



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Youth mentoring identified
as a critical dropout prevention strategy for South Coast region**

Local programs are growing; but gaps still exist

BOSTON – Research indicates that youth mentoring has increased 66 percent in the South Coast region over the past two years with 500 youth being served, but with 200 South Coast youth on waiting lists for mentors, and the need for mentoring recently identified by The Urban Initiative at UMass Dartmouth as one of five critical drop-out prevention strategies, more needs to be done.

At an event tomorrow, April 14 (8 a.m. start), Mass Mentoring Partnership, the state’s umbrella organization for youth mentoring, along with local mentoring program representatives plus business, civic, philanthropic and academic leaders, will gather at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth’s Advanced Technology and Manufacturing Center in Fall River to analyze the power of youth mentoring, and discuss further ways to leverage it as a cornerstone of drop-out prevention.

As part of this, the results of *Mass Mentoring Counts 2008* will be released. Mass Mentoring Counts is a biennial statewide youth mentoring survey from Mass Mentoring Partnership, conducted with the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, which reveals mentoring trends, gaps and program practices.

It comes on the heels of a study released last week by the Urban Initiative at UMass Dartmouth with the SouthCoast Development Partnership that identifies mentoring/tutoring as one of five strategies for the region’s drop-out prevention plan stating that it “is a tremendous, low-cost, short-term strategy with immediate effects on achievement and attendance – two significant risk factors for dropping out.”

- more on back -

Mass Mentoring research on the SouthCoast region shows:

- **Local mentoring programs have grown:** youth served increased by 66 percent between 2006 and 2008.
- **More South Coast youth need mentoring.** Based on information collected from Fall River and New Bedford mentoring programs, more than 200 area youth are currently waiting for mentors due to the need for more volunteers.
- **Of those being mentored in the region, 60 percent are adolescents.** Specifically, 39 percent of children with mentors are between 4 and 9 years old; 52 percent are between 10 and 14 years old; and 8 percent are between 15 and 19 years old.
- **The top goal for local mentoring programs is education/academic support,** followed by building self-esteem.
- **Local mentoring programs are targeting youth with at-risk factors:** all programs surveyed serve a substantial number of youth who are low-income, at academic risk, or from single-parent households.
- The gender breakdown of mentees is 58 percent female; 41 percent male.
- **Children in mentoring relationships are diverse in ethnicity, but more mentors of color are needed:** 17 percent of mentees are black/African-American; 33 percent are Latino/Latina; 44 percent are Caucasian; and 6 percent are multi-racial. In comparison, 95 percent of mentors are Caucasian; 2 percent are black/African-American; 2 percent are Latino/Latina; and 1 percent are multi-racial.

The South Coast mentoring programs that participated in the 2008 Mass Mentoring Counts study were the SMILES Mentoring Program; Family Service Association: Big Friends Little Friends; and Child & Family Services: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater New Bedford.

"Our Mass Mentoring Counts report combined with the Urban Initiative study, provides powerful information to guide the South Coast region's efforts to tackle the drop-out issue," said David Shapiro, CEO of Mass Mentoring Partnership. "Mentoring-specific data represents the great work of mentoring programs, while also pinpointing the gaps we need to close in order to benefit the children across the region, and we will work with partners to leverage all of the information now available in their pursuit of funding and increased mentor recruitment that can close those gaps."

Mass Mentoring Partnership is the only statewide organization dedicated to strategically expanding quality mentoring to meet the needs of youth across Massachusetts. MMP serves more than 165 mentoring programs statewide and over 20,000 mentoring relationships. For more information: www.massmentors.org.