



## ADOPT-A-SCHOOL MENTOR PROGRAM

### Committee on Community Service

February 2009

#### GENERAL MENTORING GUIDELINES

Interested in getting an "adopt-a-school" or mentoring program started with your regional or class alumni association? Here is general advice for alumni groups interested in establishing such projects.

**Site Selection.** The most important, and probably the most difficult, step in establishing an adopt-a-school project is choosing a school with which to work. Pick a school that is enthusiastic about the project and, if possible, one that has a mentoring track record. Also, be sure to identify a contact at the school who can recruit students, screen the mentors (most states require criminal record checks for all school volunteers), and pair the mentors and students, and, finally, help monitor the relationships.

**Level and Structure.** There is no "right" level of school to adopt or "right" structure of program to create. Current alumni projects span from second grade through high school. Similarly, whereas some of the programs have structured tutoring components and meet at an established time each week, others have neither formal activities nor set meeting times.

**Recruitment.** Once you've established a partnership with a school and determined a basic structure, it's time to recruit volunteers. Be creative — use your association or Class newsletter, sponsor a happy hour, get on the phone. However you recruit volunteers, be explicit and honest about what you expect from them. Don't downplay the expected commitment! Exaggerate it! All current alumni programs require mentors to spend a minimum number of hours per month with their students; some also dictate a minimum length of involvements, usually a semester or year.

**Training.** Volunteers who work one-on-one with children should receive training. If the school or community organization with which you are working cannot provide such training, find another group that can. One alumnus recommends sitting in on a few training sessions before choosing one. As he put it, "A poor mentor training can be a real momentum killer." Once your program is established, provide ongoing opportunities for reflection and discussion either in person or in writing. Although "expert advice" is helpful, mentors can learn a lot from each other, too.

**Preventing Mentor Burn-Out.** Mentoring is hard. Periodic group activities do a lot to relieve some of the pressures that one-on-one relationships engender and to build a sense of community among mentors and students. Don't forget to thank your volunteers—the end of each semester is not too often.



## ADOPT-A-SCHOOL MENTOR PROGRAM

Committee on Community Service

February 2009

### ESTABLISHING A MOTIVATING RELATIONSHIP WITH A STUDENT

**Establish rapport.** Find common ground so that your student feels comfortable with you.

**Build trust.** After you have established rapport in the first few sessions, you will need to develop a trusting relationship. This is done by keeping your commitments and by being honest. Your student needs to know also that you are human and have had problems to overcome. You do not need to go into current personal problems, only those that relate to your growing up and achieving success. It will help your students to know that you had difficulties in school, on the job, or socially, and show you overcame them. The most important part is how you *overcame* your difficulties.

**Give hope.** The result of sharing difficulties and how you overcame them is to give your student *hope*. You will need to reinforce your message of hope and encouragement many times, in many ways. Your student's success depends on his/her confidence and belief in him/herself.

*Distributed to all mentors in the Snowden/Princeton and Friends Mentoring Program*

### 20 WAYS TO PARTNER WITH A SCHOOL

1. Recruit mentors and tutors.
2. Build a library.
3. Provide career counseling for students and parents.
4. Paint classrooms or landscape the grounds.
5. Plan field trips.
6. Arrange guest speakers.
7. Donate computers or other equipment.
8. Organize a college or career night.
9. Sponsor a team or activity.
10. Establish a college scholarship fund.
11. Read aloud.
12. Develop a summer enrichment or after-school program.
13. Offer your professional skills.
14. Construct a playground.
15. Assist in classes.
16. Support the school newspaper.
17. Find summer job placements.
18. Orchestrate an essay contest.
19. Judge a Science Fair
20. Recruit other community partners.

*The possibilities are endless. Work together with your local school to determine how your association or club can be of most help.*



## ADOPT-A-SCHOOL MENTOR PROGRAM

### Committee on Community Service

February 2009

#### ADVICE FROM A VETERAN

*In 1994, Jim Conklin '86 established Princeton in Austin Schools. The following suggestions, which are relevant to alumni starting any type of service project, are excerpts from a memo he wrote describing how he developed the project and what he learned along the way. The full text is available upon request.*

#### Design the public service program.

**Impact.** [There is] one hard fact of getting sustained volunteer participations: the social value of community service time must at least be equal to the value of the volunteer's time at work or at home. Given the high constraints on time for the typical professional, this sets a pretty high mark. But it has to. Sooner or later, volunteers think about the value of the time they donate and if that time is being spent effectively. So, a volunteer's work must make a significant impact on an important social issue.

**Learning.** When I started working on this [project], I had little knowledge on public service organizations and little particular knowledge on the causes and symptoms of urban poverty. To find out about the latter, I read R.J. Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged*. On public service organizations—what do they do, how effectively do they do it, how are they organized, etc.—the learning was more difficult. It ended up just taking leg work and phone work. **But I had to take this step.** Otherwise, I might've started a project that replicated someone else's, which would have been a waste. Or, when others in the community heard about our program (and word gets around), they would have thought, "We're already working on that! Who do these fancy Princeton so-and-so's think they are?" Some people will think that no matter how innovative and well prepared your efforts are. A number of simple phone calls, asking people what they are doing, what do they think, how you can help, etc. will make other community organizations your supporters, not you detractors. Besides, it bears repeating, it is foolhardy to reinvent the wheel. If you're lucky, you may find an organization doing just what you have in mind. Just plug yourself and your Princeton friends into them...

**Get the Princeton Club Involved.** After I had already talked to many volunteer public service groups in the community, I talked to Charles Aubrey, then president of the Princeton Club. I told him what I had found out, and suggested that the Princeton Club get involved. At first, Charles envisioned a different scale of public service event, a once-a-year kind of thing. That type of activity is excellent as a Club event. Still, I thought Princetonians would get more out of public service that had greater impact. So, I persisted, and explained to Charles that I had something else in mind. He got very excited about mentoring, and has been one of our most enthusiastic supporters since. It would have been fine if Charles wanted to do things on a smaller scale. The key was that by the end of the meeting, Charles and I agreed about what we wanted to do and how to proceed.

**Just do it.** Charles really went for the idea, proposing that we start things up right away. I felt there was more planning to do, more people to call. But, you've always got to start before you know enough to feel comfortable, and there's always, *always* a reason to wait. It was time for learning by doing...

**The Recruiting Happy Hour.** The Happy Hour [we used to recruit volunteers] was a success, as with most things, however, there was room for improvement...To capitalize more fully on an effective public



## **ADOPT-A-SCHOOL MENTOR PROGRAM**

Committee on Community Service

February 2009

service presentation, I recommend putting someone else in charge of getting names (if you're running the presentation part of the Happy Hour, you won't be able to). Have that person make sure that everyone who wants to participate signs up. There should be sign-up sheets placed at strategic places around the room, and you official "names person" should walk around with a sign-up sheet in hand and pass out information sheets that spell out explicitly what the volunteer has to do next, what the program's organizers will do, and a list of names and phone numbers of the program's organizers. You've really got to corral those volunteers as the meeting breaks up! Also, as people show up to the Happy Hour, have them sign in on an attendance list. You will have a list of names to do follow-up phone calls or mailings if you need.