

*Supporting Durham's Youth,
Building the Future...*



EVALUATION REPORT, 2002-8

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Executive Summary

Partners for Youth (PFY) is a unique program designed to respond to what is widely recognized as a national problem: improving the long-term economic status of children from low-income families. The PFY model explores the impact of providing teen-aged students with a team of mentors who provide a broad base of support. This report describes the effectiveness of the model.

To our knowledge, PFY is the only program of its kind: we match students with a full team of community, school, and job-based mentors, and we believe that this model offers our students the best chance possible of enjoying the comprehensive support they need to become successful adults. It also offers our volunteers a chance to focus their efforts on what they do best: college students tutor, adults offer life experience, teachers offer academic support, and job-based mentors guide our students during their internships. Each volunteer has a specific area of expertise, and no one has to do it all.

Partners for Youth is an intervention program that enrolls students who choose to join voluntarily. We do not accept students who have been charged with violating the law or who have behavioral issues that would preclude them from participating in a group or communicating with adults. That said, our students are defined as “at-risk” by virtue of their families’ income, their parents’ education level, and their teachers’ perception that they are a student who needs additional support to graduate from high school and enter college.

Our clearest achievement after ten years of operation, success in guiding students through high school and on to college. Ninety-three percent of the students who have completed our program (26 of 28) have graduated from high school; eighty-five percent (24 of 28 students) of our high school graduates have continued on to college.

This report includes data through 2008 (our first report was through 2005). Over time, our results have remained remarkably constant. Respondents to our surveys indicate that we continue to have good success in our efforts to impart employment skills and to dissuade our students from unsafe activities involving sex and drugs. Our greatest disappointment is our students’ academic performance. We wish we saw a more dramatic difference in our students’ grades and willingness to challenge themselves academically as a result of being in the program. We do, however, see a significant difference between the students who are in the program for less than a year, compared to those who remain in the program. We are also establishing relationships with organizations that serve younger children so they can serve as feeder programs. We need to find more students who have had more support at younger ages, either from their families or other organizations. With the exception of a few students, our greatest challenge is to generate and maintain our students’ interest in their own academic success.

While our students experience set-backs and their grades do not improve as much or as quickly as we would like, we see our students building their resiliency to overcome failures as they receive support and encouragement from their team of mentors. We are proud of their progress and continue to challenge them to reach their full potential.

– Leigh Bordley, Executive Director, May 2009

Introduction

Mission

PFY strives to provide our students with educational enrichment opportunities and positive relationships that will enhance each student's life skills and aspirations for the future. Goals for student participants are to:

1. increase their academic and employment knowledge and skills;
2. improve their attitudes towards school and careers and to encourage behaviors that reflect these attitudes; and
3. support their graduation from high school and enrollment in college.

History

Partners for Youth is a neighborhood-based mentoring program for teen-agers. It was founded in 1998 as part of the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership, an initiative focused on improving the quality of life in the neighborhoods and schools near Duke University. PFY was founded in Southwest Central Durham in direct response to residents' interest in providing young people with positive role models and career development opportunities. After six years, it became clear that PFY could operate on its own, and PFY became an independent non-profit organization in March 2004.

Program Description

PFY employs a model that is uniquely comprehensive. Students apply to join PFY when they are 14 to 16 years old and are chosen to participate on the basis of their need for additional adult support and demonstrated ability to maintain their commitment. Once a student joins, the program's intention is to retain them until they turn 19 years old or complete their first year of college. Each class is made up of 25 students; enrollment rolls over each fall, and new spots are available as students leave the program.

Each student is matched with a team of 4 mentors: 1) a community-based mentor – an adult who meets with her or him at least 4 hours per month, year-round; 2) a tutor – a Duke student who tutors her or him twice weekly; 3) a school-based mentor – a teacher the student asks to support her or him at school; and 4) a job-based mentor – an adult at the student's summer job site. The group engages in activities, including community service projects and field trips, year-round. Each month, students and community-based mentors meet to focus on topics such as budgeting, interviewing, and team-building. During the school year, students attend tutoring twice a week on the Duke campus. Students meet at school with their school-based mentors at least one hour per month. Students who follow our Discipline and Rewards policy have the opportunity to hold a paid internship in the summer and work with an on-site job-based mentor.

Service Population and Student Demographics

When PFY was founded in 1998 as part of the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Initiative, we only accepted students who lived in Southwest Central Durham. When we became an independent non-profit in 2004, we began accepting applications from students who are not residents of Southwest Central Durham but who are enrolled in the schools that serve this area (Sherwood Githens Middle School, C. E. Jordan High School, and the Durham School of the Arts) if the child is eligible for the National School Lunch Program, which entitles her or him to free or reduced lunch. Since 1998, 84% of our students have been from Southwest Central Durham; they receive priority consideration, our program offices are located in this area, and it remains the focus of our efforts.

Southwest Central Durham, an area largely contiguous with Durham Census Tract 5. According to the 2000 Census, this area is challenged by a number of issues. The median household income of \$21,144 is a little over half of the household median income for the city as a whole. The poverty rate is 38%, compared to 11.3% for the city of Durham; 19% of the households are female-headed with children.

The community suffers from deteriorating housing; its housing stock is among the oldest in the city, and many properties are now vacant. Forty percent of the houses were built prior to 1949, and 10% of the available housing lots stand vacant.

The population of 4,273 is 56% black, 28% white, with the remaining 16% percent representing a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. Historically, the population has been predominantly African-American, but recently the neighborhood has started to change, with a growing number of Latinos moving into the area. Almost 9% of the population is over 65 years of age; 18% is under 18 years of age.

Census data indicate that the residents of this community are in need of additional education and job training. Over 29% of the adult population do not have a high school diploma, and 12% do not have a ninth grade education. The unemployment rate is twice that of the Raleigh-Durham Metropolitan Statistical Area's rate, and the community has one of the area's lowest literacy rates.

One hundred and three students (57 females; 46 males) have enrolled in PFY since the program's inception in March 1998 through August 2008. Six have lived with both biological parents, sixty-seven have been from single-parent homes, nine have lived with one biological parent and one step-parent, and twenty-one have not lived with either of their biological parents. Fifteen have been identified as learning disabled and/or have significant medical problems requiring one or more hospitalizations per year.

Thirty students (29%) completed the program, remaining from when they enrolled at age 14-16 until they turned nineteen or completed their first year of college. Twenty-seven (26%) students dropped out, were expelled, or moved from Durham within one year of joining PFY. Two students (both of whom have severe learning disabilities) completed the program but did not graduate from high school. Four students (3%) graduated from high school but did not enroll in college. Twenty-four (23%) remained in the program between three and five years, graduated from high school, and enrolled in college.

Evaluation Methodology

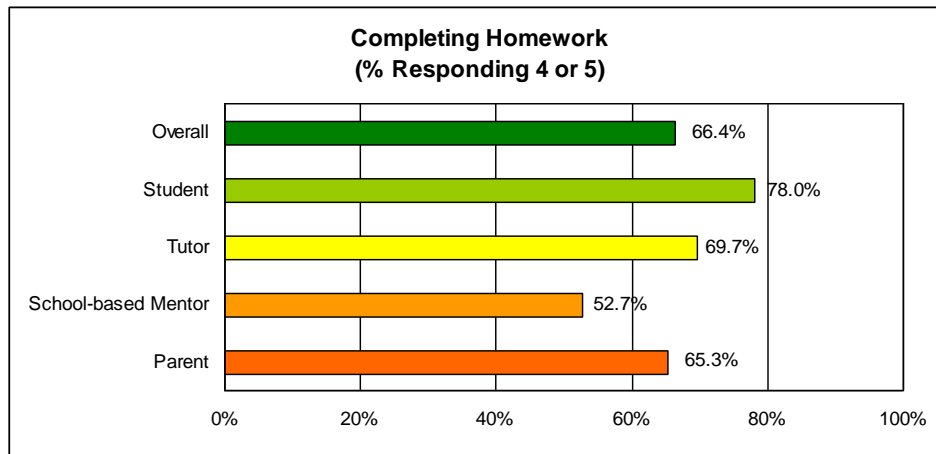
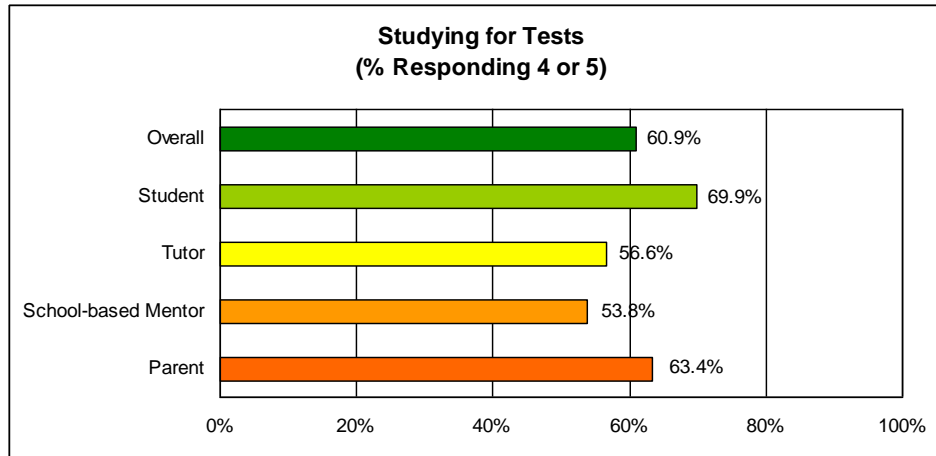
We have modeled elements of our evaluation plan on studies completed by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Sponsor-a-Scholar, programs with national stature that are similar to PFY. Our evaluation synthesizes data drawn from self-administered surveys that all program participants (students, parents, community-based mentors, job-based mentors, school-based mentors, and tutors) complete and from students' school transcripts. Our surveys measure the program's impact in two areas: a) knowledge and skills, and b) attitudes and behavior. Within each of these areas, we look at changes in terms of academics and career preparation. Program participants are asked to assess the impact of the program on the students at the end of each year. The assessment tools consist of between 9 and 37 statements (depending on the respondent), which are summarized, analyzed, and reported in this document. Respondents rank the degree of change they observe in the student on a scale of 1 to 5 (for example: 1=no knowledge of this aspect of the student's life, 2=little change, 3=some change, 4=a lot of change, 5=very much change). Two open-ended questions are also included in the questionnaires. Although analyses of all of the available qualitative data are not yet complete due to time constraints and the scope of this evaluation, comments from respondents are included in this report as supplements to the quantitative data.

At the end of each academic year, school-based mentors and tutors are surveyed on the students' performance in the areas of academic knowledge and skills, school-related attitudes, and in-school behaviors. In August, after students have completed their summer internships, the same questionnaire is given to students, community-based mentors, parents, and job-based mentors. Community-based mentors and parents are asked to evaluate students' performance regarding academic knowledge and skills, future-oriented attitudes, and positive behavioral changes at school and the workplace. Job-based mentors are asked to provide feedback about students' performance in the workplace.

All questionnaires were filled out anonymously. The data presented in this report track the performance of students enrolled between 2002 and 2008. Included in this report are data drawn from surveys returned from school-based mentors (85), community-based mentors (25), job-based mentors (42), parents (76), and tutors (81). Data presented here analyze and compare the degree to which the various mentors (in their subgroups and overall) contributed to changes in student behavior and performance. The data presented include the percent of respondents who indicated significant changes.

Improvement in Students' Knowledge and Skills

Academic Knowledge and Skills



To measure PFY's impact on our students' active participation in their own learning, we look at two of the activities we focus on most during our tutoring time and individual counseling: studying for tests and competing homework.

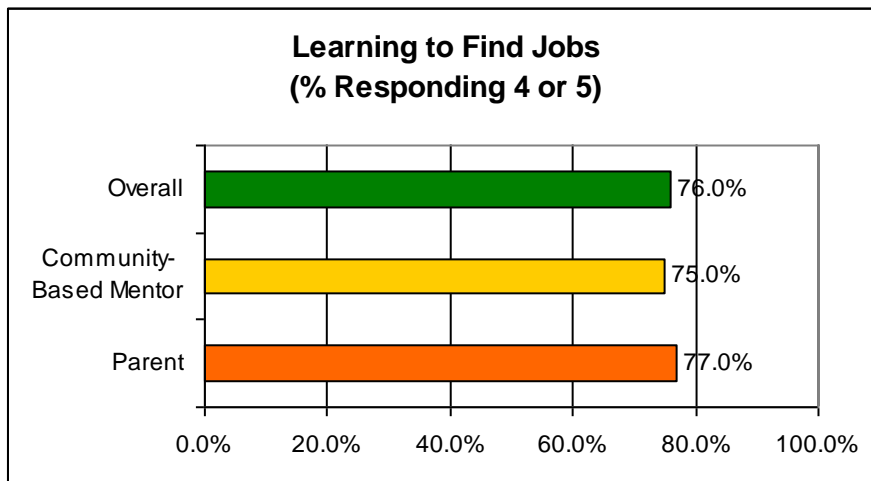
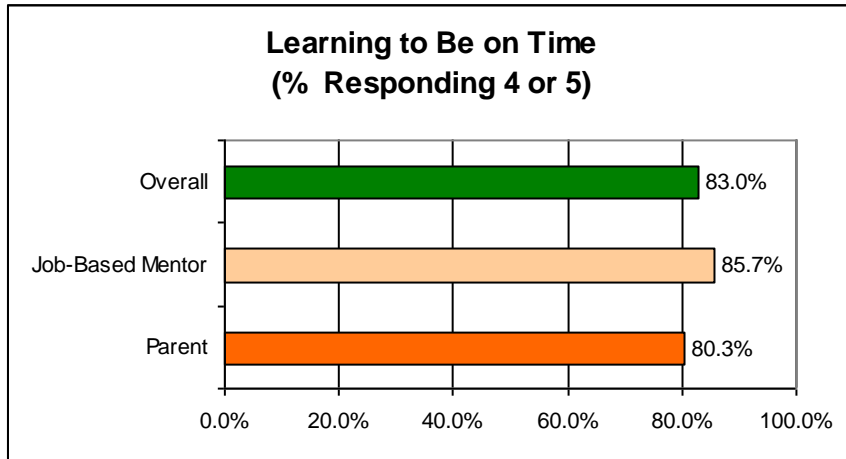
The majority (57.9%) of our survey respondents thought that PFY had helped our students for tests "a lot" (4) or "very much" (5).

When asked how much PFY had helped students with completing their homework, the majority (62.6%) said that PFY had helped "a lot" or very much with this specific task. For many of our students, having protected time and space to do their homework, is a critical benefit of participation.

Our impact on our students' grades is moderate. The majority (53%) of students who remain in PFY at least a year, either maintain or improve their grade point average. Although we are not satisfied with this result, we acknowledge that high school level work is more challenging (baseline for most students is 8th grade) and many high school students' grades fall.

We are in the process of creating a comparison group that will demonstrate the progress of similar students who are not in PFY.

Employment Knowledge and Skills



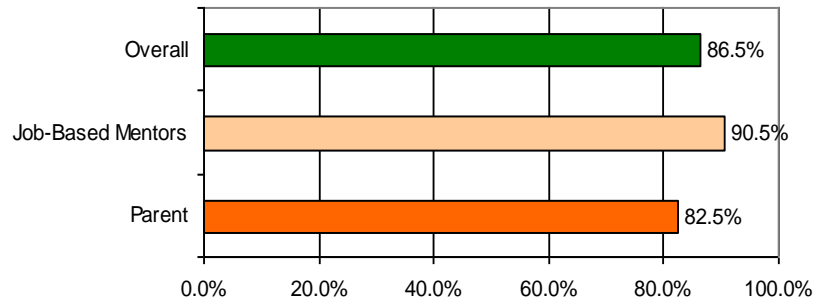
Preparing young people for employment was one of the initial objectives identified in the survey of Southwest Central Durham residents that led to the creation of PFY. It is central to our mission and is the most compelling element of our program for most of our students.

To gauge our progress in the area, we surveyed our job-based mentors and parents on how successfully PFY taught our students three tasks: learning to be on time, learning to find jobs, and communicating effectively with supervisors.

A strong majority (83%) of our respondents, felt PFY had effectively taught our students to be on time to their jobs, as reflected in their performance during their summer internships.

Our success in helping our students learn to find jobs, was an area in which we were relatively less successful in the opinion of our respondents than we had been in the 2002-5 period. We have now strengthened our curriculum which includes, how to use technology to find job postings, job interviewing, resume writing, and networking strategies.

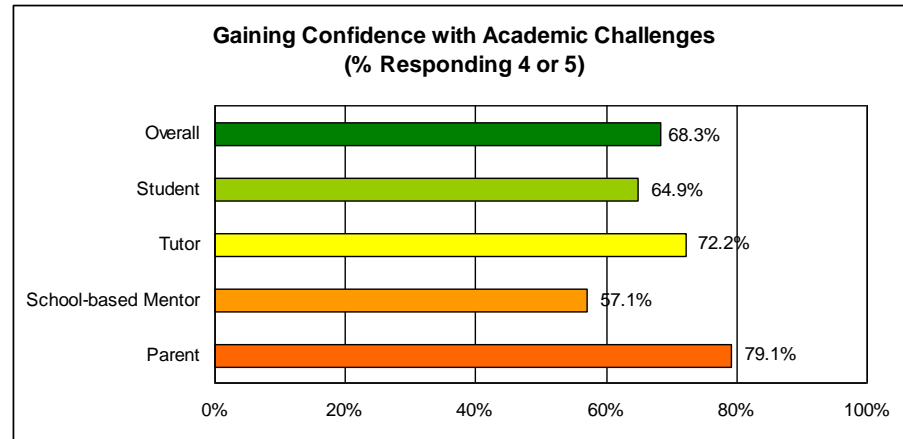
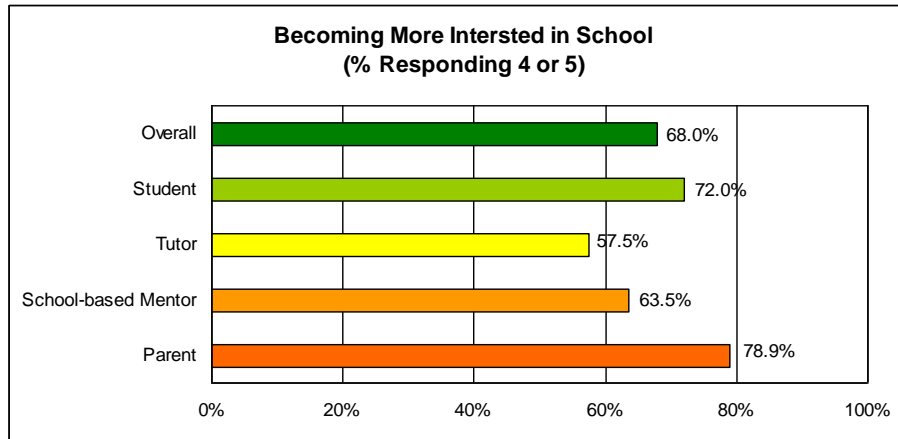
**Communicating Effectively with Supervisors
(% Responding 4 or 5)**



This is the area which received the most positive response from our job-based mentors. Eighty-six percent felt that PFY had taught our students how to effectively communicate with them.

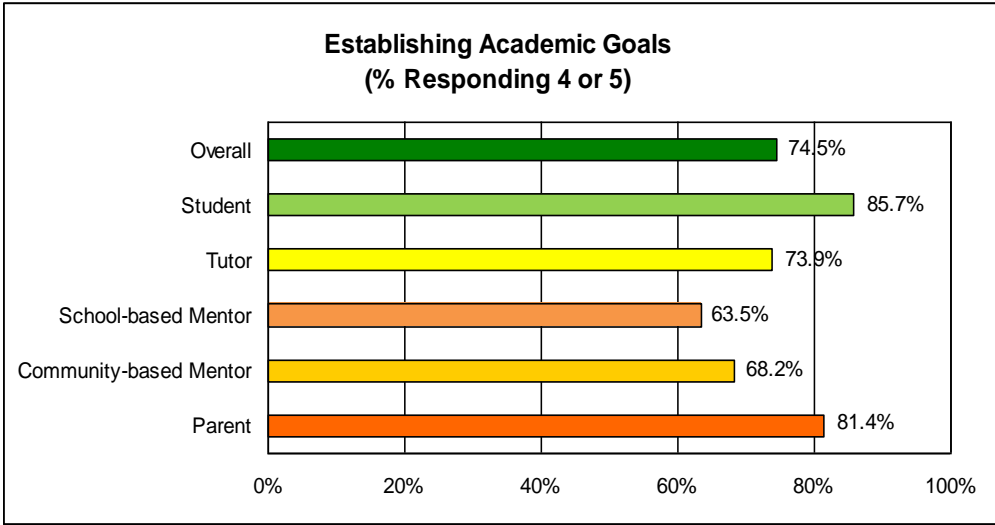
Although communicating with teachers can be challenging for some of our students, working in the “real world” is something our students take very seriously and they are often willing to try to learn new modes of communication if they believe it will affect their job performance.

Changes in Students' Attitudes toward School and Careers



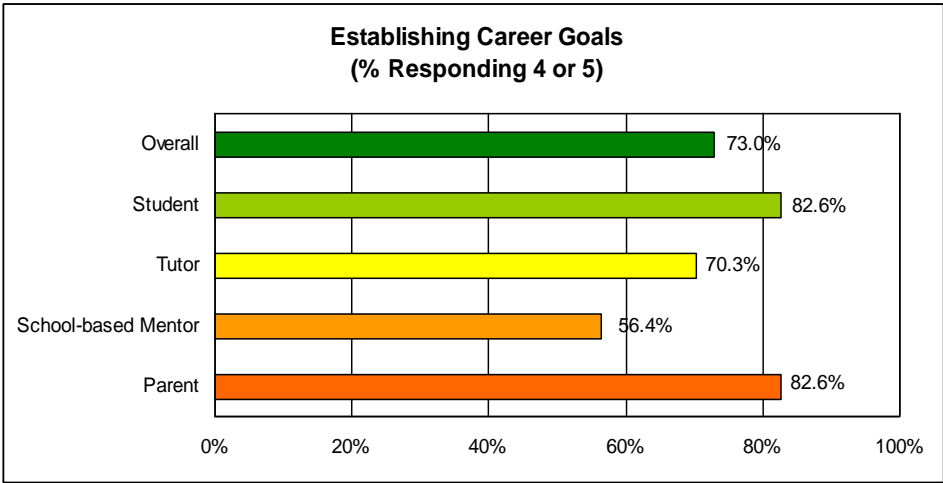
As we are teaching students new skills, we are also striving to improve their attitudes towards academic achievement and their futures. We have great confidence in their abilities. Our central mission is to increase our students' confidence in themselves and willingness to take on difficult challenges. Many of our students come to us with histories of not doing well in school and mask their lack of confidence with a façade of “not caring” about school.

The majority of our respondents said PFY had helped our students become more interested in school (66.6%) and to gain confidence with academic challenges (69.5%). Our school-based mentors typically report the smallest gains, but more than half of them (63.5% and 57.1%) report students becoming more interested in school and gaining confidence with academic challenges.

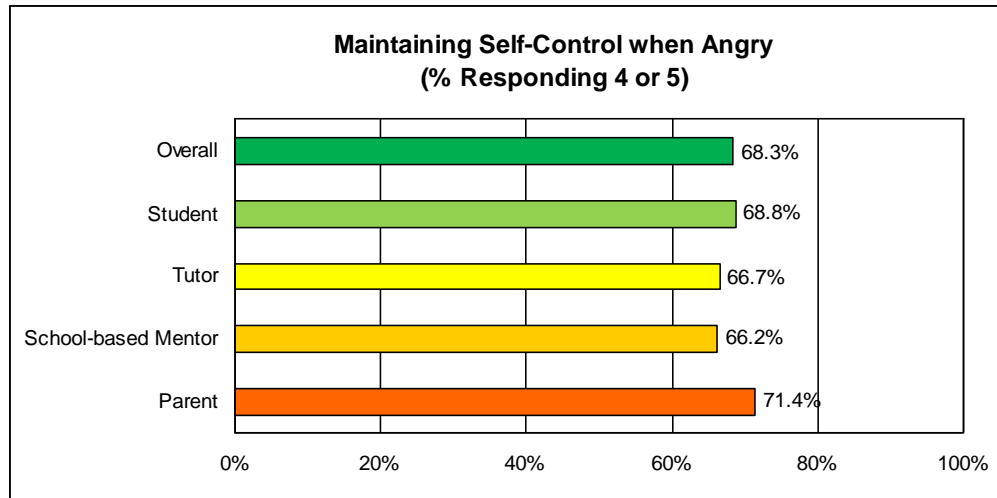


Establishing goals and achievable objectives is an unfamiliar exercise for most teens. PFY students begin each year talking with their mentors, parents and staff about what their goals are and specifically what they need to do to achieve them. This plan serves as the template for our work with the student for the year.

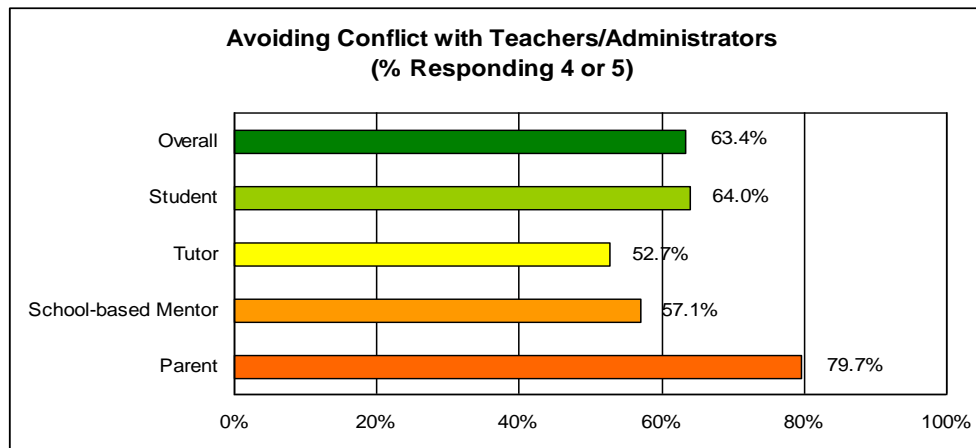
The majority of our membership (71.7% and 69.8 %) involved in this process feels PFY is successful in teaching our students to set and achieve academic and career goals. It appears that we are slightly more effective in helping our students develop their academic goals, which reflects the greater amount of time and effort we devote to that realm.

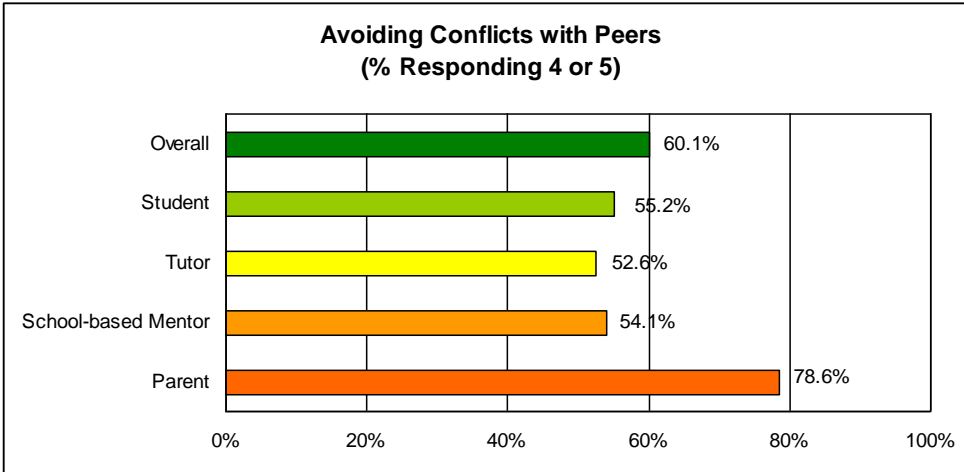


Changes in Students' Behavior

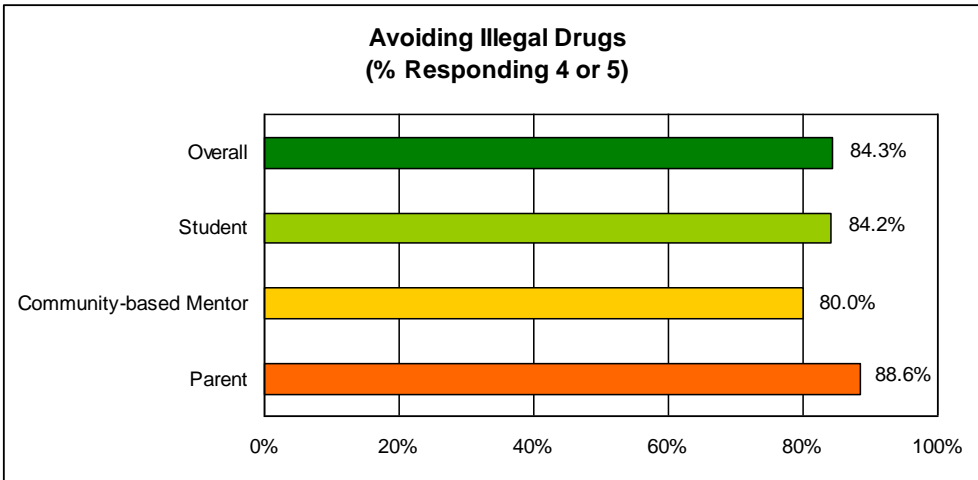


Maintaining self-control when angry, especially when a conflict involves adults at school, is a particularly difficult challenge for many of our students. The majority of our respondents (68 %) see PFY making a positive impact in this area. Our parents see the most progress, but we are especially encouraged that our teachers see the students improving their ability to control themselves at school.

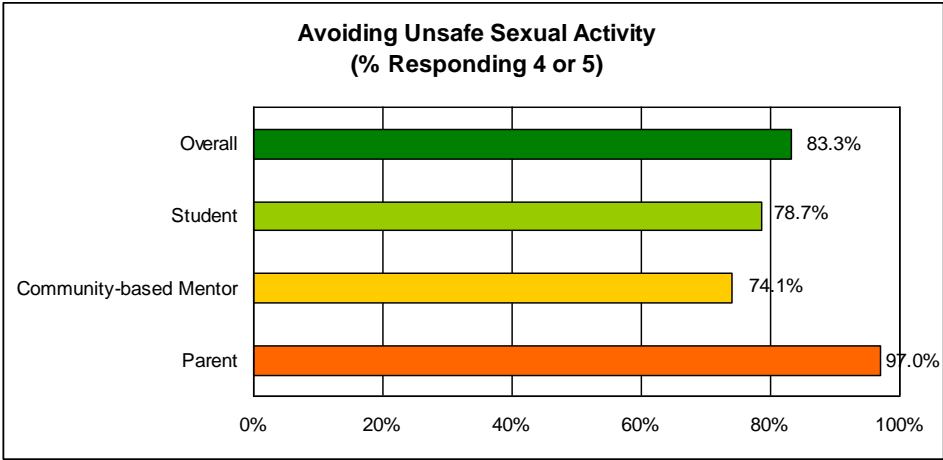




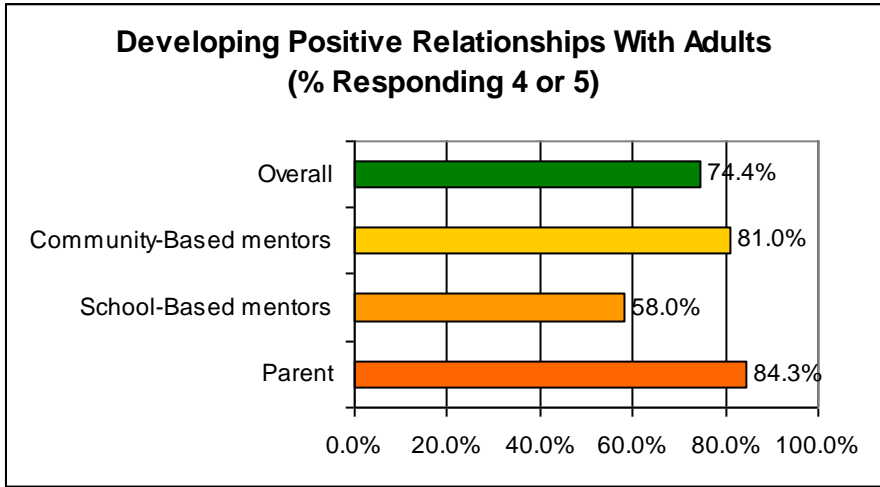
Our survey respondents also report PFY affecting our students' ability to avoid and resolve conflict with their peers. Again, parents feel the most positively about PFY's impact (78%), but a majority of our other sub-groups also see progress.



Avoiding illegal drugs is the area in which our respondents think PFY has the biggest impact on our students' lives (84%). We do share information about drug addiction with our students, but we think the fact that we consistently focus on the positive opportunities they have before them is the most effective strategy for helping our students avoid illegal drug use.



Avoiding unsafe sexual activity is another area in which PFY is felt to be very successful, especially by an overwhelming majority of our parents (97%). At our monthly meetings, we regularly have health educators as guest speakers to share information about safe sex, rape prevention, and ways to avoid sexual abuse. We believe however that the experiences our students have that bolster their self-esteem serve to dissuade them more powerfully than the specific information they receive in these sessions.



High School Graduation and College Enrollment

According to the 2000 Census, over 29% of the adult population of Southwest Central Durham the area in which over 80% of PFY students live and where the program offices are located) does not have a high school diploma.

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2007 – 8), the drop-out rate for African –American students is almost twice that of white students. Only 57% of African-American students graduate “on-time” (in four years); 63% of females and 30 % of males. By contrast, none of the 30 PFY students who completed our program dropped out of high school, and 94% of PFY students who reached their senior year of high school graduated. Of these, 27 or 90% graduated on time and 24 or 88% enrolled in college. (The two program completers who did not graduate were special-needs students who did not reach their senior year.)

Summary and Conclusions

Measuring the impact of a series of interventions on people at a stage in their lives that is marked by change and volatility is difficult. It is not always possible to control for many variables or to assess with certainty what causes a specific change. But overall, our data support what staff and the people who interact with our students observe: PFY helps our students stay engaged in school and learn about careers, acquire academic and employment skills, control their emotions, and avoid illegal drugs and unsafe sexual activity.

Our clearest impact is in the areas related to employment and avoidance of unsafe behaviors – areas that are also stressed by our students’ families. In contrast, academic achievement is not promoted with the same energy by some of our families or by our culture at large. Many of our parents did not graduate from high school, and/or did not go to college, and are not able to provide much practical academic assistance.

We are tremendously proud of our students who have avoided these problems and who have chosen to participate in a program that requires them to be constantly monitored and challenged. With our support, our students are not only avoiding the problems that surround them but are also taking steps (such as going to college) that significantly increase their chances of living independent and productive lives.

