Basic Descriptive Study of Mentoring Programs in Accredited Christian High Schools

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide practical guidance for educators and school administration on implementing and maintaining effective student mentoring programs within NCSA high schools. This study addressed the problem that while mentoring programs are mandated to support students' holistic well-being, implementation often reflects compliance rather than intentional relational practice. This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups and observations for the selected schools. Participants represented NCSA-accredited Christian schools of various degrees of functioning mentoring programs. Findings from collected data revealed that the most effective mentoring programs were mission driven rather than accreditation driven. Schools with successful programs viewed mentoring as a natural extension of their commitment to discipleship, community, and whole child development. The study also found that mentoring programs play a critical role in addressing post-pandemic challenges related to students' social skills, communication, and future orientation. Consistent with existing literature, mentoring supported goal setting, fostered hopefulness, and helped students navigate academic and personal challenges. Overall, the findings suggest that when mentoring programs are intentionally designed, mission aligned, and relationally focused, they not only meet accreditation expectations but also strengthen school culture and student well-being. This study contributes practical insights for school administration seeking to move mentoring programs beyond compliance toward sustainable and transformative practice.

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Chapter I

Overview

The concept of mentoring is as old as the beginning of time. In the Bible, the book of Genesis, Abraham was a mentor to Lot (English Standard Version, 2001, Genesis 13:1-13). In Exodus 18:1-27 *(*English Standard Version*,* 2001), Jethro was a mentor to his son-in-law, Moses. In Numbers 11:26-30 *(*English Standard Version*,* 2001), Moses mentored Joshua. In the New Testament, Barnabas was a mentor to Paul (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Acts 9:26-30).

Throughout history, mentors have shaped minds, influenced people to go on, and significantly impacted the world (Holmes, 2020). "Socrates mentored Plato. Plato spread Socrates's teachings and philosophy as far and wide as possible. Plato mentored Aristotle in philosophy, and in the Macedonian village of Mieza, Aristotle mentored Alexander the Great. The teachings from Socrates had trickled through great minds through mentorship down to Alexander. This chain of leaders sparked by Socrates demonstrates the importance of passing on knowledge and keeping the tradition of mentoring alive" (Holmes, 2020).

What did all these people have in common? They offered advice, gave encouragement, reprimanded, and supported each individual where they were and with what they needed. The same concept applies when caring adults interact with children (Rhodes, 2020). There are many adults in the lives of children; some develop special bonds and relationships that can positively impact their lives. Some children face adults in their lives that have just the opposite effect. They may have parents or guardians who do not have their best interests at heart, and these children may suffer from a lack of encouragement, love, and support. Proper mentors can fill the gaps and

help the child through difficult times. Mentors can be adults from all different walks of life, such as camp counselors, youth ministers, friends' parents, coaches, career counselors, and teachers (Rhodes, 2020). The difficulty can be when the child does not have access to these types of people, or their personality does not lend itself to reaching out to the adults in their lives for support.

As a principal in a small rural Christian school in South Georgia, the researcher worked to develop an effective mentoring program. The National Christian School Association (NCSA) and Cognia accredit this school and many others throughout this region and the United States. In collaboration with Cognia, NCSA is the accrediting organization supporting the schools and the students under their care (National Christian School Association, 2022). Over 36,000 institutions globally utilize Cognia as the accreditation solution to foster outstanding growth and development (Cognia, 2023). Having a wealth of data spanning over a century, Cognia possesses the capability to help schools formulate improvement strategies and foster growth. The extensive historical data at its disposal enables Cognia to provide valuable insights and support to educational institutions in their quest for progress and development (Cognia, 2023). NCSA/Cognia schools strive to meet these standards, designed to help the learners grow and thrive in their educational environment, social and spiritual lives.

NCSA school leaders develop these faith-based mentoring programs to serve all three areas of well-rounded learners and to prepare them for successful lives after high school. Schools must establish effective programs to help learners succeed in all areas of life. Christian schools have the freedom to address not only the academic and social needs of the learners but also the spiritual needs. These NCSA/Cognia schools have joint missions to help students develop in all areas of their lives.

Developing school-based mentoring programs can increase access to caring adults for all students. “Additionally, quality mentoring can increase school engagement and connectedness, motivation, attendance, and academic competencies” (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010, para. 2). Komosa-Hawkins goes on to indicate that school-based mentoring programs could have disadvantages, such as time constraints, being limited to a couple of months, and not having time to develop the relationships fully. Studies show mixed results from these mentoring programs (Rhodes, 2002, 2020). Numerous mentoring program models exist within school programs, making it challenging to identify the most effective approach for achieving optimal results for children (Rhodes, 2002, 2020).

The National Christian School Association, in agreement with Cognia accreditation standards, has determined that schools should develop a formal structure that fosters positive relationships with peers and adults (National Christian School Association, 2022). School-based mentoring programs can be an essential educational strategy to meet these accreditation standards and help students succeed academically, socially, and spiritually.

The NCSA standards are as follows:

> The school provides services to ensure the spiritual health of the students. The school develops and implements co-curricular and extracurricular programs aligned with the school’s foundational statements. The school has a formalized, systemic, and implemented process to align student services and co-curricular and extracurricular programs with the school’s foundational statements. Students are consistently provided multiple opportunities for spiritual growth by participating in co-curricular and extracurricular programs. The school develops and implements guidance programs aligned with the school’s foundational statements. The school demonstrates a formalized,

systemic, and implemented process to align the guidance program with the school's foundational statements. (National Christian School Association, p.30)

The Cognia Standards are as follows:

The learners benefit from a formal structure that fosters positive relationships with peers and adults. Best practices include but are not limited to the following: The institution fosters an environment where learners receive support from adults and peers. Peer and adult behaviors and interactions demonstrate respect, trust, and concern for one another's well-being. The institution allocates time to formal learner advocacy programs. Resources, such as curriculum and materials, support positive learner relationships with other learners and staff members. The effectiveness of positive learner and staff relationships is measured through analyzed survey information. (Cognia, 2023, p. 1)

Christian schools seeking accreditation through the NCSA can also be accredited jointly by Cognia due to the institution's agreement to help the schools achieve joint accreditations. This study of NCSA/Cognia accredited high schools' structured formal programs and how they met or failed to meet the standards with all the NCSA high schools could help other high school mentoring programs and develop a positive impact on the students. Research states that school-based mentoring programs can benefit at-risk students in career planning, social-emotional support, and academic success (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

Because the NCSA and Cognia have determined that having these formal student structures for each student is essential, more information is vital to give these schools the necessary tools and support to develop programs to fit the learner's needs. The schools in the NCSA are faith-based and can freely use Christ-centered approaches in dealing with the socio-emotional, spiritual, moral, and day-to-day issues that affect all the students within the program.

Many mentoring programs discussed in the literature are for at-risk children defined as marginalized, low economic status, and vulnerable (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). In contrast, the NCSA/Cognia standards require programs for all students, regardless of their situation. Alternative mentoring programs can address things that relate specifically to the children attending Christian schools. Attending a faith-based school does not prevent students from experiencing the same challenges as public school students. Mentoring programs in faith-based schools should meet the needs of all the students enrolled, not just those identified in a particular population, such as at-risk, gifted, or marginalized.

Problem Statement

The standards given by NCSA high schools in establishing effective and viable mentoring programs guided the study. Each NCSA/Cognia high school can determine how to meet these standards and what programs would work for their schools. Schools often struggle to identify the most effective practices for their educational institutions without clear and specific guidelines. This research investigated the underlying reasons for these programs' limited success.

This study holds significance as it uncovered the reasons behind the relative ineffectiveness of mentoring programs in NCSA high schools. NCSA and Cognia expect all member schools to meet a jointly devised set of standards. The standard prioritizes the holistic well-being of the students through a student advocacy program.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide practical guidance to educators on implementing and maintaining successful student mentoring programs within NCSA schools.

The study focused on school-based mentoring programs as the option to meet the NCSA/Cognia standard for a formal structure that fosters positive peer and adult development.

Drawing from the literature as related to this study, the necessary elements of the mentoring programs studied were program development, session scheduling, matching adults to students, training adults to mentor, building positive relationships, promoting self-efficacy, growth mindset, and the curriculum used with students (Bandura, 1977; Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014; Rhodes, 2020).

Because there were so few studies about faith-based high school mentoring programs, this study aimed to add to the conversation and offer guidance to these schools' programs. The NCSA/Cognia also did not provide specific guidelines on creating a formal structured program that included every student, so the question of "how" began the development of this information to share.

The study did not involve the program's end or long-term results. While the accrediting standards include all students in a school, the focus of the study was on high schools. Based on the size of the schools studied, it was not necessary to narrow it to a specific grade level. This study did not involve the parent or guardian perspective or outside stakeholders' perspectives.

Research Questions

As part of the study on the effectiveness of mentoring in high schools, the key research questions aimed at uncovering the program details, outcomes, and potential improvements in NCSA/Cognia-accredited high school mentoring programs.

1. How do NCSA/Cognia accredited schools develop a formal structure to ensure all learners develop positive relationships with adults/peers supporting their educational experiences?

2. How do schools accredited by NCSA/Cognia continually assess the formal structure to guarantee all learners have regular and consistent access to a designated adult chosen by the learner, who ensures comprehensive support throughout their educational journey?
3. How do the NCSA/Cognia schools' mentoring programs support students' self-efficacy regarding academic, social, and spiritual growth?
4. How do NCSA/Cognia accredited schools demonstrate alignment to the school's foundational statements to support the standards of both NCSA/Cognia and that specific school?

The four research questions above align with meeting both the NCSA and Cognia standards for formal student advocacy programs. Research question one focused on the program's development within each school through interviews with the coordinators, counselors, and principals. Understanding the information in research question one supported research question two in seeking assessment data on program outcomes. The data answered the question: Are the programs within the schools doing what they intended to do, supporting student efficacy? Utilizing data from research questions one and two acted as a driving force in comprehending the purpose of the standard, as evidenced in research question three: How is students' self-efficacy supported regarding academic, social, and spiritual growth? Research question four related to the difficulties schools faced in fully implementing and meeting the NCSA/Cognia standards of a formal advocacy program. As schools formalized this process, they had to demonstrate a formalized, systemic, and implemented process to align the guidance program with the school's foundational statements.

Conceptual Framework

In the context of a Christian high school-based mentoring program, a well-constructed student development framework guided its implementation and success. At its core, this framework provided guidance that reflected the program's mission, objectives, and values. It outlined how the Christian faith and principles are woven into the mentoring experience, fostering academic, personal, and spiritual development.

This student development framework clarified the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees, emphasizing the importance of modeling Christ-like character and values. Additionally, it identified critical success indicators and assessment methods that align with the Christian school's mission and vision, ensuring that the mentoring program contributed to the holistic growth of its students while staying rooted in Christian principles and beliefs. Ultimately, the student development framework in a Christian high school-based mentoring program served as a spiritual and educational compass, guiding all stakeholders toward a shared vision of nurturing the next generation in faith, knowledge, and character. Much of the literature focused on at-risk children in mentoring programs (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.; Rhodes, 2020; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008) in contrast to such programs in Christian Schools that involved all students in the school, whether at-risk or not and focused on the spiritual life of the student.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory provided the lens through which this study developed. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction, observation, and modeling in learning and behavior change (Bandura, 2003). The primary tenets of this theory include three major components social interaction, observation, and modeling learning in

behavior change. This theory supported all four research questions by helping explain research question number two and the role the mentors played in the development of young people and the positive role models they are through the mentoring programs. It suggested that individuals learn from observing others and that self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed) plays a crucial role in motivating and sustaining behavior change (Bandura, 2003). This tenet of Bandura's social cognitive theory helped to explain research question number three emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy in dealing with young people and their successes in their high school lives and in their academic journey. Nurturing a positive self-belief can profoundly impact the student across various facets of their life, presenting great opportunities for development academically and personally. Educators can apply this theory in school-based mentoring programs by developing relationships between mentors and mentees, developing curricula to enhance self-efficacy, and incorporating observational learning activities.

Bandura's tenet of social interaction aligned seamlessly with the first research question aimed at fostering positive relationships. Initiatives designed to enhance these connections should recognize the significance of social interactions with both peers and adults, as they play a vital role in the holistic growth and development of students. The fourth research question directly addressed the concept of students' self-efficacy. Nurturing a positive self-belief profoundly impacts the student across various facets of their life, presenting great opportunities for development academically and personally.

Research Design

The study adopted a basic descriptive design, focusing on a detailed examination of NCSA/Cognia-accredited high school mentoring programs, considering the nature of qualitative data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how a basic qualitative study is the most

common form of education research. Inquiries about mentoring programs, designs, curricula, and the establishment of relationships through focus groups, interviews, and observations were addressed. This basic descriptive study aimed to explore the processes involved in creating these programs, understand how both mentors and mentees perceived them, and examine the impact of these programs on their broader world and lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The study was progressive, beginning at the NCSA for a definition of the standard and then moving to study and exploring the actual programs at selected NCSA/Cognia high schools. The themes, patterns, and categories evolved as the study progressed. Focus groups and interviews of the principals, coordinators, and mentors revealed program details, compared to the social cognitive theory constructs. In observing mentoring sessions, additional theoretical connections were revealed.

Data Collection & Analysis

The elements of mentoring programs were studied by conducting focus groups, observing the program, and interviewing those implementing and overseeing the programs to gather insights about their experiences. The initial phase of the data collection procedure involved compiling the names and email addresses of high school principals or heads of schools affiliated with the NCSA. The NCSA's website provides a database containing this essential information.

Subsequently, a questionnaire to gather insights into the extent of adherence to, or deviation from, the student advocacy standard within these educational institutions was administered. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval form from Valdosta State University (see Appendix A). was shared with all potential participants prior to participation in the study. Participants were given the opportunity to review the document and ask questions

regarding the study procedures, confidentiality, and voluntary participation before consenting to participate.

The next step in the data collection involved a process aimed at identifying a subset of schools that best exemplify the whole of the NCSA. The selection criteria relied on the classification of NCSA-affiliated schools based on their degree of engagement with the student advocacy standard and the school's willingness to participate. This categorization included schools actively addressing, proficiently implementing, or working to achieve the benchmarks outlined in the NCSA/Cognia standards. Each of these accredited schools were expected to meet the standards set for them, and these categories are ones that indicated how each of the selected schools were addressing the guidelines to meet the standards. These categories also answered the research questions to be studied.

After identifying the schools for the basic descriptive study, the heads of the schools were contacted to determine if they were willing to participate. Once they agreed to the study, data collection began.

The study continued by virtually interviewing the selected school's principal or program coordinator. Interviews with key people such as principals, program coordinators, counselors, and mentors at the chosen school were necessary to answer these research questions. Ideas for some interview questions were as follows: Who is the point of contact for the mentoring program? Who is the coordinator? Who deals with the scheduling and logistics of the program? These interviews set up the entire study and were vital to establish a relationship with the principals to gain access to the people involved in the program.

The next set of virtual interviews was with the program coordinator/s, teachers, and counselors. The following interviews involved researching the logistics of the program. Who are

the mentors? Are they teachers, coaches, staff, or volunteers? How do they divide their students? Do the students choose their mentors? How do they schedule the sessions? How often do they meet? What are the goals? What is the curriculum, if any? What kind of training is available for the mentors?

The research employed a method involving three 60-minute focus group sessions, each comprising three groups from schools accredited by both NCSA and Cognia. The selection of these schools derived from their attainment of accreditation, active efforts towards meeting the standards, and experiences of encountering challenges in reaching the stipulated benchmarks. In qualitative studies exploring school-based mentoring programs, focus groups hold significant promise for enhancing the validity of research findings (Ellis, 2023). Focus groups offer an excellent platform for gathering diverse perspectives from multiple participants simultaneously, thus enriching the depth and breadth of insights (Ellis, 2023). Through interactive discussions and exchanges, participants can share their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes concerning their mentoring programs, shedding light on situations that individual interviews might omit (Ellis, 2023). This method facilitates the exploration of the social dynamics within mentoring relationships and provides a context for understanding the program's impact from various angles (Ellis, 2023).

Dr. Beverly Peters (2023) of American University makes the following statement about the usefulness of focus groups in qualitative studies. "Focus groups are often a useful data collection tool for project planners, managers, and evaluators to gather qualitative data. Yet, there is no magic bullet to conducting a good focus group. Knowing your line of questioning, being a good conversationalist who can easily build rapport, and having knowledge of the project, its theory of change, and the local culture can go a long way in helping you plan and

moderate a focus group that helps you to collect qualitative data relevant to project monitoring and evaluation" (Peters, 2023).

Purposive sampling determined the participants selected for focus groups and interviews from the chosen schools. Researchers use purposeful sampling to select participants for focus groups or interviews, which can provide detailed descriptions and fulfill the study's objectives. (Patton, 1990). The focus groups and interviews were in-depth and looked for rich, detailed descriptions of the mentoring programs.

The interviews began with the school's presidents and principals, and then moved on to the mentoring program coordinators, the school's counselors and teachers to determine the organization, development and impact of the mentoring programs.

Finally, the study employed focus groups with a range of 3 to 4 adult mentors engaged in the programs to attain a comprehensive perspective spanning all participating schools. The discussions revealed experiences and details about the schools' procedures, successes, and failures. The three focus groups consisted of presidents, teachers and NCSA commissioners from the participating schools to learn about their experiences and allow dialogue between the mentors to develop into ideas, struggles, and successes. Focus groups were a way to get perspectives and ideas from multiple people simultaneously (Ellis, 2023). As rich discussions emerge, so will insight, themes, and ideas (Ellis, 2023). Focus groups provided an avenue to share their perspectives with like schools on the program's history and how they believed it worked in their schools. They revealed organization, training, program curriculum development, and resource information. All these areas were beneficial to the study.

The last focus group was with NCSA commissioners, which are the Heads of Schools facilitating NCSA schools' accreditation visits. This focus group was designed to determine how

they assessed the student advocacy program standard. These discussions gave insight into the evaluation of the programs compared to the expected standards and provided insight into how accrediting teams perceive this standard and their expectations of meeting it.

Finally, observing the student mentoring programs in action commenced. Observing the actual interactions of the mentors further added to the study and validated the results from previous discussions and interviews.

Terms and Definitions

Mentoring. Mentoring involves a dynamic relationship between less experienced individuals, often referred to as mentees, and more seasoned individuals, known as mentors. These mentors offer guidance and support in a non-professional context to enhance the mentees' personal development (DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

School-based Mentoring Programs. "School- (as opposed to community-) based mentoring programs are typically where teachers and other school staff target and identify academically and social-emotionally at-risk students they feel would benefit from mentoring. These programs then pair these at-risk students with volunteers who meet with them regularly at school (typically one hour per week) either during or after the school day" (Institute of Education Services [IES], 2009).

National Christian School Association. "The National Christian School Association established an Accreditation Commission over 30 years ago. The mission of the Commission is to establish and maintain academic and spiritual standards designed to produce quality, Christ-centered education on the pre-college level" (National Christian School Association, 2022).

*Cognia. "*Cognia accreditation is the launchpad for school improvement. Based on rigorous research-based standards and evidence-based criteria, the process probes the whole

institution—from policies to learning conditions and cultural context—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of every learner" (Cognia, 2023).

Chapter II

Literature Review

School-based mentoring programs have many distinct aspects that make them successful. The literature will reveal different program designs, the importance of relationships, and the best practices in developing a program. Many mentoring programs discussed in the literature are for children who are at-risk, marginalized, low economic status, and vulnerable (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). The NCSA/Cognia standards require a formal structure for all students, regardless of their status. A mentoring program that can address the academic, social, and spiritual needs of the children who attend Christian schools is necessary. Some students attending a Christian school may have the same issues as students in a public school, but others will have very different needs, and it will be necessary to study how Christian schools deal with all the problems. Mentoring programs are not a one-size-fits-all type, especially when dealing with all the children in a school and their backgrounds (Rhodes, 2020). While there is not extensive literature on Christian schools, the following can give a starting point for this study.

Formal Mentoring

Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) define a mentor as "a supportive adult who works with a young person to build a relationship by offering guidance, support, and encouragement to help the young person's positive and healthy development over time. The most traditional understanding is a relationship between an adult acting as the mentor and a younger person acting as the mentee. Although the adult is not the younger person's parent, they could be another relative or close family friend. In the field, more broadly, mentoring can also include

peer-to-peer mentoring and group mentoring, which provides for multiple mentors and mentees" (p.13).

According to Bruce and Bridgeland (2014), there are two primary categories of mentoring programs. The first category includes formal or structured mentoring programs run by schools, community groups, or faith-based organizations. These programs involve matching an adult with a young person and fostering a structured relationship through regular meetings and activities.

The second category involves informal or naturally occurring mentoring programs. In informal or naturally occurring mentoring programs, the adult gets to know the young person and builds a relationship for mentoring. These adults may be family friends, coaches, or teachers with whom the students develop relationships beyond the classroom. In structured and informal mentoring relationships, the adult plays a supportive role and collaborates with the young person to build a relationship by providing guidance and support (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

The design of formal mentoring programs supports and guides young people in all areas of life (Rhodes, 2020). These programs and individuals participating in them do not intend to achieve unforeseen negative results, yet this can sometimes be the case (Rhodes, 2002). In the realm of faith-based schools, available literature is scarce. Nevertheless, examining mentoring and diverse programs allows discernment of the most effective means of supporting young individuals (Campolongo, 2009).

Numerous young individuals find themselves in a state of uncertainty and discouragement through no fault of their own, lacking the presence of supportive adults to guide them through these turbulent times. The pervasive influence of social media, deceit, and individuals who may intend to steer them toward destructive paths poses a significant challenge

for children in the contemporary world. It becomes imperative for these young people to encounter caring adults who can demonstrate that they are genuinely concerned and willing to offer support, as emphasized by Rhodes (2020). Typically, individuals included in these research studies belong to minority groups, have low-income backgrounds, are from single-parent homes, and face academic challenges (Karcher, 2008). Additionally, school-related social-emotional and behavioral issues often characterize these students (Kern et al., 2019). The outcomes of the various programs can change a young person's life and turn them toward life, happiness, fulfillment, and success.

Community Based Mentoring

Community-based programs like Christian schools can address the spiritual aspect of students' lives. Mentoring programs in the U.S. began in the early 1900s (Rhodes, 2020). For over a century, Big Brothers Big Sisters have dedicated their program to changing children's perspectives and enabling them to reach their full potential (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.). This organization traces its origins back to 1904 when a New York City court clerk named Ernest Coulter recognized the need for caring adults to support troubled kids, giving rise to the Big Brothers movement (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.). Around the same time, the Ladies of Charity group formed connections with needy girls, later becoming Catholic Big Sisters (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.) In 1977, these organizations merged to become Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of America. More than a century later, the organization continues providing caring role models for children across all 50 states and 12 countries worldwide (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.).

Volunteer Mentoring Programs

Volunteer mentoring programs like BBBS have been researched and proven effective for adolescents' growth (Rhodes et al., 2000). Rhodes et al. (2000) conducted a BBBS program study that involved 1,138 youth. The study aimed to understand the impact of mentoring relationships on at-risk children. Rhodes et al. (2000) found that BBBS mentoring positively affected various aspects of a child's life, including academic performance, social skills, and emotional well-being. The study highlighted the significance of consistent and supportive mentor-child relationships in helping at-risk youth navigate challenges and reach their potential. The work of Rhodes et al. (2000) underscores the importance of mentorship programs like BBBS in providing critical support for young individuals facing adversity.

Various mentoring programs started due to Big Brother Big Sister (Lyons et al., 2021; Rhodes, 2002). One such program is a community-based program out of Toronto, Canada. Shier et al. (2020) conducted a study of 16 and 17-year-old females who identified with a minority racial status, and the study revealed three areas that supported the mentor and mentee relationship outcomes. The outcomes were consistent, mentor-led communication strategies, and mutually satisfactory interpersonal exchange (Shier et al., 2020). The vital components for achieving optimal results in a community volunteer program are the training and development of volunteer mentors. Merely having the intention to assist young individuals is just the initial step. Effectively mentoring a young person requires further effort and education to be successful.

Campus Connections is a site-based mentoring program like a community-based program emphasizing mentoring training, support, and monitoring (Haddock et al., 2020). This program pairs at-risk adolescents with undergraduate university student mentors for 12 weeks. The main objective of Campus Connections is to create a positive environment for development while

overcoming the barriers to mentoring success. One significant aspect of this study was examining the impact of organizing mentor-mentee matches into small groups (Mentor Families) within the program. The idea was that these groups would strengthen mentoring relationships and enhance the youth's experience in the program (Haddock et al., 2020).

The study conducted two pilot tests, which showed positive effects on how the adolescent dealt with problems and their improvements in school performance, relationships, self-esteem, outlook, and behavior (Haddock et al., 2020). However, there were questions about optimizing the program further and identifying critical components. The research aimed to test the impact of mentoring groups by implementing a specific form of group mentoring where one-to-one matches are embedded in small groups (Haddock et al., 2020). The study hypothesized that mentoring groups would lead to better youth outcomes, and that features of a high-quality program setting and mentoring relationships would mediate these effects. The study included 676 mentees, half in the mentoring group condition, and the other half in the one-to-one condition. While both conditions showed positive outcomes for mentees, there were no significant differences, challenging the assumption that mentoring groups would significantly enhance the program (Haddock et al., 2020).

Group Mentoring

The study's findings suggest that within the Campus Connections program, individual mentor-mentee relationships and group mentoring settings effectively produce positive youth outcomes. The study also emphasized the importance of understanding the fundamental mechanisms of change within mentoring programs and conducting rigorous evaluations of program components (Haddock et al., 2020).

The study highlights the flexibility and effectiveness of different mentoring program models. Still, it suggests that specific group mentoring settings may not always provide a significant advantage in promoting positive youth development (Haddock et al., 2020). Haddock et al., (2020) suggested that future research should focus on long-term benefits and consider the impact on mentors in mentoring group settings. Many site-based programs tend to be time-limited, which helps maintain mentors, especially those with limited time restraints (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). In contrast, the school mentoring programs in the NCSA/Cognia will last throughout the student's school life and are available to all students, not just those at risk (Cognia, 2023; National Christian School Association, 2022).

Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) were part of a massive study by The Mentor Effect. In the summer of 2013, The Mentor Effect engaged 1109 young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 to share their opinions and insights on mentoring relationships. These exchanges occurred through various means, such as telephone conversations, online discussions, and in-person interviews. These interactions yielded encouraging results, confirming and deepening the understanding of the positive impacts of mentoring. However, the study also unveiled a challenging paradox, indicating that young people with more risk factors are less likely to have naturally occurring mentors (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

Results revealed that over one-third of young individuals, roughly 16 million in total, never experienced the presence of an adult mentor during their formative years (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). These results include an estimated nine million young people who are considered at risk. This "mentoring gap" poses a critical issue that the nation must address. Bridging this gap is essential to improve the life prospects of all young individuals, irrespective

of their backgrounds. It is crucial to help children graduate from high school and pursue higher education, ultimately leading healthy and productive lives (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

Natural Mentoring

Before establishing a formal mentoring program at the researcher's school, the institution already had "natural mentors." These natural mentors tend to emerge in young individuals who are socially active and engaged in various activities, such as sports, hobbies, religious communities, and other extracurricular pursuits. These mentors include coaches, youth ministers, family friends, event organizers, and non-parental adults. It is crucial to recognize that young people often admire and seek guidance, support, and motivation from these mentors (Lanker, 2012). Assuming the role of a natural mentor carries significant responsibilities for any adult in a young person's life.

When a natural mentor has experienced life circumstances similar to those of the mentee, it provides the mentee with hope that their circumstances can improve. This hope develops because the mentor serves as a role model, demonstrating through their experiences that positive change is possible. As a result, the advice and guidance offered by the mentor become more relevant and meaningful to the mentee, as they can see a real-life example of someone who has overcome similar challenges (Bandura, 1977). This concept is based on the work of psychologist Albert Bandura, as described in his 1977 research.

Coaches can be a positive role model for their players. Connolly (2017) discusses, "using Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory in coaching athletes has the potential to have a profound effect on coaching, athletes, and sports programs" (p. 29). Like mentors, coaches are positive role models and offer encouragement and support for their athletes. "By taking the social cognitive approach to coaching, coaches can help their athletes through the observation,

imitation, and reinforcement of acceptable social behaviors, learning behaviors, motor behaviors, and champion behaviors" (Connolly, 2017, p. 29). Rhodes reiterated this sentiment in her book Older and Wiser by stating, "Coaches not only help advance athletic skills but also promote self-confidence and self-discipline" (2020, p.135). Rhodes' research findings indicated that when students opted for coaches as their mentors, they had a higher probability of completing high school and college. These findings held even after controlling for the potential impact of their involvement in sports activities and their academic performance (2020).

Lanker (2012) researched Christian natural mentoring relationships that would develop in churches. This qualitative study involved four different denominations in various parts of the country. The program encouraged young people to get to know the adults in their lives since these were not program-matched groups. These informal connections would develop over time, and natural mentoring relationships would grow and develop. Rhodes (2020) addressed teaching young people how to seek out these natural mentors as an important part of the mentoring process.

Time Limited Mentoring

The National Guard Youth Challenge Program works with youth who have dropped out of high school and teaches young people skills to cultivate and develop relationships with supportive adults (Rhodes, 2020). During this 18-month program, participants receive holistic support to develop their mental and physical well-being and prepare them for future endeavors. This program adopts a military-style approach to help students complete their education, acquire valuable career skills, and set up a positive trajectory for their lives. Established in 1993, it has successfully graduated over 200,000 young people, transforming their future prospects (National Guard Youth Challenge, n.d.).

In the National Guard Youth programs second phase; mentoring becomes vital. Cadets select mentors from their existing relationships, and these mentors play an essential role in guiding, encouraging, and providing support as these young adults navigate their next steps in life (National Guard Youth Challenge, n.d.). This one-to-one mentoring program is a prime illustration of the significant advantages students can derive from having a dependable adult presence to assist them during challenging periods.

Community and natural mentor programs can serve as invaluable resources, offering tremendous benefits to young individuals fortunate enough to access or participate in them (Laco & Johnson, 2017). However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all young people have the means or connections to engage in these extracurricular activities or programs (Laco & Johnson, 2017). For some, even the most basic logistical challenges, like transportation to the program's location, can pose significant obstacles. Consequently, school-based mentoring programs emerged to bridge this gap. These programs aim to provide young individuals, regardless of their background or resources, with the opportunity to benefit from mentorship and support within the familiar and accessible setting of their school.

School-based Mentoring

While all the distinct types of mentoring programs can be effective, "school-based mentoring (SBM) was one of the fastest-growing forms of mentoring in the U.S. in 2008" (AOL Time Warner Foundation, 2002; DuBois and Karcher, 2005). The literature highlights that school-based mentoring programs potentially involve more students than community-based programs, primarily because students are readily accessible within the school environment (Simões & Alarcão, 2013). Furthermore, a distinct advantage of school-based programs is that teachers often serve as mentors. Given their career training, teachers are inherently equipped to

mentor and nurture young individuals without extensive formal training (Simões & Alarcão, 2013).

In a recent nationwide study examining school-based mentoring programs, compelling evidence supports finding a middle ground between building strong mentor-mentee relationships and establishing and achieving specific goals (Rhodes, 2020). The most significant positive outcomes developed when the mentor-mentee relationships struck a balance between emotional closeness and working towards defined objectives. These studies underscore the significance of nurturing strong relationships and setting clear goals. Joining these two elements creates substantial success in mentoring programs.

Research states that academic outcomes tend to improve significantly in school-based mentoring programs (Chan et al., 2019). For instance, Chan et al. (2019) reported that ninth-grade students at risk of dropping out were more likely to stay on the path toward graduation after participating in such programs. In this study, the employment of a quasi-experimental design assessed the impact of a school-based group-mentoring program on various academic outcomes related to high-school graduation, such as credits earned, instructional time received, and GPA (Chan et al., 2019). The research contributes significantly to the growing body of evidence demonstrating positive connections between participation in group mentoring and academic achievements (Kuperminc, 2016).

The study revealed that students who participated in the mentoring program were more likely to progress toward high school graduation, determining this progress based on the credits acquired during the ninth and tenth grades. On average, 60% of the students in the program were on track to graduate, while only 40% of their peers who did not participate in the program were on track. Even though many students in both groups initially did not have enough credits to

graduate, these results suggest that group mentoring effectively changes the academic path of at-risk students and helps them get closer to graduation (Chan et al., 2019).

Furthermore, observations revealed that program participants might be at a lower risk of dropping out of school because they received more instructional time than their peers by the end of the ninth grade. When students receive more academic instruction, they are less likely to fail courses and become disengaged from school, ultimately improving their chances of graduating (Chan et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that although the instructional time difference between the program and comparison groups in the tenth grade did not show statistical significance, the substantial variability within the comparison group could account for this. It is also important to acknowledge that the mentoring program was no longer available during the tenth grade due to funding constraints, raising questions about how to sustain the program's impact beyond its duration, which requires further investigation (Chan et al., 2019).

In contrast to the study's hypothesis, school-based group mentoring did not appear to influence students' GPA (Chan et al., 2019). Participants in the program did not achieve higher grades compared to non-participants. Both groups, on average, earned GPAs falling below the school district's threshold for students at increased risk of dropping out. The mentoring program did not directly address academic work (e.g., mentors did not serve as tutors), so its impact on grades may be relatively weaker than other outcomes (Chan et al., 2019).

The data suggested group mentoring could potentially contribute to grade improvements. It is also possible that the effects of group mentoring on GPA may be indirect and take longer to emerge, mediated through enhancing resilience assets such as school belonging and academic self-efficacy (Chan et al., 2019). Therefore, initiating group mentoring at an earlier grade level might be necessary to see improvements in students' GPA (Chan et al., 2019). The final study

findings indicate that group mentoring can positively impact academic outcomes associated with high school graduation, particularly regarding credits earned and instructional time (Chan et al., 2019). This study stands out as one of the few evaluations of a group-mentoring program that assesses both immediate and intermediate effects, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact (Chan et al., 2019).

The mentorship activities included regular check-ins on homework, engaging in academic discussions, setting goals, building relationships, and facilitating the transition to high school (Chan et al., 2019). The school employed a group mentoring approach, where a small group of students received mentorship from one or two adults (Chan et al., 2019). This model aligns with the expectations of NCSA/Cognia school mentoring programs, which aim to provide similar types of support and guidance to students by their teachers (Cognia, 2023; National Christian School Association, 2022).

Komosa-Hawkins (2010) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of school-based mentoring programs. One disadvantage is the intensity and time restraints of a school program. Beneficial programs lasted 12 to 18 months or more (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). In contrast, the standards set forth by Cognia/NCSA are programs that are sustained throughout the student's entire school life and not just one year or semester (Cognia, 2023; National Christian School Association, 2022).

Private School Mentoring

An intriguing study by Laco and Johnson (2017) occurred at a private high school in Bratislava, Slovakia, where an impressive 90% of graduates pursued higher education. Notably, this study differed from prior research in which participants were often selected based on income, risk factors, economics, or socio-emotional status. In this case, all participants were

freshmen and sophomore classes at the chosen school (Laco & Johnson, 2017). To ensure the effectiveness of the mentoring program, all mentors underwent 15 hours of training and maintained regular contact with supervisors (Laco & Johnson, 2017).

However, the mentorship sessions in this study involved only 30 minutes every two weeks, with a mid-term evaluation conducted after three months. Surprisingly, the review revealed no perceived educational benefits, with the study suggesting that the limited time spent together had a negative impact (Laco & Johnson, 2017). The authors suggested that conducting further post-evaluations after the program could lead to more favorable outcomes, as increased interaction time typically correlates with the program's success. In the context of the NCSA/Cognia schools' standards, which require students to participate in the program every year of their high school journey, this requirement could potentially lead to more effective results by allowing for more prolonged and meaningful mentoring relationships (Cognia, 2023; National Christian School Association, 2022).

Peer to Peer Mentoring

One study of Christian schools is a peer-to-peer mentoring program in which students mentor other students under administration and staff supervision. Campolongo (2009) used a survey to identify Christian schools participating in peer-to-peer mentoring programs accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI). Of the 344 schools, 80 leaders answered the surveys, revealing that 44 schools in grades 7 –12 had peer-to-peer mentoring programs. Campolongo (2009) chose this type of study because students' relationships with each other are one of the most influencing relationships in an adolescent's life. These schools decided to take this powerful influence and guide the young people to make a positive impact. The areas most improved were service-mindedness, respect, obedience, and spiritual-mindedness

(Campolongo, 2009). The result of these programs was that the Christian schools helped students work together to develop skills of accountability and teamwork and grow a lifelong spiritual transformation to build Christian families, societies, and churches (Campolongo, 2009).

Research suggests that the relationship between the mentor and the mentee is one of the essential parts of effective mentoring programs (Ferguson, 2017; Karcher, 2008; Lyons et al., 2021; Rhodes et al., 2000; Schenk et al., 2020; Shier et al., 2020). “A good working relationship is a necessary ingredient for all successful mentoring” (Rhodes, 2020, p. 112). While building those relationships is important, setting goals together and developing strategies to meet the goals are essential (Rhodes, 2020). The most substantial factor of successful relationships was how the youth and mentor engage in social activities such as dinner, hanging out together, or walking (Rhodes, 2002).

Lyons et al. (2021) conducted a research study of the BBBS that provided services to a school-based program from 2014 to 2018. This study aimed to understand how mentor-mentee relationships change over time. Observing the self-reports of relationship quality from mentors and mentees, as well as how these relationships were influenced by who decided on mentoring activities - mentors and mentees together or the mentoring program. The relationships tended to stay positive when the initial reports were positive. There were small positive links between mentor-reported and mentee-reported quality, but not vice versa (Lyons et al., 2021).

However, the results improved when looking at who decided on activities. When mentors and mentees made these decisions together, the relationships improved. However, the effects were weaker when mentors or the program decided on activities. Collaboratively deciding on activities enhanced relationships, while program-defined activities had less impact. However, the effectiveness depended on the specific activities involved. The results suggested that building

positive, collaborative relationships is crucial, but for better outcomes in mentoring programs, schools should also use research-based practices to target specific educational goals (Lyons et al., 2021).

Karcher et al. (2010) conducted a similar study with results that indicated a better quality of relationships when the mentor and the mentee collaborated in decision-making. To create buy-in for these programs, young people need to feel that they have a say and that their thoughts are important and heard by the adults in which they are involved (Karcher et al., 2010).

The time it takes to build relationships is another critical area (Rhodes et al., 2000). A mentoring program for a particular subject or event can limit opportunities in school-based programs. While it may be effective for that area of interest, it can also be detrimental to a student when there is a shortened program or when they feel abandoned after the program (Rhodes et al., 2000).

Career Mentoring

Avenue Scholars Foundation (ASF) is a high school mentoring program with a mission to ensure careers for students (Avenue Scholars) through the hope and support of mentors (Talent Advisors) (Weiss et al., 2017). Weiss et al. (2017) conducted a study to evaluate the feelings of the Avenue Scholars and their relationships with their mentors (Talent Advisors). Like school-based mentoring (SBM) initiatives, the ASF program enhances students' academic skills and familiarity with higher education (Weiss et al., 2017). However, ASF distinguishes itself by placing an early emphasis on establishing robust student-mentor relationships and fostering peer connections (Weiss et al., 2017).

Students in the ASF program underscored the importance of their relationships with mentors, which enabled Talent Advisors to maintain accountability effectively. They also

highlighted the value of bonds formed with peers, a unique aspect given that mentoring literature predominantly centers on mentor-mentee relationships. The Avenue Scholars cohort model provides students with the benefits of mentor-like figures and peer relationships (Weiss et al., 2017).

The study's findings underscored the vital role of the relationship between Talent Advisors and students in enhancing educational experiences and accountability (Weiss et al., 2017). The program's close collaboration with schools allowed Talent Advisors to work within the school day, enriching the mentoring experience for students. The results confirmed the importance of mentor-mentee relationships in SBM (Weiss et al., 2017). Talent Advisors built close relationships and dedicated school-day time to check attendance, education progress, well-being, and academics. This support within the school context significantly influenced students' perceptions of academic success (Weiss et al., 2017).

Weiss et al. (2017) added a noteworthy revelation: there was significance in developing peer relationships. Unlike prior mentoring research focused on mentor-mentee dynamics, the ASF program's cohort model allowed students to build bonds with mentors and peers. These peer relationships contributed to support and accountability, offering encouragement and assistance when mentors were unavailable. This program addition suggested that traditional one-on-one mentoring programs may overlook the potential of peer relationships. Students stressed the importance of their relationships with Talent Advisors and peers, enhancing the meaning of their class time, programming, and educational guidance. These relationships provided lasting support and hope for the future, establishing pathways to college and career success (Weiss et al., 2017).

Social Emotional Impact

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic plagued our world, resulting in widespread closures of educational institutions, places of worship, and businesses. People adopted practices like social distancing and mask-wearing as essential measures to combat the spread of this novel virus. The repercussions of this period of isolation continue to manifest, with a notable impact on our education systems. Students experienced a significant void as they missed the in-person instruction and the meaningful relationships they typically built with their teachers and peers.

To adapt to this challenging scenario, educational institutions are transforming. The rise of online schools is evident, and even traditional face-to-face schools are incorporating more digital learning into their curriculum, shifting away from the conventional classroom environment where students engage directly with teachers and peers.

Today, schools and educators focus on helping students develop emotional intelligence and resilience to navigate the complexities of a post-pandemic world. Schools recognize Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs as indispensable tools for promoting the well-being and success of K-12 students. NCSA member schools can use mentoring programs to address this area (Cognia, 2023; National Christian School Association, 2022). The study conducted by Rhodes in 2020 revealed that a significant number of young individuals exhibit pronounced symptoms of anxiety depression, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. These issues can hinder their academic achievements and their ability to pursue long-term objectives. These are precisely the areas that parents and educators hope to see addressed within mentoring programs. It is essential that volunteers and teachers who opt to become mentors receive thorough training to effectively manage the highly sensitive issues that young people are

grappling with in today's world. The success of mentoring programs often hinges on the quality of training provided to the adults involved in these programs.

Educators increasingly recognize that students have encountered challenges in collaboration, verbal communication, problem-solving, and developing crucial interpersonal relationships. In this context, mentoring programs emerge as a vital component in revitalizing these social and communication skills that are integral to young individuals' overall health and well-being. In essence, mentoring programs can bridge the gap created by the pandemic, nurturing the social skills and communication abilities vital in academic settings and fundamental to thriving in life (Barnett, 2023).

In a study by Barnett in 2023, the author proposes three key ways to foster hopefulness in students. The first method involves setting goals. Mentors can play a crucial role by assisting students in defining, visualizing, and making achievable goals, setting realistic deadlines, identifying obstacles, brainstorming solutions, and rewarding students as they progress (Barnett, 2023). Especially when students face significant life challenges, it can be challenging for them to focus on the future, and school-based mentoring programs can bridge the gap in the goal-setting process.

The second approach to instill hopefulness in students is through promoting agency (Barnett, 2023). The program helps students develop drive and determination and includes engaging in exercises like meaning-making, self-reflection, and self-awareness, which intentionally cultivate strategies for resilience. Young individuals find purpose in their lives, recognize their ability to influence their environment and outcomes, and learn from positive and negative experiences (Barnett, 2023). School-based mentoring programs can focus on fostering

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, building relationships, and responsible decision-making (Barnett, 2023).

Lastly, Barnett's (2023) third step involves establishing pathways. This challenging aspect of the program teaches students that they can achieve their goals and make significant strides in their lives. Active support from mentoring programs can be invaluable in helping students develop a growth mindset and realize their potential for personal growth and achievement.

Mentoring can play a vital role in fostering socioemotional learning in K-12 students. Mentors serve as positive role models, provide emotional support, teach valuable life skills, and help students develop the social and emotional competencies needed to succeed academically and in life. "Quality mentoring relationships, which are backed by a strong research base, endorsed by young people, and supported by a robust field of stakeholders, could be the leading edge in reaching community, state, and national goals, including regaining our position as first in the world in college completion, developing a future workforce for a global economy, and securing an opportunity society where all children, regardless of background, are equipped to achieve their dreams" (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014, p.12). Mentoring programs focusing on SEL can have a lasting positive impact on students' well-being and personal development.

Mentoring Program Outcomes

Outcomes of mentoring programs vary depending on the program's goals, time spent, relationships, and logistics. Studying the NCSA/Cognia school logistics and specific goals could help determine the type of program and its potential effectiveness. Adding the spiritual aspect to these types of programs can add to the well-being of the whole student. Not only looking at academic, socio-emotional, career, and relationship building but also developing their spiritual

well-being. School logistics and specific goals could help determine the type of program and its potential effectiveness. “In a meta-analysis of fifty-five mentoring program evaluations, researchers found higher effects for the programs that followed ‘best practices’ including screening of volunteers, careful matching, providing parent support, and having clear expectations and communications around the frequency of meetings and length of the match” (Rhodes, 2020, p. 120).

The literature highlights the existence of various mentoring programs. It is crucial to identify what aligns best with the community, children, and adults engaged with them for the success of any program. Investigating current trends and school requirements is essential for providing students with the highest chances of success, not only post-graduation but throughout their educational journey. This study will focus on an NCSA/Cognia-accredited high school, aiming to assess the utilization of mentoring programs within the Christian high school context. It will also identify best practices for schools seeking to meet accreditation standards for their mentoring program.

Chapter III

Methods

The aim of this research was to assess how NCSA/Cognia-accredited high schools align with the accreditation requirements of formal student advocacy programs. The research centered on mentoring initiatives for all high school students in compliance with the established standards rather than exclusively targeting at-risk students. Choosing the correct method for the study depended on the research goals. Maxwell (2013) described determining the right approach as the "who, when, where, and how of collecting and making sense of your data" (p. 87). Qualitative data is typically determined by interviewing and observing the study's participants. However, Maxwell (2013) also stressed that "in planning your research methods, you should always include whatever informal data-gathering strategies are feasible, including hanging out, casual conversations, and incidental observations" (p. 88).

This basic qualitative study delved deeply into participants' and mentors' experiences, perceptions, and insights. The goal was to comprehensively understand the program's impact on students, mentors, and the school community. By employing focus groups, observations, and interviews, the study intended to uncover the deep, rich narratives that emerged from the mentoring programs within faith-based schools. This study included exploring program development and the approaches these schools take to fulfill the student advocacy standards set forth by the NCSA and Cognia accrediting bodies.

Population and Sample

This study involved mentoring programs in NCSA/Cognia-accredited high schools located across the nation. NCSA schools vary in both size and demographics. The NCSA has 51 schools that are accredited with the same standards. These schools are as far east as Pennsylvania, west as Colorado, north as Indiana and south as Florida. They range in size from close to 2000 students to less than 100. These schools have a wide span of existence from over 110 years old to brand new in 2022. The shared connection among them is their accreditation by the NCSA, indicating that they are all academically reputable Christian schools.

The sample population was determined by the data from all NCSA schools responding to the screening questionnaire, with four to six being part of the focus groups. The screening questionnaire determined if schools fail to meet, meet, or exceed the student advocacy standards established for all schools. All NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools are required to meet specific accreditation standards. Student advocacy programs are designed according to standards set by NCSA and Cognia. The NCSA standard states, "the school provides services to ensure the spiritual health of the students" (National Christian School Association, 2022). The Cognia standard states, "The learners benefit from a formal structure that fosters positive relationships with peers and adults. Best practices include but are not limited to the following: The institution fosters an environment where learners receive support from adults and peers." (Cognia, 2023)

Purposeful sampling was utilized for data collection, aimed at selecting participants, settings, and situations representative of NCSA schools as a whole. Five schools were willing to participate in the study with various levels of mastery of the standard. This selection included three schools with established, active student advocacy programs, one in the process of developing such programs, and one without any student advocacy initiatives.

Instrumentation

The central question for this study was: How do schools accredited by NCSA/Cognia establish and assess a systematic framework to guarantee that every student cultivates positive relationships with both adults and peers, develop self-efficacy in their academic, social, and spiritual lives and provide essential support throughout their educational journey?

To address this critical question, a screening questionnaire was administered (see Appendix B) to determine the most appropriate sample. The questionnaire was sent out to the 51 accredited schools of the NCSA seeking the demographics of their school and their status of meeting or not meeting the formal structure standard. These questions were simple and direct, with one open-ended question about the description of their current programs. The questions consisted of the name and location of the school, the number of students in the high school, the percentages of how the school meets the formal structure program standards required by the NCSA/Cognia and finally a description of their current program or attempt to develop a program.

The second instrument (see Appendix C) used was for interviewing the school-principals. A predetermined set of questions were used and developed to provide information to support each of the research questions such as formation of the mentoring program, program evaluation, support for self-efficacy, alignment with the standards and school expectations, continuous improvement, collaborations and communication, challenges and solutions and finally mentor training and development. However, it is acknowledged that these questions represented only the initial phase and evolved as the interview progressed.

The third instrument (see Appendix D) was interviews with the program coordinators/counselors, and teachers at the schools that the principals represent. From those

initial interviews with principals the questions asked inquired about the program's logistics, including scheduling, mentor training, student versus mentor divisions, monitoring and evaluation, program resources and support, responsibilities, logistics and communication and feedback and improvement. Studying the variations and expectations of each program aided in developing a background for the focus group's initial questions.

The fourth instrument (see Appendix E) was for the focus groups with the mentors and sharing of their experiences about the program. The focus group questions included knowledge of observational learning, outcome expectations, positive peer relationships, social integration within the school environment, self-efficacy enhancement, alignment with Christian values, challenges and solutions, and student feedback and solutions. These areas aligned with each of the research questions and allowed for rich conversations and data. These dynamic methods allowed for unraveling personal perspectives, attitudes, and emotions.

Finally, observations were utilized to conclude the study. During the observation process, information was gathered such as specific notes on mentor/mentee cues for relationship building, time on task, questions and answers, and other noted anecdotal information that determined how the program meets the standard (see Appendix F and Appendix G). The information sheets involved cues and reminders to maintain the focus of answering the research questions. The outcomes from the data gathered on the observation sheets triangulated with the data collected from focus group sessions and interviews.

The content validity of all instruments used in this study was assessed to ensure the questions are correctly phrased to gather the necessary information for the study's research questions. Before data collection, each instrument underwent a review process by a faculty member. This review aimed to confirm that the items included in the instruments accurately

captured the breadth and depth of the required data for the research questions. Furthermore, efforts were made to establish content validity through alignment with theoretical frameworks and existing literature. By using these validation procedures, the instruments used in this study demonstrated accurate content validity, ensuring that they effectively measured the intended issues with accuracy and comprehensiveness, thus securing the credibility and reliability of the study's findings.

Data Collection Procedures

This study began with an initial phase involving a screening questionnaire (see Appendix B), which was given to 51 NCSA and Cognia accredited schools. The questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics and distributed via email to the schools, with email addresses sourced from the NCSA database (see Appendix B). The questionnaire aimed to gather demographic information, identify willing participants, and create a list of potential schools to be included in the study. Embedded within the questionnaire was an informed consent letter that included a check box indicating that the school leadership understands the study and is a willing participant. The goal was to have 5 - 8 schools agree to participate.

Following the questionnaire phase and selection of schools, interviews were conducted with each principal to delve into the logistics and intricacies of their mentoring programs which will facilitate developing future interviews and focus groups. Each interview question was tailored to address specific research questions of the study (see Appendix B). This stage served to not only gather valuable data but also foster relationships with the schools, enhancing understanding of their dynamics and programs. These interviews were facilitated through virtual meetings on Microsoft Teams, with participants receiving a meeting link via email. The interviews were set to automatically record, and the participants were able to opt out if they

needed to. These recordings allowed for thorough review of the rich data revealed, ensuring no valuable insights were overlooked. Another feature of Microsoft Teams is that it allows for a transcript when the meeting is completed. This provided printed copies to take notes on and to code as was deciphered.

The next phase of the study involved interviewing counselors/coordinators and teachers from each school who oversee the daily operations and logistics of the programs (see Appendix). Key areas to be explored included mentor training, student group divisions, schedules, and program evaluation. This interview process mirrored that of the initial principal interviews.

Following the interviews, the study progressed to focus groups, with three groups as planned. Each group was comprised of three to four participants, including principals, coordinators, and other individuals identified by the principal, such as counselors or mentor teachers, from the selected schools. The focus groups also mirrored the principals interview process through Microsoft Teams. The first focus group involved the head of school and principals. The second focus group involved coaches and teachers. The final focus group involved NCSA Commissioners. Each collaboration was 60 minutes in length and answered the research questions that were a part of the study (see Appendix D).

Finally, once all the interview and focus group data were collected, the schools' programs were observed to triangulate the findings. The objective was to observe all participating schools that have mentoring programs, however only two were chosen due to level of the programs, scheduling and logistics. Observations occurred in person and were during each school's specific mentoring times. Each observation was several hours in length and was during the time when the mentoring sessions or culmination of mentoring events took place. The observations focused on the practical and logistical aspects of mentoring programs (see

Appendix E). Followed by a focus self-efficacy, Christian values and principles embedded within the mentoring sessions (see Appendix F).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data coding was used to interpret what the data reveals. Johnny Saldaña (2016) defines code as "a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.4). Data coding began with Initial Coding, which involved breaking the data into smaller portions and assigning labels to capture the information's details and look for similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2016).

In this cycle of initial coding, In Vivo coding was used, where the participant's words were used as the codes. This type of analysis was line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence, or paragraph coding, depending on the study's goals (Saldaña, 2016). Each interview and discussion delved into different aspects of the mentoring programs and revealed how the programs were implemented and supported. In Vivo coding was the best option for the first cycle because it enabled the ability to break down the data into parts and compare them for differences and similarities using the participants' own words.

The second cycle of coding was Pattern Coding, also known as Thematic Coding. This step involved taking the initial In Vivo Codes which were in the participants' own words, identifying the patterns in the data and grouping them into themes, summaries, and concepts. "Pattern Codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that will identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Saldaña, 2016 p.236). This type of coding was the best choice in order to provide a descriptive account of characteristics, practices and outcomes of mentoring programs in Christian high schools.

Following the data coding was a thematic analysis which revealed overarching themes or patterns that emerged from the data analysis. These themes provided insight into the mentoring programs and revealed connections and or contradictions concerning the research questions (Saldaña, 2016).

This study used triangulation to corroborate the findings. Interviews, focus groups, observations, and participant sharing were invaluable to ensure accurate data. Determining the relationship and progress toward the study's development involved comparing memo writing and categories. This cycle answered the how and why of the study. It also answered how a mentoring program in an NCSA school works and why this type of program was necessary for the growth of students in a Christian school. The categories emerged from the data and helped to determine the findings. Verifying the findings by comparing the interview, focus groups, observation data and memos deepened the understanding of the study.

Reflection on the potential for personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions that might influence interpretations was necessary. Finally, reporting the results of this basic descriptive study in a clear, structured manner, including quotes, examples, and references to the data, supported the findings.

Validity

To thoroughly assess the reliability and strength of the outcomes in this qualitative study, it was essential to delve into its validity. One widely utilized approach, as advocated by Merriam (2002), to ensure the validity of research involves employing triangulation. This strategy integrates multiple data collection methods. In this study, data triangulation encompassed the use of three distinct phases of data collection. The initial phase encompassed individual interviews

with principals, program coordinators, and counselors from NCSA schools striving to meet the formal student standard of mentoring-student advocacy programs.

The second phase of data collection involved selecting three focus groups, two represented schools at different phases of program development. The third was with NCSA Commissioners to delve into the accrediting standards of mentoring programs (see Appendix H). Participants in these focus groups will include mentors, coordinators, teachers, counselors and NCSA Commissioners actively engaged in program development and execution.

The third phase was observing mentoring programs within the schools previously involved in individual interviews and focus groups will serve the dual purpose of validating the earlier collected information and reinforcing the study's internal validity.

To bolster the study's validity, memoing was employed to monitor emerging patterns and anomalies in the data. This involved comparing these patterns with insights from other sources, thereby validating or questioning interpretations and enhancing the triangulation process.

Additional validity strategies Merriam (2002) endorsed were member checks. After the data has been analyzed and compiled, it became crucial to share it with the participants to ensure that the interpretation aligns with their true intentions. Participants recognized the material from the study and how it reflected their experiences. This was done through the sharing of all analyzed transcripts with everyone who was interviewed to ensure validity.

Measures were taken to maintain anonymity regarding the schools and the information shared during interviews, focus groups, and observations within the study. Names and identities of the participants were protected. The location and name of the school involved were concealed behind a pseudonym, such as a rural NCSA school. The sharing of information with other NCSA schools was done anonymously.

It was necessary to address potential biases that may arise from developing a mentoring program at the researcher's school and from the existing expectations of the study of mentoring programs. To mitigate this validity threat, interviews were conducted in a virtual format, allowing for audio and visual recording of responses and the observation of interviewees' body language and facial expressions, which might be overlooked in an in-person interview or observation. This also allowed for multiple viewings of each event to ensure nothing was missed or misinterpreted.

A potential threat that arose is a difference of interpretations from each school of the standard of a formal student structure designed to foster positive relations with adults and peers in various student life programs. Mentoring programs within NCSA/Cognia schools look different than the perceived programs revealed in the literature. How each school meets the standard varies from school to school.

Detailed reflection memos were maintained to identify and acknowledge biases and address further validity concerns of personal reflections. Additionally, a thorough review of all collected data and potential analyses was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives.

Chapter IV

The Study

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study aimed to offer practical guidance for educators seeking to implement and sustain effective student mentoring programs within schools affiliated with the National Christian School Association (NCSA). Specifically, it explored school-based mentoring as a means of fulfilling the NCSA/Cognia requirement for a formal structure that supports positive peer and adult relationships.

The following sections introduce the study's participants and present the data collected during the research process. Each research question is addressed through an analysis of the results, highlighting key findings and insights into mentoring practices across NCSA high schools. These findings lay out the groundwork for interpretation and broader implications discussed in the next chapter.

Introduction of Participants

Table 1 (see Appendix I, Table I1) provides an overview of the participants involved in the study, highlighting their gender, school demographics, job titles, and years of experience. The participants represented a variety of roles within National Christian School Association (NCSA) high schools, including principals, deans, counselors, teachers, and athletic directors. The schools ranged in size from approximately 300 to 1,800 students, reflecting both rural and urban settings. Participants' experience in education varied widely, from as few as 2 years to more than 30 years, offering a diverse range of perspectives on mentoring practices within their

respective institutions. This variety in backgrounds and school contexts enhances the richness and applicability of the study's findings.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a male teacher and coach with 27 years of experience who currently works at a suburban school with 1,708 students. His upbringing profoundly shaped his personal background and professional approach, as he was raised by a single mother and found mentors in the coaches who guided him. Reflecting on this, P1 shared, "My coaches were my father figures, and I remember the impact each and every one had on me. I remember my varsity basketball coach being at my wedding." That influence carried into P1's career, as he recalled even the small gestures, such as his coach "fighting through a crowd" in the school hallway just to shake his hand as a freshman, reminding him of his worth despite being "inconsequential" at the time. P1 explained that these moments of intentional relationship-building inspired him to adopt the handshake and later hugs as part of his everyday interaction with students.

Much of P1's philosophy centers on the belief that relationships form the foundation of education. He emphasized, "We can talk about education, we can talk about athletics, but what it really gets down to for me is the relationships." He illustrated this through his long-term advisory role at his current school, where he walked a group of students from freshman year through senior year, building lasting bonds. Even students who have left the school remain connected with him, such as the young man he still supports via Instagram, celebrating milestones like baptism. He also recounted the story of a freshman who once caused trouble by throwing a bowling ball at a TV, noting that despite this rocky start, the student became one of his favorites—an example of how relationships can transform over time.

P1 has also integrated personal and spiritual elements into his mentorship. He described a pivotal moment at the end of one school year when, amid personal struggles, his daughter's miscarriage, and his brother's suicidal crisis, he openly shared his faith with 18 young men heading into their senior year. "I do not know how you go through life without Jesus," he told them, challenging them to seek Christ and offering his personal phone number for support. These moments reflect his conviction that teaching, mentoring, and coaching go beyond academics and athletics, pointing instead to life, faith, and enduring connection.

Ultimately, P1 measures his success not by championship trophies but by the relationships that last. He explained, "I do not have any championship rings as a coach… but I have been to 8 or 9 weddings of former players. So, I don't have a championship ring, but I've seen rings exchanged, and I'm proud of that." His story demonstrates how mentorship, personal faith, and intentional relationship-building define his identity as both a teacher and coach.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is a male educator with 27 years of experience who currently serves as the Academic Dean at a suburban high school of 1,708 students. He has been at the school since 1998, serving in various roles, and stepped into the Dean position two years ago. P2 is married with three children, who are currently students at the school, and his wife is a teacher there. P2 describes the importance of balancing both family and professional responsibilities, noting, "My family and I still attend Wednesday night church."

His leadership philosophy emphasizes student growth, responsibility, and leadership development, as he explained, "We try to push them as hard as we can into assuming responsibility, taking on the mantle of leadership, but we really want the best and the brightest to have the vision for what they want the school year to be for the kids."

P2 highlighted that his school's culture is one of flexibility and adaptability, saying, "We should probably be in the Marine Corps 'cause we are very much an improvise, adapt, and overcome school." While he respects academic rigor, his extensive career as an English teacher has shaped his perspective on striking a balance between structure and student well-being. He expressed concern over the fast-paced, seven-period schedule, stating, "I'd like to give a break in the schedule where kids have a second to breathe or extend lunchtime or have some non-academic time 'cause I think it'll help our academic time." He acknowledged the school's competitive academic environment in the suburban area, comparing it to that of top schools in the area, and recognized that due to the extreme rigor of the academic program, there is considerable pressure to succeed, particularly for freshmen and sophomores.

Although he is the Academic Dean, P2 resists a narrow focus on academics alone. He reflected, "Our mission statement is to help each student grow as Jesus did, in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, I don't feel like the mission of the school is to craft valedictorians. It's to present a complete student." He underscored the importance of creating a supportive environment where students feel that teachers and administrators are "on their side," recognizing the challenges of being a teenager. His philosophy embraces the whole student—academic, spiritual, and personal, rather than reducing education to test scores or elite college preparation.

P2 also connected this broader philosophy to the school's Christian identity. He recalled a debate, years ago, about balancing faith and academics, remembering a colleague's words: "It does say Christian on our sign, but it also says school. The burden is on us." For P2, this means avoiding extremes of proselytizing or pushing purely academic achievement and instead focusing on nurturing "the entire picture" of the student.

Through his role as Dean, P2 continues to advocate for changes that reduce student stress while promoting leadership, service, and holistic growth. His perspective reveals a commitment to shaping not just strong students, but complete human beings who are supported academically, spiritually, and personally.

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is a male who serves as Head of School at a suburban school with 1,320 students. He has been in this role for two years and is guided by the school's mission statement: "Live for God, love like Jesus, and learn for life." His background in youth ministry and preaching has shaped his leadership style, which emphasizes intentional mentorship, relational investment, and spiritual formation alongside academic excellence. P3 described one of his most significant initiatives as a leadership course he personally developed and taught 15 juniors. "The school had never had this class in the past," he explained, noting that he worked with the registrar and principals to identify students with leadership potential. Using *"Leaders and Self-Deception" by the Arbinger Institute,* a text he also teaches in doctoral courses at a Christian University, he challenged students to embrace the principle that "people are people, not objects." P3 emphasized that leadership begins in high school, not after graduation, and has witnessed these students become "an incredible catalyst" for shaping school culture during their senior year.

The course also provided P3 with what he described as "relationship shelf life," allowing him to connect with students more personally than is often possible for a Head of School. Nearly every student in the course later asked him to write their college recommendation letters, something he considered both meaningful and rewarding. He reflected on this relational dynamic, noting, "Who pastors the pastor? Who shepherds the shepherd?" and shared how

important it was for him to be intentional in pouring into students who often give so much of themselves. He recounted the story of a young woman struggling under negative influences, describing his role as offering encouragement and perspective to help students recognize their worth.

P3 also addressed broader institutional changes during his tenure. While praising the foundation built by the previous administration, he acknowledged gaps in curriculum alignment, saying, “In essence, it was teach what you want to teach, and as long as everybody is happy, we are happy.” This lack of vertical alignment created inconsistencies across grade levels. To address this, P3 and his leadership team reverse-engineered the instructional process, starting with the school’s vision and conducting in-depth analyses of student performance data. “We literally went to re-teaching and reverse engineered that all the way back to our vision and why we exist as an organization,” he explained, emphasizing the importance of interpreting data to close gaps and strengthen learning.

He described himself as “a three-to-five-year culture guy,” recognizing that transformational change requires time. Now, at the end of year two, he likened the process to assembling a puzzle: “Every time a piece falls in place, it’s like the clearer picture is emerging.” One of the practical changes implemented under his leadership requires all teachers, unless already coaching, to be available for tutoring each morning. While not every teacher is actively tutoring every day, this structure ensures students always have support when needed. These efforts, combined with his intentional leadership development initiatives, reflect his commitment to cultivating not only academic growth but also strong spiritual and relational foundations for students.

Participant 4

Participant 4 (P4) is a female High School Bible and Art teacher and campus minister at a suburban school with 1,312 students. She has 15 years of experience in education and is a mother of three children in grades K–5, including a third grader and a junior. In her role in campus ministry, P4 emphasizes creating a safe, supportive environment for students, noting, "Our role… we are not licensed counselors, but we are a place where kids… can come as a safe place if they are having a rough day, need a place to pray, need a place just to vent." The campus ministry office is intentionally designed to promote students' well-being, equipped with prayer spaces, games, puzzles, stress balls, and other resources to meet the diverse needs of students of all ages. P4 highlighted collaboration with professional counselors through a local agency, stating, "We have two counselors that come once a week, and if we have a student that's really out of our league, then we have those counselors that are there."

P4 also focuses on fostering student ownership and leadership, particularly among older students. She shared, "Kids that are really involved in sports… or acting… it gives them a chance to take ownership of something and to see what their gifts are." She emphasized the relational impact of these experiences, describing how students connect across age groups, celebrate milestones, and support one another. Reflecting on her own child, she noted, "My personal kid now as a junior… his Bible buddy… thought the world of him and celebrated his high school graduation with him." These experiences illustrate how campus ministry fosters meaningful, intergenerational relationships and encourages students to engage with the school community beyond the classroom.

P4 also discussed her personal growth in the role, highlighting the challenge of balancing new initiatives with intentionality. She reflected, "One thing we have learned is to be a little bit

more intentional and not be so rushed, to say not yet, has been really hard for me, but also very good." She described how her third year in this role has been a rebuilding period for Bible programs and ministry activities, including small group missions' projects. These opportunities have allowed her to connect with students she had not previously taught, stating, "It allowed me to get to know some kids in our school that I did not know before… that were seniors before I started teaching here or I just missed their class."

Overall, P4's work reflects a commitment to student spiritual, emotional, and relational growth, creating spaces where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to explore their gifts, take ownership of activities, and build lasting relationships.

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) is a female high school teacher and campus minister at a suburban school with 1,312 students. She described her role as "a dream job" and emphasized how meaningful it has been to watch students grow through the program. For her, the most significant impact has been the way students feel supported while also learning to take responsibility for themselves. "They do feel supported, and I think they feel heard," she explained, adding that the time spent together helps them work through struggles, whether academic or personal.

Students, particularly middle schoolers, have responded positively, with some even expressing disappointment that they must leave the program at the end of the semester. "In fact, my kids are pretty upset because they have to get out at semester," she said. "Most of them are pretty sad that it's going to be over in December." Parents have echoed this sentiment, with some contacting her directly. "Some of their parents have even reached out like, 'How do I keep them in it? I don't want them out,'" she recalled.

She also described the way accountability has shifted students' mindsets. "I had one boy today who was like, 'Miss P5, I just wanted to cry because I thought I got points taken off and I had it finished right here. I just didn't turn it in.' And I was like, 'OK, so there's no one else responsible for that but you.' P5 saw this as a breakthrough, a moment where the student took ownership of his actions rather than blaming others. "They at least own it now," she reflected. "It's not someone else's fault. They realize it's on them."

For P5, the transformation occurs when students realize their own mistakes, knowing they are surrounded by support, which makes the role so fulfilling. "It really is," she concluded. "It really is a dream job. I love it."

Participant 6

Participant 6 (P6) is a male middle-school principal at a suburban school with 1,312 students. He joined the conversation at the end and spoke warmly about his staff, sharing how proud he is of "the great job they do with the students at his school." He singled out colleagues' efforts and the collaborative spirit that shapes daily work, noting the visible difference a committed team makes for young learners.

P6 emphasized what he sees as a distinctive strength of a Christian private school: the ability to identify and respond to specific needs quickly. As he put it, "Like I said, with these two ladies in this Christian private school, what's unique is we can find a need. We can find that little niche that we need to take care of, and we can go after it, and we can take care of it with more freedom than a public school." That nimbleness, finding a niche and acting on it, was central to his praise of the team's work.

He also acknowledged leadership that enables action. Speaking about district support, he said, "Our leadership is great about, hey, let's go do it. You know, if we justify it and we go

through it, think it through, let's go, you know, and we're like I said, it's expanding." P6 framed this as a cyclical partnership: staff identify needs, leadership greenlights, thoughtful action is taken, and successful initiatives grow and expand.

Participant 7

Participant 7 (P7) is a female Assistant Principal at a suburban school of 846 students with 15 years of experience. She oversees curriculum and instruction for grades 7 through 12 and centers her work on ensuring that every student is known and noticed. "Our big motto is known, noticed, and needed," she explained, describing a schoolwide emphasis that "every kid, every day, is greeted by name." That expectation drives both classroom practice and extracurricular planning: P7's goal is "making sure there is somewhere for every student to land," whether in fine arts, athletics, science clubs, or flex-time activities.

She gave a concrete example of how seriously the school takes this commitment. After watching her son, a first grader, for a day, the staff discovered that seventeen adults called him by name. This is exactly the kind of community connection she wants replicated for older students. "I want to know how many adults know my son," she said. She notes that the adults intentionally rearrange their plans or use lunchtime to meet students' needs and then document those meetings on a shared sheet, ensuring consistent care, a great example of selfless attention given to the students.

P7 also described how academic supports are tied to student ownership: teachers set expectations and co-create goals with students through a success plan. She acknowledged how hard it can be for teenagers to ask for help. "I'm going to be asking you Friday what you need from me," but stressed the power of a clear partnership. "I will die on that hill for you," she said, summarizing the fierce advocacy she and her team offer. For P7, the combination of intentional

noticing, documented supports, and extracurricular pathways creates an environment where students feel seen, supported, and motivated to rise to expectations.

Participant 8

Participant 8 (P8) is a male teacher and coach with two years of experience at a suburban school of 846 students. He teaches Bible to 10th and 11th graders across four sections, most of which are co-ed, though one class ended up being all male. He also coaches' basketball, seeing both roles as opportunities for mentorship. "Mentorship is such a universal methodology that you can use to help people be informed more about the image of Christ," he explained. For P8, the classroom, the court, and dedicated spaces, such as LifeNet (the school's mentoring program), all serve as avenues for shaping students' faith and character.

He stressed to his players and students that their identity is not bound to past mistakes or even successes: "You don't have to identify with the mistakes you made. You don't have to identify with the successes you had. You can just keep being the best you that you can be on the court." He draws on a biblical perspective, reminding them that one may not always see the fruit of the seeds planted, but that growth still happens in God's timing.

Looking ahead, P8 shared his vision for upperclassmen: "My vision for the 10th and 11th and in 12th grade students is that they begin to learn how to make their faith more practical." He views tools like RightNow Media as resources that help students integrate their learning with real-life experiences. His deeper hope is to help young men grow into godly leaders, open to the calling God has placed on them.

P8 also reflected on his unique perspective as an alumnus of the school, noting the changes he has witnessed over time. "I went to school here. Thus, I know where the school was when I attended. Not that it was bad, but the progress that we made in this area, I think it's really

cool." He praised his administration for their openness and flexibility, describing them as focused on the greater mission: "The number one goal here is to advance the Kingdom. We're doing it through the school. However, that is still like the main objective."

For P8, mentorship is more than teaching or coaching; it is "being able to do life with students." He emphasized that students are far more receptive when adults are willing to walk alongside them rather than stand at the front of the room and lecture.

Participant 9

Participant 9 (P9) is a female social-emotional counselor at a suburban school of 846 students, serving grades 7–12. Unlike traditional guidance counselors who focus heavily on college prep, her work leans toward supporting students' mental health needs. "My counseling role isn't as much college prep as it is the mental health side," she explained. On any given day, she may respond to cases of depression, anxiety, or interpersonal conflicts, often referred by teachers who notice behavioral changes. "Sometimes the frontline defense is the teacher," she noted. "If a teacher notices a change in behavior with a student or just any concern, then they'll bring it to my attention, and I'll meet with the child at that point."

P9 balances reactive counseling with ongoing, intentional relationships. "I have some students that I try to meet with once every two weeks if it's significant at all," she said, adding that when needs extend beyond the school's scope, she works with families to arrange outside counseling. Licensed herself, she can provide professional support during school hours, meeting as often as students request. "It can really just be as needed, or as frequent as the child wants to meet with me."

Beyond counseling, P9 teaches psychology and leads core teams for 7th and 8th graders, integrating social-emotional learning into the school's culture. These groups give students both

structure and freedom: “It’s just an easy time. They can let their hair down. They can talk. They can even cry if they want for tests coming up. But it’s a safe space where they can just be themselves and be known.” Prayer and spiritual formation are integral to this time, with core teams often sharing requests at the beginning of the week.

For P9, connection with families is another key piece. At the start of the year, she emails parents to introduce herself and encourages other core team leaders to do the same. Parents respond positively, appreciating the consistent updates in newsletters that describe what students are discussing each week. Still, she emphasized that the real joy comes from the students: “Even more than hearing from parents, though, is just kids. They just love the groups.” She hopes to expand these opportunities, explaining, “Just looking them in the eyes and saying, you know, how are you, and where are you, and what’s on your heart these days, and how can I help you. I would love us to be able to do more of that.”

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) is a high school teacher at a suburban school serving 846 students. With over 30 years of experience in education, she brings a wealth of expertise and a deep love for students to her role. After nearly three decades in public schools, she retired, having served as head of the history department, coached cheerleading and cross-country, and written advanced social studies curricula. She described how the years following COVID were particularly taxing, covering classes, managing virtual instruction, and navigating administrative turnover, ultimately leading to her retirement. “After exams, nobody even knew I was retiring,” she recalled with a laugh. “Two weeks later, this school called and said, ‘We’ve heard all about you. Do you want to teach?’”

Now in her fourth year at this private Christian School, she teaches history and English, although she admits that history is her first love. “I’m not the grammar-punctuation-part-of-speech person, I’m the history nerd,” she said. Yet she has also worked to expand academic opportunities for her students, attending Pre-AP training and creating pathways for students to transition into AP-level coursework. She is equally invested in her students outside of the classroom. “I’m usually here until 4:30 or 5:00,” she explained. “If no one stays after school, I’ll bring my workout clothes and run the campus. I wave at everybody while they’re practicing, I’m 53, but I pretend I’m 16.”

Her classroom has become a haven for students. “They’ve already figured out my room is always open,” she said. “Most mornings, if the custodians have unlocked my door, I’ll have about 30 kids in my room before school even starts.” She sees relationship-building as the foundation of good teaching. “How can I ever teach a kid history unless I build a relationship with them?” she asked. “We’re building the next generation. What do we want them to look like?” Participant 10 also spoke about how her faith influences her work. “Every day, it’s more of a challenge to me in my quiet time: ‘God, allow me to speak to a kid today who needs me. Where can I be a witness?’” She smiled and added, “I’m a hugger, so I always have to tell kids at the beginning, if you have a bubble, you’ve got to let me know, because I’m going to hug.”

Participant 11

Participant 11 (P11) is a high school science teacher at a suburban school of 450 students, where she has taught for four years. She teaches middle school life science, high school biology, and also leads the senior seminar course, which is designed to help students prepare for life after graduation. “We have one period during the day that they can work on college applications,” she explained. “I talk to them about their interests, what major they might want to pursue, and we

require them to shadow at least one person, ideally two, in careers they're interested in, and then write a reflection about it. I feel like that's really valuable."

Because she has already taught many of the seniors in biology, the transition into mentoring them through seminar has been smooth. "It's been easy for me just to jump in," she said. "I already know their personalities, and so I can relate to them and talk about what they're interested in. That's been helpful, especially when we're brainstorming who they want to shadow or what direction they want to go in." She splits the seminar across the year, working with half the senior class each semester. She sees shadowing as essential for helping students make informed decisions before committing to a college path. "It's so important to really spend a day with someone and find out if that's something you like before you invest time and money in college," she emphasized.

Networking is a key part of her approach, often connecting students with professionals in the community. "Sometimes it's someone I know from church," she explained. "For instance, one of my girls wanted to shadow a physical therapist, and I knew someone, so we were able to set that up. However, the students do the work of setting it up; I just help them find the contact." Her role is not just about teaching science, but about guiding students toward their futures, combining academic preparation with practical, real-world exploration.

Participant 12

Participant 12 (P12) is the Upper School Dean at a suburban school of 450 students. He has served in education for 24 years. Until this year, P12 carried the dual responsibilities of athletic director and principal, but the workload became overwhelming. "I just had too much on my plate," he admitted. "Now, for the first time, I have an assistant principal and an athletic director, so the timing feels right." His perspective as dean blends both academics and athletics,

with a strong desire to keep the school's spiritual mission at the forefront. "We encourage coaches to do short devotionals or end their practices with prayer," he explained. "A couple of mine do it, and most don't. It's not something we set in stone, but at our coaches' meeting each year, we talk about looking for ways to bring in that spiritual side of our purpose and remember why we're really here."

One of his greatest challenges has been managing the balance of student leadership opportunities in mentoring. In recent years, uneven enrollment has created difficulties. "Two years ago, we had 12 seniors and 36 sixth graders," he said. "The numbers were skewed. This year, for the first time, I'm actually balanced, 84 high schoolers and 83 middle schoolers. Next year, I'll finally have more high school than middle school." For him, finding the right students to step into mentoring roles requires discernment. "There were three or four seniors that I thought, I don't know if I want you being a mentor," he reflected. "As a dad, not just a principal, you hear things about what kids do on Friday nights, and I just wasn't sure. Maybe that was me being too judgmental and not wanting to trust the kids to rise up." Now, he is working to give students more room to step into leadership, while still holding them accountable. "If you mess up at school, you may jeopardize that role," he said, "but I don't want to force kids into it either. That's why we treat it more like a club, you get the kids who want to be part of leadership, and then you pair them with the younger students who need help."

Participant 13

Participant 13 (P13) is a female dean in the Lower School at a rural school of 330 students, with 15 years of experience. She shared how intentional her school has been in building cross-grade relationships that foster mentorship and accountability. For example, the youngest

students are paired with older students through a “Book Buddies” program, where eighth graders regularly visit the K3 classroom to read, play, and create crafts with them.

This year, P12 was particularly excited about a new initiative that pairs kindergarten students with seniors as “senior buddies.” Seniors walk their kindergartners to chapel each Thursday and sit with them during the service. She explained how meaningful these relationships have been—not just for the little ones who look up to their older buddy, but also for the seniors, who feel a sense of accountability knowing that younger eyes are watching them. “To me, I love that the seniors don’t even realize it, but they’re being held accountable by that kindergartner because those little ones are watching everything they do,” she shared. The school even considered personal circumstances when making pairings, such as matching a senior and a kindergartner who both lacked a father figure, allowing them to share common ground. She described how these bonds have grown deeper over time, with seniors not only giving high-fives but also engaging in genuine conversations and taking their roles seriously. She emphasized how valuable this has been in helping younger children feel comfortable, confident, and connected to older students in the school community.

Participant 14

Participant 14 (P14) is a female high school teacher with 19 years of experience at a rural school of 330 students. She emphasized the importance of relationship building in helping students grow in confidence and accountability. For example, at the end of lunch each day, one of the boys is asked to lead a prayer before dismissal. Many are hesitant at first, but she explained how building trust changes their response: “If you go to them ahead of time and say, ‘I’m going to ask you at the end of lunch today if you’ll lead the prayer,’ they’re reluctant to tell you no, because they know you’re putting some trust in them, and they want to respond to that.”

Once students lead a prayer once or twice, she noted, they gain the confidence to step up when called on in the future.

P14 also reflected on the value of ongoing mentorship and advisement throughout high school. Her school's model of retaining the same class sponsors for four years provides teachers with the opportunity to build deep relationships with students. She described how those moments of connection can spark real growth: 'A couple of the girls came back to me after a discussion and said, "We're really glad you talked about that… we needed it." We talk about people too much, and we're going to hold each other accountable and try to do better.' Just the fact that they were willing to acknowledge that meant a lot." While she values structured programs, she emphasized the importance of organic relationship-building, especially for students who may not participate in sports or clubs. These intentional connections, she explained, give even the quieter, more reluctant students a chance to be seen, supported, and heard.

Participant 15

Participant 15 (P15) is a female teacher with six years of experience at a rural school of 330 students. She described how her school has utilized "mentoring chapels" as a means to foster relationships and impart life skills. Instead of attending chapel as one large group, students break into smaller groups that meet with a teacher. Reflecting on the changes between last year and this year, she noted, "Last year we assigned the groups, and honestly, I think it worked better. This year we let them pick, but it ended up being kind of a weird motley crew, and they don't really talk." Despite that challenge, she has worked to tailor the meetings to student needs by listening to their feedback and finding resources to match.

One of the main themes to emerge from these mentoring chapels has been the need for executive functioning skills. P15 explained, "A lot of what they said was, 'I don't know how to

organize myself. I don't know how to make sure I'm on time.' So, we started a series on those skills and tried to incorporate scripture and talk about how that reflects on their spiritual life." She also incorporates data conferencing after tests, asking students to reflect on their progress and set goals. This practice, she said, has given her valuable insight into her students' growth: "Just the fact that they know where they started and where they are now is some evidence of self-efficacy. They're paying attention to their grades and making that connection. It's time-consuming, but it pays off."

NCSA Commissioner Participants

In addition to the 15 school-level participants, above, the final participants were the NCSA Commissioners who are responsible for visiting and supporting the schools during their accreditation. They are also the ones who come to the schools to evaluate whether the schools are in line with the standards and can be accredited. The first is a female NCSA Commissioner and is the Head of a suburban school with 470 students and has been in education for 33 years. The second NCSA Commissioner is a male, and he has been in education for 18 years. He is at a suburban school with 450 students. While these commissioners run their own schools, in this roll, they are more of support and guidance for the NCSA school they are visiting for accreditation. They were instrumental in the study when looking at research question four and how each school's mentoring programs align with the actual standards and their school's foundational statements.

Research Question Findings

Analysis of interview and focus group data from participants across five accredited Christian schools (large suburban campus of 1,708 students, suburban campuses of 1,312 and 846 students, a mid-size suburban campus of 450 students, and a rural K–12 campus of 330

students) revealed an intentional, multi-layered approach to relationship formation. Three interrelated systems recur across sites: (a) formal longitudinal adult–student mentoring (advisement/homeroom), (b) structured peer mentorship and student leadership pathways (buddy systems, prefects), and (c) faith-integrated, holistic support structures that combine spiritual formation, social–emotional care, and academic interventions. These areas will be revealed through the analysis of each research question.

Findings of Research Question 1

How do NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools develop a formal structure to ensure all learners develop positive relationships with adults and peers supporting their educational experiences?

Key Finding 1: Intentional mentoring structures foster deep, lasting relationships between students and adults.

Participants described formal advisement/homeroom models that intentionally pair a small cohort of students with a single adult for multiple years, enabling relationship depth and continuity.

At the large suburban campus, Participants 1 and 2 described a four-year advisement model in which each mentor is assigned approximately 10–14 students beginning in ninth grade and remaining with that cohort through graduation (P1, High School Coach/Teacher, Suburban, 1,708 students, 25 years; P2, Academic Dean, Suburban, 1,708 students, 27 years). As P1 explained, “When you come in with that group of freshmen, you keep them all the way through their senior year. So, you’ve got four years to build those relationships” (P1). The advisement meetings occur weekly or biweekly for roughly 25 minutes; mentors are expected to maintain at

least two touch points per week (one during advisement and an additional check-in by email, quick meeting, or individual outreach) (P1; P2).

Members of the suburban 1,312-student campus (P3, President; P4, High School Teacher/Campus Minister; P5, High School Teacher/AVID Director; P6, Middle School Principal) described parallel small-group "Spiritual Formation" or Lifenet groupings where two adults meet regularly with, 10 students (gender-divided) for relationship building, celebration, and non-graded fellowship. One campus minister summarized the emphasis succinctly: these sessions are designed for relational connection more than academic monitoring (P4, High School Teacher/Campus Minister, Suburban, 1,312 students, 15 years).

Participants from the mid-size suburban campus (P7–P10) likewise reported homeroom or core-team models (7th–8th grade core teams; 9th grade Lifenet) and built-in flex periods or third-block time that permit adults to meet with students individually or in small groups (P7, Assistant Principal; P8, High School Coach/Teacher; P9, Social-Emotional Counselor; P10, High School Teacher; Suburban, 846 students). P11 and P12 (suburban campus, 450 students) described a weekly homeroom check-in and class sponsors who remain with a cohort all four years (P11, High School Teacher; P12, Upper School Principal).

Across contexts, the advisement/homeroom model operationalizes accreditation expectations into practice by guaranteeing repeated, predictable contact between adult mentors and small groups of students. This design shifts relational work from an ad hoc responsibility to an explicit, scheduled element of the school day, enabling trust to develop over multiple academic years.

Key Finding 2: Structured peer-mentoring and leadership pathways promote cross-age relationships, unity, and student agency.

Participants detailed multiple peer mentoring systems that intentionally pair older students with younger peers and integrate student leaders into the fabric of school life.

The large suburban campus (P1, P2) described a Prefect program that functions as a formal student-leadership structure replacing traditional student government. Prefects are appointed by administrators and are connected with adult mentors in distinct domains (e.g., Academic Prefect under the Academic Dean; Spiritual Life Prefect under the spiritual life committee). P2 noted that prefects "run a peer-to-peer tutoring program" and are "pushed to assume responsibility and take on the mantle of leadership" (P2).

The suburban 1,312-student campus (P3–P6) reported explicit cross-grade mentoring programs—Bible Buddies and the Unity Project—where seniors mentor sixth graders and juniors mentor fifth graders, with pairings made intentionally by gender and common interests (P3, President; P4, Campus Minister; P5, AVID Director; P6, Middle School Principal). These pairings frequently last two academic years, so mentees experience continuity, and older students practice stewardship and leadership. Program activities include reading, journaling, conversation prompts, and shared devotional time.

The rural K–12 campus (P13–P15) described Book Buddies, kindergarten-senior pairings, and monthly mentoring chapels that place older learners in regular, structured contact with younger peers (P13, Lower School Dean; P14, High School Teacher; P15, Middle School Teacher). P15 observed that initially assigned groups produced more consistently meaningful interactions than student-selected groups, evidence that intentional matching increases inclusion and relationship formation.

Peer mentorship systems both broaden relational networks and distribute leadership responsibilities to students. By formalizing cross-age roles (buddy systems, prefects), schools create multiple relational layers, so each learner has access to peers and near-peers in addition to adult mentors, reinforcing a culture of mutual accountability and care.

Key Finding 3: Faith-integrated and holistic support systems unify spiritual formation, social–emotional care, and academic interventions.

Participants emphasized that faith formation, counseling support, and academic remediation are woven together into the schools' relational fabric rather than treated as separate services. Spiritual transparency and ministering were commonly reported. P1 described how personal disclosure within his advisement group (sharing family loss and mental-health struggles) became a conduit for authentic faith conversations: "I told them, 'I don't know how you go through life without Jesus.' I gave them my number and said, 'Call me anytime'" (P1). P3 and P4 (President; Campus Minister, suburban 1,312 students) similarly framed spiritual formation groups as safe spaces for prayer, confession, and life counsel.

Coaches and athletic programs serve as relational hubs. Several participants (P1; P8, High School Coach/Teacher, suburban 846) reported weekly devotionals, team meals, prayer before games, and small "squad" structures that allow older athletes to check in on younger teammates' academic and emotional status. These rituals promote relational continuity between school, sport, and faith life.

Academic and social-emotional supports are integrated into these relational systems. Participant P7 reported four-tier academic interventions: early identification (e.g., 70 or below in two or more subjects), parent-student-administrator conferences, creation of an Academic Success Plan, and targeted tutoring (zero-hour, before-school sessions, and after-school help).

Participants P7–P10 (suburban 846 campus) described flex periods and third-block time dedicated to academic help alongside relationship building. P9 (Social-Emotional Counselor, suburban 846) described counselor pull-outs for at-risk students and collaboration with teachers to make timely referrals.

College and leadership readiness programming—Senior Seminar, presidential leadership institutes, and AVID—were cited as relationship-building levers. P11 and P12 reported a Senior Seminar course that combines application support with opportunities to shadow careers and perform service, while P3 (President of the 1,312 campus) described selecting 15 juniors for a leadership course that strengthened their relationships with administrative leaders.

Faith formation, social-emotional counseling, and academic remediation are not separate silos in these schools; rather, they are coordinated through the same relational scaffolding (mentors, small groups, coaches, prefects). This integration ensures students' academic struggles trigger relational responses (mentor check-ins, tutoring) rather than only administrative consequences.

The data indicate that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools intentionally convert accreditation expectations about supportive learning environments into operational practices through stable adult–student pairings, formalized peer mentoring, and faith-infused holistic supports. These practices appear across diverse contexts—large suburban campuses (P1, P2), mid-size suburban campuses (P3–P6; P7–P10; P11–P12), and smaller rural K–12 schools (P13–P15)—and are implemented in ways that reflect local culture while maintaining consistent structural features such as small cohorts, recurring contact, adult mentoring, and linked academic supports.

As one participant summarized, “The grades will be there, or they won’t. The performance on the athletic field will be there, or it won’t. But the relationships, that’s what’s going to last” (P1). This reflection captures the essence of what participants repeatedly emphasized: that long-term impact comes not merely from academic achievement but from the quality of the relationships nurtured within these schools.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

The findings from Research Question 1 revealed that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools do not leave relationship building to chance; rather, they embed intentional structures that create consistent opportunities for meaningful connections among students, teachers, and peers. These systems, rooted in mentoring, advisement, and spiritual formation—serve as the backbone of each school’s culture and reflect a shared belief that strong relationships are essential to student success. Having established how schools formally structure these relationship-building frameworks, it is important to take a closer look at how they function in daily practice. Research Question 2 explores this next layer by examining how the mentoring programs themselves support and sustain positive relationships between students and staff. Through the voices of participants, this section highlights the ways mentoring interactions foster trust, belonging, and personal growth, transforming structural intentions into lived experiences. It will also address how these programs are assessed for successfulness.

Findings of Research Question Two

How do schools accredited by NCSA/Cognia continually assess the formal structure to guarantee all learners have regular and consistent access to a designated adult chosen by the learner, who ensures comprehensive support throughout their educational journey?

Analysis of participant data revealed that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools assess the effectiveness of formal mentoring and advisement structures through a combination of relational monitoring, targeted data collection, and context-specific evaluation practices. While assessment tools and frequency varied by campus size and structure, participants consistently described intentional processes used to verify that mentoring programs remained functional, equitable, and responsive to student needs. Across settings, assessment emphasized regular access to caring adults, fidelity of implementation, and alignment with academic, social-emotional, and spiritual goals.

Key Finding 1: Relational Continuity Serves as an Informal Measure of Mentoring Fidelity

At the large suburban campus serving 1,708 students, Participants 1 and 2 described a mentoring structure intentionally designed to allow long-term observation and assessment of student support. Each teacher mentors the same small group of students from freshman through senior year, creating continuity that enables mentors and administrators to monitor relational engagement over time. This sustained pairing allows mentors to notice changes in student behavior, participation, and well-being, which serves as an ongoing indicator of program effectiveness.

As one mentor reflected, “The performance in the athletic arena will be there, but I won’t be there. I don’t have any championship rings… but I’ve been to eight or nine weddings of former players” (P1). While relational in nature, such reflections illustrate how long-term engagement allows mentors to assess whether consistent adult presence has been maintained throughout a student’s educational journey.

Participant 2, the Academic Dean, explained that assessment is reinforced structurally through scheduled advisement meetings. Mentor groups meet weekly for at least 25 minutes,

with many meeting twice per week. These sessions are designated as “protected time,” ensuring that access to mentoring is consistent across students. Mentors are encouraged to document at least two points of contact per week with each student—one during advisement and one outside of formal group time—allowing administrators to verify engagement patterns and consistency of implementation.

Key Finding 2: Assessment of Mentoring Effectiveness Is Primarily Data-Informed and Relationally Monitored

Participants at one campus described the use of student and parent surveys as a primary formal assessment tool. Participant 2 noted that surveys are administered strategically rather than frequently, often following the implementation of new initiatives, to ensure the data collected remains meaningful. Parent surveys are described as comprehensive and recurring, while student surveys are used selectively to avoid survey fatigue and compromised data quality.

In addition to surveys, social-emotional counselors employ targeted assessment instruments to gauge student anxiety, emotional regulation, and perceptions of school culture. Participant 2 emphasized that programmatic changes are not made without supporting data, noting that “we always have to have a piece of data to change a thing.” These assessments help leadership determine whether mentoring and advisement structures are meeting identified student needs.

Spiritual mentoring is assessed less formally but remains an intentional area of evaluation. Participants described relying on observational indicators such as chapel engagement, student responsiveness to speakers, and behavioral patterns aligned with spiritual formation goals. While participants acknowledged the difficulty of quantifying spiritual growth, they

consistently described these anecdotal observations as part of the school's ongoing assessment process.

Key Finding 3: Monitoring Access to Mentoring Is Embedded in Advisement Structures and Accountability Systems

To ensure that every student, including those without academic or behavioral concerns—has consistent access to a mentor, Participants 1 and 2 described a structured advisement system that meets twice weekly. Advisement groups are intentionally small, typically capped at approximately 14 students, and include both faculty and staff advisors. This structure allows administrators to monitor group size, participation, and advisor assignment to verify equitable access.

Participants also described the use of an online platform to track advisor-student contact, reinforcing accountability without formal punitive measures. Teachers are encouraged to maintain multiple points of contact with each student weekly, including emails or individual check-ins. These documented interactions serve as evidence that mentoring relationships are active and sustained.

Assessment also includes qualitative monitoring of student feedback and behavioral indicators. Participants described the integration of praise reports into discipline systems, allowing administrators to assess whether mentoring interactions extend beyond correction to include positive, specific feedback. These reports provide another data point used to evaluate whether mentoring relationships are functioning as intended.

Key Finding 4: Assessment Practices Are Contextually Adapted While Maintaining Consistent Purpose

Participants 3 through 6, representing a mid-size suburban campus of 1,312 students, described assessment practices that are less formalized but still relationally monitored. Mentoring occurs primarily on an as-needed basis, with teachers assessing effectiveness through regular check-ins, academic performance indicators, and informal conversations. While no single system guarantees universal access, administrators rely on teacher communication and targeted academic supports, such as "Zero Hour" tutoring, to identify gaps in mentoring coverage.

Participants 7 through 10, from a suburban school of 846 students, described a dual-layered mentoring assessment process addressing both academic and spiritual needs. Academic mentoring effectiveness is evaluated through progress reviews tied to individualized academic success plans, with follow-up meetings scheduled at set intervals. Spiritually, programs such as "Lifenet" and "core teams" provide structured opportunities for one-on-one and small-group engagement, allowing staff to assess participation and consistency through scheduled meetings and observations.

In the rural K–12 school of 330 students, Participants 13 through 15 described assessments as ongoing and immediate. Small mentoring chapels meet weekly, allowing teachers to directly observe student engagement and relational health. Participant 14 stated, "We don't need surveys; we see it every day." In this close-knit context, assessment occurs through daily interaction, collaborative discussion, and rapid adjustment when concerns arise, ensuring that no student lacks adult support.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

Across all school contexts, large suburban, mid-size suburban, and rural, the findings indicate that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools assess mentoring programs through a blend of formal data collection, relational monitoring, and contextual responsiveness. Surveys, documented contact points, structured advisement schedules, and observational indicators are used to verify consistent access to designated adults and to monitor program fidelity over time. While assessment tools vary by setting, participants consistently described intentional processes designed to ensure that mentoring structures remain active, inclusive, and aligned with the school's mission of comprehensive student support.

Having explored how NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools maintain and assess the formal structures that ensure every student is supported by a designated adult, the next layer of analysis turns toward the outcomes of these mentoring relationships. While the first two questions revealed the intentional systems and ongoing assessment that sustain consistent access to caring adults, Research Question 3 examines the impact of these mentoring programs on students themselves, specifically, how they shape learners' confidence, motivation, and growth. This section investigates how the mentoring process fosters students' self-efficacy across academic, social, and spiritual dimensions, drawing from participants' experiences and observations of student transformation. Through their narratives, the data illuminates how structured mentoring evolves beyond organizational design into a catalyst for holistic development and lasting personal empowerment.

Findings of Research Question 3

How do the NCSA/Cognia schools' mentoring programs support students' self-efficacy regarding academic, social, and spiritual growth?

The findings revealed that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools use mentoring as a catalyst for developing self-efficacy in students across academic, social, and spiritual domains. Participants consistently described mentorship not as an isolated program, but as a culture of guidance and modeling that allows students to see their own potential through trusted relationships. Mentors, whether teachers, coaches, or administrators, intentionally build long-term relationships that help students internalize their strengths and believe in their ability to grow.

Key Finding 1: Long-Term Mentoring Builds Confidence and Identity

The longevity of mentoring relationships was central to students' development of self-efficacy. Participants shared examples of students who had remained with the same mentor for four years and demonstrated remarkable spiritual and emotional growth. One teacher explained that a student who "was always in trouble as a freshman" grew into a mature leader who "responded to conversations about his salvation" and later asked the teacher to wear his football jersey during teacher appreciation night (P1, P2). Another student from the same mentoring group sought his mentor's recommendation letter for college, demonstrating both respect and trust developed through years of consistent guidance.

These long-term relationships also created opportunities for students to observe faith in action. Because mentors and students sat together during chapel, students were able to see their teachers model sincere worship and active participation. Over time, "they began to participate by singing and taking an active role in worship" (P1, P2). This modeling extended into athletics, where coaches integrated devotionals into practices and games. One coach shared that a female athlete struggling with challenges at home "was able to open up and ask for prayer and support" because of the trust developed in their team's devotional setting (P1). Another athlete who tore

her ACL as a senior found strength through her coach's encouragement: "He told her she was stronger than she had ever been, and she could rehab and bounce back, and she did, having a phenomenal year" (P1).

Coaches viewed their role as a spiritual calling, not just an athletic one. As one reflected, "I have this picture in my mind of me standing before the Lord with championship trophies in my hand... Or I could be standing before the Lord in the sea of my former players and say I hope it's okay I brought some people with me. The trophies and rings we win are great, but how many of our kids are we taking to the gates of heaven?" (P1). This perspective illustrates how mentoring relationships cultivate spiritual confidence that translates into students' daily choices, worship, and resilience.

Key Finding 2: Mentorship Encourages Purposeful Leadership and Academic Growth

Several schools described mentoring systems that integrate leadership development and academic accountability. One academic dean highlighted the delicate balance between faith and academics, explaining that "it does say 'Christian' on our sign," but also "School." He added, "We have a burden on us. We're not trying to proselyte every kid or make every kid an academic genius. We are trying to present the entire picture" (P2). This holistic approach helps students understand that growth involves both faith and learning, each reinforcing the other.

At another campus, upperclassmen in the Bible Buddies program mentor fifth- and sixth-grade students, modeling Christian leadership and accountability. According to participants, students "realize they have someone younger looking up to them" and "take ownership" of their behavior as a result (P3–P6). These relationships have led to mutual invitations to baptisms, games, and celebrations, demonstrating that mentorship fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility. One administrator reported that their school's ACT scores "went up a whole point

collectively" after adding academic mentoring and goal-setting support (P3–P6). Similarly, the leadership class for junior boys created close-knit groups that learned "quiet leadership" and "self-evaluation," resulting in fewer disciplinary issues and stronger peer connections (P3).

Key Finding 3: Mentoring Promotes Spiritual Formation and Emotional Growth

The mentoring culture also supports students' spiritual formation in profound ways. One administrator noted that through their spiritual formation team's work, the school witnessed "65 baptisms," often involving parents and peers, powerful moments that modeled living faith in community (P7). She explained, "I have never been in a school that is so systematic and purposeful in knowing every kid... It's powerful to see that level of care." She added, "There's a partnership and they know I will die on a hill for them. I'm on their team, and I think when they know that it's just an intrinsic encouragement that can move mountains" (P7).

Another participant emphasized the power of walking alongside students: "Our administration and everybody here is just so open to the idea of mentorship because it's like being able to do life with these students. I think students are more receptive when you are willing to just walk with them and not just stand up in front of a classroom" (P8). This "doing life together" approach captures the heart of mentoring in NCSA/Cognia schools—it is relational, grounded in faith, and centered on mutual growth.

Mentoring also helped students discover their purpose through service. In one school, seniors regularly volunteered at nursing homes and local organizations, embodying the school's mission of service and community care (P11–P12). Another student leadership program culminated in "Mission Week," where students participated in local and international mission projects. As one school president reflected, "The ideal graduate stands for Christ, academic

excellence, relationship with God and His Word, and emotional intelligence—self-awareness and awareness of others" (P3).

Key Finding 4: Mentoring Fosters Ownership of Learning and Growth Mindset

Across rural and suburban campuses, teachers described mentoring as key to building self-efficacy and growth mindset. A middle school teacher explained that by conferencing with each student about their progress on diagnostic tests, she encouraged them to "take ownership of their growth." She shared that students "were excited to discuss where they started, where they wanted to be, and how they met their goals" (P15). Another teacher described a shy senior who "really came out of her shell" through a kindergarten buddy program, learning that "she was important to this little one and grew from that" (P14).

Students also internalized the values modeled by their mentors, even requesting to repeat devotionals they missed, or leading chapel services themselves (P1, P14). One teacher summarized this impact by saying, "Sometimes we don't know the impact until they graduate… They come back and share how much they miss chapel or enroll their own children here because of the impact it had on them" (P14).

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

Ultimately, participants agreed that consistent, relational mentorship, anchored in faith and purpose, builds students' confidence to set goals, serve others, and believe in their capacity to grow academically, socially, and spiritually. As one coach concluded, "We keep building those relationships because we never know how it will impact them later in life. We just keep working and keep showing them how much we care" (P1).

Building upon the insights from Research Question Three, which highlighted the influence of mentoring on students' academic, social, and spiritual self-efficacy, the next phase

of analysis explored how NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools ensure that these mentoring and educational practices remain aligned with their foundational statements. Research Question Four examines how schools intentionally integrate their missions, visions, and core values into daily operations and institutional practices to maintain fidelity to both NCSA/Cognia standards and their own distinct spiritual and educational identities. This alignment reflects how schools translate philosophy into practice, ensuring that every policy, program, and interaction reinforces their commitment to developing students of faith, character, and excellence.

Findings of Research Question Four

How do NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools demonstrate alignment to the school's foundational statements to support the standards of both NCSA/Cognia and that specific school?

Key Finding 1: Alignment is Mission-Driven, Not Compliance-Based

Across all participating schools, alignment with NCSA and Cognia standards was consistently described as an outcome of living out the school's mission, rather than an obligation to satisfy accreditation requirements. Participants explained that the standards naturally reflected the priorities of Christian education, spiritual formation, relationships, and academic excellence rooted in biblical truth.

P14, a teacher at a rural K–12 school of about 330 students, explained that their mentoring program emerged from recognizing unmet student needs rather than from external requirements: "Because of the size of our school, we have one counselor who manages all of our students from kindergarten through 12th grade. And she does an amazing job at what she does. However, that is a lot of students with a lot of needs and levels for one person to manage. Even without looking at the standard, it just made sense that our students needed more time to bond with a teacher or faculty member one-on-one, that they would have the option to talk to."

She added, “I think the idea for the program came more from that than the idea that we had to check a box. Which I like too because we’re doing it for the right reasons, not for legalistic reasons.”

Participant 2 reinforced this same theme, describing how their school’s initiatives are deliberately built from the mission outward rather than from standards inward. They stated, “Our mission statement is to help each student grow as Jesus did, in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. I sometimes get dinged a little bit because our mission statement is not purely academic, but that’s not what the standards are about. What they’re about is fueling each student into finding a purpose and knowing that they have teachers and a school that are on their side.”

Similarly, Participant 3 expressed a nearly identical motivation, describing a mission that seeks to “equip students to live for God, love like Jesus, and learn for life.” He explained that this vision translates into developing graduates who are “filled in their heads and hearts with Christlikeness and academic excellence, relationship-driven and emotionally intelligent.”

P8 echoed this conviction, explaining that mentoring and spiritual formation are integral to “advancing the Kingdom” through education. He reflected, “Our administration is pretty flexible on how we can advance the Kingdom, because that’s the main objective. We’re trying to advance the mission of Christ.”

Although Participant 3’s school had not yet undergone an NCSA/Cognia visit, he recognized the natural alignment between their daily practices and accreditation expectations: “At this point, I’ve never heard of the NCSA or Cognia standards, our visit is in 2026, but I think what we’re doing complements that, and that complements what we’re doing. I would not have any concerns if NCSA showed up tomorrow.”

Participant 2 further emphasized that accreditation expectations align with their faith-based goals rather than dictate them: “NCSA standards don’t talk about crafting valedictorians. They’re about building a complete human being. Everything we’ve done has been deliberate programs we put in place because we’ve seen a need for student assistance. They fit nicely into that overarching goal of making a whole kid.”

In contrast, Participant 11 acknowledged that while their school does not yet have a formal mentoring structure, the family atmosphere and relational depth naturally fulfill the spirit of the standard: “I know that we don’t have a formal mentoring program, and when I first read your questions, I felt nervous because I didn’t know how I would answer those. But our school is small, and it’s just nice that we know our students so well. You know, I mean, our teachers go to the ball games, and the kids love it. It’s like a family.”

These are all aspects of relationship building that support mission-centered growth organically. The National Christian School Commissioners confirmed that this mission-centered approach reflects NCSA’s philosophy of school autonomy. Commissioner 2 explained, “By allowing schools to be autonomous and figure out the mentoring program that’s best for them, each school develops a setup that reflects their mission. If it’s working for that school, that’s positive. If not, then we look deeper to see where growth is needed.”

Together, these reflections encapsulate the heart of this finding, schools align with accreditation standards not because they must, but because the standards affirm the mission-driven practices already shaping their communities. As NCSA Commissioner one observed, “the healthiest Christian schools integrate accreditation expectations into their spiritual DNA, where mission fulfillment and accreditation goals are not competing priorities but mutually reinforcing realities.”

Key Finding 2: Relationships as the Bridge Between Mission and Standards

Another major finding highlights that authentic relationships between teachers and students serve as the primary bridge linking the school's mission and accreditation standards. Both NCSA and Cognia emphasize creating supportive, relationship-centered learning environments, and participants consistently described this as a natural outgrowth of their faith-based mission.

P14 shared a vivid example of this relational focus: "Quite a few of our teachers, especially at the high school level, have students who come talk to them regularly about things. Both of our soccer coaches, our boys' and girls' coaches, have a great rapport with their players. But even the ones who aren't their players, you'll see them talking about stuff in the rooms after school. 'Hey, Coach, can I talk to you this afternoon?' That kind of thing." She explained that these natural mentoring moments reflect the school's mission to build Christ-centered relationships.

Participant 2 echoed this same priority, describing intentional structural practices designed to ensure every student has a meaningful adult connection: "We're trying to hit every kid with a connection with an adult. We've been able to do it in such a way that our biggest advisement is about 14 students because we also use staff, not just faculty."

He elaborated that their advisement program was redesigned to promote long-term relational growth: "We changed this last year, so you go four years with your advisement. Now you've got that same group when they're freshmen all the way through their senior year, and then you rotate back and get another group of freshmen. That's been incredibly positive. Our teachers really like that because they're not seeing new faces every year."

These intentional structures not only foster comfort and trust but also create continuity across a student's entire high school experience. As Participant 2 described, "At the start of every year, we start the first school day with advisement so that you've got people you're comfortable with. For freshmen, you know who you're going to see all the time. For the other grade levels, it's people you already know—you can exchange stories or get encouragement if you're nervous about something." Participant 3's school demonstrated a similar commitment to intentional connection through a "new-student pairing program," which helps each new student feel known and welcomed: "It's very purposeful because we want that new student to feel right at home as quickly as they can. The older student walks them through campus life, showing them everything from the dining hall to chapel, and helps them connect with others. It's been a huge success." He credited his campus ministry team for leading this effort, noting that they "walk with students individually and also bring in teachers, parents, or community members with specific expertise to mentor and guide."

Similarly, Participants 4–6 described relational mentorship as central to their AVID leadership program, which prepares students for academic success and postsecondary readiness. One participant explained, "It's supposed to be a year-long program, but even in one semester, we've seen huge growth. The kids are busy talking, building things together, and working through problems, it's very hands-on. After six to eight weeks, you can really see barriers breaking down, and the kids start holding each other accountable."

P10's reflections reinforced this idea, emphasizing that knowing students personally is the foundation of effective teaching: "If you don't know a kid, how do you know how to teach them? You teach to the child. My goal is not to make them great history students, but to get them to think." He described how connecting over current events or music opened doors for deeper

relational ministry: “Every human wants to be needed; somebody knows every kid on this campus. That’s a very special thing wedo.”

P7 elaborated on this same principle, explaining that alignment and mentorship at her school were both “systematic and purposeful.” Their Lifenet mentoring model paired teachers and students in intentional relational ministry: “Our male and female Lifenet leaders meet with students, play games, walk, or just talk, checking in with them in authentic ways.” These meetings were tracked through shared documentation to ensure that “every student was known and noticed.”

Similarly, P8 emphasized that their school’s mission—to ensure “every student feels known, noticed, and needed”, drove all mentoring and relational initiatives. He shared, “We started with the goal that by the first break we would have met with every student once, but by the end of the quarter, we had met with every student twice.”

In smaller schools, such as those represented by P11 and P12, relational proximity itself ensured that “every student is known.” P11 explained, “Our school is small, and it’s just nice that we know our students so well. Our teachers go to the ball games, the kids love it, it’s like a family.” P12 added that while their mentoring program was still developing, the desire for stronger relational support had become a clear institutional goal: “Mentoring was one of the areas in the accreditation standard that we got a low score on. Now we have a guidance counselor, and that has helped. We are a small school, and our enrollment was low. Now it’s more evened out, 85 high schoolers and 86 middle schoolers. Developing a mentoring program is a goal.” Across all schools, leaders agreed that when students feel supported and connected, their confidence, communication, and work ethic flourish. One summarized it simply: when students know someone is there to support them no matter what, they succeed.

The NCSA Commissioners reinforced this finding, emphasizing that the heart of Christian schooling lies in relationships. NCSA Commissioner 2 explained, "Our goal in a Christian school is to lead children to Christ, and that happens through relationships. If students don't feel connected to someone, a teacher, counselor, or coach, they won't be reached spiritually. You can tell when you enter a school whether that relationship piece exists or not."

Commissioners also highlighted that their evaluation of schools relies not only on documentation but on triangulated evidence, interviews, surveys, and direct observation—to confirm relational culture: "We don't just rely on one piece of evidence; we look for a cross-section of interviews, surveys, and classroom observations. You can tell if students are comfortable and relationally connected." This approach mirrors how NCSA and Cognia jointly interpret alignment, not through paperwork compliance but through evidence of authentic, lived relationships between students and faculty.

Finally, the NCSA Commissioners reaffirmed that mentoring programs embody "the essence of mission alignment" because they move beyond academic structures into relational ministry, fulfilling both the spirit and the letter of accreditation standards.

Key Finding 3: Teacher Willingness and Fit Are Essential to Program Integrity

While relationships serve as the foundation for mission alignment, several schools acknowledged the challenge of sustaining consistent and formalized mentoring systems. The Commissioners confirmed that this inconsistency is a widespread reality across accredited schools. As Commissioner 1explained, "Many schools struggled not with supporting students, but with formalizing that support. We had to ask ourselves: Is the formalized structure essential to the mission? The answer varies because each school's size, staffing, and culture dictate what's possible."

For example, Commissioner 1 described their own school's practice of assigning teachers to small groups from sixth grade through graduation, emphasizing that consistency, not structure alone, builds mentoring success: "Even if a teacher isn't the perfect match, consistency matters. If they're there year after year, the bond forms."

Both Commissioners stressed the autonomy of each school in designing mentoring practices suited to its environment. "What works for one school may not work for the next," they explained. "Our role is to identify effective models and connect schools of similar size and context to learn from one another." This flexibility allows each institution to interpret alignment in ways that are authentic to its mission while still honoring accreditation standards. Participant 14 discussed how faculty engagement and willingness were critical to the success of their mentoring initiatives: "You can't mandate someone to be a mentor. You can't force the relationship. I think we've been very lucky in that all of our teachers have been more than willing to step in and do that and had a great attitude about it, because your students feel that energy one way or another." She added, "Not every teacher is cut out to be a mentor, it's a different role. Some people are cut out to mentor certain students and not other students, so there's got to be a fit there in some way."

Building on this, Participant 2 reinforced the importance of teacher buy-in and flexibility, describing how his school handled the unexpected resignation of a teacher: "We had a teacher resign mid-year, and we had to redistribute his advisement. We just found a staff member who was willing to take them all. We didn't want to split them up because they'd been together for four years. So we kept the group intact. That mattered." His reflection highlights how a teacher's willingness preserves relational continuity even amid staffing challenges.

Participants 13, 14, and 15 elaborated on this same challenge, acknowledging that while the informal mentoring culture remained strong, the structured side of their program struggled with consistency: “This year, the formal side of it, we haven’t met as often as we should. We haven’t been as consistent with a plan. Our teacher buy-in is not quite as strong as I would like, which makes it difficult for some programs to consistently follow through for all the kids. But I think our informal side works very well; our high school coaches have good relationships with their students. Our soccer coach does a devo with them every day before practice. That’s the priority.”

Even though formal structures may falter, the spiritual and relational outcomes remain visible. As one noted, “If you look at the kids from 9th grade to 12th grade, the ones you get the chance to work with for four years, you can definitely see development in those kids.” This honesty underscores a central truth: alignment is not perfection, it is direction. Schools may vary in formal structure, but alignment thrives wherever faculty model relational ministry rooted in faith.

Participant 3 echoed this need for intentional teacher preparation and engagement, explaining how his campus ministers “snag a teacher, maybe a parent or someone in the community” to join the mentoring process when needed. This collaborative approach reinforces the idea that mentorship thrives when multiple adults are invested in student growth.

Participant 10 agreed, emphasizing the emotional intelligence required for effective ministry. He regularly prayed, “God, give me the discernment to know when I can be an encourager, when I need to be a corrector, and when I just need to be a hug.” He described how faculty prayed daily for “opportunities to speak to a kid who needs me,” revealing that spiritual attentiveness often guides effective mentorship more than formal policy.

Teachers in the AVID program (Participants 4–6) also highlighted the importance of modeling and consistency: “It’s teaching them to be leaders through modeling, showing, and doing. It’s intense and takes the full year, but when kids stay in it, they graduate with AVID on their transcript, a stronger work ethic, and real confidence. That’s what makes it worthwhile for us as teachers.” Their commitment illustrates how mentorship is embedded in instructional practice as much as in designated programs.

Participant 7’s experience underscored this same point, explaining that her school’s success depended on teachers’ freedom and flexibility to connect meaningfully with students: “I’ve never worked anywhere like this, where teachers are really empowered, they document who they meet, how often, and what was discussed.” She described this as a “living system of accountability” rooted in care rather than compliance, ensuring that mentoring remains personal yet intentional.

Together, these comments demonstrate that maintaining program integrity requires thoughtful pairing of mentors and students, as well as cultivating an environment where teachers are both willing and equipped to invest in authentic relationships. Across schools, administrators viewed teachers’ willingness to engage as the most reliable evidence of mission alignment. The NCSA Commissioners affirmed this conclusion in their feedback, emphasizing that “true mission alignment is evidenced not in documentation but in the heart-level commitment of teachers who choose to invest deeply in students.”

Participant 2 added a parallel perspective, emphasizing the need for sustained reflection and intentional scheduling to support holistic growth: “I’d like to give a break in the schedule where kids have a second to breathe or extend lunchtime or have some non-academic time, because I think it’ll help our academic time. We’ve packed so much in that our modality has

changed, but we're still running a seven-period day with bells. There's something there where we could attack kids' greatest anxiety, fear, stress." He clarified that this was not about reducing rigor but deepening intentionality: "We're competing with the big schools, and our program is rigorous and fast-paced. But not every kid thrives at that pace, especially freshmen and sophomores. I think there's a way we can adjust our schedule to better align with what we're trying to accomplish, developing whole, healthy students."

Building on that thought, Participant 2 also highlighted the importance of integrating spiritual and emotional development seamlessly within academics rather than treating them as separate components: "There's got to be a better way to integrate it, so that you're feeling the same way during advisement time on Tuesday as you do in dual-credit world history. We shouldn't treat social-emotional growth as something external. It should be part of what we do every day." This comment underscores how sustained intentionality depends on coherence between academic and spiritual life.

The Commissioners also recognized that mentoring has become increasingly vital since COVID-19, as students face rising levels of anxiety and disconnection. NCSA Commissioner 1 observed, "In the post-COVID era, we're seeing an anxious generation. Even though they're connected through social media, it's superficial. Mental and spiritual health are deeply related, and mentoring relationships are key to addressing that." He described a "threefold cord" model, parents, school, and church working together for a child's holistic growth, and stressed the importance of intergenerational mentorship: "Ideally, students have multiple mentors because not every child connects with the same type of person. The strength comes from consistency and multiple connections."

Participant 3 mirrored this perspective, describing how his school intentionally redesigned curricula to ensure academic excellence did not come at the expense of mission or relationships: “We reverse-engineered everything back to our vision and why we exist as an organization. Now we interpret data, identify gaps, and address them. We’re not just chasing test scores; we want comprehension and growth. It’s been unbelievable to see students respond to that balance.”

The AVID teachers (Participants 4–6) also noted that sustained engagement transforms student behavior over time: “It took about six or eight weeks, but then you could see barriers start to break down. The kids started talking the talk, doing what they were supposed to, and owning their success.” This transformation illustrates how ongoing relational investment yields measurable growth in both confidence and accountability.

Participant 7 described the systems that help their school maintain intentionality, including academic success plans, regular parent meetings, and follow-up reviews every 4 weeks. “We use that data to drive how we create programs, modify things, what’s not working,” she explained. This cyclical process of reflection and adjustment ensures that intentionality remains active rather than reactive.

Similarly, Participant 3 described how peer-mentoring and leadership programs provided structure for belonging and accountability: “We pair new students with older peers for two weeks to help them feel at home… our new students have raved about how meaningful it was.” This practice demonstrates how sustained, structured attention to relational connection fosters a culture of welcome and continuity.

Participant 12’s reflection demonstrated another form of sustained intentionality, ongoing self-assessment. By identifying mentoring as a growth area through accreditation feedback, the

school now uses its guidance counselor role and balanced enrollment as a foundation for building stronger relational systems.

Finally, Participant 8 offered a spiritual metaphor that encapsulated the long-term nature of this work: “Sometimes you’re just a seed planter. You don’t always see the results right away, but you stay faithful.”

Summary of Findings for Research Question 4

Together, these findings paint a clear picture: alignment between NCSA/Cognia standards and each school’s foundational statements is most visible where relationships, faith, and intentional care intersect. The schools in this study are not adjusting their missions to meet accreditation; they are living their missions in such a way that accreditation naturally follows. The NCSA Commissioners summarized this principle succinctly in their remarks: “When mission drives practice, and practice reflects faith, the standards take care of themselves.”

In essence, these schools demonstrate that effective alignment is not about adopting external expectations but about allowing internal conviction, rooted in Christian mission, to guide external evidence. Thus, accreditation is not merely a measure of compliance; rather, it serves as a mirror reflecting who these schools already are, communities where academic rigor, spiritual formation, and personal relationships come together to fulfill both their institutional purpose and accrediting standards of excellence.

Chapter 4 Summary

The findings presented in Chapter 4 provided a rich exploration of how NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools intentionally cultivate relationships, mentoring structures, and alignment with both accreditation and faith-based standards. Through the voices of leaders, teachers, and NCSA

Commissioners, several interconnected themes emerged that illustrate how relationship-centered educational environments are both sustained and measured within Christian schools.

The findings from Research Question 1 indicate that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools intentionally design structures that foster meaningful relationships rather than leaving connection to chance. Through embedded practices such as mentoring, advisement, and spiritual formation, these schools create consistent opportunities for students, teachers, and peers to build strong relationships. Collectively, these systems form the foundation of school culture and reflect a shared conviction that relational connection is central to student success.

Across large suburban, mid-size suburban, and rural contexts, Research Question 2 findings indicate that NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools employ intentional and multifaceted assessment processes to evaluate the effectiveness of their mentoring programs and ensure consistent student access to a designated adult. Schools utilize a combination of formal data collection tools, such as surveys, documented mentoring interactions, structured advisement schedules, and observational indicators, alongside relational monitoring to assess program fidelity and responsiveness over time. Although specific assessment methods vary by school context, participants consistently described purposeful systems designed to verify that mentoring structures remain active, inclusive, and aligned with the school's mission of comprehensive student support.

Findings from Research Question 3 indicate that consistent, relational mentoring grounded in faith and purpose plays a significant role in strengthening students' academic, social, and spiritual self-efficacy. Participants emphasized that intentional relationships with mentors help students develop confidence to set meaningful goals, serve others, and believe in their capacity for growth across all areas of life. This mentoring approach, characterized by

sustained care and personal investment, reinforces students' sense of belonging and long-term impact, demonstrating that faith-centered relationships are foundational to student development and enduring success.

Research Question 4 findings show that alignment between NCSA/Cognia standards and each school's foundational statements is strongest where faith, relationships, and intentional care intersect, not because schools adjust their missions to meet accreditation, but because they faithfully live out their Christian missions in daily practice. As the NCSA Commissioners noted, when mission drives practice and practice reflects faith, accreditation naturally follows. In this way, accreditation is less about external compliance and more a reflection of internal conviction, serving as a mirror that reveals schools already characterized by academic rigor, spiritual formation, and meaningful relationships that together fulfill both their institutional purpose and standards of excellence.

Chapter 5 will further interpret these findings by connecting them to existing literature, exploring implications for practice, and offering recommendations for Christian schools seeking to strengthen their relational and mentoring frameworks while remaining faithful to their foundational missions. This synthesis will highlight how the integration of NCSA and Cognia standards can serve as a model for relationally centered, faith-based education that nurtures the whole student, academically, socially, and spiritually.

Chapter V

Interpretations of Findings

Chapter 5 interprets these findings through the lens of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, drawing connections between relational education, faith-based mentoring, and self-efficacy development. It also explores how alignment to NCSA and Cognia standards reinforces the mission-centered approach of Christian schools, ensuring both accountability and authenticity. This chapter will discuss how the integration of faith and accreditation influences sustainable mentoring systems that nurture student growth, empower teachers, and strengthen school culture. The implications, recommendations, and future research considerations presented here aim to guide Christian school leaders in further developing mentoring structures and accreditation practices that remain faithful to their foundational statements while advancing excellence in education.

Summary of the Problem of the Study

This study addressed the problem that, although NCSA/Cognia standards require high schools to implement mentoring or student advocacy programs designed to support students' holistic well-being, some schools struggle to make these programs effective. While each NCSA/Cognia school has the autonomy to determine how to meet the established standards, the absence of clear, detailed guidelines often results in inconsistent implementation and limited program success. This research sought to uncover the underlying reasons for the limited effectiveness of mentoring programs in some NCSA high schools, the effectiveness in others and

to identify practices that could lead to more consistent and meaningful outcomes for students.

Review of the NCSA/Cognia Standards

The NCSA and Cognia jointly emphasize the importance of mentoring and student advocacy programs as essential components of holistic student development. These programs are intended to ensure that every student is known, supported, and guided through intentional relationships with faculty and staff. The following standards outline the expectations for creating and sustaining effective mentoring or advocacy programs within NCSA high schools. They serve as a framework to help schools foster meaningful connections, promote student growth, and strengthen the overall school community. The following are the specific standards that were used for this study.

The NCSA standards are as follows: "The school provides services to ensure the spiritual health of the students. The school develops and implements co-curricular and extracurricular programs aligned with the school's foundational statements. The school has a formalized, systemic, and implemented process to align student services and co-curricular and extracurricular programs with the school's foundational statements. Students are consistently provided multiple opportunities for spiritual growth by participating in co-curricular and extracurricular programs. The school develops and implements guidance programs aligned with the school's foundational statements. The school demonstrates a formalized, systemic, and implemented process to align the guidance program with the school's foundational statements" (National Christian School Association, 2022, p. 30).

The Cognia standards are as follows: "The learners benefit from a formal structure that fosters positive relationships with peers and adults. Best practices include but are not limited to the following: The institution fosters an environment where learners receive support from adults

and peers. Peer and adult behaviors and interactions demonstrate respect, trust, and concern for one another's well-being. The institution allocates time to formal learner advocacy programs. Resources, such as curriculum and materials, support positive learner relationships with other learners and staff members. The effectiveness of positive learner and staff relationships is measured through analyzed survey information" (Cognia, 2023, p.1).

Christian schools seeking accreditation through the NCSA can also be accredited jointly by Cognia due to the institution's agreement to help the schools achieve joint accreditations. This study of NCSA/Cognia high schools structured formal mentoring programs and how they met or failed to meet the standards, could help other NCSA high schools learn how to develop a positive impact on the students through these mentoring programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide practical guidance to educators on implementing and maintaining successful student mentoring programs within NCSA schools. The research focused specifically on school-based mentoring programs as the primary means of meeting the NCSA/Cognia standard, which calls for a formal structure that fosters positive peer and adult development. Recognizing that each school within the NCSA network operates with its own unique culture and context, this study sought to identify strategies and structures that could be realistically applied while remaining true to the intent of the standards.

Drawing from relevant literature, the study highlighted several essential elements necessary for building an effective mentoring program. These included intentional program development, strategic scheduling of mentoring sessions, thoughtful pairing of adults and students, and comprehensive training for mentors. Beyond the logistical components, the research emphasized the importance of cultivating positive relationships grounded in trust and

consistency. Core concepts such as promoting self-efficacy, encouraging a growth mindset, and incorporating purposeful curriculum elements were also identified as vital components for sustaining meaningful mentoring relationships (Bandura, 1977; Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014; Rhodes, 2020). Finally, the length of these programs was vital to growing long term relationships.

Because there is limited research on faith-based high school mentoring programs, this study aimed to contribute valuable insights to that area of educational practice. NCSA and Cognia provide schools with overarching standards for student advocacy and holistic well-being but do not offer specific, step-by-step guidelines for creating a structured mentoring program that includes every student. This lack of detailed direction raised the question of "how" schools might best design and implement such programs effectively. The findings of this research were therefore intended to fill that gap by offering practical, experience-based recommendations that align with both the spiritual mission of faith-based schools and the quality expectations set forth by NCSA and Cognia.

Review of the Research Questions

The following section reviews the four research questions that guided this study and framed the analysis of findings. Each question was developed to examine how NCSA/Cognia accredited schools design, implement, and sustain mentoring or student advocacy programs that fulfill the standards for fostering positive relationships and holistic student development. This review connects the themes that emerged from participant insights, highlighting how schools interpret and apply the standards to support students academically, socially, and spiritually while maintaining alignment with their institutional missions.

1. How do NCSA/Cognia accredited schools develop a formal structure to ensure all learners develop positive relationships with adults/peers supporting their educational experiences?
2. How do schools accredited by NCSA/Cognia continually assess the formal structure to guarantee all learners have regular and consistent access to a designated adult chosen by the learner, who ensures comprehensive support throughout their educational journey?
3. How do the NCSA/Cognia schools' mentoring programs support students' self-efficacy regarding academic, social, and spiritual growth?
4. How do NCSA/Cognia accredited schools demonstrate alignment to the school's foundational statements to support the standards of both NCSA/Cognia and that specific school?

Together, these questions provided the foundation for exploring how NCSA/Cognia accredited schools translate accreditation standards into meaningful mentoring practices that serve every student. They guided the analysis of how schools create structure, maintain consistency, and promote student growth within a faith-based context. By examining each question through the perspectives of school leaders, teachers and counselors, this study identified both the strengths and challenges of current mentoring efforts and offered insights into how these programs can be refined to more effectively fulfill the mission and expectations of NCSA and Cognia schools.

Review of the Conceptual Framework

In the context of a Christian high school faith-based mentoring program, the conceptual framework for student development served as the foundation for effective implementation and long-term success. This framework provided clear direction aligned with the school's mission,

objectives, and values, demonstrating how Christian faith and biblical principles could be intentionally woven into the mentoring process to foster academic, social, and spiritual growth. Scripture calls believers to this formative work: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, ESV). Likewise, mentors are reminded to model godliness and provide guidance, as seen in Titus 2:3–5, ESV where older women are instructed to teach and encourage the younger women in faith and character. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 further reinforces the daily, relational nature of this calling, urging parents and teachers alike to impress God’s commandments upon the hearts of children through consistent teaching and example.

This framework clarified the roles and responsibilities of both mentors and mentees, emphasizing that the mentor’s role extends beyond academic support to include modeling Christ-like character, compassion, and integrity. It also identified key indicators of success and established methods of assessment that align with the Christian school’s mission and vision, ensuring that mentoring supports the holistic development of students, academic, personal, and spiritual. Much of the existing literature has focused on mentoring programs serving at-risk youth (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, n.d.; Rhodes, 2020; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). However, within Christian schools, mentoring extends to all students, reflecting a broader commitment to spiritual formation and lifelong discipleship. Ultimately, this conceptual framework functions as both a spiritual and educational compass, guiding all participants toward a shared purpose of nurturing faith, wisdom, and character in the next generation.

Review of the Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory served as the theoretical framework for this study, shaping its focus on the development of the whole student—academically, socially, and

spiritually (1977). This concept aligns closely with the structure and intent of mentoring programs in NCSA/Cognia schools, where relationships, modeling, and guided practice contribute to self-efficacy and personal growth. The theory emphasis that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. These concepts were woven throughout all four research questions and evident in the participants' experiences described in interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Within the first research question, Bandura's framework was reflected in how schools intentionally created environments that promoted relational learning and modeled positive behaviors through structured mentoring interactions. The second question drew upon Bandura's emphasis on consistency and reinforcement, as schools continually assessed their mentoring structures to ensure that each student had regular access to a supportive adult who fostered confidence and competence. The third question directly reflected Bandura's construct of self-efficacy, examining how mentoring relationships enhanced students' belief in their ability to succeed academically, socially, and spiritually. Finally, the fourth research question revealed the alignment between the mentoring process and the school's mission and values—demonstrating how modeled behaviors and shared beliefs reinforce both institutional identity and individual development.

Evidence of Bandura's theoretical framework emerged consistently throughout the data. In interviews, participants described the power of modeling and relationships as critical to student growth. Focus group discussions revealed that students mirrored the attitudes and values of mentors who consistently demonstrated empathy, perseverance, and faith. Observations of mentoring sessions further confirmed the theory in practice, as mentors guided students through reflection, encouraged problem-solving, and celebrated progress. These behaviors built both

confidence and competence. Through the integration of Bandura's theory, this study affirmed that mentoring within Christian schools is not merely a structural program but a dynamic process of social learning that develops the whole student in alignment with faith-based and educational goals.

Review of Methods

This study employed a basic qualitative research design to explore the structure and impact of mentoring programs across five NCSA-accredited high schools. The investigation examined the logistical components of each program, such as scheduling, mentor training, implementation, and assessment. The study also assesses their influence on students' academic performance, social-emotional well-being, and spiritual growth. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations, which provided rich insights into the lived experiences of both mentors and mentees. These methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how mentoring programs operate within faith-based educational settings and how they contribute to the holistic development of students.

Review of the Sample

The study included five NCSA-accredited schools with student populations ranging from approximately 350 to over 1,700. These schools represented a mix of suburban and rural settings across Georgia, Texas, Alabama, and Kentucky. Participants included teachers, coaches, counselors, campus ministers, assistant principals, principals, school presidents, and NCSA Commissioners, whose professional experience ranged from two to thirty years. The sample consisted of fifteen participants in total—six males and nine females—additionally one male and one female NCSA Commissioners who are both the heads of an NCSA School.

Overview of Data Collection

Data collection for this study followed a structured, multi-phase process designed to gather comprehensive insights into mentoring programs across NCSA-accredited schools. The process began with a screening questionnaire distributed to 51 schools through Qualtrics, which identified potential participants and gathered demographic information. From this pool, five schools were identified for in-depth participation.

Following the initial phase, interviews were conducted with principals to explore the logistics, design, and implementation of their mentoring programs. Subsequent interviews with counselors, coordinators, and teachers provided additional perspectives on daily operations, mentor training, scheduling, and evaluation practices. Three virtual focus groups were then conducted through Microsoft Teams, one with school leaders, one with teachers and counselors, and one with NCSA Commissioners, to further examine program alignment and effectiveness.

Finally, on-site observations were conducted at two of the participating schools to triangulate findings and provide contextual understanding of how mentoring programs operate in real settings. These observations focused on both the structural components of the programs and the integration of Christian values, including the emphasis on student self-efficacy and spiritual growth. Together, these multiple data sources offered a rich and reliable foundation for analyzing how mentoring programs within NCSA/Cognia schools support the holistic development of students.

Review of Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study followed a systematic qualitative process grounded in the methods outlined by Saldaña (2016). Coding served as the central interpretive tool for identifying key patterns and meanings within the data. The first cycle of analysis utilized Initial

Coding, which involved breaking down the data into smaller segments and assigning descriptive labels to capture important details while identifying similarities and differences among participants' responses. During this stage, In Vivo coding was used to preserve the authentic language of the participants, allowing their own words to guide early interpretations and maintain proximity to the lived experiences shared through interviews, focus groups, and observations.

The second cycle employed Pattern Coding, also referred to as Thematic Coding, to organize the In Vivo codes into broader categories, themes, and conceptual groupings. This stage provided a means to synthesize data into descriptive accounts that revealed consistent characteristics, effective practices, and observable outcomes of mentoring programs within Christian high schools. The subsequent thematic analysis illuminated overarching patterns across the data, revealing how these programs functioned in relation to the research questions and how they supported students' holistic growth.

To ensure credibility and validity, triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews, focus groups, and observations. Memo writing and category comparisons further clarified relationships between emerging themes and provided a deeper understanding of the processes within each mentoring program. This iterative process helped answer the study's central questions as follows. How do mentoring programs in NCSA schools operate and why they are essential to fostering student development within a Christian educational context. Reflective practices were used throughout the analysis to address potential researcher bias and maintain integrity in interpretation. The final reporting of results presented clear, evidence-based findings supported by participant quotations, thematic examples, and references to the collected data.

Synopsis of Major Findings

A finding of this study revealed that relationship-centered mentoring is a defining feature of NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools and a key to fulfilling both academic and faith-based standards. Across all data sources, participants emphasized that these schools intentionally design mentoring structures to ensure every student is known, supported, and guided within a Christ-centered environment. Formal structures such as advisory groups, small group devotions, and staff mentoring roles were identified as essential components of a relational culture that promotes belonging, accountability, and emotional safety.

Mentoring programs were consistently described as extensions of discipleship, where teachers model Christ-like relationships and provide consistent academic and personal support. These relationships extend beyond the classroom, nurturing trust and mutual respect while reinforcing each school's mission and values. The study also found that mentoring fosters student self-efficacy by linking faith, perseverance, and confidence. Through prayer, encouragement, and modeling of Christian virtues, students develop greater ownership of their academic, social, and spiritual growth.

Finally, the findings showed that alignment with NCSA and Cognia standards is achieved when schools integrate their foundational faith statements into every aspect of school life, from curriculum and instructional practices to student development and professional training. True alignment, as noted by NCSA Commissioners, is demonstrated not through documentation but through daily practice, where faith and academics function as unified expressions of the school's mission.

Findings for Research Question 1

The findings related to Research Question 1 indicate that participating schools employed a 3-structured approach for conducting mentoring sessions. They were deliberate, formal structures to ensure every student is known, supported, and connected. The 3-structured approaches were advisory periods, small group devotions, and intentional staff mentoring roles. These relational frameworks function as foundational components of student development rather than optional supports, promoting trust, accountability, and emotional safety throughout the school community.

The emphasis on structured relationship-building directly aligns with Bruce and Bridgeland's (2014) description of formal mentoring programs in which adults are purposefully matched with young people to foster consistent guidance and support. Similar to their distinction between formal and naturally occurring mentoring relationships, NCSA schools utilize both approaches, structured advisory systems alongside naturally emerging teacher-student relationships. Rhodes (2020) emphasized that well-designed mentoring programs intentionally guide young people in multiple areas of life; this intentionality was evident in how administrators in this study aligned mentoring practices with both mission statements and accreditation standards. While Rhodes (2002) cautioned that mentoring programs may at times yield unintended outcomes, the participants in this study viewed the relational systems as overwhelmingly positive contributors to students' holistic growth.

While the body of research on mentoring within faith-based educational settings remains limited (Campolongo, 2009), this lack of literature does not diminish the significance of the findings. Rather, the findings serve to extend and enrich the existing scholarship by filling the identified gaps. This study extends current literature by illustrating how Christian schools embed

mentoring within both spiritual formation and accreditation frameworks, demonstrating that relationship-centered structures can serve as measurable indicators of educational quality. For practitioners, these results highlight the importance of maintaining intentional mentoring systems that are mission-driven and relationally authentic, ensuring that every student is supported by caring adults who embody the school's faith-based values.

Findings for Research Question 2

The findings for Research Question 2 reveal that mentoring within NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools extends beyond academic guidance to encompass intentional faith formation and relational modeling. Participants consistently described mentoring as "an extension of discipleship," in which teachers walk alongside students, demonstrating Christ-centered care through consistent presence, encouragement, and accountability. These mentoring relationships, grounded in trust and authenticity, were perceived as transformative, strengthening belonging, mutual respect, and emotional safety within the school community. However, in alignment with Research Question 2, these schools do not rely solely on the relational nature of mentoring; they also implement intentional assessment structures to ensure that every learner has consistent access to a designated adult and that the mentoring system produces meaningful outcomes.

These findings align closely with national research on the effectiveness of school-based mentoring (SBM) programs. A variety of mentoring models have been shown to benefit young people; in 2008 it was stated that, "school-based mentoring is one of the fastest-growing forms of mentoring in the U.S." (AOL Time Warner Foundation, 2002; DuBois & Karcher, 2005). School-based programs hold advantages because they allow educators, individuals already trained in teaching, guiding, and nurturing youth, to serve naturally as mentors (Simões & Alarcão, 2013). This mirrors the NCSA model in which teachers intentionally integrate

mentoring within their daily interactions and academic responsibilities. The accessibility of all students within the school setting allows mentoring to be consistent and purposeful, creating ongoing opportunities to build relationships that foster both academic and personal growth. Importantly, participating schools describe formalized systems such as documented advisement rosters, scheduled mentoring meetings, progress monitoring forms, and periodic surveys to verify that each student is assigned a mentor of choice and meets regularly. Through these mechanisms, schools assess both program fidelity and student engagement, ensuring that mentoring is not incidental but systematically implemented. These activities of formative assessment allow schools to make necessary changes to meet the needs of all students. The schools are not placed in a position to end the "program" to determine if goals were met.

Rhodes (2020) emphasized the need for mentoring programs to balance emotional connection with clear goal setting, noting that the most meaningful outcomes arise when relationships combine trust with intentional direction. This dynamic was evident in NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools, where mentoring relationships nurtured belonging while also reinforcing academic responsibility, character formation, and spiritual maturity. Assessment practices reflected this dual emphasis. Schools monitored academic indicators such as course completion, attendance patterns, and behavioral referrals alongside qualitative indicators, including student self-reports of belonging and perceived adult support. Similarly, Chan et al. (2019) demonstrated that school-based mentoring programs contribute to measurable academic success. Their study found that ninth-grade students participating in a mentoring program were significantly more likely to remain on track for graduation compared to peers who did not participate. These findings underscore that when mentoring relationships are both relationally

supportive and goal-oriented—and when their implementation is continually assessed—they can alter students' academic and developmental trajectories in profound ways.

The present study extends these insights by illustrating how faith-based schools integrate spiritual formation into mentoring practices while simultaneously embedding structures of accountability to ensure successful outcomes. Participants described mentoring not only as an avenue for academic success but also as a means of discipleship, helping students cultivate moral and spiritual discernment. At the same time, school leaders articulated clear expectations for documentation, regular contact, and administrative oversight to confirm that every learner maintains consistent access to a designated adult throughout the educational journey. This synthesis aligns with Rhodes et al. (2000), who emphasized the life-changing potential of consistent mentoring relationships, and with Shier et al. (2020), who found that effective mentoring depends on communication, consistency, and mutual respect. Within NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools, these principles are reinforced through intentional assessment systems that safeguard relational continuity, monitor program effectiveness, and ensure that mentoring leads to sustained academic, personal, and spiritual growth.

Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 explored how mentoring programs support students' self-efficacy in academic, social, and spiritual growth. The findings revealed that mentoring within NCSA-accredited schools is a holistic process, guiding students to take ownership of their goals while fostering resilience, confidence, and spiritual maturity. Participants reported that having the flexibility to create opportunities tailored to each student's needs, rather than implementing a scripted or standardized program, enhances the effectiveness of mentor/mentee relationships in

developing student self-efficacy. They stressed that what is beneficial for one student may not be appropriate for another.

Participants emphasized that academic mentoring was strengthened by consistent feedback and encouragement, while social and spiritual mentoring nurtured identity and purpose through prayer, accountability, and modeling of Christian virtues. As one participant expressed, "When a student knows they are seen and prayed for, their confidence grows in every area." The data demonstrated that spiritual mentoring contributes uniquely to self-efficacy by linking faith with perseverance and self-discipline, allowing students to see their growth as both personal and spiritual progress.

These findings reinforce Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, which identifies self-efficacy as developed through observation, imitation, and reinforcement of modeled behaviors. When students see their mentors live out values of faith, perseverance, and discipline, they begin to internalize these qualities, believing they too can overcome challenges. Bandura's principle, seeing others navigate and triumph over similar life experiences builds hope and perceived ability, is mirrored in how students in this study were influenced by their mentors. When a mentor shares comparable experiences, students gain assurance that change and growth are possible, transforming abstract advice into meaningful, lived examples.

The connection between mentoring and modeling behavior also aligns with Connolly's (2017) application of Bandura's framework to coaching. Connolly explains that coaches, much like mentors, serve as positive role models whose guidance extends beyond skill-building to include emotional support, confidence, and discipline. Rhodes (2020) similarly found that mentors who act as coaches not only advance students' practical abilities but also cultivate self-confidence and self-control, two components closely tied to self-efficacy. This mirrors the

current study's findings that consistent, faith-grounded mentoring relationships foster a belief in one's own capability and purpose.

Furthermore, the relational component identified by participants aligns with a broad body of literature emphasizing that the mentor-mentee relationship itself is central to effective mentoring outcomes (Ferguson, 2017; Karcher, 2009; Lyons et al., 2021; Rhodes et al., 2000; Schenk et al., 2020; Shier et al., 2020). Rhodes (2020) noted, "A good working relationship is a necessary ingredient for all successful mentoring" (p. 112). The participants' experiences affirm this, as they described mentoring that balances compassion with accountability. They emphasized shared goal setting, intentional communication, and relationship-building through daily interactions, practices that mirror Rhodes's (2002) findings that time spent in positive social engagement strengthens trust and self-belief.

Additionally, the development of self-efficacy through mentoring can be understood through the framework of hope theory, particularly as described by Barnett (2023). Mentoring helps students create and pursue meaningful goals, develop agency, and identify pathways to success, all of which contribute to a hopeful outlook and a growth mindset. Participants described how mentors helped students visualize goals, identify obstacles, and recognize progress, echoing Barnett's (2023) three-part model of fostering hope through goal setting, agency, and pathways. Mentoring also promoted self-reflection, self-awareness, and resilience, supporting Barnett's argument that such relationships teach students to recognize their capacity to influence their own outcomes.

This process is deeply tied to socioemotional learning (SEL), which mentoring programs inherently promote. Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) contend that quality mentoring relationships, rooted in trust, encouragement, and high expectations, can play a leading role in strengthening

academic achievement, social well-being, and national goals for educational equity. The current study supports this position, demonstrating that mentoring rooted in Christian faith not only builds SEL competencies such as self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making but also deepens spiritual grounding and purpose.

Findings for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 examined how NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools demonstrate alignment to their foundational statements while meeting accreditation standards. The findings revealed that alignment is achieved through a balance of faith-driven purpose and evidence-based practice. Participants described the school's mission and vision as "the lens through which all decisions are made," ensuring that both NCSA's Christian standards and Cognia's academic frameworks are integrated seamlessly. The NCSA Commissioners emphasized that true alignment is demonstrated not through documentation alone but through daily practice, how schools live out their statements of faith in the relationships, policies, and instructional strategies that define their culture. Schools exhibited this alignment by embedding their foundational beliefs into curriculum design, student life programming, and professional development, ensuring that faith and academics are not competing priorities but unified expressions of mission.

These findings strongly align with the literature on the long-term impact of mentoring and social-emotional learning (SEL) in shaping holistic education. Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) emphasized that quality mentoring relationships, those grounded in trust, accountability, and shared purpose, can play a leading role in achieving national educational goals, such as improved graduation rates, workforce readiness, and equitable opportunities for all students. Similarly, in the context of NCSA/Cognia schools, alignment is sustained through relationships that mirror mentoring principles: relational depth, spiritual guidance, and consistent support. The emphasis

on living out foundational beliefs through daily practice parallels the mentoring process of modeling and guiding, where faith and character are demonstrated as much as taught.

The findings also support the view that effective educational systems must address the whole student, academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Integrating the spiritual dimension into alignment practices, as seen in NCSA schools, extends beyond traditional SEL frameworks by focusing on moral and spiritual formation. Rhodes (2020) found that mentoring programs following best practices, clear goals, structured communication, and long-term consistency, produced stronger outcomes for students. NCSA/Cognia alignment mirrors these principles by embedding intentionality, structure, and longevity into all aspects of school life. Unlike short-term mentoring or program-based initiatives, which Komosa-Hawkins (2010) noted often lose impact after 12–18 months, NCSA-accredited schools sustain alignment across the student's entire educational journey. This sustained faith-academic integration distinguishes NCSA/Cognia institutions from secular models by ensuring that purpose and practice remain cohesive and enduring.

The COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges for maintaining this kind of relational and spiritual alignment. As Rhodes et al. (2000) observed, relationships that are prematurely disrupted or constrained by limited timeframes can negatively impact students' sense of trust and belonging. The shift to online and hybrid learning environments during the pandemic amplified these risks, diminishing the relational and spiritual engagement central to holistic education. Yet, as the findings of this study show, NCSA/Cognia schools responded by reinforcing their mission-driven approach, investing in teacher-student relationships, prioritizing emotional resilience, and maintaining spiritual practices even in digital settings. This adaptability demonstrates how alignment to foundational statements provides stability and direction in times

of uncertainty, echoing Cognia's (2023) and NCSA's (2022) calls for mission-centered leadership in post-pandemic education.

Additionally, the findings highlight a divergence from traditional SEL programs by emphasizing the integration of faith as a vital dimension of student well-being. While SEL initiatives across public and private sectors focus on self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, NCSA/Cognia schools expand these competencies to include spiritual awareness and faith-based character formation. This alignment of faith and evidence-based practice suggests a model of education that not only prepares students for academic and social success but also nurtures their moral and spiritual growth.

In summary, the findings for Research Question 4 underscore that authentic alignment in NCSA/Cognia-accredited schools is not merely procedural but deeply relational and spiritual. These schools exemplify what Rhodes (2020) described as "best practice" alignment, sustained, intentional, and holistic, yet extend it further by embedding faith as the guiding principle that informs all aspects of learning and leadership. This integration of mission, mentoring, and measurable practice demonstrates a distinct educational paradigm where accreditation is not a constraint but a reflection of who the schools already are faith-based communities committed to nurturing the whole student, mind, heart, and spirit, through consistent and lived alignment with their foundational beliefs.

Conclusions

The voices in this study confirmed the most successful schools are those that live their mission rather than merely articulate it. They emphasized that accreditation is not a compliance exercise but a reflection of authentic Christian education in action. The study thus reveals a

holistic model of accreditation in which faith, relationship, and academic rigor function as interdependent elements rather than isolated priorities.

The findings of this study provided rich insight into the effectiveness of school mentoring programs and, in several ways, challenged the initial problem statement. This research originally sought to investigate the underlying reasons for the limited success and relative ineffectiveness of mentoring programs in NCSA high schools. However, the results revealed a more complex reality. Three major themes emerged, highlighting key practices among schools meeting both NCSA and Cognia standards.

First, these schools demonstrated success in fostering students' personal, academic, and, within this sample, spiritual growth through meaningful mentor/student relationships.

Second, mentoring programs were strongly aligned with each school's mission and supported by NCSA and Cognia standards. The mission of the school remained the primary driver of decision-making; if a program did not align with the school's mission, adherence to accreditation standards alone was not sufficient for implementation.

Third, a commitment to developing effective mentoring programs was evident across schools of varying sizes. However, implementation differed based on contextual factors such as student population, staff capacity, scheduling, and overall program logistics.

Effective mentoring programs proved that what works for one school may not necessarily work for another; however, the essential implication is that schools must begin the process, evaluate effectiveness, and refine their approach over time. Among the five schools observed and interviewed, no two mentoring programs were identical, yet all shared a common commitment to fostering strong, meaningful relationships between teachers and students.

Discussion

NCSA/Cognia schools should therefore feel confident in their missions and standards as they relate to the long-term success of their mentoring programs. One of the schools observed was in its fifth year implementing a structured mentoring model. A teacher shared she had mentored the same group of girls throughout all four years of high school and had just begun again with a new group of freshmen. She noted the program was most effective when mentors were given extended time to know students deeply and build lasting relationships.

Allowing organic development within the program occurred as a positive outcome. At one school, when the program was first introduced, the principal provided a weekly video for mentors and students to watch and discuss. However, teachers explained this approach was less effective than allowing mentors the freedom to design their own plans and involve students in decisions about how mentoring time was used. Another teacher echoed this perspective, observing that student engagement increased significantly when mentoring activities were more personal, flexible, and responsive to student interests.

Observations at this school further illustrated the impact of this relational flexibility. Teachers and students interacted through board games, video games, outdoor football, and informal conversations over snacks. Each activity reflected authentic engagement and strong relational bonds. This type of student-centered engagement is not conditional of school size; it is an effective model for both large and small school settings.

The implications of these findings also extend to the structure and accessibility of mentoring opportunities. While community-based or natural mentoring programs can provide valuable support (Laco & Johnson, 2017), access is often limited by logistics or availability. School-based mentoring programs overcome these barriers by embedding mentorship into the

daily rhythm of school life. Participants described this accessibility as essential, particularly for students who might otherwise lack positive role models. Existing literature supports this conclusion, noting that school-based mentoring provides a reliable and supportive context for personal growth (Laco & Johnson, 2017).

Taken together, these findings and the supporting literature suggest that mentoring within NCSA-accredited schools uniquely integrates Bandura's principles of modeled learning, Rhodes's emphasis on relational connection, and Barnett's framework for hope and goal setting within a distinctly faith-based context. The implication is that mentoring grounded in both relationships and faith equips students with the confidence to pursue academic excellence, the resilience to overcome challenges, and the spiritual foundation to persevere with purpose. By combining emotional support, goal-oriented structure, and Christian modeling, these mentoring relationships cultivate a strong sense of self-efficacy that prepares students to thrive academically, emotionally, and spiritually. As NCSA schools continue to develop and refine mentoring programs, this model offers a compelling example of how relationship-centered approaches foster meaningful and lasting impact.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size was limited to the schools that chose to participate in the study. Out of the 51 that were sent the screening questionnaire, five schools agreed to be a part of the study. This resulted in a self-selected sample. Because participation was voluntary and not randomly assigned, the sample may reflect bias. It is unclear whether schools elected to participate due to confidence in their mentoring programs, a desire to learn from other schools, or simply to support the researcher.

A second limitation was the lack of existing literature specifically focused on mentoring programs within Christian high schools. While there is extensive research on mentoring in general, there is limited studies addressing mentoring in private Christian school settings, which limited the ability to draw direct comparisons to prior studies.

Finally, the researcher's travel constraints during the school term, due to current professional responsibilities, limited the ability to conduct on-site visits at all participating schools. As a result, only two of the five schools were observed in person, which may have impacted the depth and consistency of data collection across sites.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several areas emerged as significant opportunities for further study. The first area involves how to better develop these types of programs in smaller schools with a limited number of teachers. This challenge appeared repeatedly across participants. Larger schools did not report the same difficulty, likely due to having more personnel and greater flexibility in staffing.

A second area for further study is teacher buy-in. Every school reported a range of engagement, with some teachers genuinely excited about the programs and others participating simply to meet requirements. Professional development could play an important role in increasing meaningful participation, not only by encouraging teachers to invest in these programs, but also by helping identify why some educators are not fully committed. A lack of buy-in ultimately becomes a disservice to the students assigned to those teachers, as the effectiveness of the program depends heavily on the level of adult engagement.

Additionally, expanding the study to include all NCSA schools would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these institutions develop mentoring programs to meet NCSA standards. It would also be beneficial to conduct a comparative study of NCSA middle

schools to evaluate how their programs align with those at the high school level and to determine whether similar weaknesses or strengths emerge.

The final area involves scheduling challenges. Schools face increasing pressure to prioritize academics by offering a wide variety of courses, including Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, electives, and career pathways. This pressure is especially evident in private Christian schools, which must remain competitive with public schools, and charter schools that offer many of these opportunities at no cost. As a result, administrators struggle to find time within the school day for programs that support student development in meaningful ways. Scheduling varied significantly among the schools studied, raising important questions about best practices. Further research is needed to determine the most effective scheduling models and whether sufficient time is essential for developing relationships and outcomes these programs are designed to foster.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that future research should focus on program development in small school settings, strategies to increase authentic teacher buy in, a larger and more detailed study of all NCSA high schools and to include Middle Schools for comparison, and scheduling models that allow for intentional student support without sacrificing academic rigor. Addressing these areas could help schools implement more effective programs that better serve both students and educators.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to provide practical guidance to educators on how to implement and sustain effective student mentoring programs within NCSA schools. While NCSA and Cognia standards require high schools to establish mentoring or student advocacy programs that support students' holistic well-being, this study addressed the persistent problem

that many schools struggle to move beyond compliance and develop programs that are truly meaningful and effective.

Findings from this study suggest that the most successful mentoring programs did originate as a response to accreditation requirements but continued from a genuine recognition of student need. One participant (P14) explained that even without reviewing the standard, it simply made sense that students needed consistent opportunities to build one-on-one relationships with a trusted teacher or faculty member. As she noted, the program was not designed to check a box but to serve students for the right reasons, allowing accreditation standards to affirm rather than dictate practice. This reflection captures a central conclusion of the study. When mentoring programs are rooted in mission and relationship rather than obligation, they are more likely to be implemented with integrity and sustained over time.

This conclusion aligns with observations from NCSA Commissioners who have noted that the healthiest Christian schools do not view accreditation and mission as competing priorities. Instead, accreditation expectations become embedded within the spiritual and relational culture of the school. In these environments, mentoring programs function as a natural extension of the school's commitment to discipleship, community, and whole child development rather than as an external mandate.

The significance of these findings lies in its implications for school administration. For school administrators, the question is not whether mentoring programs should exist, but how they are framed, supported, and evaluated. This is especially important given the growing body of literature noting that educators increasingly recognize students have encountered challenges in collaboration, verbal communication, problem solving, and developing crucial interpersonal relationships. In this context, mentoring programs emerge as a vital component in revitalizing the

social and communication skills integral to students' overall health and well-being. In essence, mentoring programs can bridge the gap created by the pandemic by nurturing social skills and communication abilities vital in academic settings and fundamental to thriving in life (Barnett, 2023).

Research further supports the role of mentoring in fostering hope and future orientation among students. In Barnett's 2023 study, he discusses how mentors can play a crucial role by assisting students in defining, visualizing, and making achievable goals, setting realistic deadlines, identifying obstacles, brainstorming solutions, and recognizing progress. Especially when students face significant life challenges, it can be difficult for them to focus on the future, and school-based mentoring programs can bridge this gap by providing consistent guidance and encouragement throughout the goal-setting process.

School administration is called to intentionally protect time for mentoring, provide professional development that equips faculty to build meaningful relationships, and communicate clearly that mentoring is valued work rather than an added task. School administration must also evaluate mentoring programs not only through documentation and data but through student voice, relational depth, and alignment with the school's spiritual mission. By doing so, schools can ensure that mentoring programs are sustainable, mission centered, and impactful, ultimately fulfilling both accreditation expectations and the deeper calling of Christian education.

Finally, as a Christian school administrator and through the completion of this study, I contend that Christian schools are uniquely positioned to meet the diverse needs of students more effectively than their public school counterparts. This distinction lies in their ability to cultivate long-term, meaningful relationships and to provide individualized, responsive support grounded

in those relationships. Additionally, Christian schools can design and implement mentoring programs that are intentionally aligned with their mission and core values, ensuring that every aspect of the program reflects their commitment to faith-based student development.

Christian schools are committed to educating the whole child, not only academically, athletically, or socially and emotionally, but also spiritually as well. The spiritual dimension is not an optional component of student development; it is essential to a student's identity and growth. Therefore, it must be intentionally integrated into the educational experience. Christian school mentoring programs embody this holistic, mission-driven approach, fostering growth across all areas of a student's life.

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Appendix A:
IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04521-2024

Responsible Researcher(s): Connie Guthrie

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Deborah Paine

Dissertation Research Member: Dr. Steven Downey

Project Title: *A Basic Descriptive Study of Mentoring Programs in Accredited Christian High Schools.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *The approved study is authorized to begin at the locations listed: Harding Academy of Memphis (**08.16.24**), Midland Christian School (**08.16.24**), Westbury Christian School (**08.16.24**), Greater Atlanta Christian School (**08.19.24**, Nashville Christian School (**08.23.24**), Foundation Christian Academy (**08.27.24**), & Madison Academy (**08.29.24**).*
- *Exempt protocol guidelines **permit** the recording of interview/focus group sessions provided recordings are made to create an accurate transcript. Exempt guidelines **prohibit** the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings. Therefore, upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview/focus group session must be deleted from all recording and storage devices used.*
- *In keeping with established consent guidelines, recordings must include the researcher reading aloud the consent statement, confirming participant understanding, and establishing their willingness to take part in the interview/focus group at the start of each session. Participants must be provided with a copy of the research statement. The transcript must document the researcher reading and obtaining consent.*
- *Pseudonym lists must be kept in a separate, secure file from corresponding data.*
- *Upon completion of the research study all data (e.g. data set, pseudonym list, email list, transcripts, etc.) must be securely maintained (e.g. locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a **minimum of 3 years**. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*

☒ ***Please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at tmwright@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***

Elizabeth W. Olphie *08.16.2024*

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix B:

Screening Questionnaire

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled "A Basic Descriptive Study of Mentoring Programs in Accredited Christian High Schools", which is being conducted by Connie Guthrie, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study aims to uncover the reasons behind the relative ineffectiveness of mentoring programs in the National Christian School Association (NCSA)/Cognia-accredited high schools.

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about developing and implementing effective students mentoring programs in NCSA high schools. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. This questionnaire is confidential. Any collected participant information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared in any public manner. All data will be collected electronically, stored it on my computer which is password protected, kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to complete the questionnaire, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Participants must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the questionnaire serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. You may print a copy of this statement for your records. Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Connie Guthrie at ccguthrie@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

1. I have read and understand the information provided in the above statements.

Type yes or no in the line below to continue to the remainder of the questionnaire.

_____

2. What is your email address?

3. What is the name of your high school?

4. Where are you located? Include city and state.

5. What is your position at the school?

____Head of School

____Principal

____Dean

____Other

6. What is your name?

7. How many students are in your high school?

8. Formal Student Advocacy Program Standards:

How well does your high school meet the formal structure program standards required by NCSA/Cognia (e.g., accreditation, curriculum standards, mentorship program adherence)

____Needs Improvement

____Satisfactory

____Good

____Excellent

Appendix C:

Interviewer Sheet for Principal: Mentoring Program

Interview Date: _____ Interviewee: Principal _____

1. Formation of the Mentoring Program:

a. Can you provide insights into how the mentoring program at our Christian high school was initially conceptualized and formed?

b. What motivated the establishment of the mentoring program, and what goals were envisioned during its formation?

c. How were mentors selected, and what criteria were considered in matching mentors with mentees?

2. Program Evaluation:

a. How is the effectiveness of the mentoring program assessed and evaluated?

b. Are there specific metrics or key performance indicators used to measure the success of the program?

c. How do you gather feedback from mentors, mentees, and other stakeholders to inform program improvements?

3. Support for Student Self-Efficacy:

a. In what ways does the mentoring program aim to support the self-efficacy and confidence of your students?

b. Can you share examples of how the program encourages students to set and achieve personal and academic goals?

c. How does the program address any challenges or barriers that may impact student self-efficacy?

4. Alignment with Standards and School Expectations:

a. How does the mentoring program align with the educational standards set by the NCSA and Cognia?

b. In what ways does the program reflect and uphold the Christian values and expectations of your school?

c. How is the mentoring program integrated into the overall educational mission and vision of the school?

5. Continuous Improvement:

a. What mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous improvement in the mentoring program?

b. How has the program evolved over time, and what adjustments have been made based on feedback and evaluation?

c. Are there any future plans or enhancements envisioned for the mentoring program?

6. Collaboration and Communication:

a. How does the mentoring program encourage collaboration between mentors, mentees, parents, and teachers?

b. Can you share examples of effective communication channels within the program?

c. How does the program foster a sense of community and interconnectedness within the school?

7. Challenges and Solutions:

a. What challenges, if any, has the mentoring program encountered, and how were they addressed?

b. How do you ensure that the program remains adaptive to the changing needs and dynamics of the school community?

8. Mentor Training and Development:

a. What training and professional development opportunities are provided for mentors?

b. How are mentors equipped to address the diverse needs of mentees while staying aligned with the school's values?

Closing:

a. Is there anything else you would like to share about the mentoring program or its impact on the school community?

b. What role do you envision the mentoring program playing in the future growth and success of your Christian high school?

Appendix D:

Interviewer Sheet for Counselors, Teachers and Program Coordinators:

Mentoring Program Logistics

Interview Date: _____ Interviewees: Counselors and Program Coordinators _____

1. Scheduling and Time Commitments:

a. How is the scheduling of mentor-mentee meetings managed within the mentoring program?

b. What strategies are in place to accommodate the diverse schedules of both mentors and students?

c. How do you address any scheduling conflicts that may arise during the mentoring program?

2. Mentor Training and Preparation:

a. Can you describe the training process for mentors before they begin working with students?

b. What topics are covered during mentor training, and how is it tailored to meet the specific needs of our Christian high school environment?

c. Are there ongoing professional development opportunities for mentors throughout the program?

3. Student and Mentor Pairing:

a. How are mentors matched with mentees, and what criteria are considered during the pairing process?

b. What steps are taken to ensure compatibility and effective communication between mentors and students?

c. How do you handle any challenges that may arise in the mentor-mentee pairing process?

4. Monitoring and Evaluation:

a. How is the progress of mentor-mentee relationships monitored throughout the program?

b. Are there specific tools or assessments used to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program?

c. How do you ensure that both mentors and students are benefiting from the program?

5. Program Resources and Support:

a. What resources are available to mentors to support them in their role?

b. How do you provide ongoing support to mentors and address any challenges they may encounter?

c. Are there specific resources or support systems in place for students participating in the mentoring program?

6. Division of Responsibilities:

a. How are responsibilities divided between the counseling and program coordination teams in managing the mentoring program?

b. What role do counselors play in supporting both mentors and mentees throughout the program?

c. How do program coordinators collaborate with other school staff to ensure the success of the mentoring initiative?

7. Program Logistics and Communication:

a. How is information about the mentoring program communicated to both mentors and students?

b. What logistical tools or systems are in place to streamline communication and coordination within the program?

c. How do you address any logistical challenges that may arise during the implementation of the program?

8. Feedback and Improvement:

a. How do you gather feedback from mentors, mentees, and other stakeholders to improve the logistics of the mentoring program?

b. Are there regular meetings or forums where participants can provide input and suggestions?

c. How has feedback been incorporated into refining the logistical aspects of the program?

Closing:

a. Is there anything else you would like to share about the logistics of the mentoring program or any future plans for improvement?

b. How do you envision the ongoing success and growth of the mentoring program within our Christian high school?

Appendix E:

Focus Group Discussion

Discussion Date: _____ Participants: Principals, Counselors, Coordinators _____

1. Observational Learning:

a. How do you believe mentors can effectively model behaviors through observational learning in the context of our Christian high school?

b. Can you share specific instances where you've seen observational learning positively impact mentees' personal and spiritual development?

c. In your view, what intentional steps can the mentoring program take to leverage observational learning experiences for the benefit of students?

2. Outcome Expectations:

a. As leaders in Christian education, what outcome expectations do you think are essential for students participating in the mentoring program?

b. How can we communicate these expectations clearly to both mentors and mentees?

c. What role do you believe clear outcome expectations play in fostering a positive mentor-mentee relationship and overall program success?

3. Positive Peer Relationships:

a. In your experience, how does the mentoring program contribute to the cultivation of positive peer relationships among students?

b. Can you share examples of how mentors actively encourage positive interactions and support among mentees?

c. Considering the impact on the broader school community, how do you envision positive peer relationships developed through the mentoring program?

4. Social Integration within the School Environment:

a. How can the mentoring program effectively facilitate social integration for students within your Christian high school environment?

b. Can you provide examples of mentorship strategies that go beyond the mentor-mentee relationship and contribute to broader social connections?

c. In your opinion, how does enhanced social integration contribute to a sense of community and belonging within your Christian high school?

5. Self-Efficacy Enhancement:

a. In what ways can the mentoring program be intentionally designed to enhance the self-efficacy of participating students?

b. Can you share experiences or mentorship activities that you believe have a significant impact on building students' confidence in their abilities?

c. How might a strong sense of self-efficacy contribute to the overall development and success of your students?

6. Alignment with Christian Values:

a. Reflecting on the core values of our Christian high school, how is the mentoring program aligned with these values?

b. Can you share specific instances where Christian values are actively integrated into mentoring activities and relationships?

c. From a spiritual and character development perspective, how does the mentoring program contribute to the growth of both mentors and mentees?

7. Challenges and Solutions:

a. Considering the unique context of our Christian high school, what challenges have you encountered in implementing mentoring programs?

b. How have you successfully addressed challenges related to observational learning, outcome expectations, positive peer relationships, social integration, or self-efficacy?

c. What strategies or best practices would you recommend for overcoming common challenges in the implementation of mentoring programs?

8. Student Feedback and Impact:

a. How do you currently gather feedback from students about their experiences with the mentoring program?

b. Can you share specific stories or instances where the program had a notable impact on students' personal, academic lives, and self-efficacy?

c. In your view, how can you measure the success of the mentoring program, considering student outcomes and satisfaction?

Closing:

a. As we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to share or discuss regarding the unique aspects of mentoring programs in Christian high schools and their impact on students?

b. Looking ahead, how do you foresee the continued development and evolution of mentoring programs within the context of Christian education?

Appendix F:

Observation Tool 1

Practical and logistics of mentoring programs.

This observation tool focuses on the practical and logistical aspects of the mentoring program, ensuring that it runs smoothly and meets the needs of both mentors and mentees.

1. Program Structure and Organization:

- Clarity and effectiveness of program guidelines and expectations.
- Adequacy of orientation provided to mentors and mentees.
- Evidence of a well-defined timeline for the mentoring relationship.

Rating: (1-5)

- 1: Needs Improvement
- 2: Below Expectations
- 3: Meeting Expectations
- 4: Exceeding Expectations
- 5: Outstanding

2. Mentor Availability and Commitment:

- Observation of mentors' punctuality and consistency in meetings.
- Evidence of mentor commitment to the program's goals and values.
- Handling of any logistical challenges or conflicts in scheduling.

Rating: (1-5)

3. Communication Protocols:

- Effectiveness of communication channels between program coordinators, mentors, and mentees.

- Clarity in conveying important program updates, events, or changes.

- Use of technology (if applicable) for communication within the program.

Rating: (1-5)

4. Resources and Support:

- Availability and accessibility of resources for mentors and mentees.

- Adequacy of support provided to mentors in addressing challenges.

- Program's responsiveness to the needs and feedback of mentors and mentees.

Rating: (1-5)

5. Goal Setting and Monitoring:

- Clarity in setting and communicating program goals.

- Effectiveness of tools or systems for monitoring mentor-mentee progress.

- Alignment of individual mentoring relationships with overall program objectives.

Rating: (1-5)

6. Feedback and Evaluation:

- Mechanisms for collecting feedback from mentors and mentees.

- Processes in place for program evaluation and continuous improvement.

- Use of feedback to enhance the logistics and overall effectiveness of the program.

Rating: (1-5)

Overall Assessment:

- Strengths and areas for improvement in the logistical aspects of the program.

- Recommendations for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Christian high school mentoring program.

Appendix G:

Observation Tool #2

Self-efficacy, Christian values, and principles

This observation tool is designed to assess various aspects of the mentoring relationship, emphasizing the integration of self-efficacy, Christian values and principles into the mentorship process.

1. Spiritual Growth and Development:

- Mentor's ability to foster spiritual growth in the mentee.
- Evidence of prayer and biblical guidance in discussions.
- Mentee's understanding and application of Christian principles.

Rating: (1-5)

- 1: Needs Improvement
- 2: Below Expectations
- 3: Meeting Expectations
- 4: Exceeding Expectations
- 5: Outstanding

2. Personal and Academic Support:

- Mentor's involvement in addressing academic challenges.
- Mentor's assistance in personal development and goal setting.
- Regular check-ins on academic progress and personal well-being.

Rating: (1-5)

3. Communication and Relationship Building:

- Frequency and quality of communication between mentor and mentee.

- Openness and trust in the mentor-mentee relationship.

- Mentor’s ability to actively listen and provide constructive feedback.

Rating: (1-5)

4. Integration of Christian Values in Daily Life:

- Observations on how Christian values are integrated into daily decisions.

- Mentor’s guidance on ethical choices and moral dilemmas.

- Mentee’s understanding and application of Christian ethics.

Rating: (1-5)

5. Community Involvement:

- Mentor’s encouragement of community service and involvement.

- Mentee’s participation in Christian outreach activities.

- Impact of mentorship on the mentee’s sense of social responsibility.

Rating: (1-5)

6. Self-Efficacy:

- Mentee’s belief in their ability to achieve academic success.

- Self-confidence in setting and working towards personal goals.

- Mentor’s role in enhancing mentee’s self-efficacy.

Rating: (1-5)

Overall Assessment:

- Strengths and areas for improvement in the mentor-mentee relationship.

- Suggestions for enhancing the Christian high school mentoring program.

Appendix H:

Focus Group discussion for NCSA Commissioners

1. How should schools structure their student advocacy and mentoring programs to align with NCSA standards while effectively supporting student development?
2. How do you, as Commissioners, assess a school's student advocacy and mentoring programs to determine their effectiveness in fostering leadership, academic success, and personal growth? What specific criteria or benchmarks do you use?
3. How have the standards for student advocacy and mentoring programs evolved over the past few years? What factors have driven these changes, and how have they impacted school programs?
4. What strategies can schools implement to ensure equitable access and meaningful participation in student advocacy and mentoring programs for all students, regardless of background or academic standing?

Appendix I:

Participant Demographics by School

Table I1

Participant Demographics by school

School Demographic	Participant ID	Gender	Job Title	Years of Experience
Suburban,	PI	Male	Coach/Teacher	25
1708 students	P2	Male	Academic Dean	27
Suburban,	P3	Male	President	30
1312 students	P4	Female	Teacher/Minister	15
	P5	Female	Teacher	17
Suburban,	P6	Male	Principal	NA
846 students	P7	Female	Assist Principal	19
	P8	Male	Coach/Teacher	2
	P9	Female	Counselor	NA
Suburban,	P10	Female	Teacher	30
450 students	P11	Female	Teacher	4
Rural,	P12	Male	Principal	24
330 students	P13	Female	Principal	15
	P14	Female	Teacher	19
	P15	Female	Teacher	6