

**MEMORANDUM**

July 29, 2010

TO: Board Members

FROM: Terry B. Grier, Ed. D.  
Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: **HOUSTON REAL MEN READ SURVEY RESULTS: 2010**

CONTACT: Carla Stevens, (713) 556-6700

The Houston Real Men Read is a mentoring program launched by HISD Board member, Paula Harris. The program focuses on the fundamental principals that reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success. During the 2009–2010 academic year, 243 mentors from the Houston community participated in the program by reading to second-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students in 51 HISD schools. This is an increase of 45 percent from the 168 mentors at 30 schools who participated in 2008–2009. A total of 77 mentors (32 percent) completed an online survey to assess their perceptions of various program components.

Overall, the mentor survey results were optimistic, with an overwhelming majority of respondents rating the program as ‘excellent’ in their classroom experiences, welcome by school, and communication from campus representatives. The improvement most often suggested by mentors was “book selection.” Approximately, 90% of mentors indicated they plan on volunteering next school year. This is evidence that the experience of the mentors in the Houston Real Men Read program has been positive.

Also, 269 students at seven elementary schools completed a survey regarding their experience in the Houston Real Men Read program. The majority of students rated the program as “super duper” (62%), while 35 percent rated it as “good.” Students indicated that they enjoyed being read to, asking questions, doing activities, and keeping the books. Students also enjoyed sharing the books with their family and friends.

Should you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me or Carla Stevens in the Department of Research and Accountability, at 713-556-6700.

  
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TBG/CS:dm  
cc: Superintendent’s Direct Reports  
Chief School Officers  
School Improvement Officers  
Tina Angelo  
Paula Pierre



# EVALUATION BRIEF

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Volume 2, July 2010

## ***Houston Real Men Read Survey Results: What was the experience of mentors and students during the second year of the Real Men Read program?***

By Deborah L. Muñiz

*Houston Real Men Read, chaired by Texas District XIII Senator Rodney Ellis and spearheaded by HISD District IV Board Trustee Paula M. Harris, is a mentoring program in which men from the Houston community committed one hour of their time, once a month, to read to second-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students. The reading dates were November 12, December 10, January 14, February 11, and May 13, 2010. This program reinforced three fundamental principals: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success. A total of 243 mentors were assigned to 51 participating schools and were trained on how to interact with students. This brief was designed to summarize the results from the Houston Real Men Read mentor and student surveys.*

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### **Data and Methods**

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This is the second year of the Houston Real Men Read program. During the 2009–2010 school year, 243 mentors participated in the program by reading to students in 51 schools. This is an increase of 45% from the 168 mentors at 30 schools who participated in 2008–2009. Houston Real Men Read mentors were asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. A total of 77 mentors completed the survey during May of 2010. This accounted for a 32% response rate. Percentages were based on the total number of responses. The survey also included open-ended questions. A coding scheme was developed for each of the open-ended questions. Responses were then coded according to emergent categories.

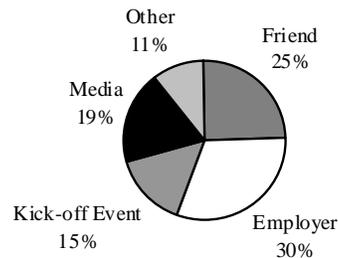
Students were given an opportunity to participate in an on-line survey after the December reading. Many of the students completed the survey at the school's computer lab. A total of 269 students at seven elementary schools completed the survey. Approximately, 53% were fifth graders, while 47% were second graders.

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### **How did mentors hear about the Houston Real Men Read program?**

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Houston Real Men Read mentors were asked to indicate how they heard about the program. **Figure 1** displays the percent of mentors that heard about the program via a friend, employer, kick-off event, media, or other. The largest percent of mentors (30%) heard about the program through their employer, while 25% of mentors heard about the program through a friend. Also, 19% of mentors heard about the program through the media, and 15% through the kick-off event. The category “other” included responses such as HISD website, spouse, and school administrator.



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Figure 1. How mentors first heard about the Real Men Read program.

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**How did mentors rate the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program?**

Mentors were asked a series of questions about the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program. **Table 1** displays a comparison of mentor response rates for 2009 and 2010. The majority of mentors rated the following components as excellent: classroom experience (74%), welcome by school (74%), and communication from campus representative (70%) in 2010. The component that experienced the greatest increase in receiving a rating of excellent was “communication from campus representative” from 55% in 2009 to 70% in 2010. In contrast, “lesson guides” experienced the greatest decrease in being rated excellent from 46% in 2009 to 33% in 2010. The “timeliness of book distribution” was rated as very good or excellent by 77% of mentors and the application process was rated as very good or excellent by 76% of the mentors. The orientation was rated as very good or excellent by 67% of mentors. Also, 66% of mentors rated the book selection as very good or excellent. Communication from central administration was rated as very good or excellent by 72% of mentors.

**What improvements can be made to the Houston Real Men Read program?**

Mentors suggested improvements that can be made to the Houston Real Men Read program. There were a total of 73 comments that were grouped into nine categories. **Table 2** shows the percent of comments by category. The categories with the highest percent of comments were “no improvement needed” and “book selection” with

19% each. Some specific responses regarding “book selection” were as follows:

- Providing a variety of bilingual Spanish books to be read to the bilingual classes.
- I would suggest rethinking the books chosen. While they were of great social value and were very well written, the detailed content made it difficult for me to engage the class given the short time available. . .
- Provide the opportunity for volunteers to read a book of their selection with approval from the District.

Also, 18% of the comments were categorized as “program support for mentors.” Some of the responses included:

- Perhaps send the lesson plan out via email ahead of time. Also, reminders further out of the event via email.
- Need more questions or guidance to stimulate classroom experience even more.
- Some feedback from school

Approximately, 16% of the comments were categorized as “expand program.” Some of the responses included:

- I think it is a good program and should just be expanded to include all of the elementary campuses in Houston ISD.
- Try to do it once a month for every month of the year and try not to skip any months, even if the day of the week must change to accommodate the school/classroom schedules.

About 8% of comments were categorized as “increase participation.” A mentor commented, “Real Men Read is an excellent program, it just needs more mentors. Perhaps, we should reach out to churches and civic clubs for more mentors.” About 5% of comments were categorized as

Table 1. Mentor Survey Response Rates on Components of the Houston Real Men Read Program, 2009 and 2010

Components	Needs Improvement		Okay		Very Good		Excellent	
	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
Application Process	7	7	30	17	32	49	31	27
Orientation	8	7	26	26	36	40	30	27
Book Selection	7	8	16	26	32	31	45	35
Timeliness of Book Distribution	14	3	21	21	29	37	36	40
Lesson Guides	3	7	17	25	33	36	46	33
Communication from Campus Representative	7	3	10	12	28	16	55	70
Communication from Central Administration	4	5	26	23	32	38	38	34
Welcome by School	0	0	4	5	19	21	77	74
Classroom Experience	1	3	3	5	18	18	78	74

Table 2: Percent of Comments by Categories

<b>Categories</b>	<b>%</b>
No improvement needed	19
Book Selection	19
Program Support for Mentors	18
Expand Program	16
Increase Participation	8
Teacher Involvement	5
Non-categorical	5
Timely Distribution of Books	4
Incorporate into regular schedule	4

“teacher involvement” One of the mentors responded, “More involvement of the reading or classroom teachers; I felt too often that I was on my own once in the class.” Also, 4% of comments were categorized either as “timely distribution of books” or “incorporate into regular schedule.” A mentor commented, “Schedule it as a regular part of the school day so it will not interrupt the teacher’s schedule.” Lastly, 5% of comments could not be categorized. Some of the specific responses were:

- It is a very good program, and maybe we can be invited to our school when there are special events being held for the students, ex. awards day.
- The application process discouraged friends of mine from becoming involved in the program. If possible, try to reduce the number of steps and amount of paperwork required to be approved as a participant in the program.
- Kids should have name tags with first name.

**How did the mentors describe their experience with the Houston Real Men Read program?**

Mentors had an opportunity to describe their experience in the Houston Real Men Read program. The data were organized as a positive, mixed or negative experience. A total of 65 comments were included in the analysis. The majority of the comments at 91% were categorized as a “positive experience.” Some of the responses included:

- My experience has been wonderful! I have enjoyed insightful discussions with the children connecting book themes to their everyday lives. The teacher was also adept at connecting the book to other classroom learning areas.
- I had a wonderful experience and the classroom I was assigned to was full of bright and engaging students. I would like to see this program continue to grow.
- Excellent--being back in the classroom with the children was refreshing.

About 8% of the comments were categorized as a “mixed experience.” As a mentor commented, “Mixed; good welcome by school; good set of colleagues but too much left on own in class itself.” Only one mentor described their experience as negative.

Mentors were also asked “Do you plan on volunteering as a mentor for the Real Men Read program next school?” Approximately, 90% indicated “yes” and 10% “maybe.” Sixty-nine percent of the mentors volunteered during the 2008–2009 school year. An overwhelming majority of mentors at 99% stated that they would recommend others to participate in the Houston Real Men Read program compared to 1% who stated “maybe.” Lastly, mentors were asked, “Has your participation in the Real Men Read program encouraged you to increase your involvement in other volunteer opportunities at your current campus or another campus?” Sixty percent stated “yes,” 23% “maybe,” and 17% “no.”

**What did students think about the Houston Real Men Read Program?**

Students were asked to rate their experience in the Real Men Read program. The majority of students rated the program as “super duper” at 62%, while 35% rated it as “good.” The remaining 3% rated the program as “fair” or “poor.”

Students were asked, “Did you share the books with your family and friends?” Most of the students indicated “yes” at 79%. Some of the responses included:

- This was a great book so I had to share it with some family members. When I told them about Spiders they were shock because I knew more things about spiders than them.
- I read my book to my brothers and my mom. They all liked the book and they liked hearing me read. They told me they like it when I read to them. I am going to read every book that you give me and then read it to my family! Ok
- Yes, I shared the book with my 3 younger brothers. I shared by first reading the book to them. Next, I went over the words with them. Then, finally I let them practice reading the book with me.

Students were asked, “What did you enjoy about the mentor’s visit?” The student’s responses were categorized as being read to, asking questions, doing activities, and keeping the books. The following are comments from the students that illustrate these categories:

*Houston Real Men Read Survey Results: What was the experience of mentors and students during the second year of the Real Men Read program?*

- I like when he read to us and he answered all of our questions. My class and I had a blast.
- What I enjoyed about the mentor's visit was that they read us the stories very clearly and that at the end we all did the activities in the student guide. We had fun doing the activities together, I enjoyed the visit very much.
- I just enjoyed listening to him read to us and being able to keep the book.

It is also apparent that for some students this was their first experience seeing an adult male read. As one student commented, "I enjoyed the mentor visit because I have never seen a guy read to my class before." In general, based on the survey responses, it is obvious that the students really enjoyed the readings from the mentors. As one student explained, "I liked that these people actually came and took the time to sit down with my class and read to us. It shows that people care about us kids."

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## **Conclusions**

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Overall, the results from the Real Men Read survey were positive. The majority of mentors rated the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program as very good or excellent. The components that were rated "needs improvement" or "okay" by a third of the mentors were orientation, book selection, and lesson guides.

Mentors provided valuable suggestions to assist those involved in the Real Men Read program to make improvements. The improvement most often suggested by mentors was to improve the book selection. Mentor survey results also indicated that efforts to improve the application process and the timeliness of book distribution were addressed from the first year of the program.

It is evident that mentors had a good experience in the Real Men Read program, since an overwhelming majority of them plan to participate in the program next year. Also, most of the mentors stated that they would recommend others to participate in the program. Furthermore, the student's positive survey responses affirm the need for the Houston Real Men Read program.

For additional information contact the HISD Department of Research and Accountability at 713-556-6700 or e-mail <a href="mailto:Research@Houstonisd.org">Research@Houstonisd.org</a> .
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