

S/PA Mission Statement

The mission of Student/Partner Alliance (S/PA) is to support inner-city high school students in New Jersey with private school tuition assistance and mentoring to increase their chances for college admission and scholarships, and to ultimately lead successful and productive lives.



Dear Partners and Mentors,

Welcome to Student/Partner Alliance!

We are thrilled and very grateful that you have agreed to become part of our important mission to improve the lives of high school students in our area through the gift of a quality education. We hope that you will enjoy getting to know your student and find your experience rewarding.

Our students face many daily challenges, including financial, educational and social challenges. Your support can make a big difference between a successful high school experience and just getting through.

This handbook will provide you with information about student mentoring through Student/Partner Alliance (S/PA). We are always ready to answer your questions and very much appreciate feedback, so please do not hesitate to call our office with any concerns, comments or questions.

We wish you a successful and gratifying experience with your student and with Student/Partner Alliance.

With much appreciation for your generosity,

*Margaret Momber
Executive Director*

THE STUDENT/PARTNER ALLIANCE MENTOR HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MENTORING

The Value of Mentors	pg. 3
What is a Mentor	pg. 3
Student/Partner Alliance Program	pg. 4
Suggestions for Your 1st Meeting with Your Mentee	pg. 5
Building a Successful Relationship	pg. 5 - 8
Guidelines For Working With Minors	pg. 9 - 12
Code of Ethics	pg. 13
How and When to Report Child Abuse	pg. 14
Frequently Asked Questions	pg. 15 - 16

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	pg. 17
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MENTORING

The Value of Mentoring (or Why Mentor?)

Mentoring is an invaluable tool for helping young people find the best in themselves. Numerous research studies have established that mentoring offers many benefits such as: improving self-esteem and relationships with parents, peers and teachers; keeping young people in school; and helping improve academic skills. Youth with mentors are less likely than their peers to start drinking and using illegal drugs. A longer article on “*The Value of Mentoring*” from MENTOR/National Mentoring Partner can be found in **Resources Section** ([link](#)).

What is a Mentor??

A mentor is a *trusted guide or coach*. The word comes from a Greek myth in which Odysseus entrusted **Mentor**, a friend, with the education of Telemachus, his son while he was away fighting the Trojan War. Since this time, over 2000 years ago, a **Mentor** is known to be *someone who shares knowledge and wisdom*.



A Mentor IS:

- A trusted guide and friend
- Someone who will listen to their mentee
- Someone who will help their mentee explore new opportunities
- Someone who will have good ideas about how to deal with difficult situations
- Someone who supports their mentee
- A Coach
- An Advisor
- Consistent and dependable
- A positive role model
- Someone who always puts the child’s safety and well-being first

A Mentor is NOT:

- A parent
- A peer
- An “ATM” (students are *never* allowed to ask their supporters for money)
- Someone to constantly unload on
- A taxi-service
- A therapist
- A tutor

S/PA MENTORING PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND EVENTS

STUDENT/PARTNER ALLIANCE was conceived as a program offering *a combination of financial and coaching support* to underserved high school students residing in the urban areas of Greater Newark and Jersey City, in order to improve the student's chances of attaining a quality education at a nearby private school.

STUDENT/PARTNER ALLIANCE is affiliated with 7 inner-city private schools that offer a solid, college preparatory education in a structured, caring environment. While each school is unique, they all produce an almost 100% graduation and college acceptance rate. S/PA coordinators at each school and S/PA staff work closely together to bring the best student/partner/mentor experience to all involved through a carefully constructed program.

STUDENT/PARTNER ALLIANCE is *unique* because of it combines scholarships and mentors which sets it apart from all other scholarship programs in the area. This unique combination has led to 100% graduation rates for our students over the past four years.

PROGRAM: At the beginning of each academic year, incoming students attend a *S/PA orientation* with their parent(s)/guardian, to learn about S/PA's program and the benefits of having a mentor. The students will also learn about the events that S/PA has arranged for them to meet with their mentors and their responsibilities.

PROGRAM: Each fall, *a mentor training workshop* is offered for all new mentors and interested others, so that our mentors can learn about the role of a mentor, how to be an effective mentor, S/PA events, their student mentees and expectations of the mentoring relationship. Legal and ethical considerations are discussed in this valuable training.

EVENTS: Throughout the year, S/PA sponsors events to encourage the student and his/her partner/mentor to meet and spend time together in a comfortable environment. These activities are fun, often help the community, and are especially important in the early days of the relationship. Yearly scheduled events include:

- Student/Partner/Mentor Breakfasts/Lunches 2X yearly (Sept/October; and again in March/April, at each school)
- Day of Service at Community FoodBank (November)
- Holiday Party (early January – families invited)
- Day of service at Newark Conservancy (April/May)
- Special events/programs offered periodically to smaller groups



*★ No relationship can succeed without clear,
regular communication ★*

MEETING YOUR MENTEE FOR THE FIRST TIME:



You and your student might be a bit nervous, that's normal!! As a new mentor, you are about to enter into a rewarding experience. This mentoring relationship can be as rewarding for you as it will be for your mentee. During your first meeting, you will have a chance to begin getting to know your new mentee. By the time this first meeting ends please make sure that you exchange necessary contact information and discuss how you would like to communicate. As with all new relationships, you may find moments when things feel awkward, until you have had a chance to find out what the other person is all about. After a while this will pass and the time you spend together will feel more natural and comfortable.

- o Share something that you have done during the summer.
- o Ask your mentee about events that have occurred in his or her summer.
- o Ask about school, what courses your mentee is taking, what he/she likes, sports, music, plays etc.
- o Talk about what you might like to do together
- o Ask a question about a goal or interest that he/she has.

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BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PARTNER/MENTOR - STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

While contact varies with each pair, S/PA encourages you to see your student **4 times a year** and that you text/email/phone your mentee **twice a month**. Each relationship between partner and student is unique. All relationships take time to develop.

*****BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP, OVER TIME, MAINTAINING CONSISTENT CONTACT WITH YOUR STUDENT*****

We suggest you start slowly and keep your contact with your student **consistent**. Do not attempt to become your student's confidant or buddy right away. Being overly friendly or inquisitive may unnerve a student and make them pull away. To become a positive and effective influence who aids and guides, it is important that you gain the respect and trust of your student. In order for this to happen, you should listen and get to know the student first, before offering advice and getting involved in his/her school. You have four years to get to know and spend time with your student. Be honest in your assessment of how often you will be able to see your student over the

four years, and do not see them more frequently at the beginning. You do not want your student to feel that you are pulling away after a few months, because he/she might think he/she did something wrong and could take it personally. Be a good friend, LISTEN, and have fun!

*****AVOID ASKING QUESTIONS THAT ARE TOO PERSONAL, PARTICULARLY ABOUT YOUR STUDENT'S FAMILY SITUATION*****

If a student is living with just one parent or with neither biological parent, it is natural to be curious about the whereabouts of the family members not in the home. However, your student's family histories are quite personal and may be painful for her/him to talk about. Let the student decide when to reveal these things to you.

*****ATTEND S/PA EVENTS AND EVENTS AT YOUR STUDENT'S SCHOOL*****

Every opportunity to get together is an opportunity to build the relationship and show that you care.

*****BE PATIENT AND ENCOURAGING WITH YOUR STUDENT, EVEN IF HIS OR HER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IS WORSE THAN YOU EXPECTED*****

You will be receiving copies of your student's report card. In the beginning, many students experience difficulty in making the transition from middle school to high school and from a public to private school. Please keep in mind your student's academic history and level of capability. You can help raise expectations of the student to encourage academic success and help your student to set high, but *realistic* goals. Please be sure to *compliment your student on successes*. When you are disappointed with your student's performance, be gentle and remember that poor academic habits usually take more than a couple of months to change. If you are concerned that your student has *serious* academic issues, please contact us.



*****GET TO KNOW THE SCHOOL YOUR STUDENT ATTENDS*****

If your student is experiencing difficulty, counseling staff and teachers at the schools can help. A gentle reminder to your student to ask for help may be the encouragement he/she needs. We recommend that you also encourage your student to get involved in sports or any extracurricular activities of interest. Developing strengths builds self-esteem, which ultimately helps improve academic performance. Throughout the year, each school hosts activities like sporting events, plays, and award ceremonies. Such occasions are great opportunities to learn about your student's interests, to see your student at their best and to become further involved in their academic career.

We encourage you to meet with your student at his/her school. For example, she/he may be on a sports team and you could go watch a game. Or you could meet in the computer lab to look at college options together.



*****GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENT'S PARENT OR GUARDIAN*****

It is a good idea to meet your student's parent(s) or guardian(s) and develop a rapport with them. Occasionally, a parent may feel uncomfortable with a stranger's unsolicited interest in their child. The Community FoodBank event in the fall; or the Holiday Party in January give you the chance to introduce yourself. Use these opportunities to demonstrate to the parent that your main concern is the student's academic performance and that you will not be an interfering or imposing figure in their home life. Also keep in mind that parents, although thankful for the opportunity to have their child in a good school, may feel embarrassed that they cannot provide the money for tuition. The less said about finances the better.

*****BE SENSITIVE AND APPROPRIATE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR STUDENT*****

- A) **Be sensitive about where you take your student.** If you wish to plan an outing with your student outside of S/PA organized activities, please start by contacting the parent to obtain their permission (see FORMS section-[link](#)). Please meet in public places where you are not alone with your student. If you would like to drive your student anywhere, you must get his/her parent to sign an Activity/Driving Permission (see FORMS section- [link](#)). Please send this to our office before the outing along with a copy of your current driver's license and auto insurance card. For any outing we encourage you to do so with another Mentor and mentee or with the student's parent/guardian.
- B) **Do not assume that your student is familiar or comfortable with traveling into other neighborhoods.** Remember that no matter how street smart your student is, he or she is still young and may be uneasy about traveling to new places. Meet your student at places to which he or she can easily travel – and perhaps invite a parent or sibling to come along. Reducing any anxiety your student may associate with your meetings will likely save you the disappointment of being stood up.
- C) **Plan events with other Partners/Mentors and their students.** This works very well for both Mentors and students. It allows you to get to know other Mentors and provides a more comfortable environment for the students. The opening breakfast in the fall is a good time to exchange contact information and business cards with individuals who are partnering with students at the same school.

D) Please do not buy your student expensive gifts. You do not want your relationship to be focused on money. It is nice to remember your student on his/her birthday or holidays with a modest gift. When selecting gifts, please choose items with values below \$100. Educational gifts are a good idea.

E) If your student asks to confide in you, be sure to tell him or her that you must break the confidence if what they tell you is so serious in nature that you feel outside help is needed. A student will not turn against you for this, and is usually familiar with this aspect of adult/student interaction. Please do not feel that you need to handle this information on your own, however. Call the S/PA office to discuss.



*****FOR PARTNERS: YOUR FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IS LIMITED TO THE TUITION ASSISTANCE THAT YOU PROVIDE THROUGH S/PA*****

All families are responsible for a portion of their tuition plus cost of books, uniforms, summer school, and miscellaneous expenses. The families are informed of their responsibilities at the time of acceptance into the program. Most families pay in monthly installments. If a student or family directly asks you for monetary help, tell them that this is *not allowed by S/PA* and please inform us of the situation. If there is a real problem with school related expenses, S/PA will evaluate the situation and will attempt to prevent any student departure for financial reasons.

*****ESTABLISH CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND HAVE FUN!*****

Talk to your student about your role and your expectations as far as meetings, locations, frequency, and expenses. You should both try to understand what the other person expects. Refer to “Guidelines For Working with Minors” for further information. Don’t hesitate to call S/PA for suggestions or support.



All successful relationships are built on a foundation of trust and confidence, where both people feel safe to share their goals and concerns.

POLICIES/GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH MINORS

A. Guidelines of Student/Partner Alliance for Partners/Mentors Modeling Positive Behavior: The following standards are intended to assist S/PA volunteers (Trustees, Staff, Partners, Mentors, Consultants and Interns) in making decisions about interactions with minors in S/PA sponsored and affiliated programs.

1. All volunteers have a responsibility to interact with minors and model positive behavior. All volunteers are prohibited from:
 - a. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while in the presence of minors.
 - b. Swearing in the presence of minors.
 - c. Speaking to minors in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
 - d. Engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with minors.
 - e. Possessing sexually oriented or morally inappropriate printed materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.).
2. Volunteers should only release minors in their care to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians. In the event you are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a minor, you should contact the local police prior to releasing the minor.

B. Standards for Offsite Events and Transportation of Minors

1. Partners and Mentors should meet with their student in a public place, never alone anywhere, including a car while transporting minors.
2. If a volunteer is to drive a student anywhere, S/PA will need prior to the event, a signed permission slip in the form attached hereto in FORMS – [link](#) from the parent or guardian in advance of the event.

3. Minors should be transported directly to their destination. No stops should be made unless approved by the director of the program.
4. Volunteers assigned to transport minors must be at least 21 years old and have a valid New Jersey driver's license and current automobile insurance.
5. Volunteers are prohibited from having minors stay overnight at their residence.
6. Volunteers should not give gifts to minors in excess of \$100.00 per year.

C. Guidelines of Student/Partner Alliance as to Physical Contact with Minors

1. All volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of minors. No form of physical discipline is acceptable.
2. Appropriate affection between volunteers and minors is important for a child's development. However, all volunteers should always be aware that physical contact with minors can be misconstrued and should occur (a) only when completely nonsexual, when there is no possibility of others perceiving it as sexual, and when such contact is otherwise appropriate, and (b) never in private.
3. The following forms of affection are regarded as appropriate examples of affection for most S/PA sponsored and affiliated programs:
 - Hugs.
 - Pats on the shoulder or back.
 - Hand-shakes.
 - "High-fives" and hand slapping.
 - Verbal praise.
 - Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of minors.
 - Arms around shoulders.
 - Sitting beside small children.

4. Some forms of physical affection have been used by adults to initiate inappropriate contact with minors. In order to maintain the safest possible environment for minors, the following are examples of affection that are not to be used in S/PA sponsored and affiliated programs:

- Touching knees or legs of minors
- Wrestling with minors
- Tickling minors.
- Piggyback rides.
- Any type of massage given by minor to adult.
- Any type of massage given by adult to minor.
- Any form of unwanted affection.
- Compliments that relate to physique or body development.
- Pats on the head.

D. Standards of Student/Partner Alliance as to Screening of Volunteers Who Work with Minors

1. Without exception, all applicants for volunteer positions that will involve working with minors must comply with the following procedures:

- a. Completion of a standard application that includes authorization to conduct criminal background checks.
- b. Cooperating, as necessary, with a criminal records check. This criminal records check shall be conducted prior to beginning volunteer work.

2. Additional screening procedures, such as reference checks and face-to-face interviews, will be conducted for new applicants.

E. Standards of Student/Partner Alliance as to Training for Volunteers Who Work with Minors

1. All volunteers shall review the Policies/Guidelines on Conduct and abide by the S/PA Code of Ethics.
2. S/PA volunteers who work with minors are strongly encouraged to attend the mentor training.

F. Standards of Student/Partner Alliance as to Supervision of Programs that Involve Minors

1. Parents have a right to observe programs and activities in which their children are involved.
2. Programs for minors shall be sponsored by at least two adults.

(Adapted from Policies on Professional and Ministerial Conduct Archdiocese of Newark)

STUDENT/PARTNER ALLIANCE PROCEDURE FOR THE MANDATORY REPORTING OF CHILD NEGLECT & ABUSE

How and When to Report Child Abuse/Neglect

In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as **1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)**. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.

Source: State of New Jersey, Department of Children and Families

CODE OF ETHICS

All Trustees, Partners, Mentors, (volunteers) and staff shall exhibit the highest ethical standards and personal integrity.

All volunteers and staff shall provide an environment that is free from harassment.

All volunteers and staff shall not take advantage of any counseling, supervisory and/or authoritative relationship for their own benefit.

All volunteers and staff shall not abuse or neglect a minor or an adult.

All volunteers and staff shall share concerns about suspicious or inappropriate behavior with the Executive Director of S/PA, Margaret Momber at mmomber@studentpartneralliance.org.

All volunteers and staff shall adhere to the requirements of the laws of the State of New Jersey regarding the reporting of any suspected abuse of a minor.

If the child is in immediate danger, and it is not possible to contact the S/PA office to discuss, please follow the prescribed procedure according to the laws of the State of New Jersey, stated below. If there is no immediate danger, you may contact the office to discuss.

★ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ★

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF...

...MY STUDENT DOES NOT SHOW UP, OR IS CONSISTENTLY LATE, FOR A PLANNED EVENT OR OUTING?

Many veteran partners have experienced being “stood up” by their student, and it is very frustrating. If this occurs, explain why you are upset with him/her, and work on activities to improve his/her organizational skills. S/He may not be used to scheduling and keeping appointments, and truly may not understand the problem with showing up late. Engage your student in correcting the problem. The next time your student arrives on time, congratulate her/him for being prompt.

...MY STUDENT NEVER RETURNS MY TEXTS/EMAILS/PHONE CALLS?

SPA finds that many students are reluctant to initiate a contact with their partner, and do not call their sponsor back when a message is left for them to do so. More than likely, the student is not calling you back because s/he is not receiving the messages, or is too timid, not because s/he is ignoring you. Once you connect with the student, explore the reasons that s/he is not calling you back, and explain that you will need her/his help in making the relationship successful. You might also suggest alternate ways to keep in touch, such as email, or setting up phone appointments in advance. Show her/him how to organize commitments, book appointments and follow through.

...MY STUDENT'S PHONE HAS BEEN DISCONNECTED?

There may be times when you are unable to reach your student due to termination of telephone service in their home, a move, or a cell phone change. You can try to correspond with him/her by email (students tend to check their school emails most frequently) or text. If this doesn't work, contact us and we will find out how to get in touch with him/her.

...MY STUDENT'S PARENTS DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH?

Your student is the first person you should turn to for translation.

...MY STUDENT IS DOING POORLY OR FAILS A CLASS?

It is not unusual for S/PA students to fail one or more classes, especially the *first* year in high school. If you notice that after the second or third marking period, your student is in danger of failing any class, help him/her to use all of the resources that are available at the school in order to raise his/her grade. There are many opportunities for extra help within the school community, such as tutoring from teachers and peers. Try to find something good on the report card, and congratulate the student before telling him/her what s/he could do better. Set realistic goals with your student for the next marking period if (s/he has a 69, strive for a 73, not a 90). It is NOT your responsibility to tutor the student.

...MY HELP ISN'T WANTED?

It's not easy to trust a stranger, especially if you are a young person who has had bad experiences with adults in the past. It may take *a lot of time to build up* trust. Don't interpret caution as rejection. Your student may not show that he/she appreciates you, at least not in the beginning.

...I AM TOO DIFFERENT TO RELATE WELL?

Many first-time partners/mentors worry that differences in age, race, religion, education, or economic status will be insurmountable barriers. Actually, most veteran partners/mentors report that sponsoring a young person from a different background broadened their own horizons and deepened their understanding of other people and cultures. After four years, most say that they learned more from their student than their student did from them.

...SOMETHING REALLY SERIOUS COMES UP?

While most sponsor/student relationships develop and flourish without serious problems, things do happen. You have an important role as a student's partner/mentor, but that role does not include medical or psychological treatment, or family counseling. Please call S/PA when something of a serious nature arises.

...WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK THAT MY MENTEE IS BEING SUBJECTED TO CHILD NEGLECT or ABUSE ?

Contact Margaret Momber at mmomber@studentpartneralliance.org or 908-522-0405 as soon as possible. In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information. DO NOT try to deal with the situation yourself!

...WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK THAT MY MENTEE IS GOING TO HURT HIM/HERSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE?

As in the above question, immediately contact Margaret Momber at mmomber@studentpartneralliance.org or 908-522-0405. Again, DO NOT try to deal with the situation yourself.

...I MOVE? Please notify the S/PA office.

In closing.....

We realize that our mentors enter into this mentoring relationship with great aspirations for helping their student mentee. Do not underestimate the great impact that mentors can have on their students. Even at points when it may not seem as if you are reaching your student, your caring in all likelihood is, in fact, making a significant difference! Nearly all students write to us about how much it means to them to have someone else to "be there", "believe" in them and support them. If you should ever have doubts/concerns about your student or your relationship with him/her, please contact us! We are here to help! -The Staff at Student/Partner Alliance

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