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## INTRODUCTION

The University of New Brunswick Saint John's Promise Partnership is a community-based and university-run academic enrichment and poverty reduction initiative focused primarily on the priority neighbourhood of Crescent Valley. Crescent Valley has the highest levels of poverty, high school non-completion, and single mother families in the city of Saint John, along with the lowest levels of post-secondary education and labour force participation (Asher, 2008). UNB Saint John students, supported by the Vice-President's Office and a staff of education specialists offer four streams of programming for the children and youth in this high-risk neighbourhood. These programs focus on improving academics. Of primary interest to the current study is **The Student Mentoring Club** which is a one-to-one mentoring program offered yearly by The Promise Partnership and running September until April. Students from Hazen White/St. Francis are matched with UNB Saint John student volunteers, who dedicate an hour a week to visiting their mentee at the school, supporting them both academically and socially.

## CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

48.8% of the parents indicated that their child's involvement with the Promise Partnership has changed their perceptions/opinions about university.

The control parents wrote significantly more negative opinions about university compared to the parents of Promise Partnership children.

- **63.2% of those comments referred to university's prohibitive costs and exclusivity**

The parents of Promise Partnership children showed significantly more parental support than controls for their children to attend university.

- **56.1%** reported they believed their child could obtain a university degree
- **4%** believed their child would drop out of high school

Compared to control parents

- **30.2%** believed their child could obtain a university degree
- **6.3%** believed their child would drop out of high school.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Mentors

1a) What has been the impact for UNB Saint John students who volunteer as mentors for the Promise Partnership's Student Mentoring Club at HWSF?

1b) How do the mentors feel about their mentor/mentee relationship and about the program in general?

### Parents

2a) What are the parents' perceptions of the Promise Partnership?

2b) What are the parents' perceptions on education/university?

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

### Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire

Students who are mentors for the Promise Partnership relative to students who are not, showed higher scores on civic action, leadership skills, and Social Justice.

### Feagin Poverty Scale/Attitudes Towards Poverty

Mentors were significantly less likely to adhere to the individualistic causes of poverty compared to students who were not mentors. Meaning mentors were less likely to blame the poor for their misfortunes and have more positive views about people who live in poverty.

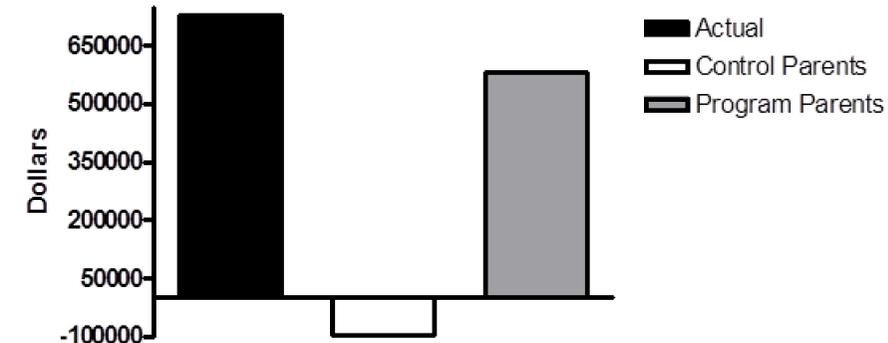
### Results from Mentor Survey

80.5% reported a close relationship with mentee  
 94.1% reported a successful relationship with mentee  
 70.6% reported mentoring was what they expected  
 86.3% reported their intention to continue with the program when the new semester starts.

### Parents' perceptions of the Promise Partnership

Parents indicated the program significantly improved their child's  
 Interest in school = 80.5%  
 Reading skills = 75.6%  
 Confidence in social settings = 70.7%  
 Ability to work independently = 68.3%  
 Confidence in their ability to do school work = 67.5%  
 Writing skills = 65.9%

Perceived Returns on Investment of Attending University



The above graph shows that the control parents perceived the financial returns of a university education to be negative. This is in keeping with previous research that shows the same trend throughout Canadian low-income families.

## TARGET SAMPLE

56 Mentors

55 Parents with children in the Promise Partnership

## CONTROL SAMPLE

56 UNBSJ students who do not mentor

55 Parents from another priority neighbourhood

## CONCLUSIONS

Combating the poverty cycle is an on going and complex challenge. However, altering perceptions of the importance of education is a necessary step in facing this challenge. It is encouraging to see the opinions on university expressed by the parents in the target priority neighbourhood of Crescent Valley.

Likewise, it is a promising finding that the mentors expressed more positive opinions of those who live in poverty, as discrimination towards those from low-income backgrounds is another hurdle in overcoming poverty cycles.