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An Evaluation of Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate

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The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Teaching Transforms Lives

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Executive Summary

Summary of Findings

This evaluation found:

1. BRMA is a well-designed mentoring program. It meets and exceeds the 'best practices' established by research on youth mentoring programs.

2. BRMA is extremely effective in promoting high school graduation and college attendance.

3. BRMA has significant effects on grade point average of the students but not on test scores. This represents a challenge to CHCCS—how can the motivation and classroom work of these students be converted into improves test scores?

4. Parents, mentors, and mentees all highly value the program and see it as effective. Race and language are issues that participants find themselves continuing to struggle with in CHCCS.

5. Staff also highly value the program and, through a commitment to continuous improvement, work to make the program more effective for program participants. However, the level of staffing seems minimal for the tasks required and, consequently, relies on part-time, temporary and volunteer personnel.

The evaluation team concludes that Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate is an important asset to CHCCS. It is highly effective for youth and their families, and provides CHCCS with a conduit to families that have been traditionally hard for the schools to serve well.

Considerations

Many evaluation reports end with a set of recommendations, but this does not seem appropriate given the data analyzed here. Recommendations are most appropriate when there are clear weaknesses in a program, and when there are evident ways to address these

weaknesses. To be sure, BRMA has identified initiatives that they wish to pursue but since we see these as an outcome of a continuous improvement model, these efforts are not properly understood as weaknesses. Rather they provide next steps in serving the youth and families well. Given this state of affairs, the evaluation team views it best to offer 'considerations.' Literally, we see these as things that BRMA and CHCCS may wish to think through in the coming months and years.

We offer five considerations to BRMA staff:

1. What are the limit conditions of your work? How many mentees and others can you serve well with what mix of services and with what patterns of staffing and funding? As there seems to be real limits on the number of mentors available, what strategies are there to address these limit conditions?

2. How can you best provide mentees with exposure to the wider society and support their home cultures as well?

3. How can academic support best help with test outcomes? Given that Common Core Standards and assessments are beginning, this may be an opportunity for BRMA to more systematically address curricula and testing. Who should be brought into this conversation?

4. How can BRMA link with post-secondary institutions to promote continued college enrollment and student success?

5. How can BRMA more effectively coordinate efforts with schools, teachers, and administrators?

We offer five considerations to CHCCS:

1. BRMA has demonstrated that concerted efforts for youth of color can have dramatic effects. What are the district's limit conditions for supporting BRMA and potentially other efforts?

2. How can the CHCCS best employ the linkages to families and mentors that BRMA has developed? What is the relationship CHCCS would like to have with families of color?

3. How can the instructional program be altered to better channel student motivation and classroom effort into testing outcomes?

4. BRMA currently is a 'work around' of the instructional system of CHCCS in enrichment, leadership, academic support, student services and advocacy. How can BRMA be more of a central factor in the learning of students of color?

5. Race and language continue to affect both perceptions of, and relationships with, the schools. What would change this state of affairs and what would this change require of the district?

The evaluation team offers these considerations as a way to 'think through' the findings of this evaluation of BRMA. We will, over the coming years, continue to work with BRMA to examine these results and their more concrete implications for the program. We offer our services to CHCCS more broadly as well. Our hope is that the lessons of this evaluation are but a place to start a thoughtful dialogue on better serving students of color.

An Evaluation of Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate

"I wouldn't change anything."—a mentee's mother

"It's an incredible program."—a mentor

"I would say that Blue Ribbon is a really, really good program." --a mentee

Introduction

Starting an evaluation report with such statements invites a host of questions.

Did all of each group say this? Would other participants agree? What exactly is it about the program that it should not be changed? Does this mean that Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate (BRMA) should not focus on improvement? Are these sufficient indicators of effectiveness?

We will detail the answers to these questions and others in what follows, but some short answers can set the stage. These quotes represented not single people but many of those who we interviewed. Also some people we interviewed made suggestions for program improvements--yet the worth of the program was clear to everyone we interviewed. Further, BRMA has continually focused on improvement, and this is likely one of the reasons for such positive reviews by clients and even why suggestions would be offered. Finally, of course these statements are not sufficient indicators of effectiveness —a program designed to serve those who have struggled to succeed in public schools has to be effective on many counts, and the job of this evaluation team has been to examine effectiveness in several ways.

These ways include: 1.) an analysis of program components and how they work together to serve the interests of program participants 2.) A quantitative analysis of effects of the program on mentees with respect to attendance, grades, test results, (add all) when compared to a similar group of students; and 3.) a comparison of the perspectives of various participant groups (staff, parents, mentees, mentors) who have the most intimate experience with the program. We will also note some ancillary effects (connections of parents of color, national visibility of the program, etc.) of the program that serve the interests of Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS), before drawing conclusions from the evaluation.

The Evaluation

This evaluation was conducted by faculty and graduate students of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Education (SOE) and the Department of Public Policy. CHCCS issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the Spring of 2011, and the review of the submitted proposals led to the contract being awarded to the SOE. The study received approval of UNC's Institutional Review Board for protection of human subjects.

To be as complete as possible, the evaluation was designed to have both quantitative and qualitative components. Both components speak to the effectiveness of the BRMA but in different ways. The quantitative data allow an assessment of the outcomes of the program in terms of high school graduation and college attendance. They also allow the description of the mentees in terms of school system administrative data, as well as their changes over time. Similarly, these data allow a comparison of academic progress of mentees to a set of students similar in background characteristics but not participants in BRMA. This is a quasi-experimental study design, although our matching procedure, propensity score matching, makes this a very rigorous type of design. The analyses were designed by the evaluation team and in part conducted by Hanover Research, pursuant to their contract with the CHCCS for such work. Diane Villwock of Testing and Research in the CHCCS worked assiduously to create the data files and support this evaluation. In the end, however, the evaluation team conducted the final analyses.

The qualitative data include ten observations of BRMA program activities by members of the evaluation team and a total of 76 mentees (former and current), parents of the mentees, the mentors, and BRMA program staff were interviewed: twenty eight students/mentees, 22 parents, 17 mentors and 9 staff (including part-time). The observations and interviews were transcribed and entered into a qualitative analysis software program, Atlas Ti. These data were coded, and analyzed for themes related to the evaluation of BRMA, social and economic mobility, and other themes that inductively emerged in the analysis.

There are some important limitations to the data that affect what can be concluded from our analyses. First, the quantitative data was based on administrative data already collected by CHCCS. These data were not designed for this evaluation and thus do not always speak directly to its concerns. Secondly, what data and how it is measured and collected varied over the time frame of this study, and thus there are gaps in the analyses. Most notably, we were unable to obtain usable data concerning early participants. This is unfortunate because this reduced the number of students we could track over time, thus reducing the probability of statistically significant findings. Further, the measures captured in administrative data do not always allow all we would have desired for the evaluation. For example, we do not know if the matched comparison group also received some BRMA services through the Youth Leadership Institute or through the tutoring program. Yet given that these services are provided to youth similar to those BRMA serve, the probability of finding differences between the BRMA mentees and the comparison group is again reduced by the comparison group being partially 'contaminated' by receiving BRMA services. Finally, students of color also could be receiving mentoring through other formal or informal arrangements, again reducing the likelihood of finding statistically significant differences. This said, the administrative data were the only cost-effective way to conduct this evaluation.

Second, it turned out to be difficult to gain permission and/or consent to conduct the interviews. The evaluation team doggedly pursued potential interviewees but many did not grant permission. We had also hoped to have interviews with some CHCCS students who did not participate in the program but they had even less interest in taking the time to talk with the

evaluation team. Our multiracial team is very experienced with recruiting interviewees but in the end, we were not able to develop a representative sample. Thus we cannot generalize from these data to all BRMA participants. Yet 76 interviews is a large number of cases for qualitative studies and provides some reassurance that the patterns discerned are important. Of course, there could be patterns among those who were reluctant to be interviewed that we were not able to capture. Also, the qualitative data was limited to a single interview, usually of an hour's duration, although some interviews went much longer. The interviewers attempted to cover as many topics as possible in the time the interviewee allowed for the interview, but time clearly limited how much data could be collected.

Such limitations are unfortunately common in evaluation studies because the resources are always limited and because any program has a specific population that limits the study. Nevertheless, we do think the data are sufficient for the purposes we use them for in this report.

A Description of Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate

BRMA is a program of CHCCS that is designed to support the achievement and engagement of students who are in need of mentoring, academic supports, and leadership development. Its goal is unchanged after 16 years of effort: enabling each BRMA student to reach their full potential. The program has served 255 students over the past 16 years. Students are selected in the third grade to begin BRMA in the fourth grade and to continue with the program through the completion of high school. The program has grown since its inception and this last year had 128 mentees working with a mentor.

The program is funded through district resources, grants and partnerships with various agencies that provide staff support (e. g. UNC-CH internships, Americorps, volunteer mentors and tutors, etc.). The majority of the funds come from outside CHCCS. Indeed, the proportion of CHCCS funding has dropped over the years and this past year was 38% of the BRMA budget. The program has used interns from professional programs at UNC-CH to plan and develop new program initiatives under the guidance of CHCCS staff. Continuous improvement can be seen over the history of the program. Each ongoing program element is planned anew each year, incorporating evaluative information in the process. As the years have progressed, new initiatives have been added to more fully address the needs of the students and parents. In recent years, initiatives have included academic tutoring, Parent University, and programming on racial identity and achievement among others. BRMA has regularly conducted internal evaluations of their work to serve as a basis for continuous improvement. This report is the first external evaluation of BRMA but was conducted at their initiation with outside funding.

BRMA offers a set of comprehensive services. Our review of the services offered revealed that there are a set of key elements, two levels of services and a host of related activities. The evaluation team's conceptualization of BRMA is slightly different than the one BRMA uses in their *Participation Guide.* This is likely the result of what data is easily observable to outsiders.

We have discussed this with the leadership of BRMA and will use this as a staff development exercise in the coming year. BRMA has 3 key elements: mentoring, youth leadership and service, and advocacy.

First and foremost, BRMA identifies students who can benefit from mentoring, links these students to trained mentors and expects that relationships will last over time. Students are identified by school social workers, counselors and others. These students are involved in all the BRMA services in that they attend educational and training programs, visit post-secondary institutions, conduct service learning projects, attend tutoring and other academic support programs, and benefit from advocacy efforts. These students are matched with mentors, usually of a different race and from different socio-economic backgrounds. These mentors provide the mentees with experiences with people from different walks of life, with cultural and social events that would not normally be available to them, with different perspectives on how to be in the world, and, importantly, with advocacy for their success in school and involvement in the community. Mentors work with parents to coordinate these efforts and to help the mentee respect both their families and the wider world represented by the mentors. The research on mentoring indicates that mentoring relationships that last over a number of years have more positive effects than those of shorter duration (CITE), and thus BRMA asks mentors to commit to a minimum of two years. Internal evaluations showed that over 90% of the mentoring relationships lasted beyond two years and over 60% of the mentees had the same mentor over the 8 years of the program.

Mentoring is not easy. It requires time and commitment that some find hard to deliver. Thus the mentoring program is limited by the number of mentors willing to make the extensive commitment required, and who are willing to deliver on this commitment over time. This is also the key limitation on the size of the mentoring program. Mentors are trained, submit regular documentation of their efforts and participate in many of the activities BRMA sponsors. Similarly, parents must commit to participating in BRMA efforts, attend workshops and other events, and work collaboratively with the mentor. Parents of mentees take on much more than parents of other students who join BRMA's leadership or academic support efforts. Parents and mentors also agree to work together to attend parent teacher conferences and to advocate for mentees so that they receive appropriate services from CHCCS and other local agencies.

The youth leadership and service element of BRMA invites students to take part in the Youth Leadership Institute and other educational programming, to develop and conduct service projects in the community and even for other communities (Atlanta, DC, New Orleans, etc.) through the program's spring break service trips. The program's goal is to help students transform from the recipients of volunteers service into being service providers themselves. These efforts develop student capabilities to discern assumptions and requirements in activities, to effectively represent themselves and their communities, and to design, plan, implement and assess needed service and the leadership required to implement the service program. The youth leadership and service work requires extensive student participation and responsibility which must be sustained over time, and often invite parent and mentor participation as well. BRMA

staff work with the youth to facilitate the work but the youth are responsible for the work. This element involves the students in the wider community as it develops new leadership capability in the students. These efforts reveal the capabilities of students of color and shows that CHCCS is a willing sponsor of community improvements.

The third element of BRMA is in many ways embedded in the other two elements. The students who participate in BRMA are in need of concerted advocacy. Schools in the United States have a relatively poor track record in both involving and effectively educating students of color (CITATION), and CHCCS are not an exception to this pervasive pattern. Students of color tend to be disproportionately identified for some services and not identified for others. They also are more likely to be subject to more severe disciplinary actions when compared with white students (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hughes and Berry, 2012). Finally, educators tend to interpret their dress and demeanor as signifying a lack of interest in education and all too often dismiss them as serious students (Valenzuela, 1999). To address these, BRMA promotes advocacy for these students. Mentors and parents are prepared to undertake advocacy for the youth through working closely and effectively with teachers, school counselors, school social workers, administrators and others. BRMA staff also advocates for individual students with teachers and other educators as well as in IEP meetings, disciplinary hearings and so on. Moreover, BRMA is involved in systemic advocacy to address the pervasive patterns noted above. These efforts include working with the CHCCS equity teams, the administrative council, and teacher and other professional development efforts, etc. The goal here is to help move forward the CHCCS efforts to reduce the achievement gap, and to develop more effective relations with the various communities the school system serves.

BRMA has two levels of service as well. The program provided 128 students this past year with a full complement of services: mentoring plus advocacy, parent support, tutoring, cultural enrichment college and career exposure leadership development, and scholarships for college. This is an extensive program of complementary services that exhausts the resources BRMA has available to it, including the availability of quality mentors.

However, the school district has many students who need such services. To help with this larger demand, BRMA has opened some of the components to other students and parents. The Youth Leadership Institute, Parent University and after school tutorials all have expanded to include some students and families who are not part of the mentoring program. These efforts greatly expand the number of people served by BRMA. The Youth Leadership Institute served over 100 students, Parent University enrolled 70 families, and Hargraves Tutorials served approximately 40 students. To a lesser extent, advocacy is also provided for students without mentors if BRMA learns of the need. However, BRMA has the most knowledge about the needs of the students in the fuller service mentoring program and thus provides more advocacy for these students. In all BRMA offers the CHCCS a host of supportive services for struggling students, a linkage to committed local professionals who are willing to mentor youth and an engagement with parents

of color who are notably reluctant, as research confirms (Nieto,2004), to become involved in schools.

More detail on services can be seen on the BRMA webpage and in available publications and videos. What is notable about the program is the comprehensiveness of services, its focus on continuous improvement and development, its willingness to serve as many possible, the capability and commitment of the staff and, as we will discuss below, the very positive reviews by parents, students, and mentors. As importantly, all this is accomplished with only 4 full-time staff, 4 interns (this past year), and volunteer mentors and tutors. This is quite remarkable, but also raises questions about the long term sustainability of the program with this level and mix of resources and staffing.

In all this, BRMA can also be understood as a set of integrated services that include:

1. Youth mentoring

2. Youth leadership programming

3. Tutoring and instructional support

4. Parent involvement and development

5. Advocating for BRMA students within school district

6. College and career exposure

7. Social and cultural enrichment

8. Educational programming for mentors, parents, mentees and other students

9. Exposure to colleges and other post-secondary education institutions

10. Service programming that affects the quality of life of local, national and international groups

11. Negotiating economic resources for extracurricular, summer and post-secondary programs

BRMA has also developed a reputation nationally as a high-quality program. Mentoring experts use BRMA as an example others can learn much from, as the evaluation team has learned as it interacted with these experts. There are reasons for this reputation. First, BRMA meets and exceeds what experts regard as 'best practices" for mentoring programs. DuBois et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of studies of mentoring programs and concluded that best practices included: implementation monitoring of the program; explicit expectations for frequency of contact; opportunities for mentors and mentees to engage in structured activities; ongoing mentor training; and parent support and involvement in the mentoring relationship. From the above description of the program, it is evident that BRMA employs these 'best practices'.

Second, BRMA is an example of what is regarded as 'cutting edge' programming that focus on systemic mentoring. Thomas Keller (2005) has argued that as mentoring programs move ahead they need to reconceptualize mentoring from a two party relationship (mentor-mentee) to a systemic model that influences and benefits from the a child's many connected relationships with adults and institutions.

It is clear that BRMA is an example of where mentoring programs should be in terms of practice. According to professional norms of practice in program design and planning, program management, program operations, and program evaluation, BRMA stands as exemplary (MENTOR, 2012).

The Quantitative Study

As accountability pressures continue to drive public education, states, districts, schools and community organizations are trying to implement several policies and programs as strategies to improve student achievement, especially among students of color and economically disadvantaged students. With federal initiatives from the No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top, these students have become the target for additional services; however these supports are often fragmented and often do not provide a comprehensive approach for increasing student outcomes. The Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate program (BRMA) offers students extensive and coordinated support services to aid in achievement for Black, Latin@, Burmese and Karen students in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools.

This quantitative study that is part of the external evaluation of BRMA examines the effectiveness of the mentoring program in increasing high school graduation, college attendance, student test scores and grade point averages (GPA) using descriptive and regression analysis. In what follows, we will present three analyses. The first is of high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates of BRMA mentees. The second reviews the results of descriptive analyses conducted by Hanover Research as part of its ongoing contract with CHCCS to provide such analyses for policy and program purposes. Finally, we will discuss analyses of BRMA"s effects on test scores and grade point averages (GPA) while in CHCCS in comparison with a propensity score matched comparison group.

High school Graduation and Post-Secondary Enrollment Rates

BRMA keeps extensive records on the mentees. For the purposes of this evaluation, the key outcomes of interest are: high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates of BRMA mentees. The evaluation team requested and received a list of names of participants and whether or not they graduated from high school and/or went on to post-secondary education. We then calculated the rates for each outcome. Forty students had completed BRMA.

Table 1: BRMA Mentee Outcomes

Outcome	Rates
Percent graduated high school	97.5 (n=40)
Percent post-secondary enrollment	100 (n=39)

As illustrated in Table 1, only one mentee who completed BRMA did not graduate from high school. All of those who graduated both BRMA and high school went on to post-secondary education. Former mentees enrolled most often in historically Black institutions and in community colleges. To gauge the significance of these results, it helps to compare these percentages with the most recent national data. In 2009, according the National Council on Educational Statistics, 14.3% and 12.5% of college students were African American and Latin@ , respectively. Note that these data are not directly comparable. Post-secondary enrollment figures are no doubt higher than attendance figures but, nonetheless, we conclude BRMA has had a remarkable effect on its mentees.

Descriptive Analyses

Hanover Research, Inc. has a standing contract with CHCCS to conduct regular analyses of administrative data to enable program planning and evaluation. The UNC team agreed to work with them on structuring these analyses as part of the contract. Please refer to the report in Appendix 1 for the complete analyses. Statistics were provided for three groups of BRMA and non-BRMA students: 1) active BRMA students; 2) inactive and 3) never participated in the BRMA program. Inactive refers to students that no longer participate in the BRMA program for various reasons such as the student no longer attends a CHCC school. Non participants were sampled based on racial or ethnic composition only. For example, African American students active in BRMA were compared to a group of non-participant African American students in terms of exceptionality, economic disadvantage, gender, graduation and test performance. Although this is a crude comparison, it allows some understanding of how BRMA participants are different and alike other students. Here we present only a summary of the analyses from the Hanover report. Consistent with Hanover, our summary reports findings for African American and Latin@ students separately.

African American Students

Exceptionality. As shown on Figure 8 of the Hanover report, over the evaluation period there were no active or inactive BRMA African American students that were identified as English language learners; however, a small percentage of non-BRMA students were identified as English language learners. In each year, there were a several active BRMA students identified as disabled. Compared to 2002-03 and 2003-04, the percent of active BRMA students identified as disabled decreased by about half between 2004-05 and 2006-07. However, the following three

years there is a sharp increase in the number of active BRMA students identified as disabled. Active BRMA students participated in the AIG program had higher rates than non-BRMA students in five of the nine evaluation years.

Economically Disadvantaged. During each academic year there was a relatively large percentage of active BRMA students identified as economically disadvantaged, based on participation in the free or reduced lunch program. Non-BRMA students had significantly lower rates of being identified as economically disadvantaged, with the largest difference being 39 percentage points.

Gender. Over the evaluation period, there were more active BRMA female students than male students. This pattern was not present for the non-BRMA students.

Graduation. The sample of graduates was too small to make any inferences or comparisons.

Test Performance. Among all African American students, a higher percentage of active Blue Ribbon students achieved proficiency on the ABCs End-of-Grade or End-of-Course exams in math and reading than non-participants in all nine school years. BRMA African American students typically achieved noticeably higher rates of proficiency than non-participants in Algebra I, Biology and English 1. Active Blue Ribbon students also had higher mean scale scores in math and reading as compared to non-participants in all school years. However, compared to the state average, active students typically performed worse on the EOC and EOG, with the exception of English 1.

Latin@ Students

In general, the number of Latin@ students is significantly lower than that of African Americans. However, over the nine year period the number of Latin@ students substantially increased.

Exceptionality. As shown on Figure 37 of the Hanover report, over the evaluation period the percentage of BRMA Latin@ students identified as English language learners (ELL) fluctuated. For example, in 2002-03 forty percent of active participants were identified as ELL. During 2003-04 the percentage increased significantly to eighty-two percent, but fell to forty-six percent in 2004-05. The rate of ELL classification was consistently lower for non-program participants than for active BRMA students. Fluctuations were also observed for active BRMA students identified as disabled. In six of the nine evaluation years, active BRMA participants had higher rates of being identified as disabled. The number of active BRMA Latin@ students that participated in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program, was relatively consistent over the evaluation period; however, during the 2009-10 academic year the number of AIG students nearly doubled. However, active BRMA Latin@ students participated in the AIG program at higher rates than non-BRMA students.

Economically Disadvantaged. As illustrated in Figure 37 of Appendix I, during each academic year there was a relatively large percentage of active BRMA Latin@ students classified as economically disadvantaged, based on participation in the free or reduced lunch program. Non-BRMA students had about a 20 percentage point lower classification as economically disadvantaged.

Gender. Over the evaluation period, there were more female active and inactive BRMA Latin@ students than male students. This pattern was not present for the non-BRMA students.

Graduation. The sample of graduates was too small to make any inferences or comparisons.

Test Performance. Latin@ students that were active in BRMA typically achieved higher proficiency than non-participants in math. Over the last four evaluation years, BRMA active students' proficiency rates exceeded those of program non-participants by an average of 14.1 percentage points. The results for reading were mixed - active students had higher proficiency rates in five of the nine years, although results for other years indicated similar proportions of students achieving proficiency. A comparison of mean scale scores of active and non-participants among Latin@ students were mixed. In math and reading, active Lain@ students scored worse than the state average on the EOG exams between 2002-03 and 2006-07. From 2007-08 to 2010-11, active Latin@ BRMA students scored slightly higher than the state average in math. The same was true for reading, with the exception of the 2007-08 academic year. The sample was too small to make inferences or comparisons about students' test performance on the Algebra I, Biology, English I or U.S. History exams.

Overall, the descriptive analyses suggest that BRMA has some effects on achievement--more systematically for African American students than for Latin@ students. There were too few cases in the samples for analyses of differences in GPA. Descriptive studies such as the above, however, compare the program participants with all other students of that group. Thus any differences between the groups may be due to the fact that the comparison group may be different from the participants in ways other than program participation. For this reason, the evaluation team employed a sophisticated matching process to develop a more equivalent comparison group in quasi-experimental design.

The Quasi-Experimental Analysis

The primary research question for the quasi-experimental analysis was: *Does participation in the BRMA program increase student performance, as measured by student test scores and academic grades?*

To assess the causal effects of the program on student performance we must first understand what would have happened to student test scores and GPAs in the absence of BRMA. While randomly assigning students to the program would produce the most accurate estimates of the

effect of BRMA; this was not realistic for various reasons; therefore, a quasi-experimental design, propensity score matching (PSM), was employed. PSM is a technique designed to reduce selection bias between nonequivalent groups, i.e. BRMA and non-BRMA students.

Propensity scores were created based on a set of observed control variables. These variables are typically related to both program membership and the outcome variables, which were standardized test scores and GPA. Because selection into BRMA is based on subjective measures, such as an affinity for adults, we examined the descriptive statistics to determine if there were student characteristics associated with selection. For example, the majority of the participants in the program is eligible for free or reduced priced lunch; therefore, this characteristic was used to determine the propensity score. As indicated in Table 2, the variables used for matching differed across models , because the sample of students varied across models. As an example, in the U.S. History model, none of the students are English language learners; therefore, this variable is not included in the propensity score.

Propensity scores are the predicted probability that a student would be assigned the treatment group (e.g., BRMA) given certain observed characteristics (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). Consistent with prior studies, propensity scores were estimated using a logistic regression model (Fan & Nowell, 2011).

The estimated scores from the logistic regression analysis were then used to match BRMA and non-BRMA students. Several matching approaches currently exist in the literature; however, there is not a general consensus on the *best* approach to employ (Stuart, 2010; Baser, 2006; Austin, 2008; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1984). In this study, we used the 'one nearest neighbor without replacement' approach. This approach selects a BRMA student and finds her/his closest non-BRMA student match based on the propensity score. Without replacement, ensures that non-BRMA student can only be matched to one and only one BRMA student. 'Nearest neighbor' matching guarantees that a match is found for all BRMA students, even if the propensity scores are not close. After the students are matched, equivalence between the treatment and control groups was determined using t-test. Once equivalence was determined, this sample was used to estimate and statistically test BRMAs' effect on students' test performance and GPA.

Sample

The data for this study were assembled from all K-12 public schools that operated in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) district from 2002-2003 through 2010-2011. This data was provided by the CHCCS Office of Testing and Program Evaluation and Hanover Research. The sample includes students from 14 of the 19 CHCC Schools. For these students, we include examination scores in mathematics, reading, Algebra 1, English 1, Biology, and U.S. History. GPA was also included for a small sample of high school students. Over the eight study years, approximately 121,000 exams were taken across the sample students. Although there were a large number of students who took these exams, the sample size for some analyses was reduced because of testing requirements by grade and missing data.

Measures

Four types of variables were included in this study: student test scores, weighted GPA, individual student control variables, and an indicator of participation in the BRMA program. Two outcomes of interest were used in this study to evaluate the BRMA program: standardized test scores and weighted GPA.

Student EOG and EOC scores. Seven analyses were individually employed to assess the extent to which the BRMA program improves student test performance (one for each test). Beginning in third grade, students in North Carolina are required to take either an End-of-Grade (EOG) or End-of Course (EOC) exam each year. These exams were created to assess students' knowledge and skills of a particular subject matter. At the elementary and middle school levels, students take EOG exams in math and reading. As of the 2008-2009 academic year, 5th and 8th grade students were also required to take an EOG exam in science; however, this was not included in our analysis. Additionally, middle school students may also take the Algebra 1 EOC exam. At the high school level, students were required to take Algebra 1, English 1, Biology, and U.S. History EOC exams during the study period. As of the 2008-2009 school year, students were allowed to retake EOGs and EOCs. For this analysis, we included students' highest score received on a given exam. Because of changing test requirements and missing data, some students were omitted from the analyses. Test scores were standardized to the state's average in a given subject, grade and year (for a detailed discussion on the standardization process see Hanover Research's report in Appendix 1.). Standardizing the test scores allow for comparisons across difference years, grades, and subjects. Test scores are therefore in standard deviation units, with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one. Simply put, the coefficients describe how much, on average, a students' test score differs from the average score of all other students in the state.

Weighted GPA. GPA was only available for high school students and was measured as a weighted average to account for the different levels of rigor in courses.

Individual student-level controls. In this study we also include several student level variables. For the analysis, a dichotomous variable was created which combined non-African American students into one category and African American students in the other category. Non- African American students in this sample include: Latin@s, Native Americans, and Multiethnic/multiracial. Eligibility for the free or reduced price lunch program was included as an indicator of family resources (EDS). Free and reduced price lunch was combined into one dichotomous variable indicating whether the student was eligible for either program. In addition, we included control variables for exceptional students, which include participation in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program and students who have disabilities (SWD). A dichotomous variable for English language learners who are receiving services was included (ELL). As an indicator of absenteeism, we included a continuous variable for the number of days a student was absent by academic year. Finally, we include a control for the gender of each student. Teacher, classroom, or school-level variables were not available for this evaluation.

Program indicator. The variable of interest for the evaluation of program effectiveness is a dichotomous variable that indicates students' participation in the BRMA program. The variable includes students who have *ever* participated in BRMA. Thus for these analyses students who left BRMA at any point are still included as participants. This may underestimate BRMA effects. Also the non-participant group includes students who receive some of BRMA services such as tutoring or youth leadership and parent training. This also may underestimate BRMA effects. After employing the PSM technique and including student-level controls, the coefficient on the program indicator variable, estimates the BRMA's impact on student performance.

Analytical Model

The analysis estimating the effects of BRMA participation on student performance was conducted using the regression model shown in Equation 1:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 BRMA + \beta_2 Race/Ethnicity + \beta_3 EDS + \beta_4 AIG + \beta_5 SWD + \beta_6 ELL + \beta_7 Days\ Absent + \beta_8 Gender + \varepsilon_i$$

where, Y_{igt} is the test score or GPA for student *i*; β_1 is the coefficient on the program indicator variable; and ε_{ig} is the unobserved random error.

Evaluation Findings

Overall, these analyses show, as illustrated in Table 3, that the program had a statistically significant positive impact on the GPA of high school students. However, BRMA program has no statistically significant impact on student test score performance. Additionally, there were no consistent student-level controls across the models that were associated with increased performance. The following analyses reveal the effects of variables other than BRMA participation on academic outcomes.

Individual Student-Level Controls. Because there are other factors that influence student test performance and GPA, we included several controls to adjust for unequal differences between students. As shown in Table 2, the controls used differed by the model.

Elementary and Middle Schools. In the reading model, AIG-identified students score significantly higher on the reading EOG test than non-AIG students. On average, ELL students performed worse than their peers. A one-standard deviation increase in a student's math score is associated with an increase of 0.442 standard deviations on the EOG reading exam.

In the math model, a one-standard deviation increase in a student's reading score is associated with an increase of 1.226 standard deviations on the EOG math exam. Students who have disabilities score lower than their counterparts. On average, male students score higher than female students, by about 0.31 standard deviations.

In the Algebra model for middle school, scoring one standard deviation higher on the EOG reading and math exam is associated with a 0.912 and 0.193 increase on the Algebra 1 EOC exam, respectively.

High Schools. In the Algebra 1 model for high school, an increase in the number of days a student is absent is associated with a decreased Algebra 1 test score by about 0.017 standard deviations. AIG-identified students score significantly higher than non-AIG students. On average, SWD score lower than their peers by about 0.428 standard deviations.

In the English 1 model, African American students scored significantly lower than non-Black students on the EOC exam by 0.339 standard deviations. On average, ELL students performed than worse than their peers. An increase in the number of days a student is absent is associated with a decrease in the EOC score by about 0.017 standard deviations. Male students scored worse than comparable female students by 0.334 standard deviations.

In the Biology model, African American students scored significantly lower than non- African American students on EOC exam by 0.425 standard deviations. Students who have disabilities score lower than their counterparts by 1.140 standard deviations. An increase in the number of days a student is absent is associated with a decrease in the EOC score by about 0.020 standard deviations.

In the U.S. History model, an increase in the number of days a student is absent is associated with a decrease in the EOC score by about 0.018 standard deviations.

In the GPA models, students who have disabilities have lower weighted GPAs than their counterparts by 0.208 points.

Summary of Effect Estimates. Across all of the test score models, participation in BRMA did not have a statistically significant effect on student test score performance. Although not statistically significant, the coefficient on the BRMA indicator variable is positive in the math, Algebra 1 middle school and English 1 models. The coefficient is negative in the reading, Algebra 1 high school, Biology and U.S. History models. The GPA model indicates that high school graduates who have ever participated in the BRMA program had statistically significantly higher GPAs than non-participants.

Conclusions of the quasi-experimental analyses

Similar to previous impact studies on school-based mentoring programs, this program did not reveal differences in student test score performance; however, this does not necessarily suggest that the program is ineffective (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012; NCEE, 2009; McQuillin, Smith & Strait, 2011). As literature indicates, students who participate in school-based mentoring programs often experience several benefits including increased self-esteem, college aspirations, and academic attitudes (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002; Converse & Lignugaris/Kraft,

2009). Because these analyses only measure relatively objective outcomes, it is difficult to estimate the total effects of BRMA on students while in CHCCS.

There are a number of limitations to remember. First, the effectiveness of PSM is dependent on the richness and quality of the available controls. In this study, only a small number of student-level controls are used; therefore, the potential for biased estimates is present. As previously discussed, the inclusion of teacher, classroom, school level controls and additional student level controls such as prior performance may provide stronger estimates of the effect of BRMA. Second, PSM only adjusts for observed characteristics between the treatment and control students. Therefore, if treatment students differ from control students based on any unobserved characteristics, such as motivation, this is not accounted for and may result in biased estimates. Third, in some of the models the sample size is small, which causes difficulty in detecting a program effect. Fourth, as noted above, the participants and non-participant sample may be confounded by non-participants receiving some BRMA services and the BRMA participants including students who had limited services. Finally, the number of cases, particularly in the BRMA group, may suppress statistical significance.

Table 2. Matching and Control Variables used for Propensity Scores Matching and Analyses

Matching Variable	Math Model	Reading Model	Algebra 1 MS Model	Algebra 1 HS Model	English 1 Model	Biology Model	US History Model	Weighted GPA
Black	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Hispanic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Native American	X	X						
Multiracial/Multiethnic	X	X						
EDS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
AIG	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
SWD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ELL	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Days Absent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Gender	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Math Score	X	X	X					
Reading Score			X					
Algebra 1 Score			X	X				
English 1 Score					X			
Biology Score						X		
US History Score							X	
Weighted GPA								X

Table 3. Propensity Score Matching Analyses Showing Effects of BRMA on Student Performance Outcomes

Variable	Reading Model Coeff.	SE	Math Model Coeff.	SE	Algebra 1 MS Model Coeff.	SE	Algebra 1 HS Model Coeff.	SE	English 1 Model Coeff.	SE	Biology Model Coeff.	SE	U.S. History Model Coeff.	SE	Weighted GPA Coeff.	SE
BRMA	-0.083	0.085	0.111	0.143	0.025	0.089	-0.026	0.117	0.062	0.113	-0.030	0.137	-0.020	0.140	0.183*	0.080
Black	-0.239	0.133	0.054	0.225	0.078	0.194	-0.191	0.191	-0.339*	0.153	-0.425*	0.205	-0.384	0.200		
EDS	0.003	0.137	-0.080	0.232	0.134	0.127	-0.047	0.133	-0.147	0.126	-0.072	0.155	-0.131	0.153		
AIG	0.504**	0.158	-0.205	0.268	0.104	0.133	1.242**	0.195	0.352	0.221	0.375	0.215	0.355	0.248		
SWD	-0.221	0.128	-1.87**	0.208	0.217	0.198	-0.428*	0.203	-0.231	0.263	-1.140**	0.392	-0.367	0.324	-0.208**	0.171
ELL	-0.596**	0.155	0.248	0.262	0.125	0.235	-0.136	0.240	-0.496*	0.218	-0.383	0.331				
Days Absent	-0.006	0.008	-0.011	0.013	-0.008	0.009	-0.017*	0.007	-0.017**	0.005	-0.020**	0.007	-0.018*	0.007		
Male	-0.161	0.087	0.308*	0.147	-0.061	0.097	-0.185	0.123	-0.334**	0.125	0.068	0.145	0.114	0.171	-0.650	0.081
Math Score	0.442**	0.012			0.912**	0.095										
Reading Score			1.256**	0.033	0.193*	0.088										
Constant	0.274	0.192	0.004	0.323	-0.516	0.238	0.161	0.218	0.573	0.171	0.305	0.241	0.334	0.229	2.381	0.068
Sample Size	1,189		1,189		81		170		141		125		99		189	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

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Sample Size	1,189		1,189		81		170		141		125		99		189	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Conclusions from the Quantitative Study

BRMA mentees graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary institutions at very high levels. BRMA mentees also have significantly higher GPAs than non-participants, but do not have significantly higher test scores. The descriptive analyses conducted by Hanover Research suggests that this may be because African American and Latin@ students in BRMA have different patterns of testing results.

Nevertheless, it appears that BRMA is able to motivate its mentees to graduate high school and go on to post-secondary education. These same mentees are getting higher grades in classes than a matched sample which is a good marker of students successfully doing classroom work. Yet it appears that CHCCS instructional program is not effectively translating BRMA mentees motivation and relative classroom success in test results. This then is a challenge to the CHCCS. Steele (1992) argues that it is demand situation of testing that creates an achievement gap. If this is true, then it is unlikely that CHCCS or any school that employs standardized testing will be able to eliminate the gap. Given the dominance of accountability policy in current school affairs, Effort and motivation must somehow be harnessed to test outcomes. Moreover, it appears that this is especially true for Latin@ mentees and test results in language arts. For African American students, some consideration may need to be given to testing of US history based on passing percentage, although this exam is no longer required by the state.

The Qualitative Study

The qualitative study used observations, interviews, and documents and other artifacts to develop and understanding of the program (as reported in the description section above) and to understand the views of mentees, parents and mentors. The interview data allows us to speak in terms of the perceptions about issues related to the BRMA program. It is important to remember, though, that the interview data cannot be generalized. These data provide us rather with perspectives on the program by participant group: parents, mentors, mentees and staff.

Parent Perspectives on BRMA

The parents of mentees agree to participate in BRMA activities and to work with the mentor. They also agree to go with the mentor to parent teacher conferences. Many of the programs for mentees have year-end celebrations, and parents as well as mentors join in on these as well. Finally, the new Parent University helps parents learn to navigate the school system and support their children. Thus parents interact with BRMA in many ways, and they do so because of the desire for their children to do well in school and go onto post-secondary education. BRMA has explicitly tried to address issues of race and education in the CHCCS, and the parent interviews

reveal that race is indeed an issue that needs addressed explicitly. For some of the parents, their support of BRMA is related to racial dynamics in the town and schools. As one parent noted:

Yeah, race plays a role in everything, everyday life, especially in Chapel Hill.

Some parents talked about the issue in terms of gender as well as race. One said she has had to tell her son:

They're waiting for you to mess up. You being a black male, they're waiting for you to mess up.

Parents indicated that CHCCS has a history that it needs to live down. One parent personalized it:

In the second grade, a teacher told [my son] that he would never be anybody --that he would never read or write, um, he'd probably sell drugs on the street. And she actually told me to my face that she actually felt sorry for me at home. And that's when I told them that they needed to take the child out of the room right now, so I had to clean up a little bit of stuff and let her know that my day on Saturday started before she got up out of the bed, that you know, he was in swimming classes, he was doing basketball, and we go to church on Sunday, so don't tell me that he can't sit still. So don't tell me what he's going to (do) because you don't know what the future holds. You know, she's no longer working for Chapel Hill city schools no more, either.

In this case, the parent took effective action and apparently so did the school system, but such incidents continue to drive the view that race is an ongoing issue in the towns and schools. Another parent explained how he wished his son to deal with race:

I want him to overcome racial barriers, to "demand respect" in racial incidents, but never escalate such incidents.

Of course, not all parents are willing to address race so directly. One mother simply said about her family: "We just don't go there." Further, for Latinos the issue is often coded in terms of language. A parent explained this issue in terms of her daughter, noting that BRMA helped with this:

She was confused with the language and then it was very difficult for her but when they offered her the program, it was a lot of help for her.

Other parents had critiques of our current educational system. One parent said:

> I'm not excited about these tests, EOG tests. Teachers are teaching to the tests… The
> system is not working. Kids are lost, but passing the tests. You can't blame the teachers.
> Education is about comprehending and understanding.

Parents commented very positively about all aspects of BRMA: mentoring, leadership, service
programs, tutoring, advocacy, education and cultural enrichment programs, Parent University,
college visits, etc. Yet several wanted to emphasize how difficult it was to allow their child to be
with a mentor. One parent shared her worry:

> The first time [the daughter] and [the mentor] went out, I was really, really scared. I was
> thinking like, "Oh my goodness. Is she gonna be happy? Oh my goodness…she's gonna
> be nice? I mean, she's not gonna be mean to her?

Another parent discussed the mentors of her daughters noting the difference in how they
worked with the children and what that meant. She noted she did not have overly lofty
expectations for the mentor:

> I didn't have no expectations …just a good communication and understanding and, you
> know, keeping a schedule [with] my child and vice versa. That's pretty much it.

She noted that her daughters' relationships with their mentors ended up working well:

> … being comfortable with each other. Uh, the mentor being comfortable with the girls
> and the girls being comfortable back. ..she just… enjoys being with her mentor.

> …she just, um, enjoys being with her mentor… One of the things that I can't afford to do
> for them, you know, she takes her places and does a lot…just a lot of things. So… it's
> really been good for all my girls.

> She's [the mentor] really taken time to go over a couple of projects and stuff. They help
> them with their projects and find ways to do projects different ways. It's just wonderful.
> The mentors help. And just caring for them as your child. The mentors, they really make
> you comfortable they're with your child.

Yet the mother thought one mentor was judgmental and this required the mother to deal with
this:

…one of my girls …the mentor was disappointed in her …and I felt that she jumped… It was a rough spot. She wanted her to be successful and so we worked on that.

This same parent 'worked' on cross-racial understanding as well with the mentors:

They're different [the mentors] because of color, you know. African Americans are not like white families. It's just different. So it's really been a good exposure. It's been good.

Other parents shared similar stories about working with the mentors, getting though 'rough spots' and learning to work together. Parents also saw the mentors and BRMA as a support in advocating for their children. One parent explained this succinctly:

They [the mentors] would always…you know, if I scheduled an appointment with the school, they would come. Blue Ribbon always meets with me. Once he was in high school, [staff] would meet with me with his guidance counselor. Well, the way the middle schools do it is they team-teach, so if your child's having a problem you're gonna be in there with three teachers and maybe a guidance counselor and then you, and then they're all over there and then you. It's kind of nice having someone else there with you. …So I mean, I've had to advocate for them. One time he got in trouble and I think I sent a letter all the way up to the Central Office and, you know, [staff] kind of advised me on it.

In the cases shared in the interviews, most mentoring relationships turned out fine—but the concern of the parents for their children rings through these comments, and reveal the demands that mentoring makes of families. Parents take on additional roles when their child is part of BRMA, but they say this has been worth the effort.

Parents were universally positive about BRMA. As they said:

I am very grateful with everyone at the program.

They were hard on [the daughter] when they needed to be. I mean, they weren't hard on her, but they pushed her. You know? And they gave her something to strive for and brought her out of her shell. It was good, I mean, you know, I can't say anything, absolutely anything bad about that program.

They give a hundred and ten, you know.

I want to tell them that I am very appreciative of the program and the mentors. It's an exemplary program. It's very beautiful. I am very grateful.

The evaluation team pushed parents to be critical of the program in the interviews. **This brought up only one complaint--about the expectation that parents would attend BRMA activities and do advocacy work.** As above, there were stresses in developing an effective mentoring relationship and in negotiating with schools. Yet these seemed to work out over time with the support of the program.

The parents expressed this latter assessment in a number of ways:

I wouldn't change anything about the program.

…Blue Ribbon does make a difference. And I don't know if the Chapel Hill City Schools really know that they make a difference, I know they can see how many have graduated and went on to college, but when you look at where they started from and where they end up at, even when looking at my son… I look at where he was, not proficient in reading, now he is reading on 8th grade level. That took everybody working together to get that done. It wasn't just me, it just wasn't the teachers, it wasn't Blue Ribbon, it was everybody had a stake in that, you know what I'm saying? And I just think that if we continue to work together for that child, for the need of that child, no child would be left behind.

It's a great program.

Mentor Perspectives on BRMA

BRMA mentors, while diverse in many ways, tend to be middle class and white. The BRMA program recruits widely and actively with hopes that a more diverse pool of mentors can be developed. These mentors then receive twelve hours of training, are assigned a mentee and then regularly report on their activities to BRMA, which are reviewed and commented upon as necessary. Mentors are to meet weekly with the mentee and share activities together. Mentors are also to advocate for their mentee and join with parents in this advocacy. Finally, mentors are encouraged to attend BRMA sponsored events and celebrate their mentees' accomplishments.

Clearly, being a BRMA mentor is not to be taken lightly. Much is expected of you. Moreover, the mentor is also involving herself or himself in lives of the mentees and their families and, as with all relationships; this involves not only time but much social and emotional work that needs support.

The mentors found the training was quite good. One mentor explained:

> *I think [it is] a really good training program.…They had one of the meetings--meetings were almost like dramas, little workshops bringing up various incendiary questions or situations. And then we had some existing mentors came and talked and I think maybe one or two brought mentees.*

> *…The training was really good…the support is always there.*

Another mentor elaborated:

> *So I feel like the training and the support has been good. I read every word of the booklet that he passed out and…especially at the beginning, it's kind of nice to have a little bit of a template or a formula that said you need to do this…*

Mentors also saw the value of the overall BRMA program and its connections within the school system as well:

> *I think Blue Ribbon has always been there for them as far as the tutoring aspect goes and advocating for them in the school system. Umm…obviously they are much more connected to the programs and they are able to monitor the programs a lot better than I would be able to do on my own.*

The mentors saw themselves as offering their mentees a range of things that the mentees may not be exposed to otherwise. The mentors have had a range of experiences that each serves as a basis for their work with their mentees. Some of the range can be seen in the following quotes:

> *I think probably that the biggest thing is, my life experiences are pretty broad and varied and I think I can help broaden horizons for most kids, for anybody that I were to mentor.*

> *So I feel like versus what I've seen and been through, I really kind of beat the odds a bit.…I'm still growing and still learning and I feel like there's a lot that I still haven't really seen…*

> *So at any rate, I had some feel because I had worked with the indigenous people … for two years that … I had some feel for them and it was easy for me to imagine the kind of things they were going through in adjusting to a new culture.*

The mentors did many different sorts of things with their mentees. In doing so, they recognized some limitations with both the community and schools:

Um, you know, for kids her age, until you get into college, this town is really bereft of activities. Um, the teen drop-off below the post office in Chapel Hill is a scary and awful…

So I think school is probably, depending on the age and what not, can be, well it can be intimidating for anyone. I think it's particularly intimidating for the young Latinos. And that may also be the case for Blacks…

The tough part for him was that his parents did not speak very much English at that point. So I think the parent teacher conferences were either nonexistent or very difficult for them. …So I don't think that they were able to keep up with him if he started to struggle in the class. So I think that is one thing that the mentor program really helped with.

Building the relationship, according to the mentors included both being consistent and doing things the youth find interesting and different. Consistency seemed to be essential to developing a good relationship with both the mentee and their family:

…One of the things that I had tried to establish from the beginning, and this was completely based on [staff] advice, was to be extraordinarily consistent to like call before every time we were getting together, to never be late, to never change plans. You know, like just whatever we said we were gonna do, we did exactly. And I think that was actually very reassuring to them because they saw that I could be consistent and [the mentee] was always there and ready, so they were consistent back. So we…I think that was a good start to the relationship.

Going for ice cream, taking a walk, going to the museum or … going to a movie. Take him out to dinner. Kick the soccer ball around. It was just a matter of spending time with him on a consistent basis. I think that was very important in the beginning you know pretty much, every Thursday afternoon we are going to get together. I think that was a very important part of the beginning of the relationship. After that it became more flexible. It wasn't that important for me to be there on a specific time. I think we were able to mix our days around.

The activities varied by both the mentees and mentors interests:

In the summer we go swimming sometimes. We go to the movies sometimes. We've been to Duke Gardens. We've been to the Botanical Gardens.

We have done all kinds of stuff. Athletic events are kind of a biggie. Basketball games and soccer matches, men's and women's. And, you know, we have been to the museum in Raleigh, history museum which doesn't really keep them right on the edge of their seat but they you know like the museum of science and whatnot. Then there is a

museum over at Durham that we have been to. We have been to some cultural events I guess you would call it.

Often we come here [mentor's home], we make dinner, we hang out. Sometimes we play board games, sometimes we'll watch a movie, sometimes we don't do much of anything. But usually I pick her up on Friday after school…So that's sort of the default. If we have nothing else to do, that's kind of what we do. But we do other things. We just went to an Alvin Ailey performance. We're going to see Circa - that's like Cirque du Soleil - pretty soon. On Saturday we went up and we visited UNC-G…

Mentors also prompted utilization of BRMA resources and advocated with teachers:

As far as the education aspect of it, if the grades were bad, I would put him in touch with the tutoring program and try to get tutors for them and that kind of thing

When she got the low grade in Science, um, I asked her why, we talked about it. I emailed her Science teacher and I told him that …he's using words that she doesn't understand and she's embarrassed to raise her hand. So could…I know he's very busy, but could he work out something where he could just check in on her every once in a while and just get some eye contact as to whether she was confused, troubled, struggling.

Mentors also took on some responsibilities that they saw beyond the normal mentoring role. Usually this concerned helping with academics. Two mentors explained:

I spent a fair amount of time one summer tutoring him in math though I don't see that as a mentor's mission… the job or whatever. But when he was interested he was a quick study.

I guess that the biggest thing I have had in my thought process has been that we really our mission is not so much to tutor and all that sort of thing. It's to expose the mentee to things that he or she might not have had exposure to. And I know when I started out I wanted to bring his grades up and go full board and getting after him in the classroom and that sort of thing. And that's not really our function. It's nice to suggest that but …it gets in the way of you enjoying your time together. I am still learning that…

Aside from establishing a supportive relationship, advocating, providing cultural enrichment activities, and addressing academic needs, mentors also took on a role of explaining how the dominant society worked on a more interactional level:

I would say look "the deal with Anglos is look them in the eye and smile and if you can do that, you are going to get by in pretty good shape. If you look down then it shows them you don't think you are good as they are" but if you look them in the eye then you are home free.

We get to have a lot more teachable moments and she's sort of, um, now she kind of talks over me so I've kind of reined her in a little bit. But, you know, I make her listen to me about some things. Manners. When she's introduced to somebody… 'how do you do? It's nice to meet you.' It's not just the head down and we don't acknowledge the person. Eye contact, 'how do you do? It's nice to meet you?' and she said, "Okay, okay, okay."

I do correct her grammar a lot.

The mentors saw themselves as bringing something to the mentee that was more than just exposure:

I hope she gets another perspective on things.

So I hope that I bring that to her. Just exposure to the world and to show that she can do something; she can be successful; she can make it.

The mentors had aspirations for their mentees that mirrored BRMA's hopes for the youth.

You know the main this is I want to see [the mentee] finish high school.

I hope that she will be a rational, uh, rational child, turn into a rational young adult that will grow into a rational adult. Um, I hope that she will go to college. I hope that she will be successful. I hope that she'll be happy. I hope that she'll have positive relationships with people. Um…and I hope that she realizes that there's more to the world than just what she sees right now. That's what I hope…

While BRMA's focus is appropriately on the youth, the mentors also saw themselves as benefitting from being mentors. For some the relationship was fulfilling, others learned things about their own family life, and some simply found contributing to the community to be worthwhile in itself. As they said:

[my mentee] has taught me that relationships can be really easy. She's taught me that relationships can be really non-judgmental. She's taught me that you can rib somebody and have no hidden meaning behind it. Um, she's just taught me the joy of having one of the most delightful people I've ever known, um, in my life on a regular basis, and it's really been fabulous.

I think one of the things that I realized at the beginning was how little even though I spent times with my kids, that I didn't set time aside just to be with them. I think both my wife and I picked that up almost immediately and that we would set aside two or three hours to spend time with one of our mentees and yet we wouldn't set two or three hours aside with our own children. Yeah we were with them but we were doing laundry, cooking, running errands. And I think that …that we realized that we needed to do it with our own children as well. I think it helped with our relationship with our children

I think that what I get out of it … you know it's altruistic I suppose. I wanted to give back to the community and it makes me feel good that I can give back to the community and broaden their horizons.

The mentors had few suggestions to improve BRMA. As one mentor put it:

I think [staff] is always trying to improve the program and I guess there is not a program anywhere that couldn't be improved. I just don't know how it could be.

When pressed, some suggestions were offered. Mentoring has financial costs that can be burdensome. Further, mentors are a resource that may be useful in other ways as well.

But, you know, when I went to buy things, you know, they just let me pay and I don't know how to do it differently. So now I do wish that sometimes she would bring money to pay because I am on a fixed income, I do have a lot of expenses, and sometimes, you know, if you add it up, it's a lot. I mean, just taking somebody out to dinner once a week is a lot. So that would be one thing that I wish could be different.

I think that BRMA should, um, use the amazing mentors that they have and their contacts to do a, um, a jobs fair.

Finally, there was a reference to a dilemma noted by Shujaa (1994) that true education involves education in one's home culture not just the dominant culture. Here the focus is on what the schools should do as much as BRMA:

I always say that I think it should prepare them for functioning in this culture but I also think education should keep them up to date, not up to date, but give them exposure to their own culture. So that… many of them don't even know what their own culture is other than their family situations because they were very young when they came. In the case of [name], he is an American citizen because he was born here. So education needs that… it needs to prepare one live and work in this culture but also it wouldn't hurt to

have, and I know this would not be popular with the population at large but I think they ought to have some continuing education about their own culture. And the fact that they should finally take pride in their culture.

Mentee Perspectives on BRMA

BRMA Mentees found the program to be very helpful. The mentees saw their parents as having high aspirations for them.

> *Like my…my family's expectations for me; they have always been the same. Like they always just wanted me to do good, 'cause I've always had like good grades and stuff. Just like I make sure I stay on top of my academics.*

> *…My family, I think they want me to, like, not go through the same thing they went through. I think they like…well, I know-- they want me to like go to college, get my education, have a nice job, and not…like, be like my parents that they have to work hard to get my brother and my sister to where we're at right now.*

Similarly, the mentees have developed high aspirations for themselves. This was framed in several ways:

> *Education to me is doing well in school. Trying the best you can do and doing always something new and getting good grades and … if you get a bad grade that you think isn't good, try it again and keep on doing better and try to improve it.*

> *I want to do something in my life.*

> *I want to be somebody important in life. I want to help my family. I don't want…like when I go to college and I graduate and become a dentist, I want to be the one helping them. I don't want my parents to still be working. I want to work for them, because that's what they're doing for me right now.*

> *Got to go to college, get a master's at least, try and get well-paying job so I can like bring home some good money, give that to my family and friends in the community and stuff.*

> *To be happy. And um…to be happy and just…just go forward and have like a life of so many like adventures and I want to be stable in my life so I can just travel and like do what I want. Like I just want to like be able to like do something and not have to worry about a price if I want to do something. I mean, not to go crazy like go to five star hotels. But like something reasonable ….*

However, the mentees have found it sometimes difficult to work consistently towards these goals. Some of this is the simple reality that school entails a lot of work that has to be regularly completed. Further, not all teachers are likeable. As one student put it:

> *Once you get to high school you have to do homework every day. You have homework on the first day. If you miss your assignment, you're life backs up. Two days of missing can affect your whole grade. You have to stay on top of things. And um, oh yeah, of course there's like teachers you're not gonna like. There are teachers I don't really care for but others are really sweet and nice.*

The mentees regarded the program as having a positive effect on their motivation. In the following quotes, they explain how BRMA motivates them by providing opportunities, pushing for better school work, teaching mentees to communicate with their teachers, by providing tutoring , and most importantly by linking this to going on to college.

> *I mean, going to the program I didn't really know what to expect. But they do such a great job helping us. Like, um, they motivate you. Like I know what motivated me a lot for getting good grades and studying was like, at the end of the quarter if you got A's and B's, they would take you bowling or ice skating or to Frankie's. And even now, even like right now I'm in high school, but that all motivates me still. Like "Oh, why not?" the surprise at the end. Um, and, I mean, they help you apply to college, which was what I was really looking forward to since both of my parents never went to college, and my brother who kind of didn't really go to college. He went to Durham Tech this semester and really didn't like it. But I feel like applying to Durham Tech is not the same as applying to any other college.*

> *Well, sometimes I'm like that type of person, I'm like "Oh, I don't want to do this. I don't want to do it." They're like "You have to do it because it's for the best of you," so they have helped me and done things for the good of me.*

> *It's had a really important role. Um, I don't really know if I would be going off to college if I wouldn't have been in Blue Ribbon, just because…like I probably would be going to community college instead of a college, uh, just because…like I've never gone through it…through the process or no one else could have helped me with the process, so I would have been scared to go through it all, or I wouldn't have known to get my extracurricular activities. I wouldn't really have cared and maintained my GPA high. Stuff like that. And with my mentor, my previous one, uh, she was always like…she would always tell me to do my homework. She would be like "If you're gonna…if you're gonna…" She would always use a quote like, "If you're gonna…if you're gonna do it wrong the first time…" figure you actually have a lot of time to go back and correct what you did*

wrong." So she would always be like "Do it right once so you don't have to do it again." And I mean, it's really true.

Before…I never communicated with my teachers. I'd just be like "Whatever, I'm just gonna leave it to that." And I used to not like my teachers, for the reason that I would get bad grades and I'd be like "Oh, that teacher. I don't like her. She gave me a bad grade." But now it's like when I have a bad grade I'm actually like communicating with the teacher, "Why do I have a bad grade? What do I have to do?"

It's helped out a lot because I know they like give a lot of extra help. Like they do, like, tutoring and stuff. Like my mentors, they like sort of give me, like, some lessons, like help me in life and stuff.

A big role. Um, I don't think most of the opportunities I would get if I didn't have Blue Ribbon. Like there's so much they…like they can help you with so much. Um…if you…like if [you need] something, they will be there with it. Like camp, the money for scholarships or anything like that, they will provide for you.

I had like a lot of help with like school and like camps and like a lot of things that I needed help with, and school work and things like that. And it brought up my grades being in Blue Ribbon.

If you [need} something, they will be there with it. Like camp, the money for scholarships or anything like that, they will provide for you.

BRMA provides many supportive program elements but mentors have a role in having high expectations for their mentees as well. Mentors also advocated effectively and shared in the struggles of their mentees.

My mentor. Like he's more like…he helps me a lot with planning for my future. So like after high school and like what do I need to be doing during the school year so by the time I get to college I'll have it all under control.

We go on like different campuses to, um, see plays and like different shows, because she's really into that, and we've been to a lot of places just supporting college life and she always talks about like what I want to do and all this other stuff.

So it's always been…he always tells me like "You need to do this" or "Take this class so that by the time you get to college you'll know all about this subject."

She helps me and we have been reading stuff and we have been doing really fun stuff. She has been helping me read because you know I am not the best reader but I am not the worst reader so she has been helping me improve my reading.

Like we've had like shared tears together and everything, and she's always a person I can count on, especially like when I'm stuck somewhere.

He stood up…I think he stood up for me at the beginning of the year when we were talking about my math class, 'cause I didn't want to take…at first I didn't want to take AP Calculus, but like he went in there, he like talked to the teacher and stuff, like ways that I could get my grade up or like…'cause I had to get it up before report cards came out. So he like sort of asked the teacher for ways that I could improve my grade or like what I needed to work on better in the class.

Of course, not all mentors worked out as well as the above quotes indicate. One student explained her struggles with her first mentor:

Well my previous one, she was a little bit older, so um, she didn't…really…like some stuff that she wanted to do didn't really get my attention. Um…I guess that was the only difficulty. And since she was more like older, she was more conservative so she wouldn't really like want…she wouldn't really want to do new things. I mean, I understand 'cause like she was older so I didn't want her to break a bone when we went ice skating or any of that.

Changing mentors was not always bad. One student explained what each of her mentors contributed to her life. Her first mentor took her to lots of activities; the second was more focused on school; the third helped with understanding her cultural heritage.

I mean, they were great. As far as I can remember with the first one, they were great. But again, I was in fourth grade. We did a lot of fun activities. Um, my second mentor, she was great but she was more about like education, education, education, so we really didn't do many activities. But I mean, we would cook at her house, we would watch movies. So she made like studying and all that fun for me. So it wasn't like boring. Um…and then with [current mentor], I guess… I mean, my previous ones were white, so with [current mentor] I can relate more, like we can talk Spanish and understand, or like we can be like "Oh, that's something like…" that's Hispanic this and that. So I guess I just can relate more to her.

Mentees clearly think they have benefitted from being BRMA. Two students expressed the views of many:

I would say that Blue Ribbon is a really, really good program. I think they should put it in other states 'cause it like…from what I have seen, a lot of other people like black and Latinos and Asians, they have been able to go to college. Like Blue Ribbon has helped them go to college. 'Cause you know how like some kids, it's hard for them? So Blue

Ribbon has helped them a lot. They helped me a lot. And I think the message I would send is never to give up. Like always try no matter what. No matter what people say. Like if you're from this part, you can do this… it doesn't matter. No matter where you come from, you can still do whatever you want.

But I believe without Blue Ribbon many students…minority students or students of color won't be able to college or as far as some of us have gone.

Staff Perspectives on BRMA

While BRMA staff believed that they are doing a good job, they also have a critical view of what currently needs to be done. The staff assessed their work in multiple ways. In part, their assessment was based on the model used by the program for continuous improvement and development.

We have a model of continuous reflection on what we're doing and what we can and should be doing. And of course there are times where we make bigger leaps and those -- the times when we make the biggest leaps have been times when we have intentionally tried to investigate one piece of our program that we really want to work on. So we do some internal research, reflection, some focus group work or whatever it is, and engage our program participants in giving us feedback on what's there, what they wish was there, what shouldn't be there, and then we can put a plan in place for that.

We almost always pilot something and use pilot funding oftentimes.

One thing that we do, try to do consistently is every two to three years we use the What's Working? Evaluation toolkit …. That's really a benchmark comparison – how we are doing and it also shows what developmental areas based on the forty developmental assets we're making an impact on. – how we are doing and it also shows what developmental areas based on the forty developmental assets we're making an impact on. At this point, we basically know what that data is going to show. It doesn't vary much.

The model's stable….This is a mature program.

The evaluation being reported on here was also part of a continuous improvement process, and the results will be feedback to staff and participants in the coming year.

Staff also assessed their work in terms of the mission of BRMA, which as one staff member put it is:

…number one: students graduating from high school; number two… students enrolling in post-secondary education; and then … probably number three is changing the system.

To accomplish this mission, BRMA has a number of initiatives that staff worked long hours to implement effectively:

> *Blue Ribbon is first and foremost a mentoring program, so we have that mentoring component where adult community members are paired up with students from 4th through 12th grade, and really just looking to help them discover, you know, 'What are your interests and what are your strengths?' And how can you bring those, uh, forward and broaden their vision for themselves and their future.*

> *…We offer enrichment funds so that students can take music classes or join a sports camp or develop their writing skills, if it's in a summer camp or something like that*

> *For the students who are involved we offer academic support, cultural enrichment opportunities, leadership development through YLI and high school… college and career exposure…*

> *…A big focus on volunteerism and leadership and service learning.*

> *Blue Ribbon works to provide students with the necessary resources outside of the classroom to do the best that they can and work on closing the achievement gap is something that Blue Ribbon talks about a lot.*

> *…We always have the back of our students. Of course when we know that they did something wrong we always hold them accountable.*

> *Around that piece is also the advocacy component. So getting kids and parents more comfortable advocating for themselves in schools and advocating for their needs…*

> *…To move our advocacy from individual student advocacy to systemic advocacy within the school district.*

> *…Having that racial identity component be part of BR, and that's a key - not necessarily articulated in our program description - but that's a key part of what BR does is just looking at, um, paying attention to race and how that plays a part in our students' experiences in school and how can we go about helping build that, like, positive racial identity with them or just have conversations about race that aren't had in school.*

> *For the most part, we just openly acknowledge race and incorporate their racial perspectives and their cultural perspectives into all of the work that we do with them. So they know, that they feel like it's ok for that part of who they are to be present when they're working with us.*

BRMA has found that a strengths-based approach works best to avoid a deficit model of working with youth and families. They explained this approach in various ways:

…What I'm trying to do is help the kids identify their strengths. So what are things that you're good at? That you're already good at? You know? And help them build upon that.

…Part of what our mission is to identify and foster those strengths and interests and those things become programming.

…We match mentors with the students based on shared strengths and interests---and that's what most of the relationship should be based on. That makes the mentoring relationship more rewarding and it makes the mentor more successful to have that as a focus rather than targeting deficits and needs.

It is important to note that a strengths-based model means that the program is not for all youth. Those with severe needs would need a different approach.

The staff of BRMA were also well aware of the issues they face in working with youth and families in the context of the school system. As they put it:

I think many of our parents are people who didn't feel empowered themselves in school, so it's not a safe place to go back to and advocate for your child.

Because you know with the school system at large, you know, it's pretty easy for the parents to stay disconnected.

…what I've seen when I go to Latino family nights and diversity trainings, is that there's just so much more work to do and there's not as much commitment, I think, to really, putting in the time and effort that it takes to really be culturally competent and to really do the things it's going to take to bring these families in, in a way that I see Blue Ribbon doing it. …I think part of it is just being really open and willing to talk about it, and just do something about it, you know. …Like a real - a true desire to understand where these kids are coming from and what their needs are. As opposed to… I went to a Latino parent night last fall and it was, you know, they bring all these parents in and… there's just this laundry list of "Here are things you need to do. You need to do this, you need to do this. Fill this out, fill out this form. You need this service, you need this service." And there was just nothing empowering about it, there was nothing engaging about it, there was not one school staff member there who spoke Spanish. So I mean all of these ways, you're - you look like you want to engage these families, but I'm watching you do it and you're kind of failing at it.

…What I've come to see in the schools as well is that students of color often don't have the same leadership positions as white students and so they're not represented in student government. They're not leading other clubs. They're not involved in other clubs. So YLI gives them a place to be leaders, to be involved and to see that their

diversity, racial diversity can be a contribution and they still have, you know, they definitely play a valuable role.

We did have one person at the district level tell Graig and I that our um, involvement in an issue for one of our students was inappropriate, um, to which Graig and I both told her "no, it's not" because if what needed to be done was done then we wouldn't be having this conversation.

I think that there's - even though the program's been there for 15 years, there's still a lot of people in the district that don't know what it is, and don't understand it's really a part of the district….

Moreover, the key element of mentoring is not without its persistent issues. One staff member indicated what BRMA youth need most:

They need somebody in their life who is going to follow through.

In many cases, the staff were the ones to 'follow through' with the youth and the parents, but the mentors play a special role given their day-to-day, week-to-week, year-to-year relationship with the youth and their families. Yet as noted in the previous analyses, the mentoring relationship is not easy. Parents, mentors and mentees all have to do their part and even then there is much that go wrong. Relationships are messy. Cross-race relationships take special care, and the families often are troubled in themselves. Expectations are easily dashed in the press of everyday life. The staff knew this all too well:

The most common place it [the mentoring relationship] goes bad is in… poor communication between the mentor and the family. And that can happen from either direction.

The second most common thing are families that just don't follow through on the mentoring commitment, or put undue burdens onto the mentoring commitment, you know, [the families]really want the mentor to do something that the mentor feels like, "this isn't my job."

…When kids have a hard time warming up to their mentors, one thing they say is that they, the mentors, ask too many questions or talk too much, demand too much up front, and I think when you are building a relationship like that with somebody from a different culture - you think, most of our mentors are upper-middle class and white, and there's a certain style of communication that we have.

And there's some letting go involved. You know, I have a stake in this, but it's not my decision, it's not my life. That's hard, that's really hard.

It's frustrating when people don't do what you experience as their best interests….

I think…especially if you are somebody who holds herself to high standards you hold other people to high standards and it's hard to have … your tradition- you know, like if you've been a diligent, hardworking, successful person and your children are hardworking, diligent little people and then you got this mentee that's struggling or this family who's disengaged, it's frustrating. It's really frustrating.

The payoff though was in how well so many of the relationships work, and how well the mentees do in school.

The program clearly has some important successes overall as well which the staff have tracked:

Ninety-five percent [sic] of those kids have gone on to post-secondary education, which is really impressive.

…It's been going really well.

…You know the program defines success in pretty concrete ways because we have a participation agreement that I'm sure you're familiar with. So the participation agreement says that you need to have all As and Bs or you need to be going to tutoring. You need to be going to college visits. You need to be doing service projects. You need to be seeing your mentor once a week. You need to graduate high school. You need a college acceptance, you know, that's how we define success. Ultimately, did they graduate from high school? …Did they go on to a four-year college or to any post-secondary education?

…In terms of success is I really love the idea of taking kids who have traditionally been disenfranchised or sidelined and bringing them in and making them providers of service and providers of good things in the community.

Whatever…else comes to mind first when I think of Blue Ribbon is the sincerity of it and [that] the people who work here care.

Yet the staff offered two caveats that are telling. First, BRMA is situated in the school district in a way that makes it harder to have direct involvement with classrooms. The staff worked around this in many ways but:

Community programs don't have the potential for academic support, and advocacy that we have. School-based programs don't extend themselves as far beyond the school walls as we do.

If you're a community based mentoring program, even if you're a longitudinal program and an anti-racist program, you don't have the access to the school.

…We don't have a large leverage on services that are delivered inside the classroom.

Second, BRMA is doing a lot with limited resources:

…Sometimes it feels like we are doing too much.

But you do what you can with the resources that you have.

…So the first thing I'll talk about is a strength, but it's also is a weakness, is the number of staff members that we have that are part-time.

Ironically, these caveats seemed to push the staff harder—to seek ways to improve what they do even more and to actually do even more than they currently are.

…The area where that's the biggest concern to us is in our tutorial program. Because the tutorials are what've been staffed ever since we've started them, by temporary employees, by AmeriCorps, APPLES or Public Allies or you know, we've had a bunch of people who've done that – MSW interns – no one has done it for more than a year. So part of our effort to stabilize that.

And how can you work as a team with the other students? I think that's still an area of growth for us, to build relationships between the students and BR. Because I think they can be a huge asset to each other, um, in a way that they aren't currently.

And I see sort of as an area of weakness because there's sort of untapped potential in terms of relationships and resources that could be shared among parents, too, you know if so-and-so's mom and the other student in Blue Ribbon's mom, they like live around the corner from each other but if they don't know each other, not just in terms of - I'm thinking in terms of logistics - like carpooling, but also, just having that sense of asking that other parent what they do when their child does this or [that]…

I'd like to see parents more consistently engaged in our programming.

It's hard for [staff] to keep track of all of their students but I think if there was a way to improve that…that would be great, but I don't have specific ideas - that's a lot of people.

College completion and post-secondary completion… The college piece is my big thing.

These concerns are in addition to new things already in play. As the staff explained:

We're now going to norm what our successful practices have been so that all of those things are required for everyone.

I know that there has to be consistency for learning to take place. So the gap that I saw immediately when I started coming was they're only receiving help once a week, after school it's four days, Monday through Thursday, so one out of four days, they are receiving more academic help but what's happening the other three days? … And so next year, they're applying for three full-time members instead of just two from AmeriCorps.

...We just got approval - where um, the kids identify kind of six things that teachers do that make them, the students of color, feel successful in the classroom.

The staff were fully committed to BRMA's mission and doing what was necessary so that they are:

…making that all part of growing into a successful, high achieving adult, is giving back to your community and being a service provider.

Conclusions from the Qualitative Study

Parents, mentors, mentees and staff all find the program to be well-designed and effective. Each group, however, notes that the program asks a lot of participants. Parents have to welcome and work with another adult, often of another race and social class, and participate in BRMA activities and advocacy. Mentors have to negotiate a relationship with a young person and the family, finding a balance of expectation and support. They are to join the parent in advocating for the mentee as well. Mentees participate in a range of activities designed to boost their understanding of the wider world, their own culture, post-secondary education, leadership and service, and are expected to keep their grades in the A and B range. Staff design and deliver the programs, manage volunteers, advocate for the mentees, develop necessary funding and staff resources, keep track of the youth and the mentoring activities, and continue to develop the program to meet the needs of the youth they serve.

The need for advocacy is perhaps the most telling aspect of BRMA in the interviews. Whether seen as a racial or language issue, these youth, mentors, families, and staff find that they need to intervene in normal school processes and with teachers to have the children receive appropriate treatment. In this, BRMA demonstrates that the CHCCS are trying to address the needs of children of color and, in doing so, has established a conduit to families of color and

educated professionals that many school systems lack. Where 'race is everything', there is a vehicle for youth of color and their families to make something better happen. Repeating what one parent said about her child's success:

> *That took everybody working together to get that done. It wasn't just me, it just wasn't the teachers, it wasn't Blue Ribbon, it was everybody had a stake in that, you know what I'm saying? And I just think that if we continue to work together for that child, for the need of that child, no child would be left behind.*

Summary

In summary, this evaluation has found:

1. BRMA is a well-designed mentoring program. It meets and exceeds the 'best practices' established by research on youth mentoring programs.
2. BRMA is extremely effective in promoting high school graduation and college attendance.
3. BRMA has significant effects on grade point average of the students but not on test scores. This represents a challenge to CHCCS—how can the motivation and classroom work of these students be converted into improves test scores?
4. Parents, mentors, and mentees all highly value the program and see it as effective. Race and language are issues that participants find themselves continuing to struggle with in CHCCS.
5. Staff also highly value the program and, through a commitment to continuous improvement, work to make the program more effective for program participants. However, the level of staffing seems minimal for the tasks required and, consequently, relies on part-time, temporary and volunteer personnel.

The evaluation team concludes that Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate is an important asset to CHCCS. It is highly effective for youth and their families, and provides CHCCS with a conduit to families that have been traditionally hard for the schools to serve well.

Considerations

Many evaluation reports end with a set of recommendations, but this does not seem appropriate given the data analyzed here. Recommendations are most appropriate when there are both clear weaknesses in a program and when there are evident ways to address these weaknesses. To be sure, BRMA has identified initiatives that they wish to pursue but since we see these as an outcome of a continuous improvement model, these efforts are

not properly understood as weaknesses. Rather they next steps in serving the youth and families well. Given this state of affairs, the evaluation team views it best to offer 'considerations.' Literally, we see these as things that BRMA and CHCCS may wish to think through in the coming months and years.

We offer five considerations to BRMA staff:

1. What are the limit conditions of your work? How many mentees and others can you serve well with what mix of services and with what patterns of staffing and funding? As there seems to be real limits on the number of mentors available, what strategies are there to address these limit conditions?

2. How can you best provide mentees with exposure to the wider society and support their home cultures as well?

3. How can academic support best help with test outcomes? Given that Common Core Standards and assessments are beginning, this may be an opportunity for BRMA to more systematically address curricula and testing. Who should be brought into this conversation?

4. How can BRMA link with post-secondary institutions to promote continued college enrollment and student success?

5. How can BRMA more effectively coordinate efforts with schools, teachers, and administrators?

We offer five considerations to CHCCS:

1. BRMA has demonstrated that concerted efforts for youth of color can have dramatic effects. What are the district's limit conditions for supporting BRMA and potentially other efforts?
2. How can the CHCCS best employ the linkages to families and mentors that BRMA has developed? What is the relationship CHCCS would like to have with families of color?
3. How can the instructional program be altered to better channel student motivation and classroom effort into testing outcomes?
4. BRMA currently is a 'work around' of the instructional system of CHCCS in enrichment, leadership, academic support, student services and advocacy. How can BRMA be more of a central factor in the learning of students of color?
5. Race and language continue to affect both perceptions of, and relationships with, the schools. What would change this state of affairs and what would this change require of the district?

The evaluation team offers these considerations as a way to 'think through' the findings of this evaluation of BRMA. We will, over the coming years, continue to work with BRMA to examine these results and their more concrete implications for the program. We offer our services to CHCCS more broadly as well. Our hope is that the lessons of this evaluation are but a place to start a thoughtful dialogue on better serving students of color.

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Appendix 1: Hanover Research Report

Blue Ribbon Program Evaluation – Descriptive Statistics

Prepared for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

In the document, Hanover Research presents descriptive statistics based on whether or not a student is active, inactive or not enrolled in the Blue Ribbon program. We examine proficiency rates and mean scale scores on various end-of-grade and end-of-course exams. We also analyze key demographic variables such as proficiency in English, economic disadvantage, disability, gender and academically gifted status. We perform the analyses separately for African-American and Hispanic students. 2

Executive Summary

Methodology

The report includes initial calculations of the descriptive statistics intended for inclusion in the Blue Ribbon program evaluation. Prior to highlighting the key findings, however, we discuss several components of the methodology used to arrive at the statistics presented in the next section. As requested by Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, we calculated the descriptive statistics for each subset of students separately:

❖   African-American students (All)
❖   African-American students (Economically Disadvantaged Status (EDS) = N Only)
❖   African-American students (EDS = Y Only)
❖   African-American students (Active BRMA Only)
❖   Hispanic students (All)
❖   Hispanic students (EDS = N Only)
❖   Hispanic students (EDS = Y Only)
❖   Hispanic students (Active BRMA Only)

For each subset of students, the **first table reveals the percentages achieving proficiency** in the following subjects: Math, Reading, Algebra 1, Biology, English 1, and U.S. History. In all subjects, we considered students earning a score of either 3 or 4 on the relevant end-of-grade or end-of-course exam as having achieved proficiency. The proficiency rates span the nine schools years from 2002-2003 through 2010-2011 with two exceptions. The data set excludes achievement data for English 1 for 2006-2007 and for U.S. History for 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

The **second table shows the mean scale scores** earned by students in each of the aforementioned subjects. We relied on scale scores in order to account for the fact that the grading scales within a subject often vary across grades and school years. When scaling each student's score, we used the following formula:

where z = scale score, x = student score, μ = state mean score, and σ = state standard deviation. The scale score measures the distance of a student's score from the state mean in standard deviation units. A positive (or negative) scale score, therefore, indicates that a student performed better (or worse) than the state average. Figures 1 and 2 show the state test results used to scale the student scores, provided to Hanover Research by Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. 3

The **third table for each subset presents several demographic variables**, such as limited proficiency in English (LEP), economic disadvantage (EDS), disability (SWD), gender, and standing as academically gifted. With respect to LEP, we considered a student as having limited proficiency in English if the LEP variable for a given school year assumed a value of either "1" (representing a student's first year in the United States and limited understanding of English) or "Y" (for yes). With respect to gifted standing, the data set includes a general variable from 2002-2003 through 2006-2007. Beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, however, the data set distinguishes between gifted standing in math and gifted standing in reading.

The **fourth table counts the number of graduates** each year, either by program status (for all students as well as for students defined as EDS=N or Y) or by economic status (for active Blue Ribbon students only). We measure the number of graduates based on the year in which a student's given Blue Ribbon program status ends. For example, for students with Blue Ribbon status defined by BRMA 0203, we calculated the number of students who graduated in 2003. Lastly, for all African-American and all Hispanic students, a **fifth table shows mean grade point average (weighted and unweighted) at graduation**. The data remain limited to students graduating in 2003, 2004 and 2005, with no data available for students graduating in later years. Also, for the subsets defined by economic and program status, the data set contained no GPA data. 4

Descriptive Statistics

The following section analyzes the trends among active Blue Ribbon participants and students not enrolled in the program. We do not refer to inactive Blue Ribbon participants, as the small number of students with inactive status limits our ability to draw reliable conclusions.

African American Students

❖ **Among all African-American students, a higher percentage of active Blue Ribbon students achieved proficiency in the core subjects of math and reading than non-participants in all nine school years**. Active Blue Ribbon students also had higher mean scale scores in the core subjects of math and reading as compared to non-participants in all school years. Math proficiency rates among both participants and non-participants fell sharply in 2005-2006 with the introduction of a new version of the math test, and remained lower in the following years than in the three school years prior to the decline. For reading, both groups also experienced a drop in student performances with the introduction of a new reading test in 2007-2008 and proficiency levels have remained lower thereafter. Similar results were also observed in proficiency levels among economically-disadvantaged Africa-American students, although this was not the case for non-economically disadvantaged students.

❖ With respect to the non-core classes, **active African American (all) students typically achieved noticeably higher rates of proficiency than non-participants in the other subjects examined (Algebra I, Biology, English, and US History) as well**, **with the exception of US History.** Unfortunately, the limited sample sizes of students in particular student sub-groups limit our ability to draw results from other comparisons involving the non-core classes, with one exception. Economically disadvantaged African-American students who were active achieved higher rates of proficiency than non-participants.

❖ For all African-American students, the number of graduates among active students in the program ranged from 2 to 5, whereas that among non-participants ranged from 69 (in 2006-07) to 103 (in 2010-11), with an average slightly above 86. Not surprisingly, the graduates among smaller sub-groups of African American students active in the program were even smaller or non-existent. The limited sample sizes did not allow for a comparison of student GPAs (active vs. non-program students) at graduation. Note also that the data set only supplied grade point averages for students graduating in 2003, 2004, and 2005.
5

Hispanic Students

❖ **In mathematics, Hispanic students that were active typically achieved higher proficiency that non-participants.** Although active and non-participants both saw proficiency rates drop first in 2005-2006 with the introduction of the new test, achievement levels have recovered in subsequent years. Interestingly, active students' proficiency rates exceeded those of non-participants by an average of 14.1 percentage points over the last four years. **Results for reading, however, were mixed - active students had higher proficiency rates in five of the nine years**, although results for other years indicated similar proportions of students achieving proficiency. **Similar trends were also observed among economically-disadvantaged Hispanic students who were active in the program – they students attained higher rates of proficiency in both Math and Reading than non-participants in each of the nine years examined.** Sample sizes of the other groups limit our ability to draw results for other comparisons and also for their performances across other non-core classes. A similar comparison of mean scale scores of active and non-participants among all Hispanic were mixed. However, economically disadvantaged Hispanic students who were active in the program typically had higher mean scale scores as compared to their counterparts who were not participating.

❖ Across all years, there were only a total of two graduates among Hispanic students active in the program, which did not allow for a comparison of student GPAs (active vs. non-program students) at graduation. On the other hand, the number of non-participant Hispanic students who graduated ranged from 18 (in 2002-03) to 63 (in 2009-10). After averaging 23.8 students per year from 2002-03 to 2006-07, the number of graduating non-participants averaged 38.5 students in the next two years and 62 students in 2010-11 and 2011-2012. For non-participants, mean grade point average (GPA) at graduation (both weighted and un-weighted) decreased annually between 2003 and 2005.

6

Demographics (Overall-level only)

❖ Among all African American students, none of the active students (in any school year) were also LEP students and only a small percentage of non-participants (1.3 to 1.8 percent from 2003-04 onward) were also LEP students. African-American students who were active participants were also more likely to be qualified as economically disadvantaged as compared to non-participants. On the other hand, active participants were less likely to have a disability. Active African-American participants were also more likely to be female, although the percentage of females among active students has decreased in recent years. Typically, active students were also more likely to be qualified as academic gifted than non-participants. For more detailed demographic breakdowns of the other sub-samples of African-American students, please refer to the results section of the report.

❖ Unlike African-American students, there were active Hispanic students with LEP status. Generally, a higher percentage of active students demonstrated a limited proficiency in English than non-participants in all years for all sub-groups of Hispanic students examined as well. Other characteristics of active Hispanic students were similar to that of active African-American students. Active Hispanic students were also more likely to meet the criteria for economic disadvantage in each year, more likely to be females, and also more likely to be gifted. Contrary to characteristics observed for African American students, however, active Hispanic students were more likely to be disabled (true in six of the nine years). Please refer to the results section of the report for more detailed demographic breakdowns of the other sub-samples of Hispanic students.

7

State Test Data Used to Scale Student Scores

Figure 1: Mapping of State Test Data Used to Scale Student Scores in Math and Reading

Student Test Scores		State Test Data Used for Scaling	
2001	2006	2003	2008
MA03-MA08	**MA03-MA08**	**RD03-RD08**	**RD03-RD08**
MathScore0203		X	
MathScore0304		X	
MathScore0405		X	
MathScore0506		X	
MathScore0607		X	
MathScore0708		X	
MathBestScore0809		X	
MathBestScore0910		X	
MathBestScore1011		X	
ReadScore0203		X	
ReadScore0304		X	
ReadScore0405		X	
ReadScore0506		X	
ReadScore0607		X	
ReadScore0708		X	
ReadBestScore0809		X	
ReadBestScore0910		X	
ReadBestScore1011		X	