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State-Funded Mentoring Program Performance Mixed; Take Stock and Best Buddies Do Well

at a glance

The Legislature appropriated \$10 million for Fiscal Year 2010-11 to six mentoring programs intended to help K-12 students enhance their social, life, and/or academic skills. These programs served over 28,000 students during the past year. Although there is some overlap, the programs generally vary in structure, portion of budget supported by state appropriations, and primary focus.

Students who participated in two programs (Best Buddies and Take Stock in Children) outperformed comparison groups of similar students in three or more performance areas by achieving better academic and behavioral outcomes, such as reading at grade level and having few disciplinary incidents. Results for the remaining programs were mixed, with students exceeding the performance of peers in some areas but performing comparably or lower in other areas.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, OPPAGA examined six state-supported mentoring programs for K-12 students. This report describes the variation among programs and analyzes participants' performance outcomes compared to those of students with similar characteristics. The programs reviewed were Best Buddies, Bigs in Schools (Big Brothers Big

Sisters), Boys & Girls Clubs, Take Stock in Children, Teen Trendsetters, and the YMCA Reads! program.

Background

The state provides funding to support six mentoring programs that are intended to help students enhance their social, life, and/or academic skills. As shown in Exhibit 1, the Legislature appropriated the six programs approximately \$10 million from state and federal sources for Fiscal Year 2010-11.¹ Of this amount, \$9.7 million was from general revenue and the remaining \$320,000 was from federal stimulus funds. The Legislature also appropriated over \$5 million to the Florida Department of Education to award as grants to numerous entities that provide mentoring services; these grant recipients, not included in this review, are described in Appendix A.²

¹ The \$10 million does not include all funding in special categories of Education appropriations, such as the \$2.6 million for the Black Male Explorers, Girl Scouts of Florida, Learning for Life, and the Project to Advance School Success.

² These programs have not yet generated performance data as they were awarded grants in the fall of 2010.

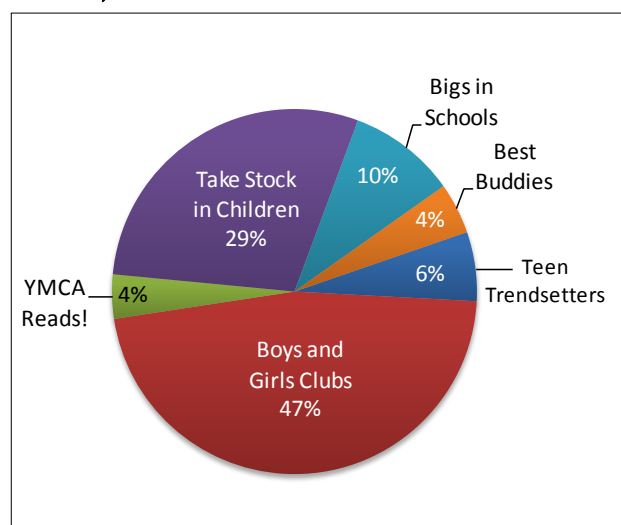
Exhibit 1**The State Provides Funding to Six Mentoring Programs for K-12 Students¹**

Program	Description	Fiscal Year 2010-11 Funding
Take Stock in Children	Provides adult mentors and encourages students to finish high school and attend college	\$4,000,000
Bigs in Schools (Big Brothers Big Sisters)	Provides adult mentors to primarily elementary school students	2,270,880
Boys & Girls Clubs (The Florida Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs)	Provides tutoring and group mentoring services to elementary and middle school students after school at club locations	1,809,941
YMCA Reads! (YMCA State Alliance)	Provides volunteer mentors to help primarily early elementary students improve early reading skills	899,967
Best Buddies	Provides peer-to-peer mentors to primarily high school students with special needs	689, 973
Teen Trendsetters (Governor's Mentoring Initiative)	Provides volunteer teen mentors to help early elementary students improve early reading skills	316,533
Total Appropriation		\$9,987,294

¹ The organization's name as it appears in statute is shown in parentheses.

Source: General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2010-11 and information provided by the Department of Education.

Students served. The six state-supported mentoring programs served 28,695 students in the 2009-10 school year. As shown in Exhibit 2, Boys & Girls Clubs served the largest percentage (47%) of participants, followed by Take Stock in Children (29%).

Exhibit 2**Six State-Supported Mentoring Programs Served over 28,000 K-12 Students in 2009-10¹**

¹ The figures on which the percentages are calculated only includes mentees.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Department of Education data.

Program oversight. The Department of Education's Bureau of Family and Community Outreach administers the funds appropriated for K-12 mentoring programs. Each year, the state-funded programs respond to a Request for Application (RFA). The programs are required to provide a budget and project deliverables, as well as the annual and bi-annual reports on their activities.

Findings

There is wide variation in the structure and focus of the six state-funded mentoring programs. Performance analyses showed that students in two of the programs surpassed comparison groups in three or more performance areas, while performance was mixed for the remaining programs.

Variation Among Programs

Mentoring programs vary in structure, state support, and program focus

Although there is some overlap, several aspects of the state-supported mentoring programs vary. As shown in Exhibit 3, these aspects can be grouped into three areas: program structure, the percentage of budget funded by the state, and program focus.

Exhibit 3

State-Supported Mentoring Programs Vary in Three Primary Areas

Program	Program Structure				Budget Portion Funded by State ¹	Program Focus		
	Type of Mentoring	Relationship of Mentors to Students	Ratio of Students to Mentors	Location		Program Goals	Grades Served	Low Income (Percentage Free or Reduced Price Lunch)
Best Buddies	Social	Peer-to-peer	1-to-1	On campus	55%	Provides mentoring activities to intellectually challenged students to help them become integrated with other students and promote social inclusion in the community	Primarily high school	66%
Bigs in Schools (BigBrothers Big Sisters)	Academic/ Life skills	Adult-to-student	1-to-1	On campus	26%	Provides mentors for low performing students within low performing schools to provide academic assistance to students who are identified as at-risk of failing in one of the FCAT learning areas	Elementary and middle school with some high school	88%
Boys & Girls Clubs	Academic/ Life skills	Adult-to-student	18-to-1	Primarily off-campus	4%	Provides tutoring and mentoring services for at-risk and low performing students after school	Elementary and middle school	87%
Take Stock in Children	Life skills	Adult-to-student	1-to-1	On campus	47%	Provides mentors and college scholarships for low-income children in order to enhance the likelihood of college preparation and attendance	Majority in high school, but start identifying students in middle school	99%
Teen Trendsetters	Academic	Teen-to-student	1-to-1	On campus	38%	Increases the number of mentors available in Florida for academically at-risk youth by providing high-school students to tutor elementary students in reading	Primarily second and third grade	71%
YMCA Reads!	Academic	Adult-to-student	2.6-to-1	On campus	81%	Provides mentoring and tutoring assistance in reading to at-risk students in low-performing schools or schools that have a high percentage of students below grade level in reading	Primarily first, second, and third grade	90%

¹ The total revenues for programs may not include in-kind items, the value of volunteer hours, or other components of the resources available. Thus, the percentage of the programs' budgets provided by the state funds could be lower.

Source: Information provided by the mentoring programs and the Florida Department of Education.

Program Structure

Four aspects of the mentoring programs' structures vary: (1) type of mentoring provided; (2) relationship of mentors to students; (3) ratio of students to mentors; and (4) the location where mentoring is provided to students.

Type of mentoring. The programs provide three types of mentoring: social, life skills, and academic. Social mentoring, like that provided by Best Buddies, is designed to enhance students' social interactions and friendships. Programs with life skills mentoring, such as Take Stock in Children, are designed to provide students with a trusted adult from whom they can seek advice on a variety of subjects such as social and academic challenges or college planning. Academic mentoring programs, like Teen Trendsetters and YMCA Reads!, provide tutoring on specific subjects such as reading. Bigs in Schools and Boys & Girls Clubs provide both academic and life skills mentoring.

Relationship of mentors to students. The programs use one of three types of mentor-to-student relationships: peer-to-peer, adult-to-student, or teen-to-student. Best Buddies provides peer-to-peer mentoring by pairing students with other students at the same school. Four of the six programs use an adult-to-student structure in which students are mentored by adults from their communities. Teen Trendsetter uses a slightly different approach in which the mentors are teenagers who tutor early elementary students.

Ratio of students to mentors. Four of the programs, Best Buddies, Bigs in Schools, Teen Trendsetters and Take Stock in Children, give students a one-on-one relationship with a mentor. YMCA Reads! tends to have slightly higher ratios of two or three students per mentor, although program staff emphasize that these ratios vary by site and the number of mentors available. The Boys & Girls Clubs use a group mentoring model with an average ratio of 18 students for each mentor.

Location. Five of the six programs provide services on school campuses. Although

programs like Best Buddies and Big Brothers Big Sisters also have community-based mentoring programs, their state-funded programs provide school-based rather than community-based mentoring.

Boys & Girls Clubs are the only state-supported mentoring programs not designed to provide services on a school campus. Boys & Girls Clubs primarily function as after-school programs at Boys and Girls Club locations.

Portion of Budget Supported by State Appropriations

The portion of program budget supported by the state varies widely across the six mentoring programs. As shown earlier in Exhibit 3, Boys & Girls Clubs received the lowest percentage (4%) of its mentoring program budget through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2010-11. In contrast, 81% of the YMCA Reads! budget is supported by state funding. Some of the variation may be due to the availability of other funding sources for specific programs. For example, Boys & Girls Clubs are part of a national organization that receives funding from a variety of public and private sector sources. Take Stock in Children and Teen Trendsetters are Florida-based organizations for which the state provides 47% and 38% of their funding, respectively. These programs receive the remainder of their funding from several other sources. For example, Take Stock in Children uses state appropriations to administer and implement its mentoring programs, but uses private sector funding sources with a state match to provide participants a prepaid higher education scholarship. Take Stock in Children also receives federal funding.

Program Focus

Mentoring programs serve different student grade levels and target their services to different groups of students based on their goals. Based on their eligibility for the free or reduced price lunch program, the majority of participants are from low income families.

Student grade levels. The six mentoring programs serve varying student grade levels. Teen Trendsetters and YMCA Reads! primarily mentor early elementary students, Bigs in Schools mentors primarily elementary and middle school students of all grade levels, and Boys & Girls Clubs mentors both elementary and middle school students. Best Buddies primarily mentors high school students. Take Stock in Children primarily mentors high school students, but identifies and begins working with students in middle school.

Program goals. Mentoring programs target their services to different groups of students based on the programs' goals. For example, while both Best Buddies and Take Stock in Children mentor high school students, Best Buddies targets students with exceptionalities, and Take Stock in Children targets students who are likely to be the first in their families to attend college. As a result, participants in Best Buddies are more likely than other students to have exceptionalities while participants in Take Stock in Children are more likely than other students to be from low income families.

Another example is YMCA Reads!, which focuses on early reading skills for students who are at-risk of not being at grade level in reading. The program focuses on low-performing schools and schools with high rates of students reading below grade level. Because of this focus, 90% of the participating students are from families with low incomes.

Low income. Some of the programs include assisting low-income students as one of their specific goals. The majority of students participating in the programs are eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program, although the percentage differs between programs. Take Stock in Children serves the highest percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (99%), while Best Buddies serves the lowest percentage (66%).

Other eligibility criteria. One program, Take Stock in Children, has additional criteria that students must meet to continue participating. To remain in the program and receive a scholarship,

students must sign a contract and meet criteria specified in the contract, such as meeting with their mentors, maintaining a minimum grade point average, and attending school.

The other programs do not have similar requirements for participation. For example, each Boys & Girls Club serves students within the community in which it is located.

Performance Analyses —

Students in Take Stock in Children and Best Buddies surpassed comparison groups in three or more of the performance areas we reviewed. Boys & Girls Clubs participants exceeded peers in two areas, but middle school participants were behind peers in one area and elementary school participants in another. Participants in Teen Trendsetters and YMCA Reads! outperformed peers in two areas, while participants in Bigs in Schools had similar or lower performance than peers; participants in these three programs were less likely than their peers to be promoted to the next grade level. Bigs in Schools students who participated for more than one year had higher rates of grade promotion and fewer absences.

Methodology. We examined performance using five measures. These measures assessed the percentage of students: (1) chronically absent, defined as absent 21 or more days in a 180-day school year; (2) with one or more disciplinary incidents during the school year; (3) reading at grade level based on FCAT scores of 3 or higher; (4) performing math at grade level based on FCAT scores of 3 or higher; and (5) promoted to the next grade. In addition, we calculated graduation rates for the two programs that focus primarily on high school students, as well as higher education participation for Take Stock in Children because this is one of the program's goals.

To determine whether programs demonstrated success in helping students improve performance outcomes, we compared participant outcomes to those of a comparison group of students who did not participate. We statistically tested the outcomes of the mentored students

and considered a program's performance outcome different from the comparison group if the difference was statistically significant at the 95% level of confidence and greater than one percentage point.³

To make this comparison, we looked at students' baseline performance before entering a mentoring program and their outcomes for 2009-10 after participating for a year or more.⁴ We then identified a comparison group of students for each performance measure by selecting students with similar baseline characteristics.⁵ Appendix B provides additional information about our methodology for testing statistical difference.

We encountered two challenges when examining student outcomes. First, programs do not routinely report identifying information about their participants to the Department of Education. The department provided as much information as was available, but we needed to gather information on individual participants from each mentoring program. Second, when identifying comparison groups, we could not factor in every characteristic that may lead to students being selected for a mentoring program and thus affect their outcomes. For example, if

administrators tended to select students who have unstable home environments, this could result in participants being more at risk of not meeting performance standards. However, this higher level of risk would not be captured in existing demographic data.

Participants in two mentoring programs outperformed their peers in multiple areas and did not fall behind for any outcomes

Students in Take Stock in Children surpassed similar students in all of the performance areas we examined. Outcomes for participants in Best Buddies exceeded those of their peers in three areas.

Students in Take Stock in Children were above their peers in all seven performance areas we examined. Take Stock in Children focuses on encouraging students to finish high school and pursue a college education. A key component of the program is that it provides participants with a pre-paid scholarship designed to help them afford college. Ninety-nine percent of these students come from low income families.

As shown in Exhibit 4, participants in Take Stock in Children outperformed their comparison group in each of the seven areas we examined. For example, participants had higher FCAT math scores (86% compared to 76%) and lower rates of disciplinary incidents (15% compared to 23%). They also had better outcomes for FCAT reading scores, high school completion rates, and chronic absences.

³ We performed a multivariate regression to test whether the effects of program participation on student outcomes were statistically significant. See Appendix B for a description of our statistical analyses.

⁴ Because some programs had small case counts, we pooled their participant data with the prior year's participants.

⁵ Demographics included families with low incomes (measured by participation in the free or reduced price lunch program), race and ethnicity, and proficiency in the English language.

Exhibit 4

Take Stock in Children Participants Outperformed Peers in All Seven Performance Areas Examined

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		Take Stock in Children	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)	11%	13%	Yes
	Discipline Incidents	15%	23%	Yes
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)	56%	49%	Yes
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)	86%	76%	Yes
	Grade Promotion	97%	91%	Yes
	High School Completion	94%	71%	Yes
	Higher Education Participation	69%	45%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the Take Stock in Children program.

To examine whether Take Stock in Children participants pursue a college education at a higher rate than their peers, we compared participant performance to a peer group of students in the tenth grades who were scheduled to graduate from high school in 2007-08. We assessed whether these students had attended a higher education institution in Florida within two years of their scheduled graduation date, and found that 69% of program participants pursued a college education compared to 45% of students in the comparison group.⁶

Best Buddies participants were more likely than peers to read at grade level and complete high school and were less likely to have discipline incidents. Best Buddies provides mentors to students with special needs; the majority of participants are in high school. As shown in Exhibit 5, program participants outperformed a comparison group of students with similar exceptionalities by nine percentage points or more in reading at grade level (36% compared to 27%) and completing high school within three years of completing the ninth grade (66% compared to 56%).⁷ Also, fewer participants had discipline

incidents than the comparison group (12% compared to 16%). For the remaining measures, outcomes for Best Buddies participants were similar to the comparison groups (i.e., no statistically significant differences).

Boys & Girls Club participants surpassed their peers in two areas; level of performance varied in other areas

Boys & Girls Clubs provide tutoring and mentoring services to at-risk and low performing elementary and middle school students. We analyzed elementary and middle school students separately when comparing the performance of participants to non-participants.

Boys & Girls Club participants in both school levels exceeded their peers in two areas, but middle school participants were behind peers in one performance area and elementary school participants in another. As shown in Exhibit 6, participants were less likely to be chronically absent and more likely to perform at grade level in both elementary (62% compared to 56%) and middle school math (52% compared to 45%). In addition, elementary students had higher FCAT reading scores than their peers (65% compared to 60%) and middle school students had higher grade promotion rates (96% compared to 93%).

⁶ The comparison group was composed of low income students who had similar FCAT scores and other characteristics.

⁷ To select the comparison group for Best Buddies, we identified a group of special needs students who had a similar distribution of exceptionality code types as the Best Buddies participants.

Exhibit 5

Outcomes for Best Buddies Participants Exceeded Those of Peers in Three Areas

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		Best Buddies	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)	17%	14%	No
	Discipline Incidents	12%	16%	Yes
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)	36%	27%	Yes
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)	52%	51%	No
	Grade Promotion	85%	84%	No
	High School Completion	66%	56%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the Best Buddies program.

Exhibit 6**Compared to Their Peers, Boys & Girls Club Participants Had Fewer Chronic Absences and Higher Math Scores**

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		Boys and Girls Club	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)			
	Elementary School	3%	5%	Yes
	Middle School	6%	9%	Yes
	Discipline Incidents			
	Elementary School	12%	10%	Yes
	Middle School	38%	38%	No
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)			
	Elementary School	65%	60%	Yes
	Middle School	55%	57%	Yes
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)			
	Elementary School	62%	56%	Yes
	Middle School	52%	45%	Yes
	Grade Promotion			
	Elementary School	92%	92%	No
	Middle School	96%	93%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the Boys & Girls Club program.

However, middle school participants were behind their peers by two percentage points in FCAT reading scores, and elementary school participants had a higher rate of discipline incidents. Middle school participants had a similar (not statistically different) discipline incident rate as their peers while elementary school participants had a similar grade promotion rate.

Participants in programs focusing on elementary school students improved in some areas but fell behind in others

The remaining three programs primarily serve elementary students. Although participants in two programs outperformed their peers in some performance areas, students in all three programs were less likely than students in comparison groups to be promoted to the next grade level. This is possibly due to

administrators selecting students for mentoring because they were struggling and most in need of extra help.

Participants in Teen Trendsetters had lower chronic absence rates than their peers, but lower grade promotion rates. Teen Trendsetters focuses on improving the reading proficiency of early elementary students. Most participants in Teen Trendsetters and YMCA Reads! are in third grade or lower and third grade is the first year the FCAT is administered. Since these students did not have prior scores to use as a baseline, we did not select a comparison group.

As shown in Exhibit 7, students participating in Teen Trendsetters had fewer chronic absences (4% to 5%) than students in the comparison group. However, participants were less likely to be promoted to the next grade level than the comparison group (87% to 91%).

Exhibit 7**Teen Trendsetters Participants Outperformed Peers in Two Areas but Grade Promotion Rates Were Lower**

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		Teen Trendsetters	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)	4%	5%	Yes
	Discipline Incidents	6%	7%	No
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)	64%	Third Grade FCAT No Baseline Comparison	
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)	73%	Third Grade FCAT No Baseline Comparison	
	Grade Promotion	87%	91%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the Teen Trendsetters program.

A possible contributor to participants having lower performance than their peers on grade promotion rates is that school and program administrators may select participants that they identify as at least six months behind peers and most at risk of being retained. This type of program criteria is not captured by existing state data. For example, if administrators select students because they are struggling and in danger of being held back a second time or have unstable home environments, this would not be captured in existing data. This would result in a higher proportion of program participants being negatively affected by these situations than students in the comparison group.

Students in YMCA Reads! had lower chronic absence and discipline incident rates but also lower grade promotion rates. YMCA Reads! is similar to Teen Trendsetters in that it focuses on reading skills for early elementary students. The program serves students that teachers in participating schools identify as being most in need of help. As shown in Exhibit 8, students

who participated in YMCA Reads! had fewer chronic absences (5% compared to 7%) and discipline incidents (4% compared to 6%).

However, as with Teen Trendsetters, YMCA Reads! participants were more likely to be retained than the comparison group, which may be due to being selected because of being 'at risk' and most in need of help.

Participants in Bigs in Schools had similar or lower outcomes than their peers; multi-year participants have better outcomes in two areas. Bigs in Schools targets lower income students in elementary schools. As shown in Exhibit 9, Bigs in Schools participants were less likely than the comparison group to be promoted to the next grade level (85% compared to 93%). Participants were also somewhat more likely to be involved in a discipline incident and have lower FCAT math scores. As with Teen Trendsetters, a possible reason for these performance gaps is that participants were selected for mentoring because they were struggling. For the remaining measures, participant performance was similar (not statistically different) to that of their peers.

Exhibit 8**YMCA Reads! Participants Had Better Outcomes Than Peers in Two Areas but Had Lower Grade Promotion Rates**

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		YMCA Reads!	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)	5%	7%	Yes
	Discipline Incidents	4%	6%	Yes
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)	52%	Third Grade FCAT No Baseline Comparison	
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)	63%	Third Grade FCAT No Baseline Comparison	
	Grade Promotion	81%	91%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the YMCA Reads! program.

Exhibit 9**Outcomes for Bigs in Schools Participants Did Not Surpass Those of Peers**

Performance Category		Percentage		Statistically Significant (95%)
		Bigs in School	Comparison Group	
Behavioral Outcomes	Chronic Absences (21 or more days)	7%	7%	No
	Discipline Incidents	12%	10%	Yes
Academic Outcomes	Reading at Grade Level (FCAT)	51%	53%	No
	Performing Math at Grade Level (FCAT)	45%	47%	Yes
	Grade Promotion	85%	93%	Yes

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Department of Education and the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

We examined Bigs in Schools data to see what other factors affect participant outcomes. This analysis showed that participants with more exposure to the program do better in two areas. Participants who were in the program two or more years had higher rates of grade promotion (97% compared to 85%) and fewer absences (2% compared to 7%) than all Bigs in Schools participants. However, less than one-third of 2009-2010 participants completed two full years in the program.

Recommendation ---

Mentoring programs funded by the Legislature are not required to annually report identifying information on participants to the Department of Education, which is a major impediment to evaluating program performance. We therefore recommend that the Legislature require mentoring programs receiving state funds to annually report student identifying data as a condition of receiving funding.

Appendix A

Recipients of Competitive Mentoring Grants for Mentoring Programs

In addition to the funds appropriated to the six mentoring programs described in this report, the 2010 Legislature appropriated the Department of Education \$5.2 million in competitive bid funds for mentoring programs. Table A-1 lists the recipients of the competitive mentoring grant funds, the amount received, and the mentoring services provided. Only the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County and the YMCA also received a direct appropriation for Fiscal Year 2010-11. Because a full year has not passed since these programs were awarded funding we did not have outcome data to use for evaluating their participants' performance.

Table A-1
Recipients of Competitive Mentoring Grant Funds for Fiscal Year 2010-11

Program	Amount Received	Description of Mentoring Services
Seminole County School District	\$799,860	Tutoring and mentoring to improve academic performance, personal and social functioning, and graduation rates for high-needs students in eight middle and high schools
After School Program, Inc.	693,890	Enrichment and tutoring for 400 students in grades K-5 in Collier County
Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board	425,368	High school students mentor students in grades K-9 to improve life skills, develop strong character traits, and attain a proactive attitude toward school
YMCA of West Central Florida	354,186	Reading and social skills mentoring for low-income students in grades K-3
Non-Violence Project USA	350,000	Promotes improved attendance, school attachment and academic achievement for at-risk students between ages 13 to 17
Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida	320,000	Academic tutoring in reading and math for low-income students
Computer Mentors Group	304,486	Tutoring in science, technology, engineering, and math for middle school students in Title I schools
The Juvenile Transition Center	275,931	Offers mentoring and academic enrichment activities to at-risk middle and high school students in low-performing schools in Palm Beach County
Boys & Girls Club of Collier County	250,000	Mentoring for 400 students in core areas of character and leadership development, education and career development, technology, health and life skills, the arts, and sports and fitness
Town of White Springs	210,326	After school program providing educational enhancement and remediation programming, positive adult/youth mentoring experiences, social and civic engagement opportunities, health learning and recreational activities, and parental enhancement for at-risk children and youth in White Springs
Duval County School District (KIPP Impact Middle School)	206,092	An extended school schedule to improve student outcomes in academics, behavior, and character
Barry University	190,095	College Reach-Out Program (CROP), which prepares at-risk, economically disadvantaged students in grades 6-12 to pursue and complete a college degree
Investing In Our Youth	187,404	Mentoring for girls in grades 3-12 aimed towards emotional, academic, and social outcomes

Program	Amount Received	Description of Mentoring Services
Leon County School District	\$181,509	Focuses on course recovery, remediation, and acceleration for middle school students who are two or more grade levels behind
Putnam County School District (Grant 1)	150,000	Academic mentoring in reading and math for grades 3-5
Suwannee Valley Learning	136,800	After school mentoring/tutoring in the areas of FCAT remediation and grade promotion for Columbia, Hamilton, and Suwannee counties
Epps Christian Center	117,880	Mentoring for at-risk middle school students in conflict resolution, violence prevention, communication and social skills, and academic performance
Florida Atlantic University	88,375	At-risk high school students enrolled in intensive reading FCAT retake classes are mentored by state college students trained in research-based reading and motivational strategies

Source: Information and data from the Florida Department of Education.

Appendix B

Methodology for Testing Statistical Significance of Performance Comparisons

To evaluate the performance of the six state-funded mentoring programs, we used Department of Education data to construct a comparison group for each program's outcomes. The comparison group was selected to have similar prior outcome performance, demographic characteristics, and levels of school quality (as measured by school grade) as students in the comparison group.⁸ We then examined the 2009-10 outcomes of the mentored students and compared them to the outcomes of the comparison groups.

We used a student-level multivariate logistic model to test for a statistically significant difference between the outcomes of the mentored students and their comparison groups. Within each performance category, we ran separate tests for each program. We coded the models' dependent variables 1 for students who obtained the outcome in the outcome year. For example, in the chronic absence analysis, we coded students 1 if they were chronically absent and 0 otherwise. We measured the statistical significance of the performance comparison with a binary variable that was coded 1 if a student was in the mentoring program being evaluated and 0 if the student was in the comparison group. The model also included an independent variable that measured each student's performance in the baseline year and their demographic and other characteristics.

Table B-1 shows the results of our statistical tests of the differences in outcomes between mentored students and comparison groups of similar students. It also provides the number of students from which we constructed our mentor program and comparison groups.

⁸ Demographics included race and proficiency in the English language.

Table B-1
Results of Statistical Tests of the Differences in Outcomes Between Mentored Students and Comparison Groups of Similar Students

Program		Probability Value	Number of Students (Sample and Comparison Group)
Chronic Absence (absent for 21 or more days in a 180 day school year)	Best Buddies	0.320	1,666
	Bigs in Schools	0.071	258,954
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Elementary)	0.000	66,708
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Middle)	0.000	54,884
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	314,838
	Teen Trendsetters	0.000	63,831
	YMCA Reads!	0.001	138,160
Discipline Incidents (one or more)	Best Buddies	0.010	2,113
	Bigs in Schools	0.005	249,771
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Elementary)	0.002	243,043
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Middle)	0.387	81,189
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	347,852
	Teen Trendsetters	0.355	85,167
	YMCA Reads!	0.000	191,822
FCAT Reading at Grade Level	Best Buddies	0.026	422
	Bigs in Schools	0.426	54,485
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Elementary)	0.006	67,769
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Middle)	0.000	69,485
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	125,191
FCAT Math at Grade Level	Best Buddies	0.733	417
	Bigs in Schools	0.004	54,328
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Elementary)	0.005	75,430
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Middle)	0.008	62,840
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	124,844
High School Graduation	Best Buddies	0.002	5,414
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	146,766
Higher Education Participation	Take Stock in Children	0.000	2,272
Grade Promotion	Best Buddies	0.114	1,929
	Bigs in Schools	0.000	242,176
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Elementary)	0.000	228,306
	Boys & Girls Clubs (Middle)	0.000	75,959
	Take Stock in Children	0.000	384,077
	Teen Trendsetters	0.000	62,099
	YMCA Reads!	0.000	112,879

Source: OPPAGA analysis of information provided by the Department of Education and the six mentoring programs.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



OPPAGA provides performance and accountability information about Florida government in several ways.

- Reports deliver program evaluation and policy analysis to assist the Legislature in overseeing government operations, developing policy choices, and making Florida government better, faster, and cheaper.
 - PolicyCasts, short narrated slide presentations, provide bottom-line briefings of findings and recommendations for select reports.
 - Government Program Summaries (GPS), an online encyclopedia, www.oppaga.state.fl.us/government, provides descriptive, evaluative, and performance information on more than 200 Florida state government programs.
 - The [Florida Monitor Weekly](#), an electronic newsletter, delivers brief announcements of research reports, conferences, and other resources of interest for Florida's policy research and program evaluation community.
 - Visit OPPAGA's website at www.oppaga.state.fl.us
-

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing data, evaluative research, and objective analyses that assist legislative budget and policy deliberations. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

OPPAGA website: www.oppaga.state.fl.us

Project supervised by Tim Elwell, Education Policy Area Staff Director, (850/487-9228)

Project conducted by Mark West and Laurie Scott

Kathy McGuire, OPPAGA Interim Director

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Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner of Education



March 7, 2011

Dr. Gary R. VanLandingham
Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
and Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Dr. VanLandingham,

Thank you for providing the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) an opportunity to respond to the draft report titled *State-Funded Mentoring Program Performance Mixed; Take Stock and Best Buddies Do Well*. As always, the FDOE sincerely appreciates OPPAGA's commitment to agency collaboration and overall accuracy of released reports. We are pleased to see the positive performance-based results that many of Florida's mentoring programs demonstrate, as it is recognized that quality mentoring is a valuable element of the educational process.

The Department is in agreement regarding the report's recommendation, "We recommend that the Legislature require mentoring programs receiving state funds to annually report student identifying data as a condition on receiving funding."

We appreciate the time and effort OPPAGA has already devoted to the development of this important study, as well as your careful consideration of our suggestions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eric J. Smith



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YMCA READS!

Sponsored by the Florida State Alliance of YMCAs

RESPONSE TO OPPAGA REPORT ON MENTORING PROGRAMS

Students are referred to the YMCA READS! Program by their teacher, reading coach or principal because their reading skills are significantly below grade level expectations. In the third grade, students take the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test), and failure to score at a Level 3 on the test routinely results in retention. The Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) is administered to students three times a year, and gives a Probability of FCAT Success score in third grade. Students with less than an 85% Probability Score are considered at risk of failing the FCAT, therefore are at risk of being retained at the end of the year. Students with less than 16% Probability score are considered at the highest risk of failing the FCAT.

In 2009-2010, 98.5% of the third grade students who entered the YMCA READS! Program were considered at risk of failing the FCAT based on their Probability of FCAT Success score. 73.20% were in the highest risk category, as they had between a 2% and a 15% Probability of FCAT Success. They were therefore considered to be at the highest risk of retention at the end of the year.

The promotion rate of students enrolled in the YMCA READS! program quoted in the report is 81%. Considering that over 98% students are at risk of retention when they enter the program, this promotion rate exceeds expectations for this high risk group and attests to this program's success.



Response to the OPPAGA Study - March 21, 2011

The Florida Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs has three issues with the methodology used by OPPAGA in their Report.

1. **The Boys & Girls Clubs children outperformed their elementary school peers in three 3 areas and their middle school peers in 3 areas. The OPPAGA study methodology only noted areas of the Study that were common to both age levels (elementary/middle).**

Note: *None of the other mentoring organizations studied had to meet this standard due to the fact their study group only included a single age level.*

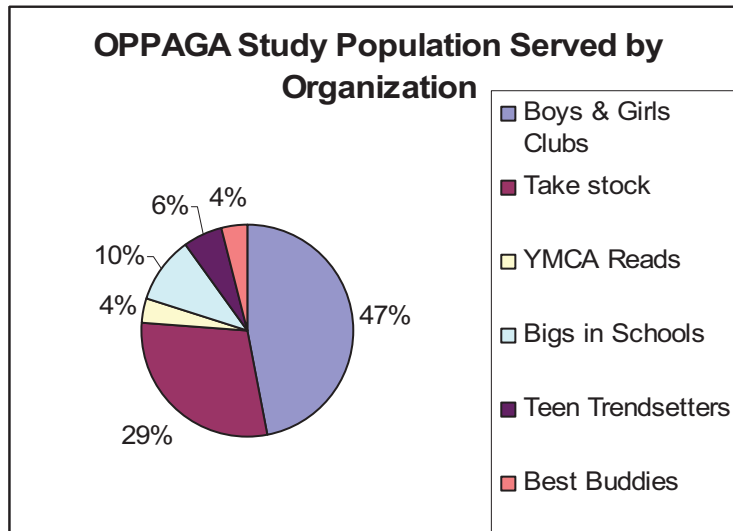
If the OPPAGA Study methodology were adjusted to take into account mentoring organizations that work with both elementary and middle school children the body of the report would show:

- Boys & Girls Clubs' elementary school students outperformed their peers in Reading and Math and had fewer chronic absences.
- Boys & Girls Clubs' middle school students outperformed their peers in Math and Grade Promotion and had fewer chronic absences.
- Elementary Club members had a 92% promotion rate and our middle school Club members posted a promotion rate of 96%, outperforming their peer group.

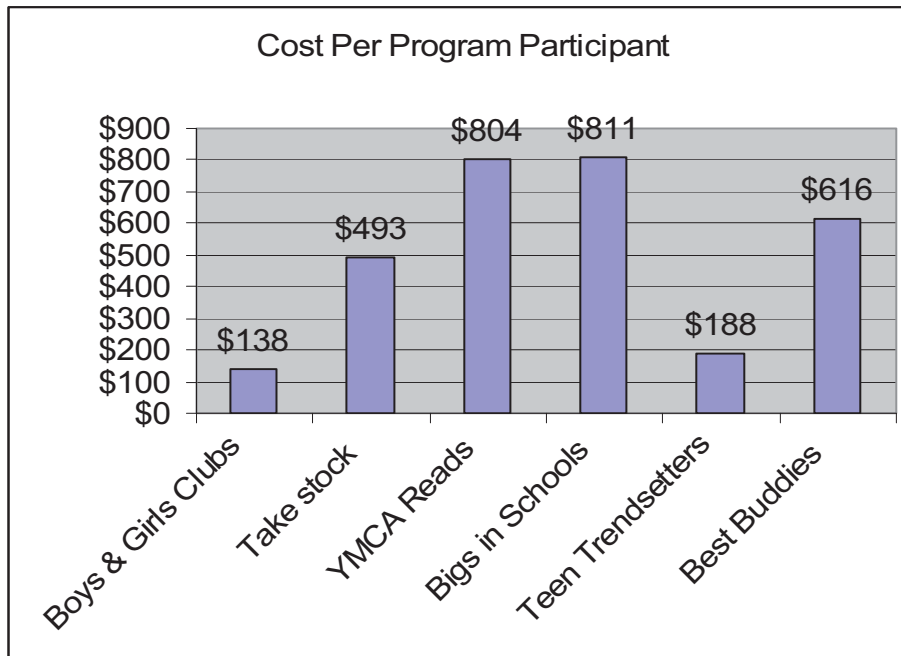
Boys & Girls Clubs showed a measurable difference in all domains.

2. **The OPPAGA study fails to adequately address the return-on-investment of the programs studied.**

It is worth noting that Florida Boys & Girls Clubs programs help nearly as many kids annually as all of the other funded mentoring organizations combined.



Yet Boys & Girls Clubs receive less funding per child than any of the other programs studied.



The Study did show that Florida Boys & Girls Clubs only receives 4% of their total budget from the Mentoring Appropriation yet they served 47% of the children at a cost of \$138 per program participant. When you compare these numbers, you will quickly see Boys & Girls Clubs provides a big bang for the buck and the greatest return on investment.

3. The OPPAGA Report doesn't take into account critical differences in the populations that are directly related to the different programs eligibility requirements.

It is not always possible to make an apples-to-apples comparison between two groups but it is important to note significant differences in populations when attempting to make a comparison.

Some programs have specific academic eligibility and/or continuing participation requirements. No child is turned away from a Boys and Girls Club program based on financial, behavioral or academic concerns. Because of this our results are even more meaningful. Club Members are not screened or reviewed for program acceptance. All are welcome, and we service mostly at-risk youth in some of the more challenging neighborhoods across the state.

OPPAGA Comments

Our analysis of programs with continuation requirements included program participants who did not meet program continuation requirements. For example, participants in Take Stock in Children must meet minimum academic and attendance standards in order to continue in the program. However, the Take Stock in Children participants that we evaluated included students who had been discontinued from the program. This approach eliminated any advantage in outcomes achieved by discontinuation of participants.

Florida Boys & Girls Clubs Facts

Florida Boys & Girls Clubs are part of a nationwide affiliation of local, autonomous organizations that work to help young people of all backgrounds develop the qualities they need to become responsible citizens and leaders.

- We are facility-based, collectively employed 2,900 paid professional staff members in 2009 which were supplemented by 7,300 part-time volunteers.
- Our 253 facilities last year were open to children 255 days: during the school term from 2:00 pm – 7:00 pm Monday – Friday and all day (7:00 am – 6:00 pm) during summer vacation and school holidays. Boys & Girls Clubs offered daily access to a broad range of programs in three areas:
 - **Academic Success - (103,806 participants statewide)**
 - **Good Character and Citizenship - (39,976 participants statewide)**
 - **Healthy Life Styles - (110,249 participants statewide)**

During 2009, Florida Boys & Girls Clubs expended:

\$1.82 per child served daily

\$467.27 per child served annually

Organization wide: \$78,000,000 was spent to serve 161,488 children ages 6 – 18

In 2009, the Florida Legislature appropriated:

\$0.06 per child served daily

\$11.32 per child served annually

\$1,809,941 total appropriation to the children served by Florida Boys & Girls Clubs last year.

For every dollar invested by the state in Florida Boys & Girls Clubs last year, the state was matched 43 to 1.

RESPONSE OF TEEN TRENDSETTERS™ READING MENTORS*

Teen Trendsetters™ Reading Mentors utilizes high school students to academically mentor struggling, young elementary school children. Purposefully selected, our primary target mentee audience is second or third grade children whose reading ability *is at least six months behind their peers and deemed to be the most at-risk for failure by their teachers*. We believe OPPAGA results should be reviewed with caution as the Teen Trendsetter™ Reading Mentors mentees were only matched at the demographic level, not with students of like academic performance levels. As a result, we do not believe this report represents a fair or complete assessment of grade promotion rates.

OPPAGA Comments

Teen Trendsetters incorrectly describes OPPAGA's analysis. Students who received mentoring from Teen Trendsetters Reading Mentors were not "only matched at the demographic level." Rather, these students were compared to students with the same baseline performance outcomes as Teen Trendsetters mentees in the year prior to these mentees entering Teen Trendsetters.

OPPAGA does not provide data on our impact academically. The report simply states "Third Grade FCAT No Baseline Comparison"; however, Teen Trendsetters third-party evaluator reviews in the past year *found that Teen Trendsetter mentees made statistically significant gains in reading*. Professional academic evaluations were conducted by Ann G. Bessell, Ph.D., University of Miami and Yaacov Petcher, Ph.D., Florida State University and director of the Florida Center for Reading Research.

OPPAGA Comments

The studies of Dr. Bessell and Dr. Petscher do not show a statistically significant difference for the reading scores of Teen Trendsetters students compared to a comparison group of students with similar baseline reading scores. However, Dr. Petscher did find that Teen Trendsetters participants who had baseline scores above those of a comparison group also had outcomes that were above those of a comparison group. Dr. Bessell's analysis does not include a comparison of the reading scores of Teen Trendsetters students to a comparison group.

Further, Teen Trendsetters™ is unique in that we use high school teens to provide the mentoring, thus providing service-learning opportunities to teens as well as second or third-grade students. In addition, our teen mentors data is meaningful but was not included in this report: 93% of teen mentors plan to attend college and 89% plan to continue to volunteer based on their positive experiences as Teen Trendsetters.

Also, the following statement could cause confusion, "Take Stock in Children and Teen Trendsetters are Florida-based organizations for which the state provides 47% and 38% of their funding, respectively". While Teen Trendsetters is home-based in Florida, it also operates in 6 states in the Southern U.S. We do appreciate that a careful reader of the cost section of this report would see that Teen Trendsetters is a very cost-effective and cost-efficient program.

*A program of Volunteer USA Foundation. For more information, please contact us at 850.562.5300.



BIGS IN SCHOOLS & SITES (BISS) PROGRAM: OUR OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE 2011 OPPAGA STUDY

DEFICIENCIES IN OPPAGA STUDY RESULTED IN MATERIAL FLAWS

- The OPPAGA Study only focused on youth in our BISS Program who had met 12 times in one school year. The average length of our Big/Little matches in this program is 12 months, which equals about 36 visits, three times the number of visits of youth in the OPPAGA dataset. Accordingly, the full, positive impact of our BISS program is not recognized in this study. *(In a subsequent review of long term data that was available to OPPAGA, they did acknowledge that students who participated in the program for two years had a much higher grade promotion rate (i.e., 97%), and lower chronic absences (i.e., 2%). Discipline incidents were also lower.)*

OPPAGA Comments

Big Brothers Big Sisters' assertion that we focused on youth who had met with their mentor 12 times in one school year is incorrect. Our analysis of the Bigs in Schools Settings (BISS) program included all participants with 12 or more participation hours. The median number of participation hours for the students we examined was 15 hours. When selecting BISS students for analysis, we excluded students with less than 12 hours. We used the 12-hour minimum because BISS reported to us that 12 hours was the minimum number of participation hours students need in order for the program to have an effect.

We found that BISS participants with higher levels of participation hours were more likely to have positive results. However, the data that BISS provided to us did not show that most Florida participants received a high number of hours in the program. In fact, only one-third of BISS students participated in the program for more than 20 hours.

- On page 6 of their report, OPPAGA states "...when identifying comparison groups, we could not factor in every characteristic that may lead to students being selected for a mentoring program and thus affect their outcomes. For example, if administrators tended to select students who have unstable home environments, this could result in participants being more at risk of not meeting performance standards. However, this higher level of risk would not be captured in existing demographic data..."

Students in our BISS program come from some of Florida's lowest performing schools and have multiple risk factors arising from their home environments. These students are referred to us by their teachers, school social workers and principals because they are considered most at risk for school failure. It is clear from the study that the comparison groups used by OPPAGA in evaluating the BISS Program did not have these same characteristics. This deficiency in the study creates a material flaw in the reported outcomes.

We hope that at a minimum a comparison group can be formed that will better reflect the Big Brother Big Sisters mentored youth, and from this data we can be better informed of our outcomes and areas we need to improve.

OPPAGA Comments

It is correct that we did not have access to the teacher/school counselor/principal recommendations that are part of the BISS selection process. However, our analysis did control for school quality (measured in Florida through school grades). In addition, baseline performance levels of the comparison groups were the same as the performance levels of the BISS participants we examined. Specifically, for the year prior to entering the BISS program, BISS participants had outcomes in which 9% were chronically absent, 9% were involved in a disciplinary incident, 80% were grade promoted, 58% read at grade level, and 58% performed math at grade level. The comparison group had identical baseline percentages.

- On page 6 of their report, OPPAGA also states “...programs do not routinely report identifying information about their participants to the Department of Education. The department provided as much information as was available, but we needed to gather information on individual participants from each mentoring program...” Again, this factor creates a material flaw in this study and the reported outcomes. For a true, scientific study, youth must be randomly assigned to either to a treatment group (youth who are mentored) or a control group (youth who do not receive a mentor); data from both groups must be gathered in a uniform source and fashion so as to avoid biases.

OPPAGA Comments

The Florida Department of Education collected all the outcome and performance data that we used in this study through their regular surveys of school districts, which are conducted five times a year. The Florida Department of Education uses uniform procedures to collect and maintain student demographic and performance data for all public K-12 students in Florida. Mentoring program participation data was the only piece of information included in our study that was not part of the Florida Department of Education’s data system. We worked with the six mentoring programs we reviewed so they could submit participation information directly to the Department of Education. The department then matched this information with the student outcome and demographic records that was already available in the department’s data system. As a result, the Florida Department of Education provided OPPAGA with student and demographic data that included information which identified mentoring participants, the length of their participation, and the programs in which they participated.

We used a quasi-experimental research design in that we did not randomly select the “treatment group” prior to those students entering their mentoring programs. Rather, to create a treatment group, we selected all mentored students who had baseline year and outcome year demographic and performance records. We used the population of non-mentored students to randomly select the control group from the pool of students who never participated in any mentoring programs. Our selection criteria were mathematically designed to ensure that the comparison group of students had the same baseline performance level as the treatment group. However, the selection of individual students for the comparison group was otherwise random. In addition to ensuring the same baseline performance levels, our comparison group selection criteria also adjusted for school grades and poverty.

**ANALYSIS OF FLAWED COMPARISON GROUP CONSTRUCTION IN THIS STUDY
SHOWS OPPAGA ENDED UP WITH AN 'APPLES TO ORANGES' COMPARISON WHEN
ANALYZING BISS PROGRAM**

Big Brothers Big Sisters has serious concerns regarding the construction of the comparison group used in this study, which had a direct impact on the reported outcomes.

-1-

OPPAGA Comments

We examined all BISS students who had matching public school records. In aggregate, this was 87% of the records BISS provided to us. We employed no other selection criteria to BISS student data. The results reflect the performance of BISS students based on their official Department of Education records.

As we understand Big Brothers Big Sisters' point, different selection criteria might result in a comparison group with lower performance outcomes. As a result, BISS outcomes would look relatively better when compared to the lower bar. There are several issues this point raises.

First, going forward, BISS does not necessarily need a lower bar in order for its students to outperform a comparison group of students, like the one we used, with the same baseline level of performance. Our analysis showed higher levels of performance for BISS students who had higher levels of exposure (more participation hours) to the program. If BISS focuses upon providing its participants more hours, their performance outcomes relative to a comparison group may improve.

Second, the comparison groups were selected to have the same starting points in performance as program participants. This in turn substantially lowered the bar for our comparisons of BISS participants' performance in the outcome year, as the comparison groups' performance was much lower than the average performance of students statewide. For example, for elementary reading and math, the outcome percentages for students in the comparison group were 53% and 47%, respectively. By comparison, the statewide averages for students in these criteria were 71% (rather than 53%) for reading and 69% (rather than 47%) for math.

Third, in addition to the analysis summarized in our study, we performed multiple sub-analyses and validation techniques to determine whether our findings would change if we employed different methodological/research design approaches, tested different comparison group selection criteria, focused upon different grade levels, or expanded (pooled multiple years) mentor participant outcome data. All the different approaches we examined showed only one factor that consistently resulted in BISS participants achieving better outcomes—hours in the program. Again, BISS participants with more exposure to the program had better outcomes.

Finally, the performance outcomes of BISS participants are very similar to their comparison group. This is what we would expect to see for two groups of

similar students in which neither received a substantial intervention. For example, the direction of the outcome is the same for both groups in all five categories. Specifically, the FCAT scores and the chronic absences decreased for both groups while grade promotions and discipline incidents increased for both groups. Second, the percentage point differences in the outcomes for the two groups were small (two percentage points or less) in four of the five categories. And, in the one area where the differences were greater than two percentage points, grade promotion, the differences are reversed for BISS participants with more than 25 hours in the program.

- a. The comparison group, particularly for elementary aged kids, does not appear to adequately match the mentored youth. One reason was FCAT test scores were not available before 3rd grade so this information couldn't be used in the creation of the comparison group (i.e., we estimate that this would involve approximately 20% of the children we serve each year.).

OPPAGA Comments

Big Brothers Big Sisters' statement is correct; our analysis of FCAT scores only included students who took the FCAT. We also examined, for the non-FCAT performance measures, whether our findings changed if we used FCAT scores as a control variable. This approach showed that including FCAT scores as a control variable reduces the number of BISS participants available for analysis but does not result in BISS participants having outcomes that exceed those of their comparison group.

We question why a better system of matching was not used given the large dataset available to OPPAGA. Given the data availability, a better approach would be to use propensity score matching to create the comparison group, which is a statistical procedure used to equate groups and is more effective than the procedure used in the OPPAGA report. This was the recommendation received from several members of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Mentoring Research Advisory group (i.e., a group of independent researchers and academics from across the US.) Additionally, we feel that the comparison group should be of comparable size to the treatment group. The sample size was about 250,000 and approximately 1,000 of those youth were mentored by BBBS. The unequal groups, as one of the advisors notes, "gives a false sense of precision."

OPPAGA Comments

As noted above, we validated our findings using multiple approaches. Comparison group size and alternative model techniques did not result in BISS participants having higher levels of performance than their comparison group; however, additional hours of program exposure did result in higher levels of performance for BISS participants.

- b. Given the large sample of comparison kids, there are likely to be school effects that aren't being dealt with. As referenced above, our Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are intentionally focused on some of the highest risk schools in Florida, as well as with the highest risk kids. Kids in low risk schools who were the same race and SES (not identified as at risk of failing) are more likely in the comparison group, resulting in an 'apples to oranges' comparison as opposed to an 'apples to apples' comparison.

OPPAGA Comments

We were also concerned about school level effects. To account for this, we designed our comparison group to have the same proportion of low performing schools as the mentored students' schools.

- c. Additionally, it isn't clear how mentored youth were identified by each of the mentoring organizations analyzed by this study. Each group has different levels of sophistication in the data systems they use to track youth and how representative the samples in the study are to the all the youth that are actually served may have varied substantially.

We hope that at a minimum a comparison group can be formed that will better reflect the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentored youth, and from this data we can be better informed of our outcomes and areas we need to improve. However, we are certain we do have positive impact on the youth in our BISS program as is reflected in our own BBBS Program Data, which follows. Previous independent research of mentoring on a national level has consistently shown positive impacts for the Big Brothers Big Sisters brand of mentoring. Previous evaluations of our mentoring programs have consistently shown positive impacts. For example, in the School Based Mentoring Impact study, conducted by Public/Private Ventures it was found that one school year of mentoring had positive impacts in grades, homework completion and quality, a reduction of serious school infractions, skipping school and scholastic competence. Our own BBBS Program Data here in Florida is consistent with those national, positive outcomes. This indeed was actually confirmed by the OPPAGA study that showed 97% of the youth who had been mentored 2 years or more by Big Brothers Big Sisters were promoted to the next grade level, and only 2% were considered truant down from 7% in the general population.

OPPAGA Comments

All six programs were able to identify their program participants. The programs differed in how they defined “full program participant” (i.e., the students we used as our “treatment group”). Three programs track participation hours. These are BISS, YMCA Reads!, and Teen Trendsetters. The Boys & Girls Clubs consider full participation to be students who attend three days a week over the course of a year. Best Buddies matches program participants with a peer (fellow student), resulting in the mentor and mentee being in school together every day over the school year.

Take Stock in Children, which is a multi-year program, requires students to meet minimum academic and attendance thresholds in order to maintain their status as program participants, and discontinues students who do not meet these minimums. We recognized that this policy posed a potential bias if we only measured outcomes of program participants who met the minimum attendance and academic requirements. To deal with this potential problem, we designed our analysis of Take Stock in Children outcomes to include the outcomes of students who were discontinued from the program.

The criteria programs use to define full participation is linked to outcomes because mentoring participants with more exposure (multiple years, multiple days a week, or both) were more likely to have better outcomes than their comparison groups. Take Stock in Children, which forges multi-year relationships between mentors and mentees, had program participants who outperformed a comparison group in all categories. Best Buddies, which has mentees and mentors in school together on a daily basis, had participants outperform their comparison group in three areas. Boys & Girls Clubs, in which students participate at least three days a week, also had participants outperform peers in multiple areas, although they were behind in one.

The three programs that use minimum hours to define full program participants, including BISS, had fewer categories in which program participants outperformed a comparison group. However, as noted above for BISS participants, higher levels of participation resulted in higher levels of performance.

DATA FROM BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS ASSOCIATION OF FLORIDA CONSISTENTLY SHOWS SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER OUTCOMES FOR BISS PROGRAM

2009-2010 School Year. In the BISS program, we mentored 1,549 youth who met a minimum of 12 times during that academic year.

- 1,500 (or 96.8%) maintained or improved academic performance
- 1,498 (or 96.7%) maintained or improved school attendance.
- 1,472 (or 95.0%) showed improvement on behavioral evaluation
- 1,528 (or 98.6%) were promoted to the next grade level

2008-2009 School Year. In the BISS program, we mentored 1,758 youth who met a minimum of 12 times during that academic year.

- 1,667 (or 94.8%) maintained or improved academic performance
- 1,667 (or 94.8%) maintained or improved school attendance.
- 1,572 (or 89.4%) showed improvement on behavioral evaluation
- 1,690 (or 96.1%) were promoted to the next grade level

2007-2008 School Year. In the BISS program we mentored 2,331 youth who met a minimum of 12 times during that academic year (i.e., which is based on when during the school year they were matched in our program.)

- 2,211 (or 94.9%) maintained or improved academic performance
- 2,123 (or 91.0%) maintained or improved school attendance.
- 2,139 (or 91.8%) showed improvement on behavioral evaluation
- 2,534 were promoted to the next grade level*

*During this school year, for promotions to the next grade level we looked at all students mentored; not just those who met 12 times or more.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Florida (BBBSAF), a §501(c) (3) not-for-profit, was established in 1995 representing all of our Florida agencies. We launched our first school based funded program in 1999 to reach low performing students in low performing schools. Big Brothers Big Sisters has been doing one-to-one community based mentoring in the United States for over 105 years.

All volunteers are vetted through an extensive and rigorous background screening system; all participants - child, volunteer and parent/guardian receive child safety training; and on-going training is provided to all participants for the life of the match. We work with Customized Client Case Plans and our service approach – is not "One size fits all"

We reach the most fragile and vulnerable children in the state: Children with little or no adult supervision, Children of Incarcerated Parents, Children who have been identified by schools as failing, and youth in Foster Care. Children we serve are identified by the teachers/social workers/guidance counselors in each school we serve. They typically have multiple risk factors that place them at significant jeopardy of failing in school.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is performance and results driven. We collect and analyze data, set benchmarks and goals, focus on developing strategies designed to maximize efficiency, quality and service for Florida kids, and we have a leading-edge data and performance management system (AIM) that allows real-time reporting and accountability of key metrics.

We do everything we can to keep the match together, even if the child is failing, because we know that eventually those children will ultimately turnaround. BBBS selects young children and youth who have the greatest need for direct one-to-one intervention with a caring adult. This can be a slow process, depending on the background of the child and the time it takes to develop a trusting relationship. Consistency and patience will eventually result in improved academic performance. However, without intervention, these children will likely fail in school and eventually dropout.

We are very appreciative of having the opportunity to review the OPPAGA report, provide feedback, and continue the dialogue relating to everyone understanding the significant positive impact the Big Brothers Big Sisters brand of mentoring has on some of our most at risk children here in Florida. Again, Big Brothers Big Sisters wants to acknowledge that we value using statistically accurate data to make policy, and as a national and state organization we routinely use data to improve our practices that produce positive, evidenced-based outcomes.