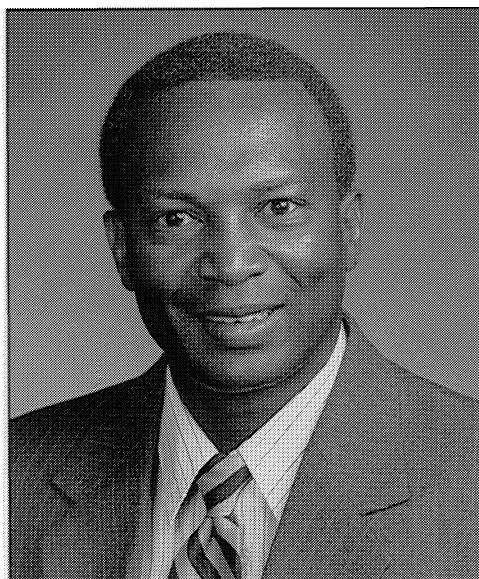


# **MENTORING STUDENTS AT RISK**



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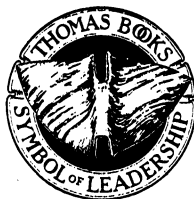
# MENTORING STUDENTS AT RISK

An Underutilized Alternative  
Education Strategy for K-12 Teachers

*By*

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*With love and thankfulness, I dedicate this book to my family, and  
in particular to my son, Sebastian, my daughter, Kedra, and in  
memory of my father, Willie James.*



## **PREFACE**

**T**his publication is the result of my numerous requests from teachers to collaborate with them to establish mentoring programs for students at risk in their schools. Teachers begin to realize what research has demonstrated for many years. Research clearly shows mentoring is a powerful alternative education (dropout prevention) strategy for students at risk.

Chapter One discusses the need to restructure classrooms, programs, and schools to better serve our students. Why restructure? The answer is twofold. First, there exists more research-based, effective alternative education programs to use as models. Second, some school boards of education are mostly ignoring the at-risk situation by not being proactive in pursuing alternative education. It is imperative that teachers take a leadership role to bring alternative education into their schools. Teachers have to be proactive on the issue of alternative education.

Common questions asked by teachers are: Who are these students at risk? Why mark these students with the at-risk label? Answers to these questions are shared in Chapter One. The chapter also delineates important facts about alternative education, specifically that alternative education is research-based; alternative education schools are personal and focused; and alternative education students feel valued. Lastly, the chapter explains five commonly used categories of alternative education programs: Educational Alternative Programs, Teenage Parent Programs, Substance Abuse Programs, Disciplinary Programs, and Youth Services Programs.

Chapter Two introduces two funded alternative education programs with which the author works. The programs are the Truancy Court Conference Program (T.C.C.P.) and the Mentoring and Tutoring Help

(M.A.T.H.) Program.

With the inception of the Truancy Court Conference Program (T.C.C.P.) came the first system to document, monitor, and process truants. The Mentoring and Tutoring Help (M.A.T.H.) program provides positive role models from the community for the Truancy Court Conference Program students. Involving these students in a personal relationship with the mentor and in school activities with the mentor engenders renewed interest in school and a feeling of belonging. The mentoring component of the M.A.T.H. program produces substantial successes in proteges.

A significant portion of the M.A.T.H. program can be used by K-12 teachers to establish mentoring programs in their school districts. For instance, teachers can use the M.A.T.H. organizational chart and the TimeTable of Major M.A.T.H. Milestones as models to design similar instruments for their mentoring programs.

Chapter Three discusses some more important components of the M.A.T.H. program. These components are helpful to teachers to design, operate, and evaluate their mentoring programs. *Tips* to help recruit, screen, and orient mentors are presented. Models to design recruiting flyers, mentor applications, and interest inventories are shared, as well as mentor interview questions.

Activities for mentors and proteges are delineated to include community service activities. The latter part of this chapter shares process and outcome evaluation questions. The procedure for the M.A.T.H. process and outcome evaluation is helpful to teachers. Lastly, a 20-Step Replicable Model for Students At Risk will be supportive of teachers' efforts to design and to write a proposal to fund their program. The model summarizes the important features of the M.A.T.H. program, which are applicable to most school-based mentoring programs.

Chapter Four deals with what K-12 teachers can emphasize to mentors. In this chapter, the need for teachers to facilitate the efforts of mentors to gain knowledge and training in specific areas is discussed. The areas are familiarity with theories on school achievement, sincerity about helping, committing for the long-term, bonding, reliability, praising and listening, dos and don'ts, terminating if needed, liabilities, communicating with teachers, and setting goals and objectives.



Chapter Five deals with *tips* for teachers to build a mentoring program. These *tips* are organized into distinct categories. The categories are familiarity with effective mentoring programs; identifying proteges and school liaison persons; writing mission statements, goals, and objectives; and being aware of the changed family structure and a facilitator of family involvement.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book, like almost all others, could not have been written without invaluable support from many people. The author wishes to express his gratitude and thanks to all those who gave assistance as he gathered this information. Special acknowledgment goes to Cheryl Mallory and Terry Bell. Cheryl works with programs for students at risk at Pensacola Junior College in Pensacola, Florida. Terry works in the Educational Research and Development Center at the University of West Florida. Cheryl and Terry critiqued the manuscript and contributed many ideas which enhanced all of the chapters.

Special thanks go to Stacy Jobling, coordinator of the Escambia School District Mentoring and Tutoring Help (M.A.T.H.) program, and Anjanette "Anjie" Moffitt, coordinator of the Santa Rosa School District Mentor Program. Stacy and Anjie field-tested the data collection instruments in the text. They innovated and critiqued many of the recruitment, screening, orientation, and training procedures in Chapters Two and Three.

I would like to acknowledge Deborah Malishan and Elainia "Helen" Adams for their contributions. Deborah is the principal of Lincoln Park Elementary School in Escambia County, Florida. Elainia is the principal of Pleasant Grove Elementary School in Escambia County, Florida. Both are adjunct professors at the University of West Florida, and they teach courses in our Master's Degree program in Alternative Education. Deborah and Elainia completed a thorough review of strategies and models in Chapter Four, carefully pointing out what would work and would not work for K-12 teachers. Lastly, this book was supported in part by grants and contracts from the American Express and Travel Related Services, the International Paper Foundation, the Escambia Public School District, and the Santa Rosa Public School District.



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## **MENTORING STUDENTS AT RISK**



## **CHAPTER 1**

# **TEACHERS CAN RESTRUCTURE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS AT RISK**

### **OBJECTIVES**

After reading this chapter, teachers should be able to:

- Explain why restructuring education is important for students at risk.
- List the research-based alternative education strategies used with students at risk.
- Explain why increasing time on task results in more achievement for students at risk.
- Discuss the outcome of students at risk being ignored.
- Tell what the term *at-risk* means.
- Explain why truancy often leads to juvenile delinquency.
- Discuss why juvenile crimes and gangs are on the increase.
- Provide statistics to show that dropouts are costly to society.
- Define or describe the term *alternative education*.
- Discuss some important research studies supporting alternative education.
- Explain how alternative education schools are more flexible than regular schools.
- Compare and contrast the five categories of alternative education programs.

### **WHY RESTRUCTURE?**

Nationally, many schools are going to the school-based management approach to school governance. School-based management formally alters school governance arrangements. Decision-making authority is redistributed for the purpose of stimulating and sustaining school improvements in individual schools, resulting in an increase in authority of teachers at the school (Duttweiler, 1995).

School-based management gives teachers at school sites the authority to make important decisions about personnel, staff development, allocation of resources, curriculum, and instruction. Thus, teachers can become major players in efforts to restructure classroom instruction and school programs to better serve students at risk. Students at risk are defined as those students who are seen as potentially dropping out of school for various reasons. Reasons vary, including low self-esteem, drug abuse, problems within the family unit, pregnancy, behavioral problems, interaction skills, and the like.

As teachers know so well, there is a dire need to restructure education for students at risk. Presently, the system is failing students. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1985), almost a quarter of all seventeen-year-old students cannot read simple magazines. Since approximately 14 percent of students drop out by age seventeen, the problem becomes enormous (Slavin, 1989).

Orr (1987) revealed that subpar academic performance includes many personal and social pressures that have long been known to negatively affect educational achievement and school completion. More specifically, Peng (1983) identified family-related problems such as getting divorced or married, being pregnant, needing to work, as well as personal problems such as being sick, responding to peer pressure, becoming violent, and lacking self-esteem as reasons for poor achievement and premature school departure.

Teachers know that the argument for restructuring rests, for the most part, on the fact that America's schools have reached a point where minor changes or improvements to the current system will be inadequate. Changes must be fundamental and cost effective. In making their case, some point to the fairly dismal record of American schoolchildren in the past 25 years (Wircenski, Sarkees, & West 1990); others refer to the outdated *factory model* of schooling in which students are

processed, as on an assembly line (Fiske, 1991). Still others cite the increasing diversity of students and the way they learn (Reglin, 1995) or the heavily bureaucratized system of public education (Finn, 1991).

My research and personal experiences show teachers becoming more aggressive in restructuring classrooms and schools to reflect more alternative education. All teachers must restructure for two basic reasons. First, there are more validated alternative education strategies. Second, many school boards of education are neither knowledgeable nor proactive when it comes to alternative education. In fact, for various reasons, some school boards of education largely ignore the at-risk situation.

### **More Validated Alternative Education Strategies**

According to Morley (1993), alternative education is a perspective. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur. Alternative education means recognizing that everyone does not learn in the same way and, therefore, that some should be taught differently using an innovative curriculum. This is especially true for students at risk. It means accepting that all classrooms, programs, and schools do not have to be alike with the same learning environments. Therefore, it is a means of instituting variety and choice within school systems. Today, some public school districts have done well in implementing alternative education. Many of the alternative education efforts were designed with significant input from classroom teachers.

Thirty years ago, the curriculum field had almost nothing to offer the student at risk in terms of school restructuring. Today, we have an array of validated strategies that we can pass on to novice and experienced teachers, to school policy-makers, and to legislators. Scores of such alternative education strategies have been revealed by the research, which can substantially increase the effectiveness and productivity of schools and reduce educational costs. Below is a list of important research-based alternative education strategies.

### List of Research-Based Alternative Education Strategies

- Modified scheduling
- Common planning periods for teachers
- Peer tutoring and peer teaching
- Individualized instruction
- Career awareness
- Self-concept and affective education
- Manipulatives
- Service learning projects
- Authentic assessments
- Summer enrichment program
- Teachers-As-Advisors
- Learning styles instruction
- Teacher aides
- Anger management curriculum
- Conflict resolution curriculum
- Whole-child instruction
- Self-esteem building
- Resource speakers
- Challenging goals and feedback
- Team/core teaching
- Peer counseling
- Peer mediation
- Award systems
- Vocational assessment/experiences
- Application of life skills
- Field trips
- Computer Assisted Instruction
- Internet
- Adopt-A-Student
- Multiple Intelligences
- Low student/teacher ratio
- Student portfolios
- Violence prevention curriculum
- Social skills curriculum
- Competency based instruction
- Enhanced Time on Task Techniques
- Establishing Challenging goals
- Mentoring

The latter three alternative education strategies (Enhanced Time on Task Techniques, Establishing Challenging Goals, and Mentoring) will be discussed briefly. Information on many of these strategies can be obtained by reading two of my books: *Achievement for African-American Students* and *Motivating Low-Achieving Students*. Information on the publishers of both books is in the Index of this book.

### Increasing Time on Task

The actual amount of time during which students are actively engaged in learning varies enormously from one classroom to another and from one student to another. Most studies indicate that the average student is *on task* for about one-third to one-half of his/her time in school. My research and personal experiences show that these numbers are much greater for students at risk. Some students at risk learn slowly only because they are off task much of the time.