

Benefit of a mentor: Disadvantaged teens twice as likely to attend college

4 November 2009



Denise Daniels, a math teacher at Spanish Fork High School in Utah, mentors a student during an after-school math lab. A new Brigham Young University study shows teacher-mentors greatly increase students' chances of going to college. Credit: Mark Philbrick/BYU

Adult mentors give teens a 50 percent greater likelihood of attending college. Mentorship by a teacher nearly doubles the odds of attending college for disadvantaged students. The students who need mentors the most are the least likely to have them.

Two findings from a new national study reveal the power of mentors, particularly those in the teaching profession:

- For all teen students, having an adult mentor meant a 50 percent greater likelihood of attending college.
- For disadvantaged students, mentorship by a teacher nearly doubled the odds of attending college.

"Potential is sometimes squashed by the social environment, and the data show that mentors can overcome those forces," said Lance Erickson, a sociology professor at Brigham Young University

and the study's lead author.

The research will appear next week in the academic journal *Sociology of Education*. Study coauthor Steve McDonald, a sociologist at North Carolina State University, notes a harsh paradox evident in the numbers.

"Youth who are most likely to need mentors are least likely to have them," McDonald said.

Their research shows less than half of disadvantaged students report having any adult mentor. Only seven percent had a mentoring relationship with a teacher.

The data includes information from more than 14,000 adolescents who participated in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

In the statistical analysis, mentors proved pivotal in whether students make the jump to college. For example, students whose parents do not have even a high school degree are normally 35 percent likely to enroll in college. According to the study, the rate jumps to 66 percent when the youth considers one of their teachers to be a personal mentor.

"Teacher-mentors close the [college](#) gap for disadvantaged kids," Erickson said.

The authors point out that much needs to be done to help disadvantaged youth connect to the adults, especially teachers, in their lives.

"Comments from study participants indicate that their mentors weren't necessarily doing anything extraordinary, just being involved and treating the young person as an important human being," Erickson said.

Source: Brigham Young University ([news](#) : [web](#))

APA citation: Benefit of a mentor: Disadvantaged teens twice as likely to attend college (2009, November 4) retrieved 2 December 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-11-benefit-disadvantaged-teens-college.html>

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