

TO: Members of the 152nd General Assembly

FROM: Caroline O'Neal and Evelyn Brady
Task Force Co-Chairs

DATE: June 1, 2023

SUBJECT: House Joint Resolution (HJR) 1 *Establishing a Task Force to Improve School-Based Mentoring and Literacy Education Efforts in Delaware* Report

HJR 1, sponsored by Rep. Kim Williams and Senator Laura Sturgeon, established a Task Force comprised of members of the General Assembly, Governor's Office, specific Executive Branch Departments, advocacy organizations and members of the public.

The Task Force's charge was to study and report its findings and recommendations on the following topics by June 1st, 2023:

- (1) The current state of school-based mentoring in Delaware.
- (2) Concrete steps that could be taken to expand the number of adults acting as volunteer mentors in Delaware schools.
- (3) Steps that would need to be taken with respect to more efficient provision of legally required background checks to ensure that these important child protection measures are as convenient and inexpensive as possible for potential volunteer mentors.
- (4) Improved use of information technology to improve recruitment, training, and retention of mentors including the creation of a single statewide web site for school mentoring.
- (5) The necessary infrastructure at the state level, school district and school level, and among state non-profit organizations to support a quality, expanded mentoring effort.
- (6) The integration of evidence-based literacy efforts into both the training of school mentors and routine mentoring efforts.
- (7) State funding support, if any, necessary to support the Task Force's recommendations.

Findings:

HJR 1 was signed by the Governor on March 29th, 2023. With limited time between appointment of Task Force members and the due date for the report to the General Assembly, the Task Force held four (4) meetings. Each meeting was between 60-90 minutes long and the Task Force invited several guest speakers to provide presentations related to topics of discussion. The Task Force determined that more information is needed related to the current landscape of mentoring and types of mentoring offered by community-based organizations as well as schools. The Task Force heard from Captain

Andrew Lloyd, Delaware State Police, regarding upcoming changes for the processing and cost of criminal background checks. Captain Lloyd mentioned that the State Bureau of Identification has obtained the use of a new system, IdentoGo, and with changes that will be implemented with the new system are anticipated to make obtaining a fingerprinted background check more accessible across the state. Mr. Aaron Bass, Head of School at Eastside Charter School, was invited to a Task Force meeting to discuss the current mentoring program at Eastside Charter. Mr. Bass noted that the mentoring program has been in existence for over a decade and has much success in connecting with local businesses. The businesses provide incentives for their employees to mentor at the school. Mr. Bass noted that the mentoring program at his school has changed the lives of many students and has led to other school initiatives such as the STEM Hub. Additionally, a brief questionnaire was sent to Districts and schools to gather information related to current mentoring activities. While the response rate was low, the results of the questionnaire were shared with Task Force members and assisted in ongoing discussions.

Task Force members noted that more consistent communication and statewide support in the areas of training and literacy, to support current and potential mentors is needed. Additionally, the members noted that support for mentoring at the school level must not be an “add” on to someone’s current workload if mentoring is going to be as successful as possible. The Task Force members felt that a full-time person employed in state government, currently the Out of School Time Officer in the Governor’s Office, should be focused solely on mentoring efforts. The members felt this will allow mentoring opportunities in Delaware to expand and will be needed to carry out the recommendations outlined in this report.

Recommendations:

Based on the discussions and presentations during the meetings, the Task Force is submitting the following recommendations as a starting point for improving school-based mentoring and literacy education efforts in Delaware. These recommendations, which fall under each of the charges outlined in HJR 1, were approved unanimously by the Task Force members:

- 1) The current state of school-based mentoring in Delaware
 - Commission a landscape analysis of mentoring in Delaware to include school districts, charter schools, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. The analysis should be inclusive of special schools and programs as well as before and aftercare programs. The landscape analysis should include needs, gaps, and types of mentoring provided. This work should be done by or in partnership with the state agency staff connected to mentoring and in partnership with the Governor's Office and the Delaware Department of Education

- Establish a definition of mentoring (pre-K through grade 12) that is inclusive of types of services such as academic tutoring and career development opportunities.
- 2) Concrete steps that could be taken to expand the number of adults acting as volunteer mentors in Delaware schools.
- Provide more investment in marketing and advertising about available mentoring opportunities. Examples include mentoring recruitment at career fairs and open houses.
 - Support state funding to cover the cost of criminal background checks and Child Protection Registry checks for people who want to become mentors.
 - Explore incentives for increasing mentors, e.g. community service hours for High School students, credit hour courses for college students.
- 3) Steps that would need to be taken with respect to more efficient provision of legally required background checks to ensure that these important child protection measures are as convenient and inexpensive as possible for potential volunteer mentors.
- Encourage the state to purchase more mobile Identigo kiosks that could be used at locations where there is a significant probability of mentor recruitment.
 - Encourage the state to extend hours to increase availability for criminal background checks at Identigo locations.
 - Clarify the feasibility of sharing background check information with an aim to provide consistency and regularity for sharing of information related to criminal background checks for mentors across school districts and charter schools.
 - Assess the need for school districts and charter schools to have a designated point of contact for criminal background check information for mentors.
 - Provide consistent communication on the requirements of background checks to prospective mentors, community-based organizations, and schools.
- 4) Improved use of information technology to make improve recruitment, training, and retention of mentors including the creation of a single statewide web site for school mentoring.
- Establish a working group to identify what the needs are to support the website to grow mentoring.
 - Develop a stand-alone website for mentoring that encourages participation and highlights mentoring opportunities. The website should be a central portal and provide a streamlined process for learning about mentoring and where potential mentors can be connected with organizations and schools if they are interested in mentoring.
 - Provide access to training resources for mentors (e.g. Social Emotional

Learning, trauma informed training, content areas, literacy instruction) on a statewide website.

- 5) The necessary infrastructure at the state level, school district and school level, and among state non-profit organizations to support a quality, expanded mentoring effort.
 - Study how other states have increased school-based mentoring.
 - Require a full-time equivalent staff person in state government to work specifically on expanding mentoring.
 - Change the Out-of-School-Time- Officer title to something more friendly and reflective of mentoring responsibilities.
- 6) The integration of evidence-based literacy efforts into both the training of school mentors and routine mentoring efforts.
 - Use existing evidence-based literacy training (grounded in Science of Reading) and connect those trainings with existing mentoring opportunities inclusive of types of services such as academic tutoring and career development opportunities.
- 7) State funding support, if any, necessary to support the Task Force's recommendations.
 - Include \$75,000 in the fiscal year 2024 budget to cover the cost of background checks for mentors.
 - Recommend that the state Out-of-School-time Officer develop and implement a feasibility study on resourcing school and district level staffing support (during the school day and afterschool) for mentoring based on the outcomes of the current state analysis.
 - Provide any initial and ongoing funding for a state website to support the growth of mentoring.

In Conclusion:

The Task Force members would like to have a meeting with the newly hired Out-of-School-Time Officer (current position in the Governor's Office focused on mentoring) to provide some additional context and thoughts related to the recommendations in this report and to review the process the Task Force took in developing the recommendations. The Task Force members remain available to support the work of the Out of School Time Office as it relates to mentoring as progress is made toward implementing each of the recommendations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Task Force Co-chairs Caroline O'Neal at Coneal@readingassist.org or Evelyn Brady at evelynbrady@comcast.net

cc: Mark Holodick, Secretary, Department of Education
Meredith Seitz, Chief of Staff, Department of Education