

OP-ED

**Guest
Comment**

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A mentoring success story

In this fast-changing world, organizations must continuously evolve — and mentoring is one excellent way to do that.

Consider Philadelphia Academies Inc.

PAI dates to 1968. That's when Philadelphia's deputy mayor approached the CEOs of Philadelphia Electric Co. and Bell of Pennsylvania to determine how they could improve education opportunities and reduce the dropout rate of Philadelphia high school students. The initiative began the following year with the Career Academy — the nation's oldest business/education partnership — and evolved into Philadelphia Academies in 1988.

PAI serves approximately 4,000 students through 21 Academy programs in 10 career areas within 13 Philadelphia public high schools. Housed as a "school within a school," Academy programs provide career-based learning, college readiness support and positive adult networks to expand life and economic options for students.

And it's working.

Students PAI supports have an 83 percent graduation rate — about 20 percent higher than the graduation rate of Philadelphia students who do not have access to its programs. Nearly 90 percent of PAI graduates go on to college, enter the military or join the work force as productive citizens.

The program draws much acclaim — and imitators. Today, there are more than 2,500 similar programs nationwide.

Under the direction of President Lisa Nutter, educational administrators, partners and volunteers, PAI has developed an aggressive plan to double the number of Academy students to 9,000 over three years. That means more community support is needed. This is where mentoring comes in.

The Greater Philadelphia Senior Executive Group contacted PAI last summer to see how to best put the knowledge, skills and experience of its 1,200 executives to use for the public good.

As the school year began, GPSEG mentors and PAI staff selected each other based on individual skills and competencies. Goals were defined and the joint work was launched.

GPSEG assigned a mentor coordinator to oversee the progress of the mentor-protégé pairs and to facilitate any "bumps" in the road, the success of PAI staff members and in meeting goals.

PAI and GPSEG growth should soon be readily apparent to everyone involved, despite the project's incremental nature. We will be tracking our successes, with a celebration of those results-planned, and reporting that progress.

We've already seen authentic signs of success — a sure sign that mentorship works and simultaneously gives back to the community.

JANE HARTMAN FRANKEL is chair of the Greater Philadelphia Senior Executive Group Mentor Program and KEVIN MILES is coordinator. Frankel is the founder of The Art of Performance, LLC in North Wales. Miles is CEO of Avantras Consulting Group in King of Prussia.