

# Hi-tech mentoring program utilizes the Internet

□ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Ann Arbor Public Schools' web-based career mentoring network, called Insite Mentoring Network, matches middle and high school students with local, pre-screened adults based on shared career and academic interests. The project opened in September. About 70 students from the Ann Arbor Public Schools have interviewed local career mentors and produced their profiles for the mentor database. Meanwhile, about 45 students — most from Huron High School — have been corresponding with career mentors through the Web site. The network is sponsored by the Ann Arbor Public Schools' Career and Technical Education Department in partnership with the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, the state of Michigan's Next Day Program, America Online, the Huron Valley Community Network and nine oth-

er agencies. Reporter Jo Collins Mathis interviewed Insite's director, Paul Fortier of Ann Arbor, last week. □

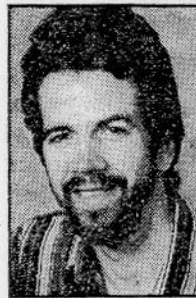
**Q:** How did you come up with this idea?

**A:** The mentoring network grew out of an intergenerational Web project begun with Livingston County at-risk students in 1997. When we received some radio coverage, many adults younger than 65 contacted us to ask if they could get involved. Once we opened the project to adults of all ages, the student participants moved us toward the career focus. Most of our mentors are now career-age, although we still have retired mentors.

The mentoring network, as it now exists, grew out of a collaboration between Michael Riesterer, the graphic communica-

## Q&A

A weekly interview  
on a topic in the news,  
this week with:



Paul Fortier

tions teacher at Huron High School, his students and myself. We operate under the oversight of the AAPS Career and Technical Education Department.

**Q:** How do students get involved?

**A:** There are two components to our

program: production and mentoring. Students participate in both.

We have been putting more of our energies into the production component up to this point. (As well as recruiting and screening mentors, etc.) Three Ann Arbor Public Schools (Project Education, Pioneer High School and Huron High School, Peace Neighborhood Center and Livingston Secondary Academy ... have participated in production sessions thus far. In these sessions, student Web production teams interview, photograph and (profile) adult mentors from our community and include them in our database, searchable by career area. They also create online resumes for other students.

There have been about 85 students who have participated in our Web production sessions and produced the Web profiles and

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# Q&A: Mentor program uses new technology for an old idea

Day at Work features now in our database. About three-fourths of these students had no prior Web production experience and one-third (had) no computer experience before becoming involved in these sessions. The teaching time required to get most of the students to the point where they could produce material for our database has delayed the launch of the mentoring component of the program but much good was done in the process and many students have gained marketable skills.

We have just begun to open the site for use by students and right now about 30 students from AAPS schools have on-site accounts and are regularly corresponding with mentors from our database. After the students at Huron, who are now producing Web material (adults' Web profile, students' online resumes and Day at Work features), get to the point where they can work independently, I will devote myself to introducing the project to staff at other AAPS schools and establish user sites in each building.

**Q:** With so much publicity about problems on the Internet, how do you address the risk?

**A:** Unfortunately, 40 percent of my time and energy is spent making this a vehicle for safe correspondence. I wish the world wasn't that way, but ... we use screening procedures with the mentors, anon-

ymous e-mail procedure, and the editing of Web profiles.

**Q:** So you read everything?

**A:** Everything. It's a tremendous undertaking.

**Q:** Why is it important for kids to have a mentor?

**A:** I've worked with at-risk kids for over 13 years now and the one factor that determines whether a kid succeeds or not — from my experience and all the literature on it — is a significant person in their life. I found that regardless of the structure of the program or the agenda, or the way the school was run, the important thing was whether he felt there was an adult in his corner.

That's why I think this is important. It's using technology in a new way to do an old thing. A new way to hook kids with adults. One of the ways to do it is careers. Kids are really interested in "How am I going to fit into society. How am I going to earn a living?" They say, "I don't want to work at something boring." OK, what do you like? Let's put it in the search engine and see what comes up. If they get a hit, they'll check out the adult's Web profile. ... (A mentor may describe a situation he encountered) when he was a teen. And he kind of blew it here and feels he made a bad choice here. Then they go on to his present, read about his typical day

at work, then go to the core page and read about deeper issues, like things they would have done differently if they had known then what they know now. Then go to the bottom and you can contact them if they have a password, which sends a message to the mentor and the mentor gets back to them. We've had some great correspondence happen. ...

**Q:** Do you have any success stories yet?

**A:** Many of the students involved in our production sessions have gained Web production skills. Students involved in online correspondence have been able to investigate various careers and get the inside track on what the work is really like.

Students have developed new interests as a result of their involvement. A recent quote taken from a Huron student's online correspondence with a software engineer from our database: "Oh, yeah. I told my dad about being interested in programming and about being in contact with you and he got excited and signed me up for a few computer magazines, and programming books, so I will start looking at them as soon as I start getting them." We expect many more successes as use sites are established throughout the district.

**Q:** Is face-to-face mentoring a

part of it?

**A:** Our student participants have been involved in job shadowing activities and we will continue to provide career placement information, but we can't manage these placements (arrange transportation, school release time) until we are able to hire staff to do this. Our Web site will continue to serve as a place where students can find career mentors for face-to-face (as well as online) interaction, but because of staff limitations, we can only manage the online interactions right now (monitoring, screening and forwarding e-mail correspondence). The parents are responsible for all the arrangements related to accepting and following up on career exploration placements found via a search on our site.

**Q:** Who else is involved in this effort?

**A:** We could not do what we do without the Huron Valley Community Network. This organization has hosted us and assisted us with technical matters from day one. Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation and U-M Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program have also been real supporters from the inception of this project.

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The mentoring network Web site is [www.mentoringnetwork.org](http://www.mentoringnetwork.org) or call (734) 995-8853.