



# Graduation Matters Montana School-Based Mentoring

A guide to Thrive's award-winning,  
Montana-based, Child Advancement Project (CAP)

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## Letter from Denise:

My statewide initiative, Graduation Matters Montana, has brought together more than 50 Montana communities, to provide every child with the support they need to graduate from high school and be prepared for college and the workforce. It's not just the letter grade a student receives that can hold her back from graduating. Students face difficult social and life situations that make it tough or seemingly impossible to obtain their diploma.

In order for Montana students to be successful, they need a healthy and meaningful relationship with at least one adult. My conversations with students around the state always result in hearing how those young adults want a positive relationship with a caring adult. This parent, family member, teacher or community mentor is critical to achieving their dreams.

In Montana, we are fortunate to have Thrive, an award-winning school-based mentoring program. Thrive's Child Advancement Project (CAP) started in two Bozeman elementary schools when 45 caring community members and students were matched. Today, CAP matches almost 600 students in Bozeman and Big Sky with mentors. These relationships have changed the course of childrens' lives for the better.

If you are considering the development of a community-based mentoring program, or are looking for strategies to improve your current mentoring program, I hope you will find inspiration as well as practical tips in this guide.

Thank you for all that you do provide support that enables each and every Montana student to succeed.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Juneau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Denise Juneau, Superintendent of Public Instruction*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION
- 2. THRIVE OVERVIEW 1
  - Mission 1
  - Values 1
  - Thrive’s Five Signature Programs 2
- 3. CHILD ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (CAP) 2
- 4. CAP PROGRAM STRUCTURE 4
  - Recruitment 4
  - Screening 5
  - Student Nomination 5
  - Training 5
  - Matching 6
  - Supervision 6
  - Communicating with School Staff 6
  - Closure 7
  - Evaluation 7
  - Timeline 8
- 5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNITIES PLANNING SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION 9
- 6. CAP INCOME BREAKOUT 9
- 7. CAP LOGIC MODEL 10
- 8. PROGRAM OUTCOMES 11
- 9. THRIVE AWARDS 12
- 10. RESOURCES 13

## INTRODUCTION

Thrive is a local non-profit organization in Bozeman, Montana. Over the past 28 years Thrive has built an interconnected system of programs designed to ensure that all children have every opportunity to grow, succeed and become valuable members of the community through programs that engage parents and empower children.

*Thrive has been voted best non-profit in Bozeman seven years in a row from 2009-2015.*

These programs are based on the core beliefs that: 1) stable family life and quality parenting are directly related to a child's opportunities for learning and success; 2) the road to success begins in the earliest years with children who are born healthy and raised in safe and nurturing families; 3) we can best impact good outcomes for children when systems, organizations and communities work collaboratively to support families and children; 4) creating the right conditions for early growth development are more effective and less costly than addressing problems later; 5) healthy child development is the foundation for community and economic development; and 6) because children live in the context of their families, services are most effective when they focus on the entire family rather than the child alone.

Thrive has designed and implemented a number of proactive programs, which are crucial to the well-being of children in the local community. At the heart of these is a preventative, strength-based, empowerment model of working with parents and children. Programs have been developed using evidence-informed and evidence-based practices and adapted to meet local community need.

*"(Thrive) forms a community-wide partnership of organizations, professionals, and services...combining mentoring with communication, professional development, interdisciplinary teams, counseling, parent education, and family engagement to help students be successful both academically and socially."  
(Gordon, 2013)*

Thrive maintains critical partnerships that are enhanced by the sharing of design, implementation, management, evaluation and financial resources and responsibilities. Our commitment to collaboration is fueled by the belief that only by utilizing the best and the brightest in the fields of health, child development, child care, education, youth development and economic development can we effectively impact our target group. We employ rigorous evaluation methods to ensure program efficacy. Data is collected throughout the year and analyzed on an annual basis.

Thrive has been recognized for innovative, effective programs, quality operations and strong collaborations at the local, state, regional and national level. Thrive benefits from the time and talents of over 700 volunteers annually, an amazing board, a remarkable professional staff and the loyal support of foundations, businesses and individuals.

## THRIVE OVERVIEW

### Mission:

*All children have every opportunity to grow, succeed and become valuable members of our community through programs that engage parents and empower children.*

### Values:

- Investments in early, preventative supports for children and families yield great returns.
- When we form alliances to create optimal conditions for families and children, we lay the foundation for thriving communities.
- A strategy that provides a continuum of supports that span all of the childhood years and targets both the parent and the child is 'best practice'.
- The stress from poverty, neglect, and abuse in early childhood can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior and physical and mental health. These problems impact the children who experience them and the entire community.
- All families need information, education, support and resources at some point. Normalizing this need and designing services that build on strengths inherent in every family, removes the shame associated not knowing everything or having everything you need to do the best for your family and increases likelihood of parent engagement.
- Every parent and child has strengths.
- We earn our investor's support when we have a strong knowledge base in the areas we impact, professional staff, and regular/thorough evaluation of our services.
- When families are strong, children succeed and communities thrive.



## THRIVE'S FIVE SIGNATURE PROGRAMS:

*Thrive programs are designed locally to address community needs. These programs are preventative and are based on research-based program practices in the fields of child/youth development, family support and mentoring.*

1. **THE PARENT LIAISON PROGRAM:** The Parent Liaison Program encourages a strong link between home and school so parents and teachers become partners in children's success.
2. **THE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT:** The Partnership Project helps young parents with kids birth-5 get off to a good start. Partners include Thrive, Gallatin City-County Health, Gallatin Mental Health Center and local quality child care programs.
3. **THE PARENT PLACE:** The Parent Place Family Resource Centers provide information, support, and resources to all parents.
4. **GIRLS FOR A CHANGE:** Girls for a Change is a grassroots initiative that empowers girls to embrace their futures and secure their ability to succeed and lead. Youth participants design and host an annual conference, participate in international dialogues and volunteer in their communities.
5. **CHILD ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (CAP):** CAP matches nurturing community mentors who provide support and encouragement to children in Bozeman and Big Sky public schools grades K-12. One of the first school-based mentoring programs in the nation, CAP matches almost 600 students and volunteers each year.

## CHILD ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (CAP):

The Child Advancement Project (CAP) was initiated as a result of a 1989 survey of teachers who expressed concerns that increasingly, factors existed which inhibited the ability of schools to do their job of educating children. Teachers reported that many students lacked the emotional engagement and rudimentary academic and personal skills necessary to learn and interact effectively with peers and adults. These reports coincided with reports from parents that the demands of their lives leave less and less time for their families. According to research, these children are more likely to fail in school and are more likely to engage in violence, delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, teen pregnancy and teen suicide.

CAP, one of the first school-based mentoring programs in the country, matches nurturing community volunteers with students in grades K-12. In a school-based mentoring relationship, mentors meet with their students for one hour each week on the school grounds throughout the school year.



School-based mentoring can appeal to volunteers who are new to mentoring, have limited time or who prefer the more supervised structure of the school setting (Herrera et al., 2007). Mentors provide weekly support and encouragement to students, help the students discover and build upon their individual strengths, and affirm students' ability to shape their own futures. School-based mentoring has proven to be an effective tool in assisting students in becoming more successful in school and, therefore, better prepared for adulthood. Students who feel more connected to their schools, peers and parents are more successful than students who do not have these connections (Karcher, 2011).

*"Mentoring is based on a straightforward concept that children benefit from additional adult support and guidance in their lives—which both schools and parents can easily buy into. And because they require very little school staff time and are amenable to serving students during the school day, the programs are inexpensive and relatively easy for schools to adopt." (Herrera et al., 2007)*

Thrive piloted the CAP program in two elementary schools in the first year, matching 45 students with mentors. Today, CAP matches nearly 600 students in Bozeman and Big Sky with caring community volunteers.

From the very beginning, Thrive has worked in partnership with the school district. This collaboration is invaluable to the success of the CAP program. This collaboration takes place daily and on many different levels. Regular meetings occur between Thrive management and school district administration to guarantee that the CAP program continues to compliment the needs of the district. CAP staff work in the schools to put into practice measures to provide daily support and practice of the goals set by the district administration and Thrive management.

### Short Term Goals:

- 1 *Increase students' academic and social skills*
- 2 *Reduce negative behaviors and truancy*
- 3 *Improve students' connectedness to family and community*

### Long Term Goals:

- 1 *Increase school success and graduation rates*
- 2 *Decrease substance abuse, teen pregnancy and school failure*



## CAP PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Elements of Effective Practice, an evidence-based standard, is seen as the national standard for structuring a mentoring program (MENTOR, 2009). CAP structures its program based on these guidelines because they are proven to ensure success. CAP staff work as a team to recruit, screen, train, manage, and retain outstanding mentors. The following sections detail general policies and procedures of the CAP program.

### RECRUITMENT:

In the fall, CAP staff immediately begins recruiting volunteers from an established pool of community resources that provide consistent, dedicated and safe volunteers. In addition to maintaining this pool of resources, CAP staff continually adds new reliable recruitment sources to attract volunteers who demonstrate these desired characteristics. A secondary outcome of recruitment is that it becomes a way to publicize the program throughout the community. Some of the methods CAP uses to recruit volunteers are:

- Canvassing the town with posters
- Talking to businesses that allow their employees time to volunteer
- Utilizing available media resources
- Speaking with university and other classes that encourage volunteerism
- Contacting other organizations that support community involvement

### SCREENING:

Once volunteers are recruited, they begin a rigorous screening process. Screening is one of the most important components of the program. Schools and parents trust mentors are safe, committed and possess qualities that will benefit the students. An applicant must complete all portions of the screening process in order to be matched with a student:

- Submit an application, two references and fingerprints for background checks
- Participate in an in-person interview
- Attend a mentor orientation

*“Students who participated in Thrive’s (CAP program) had significantly fewer unexcused absences from school than students who did not participate in (CAP).”  
(Gordon, 2013)*



## STUDENT NOMINATION:

Student mentees are nominated by school staff, parents or themselves to participate in the program. It is critical that a nominated mentee's goals fit within the guidelines of the CAP program to ensure a successful match (MENTOR, 2009). A team consisting of the nominating teacher, school principal, CAP staff, and other appropriate professionals review the goals set for each student and determine how best to achieve those goals. Guidelines for nomination are (but not limited to):

- Academic performance (for both low performance or enrichment)
- Social skills/emotional support
- Additional support during times of transition

*"It has definitely made me more confident in my school work to have a CAP mentor. I feel like I can accomplish tasks and get help when I need it."-CAP Student*

## TRAINING:

All new mentors are required to attend five hours of training. The primary goal of training is to orient mentors to the goals and expectations of CAP and strategies for success as a mentor. Mentors who leave training with realistic expectations for fostering a relationship will be more successful and are more likely to maintain longer lasting relationships (MENTOR, 2009).

- The first training is a three hour orientation:
  - CAP program policies and expectations
  - School district policies and expectations
  - Suggestions for goal setting for success
  - Identifying the difference between mentoring and other adult/student relationships

### Tips for relationship building

- New mentors attend a follow-up training in the winter which covers more specific topic areas that arise as a mentoring relationship develops.
- All mentors meet with the school's CAP Volunteer Coordinator at the school on their first day to provide an on-site orientation.

## MATCHING:

Special attention is taken to ensure that each match is highly individualized. Thrive strongly believes that each mentor brings a different skill set to his/her mentoring relationship. Mentees who feel their mentors show personal interest in them are not only more likely to improve academically, but also behaviorally (Herrera, 2004). In order to ensure a mentor's success, CAP staff will take into consideration:

- Skills, life experiences and similar interests.
- Available to make a minimum of a one year, weekly commitment.

## SUPERVISION:

- Volunteers are supported through a CAP Volunteer Coordinator. With the exception of the high school, which has a full-time CAP Volunteer Coordinator, all schools have a half-time coordinator who is on-site at the school daily. The school district provides the majority of funding for the CAP Program in its schools. CAP Volunteer Coordinators provide mentors with on-going support throughout the entire school year. Mentors who feel that they are supported are more likely to remain motivated to build a long lasting relationship and have a more positive view of themselves, their mentees, and the program overall (Karcher & Herrera, 2007).

CAP Volunteer Coordinators provide:

- Year-round supervision for mentors by making two contacts with every mentor each month.
- Support and information to help the mentoring relationship successfully work toward established goals by being readily available for mentors to contact at any point.
- Communications from teachers and school staff.

## COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOL STAFF:

The Thrive model prioritizes the crucial component of communicating with school staff. CAP Volunteer Coordinators are considered members of the staff. It is the job of the CAP Volunteer Coordinator to maintain open communication with school staff and to relay pertinent information between the teacher and mentor. This communication happens in both formal and informal ways.

*"The CAP program does a very successful job of matching students with volunteers who care about them, helping feel more connected to school, and more confidence in themselves."-CAP Teacher*



### **CAP Volunteer Coordinators:**

- Attend staff meetings to review the goals of the program and the nomination criteria for potential students.
- Meet with school personnel to discuss the status and goals of students in his/her class two to three times a year at Student Success Meetings.
- Are available on-site daily.

### **CLOSURE:**

When a match ends, whether it is because the student is no longer identified as a candidate for the program or life changes have occurred for either the mentor or student, it is important to have closure. “Mentors should be well-trained in how to terminate or close their matches effectively” (Karcher & Herrera, 2007). CAP mentors are provided with guidelines for their last meeting with their students. After a match has ended, CAP staff:

- Record the reasons for the match closure
- Determine whether or not the student and/or the mentor should be recommended for re-match in the future.

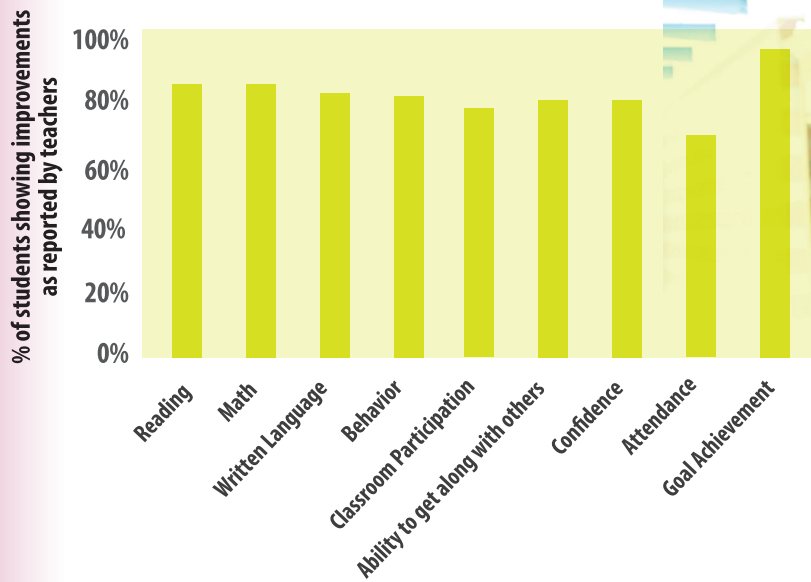
### **EVALUATION:**

At the end of each school-year, CAP staff facilitates a thorough evaluation process. Mentors, students, teachers, parents and principals evaluate the quality of the program. Additionally, data provided by the school district assesses the academic, attendance and behavior progress of CAP students.

In 2009, Thrive and the CAP program received a national Service to Science Award for building evaluation capacity for evidence-based interventions that allowed Thrive to hire a professional evaluator. Through the last several years, the CAP program has strengthened its ability to measure outcomes and has increased its capacity to support youth and young adults in the experimental research with a control group to document program outcomes.

After years of data collection, CAP research shows that students who had a CAP mentor not only demonstrated a significant decrease in discipline reports and absenteeism, but also had a stronger sense of connectedness to school, family, peers and community than did the students in the control group who did not have a mentor (Gordon et al., 2013). The outcomes of this research led to CAP becoming nationally recognized as an evidence-based program with the National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

## Teacher Evaluation of Students



### TIMELINE:

When considering the possibilities of implementing a school-based mentoring program, you will need to determine the program timeline that will work within your school and community. It will take time to plan exactly how and when it will work best for you to maintain program quality.

### SAMPLE PROGRAM TIMELINE

Fall	Winter	Spring
Recruitment	Continued recruitment and screening when necessary	Continued supervision
Screening of potential volunteers	Supervision of mentors	Meetings with school staff
Mentor orientation	Winter Workshop training	Program evaluation of students, parents, teachers, mentors and principals
Meetings with school staff	Meetings with school staff	Closure
Matching of mentors and students		

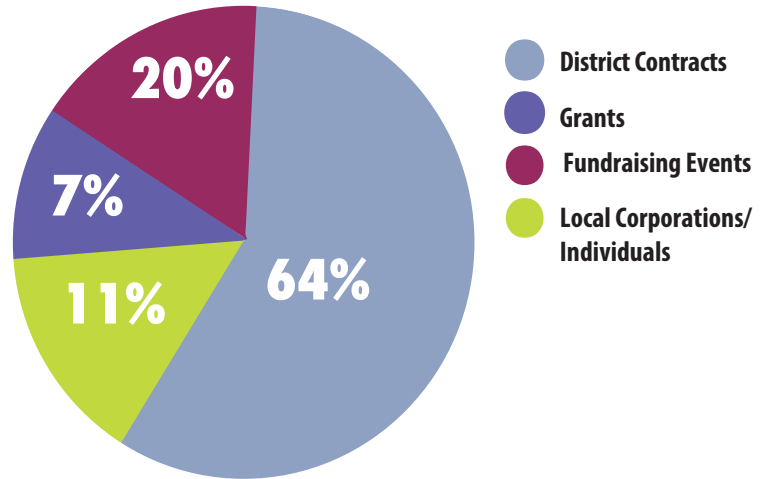


# CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNITIES PLANNING SCHOOL-BASED MENTOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION:

## My community:

- Has identified a specific need that will be best addressed through a school-based mentor program
- Believes the program employs an intervention that addresses the need.
- Feels the need is not met by existing resources and will not duplicate activities of another program or compete for participants and other resources.
- Has identified local capacity (engaged school, ample volunteers) and intent to commit to implement program according to the defined elements necessary to successfully replicate program impact and fund program.
- Has strong stakeholders committed to ensuring program integrity, outcomes and sustainability.
- Has a pool of community members available to mentor.
- Has access to qualified service delivery staff.

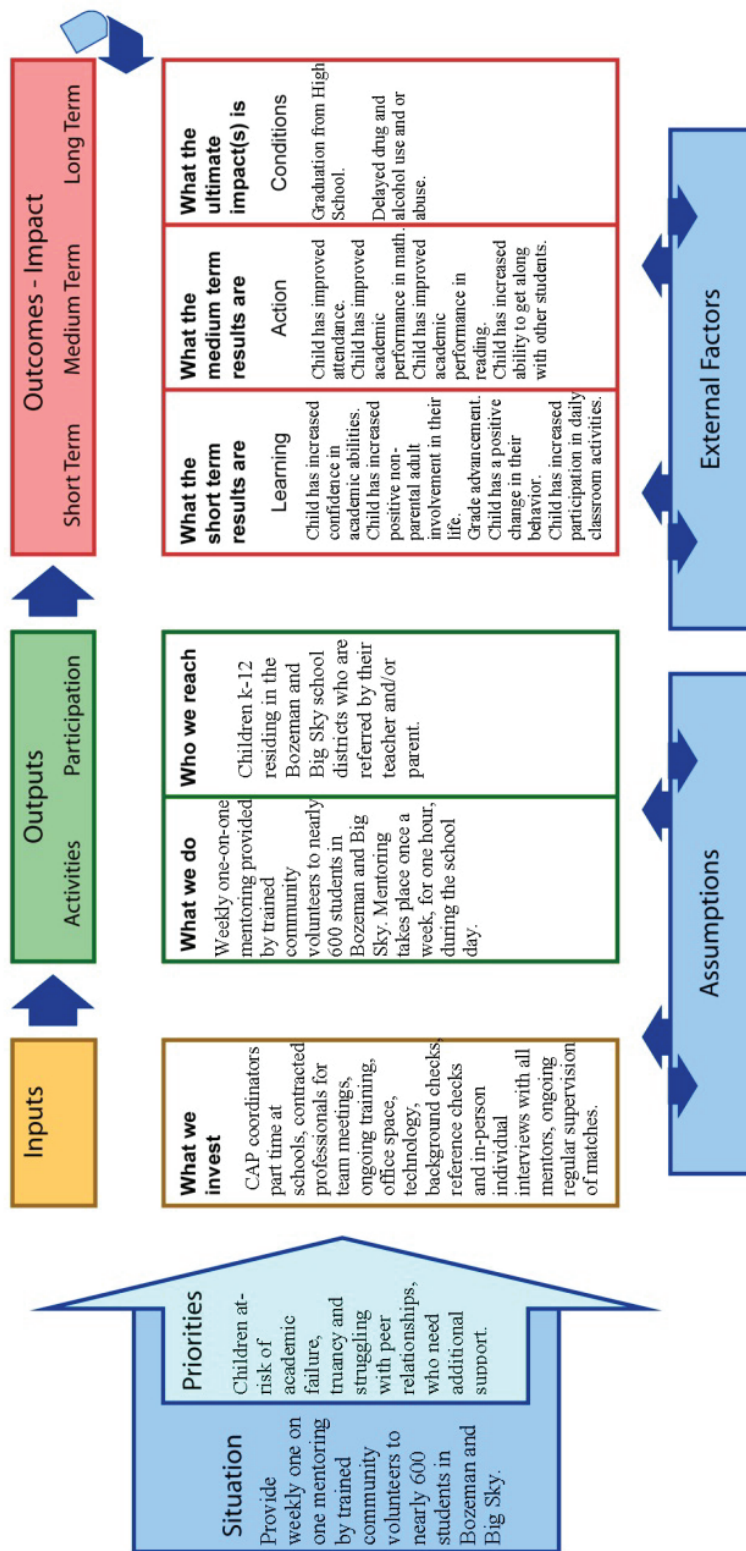
CAP Income Breakout



# PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

## Planning – Implementation – Evaluation

### Program Action - Logic Model



1. Organize five years of existing data
2. Format data for SPSS
3. Conduct analyses to identify trends
4. Identify needed improvements in existing evaluation instruments.
5. Design new instruments
6. Pilot new instruments
7. Develop recommendations for expanded program evaluation.



## Program Outcomes:

### 1. **Reduced school unexcused absences.**

The results from this study indicate that students who participated in Thrive's School-Based Mentoring Program (SBMP) had significantly fewer unexcused absences from school than students who did not participate in a SBMP. The moderate to large effect sizes associated with this finding are important and suggest that participation in the SBMP can help to reduce the number of students' absences from school. (Evaluation Report, pages 9, 11, 15)

### 2. **Fewer discipline referrals.**

Students' disruptive behavior is one of the highest ranked problems identified by teachers (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Students who participate in Thrive's SBMP had significantly fewer discipline referrals than students in who did not participate in the SBMP. The very large effect size of this finding suggests that participation in the SBMP is likely to make a significant difference in reducing the number of students' discipline referrals. Thrive's SBMP provided an effective, robust approach to reducing the number of ODRs which in turn may provide teachers with more instructional time and improve learning for all students. (Evaluation Report, pages 9, 11, 15)

### 3. **Increased connectedness for SBMP participants.**

For the past 15 years, researchers have explored various aspects of adolescents' social connectedness and attempted to identify the factors that support healthy personal development. One of the key findings is that connectedness to school was found to be one of the strongest predictors of adolescent health and risk-taking behaviors (Resnick & Bearman, 1997). Thrive's SBMP resulted in increased connectedness for mentored students.

Sixth graders in Thrive's SBMP reported a stronger sense of connectedness on nine of the 10 MAC subscales (Neighborhood, Friends, Parents, School, Peers, Teachers, Reading, Present Self, and Future Self). Seventh graders in the SBMP reported a stronger sense of connectedness on nine of the 10 MAC subscales (Friends, Parents, Siblings, School, Peers, Teachers, Reading, Present Self, and Future Self). Eighth graders in the SBMP reported a stronger sense of connectedness on six of the MAC subscales (Neighborhood, Friends, School, Peers, Reading, and Present Self). Ninth graders reported a stronger sense of connectedness to Friends and Reading while 10th graders in the SBMP reported a stronger sense of connectedness to Present Self and Reading. (Evaluation Report, pages 9, 11, 16)



#### 4. Increased connectedness for first year SBMP participants.

Previous research has suggested that most of the benefits of SBMP are not seen until after one year of meeting (e.g., Grossman & Johnson, 1999; Lee & Cramond, 1999). However, in Thrive's SBMP, sixth graders who were new to the SBMP reported a stronger sense of connectedness to Present Self. Tenth graders who were new to the SBMP also reported a stronger sense of connectedness to Reading than students not in a SBMP. (Evaluation Report, pages 9, 11, 16) Thrive's Child Advancement Project (CAP): A School-Based Mentoring Program (Gordon, 2013).

#### THRIVE'S AWARDS:

- Thrive voted best non-profit in Bozeman each year from 2009-2015.
- CAP accepted as National Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) 2012.
- Independent research of Partnership Project shows statistically significant improvements for families on multiple measures 2012.
- Presenters at National Community Schools Conference in San Francisco, CA, 2012.
- Presenters at OPI Graduation Matters Montana Summit, 2012 & 2015.
- Presenters at National School-Based Mentoring and Volunteerism Conference in Kansas, MO, 2009.
- Received National "Service to Science" award 2009.
- CAP nominated for the National Exemplary Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention Programs 2007.
- In a study conducted by an independent researcher at the University of Washington, the Partnership Project showed significant impact compared to the other national research subjects in improving Family Health Literacy, 2007.
- Outstanding Contributions & Excellent Programs in Support of Children & Families, Governor's Council on Families, 2000.
- CAP and Parent Liaison, Exceptional Program in Northwest US, Northwest Regional Assistance Center of Oregon, School wide Northwest, 1997.
- Journal article accepted for publication in the *School Community Journal*, 2013.



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Thrive collaborates with Bozeman and Big Sky School Districts to implement CAP. This partnership is essential to the success of the program. Thrive is developing a training for school districts and their community partners, who wish to replicate the evidenced-based CAP model. This training will take place during the summer of 2016. Please contact Sarah Stiff, the CAP Program Manager, if you would like more information about CAP or the upcoming training opportunity.

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### **If a community is interested in considering implementing CAP, they should:**

Contact: Sarah Stiff, CAP Program Manager at 406-585-7929  
or email: [sarah.stiff@allthrive.org](mailto:sarah.stiff@allthrive.org)

Check out our website at: [allthrive.org](http://allthrive.org)





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