



STUDENT
SPONSOR
PARTNERS



SSP Mentor Handbook

2016-2017

A Word of Welcome

Hello Mentors!

Thank you so much for joining the partnership and mentoring a student this year! I call our mentoring program “the secret sauce” to our students’ success; we couldn’t be more grateful for your commitment.

A mentor is defined as someone who provides guidance and advice to a less experienced and often younger person. We hope that the contents of this handbook will guide you along the beginning stages of your mentoring journey and serve as a reference as your relationship with your mentee grows over the next four years. We also offer periodic trainings and opportunities to interact with other mentors as the year goes on.

Please remember that both the SSP staff and your student’s SSP School Coordinator are available at anytime to support you and your student when questions arise. You can find all contact information included in the appendices of this handbook. We, at SSP are looking forward to working with you as we partner to ensure that our SSP students are successful in reaching their fullest potential.

Best,



Denise Durham Williams
Executive Director

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Who We Are



Student Sponsor Partners (SSP) was founded in 1986 by Peter M. Flanigan to help low-income students in New York City receive a quality non-public school education. He believed attending a challenging and supportive high school was the key to jump-starting a student's success in life. Because of this belief, SSP has a community of nearly 7,000 alumni who have graduated high school, continued into college, and have had a successful career! This September, the SSP program will have over 1,100 students attending 23 schools throughout the New York City area.

Students enrolled in the SSP program are given the opportunity to attend a non-public high school because of the financial support of our sponsors. Students are not only paired with financial sponsors, but also with a dedicated mentor like you. SSP mentors are passionate, successful individuals who act as cheerleaders and support systems for their mentee. Throughout your time as an SSP mentor, you will get to know your mentee by attending events and talking each month about his or her challenges and triumphs!

Because of your support, our students are able to attend fantastic, quality schools, as well as have experiences they may not have had otherwise. Many of our alumni also go on to become mentors and sponsors themselves due to the positive experience they had in the program.

The SSP Support System

As an SSP mentor, you are a part of a supportive ecosystem that works to serve our students. The guidance and encouragement that you offer your student is a vital part of this system and works in concert with the other parts of the organization to help your student reach his or her full potential.

Your Student

You! (The Mentor)

As a mentor, you are a vital support to your student. Your advice, support, and encouragement help your student strive to do his or her best!

Financial Sponsor

Your student's sponsor contributes financially to his or her private high-school education (tuition) for four years. A sponsor can also be a mentor.

SSP School Coordinator

Your student's SSP School Coordinator acts as his or her link to SSP in school. They enforce our values and are designated in-school support for all of our SSP students. They will be keeping track of student and mentor communication as well as your student's report cards!

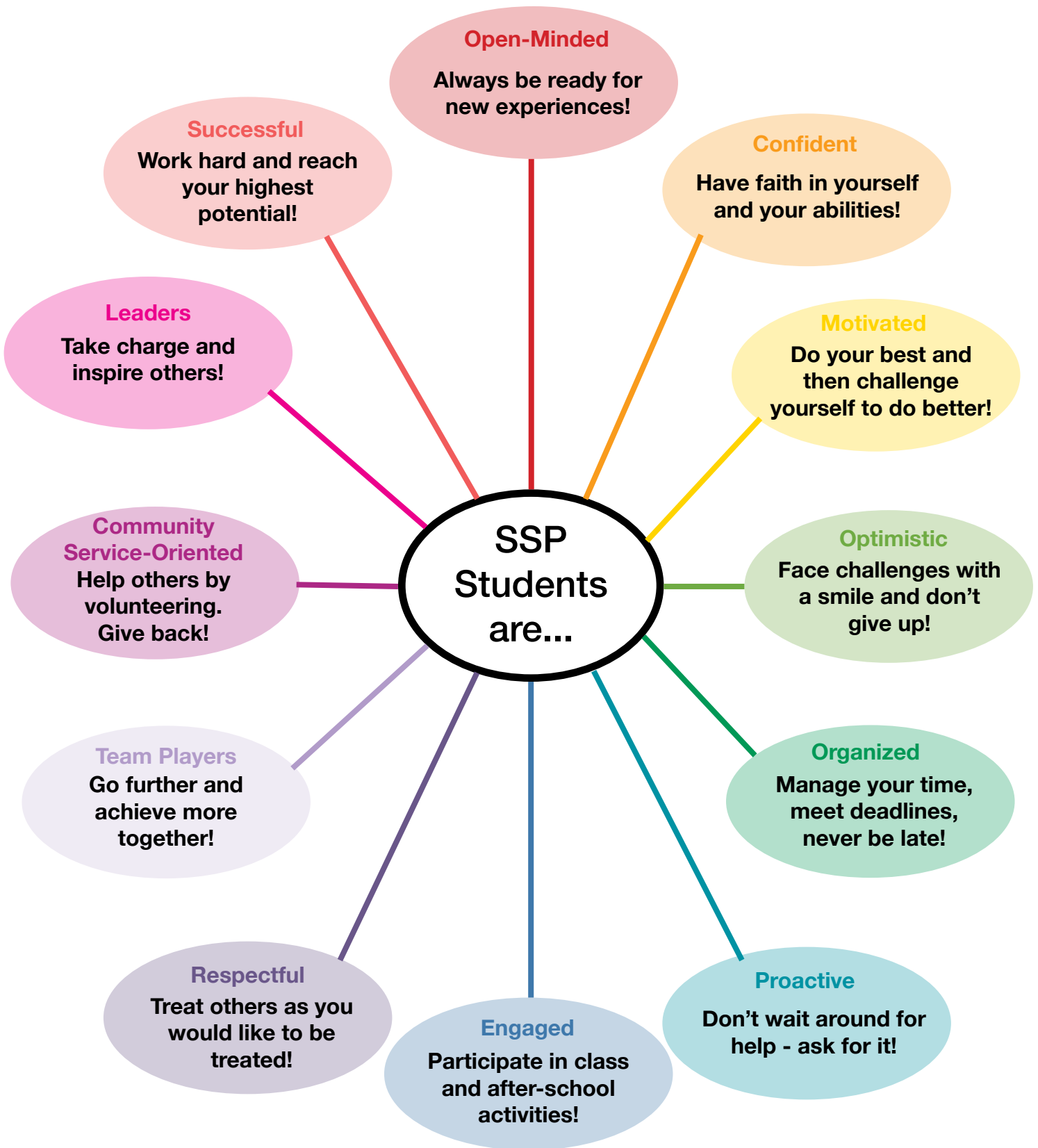
SSP Staff

SSP staff organizes and manages these relationships and supports your success! If you need support at any time, reach out to a member of the staff and we'll try our best to give you the resources that you need.

Keep in mind, your participation in this support system means that you, in turn, have resources at your disposal! SSP Staff both in and out of your student's school are here for you. Taking advantage of these resources can help you better connect with your student and get more out of your experience!

SSP Student Values

At SSP, we encourage our students to embody a set of values that help them achieve their full potential. As a mentor, you are vital in supporting these values!



Managing Relationships

As a mentor, the most important relationship will be the one you have with your mentee. However, there are many other individuals you will be interacting with over the next four years. Below we have a few ideas on how to manage these important relationships!

Your Student

Above all, be a good listener to your mentee. Focus on the positive in challenging situations, and help your mentee work through issues in the same way. You are there as a mentor to be an additional support system for your mentee. This will come in handy as our mentees encounter many situations they're not previously familiar with in their new private college-preparatory school environment. One of the toughest transitions for young people is between 8th and 9th grade, so be patient with your relationship growth and your student's progress. If your mentee is not responsive on email, try phone or text. Encourage your student to leave voicemails if they call you and you are not by your phone. Encourage your mentee to follow his/her school's rules and his/her parents' rules. Tell your student that what he/she says to you is confidential, unless he/she is being hurt, will potentially hurt someone else, or will potentially hurt him/herself. In those rare cases, let your mentee know that you will report this to SSP.

Your Student's Family

Be sensitive to your mentee's family's decisions and situations. If your mentee has a particular curfew or other particular rules to follow, respect those wishes. You may find that a student's parent prefers to speak with you to arrange a time/place to meet for an outing, especially in the beginning. Quite often, mentors form very strong bonds with mentee families and their influence trickles down to younger siblings and other members of the family. Let your mentee's parents know that you are there as an extra support and that they can reach out if they have any questions or concerns about their child.

Your SSP Coordinator

Please do not hesitate to reach out to SSP school coordinators if you have any questions about school rules, academic expectations, or any other school issues. The name and contact information for your school coordinator can be found in the Appendix.

The SSP Staff

SSP Staff is your ultimate stop for any questions, concerns, and feedback. You can find all contact info at the end of this handbook. From the Mentor and Mentee Kick Off event and trainings, to mentor events and college readiness programming, SSP staff is your constant resource. Email or call the office anytime. Staff is also available for in-person meetings if needed. If you'd like to get more involved in SSP by sharing your mentoring experience or recommending an idea to enhance the program, we'd love to hear from you.

Thank You

The entire SSP Community is thankful for the time you are willing to donate to your student's academic achievement. Without the diligent and compassionate work of our mentors, the SSP model would not be as successful.

Have more questions? Here are a few resources we thought you might need - including contact information, an FAQ section, as well as additional resources for mentors.



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SSP Policies

The following policies have been communicated to both the students and their families at an SSP Orientation. Any questions concerning policies should be directed to SSP Staff.

Academic & School Policy

- SSP students are expected to pass all courses and Regents exams in accordance with their school's policies.
- SSP students who fail a course at the conclusion of the school year must report to summer school and pass that course in order to matriculate to the next grade as an SSP student. Summer school tuition is the responsibility of the student's family.
- SSP mentors and sponsors receive quarterly report cards and will be notified by SSP if their student is failing three courses.
- SSP students who fail three courses at the conclusion of the school year are subject to review by SSP. Their funding will be ordinarily discontinued for the upcoming fall semester. Tuition for the fall semester will be the responsibility of the student's family. In order to have their SSP funding reinstated for the spring semester, students must end the fall semester with no more than two failures.
- SSP sophomores, juniors, and seniors failing 5 or more courses at mid-term are subject to review by SSP. Their SSP funding will be ordinarily discontinued for the remainder of the school year. In order to have their SSP funding reinstated for the next academic year, students must: 1) end the school year with no more than two failures 2) attend summer school to make up these failures 3) earn passing grades in these summer school courses.
- Students who are currently under funding suspension and who continue to fail three courses at the end of the following semester will have their funding permanently suspended. They will also be dismissed from the SSP program. If the student wishes to continue attending their school, the tuition will be the responsibility of the student's family.
- In very rare cases, a school will decide to dismiss a student for a serious disciplinary infraction. When this occurs, the student is dismissed from SSP as well. SSP students, and SSP funding, cannot be transferred from one school to another.

Sponsor & Mentor Policy

- SSP students are expected to maintain an active and productive relationship with their sponsor and mentor.
- Students are to communicate at least once a month via phone or email with their mentor. They will share information on their academics, extracurricular activities, and other school events.
- If you have any issues contacting your student or are unable to participate in the program notify your SSP School Coordinator or SSP staff know immediately.
- Students are asked to meet with their mentor face-to-face 3 to 6 times throughout the year.
- Students are instructed by SSP School Coordinators to write two thank you letters to their sponsor and mentor each year.

Financial Policy

- Students' families contribute a minimum of \$900 towards school tuition each year. The school may have additional fees that the family is also responsible for (transportation, uniform, books, lab, activities, graduation, etc.). Any questions regarding payment should be directed to the school's financial officer.
- At no time should your mentee or his or her family ask you or the sponsor for financial help. Asking sponsors and mentors for money or gifts of any kind is unacceptable and may result in dismissal from SSP.

Transfer Policy

- The mission of SSP is to provide the best learning experience for each student, one in which they perform to their full potential in a sound, uninterrupted environment. It is due to this that SSP follows the policy of **no transferring between schools** within the four years of high school.
- Students who are experiencing any difficulties at their current school are highly encouraged to contact the SSP school coordinator, SSP staff, and/or mentor to discuss these issues.

A Yearly Snapshot of Your Student

SSP is focused on empowering our students to graduate from high school, succeed in college, and achieve their post-graduate goals. Our **College and Career Program** helps students during each stage of their high school career. As a mentor, you'll be along for the ride as a valuable resource. Highlighted below are topics and skills students are learning each year.

Freshman Year

- Freshmen are learning how to set and accomplish short-term and long-term goals. They will write S.M.A.R.T. goals. S.M.A.R.T. goals are goals that are (S) Specific, (M) Measurable, (A) Attainable, (R) Relevant in my life at this moment and (T) Time-bound
- Ask your student how he/she is managing organizing notebooks, planner, their homework, etc.
- Help your mentee identify resources at school and outside of school (SSP Coordinator, Mentor, SSP Staff, etc.) and utilize them often.
- Encourage your mentee to participate both in class and also by joining clubs and sports teams. Share experiences you had in high school. What did you struggle with? Where did you find your niche?

Sophomore Year

- By sophomore year, our students are more comfortable in high school, though they should be finding ways to challenge themselves. Are they eligible for honors courses? Have they identified a subject area they would like to learn more about?
- Encourage your student to continue using all resources at SSP and at their schools.
- SSP has begun to talk to students about career and college readiness.
- Each sophomore also participates in SSP Soft Skills training and learns how to make a good first impression to prepare them for Career Days, Mentee Job Shadow Days, summer employment interviews, and college admission fairs.

Junior Year

- Junior year is extremely important, as colleges look closely at class choice and grades in this year. Through our College and Career program, our juniors receive free access to the following: Intensive SAT Prep course, college visits and fair information, college readiness workshops, scholarship exploration workshops, and career/Internship prep workshops.
- Encourage your student to talk to his/her guidance counselor, SSP staff, or SSP coordinator about the many deadlines regarding SAT Prep, SAT's, and college search.

Senior Year

- Your mentee is preparing his/her: college lists, college applications, drafting his/her personal statements and essays, preparing for college interviews, and filling out financial aid and scholarship applications.
- SSP organizes college readiness, career, & leadership skills events; encourage your mentee to attend.
- Get excited with your mentee, and let him/her know that you're there for him/her to talk through any forthcoming decisions. Remind him/her about the SSP support system behind them.

Mentor FAQ

What are the requirements to be an SSP student?

- Students currently enrolled in the eighth grade.
- Students who come from low-income families. In order to qualify financially, a family should have an income of \$10,000 or less per person in the household each year. For example, a family of four should have an annual income of about \$40,000.
- Students of all backgrounds; SSP does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, or national origin.
- Students who, along with their families, are willing to contribute a portion of the tuition costs, usually around \$900 per year.
- Students who are academically average to below average.

Is SSP a catholic organization?

No. Each of our partner schools has a long history of successfully educating vulnerable inner city youths in a disciplined and nurturing school community. Although most of them are Catholic schools, SSP is not a religious organization and students are not asked about their religious affiliations. Our partner schools simply provide the best education available to our students at the most affordable cost.

What is the best way to connect with my mentee?

Mentors will initiate most of the outreach to their mentee, at least early on in your relationship. Be persistent and clear with your mentee about what your expectations are in terms of returning phone calls and emails.

Many students communicate almost exclusively via text and rarely check their email. Let your mentee know that texting is fine, but you need to speak by phone and in person from time to time as well.

Common interests are a great way to strike up an awesome, no-pressure conversation. We strongly discourage connecting via social media.

What if I move out of New York metropolitan area?

How a relationship ends is key to how you and especially the mentee will think about and value the experience you shared. Tell your mentee well in advance of your departure. Next, notify us and we will re-pair your mentee.

My student moved away and can no longer participate in the program. What happens to me?

Don't worry, if you would still like to continue your mentoring journey then SSP staff will be happy to re-pair you with another student! If you and your student would like to stay in touch in their new location then make sure you get their most current contact information.

What if I can't get in contact with my mentee?

First off, don't panic. Notify the SSP staff as soon as possible if you are having communication issues. Sometimes our students' contact information changes and wasn't properly communicated. We will take the steps needed to reconnect you and your mentee.

How often do I need to be in contact with my mentee?

The expectation is that mentors and mentees see each other 4 to 6 times a year and speak by phone or email at least once a month. This expectation goes both ways; SSP students are expected to participate in the relationship as well.

My mentee's parent won't allow him/her to attend evening events or be out late on a school night.

It is important to speak with the mentee's parent early on to learn the parent's expectations of the mentee and their own house rules. We try to plan the SSP organized events for early enough that getting home late shouldn't be an issue. We also try to have a few weekend events each year. Remember, you are not obligated to attend SSP events, so work out a time to meet with your mentee that is acceptable to you, the mentee, and the mentee's parent.

My mentee persistently invites his or her relatives to our outings. I would prefer these to be one-on-one mostly - what should I do?

Communicate your wishes with your mentee. It isn't appropriate for your mentee to invite someone else on your outings without asking your permission. It is possible that they feel nervous about connecting with someone new and feel more comfortable with a family member present. Having a frank conversation about your expectations for the relationship can help take the pressure off while making sure that you are both on the same page.

My mentee is not doing well in school. What should I do?

If your mentee is not doing well in school, there are a few things you can do:

Meet with your mentee. Sometimes simply sitting down with your mentee and talking about the academic problems they are having can give you a chance to work out a plan with them to improve their grades. Encourage them to get extra help from their teachers and to attend after school tutoring sessions if they are available.

Remember, you do not need to be their tutor and you are not a social worker; if you find you do not know how to handle a situation, please contact SSP and/or the SSP School Coordinator to figure out a strategy to get the student back on track. The school coordinators are often guidance counselors in the partner schools, so they can help the student get on track and monitor the student on a daily basis.

If you have more questions about mentoring, contact:

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If any students have questions, please direct them to our new student support email address!
studentsupport@sspnyc.org

Stay connected with us through our website and social media! **Twitter:** @SSPNewYork
Like Us On Facebook: Student Sponsor Partners
www.sspnyc.org

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