



EVALUATION BRIEF

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Houston Real Men Read Survey Results: What was the experience of mentors during the fourth year of the Real Men Read program, 2012?

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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 17 and December 15, 2011, as well as January 19, February 16, and May 17, 2012. This program reinforced three fundamental principles: reading is fun, the community cares, and a commitment to education can ensure success. An estimated 300 mentors were assigned to 44 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.

Data and Methods

This was the fourth year of the Houston Real Men Read program. During the 2011–2012 school year, an estimated 300 mentors participated in the program by reading to students at 44 schools. This was a slight decrease from the estimated 308 mentors who participated in the program by reading to students at 47 schools during 2010–2011 school year. There were 243 mentors at 51 schools who participated during the 2009–2010 school year. 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. A total of 29 out of the 44 participating campuses submitted the requested information (66 percent). Exactly, 210 mentors were asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. A total of 71 mentors completed the survey during May of 2012. This accounted for a 34 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.

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

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, or media. The largest percent of mentors (56 percent) heard about the program through a friend, while 24 percent of mentors heard about the program through their employer. Also, 13 percent of mentors heard about the program through the kick-off event, and seven percent via the media.

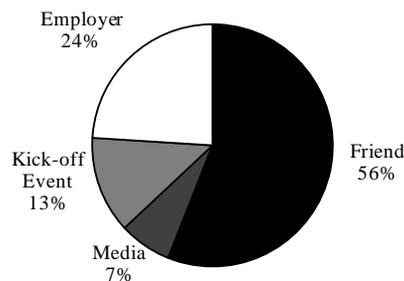


Figure 1. How mentors first heard about the Houston Real Men Read program.

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, 2011, and 2012. In 2012, the majority of mentors rated the following components as “excellent:” timeliness of book distribution (50 percent), communication from campus representative (66 percent), welcome by school (73 percent), and classroom experience (80 percent). The program component with the highest percent of mentors rating it as “needs improvement” or “okay” was communication from central administration (47 percent). Overall, throughout the four years of the program, the overwhelming majority of mentors have rated all of the program components as “very good” or “excellent.”

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 45 comments that were grouped into seven categories. **Table 2** shows the percent of comments by category. About 31 percent of the comments suggested that no improvements were needed. The next category with the highest percent of comments was “improve book selection” with 20 percent. **Table 3** provides a list of the book selections for the 2011–2012 school year. Some specific responses regarding “improve book selection” were as follows:

- Some of the titles selected were not at grade level. I read to a 2nd grade class at one campus and a 5th grade class at another campus. I felt

Table 2: Percent of Comments by Categories

Categories	%
No improvement Needed	31
Improve Book Selection	20
Improve Communication	13
Promote the Program	13
Expand Program	11
Non-categorical	11
Increase Teacher Involvement	4

that some of the titles were not at reading level and interest level for the children.

- By providing a variety of Spanish books to read to the bilingual classes.
- The books need to be self contained in the time you have to read to them or increase the sessions...I would have preferred to schedule other sessions to complete the book together rather than start other books.

About 13 percent of mentor’s comments were categorized as “improve communication.” Some of these comments included:

- Constant and timely communication would be very helpful for any changes that may occur [and] also a meeting with all mentors to discuss experiences.
- Excellent experience! Having the reading material/questions in advanced would help us prepare a little better.
- A great program--better communication from school reps would be helpful.

Another 13 percent of mentor’s comments were categorized as “promote the program.” Some of the responses regarding “promote the program” included:

- More effort to market the program. Once men get there I believe they will stay.
- This program is great in the implementation,

Table 1. Mentor Survey Response Rates on Components of the Houston Real Men Read Program, 2009– 2012

Components	Needs Improvement				Okay				Very Good				Excellent			
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2009	2010	2011	2012	2009	2010	2011	2012	2009	2010	2011	2012
Application Process	7	7	0	0	30	17	20	16	32	49	39	52	31	27	42	32
Orientation	8	7	6	0	26	26	17	21	36	40	36	40	30	27	41	40
Book Selection	7	8	5	6	16	26	15	16	32	31	39	33	45	35	41	46
Timeliness of Book Distribution	14	3	3	4	21	21	15	14	29	37	27	31	36	40	55	50
Lesson Guides	3	7	2	3	17	25	15	13	33	36	33	46	46	33	50	38
Communication from Campus Representative	7	3	0	3	10	12	8	7	28	16	20	24	55	70	73	66
Communication from Central Administration	4	5	5	12	26	23	27	35	32	38	24	26	38	34	44	26
Welcome by School	0	0	0	0	4	5	3	1	19	21	18	26	77	74	79	73
Classroom Experience	1	3	0	0	3	5	2	0	18	18	20	20	78	74	79	80

Note: “Bold” indicates the highest rating for that component by year.

Table 3: HISD Real Men Read Book Selections for the 2011–2012 School Year by Grade

<u>Second Grade</u>	<u>Fifth Grade</u>	<u>Seventh Grade</u>
<i>Reptiles</i>	<i>Spiders</i>	<i>Face to Face with Sharks</i>
<i>A Chair for My Mother</i>	<i>Nothing Happens on 90th St.</i>	<i>Esperanza Rising</i>
<i>My Brother Martin</i>	<i>March On!</i>	<i>Students on Strike</i>
<i>Raising Dragons</i>	<i>Hachiko Waits</i>	<i>Touching Spirit Bear</i>
<i>Carlos and the Squash Plant</i>	<i>Broken Bike Boy and The Queen of 33rd Street</i>	<i>All of the Above</i>

however it needs publicity beyond word of mouth.

- Please make this a higher priority throughout the district and seek 1-3 major corporate sponsors to support with their financial and manpower commitments. I would suggest BP, Minute Maid, Houston Texans, ExxonMobil, CITGO, SYSCO Foods, just to name a few. It has been without question, the most rewarding volunteer experience I have ever had.

Also, 11 percent of comments were categorized as “expand program.” A mentor commented, “Don’t take a hiatus in March and April...the kids could probably use a less than 1 hr break from testing prep.” About four percent of comments were categorized as “increase teacher involvement.” A mentor commented, “I’d like to see teachers get more involved in the lesson. Maybe coordinate a lesson with the mentor? I’m not very creative so I would have liked a little more help from the teachers in what to talk about, activities to go along with the book, discussion topics, etc.” Lastly, 11 percent of comments could not be categorized. Some of the specific responses were:

- As a volunteer, I would enjoy reading about my assigned school(s) ahead of the first onsite meeting.
- Real Men Read program should be a part of each school year being that the mentors can assist teachers and staff with students as they prepare for test, exams and daily curriculums.
- Maybe go to a performing arts production as a group.

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 60 comments that were all categorized as a “positive experience.” Some of

the responses included:

- It was great! I wasn't sold on the idea that reading to the students once a month would make that much of an impact, but once I started the program I realized how much they looked forward to me coming to read each month. I'd hear them talk about the books they read since the last time I was there and the further we got into the semester the more books it seemed like they could tell me about each time I was there.
- The RMR program was a great experience overall, and a great start to my day. While our time is brief with each visit, this is a worthwhile investment with residual benefits for years to come. The thank you cards from students are eye-opening, communicate their impression, and reiterate the positive impact of such a program. I look forward to reading next year.
- It's a great program that allows the kids to get a different perspective on life through the eyes and experiences of others outside the public education area.

Mentors were also asked “Do you plan on volunteering as a mentor for the Real Men Read program next school?” Approximately, 81 percent indicated “yes” and 19 percent “maybe.” **Figure 2** shows the number of years that surveyed mentors have volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program. Most of the mentors indicated that this was their first time to volunteer in the program (73 percent). About 16 percent have volunteered for two years; three percent for three years, and nine percent have volunteered all four 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

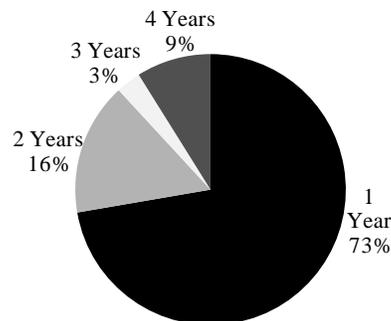


Figure 2. Number of years surveyed mentors volunteered in the Houston Real Men Read program.

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-one percent stated “yes,” 15 percent “maybe,” and 15 percent “no.”

Conclusions

Mentor’s survey results indicated that their experience in the Houston Real Men Read program was rewarding. The positive experience of mentors in the program was also evident in that the 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. Overall, the various components of the Houston Real Men Read program were all rated as “very good” or “excellent” by the majority of mentors.

Mentors provided valuable suggestions to assist those involved in the program to make improvements. District and campus representatives involved in the Houston Real Men Read program may want to review the book selection. Mentors also recommended that communication be improved and also that the program be expanded and promoted. A collaborative effort among the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Division, Strategic Partnerships, Volunteers in Public Schools, and the Research and Accountability Department will further strengthen program practices.

For additional information contact the HISD Department of Research and Accountability at 713-556-6700 or e-mail Research@Houstonisd.org .
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