The Impact of a Mentor Program on Student Discipline in a Catholic High School

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BACKGROUND

Our Lady of Mercy (OLM) serves 318 racially and socio-economically diverse high school students near Atlanta, GA.

* Detentions issued have decreased annually; however, discipline issues still exist that hinder instruction.
* OLM operates with a House System that provides a good sense of community within the school.
* “What greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young” ([Divini illius magistri](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0016/DEC0016/text/enc-divi-inf-mag-1930-08.htm), 1930, §8).

CURRENT STUDY

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this action research project was to explore the impact of a mentor program on student discipline and the sense of community within the school.

Research Questions:
- Did the mentor program reduce the number of detentions?
- Did the mentor program contribute to the sense of community in the school?
- How can the mentor program be improved?

Hypothesis: The mentor program would assist in reducing detentions and would increase the sense of community within the school.

METHOD

Participants in this quasi-experimental study consisted of 318 students and 41 faculty and staff. The number of detentions during each semester was compared using a t-test. A post-intervention survey was used. Descriptive analysis of the quantitative survey data was completed. The free response questions were analyzed using a qualitative coding process.

FINDINGS

A t-test revealed that there was not a significant difference in the average detentions received each week during the fall 2009 semester ($M = 6.44$ detentions per 100 students; $SD = 3.31$) compared to fall 2010 semester ($M = 6.93$ detentions per 100 students; $SD = 3.32$), $t(19) = -0.46$, ns.

The participants disagreed that the new mentor program increased their feeling of belonging to the community or made them feel more cared for or valued.

The students indicated that they did not like the new mentor program while the faculty and staff indicated that they did.

The data indicated that the mentor program did not reduce the number of detentions issued nor did it strengthen the sense of community.

Faculty and staff thought the way to improve the mentor program was to allow for more meeting time. A faculty member captured this sentiment by stating “There is not enough time devoted to the meetings, and at times, we do not even get to them. I believe that they would be effective if sufficient time is devoted to them.” Another faculty member thought that “There has to be time to allow the mentor to meet with their mentee. It is important to establish a relationship.”

The students also thought a strong relationship was the most important factor to a successful mentor program. One student remarked, “If the mentor and I talked more, I would have more respect for them and try not to get into trouble.”

The students agreed that the meetings were not effective because of time constraints. A student captured this theme by stating that there is “never enough time to be personal or to truly mentor a person.”

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION

In *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education emphasized that “the vocation of every Catholic educator includes the work of ongoing social development: to form men and women who will be ready to take their place in society” (1982, §19). The idea behind the mentor program was to provide another avenue by which the faculty and staff could assist in the formation of the students, especially by discussing each student’s behavior that caused the detention and how to avoid it.

From this research, the following improvements to the mentor program are necessary in order for it to accomplish its goals of reducing detentions and strengthening the sense of community:

- provide training for the mentors on how to properly mentor other students
- allow for ample time to build relationships between mentor and mentee
- allocate sufficient time for mentor and mentee to discuss behavior and corrective actions

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