



# EVALUATION BRIEF

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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## ***Houston Real Men Read Survey Results: What was the experience of mentors during the third year of the Real Men Read program, 2011?***

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*Houston Real Men Read, chaired by Texas District XIII Senator Rodney Ellis and spearheaded by Houston Independent School District (HISD) 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 11 and December 9, 2010, as well as January 13, February 10, and May 12, 2011. This program reinforced three fundamental principles: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success. A total of 308 mentors were assigned to 47 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 survey.*

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### **Data and Methods**

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This was the third year of the Houston Real Men Read program. During the 2010–2011 school year, an estimated 308 mentors participated in the program by reading to students at 47 schools. This is an increase of 27 percent from the 243 mentors at 51 schools who participated in 2009–2010. At the start of the program in 2008–2009, there were 168 mentors at 30 schools who participated.

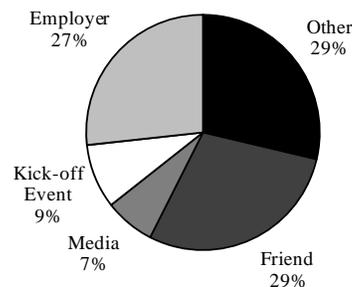
Campus representatives were asked to submit the names of their mentors along with their email addresses to HISD’s Curriculum Department. Only 20 out of the 47 participating campuses submitted the requested information (43 percent). A total of 131 mentors were asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. A total of 69 mentors completed the survey during May of 2011. This accounted for a 53 percent 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.

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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 (29 percent) heard about the program through a friend, while 27 percent of mentors heard about the program through their employer. Also, nine percent of mentors heard about the program through the kick-off event, and seven percent through the media. The category “other” included responses, such as school administrator, teacher, and church (29 percent).



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Figure 1. How mentors first heard about the Houston 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, 2010, and 2011. The majority of mentors rated the following components as “excellent:” lesson guides (50 percent), timeliness of book distribution (55 percent), communication from campus representative (73 percent), welcome by school (79 percent), and classroom experience (79 percent) in 2011. Each program component experienced an increase in receiving a rating of “excellent” from 2010 to 2011. The component that experienced the greatest increase in a rating of “excellent” was “lesson guides” (33 percent in 2010 to 50 percent in 2011).

**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 53 comments that were grouped into eight categories. **Table 2** shows the percent of comments by category. The categories with the highest percent of comments were “improve book selection” and “expand program,” with 20 percent each. Some specific responses regarding “improve book selection” were as follows:

- There are not sufficient books in Spanish for the bilingual classes.

- The book selections were not overly impressive. I would much rather introduce the children to great literature than just some kid’s book. I know of several books that have been edited to be age appropriate but still retain the qualities that make them great literature. If you are bringing men to read to influence a child’s love of reading then give men a shot at sparking an interest in the classics.
- Books were too simple-even for 2nd graders. Raise the level.

Some of the responses regarding “expand program” included:

- I think that the program should be extended to other grades as well.
- Make it twice per month.
- I think the district should expand this initiative to every elementary and middle school in the district. A great way to involve the community and present positive male role models to the students. I think this program can be even more impactful if done on a larger scale, more funding and much more local and state publicity.

About 14 percent of mentor’s comments were categorized as “improve communication.” Some of these comments included:

- Just improve communication between campus reps a little more.
- Communication can always be improved upon. Possibly creating a website that is updated more frequently.
- More communication between mentors and administrators.

Table 1. Mentor Survey Response Rates on Components of the Houston Real Men Read Program, 2009, 2010, and 2011

<b>Components</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>			<b>Okay</b>			<b>Very Good</b>			<b>Excellent</b>		
	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Application Process	7	7	0	30	17	20	<b>32</b>	<b>49</b>	39	31	27	<b>42</b>
Orientation	8	7	6	26	26	17	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>	36	30	27	<b>41</b>
Book Selection	7	8	5	16	26	15	32	31	39	<b>45</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>41</b>
Timeliness of Book Distribution	14	3	3	21	21	15	29	37	27	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>55</b>
Lesson Guides	3	7	2	17	25	15	33	<b>36</b>	33	<b>46</b>	33	<b>50</b>
Communication from Campus Representative	7	3	0	10	12	8	28	16	20	<b>55</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>73</b>
Communication from Central Administration	4	5	5	26	23	27	32	<b>38</b>	24	<b>38</b>	34	<b>44</b>
Welcome by School	0	0	0	4	5	3	19	21	18	<b>77</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>79</b>
Classroom Experience	1	3	0	3	5	2	18	18	20	<b>78</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>79</b>

Table 2: Percent of Comments by Categories

Categories	%
Improve Book Selection	20
Expand Program	20
Improve Communication	14
Increase Awareness	8
Provide Teacher Feedback	6
Increase Participation	6
No improvement Needed	16
Non-categorical	16

Also, eight percent of comments were categorized as “increase awareness.” A mentor commented, “Advertise it better in the community.” About six percent of comments were categorized as “increase participation.” A mentor commented, “The program can only get better if the information about it gets to the men in the community. We need more volunteers.” Another six percent of comments were categorized as “provide teacher feedback.” One of the mentors commented that they would like, “periodic meetings with teachers to get feedback.” Lastly, 16 percent of comments could not be categorized. Some of the specific responses were:

- Sponsor an essay contest for students to talk about our visits or the books we read.
- Campuses need to be prepared.
- Incentives for the kids to read.

**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. There were a total of 57 comments that were all categorized as a “positive experience.” Some of the responses included:

- I enjoy reading to the students. I think having a positive male presence is a great thing in the lives of our youth. I look forward to the next school year.
- I absolutely enjoyed interacting with the children. The teachers and other staff were very friendly and welcoming. I plan to continue with the program.
- I do not have any classroom experience, but sitting in front of 15+ 2nd graders and listening to their thoughts and questions was an unbelievable feeling. I truly enjoyed reading to the students and listening to how they interpret and understand the stories and apply it to their lives.

A couple of the mentors who described their experience as rewarding also commented that the middle school students are not as interested in the

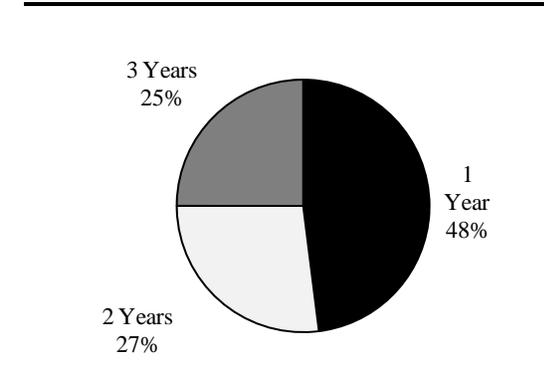


Figure 2. Number of years mentors have volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program.

readings as the elementary students. As a mentor commented, “It has been very rewarding. I get a lot out of working with ES [elementary school] kids. The MS [middle school] kids aren’t interested. If you could find a way to get them to keep that enthusiasm when they go to MS.”

Mentors were also asked “Do you plan on volunteering as a mentor for the Real Men Read program next school?” Approximately, 86 percent indicated “yes” and 14 percent “maybe.” **Figure 2** shows the number of years that surveys mentors have volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program. Slightly less than half of the mentors indicated that this was their first time to volunteer in the program (48 percent). About 27 percent have volunteered for two years; while a quarter have volunteered for three years. All of the mentors (100 percent) stated that they would recommend others to participate in the Houston Real Men Read program. 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?” Seventy-six percent stated “yes,” 15 percent “maybe,” and 9 percent “no.”

**Conclusions**

The results from the Houston Real Men Read survey were positive. The various components of the Houston Real Men Read program all received higher ratings in 2011 compared to 2010. The majority of the components were rated as “very good” or “excellent.” Mentors provided valuable suggestions to assist those involved in the program to make improvements. For example, mentors recommended that the book selection be improved and also that the program be expanded. 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, all of the mentors stated that they would recommend others to participate in the program.

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