



Connect Charter School:

The Peer Mentoring Program



On Day 3, period 8 it's time for peer mentoring! The peer mentoring program at Connect Charter School began in 2014 when a grade 8 teacher saw a need to create a leadership opportunity for older students within the school, that would also contribute to internal community building. The initial program ran with 20 student pairings and has now expanded to 165 pairings this year. The program offers an opportunity for grade 7 to 9 students to mentor and support students in grades 4 to 6 in their academic studies as well as provide friendship and guidance. Potential peer mentors must complete an application form, attend training, and mentees are referred by their teachers or can refer themselves.

The student pairings have always been deliberate and purposeful in order to provide both the mentor and the mentee with the most beneficial relationship building experience. It's important for the program's success to ensure that not only is the mentee receiving the support they want, but that the mentor is also experiencing personal growth. "My leadership skills have definitely improved through the peer mentoring program," explains a grade 8 mentor. Other mentors have used this opportunity to get a head start on their future career interests. "I joined this program





because I want to be a teacher one day and I like figuring out how [my mentee] learns best,” expresses a grade 9 mentor.

When a peer mentoring pair was asked about their experience together, they were quick to rave about the program. “I think the peer mentoring program here at connect helps fill the gap between the younger and older grades to help build a relationship,” shares a grade 7 student. His mentee in grade 5 was quick to agree and added his own opinion that “I like having a friend in an older grade because whenever I see him in the hallway we always high five.”

A parent at Connect Charter School, whose son is a mentee in the program, explains how he enjoys working on special projects with his peer mentor that are outside of his normal school work. “They have a lot in common, so it provides him with someone to chat with about the things he is interested in and have a full, well rounded conversation about it. He looks forward to meeting up with his peer mentor each Wednesday, it’s a highlight in his week,” reveals the parent.

“What’s wonderful about peer mentoring is that each relationship is unique and it will go exactly where it needs to. Just having a friend in an older student is sometimes all they need to feel safe and that they belong. It is a beautiful thing to be a part of!” states Educational Assistant Leane Riley.

Although it was not Riley who first initiated the peer mentoring program, she is the one who keep the wheels turning. She instinctively makes



the mentoring matches, helpfully provides materials and resources



for students to use during peer mentoring and routinely monitors the peer mentoring groups to provide advice and help keep them on task.

Last October, Connect Charter School was fortunate enough to welcome Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary into the school. They facilitated free workshops to help prepare our students for the responsibility of being a mentor. Next year, we hope to provide an orientation discussion for mentees about what their roles and responsibilities are in the program and how it could benefit them.

This Peer Mentoring Program at Connect Charter School is one of the most cherished programs we offer for students and we can't wait to see how it grows and prospers. The program only further shows the value that Connect places on building a sense of community, leadership and learning enrichment in our children.