



STUDENT
SPONSOR
PARTNERS

Mentor Guide



2019-2020
School Year

WELCOME

Welcome Mentors,

Thank you for joining the Student Sponsor Partners (SSP) community to guide a student through high school. We're grateful for your commitment and excited for the journey ahead for you and your mentee.

As an SSP mentor, you'll make a positive difference in your student's life simply by being at his/her side while facing life's challenges. Your essential role is to support and encourage your mentee, particularly when he/she struggles to overcome obstacles and solve problems through the transition into young adulthood.

We hope this handbook will guide you through the early 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 years go on to share lessons learned and connect about your experiences.

Please note that both SSP staff and your student's School Coordinator are available throughout your mentorship to support you and your student when questions arise. You can find all contacts in the appendix of this handbook.

We at SSP look forward to working with you as we ensure our students are successful in reaching their full potential!

Thank you,
The SSP Team

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WHO WE ARE

SSP was founded in 1986 by Peter M. Flanigan to help low-income New York City students receive a quality, private high school education and mentorship. He believed a challenging and supportive high school is the key to jump-starting a student's success in life. Due to Peter's vision, SSP has a community of thousands of alumni who have graduated high school on time, continued to college, and had successful careers. This year, we have more than 1,100 students attending 25 schools across New York City.

Students enrolled in SSP have the opportunity to attend a quality, private high school because of sponsors who help fund their tuition. They are also paired with dedicated mentors like you! SSP mentors are passionate and successful individuals who act as cheerleaders and support systems for their mentees. Throughout your time as an SSP mentor, you'll get to know your mentee by attending events and talking about his/her challenges and triumphs.

Because of your support, our students are able to attend quality schools, meet a robust network of supporters, and gain exposure to opportunities to expand their ideas of what's possible.



SSP SUPPORT SYSTEM

As an SSP mentor, you are an integral part of a supportive ecosystem working to serve our students, helping them reach their full potential.

1. Your Student

2. Mentor (YOU)

Your advice, support, and encouragement help your student strive to do his/her best.

3. Financial Sponsor

Your student's sponsor contributes financially to his/her private high school education for four years. A sponsor can also be a mentor if he/she wants a stronger one-on-one connection.

4. School Coordinator

SSP School Coordinators act as our liaison at each partner school. They enforce SSP's values and check in with students during their high school careers. They keep tabs on students' academic performance, wellness, and behavior to communicate progress to SSP staff and mentors.

5. SSP Staff

SSP staff harness the power of our community to promote each student's infinite potential. We identify when to deploy resources to support student success including tutoring and SAT prep. We check in regularly throughout your mentorship, and mentors are encouraged to reach out to staff at any point for resources you need to help your mentee succeed.

Keep in mind, your participation in this support system means that you, in turn, have resources at your disposal! Take advantage of our resources to better connect with your student and get more out of the experience.

SSP STUDENT VALUES

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

SSP students are...

- *Open-Minded* – Always ready for new experiences.
- *Confident* – Have faith in yourself and your abilities.
- *Motivated* – Do your best and then challenge yourself to do better.
- *Optimistic* – Face challenges with a smile and don't give up.
- *Organized* – Manage your time, meet deadlines, never be late.
- *Proactive* – Don't wait around for help – ask for it!
- *Engaged* – Participate in class and after-school activities.
- *Respectful* – Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- *Team Players* – Go further and achieve more together.
- *Community Service-Oriented* – Help others by volunteering. Give back!
- *Leaders* – Take charge and inspire others.
- *Successful* – Work hard and reach your highest potential!

RELATIONSHIP STAGES

The mentor/youth relationship typically goes through three stages:

1. *Developing Rapport and Building Trust* – Freshman and sophomore year
2. *Setting and Reaching Goals* – Junior year
3. *Bringing Closure to the Relationship* – Senior year

Developing Rapport and Building Trust

One of the best ways to build trust is to help youth accomplish something important to them. Utilize SSP's Roadmap for Freshmen Workbook to help your mentee reach his/her goals. SSP's Roadmap outlines how to write a S.M.A.R.T. goal to help find solutions to challenges. Help your mentee view his/her goal realistically, break it down into small steps, and explore ways of reaching the goal. Building trust takes weeks, sometimes months.

Your mentee may be slow to give his/her trust, expecting inconsistency and lack of commitment due to past experiences with adults. Your trust and commitment may be tested, particularly when youth are from unstable backgrounds where adults have repeatedly disappointed them.

During the testing period, mentors can expect:

- Missed appointments
- Phone calls not returned
- Unreasonable requests
- Angry or sullen behavior

RELATIONSHIP STAGES

Once you pass the test, the real work of the relationship will begin. Mentors should remember that the issue is not whether youth like them. Youth are protecting themselves from disappointment. From their perspective, not having a relationship at all seems better than trusting and subsequently losing someone. These young people come from families where nothing can be taken for granted.

- Predictability breeds trust. You must be consistent and accountable.
- Follow through on promises and contracts that were volunteered.
- One misstep, however small it may seem, can assume great importance to youth. Mentors must be prepared, understanding, and refrain from personalizing the experience.
- Confidentiality is essential to trust. Your mentee may be unsure whether the feelings and information he/she discloses to you will be shared with teachers, parents, etc. Early in the relationship, you must reassure your mentee:
 - Nothing your mentee tells you will be discussed with anyone else.
 - If you feel it's important to involve another adult, you must discuss.
 - If there is threat of physical harm to your mentee or others, you must break confidentiality to seek protection for the endangered person.



RELATIONSHIP STAGES

Setting and Reaching Goals

Once the “testing” is over, the rocky part of the relationship usually ends and your mentee becomes more committed. At times, old behaviors may appear, usually if under stress. In general, youth at this stage will view their mentors as important in their lives. Because each relationship is unique, timing and intensity will vary.

When things aren't working:

- The match/fit between mentor and youth may not be right.
- Some youth have been so damaged by earlier experiences that they are unable to risk taking advantage of a helping relationship.
- Some youth will get stuck in the “testing” stage.
- Some youth may drop out of the program or school.
- The mentor may feel burdened by the relationship and feel angry or annoyed by the youth's behavior or words.

Bringing Closure to the Relationship

Relationship closure for planned terminations:

- Use the closure as a means to recall youth's progress and strengths.
- Help youth grow from the process; reassure them about what they have learned and are capable of.
- Discuss some positive actions and directions for the future.
- Reassure youth about your confidence in them.
- Mutually agree about how, when, or if you will stay in touch.
- Follow through on that commitment.

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 interact with over the next four years. Below we have a few ideas to manage these important relationships!

Your Student

Be a good listener for your mentee. Focus on the positives of challenging situations, and help your mentee work through issues in the same way. Your role as a mentor is to be an additional support for your mentee. This will come in handy as our students encounter many situations they're not 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 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 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 family members. 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.

MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

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-related 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 kick-off event and trainings to mentor events and college readiness programming, SSP staff is your constant resource. Email or call the office any time. 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.



What are the requirements to be an SSP student?

- Students currently enrolled in 8th grade and who come from low-income families. In order to qualify financially, a family must have an income of \$10,000 or less per household member 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.
- Students who are academically average to below average (70 - 85%).

Is SSP a Catholic organization?

No. Each of our partner schools has a long history of educating vulnerable inner-city youth 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 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 with their mentees, at least early on. Be persistent and clear with your mentee about your expectations 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. We strongly discourage connecting via social media.

What if I move out of the New York metropolitan area?

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

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

If you would still like to continue your mentoring journey, SSP staff will be happy to re-pair you with another student! If you and your student would like to stay in touch in his/her new location, make sure you get his/her most current contact information.

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

First, don't panic. Notify the SSP staff as soon as possible if you are having communication issues. Sometimes our students' information changes and isn'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 4-6 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 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 your mentee's parent early on to learn their expectations of the mentee and their house rules. We try to plan the SSP organized events for early enough that getting home late shouldn't be an

MENTOR FAQ

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, your mentee, and your mentee's parents.

My mentee invites his or her relatives on our outings. I 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 your permission. It is possible that he/she feels nervous about connecting with someone new and feels 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?

- Meet with your mentee. Sometimes simply sitting down and talking about the academic problems he/she is having can give you a chance to work out a plan to improve his/her grades. Encourage him/her to get extra help from teachers and to attend after-school tutoring sessions if available.
- Remember, you do not need to be your mentee's 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. School coordinators are often guidance counselors at partner schools, so they can help your student get on track and monitor your student on a daily basis.

MENTORING CONTACTS

Ali Hoban, Senior Director of Mentoring Systems & Analytics

p: 917-472-9513

e: ahoban@sspny.org

Heather Turner, Senior Director of Mentor Programming

p: 646-783-2714

e: hturner@sspny.org

Yessenia Hoyos, Mentoring Assistant

p: 917-472-9517

e: yhoyos@sspny.org

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[@sspnewyork](https://twitter.com/sspnewyork)



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The following policies have been communicated to both 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 school policies.
- SSP students who fail a course at the conclusion of the school year must report to summer school and pass the course 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 students are failing more than two courses.
- SSP students who fail more than two courses at the conclusion of the school year are subject to review by SSP. Their funding will ordinarily be suspended 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 five or more courses at mid-term are subject to review by SSP. Their SSP funding will typically be suspended 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; and 3) earn passing grades in those summer school courses.

SSP POLICIES

- Students who are currently under funding suspension and who continue to fail more than two courses at the end of the following semester will have their funding permanently discontinued. They will also be dismissed from the SSP program. If the student wishes to continue attending his/her school, the tuition will be the responsibility of the student's family.
- SSP students are expected to arrive at school on time, and to maintain a good attendance record. If a student does not regularly arrive at school on time or maintain a good attendance record, SSP may suspend the student's funding or dismiss the student from the SSP program.
- SSP students are expected to uphold behavioral standards set forth in their school's handbook. Serious or persistent disciplinary infractions may result in funding suspension or dismissal from the SSP program.
- In rare cases, a school will decide to dismiss a student for a serious disciplinary, academic, or attendance infraction. When this occurs, the student is dismissed from SSP as well.

Financial Policy

- Each SSP family contributes \$800 toward school tuition annually. Schools may have additional fees that SSP families are responsible for (transport, uniform, books, lab, activities, graduation, etc.). Payments are made per the school's policies, and any questions regarding payment should be directed to the school's finance office.
- SSP students or family members should never ask a mentor for financial help. Asking mentors for money or gifts is unacceptable and may result in the student's dismissal from SSP.

SSP POLICIES

Transfer Policy

- The mission of SSP is to provide the best learning experience for each student - one where they perform to their highest potential in a positive environment. It is due to this that SSP has a no-transfer policy between schools within the four years of high school.

Mentor Communication Policy

- SSP students must maintain an active and productive relationship with their mentors.
- SSP students must communicate with their mentors at least once a month via phone, text, or email. We suggest they share information on academics, extracurricular activities, and other school events. Students are not permitted to communicate with mentors via social media.
- SSP students must meet with their mentors face-to-face 4-6 times per year.
- We ask that SSP students notify their school coordinator immediately if they are not able to reach their mentor or if their mentor has informed them that they can no longer participate in the program.

The SSP College and Career Success Program empowers each student with the tools to be proactive in achieving their academic goals, graduate from high school, and go on to college.

The program is designed to help our students:

- Build confidence
- Set academic and personal goals
- Prepare for their first job
- Navigate the college application and financial aid process
- Be admitted into a 'best fit' college with minimum debt

Our College and Career Success Program helps students during each stage of their high school journey. 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. In addition, please find suggestions below on how to connect with your mentee during those critical years.

Freshmen are learning:

- How to set and accomplish short-term and long-term goals.

How to write S.M.A.R.T. goals: (S) Specific, (M) Measurable, (A) Attainable, (R) Relevant in my life at this moment, and (T) Time-bound.

How to find solutions to challenges such as transitioning to a high school curriculum, studying for difficult subjects, and managing time efficiently.

Each freshman receives an SSP Roadmap for Freshmen workbook.

Opportunities to connect with your mentee:

- Ask your mentee about his/her study habits and grades and share your own tips on test-taking.
- Reach out to your mentee's SSP school coordinator to receive his/her S.M.A.R.T. goals.
- Review and revise the steps needed to complete the S.M.A.R.T. goals with your mentee.
- Ask your mentee about his/her organization and stress the importance of organization in keeping track of school assignments.
- Help your mentee identify resources at and outside of school (SSP school coordinator, mentor, SSP Staff, etc.) and utilize them often.
- Encourage your mentee to participate in and outside of class (clubs and sports teams).
- Share your high school experiences. What did you struggle with? How did you find your way?

Sophomores are practicing the following:

- Conducting proper introductions for networking and interviews.
- Communicating clearly and respectfully.
- Learning the importance of a confident handshake, good eye contact, and strong body language.

Each sophomore gets a SSP ABCs of Soft Skills booklet, a Body Language for First Impressions handout, and is invited to participate in Career Day/ Mentee Job Shadow Day.

Opportunities to connect with your mentee:

- Assist your mentee in developing balance between academic workload, home responsibilities, and extracurricular activities.
- Review your mentee's resume.
- Help him/her research and prepare for a part-time summer job interview.
- Share your tips on how to stay motivated in high school.
- Invite your mentee to visit your job after school, give him/her a tour of the facility, and introduce him/her to your colleagues.
- Ask your mentee to reflect on what he/she can do now to get one step closer to a dream career.

Juniors have FREE access to the following:

- Intensive SAT Prep course
- College visits and fair information
- College readiness workshops
- Scholarship directory

Juniors can enroll in the 5-week Saturday College Admissions Consulting course in the fall and SAT Prep course in the spring.

Opportunities to connect with your mentee:

- Talk about any concerns your mentee may have about attending college.
- Encourage your mentee to talk to his/her guidance counselor, SSP Staff, or SSP school coordinator about the many deadlines regarding SAT Prep, SAT registration, and the college search.
- Urge your mentee to participate in all SSP college and career programs.
- Remind your mentee to register for the SAT in May or June.
- Talk to your mentee about the schools he or she is considering.
- Assist in researching and visiting local colleges with your mentee.

Seniors are preparing and completing:

- College lists
- CUNY, SUNY, and private college applications
- Personal statements and supplemental essays
- College interviews
- Financial aid and scholarships applications

Seniors participate in a 6-week Saturday College Admissions Consulting course and High School to College Transition workshops.

Opportunities to connect with your mentee:

- Let your mentee know that you're there for him/her to talk through any forthcoming decisions.
- Remind him/her about the SSP support system.
- Offer to review his/her college statements and supplemental essays.
- Encourage your mentee to apply for college scholarships.
- Share possible college pitfalls you experienced and how you overcame them.

On the next page is your mentee's SSP school coordinator contact info. Please don't hesitate to contact a member of the SSP Mentoring Team or your mentee's school coordinator for any matters related to your student or mentor-mentee relationship.

Academy of Mt. St. Ursula

Sinead Cameron
718-364-5353
scameron@amsu.org

All Hallows High School

Cindy McDonald
718-293-4545
cmcdonald@allhallows.org

Aquinas High School

Kristy-Ann Tamburello
718-367-2113
tamburellok@aquinashs.org

Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School

Barbara Foley
718-857-2700
bfoley@blmhs.org

Cardinal Hayes High School

Tracy Edwards
718-292-6100
tedwards@cardinalhayes.org

Cathedral High School

Maria Spagnuolo
212-688-1545
msapagnuolo@cathedralhs.org

Christ the King High School

Bob Mackey
718-366-7400
rmackey@ctkrhs.org

Cristo Rey

Tiffany Tejada
212-457-2818
ttejada@cristoreyny.org

Cristo Rey Brooklyn

Luis Posada
718-455-3555
lposada@cristoreybrooklyn.org

Holy Cross High School

Lisa Ann Sanzo
718-886-7250
lsanzo@myhchs.org

La Salle Academy

Sandra Sanchez
212-475-8940
ssanchez@lasalleacademy.org

Martin Luther High School

Obed Figuero
718-894-4000 ext. 150
ofigueroa@martinluthernyc.org

Monsignor McClancy High School

James P. Carey
718-898-3800
careyjames945@gmail.com

Monsignor Scanlan High School

Chris Florentino
718-430-0100
cflorentino@scanlanhs.org

Mount St. Michael Academy

Tom Fraher
718-515-6400
thomas.fraher@mtstmichael.org

Nazareth Regional High School

Nancy Roberts
718-763-1100
nroberts@nazarethrhs.org

Preston High School

Karen Wszolek
718-863-9134
kwszolek@prestonhs.org

REFERENCE GUIDE

St. Barnabas High School

Gina Nieves
718-325-8800
gnieves@stbarnabashigh.com

St. Catharine Academy

Christina Antico
718-882-2882
cantino@scahs.org

St. Francis Prep

Lisa Schaefer
718-423-8810
lschaefer@sfonline.org

St. Jean Baptiste High School

Sr. Alla-Anne Boyle
212-288-1645
aboyle@stjean.org

St. Joseph High School

Nichole Prime
718-624-3618
nprime@sjhsbridge.org

St. Raymond Academy

Ruth Ann Tully
718-824-4220
rtully@straymondacademy.org

St. Raymond High School for Boys

Damian Carparelli
718-824-5050
dcarparelli@straymondhighschool.org

The Mary Louis Academy

Sr. Joan Killen
718-297-21230
jkillen@tmla.org

