Local Diploma, which fueled a substantial increase in high school graduation rates.

Table 3: iMentor's Impacts on 12th Grade Academic Outcomes

Student Outcomes	iMentor (Projected)	iMentor Difference	Comp. Difference	Impact
Attendance	78.5	1.1	-0.5	1.6
Credits Earned	8.5	0.1	-0.5	0.6
College Readiness				
Graduating with any Diploma	66.9	7.2	-0.7	7.9*
Graduating with Local Diploma	5.7	5.1*	-0.7	5.8*
Graduating with a Regents Diploma	61.2	2.1	-0.1	2.2
College Ready [a] (NYS APM)	22.1	0.0	-0.9	0.9
College Enrollment				
Attending Any College	51.3	0.8	-2.5	3.3
Attending 2-Year College	23.4	1.0	-2.1	3.1
Attending 4-Year College	27.8	-0.2	-0.3	0.2

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from New York City Department of Education.

Notes: Sample includes all eight iMentor schools with 1706 treatment students and 16 matched comparison schools with 3490 comparison students. * Denotes statistical significance at the 5 percent level.[a] In this report, being "college ready" is based on the New York State Education Department's Aspirational Performance Measure (APM), which is defined as earning a New York State Regents Diploma and receiving a score of 80 or higher on a Mathematics Regents examination and a score of 75 or higher on an English Regents examination. However, we recognize that college success depends on a variety of other skills and knowledge not necessarily reflected in this measure.

Exploring Links Between iMentor's Implementation, Relationship Closeness, and Impacts

The findings presented elsewhere in this chapter reflect averages, comparing iMentor students and non-iMentor students. But, as we've noted, there was significant variation in the extent to which students participated in key program activities. We also found fairly high levels of relationship closeness—which generally didn't appear to be dependent on participation levels. We conducted an exploratory analysis to discern whether differences in participation or closeness were associated with accompanying differences in iMentor's student impacts. For this analysis, we identified two subgroups of students:

- Students who met iMentor's participation goals in the 12th grade (these students attended at least four events, connected with their mentor online at least 55 percent of class sessions, and had the opportunity to attend at least 15 iMentor classes over the course of the year); and
- Students who reported being "Very Close" to their mentor on the 12th grade survey.

Generally, we found that higher levels of participation were not associated with larger impacts. For almost all of the college and career activities and SEL outcomes we assessed, we saw no meaningful differences between students who participated fully and those who did not (the one exception was Growth Mindset—which improved slightly more for students who participated fully). Similarly, we also analyzed differences between schools with higher levels of participation and schools with lower levels of participation and did not find statistically significant differences in impacts.

By contrast, students who reported feeling very close to their mentor did significantly better than students who were not close. They had more growth on every SEL outcome we measured. They also participated in some college and career activities (making a college list and comparing financial aid offers) at a higher rate than students who did not feel as close to their mentor.

There are some important caveats to note with this analysis. It is possible that students who develop close relationships are different to begin with—and might have done better on the outcomes we assessed even without a program like iMentor. To account for this, we controlled for a wide variety of background characteristics and differences on the baseline student survey (see Appendix C for details). Overall, these findings suggest that having a very close relationship with a mentor may be a promising lever for increasing SEL skills and supporting the college transition.

Summary

Overall, we found that four years of iMentor programming had few impacts on SEL skills, college going activities, and college transitions for students in the eight study schools. The program had small positive effects on students' Self-Advocacy and Critical Thinking. The most promising finding was the impact on high school graduation rates, which suggest that iMentor is helping students who otherwise would not graduate to earn a diploma. Our exploratory analyses showed more and larger impacts of on students' SEL outcomes for those who reported being very close with their mentors. Based on the main impact findings and the exploratory analyses, we suggest that iMentor redouble its efforts to investigate how and why some pairs are closer than others. In certain circumstances, it may make sense for iMentor to prioritize relationship building over activity participation, given that outcomes did not vary for students with higher and lower participation levels. The next chapter discusses these implications in more depth.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The goal of our seven-year mixed method longitudinal study was to help iMentor improve their program and inform the mentoring field at large. Our results suggest a number of key takeaways for iMentor and other organizations seeking to promote student college success.

Key Findings

Schools struggled to implement iMentor's College Ready Program as designed.

The eight schools in our evaluation generally did not meet iMentor's benchmarks for program implementation, and implementation levels declined over time. On average, students were more engaged in 9th and 10th grade than they were in 11th and 12th grade. While a majority of students were matched with a mentor across the four years of the study, most students did not interact with their mentor as frequently as iMentor would like.

Despite these challenges, iMentor produced small, positive changes in students' critical thinking and self-advocacy skills.

iMentor accomplished an important goal by matching students with a mentor and providing ways for them to interact. Students also had access to the weekly iMentor class, which focused on teaching important SEL competencies. Our findings show that, after four years of implementation, iMentor had a small positive effect on two of the nine SEL outcomes we measured, critical thinking and self-advocacy, both of which may provide an important foundation for navigating transitions to college and a career. We found no significant impacts on other SEL skills, such as growth mindset, task persistence, and personal initiative.

iMentor did not increase participation in college and career activities.

iMentor provided students with opportunities to engage in college and career activities during class, such as writing a resume and filling out college applications, as well as during events (including visits to college campuses). Our results suggest that many NYC students are engaged in these kinds of college and career activities. The high levels of participation among comparison students left little room for iMentor to add value. We found that iMentor students were more likely to compare financial aid packages, which could help students compare the costs of colleges they might attend.

Many schools reported that iMentor took the place of prior college access programming, and, at times, was working alongside other college-focused supports.

iMentor improved high school graduation rates.

Our analyses found no statistically significant impacts on students' attendance rates or credit accumulation throughout high school. However, iMentor students were more likely than comparison students to graduate. The increase in high school graduates was driven mostly by students earning a Local Diploma, suggesting that iMentor may be particularly helpful for students who are struggling academically. College enrollment outcomes showed no statistically significant differences but were generally moving in a positive direction for iMentor schools.

Students with stronger relationships experienced larger gains.

Our exploratory analyses found that students who felt very close to their mentors had large, statistically significant growth on all the SEL competencies we measured and some college activities. This suggests that increasing the proportion of students with stronger relationships might be promising strategy to enhance iMentor's impact. In contrast, we did not find that students who intensely engaged in the program had larger impacts.

Moving Forward

Not many new, innovative programs submit themselves to a rigorous, public evaluation. iMentor's engagement and interest in the evaluation prompted some important programmatic improvements. For example, iMentor began hiring PMs with more classroom experience and reorganizing how iMentor staff interacted with school leaders, after our research found challenges in some of the weekly classes and wide variation in the levels of collaboration between iMentor and school staff. iMentor also revamped its online email system to include a chat feature after our research showed that students found the prior system outdated, and that informal communication (like texting) was associated with stronger relationships. While these changes present some challenges for evaluating iMentor's impact (with programming becoming somewhat of a moving target), it is encouraging that iMentor was able to adapt as program staff learned more about what was working well and what needed to be improved. In retrospect, the program may not have been ready for a rigorous impact analysis. More formative research, aimed at assessing and improving implementation, could have provided valuable information to hone the program model early on.

Over the seven years of this evaluation, the implementation and impact data raise important questions regarding iMentor's theory of action. The evidence generally doesn't show a relationship between iMentor activities and anticipated outcomes. The fact that student engagement is not strongly related to relationship development and that students who meet iMentor's engagement goals do not show larger impacts raises questions about the program model. Should iMentor invest in different activities that might lead to increased closeness and strengthening students' SEL? For example, iMentor staff reported that field trips (like ice skating) were particularly useful for nurturing closeness. Should mentees and mentors do more events of this kind? Perhaps there are other iMentor activities that we did not measure that contribute to students feeling close to their mentors and strengthening their SEL skills? In particular, it is possible that the work of the PM, which we had relatively little data on, is especially important for fostering closeness. It may also be that closeness is a function of the quality of the match—we suspect that some students and adults are more likely to be close with another because of who they are, not because of the activities they engage in.

Taking a step back, these findings also raise larger issues for the mentoring field. First, how can programs help develop close mentoring relationships in an online context? While we found that iMentor created many close relationships between mentees and mentors over the years in their program, we could not determine how the program facilitated the closeness (i.e., the links between engagement in program activities and relationship closeness were weak at best). Understanding the mechanisms and strategies that create close relationships in a virtual environment is only becoming more important for the field, as more and more communication takes place online. Second, what does it take to effectively implement universal, whole-school mentoring? This evaluation highlighted how difficult it is to actively engage all students throughout a school in a mentoring program, especially if the goal is to keep them involved year after year. Often, mentoring targets selected students within a school and for shorter periods of time, but iMentor sought to serve all students for the entirety of their high school career. This model may increase the odds of reaching more students who particularly need support—which may help explain how iMentor successfully raised graduation rates. But serving a large, diverse student population, including students who might be resistant to the program, brings many challenges. There is a lot to learn about how school-wide programs can effectively engage students over time. We encourage iMentor and other programs to continue to investigate how a blend of technology-based communication and in-person meetings

can be leveraged to foster close mentoring relationships and, ultimately, better student outcomes. In response to their own learning and this evaluation, iMentor has been conducting focus groups with PMs, students, and mentors to gather their perspectives about how to develop strong relationships. We look forward to seeing how their program evolves given this information and how they can continue to inform the mentoring field.

Endnotes

[1] This survey item is derived from the Big Brothers Big Sisters study (2013).

[2] For more information about graduation requirements in New York State, please see http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/diploma-and-credentials-summary-requirements.pdf.

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The Research Alliance for New York City Schools

627 Broadway, 7th Floor | New York, New York 10012-2634
212 992 7697 | 212 995 4910 fax
research.alliance@nyu.edu | www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance

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