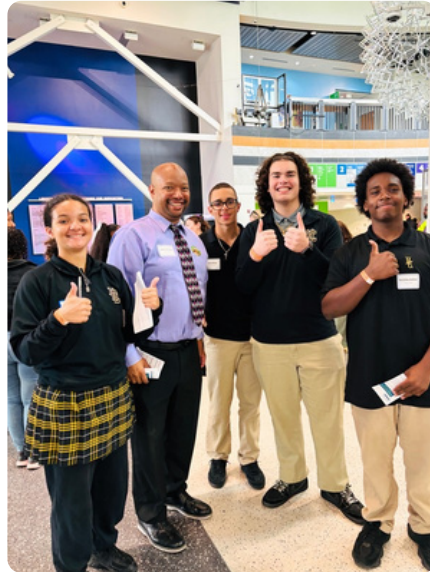


Student/Partner

A L L I A N C E

30 YEARS OF SCHOLARSHIPS
& MENTORING



2026-2027

Mentor
Handbook

WELCOME



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 and your time, advice, and encouragement. We hope that you will enjoy getting to know your student and find your experience rewarding and fun.

Our students face many daily challenges, financially, educationally, and socially, and your support can make a big difference in their high school career and their lives.

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 fun and rewarding experience with your student and with Student/Partner Alliance. S/PA would not be able to provide its programs and services without its dedicated Partners and Mentors. We are grateful for your engagement.

With much appreciation,

Kristin Shannon & the S/PA Team

Table of Contents

Welcome.....	Page 2
Table of Contents.....	Page 3
About S/PA.....	Page 4
S/PA Mentoring Program Structure and Events.....	Page 5
A Year in the Life of a Mentor.....	Page 6
What is a Mentor?.....	Page 7
Building a Relationship Takes Time.....	Page 8
Stages of a Mentor Relationship.....	Page 9
Reach out.....	Page 10
Frequently Asked Questions.....	Pages 11-12

About S/PA

In the late 1980s, Tom Cash informally started what would become Student/Partner Alliance by providing ten students in Jersey City with tuition assistance at St. Mary's High School. Cash recognized that students attending top quality, college preparatory high schools in their neighborhoods were more prepared to qualify for college admission and scholarships.

Student/Partner Alliance was formally incorporated in 1993, and since that time, has provided 2,500 scholarships and mentoring support to students from low-income areas in NJ. Mentoring is an effective way to provide guidance and support to students.



Tom Cash & Sheila Klehm
(2 of our founders)

Our Students

- Well over 50% are from single parent homes
- Average income is lower than \$50,000
- 100% of S/PA scholarship recipients have gained admission to college, post-secondary schooling, or armed forces in the past 10 years
- Represent a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds and religions



Our Schools

- 5 main schools located in Newark, Jersey City, and Roselle
- College-preparatory, community-based, structured, committed, nurturing

Our Staff

Kristin Shannon, Executive Director: kshannon@studentpartneralliance.org

Kate Hutson, Director of Development: khutson@studentpartneralliance.org

Jennifer Van Vort, Program Coord.: jvanvort@studentpartneralliance.org

Rachel Rydzewski, Marketing & Comms. Coord.: rydzewski@studentpartneralliance.org

S/PA Mentoring Program

Structure & Events

Student/Partner Alliance

S/PA is affiliated with 5 urban 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.

Program

At the beginning of each academic year, incoming students attend a S/PA orientation 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. Each Fall, a Mentor training workshop is offered for Mentors, 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

We have planned in-person Mentor/Mentee get-togethers at the students' schools in the fall and will be planning additional events in-person and virtually throughout the school year. You will receive invitations via email to all events for you to RSVP to. We welcome your suggestions for future events.

A Year in the Life of a Mentor

SUMMER

- New Mentors for the next graduating class apply.
- Accepted Mentors are matched with students from the next incoming class.

FALL

- Mentors attend a 1.5-hr virtual training class.
- Mentors get to meet their Mentees in person at a 1-hr school event at their school. (Either breakfast, lunch, or afternoon tea)
- Mentors and Mentees attend a virtual 1-hr webinar on college planning.

WINTER

- Blackstone Career Fair at a partner school with Mentors and Mentees.
- Annual Winter Party at Seton Hall University.
- Mentors and Freshman/Sophomore Mentees attend a virtual 1-hr webinar "Virtual Banking" with Citizens' Bank.
- Mentors and Junior/Senior Mentees attend a virtual 1-hr webinar "Financial Literacy" with Lord Abbett.
- Mentors and all Mentees attend a virtual 1-hr webinar on "Resume Building and Self-Branding."

SPRING

- Mentor and Mentee Spring events (breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, or field trips), i.e., Newark Art Museum, Liberty Science Center, Bowling, Soup Kitchen.
- Mentor/Mentee Career Fair with Lord Abbett at one of our partner Schools.
- Mentors of Seniors are invited to attend graduations at their schools.
- Mentors arrange to communicate with Mentees over the Summer. No planned events during the summer

*All events are typically 1-3 hrs.

We also encourage our mentors to communicate via text, email, or phone at least once per month.

What is a Mentor?

A Mentor is:

- A trusted guide and friend
- Someone who will listen to you
- Someone who will help you explore new opportunities
- Someone who will have good ideas about how to deal with difficult situations
- A coach
- An advisor
- Consistent and dependable
- A positive role model
- Someone who always puts your safety and well-being first

A Mentor is not:

- A parent
- A peer
- An “ATM” (students are never allowed to ask their Mentors for money)
- A driver
- A therapist
- A tutor

Students who have Mentors are...

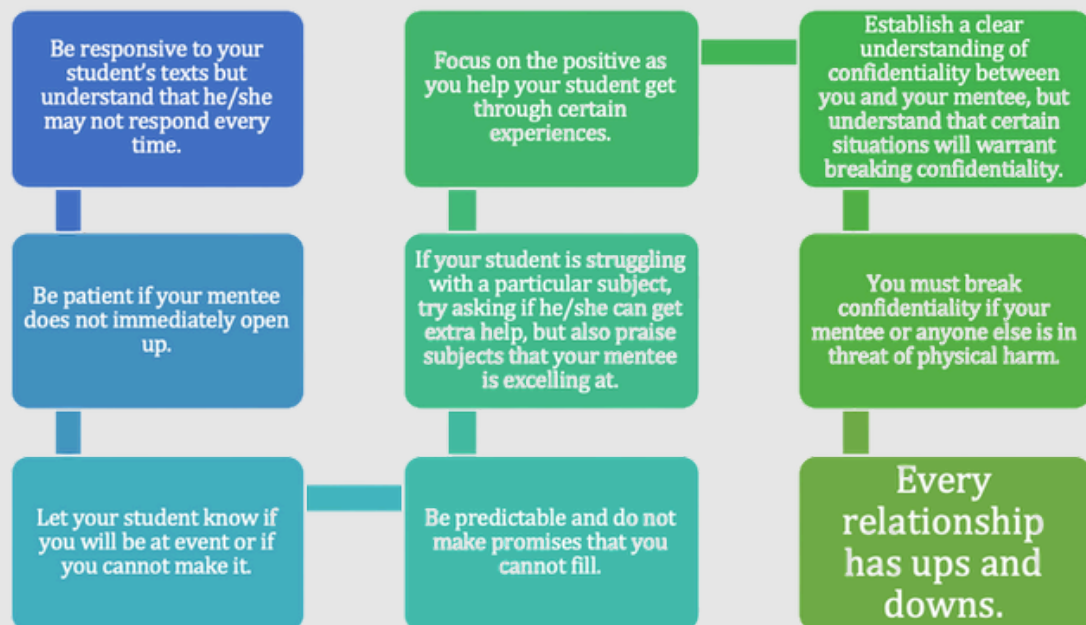
- 52% less likely to skip a day of class
- 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs
- 93% of Mentees try harder, improve their attitude about school, and benefit from an improved self-concept

Building a Relationship Takes Time

Allow your relationship to develop gradually, but focus on being an attentive listener. The first two years of your relationship should be about listening, getting to know each other, and building trust. As with any relationship, learning to trust is a gradual process that will not start on day one. Communication may be touch-and-go in the early years, but the most important thing is to be consistent. Showing up at S/PA events, sporting events, or the school play will demonstrate to your student that you are committed to developing a strong relationship.

Try not to view mentoring as a way to change your Mentee. Successful mentoring relationships rely on fostering youth development and growth as a supportive friend.

Try not to expect to have an instant bond, but with time, your student will be able to trust you and depend on you. If your Mentee is slow to bond, it is likely due to natural shyness and/ or previous experiences; trust is gradually built as the relationship develops.



Stages of a Mentor Relationship

Stage 1: Getting acquainted

- Like all relationships, the beginning phase can be awkward – that is normal!
- Learn the Mentee's style of communication and your best way to stay in contact

Communication tips for stage 1:

- Ask open-ended questions
- Balance the sharing of information by also talking about yourself
- Do not push topics that seem difficult
- Actively listen

Stage 2: Challenging & Trust

- It is normal for your Mentee to start to test the boundaries of the relationship
- Many Mentees come from difficult home situations, so they may try to act out against adults or disrupt the situation

Communication tips for stage 2:

- Be consistent
- Honesty, respect & reliability are key
- Disclose personal experiences or feelings when appropriate
- Actively listen

Stage 3: Real Mentoring

- Trust has been established. You have a solid relationship that cannot be taken off track
- Mentors can help Mentees set and pursue short and long-term goals

Communication tips for stage 3:

- Longstanding honesty
- Mutual acceptance. Do not try to change who your Mentee is
- Actively listen

Stage 4: Redefinition

- While the formal relationship through S/PA comes to a close at graduation, many Mentors and Mentees choose to continue their relationship over time and to remain in each other's lives

Reach Out

As your Mentee enters junior and senior year, the testing period of the relationship is usually over, and your Mentee will typically become more engaged and committed to the relationship. You can help establish goals for the future, help your mentee evaluate potential colleges, or brainstorm about possible college essay topics.

From time to time, Mentee/Mentor matches are not a perfect fit due to extenuating circumstances. If you are experiencing difficulties, contact S/PA or an experienced Mentor for possible suggestions on how to improve the relationship. S/PA staff are always available for any questions or issues.



Frequently Asked Questions

How should I first initiate contact?

We have planned in-person events at the school your Mentee attends for October. We encourage you to meet your Mentee at this event as an in-person meeting is easiest for all. If you can't attend the in-person event, please let us know and we will discuss an alternative.

How often should I be in contact with my Mentee?

S/PA recommends that you text, email, call, or video chat your Mentee at least once a month.

What should I do if my Mentee never returns my texts/emails/calls?

Building a rapport is essential when working with youth. They may be hesitant at first as they are being asked to talk with a stranger. It is important to use in-person events to build trust and rapport. Ask about your Mentee's interests. You can discuss your common interests, but also let them tell you about their different interests. Share information about yourself and your different interests so your Mentee feels more comfortable sharing with you. It will make your interactions feel more like a conversation and less like an interview. Once you've built rapport with your Mentee, you will have better luck getting them to engage with you. It is also important that you ask your Mentee how they prefer to stay in touch. Many may not like talking on the phone, or they may not check their email often. Texting may be the best way to stay in touch. Mentees are expected to respond to all Mentor's texts, calls, and emails within 24 hours.

What should I do if I cannot reach my Mentee?

If you have repeatedly tried to reach your Mentee without success, contact the S/PA staff and we can reach out to the school.

Is S/PA a Catholic organization?

No, although S/PA is not a Catholic organization, each of our partner schools is a Catholic school. We have chosen to partner with these schools because they provide solid, college-preparatory, nurturing, learning environments and serve the communities S/PA seeks to serve.

What should I do if my Mentee does not show up or is consistently late for an in-person or virtual planned event?

If your Mentee is consistently late to in-person or virtual events, reach out to check in. They may have a good reason for not being able to attend. In the future, ask them to let you or someone else know prior to the event that they can't attend. If you cannot reach them, let S/PA staff know, and we will reach out to their school or parent/guardian to check in on them.

FAQs (cont.)

What are the requirements to be a S/PA student?

In order for a student to qualify for a S/PA scholarship, their family's combined income must be less than \$75,000 per year (and most of our families earn much less than that). We also ask that the student maintain a GPA of 2.5 or higher, attend all S/PA related events and have no more than 3 tardies and 3 absences per semester.

What should I do if my Mentee is not doing well in school?

If your Mentee is not doing well in school, have a conversation with them about what they feel is going on. You can help them identify resources that can help improve their grades, such as tutoring or after-school help. Give them praise in areas where they are doing well, but also for their effort to seek help and improve grades. Feel free to reach out to S/PA staff with any concerns.

What are S/PA's policies on connecting through social media?

We discourage Mentors from connecting with their mentees or their Mentees' families on social media. If you would like to post any photos of your Mentee, you may do so with written permission from S/PA staff, your Mentee and their parent.

Can I meet with my Mentee one-on-one outside of a S/PA organized event?

S/PA will provide Mentees with events and opportunities to meet with their students in a group setting. One-on-one meetings outside of your Mentee's school are not permitted at this time.

Can I drive my Mentee places?

S/PA's insurance policy does not cover Mentors driving mentees places, so it is not permitted at this time.

Can I buy gifts for my Mentee?

Yes, but they should be modest. We ask that any gifts to Mentees be valued at under \$100 per occasion.

Should I introduce myself to or build a relationship with my student's parents?

Yes, you may start by contacting your student's parent(s) via email if you would like, but it is not mandatory to do so.

What should I do if something serious happens?

If you feel as though the safety and well-being of a youth is in danger, please report it and then let S/PA staff know. 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 the information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as:

[1-877 NJ ABUSE \(1-877-652-2873\)](https://www.nj.gov/education/central-registry/)