NEAR-PEER MENTORING

Eye to Eye

EYE TO EYE

Scan QR code with your phone's camera to access this content online.

Through near-peer mentorship, Eye to Eye helps students and young adults with learning differences build skills to advocate for what they need to thrive in school and life.

OVERVIEW

The Eye to Eye Near-Peer Mentoring Program is a transformative initiative that empowers students with learning differences through one-on-one mentorship. College and high school students with learning differences serve as mentors, engaging in art-based activities with middle school mentees. Through creative projects and personalized support, the program fosters self-esteem, self-advocacy, and social-emotional growth. It creates a supportive community where mentees develop skills to navigate their challenges, express themselves, and build resilience.

The program offers individualized support tailored to each mentee's specific needs and strengths. Mentors provide guidance, share personal experiences, and offer strategies to help mentees overcome obstacles related to their learning differences. Eye to Eye creates a safe and supportive space, known as the Art Room, where mentees can openly discuss challenges, discover their strengths, and develop self-advocacy skills. The program promotes empowerment and self-advocacy by encouraging mentees to identify and articulate their needs, communicate effectively with teachers and peers, and seek appropriate accommodations and support. The community engagement aspect of the program extends beyond mentor-mentee relationships, fostering a broader support network. The program organizes events and exhibitions to showcase participants' artwork and accomplishments. These gatherings create opportunities to further strengthen the sense of community and understanding.

The program demonstrates a strong impact for both mentors and mentees. The program currently reaches 54 schools and has a partnership model to support new schools in implementing the program. ▶Eye to Eye Video

What Makes This Model Innovative?

High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities

Using neurodivergence as a strength, Eye to Eye emphasizes high expectations for all students and ensures that they have the knowledge and skills to advocate for and access the resources they need to be successful.

Whole-Child Focus

Students in Eye to Eye's Near-Peer Mentoring program engage in experiences that honor their neurodiversity. Curriculum is designed to address students' holistic needs socially, emotionally, and cognitively.
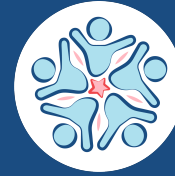
Affirmation of Self & Others

Students identify their strengths and embrace their own unique learning differences, while recognizing and celebrating the diverse identities of their peers. They use mentorship and art-based methods to support everyone's learning needs.

DESIGN

Goals

The Eye to Eye model is designed to prepare students for success by developing a strong sense of self and activating agency within a tight-knit community.

|	
Seen, Heard, Valued	Students feel seen, heard, and valued, and are empowered through confidence building and support to develop a positive and integrated sense of identity.
Connected to Community	Students are connected to a community of neurodiverse peers where they learn and develop their unique strengths and abilities.
Mobilized to Act	Students deepen their understanding of critical concepts like growth mindset, agency, and metacognition, helping them build confidence to mobilize and act.

Experience

In Eye to Eye's classic after-school program, neurodiverse near-peer high school and college students (ages 16-26) work directly with neurodiverse local middle school students (6th-8th grade) to engage in a two-year mentorship program. This community of mentors and mentees is referred to as the Chapter, and meetings take place in a designated classroom space on the

middle school campus, known as the Art Room. 📝Eye to Eye Program Through the program, students participate in 36 lessons that follow a cycle of art-based, action- and reflection-driven mentoring rooted in the Young Adult Success Framework. 🖥️Foundations for Young Adult Success During this cycle, mentor-mentee pairs engage in a creative action art project that promotes agency and growth mindset, followed by a whole group share-out and reflection to deepen understanding and build community. 📝Art Room Flow
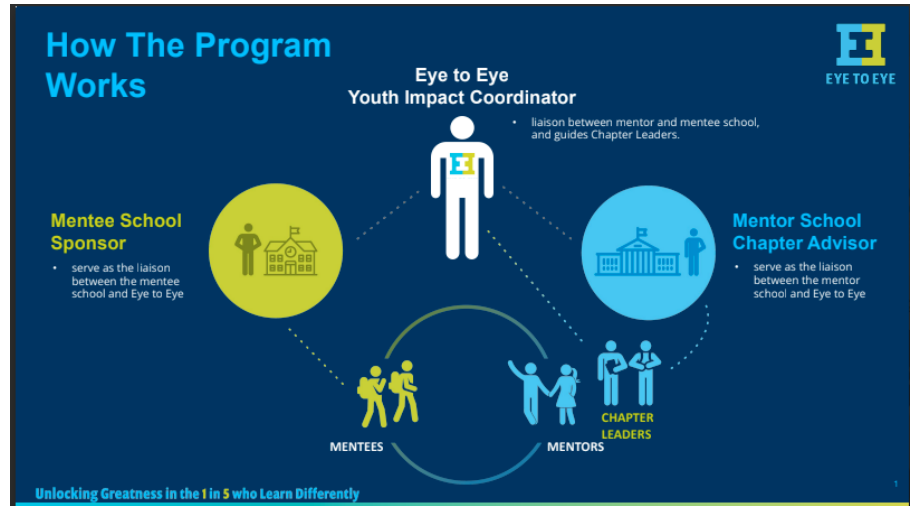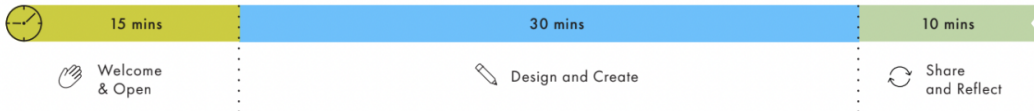
Each year culminates in a two-week Capstone project. The program is led entirely by neurodivergent high school and college students, and supported by adult advisors. Chapter Leaders are carefully selected high school and college students chosen to guide the program at their respective Chapter sites. The mentors are full-time enrolled students who volunteer their time for a year-long commitment to work with their mentees. The program centers on art-based learning to foster community building and promote agency development for both mentors and mentees.

Art Room Community Building

Each Eye to Eye lesson begins with an opening welcome activity to build community and create a safe space for both mentors and mentees. Each Art Room begins in a circle so that the group feels connected in community. The mentors and mentees start by getting to know each other and establishing connections through an icebreaker and welcome activity. The first welcome activity begins with establishing Community Agreements. The Community Agreements are revisited during the welcome activity for all subsequent lessons.

Following the welcome activity, the Chapter Leader reviews the objectives for the day, creating a sense of structure and focus. During this time, the Chapter Leader asks both the mentors and mentees questions aligned to the objective. Mentors are encouraged to share out personal experiences to better connect with what mentees may be going through and generate empathy while modeling vulnerability. This helps to create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable sharing their own experiences and challenges.

While most of the time in the Art Room is spent in one-on-one mentoring, the Chapter comes together at the end of each lesson for a group share and reflection. This time is also spent in a whole group circle to strengthen the community. During this time, mentees share their artwork and use prompts provided by mentors and Chapter Leaders to share their reflections on the lesson. These activities provide a close out to each lesson and continue to build the whole community by fostering a sense of connection and understanding. Following each lesson, Chapter Leaders fill out an Art Report, which records progress and program experience updates.

One-on-One Mentoring

During one-on-one mentoring time, which serves as the "action" portion of the mentoring cycle, the mentor and mentee engage in activities that align to the objectives of the lesson. The mentor supports the mentee by tailoring the activity to their strengths and interests, with a focus on empowering the mentee to embrace their own unique learning style and advocate for themselves in the classroom. During this time, mentors and mentees may use various materials such as art supplies, technology, and other resources to support the mentee's growth and development. This is also a space where the mentor provides emotional support and helps the mentee build confidence and self-esteem. In an example lesson linked below, mentors help mentees create a graphic illustration or playlist cover to represent what they have learned about themselves over the course of the year. This lesson helps mentees understand agency and express their skills and strengths creatively as they advocate for themselves. Example Activity

Capstone Project

Near the end of each year, Eye to Eye Chapters collaborate on individual projects that serve as culminating opportunities for mentees to apply their learnings from the year. To maintain a commitment to community-rooted programming, Chapters exercise their collective agency by selecting capstone projects from a menu of options, which benefits both the mentee-mentor groupings and the Chapter as a whole. There are two capstone options each year, and Chapters can choose to participate in one or both, although they must complete at least one. All mentor and mentee pairs in a Chapter select the same capstone to work on. Capstone projects are designed to be completed over one or two weeks. The scope and sequence allows Chapters to pace their capstone projects according to their needs and calendar. 📑 Capstone Implementation Guidelines

Before beginning, Chapters check with their Mentor Program Coordinator (MPC) and Mentee School Sponsor (MSS) about whether to follow a one-week or two-week capstone project timeline and ensure they have the required supplies. During the capstone project, Chapter Leaders check in with their Art Room community on progress toward their project and fill out the Art Room report to record progress on the capstone project. In one capstone project, students make monuments that reflect their strengths and share their work in a community monument garden. 📑Sample Capstone Project

After completing the capstone project, Chapters share feedback with their MPC and leave enough time for the Art Room to celebrate and invite the school community to view their creations.
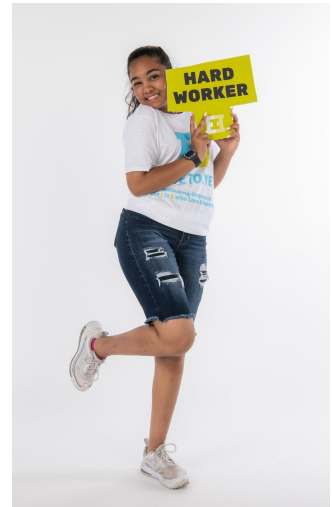
Mentor Roles, Recruitment, and Training

High school and college students that identify as learning differently are recruited and trained to lead programming. Ongoing training and development are provided to them to support their growth as leaders.

Mentors: Mentors are neurodivergent young adults (aged 16-26) who are full-time enrolled high school or college students. Mentors commit to a year of volunteering in the Art Room and work one-on-one with their mentees each week. They are encouraged to volunteer for a second year and work with the same mentee if their schedule allows. Mentors participate in weekly coaching calls with their Chapter Leaders, where they discuss classroom management techniques, debrief

on the weekly lesson, and receive a weekly Art Report. The coaching calls build confidence in leadership for mentors.

Chapter Leaders (CLs): Chapter leaders are neurodivergent young adults (ages 16-26) selected to lead programming at their Chapter. They participate in a week-long intensive training program, called the Youth Leaders Organizing Institute (OI), which is an on-site experience at a higher education campus. During the program, Chapter Leaders participate in workshops, engage in community building activities, and work with leading role models from the national stage to develop their leadership skills. The training is designed to equip Chapter Leaders with the skills necessary to lead their local school chapters and build an empowered community. Additionally, they receive ongoing and in-depth coaching from a dedicated Eye to Eye Program Coordinator. Chapter Leaders are recruited and selected by faculty sponsors, known as Chapter Advisors, from the mentor school. While it is not required for Chapter Leaders to have been mentors previously, it is helpful if they have had previous experience. Chapter Leaders are responsible for mentor recruitment and registration, coaching calls with mentors, and filling out the Art Report. The weekly Art Report includes attendance, program experience questions, and program impact statements, such as recognizing how the art program creates opportunities for young people to work together. The report is used to guide check-ins between the Chapter Leader and program coordinator, providing an opportunity for the Chapter Leader to receive support from the coordinator. 📝Sample Art Room Report

Supporting Structures

Eye to Eye can be implemented in any existing school but requires shifts in curriculum, adult roles, schedules, and more.

Schools leverage Eye to Eye's curriculum to develop mentor-mentee relationships while building critical competencies and skills.

Eye to Eye's Near-Peer Mentoring model leverages an arts-based mentoring curriculum rooted in the Young Adult Success Framework. 🖥Foundations for Young Adult Success. The curriculum consists of 18 lessons per year for the two-year program. 📝 Curriculum Overview

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

Each year has foundational lessons and activities that emphasize the core concepts and provide opportunities for executive functioning, creative thinking, and reflective practice. The curriculum is divided into two arcs: Fall and Spring. The Fall arc consists of projects that highlight the core concepts,

while the Spring arc focuses on activities and at least one capstone project that Chapters work on together to strengthen the mentee-mentor relationship.

Embedded activities are used to provide opportunities that promote mentor and mentee agency to approach learning objectives at varying levels of depth and develop social-emotional, executive functioning, and creative thinking skills. Each lesson plan does the following:
- Introduces key competencies in the Young Adult Success Framework and against desired program outcomes;
- Integrates ways to authentically practice these competencies while promoting higher-order thinking skills;
- Provides opportunities for relationship building between mentor and mentee that is most meaningful to the pair or small group.

Each site receives a curriculum guide providing activity and project plans for mentors and Chapter Leaders. Mentees receive a workbook with worksheets and activity guides to track their growth and reflect on their learning throughout the program.

A weekly Art Report is used to assess programming and the Chapter's progress on meeting goals. Chapter Leaders respond to items on each week's activities. The Art Report is intentionally designed to monitor at the Chapter level and does not assess individual mentee performance like traditional assessments, in order to allow mentees to be as open and creative as possible. Sample Art Room Report

---

SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

A community based on shared experiences is critical to creating a safe space for students to learn and grow.

Creating a community of peers who share similar experiences is a critical aspect of this model. All participants in the Art Room identify as neurodivergent. Mentors and mentees work one-on-one and together as a community, ensuring that the Art Room becomes a safe place to experience and develop empathy, agency, shared understanding, and friendship.

ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

Successful implementation requires designated adult roles at each Chapter and school site.

While programming is led by young adult mentors and Chapter Leaders, there are a number of critical adult roles that support the Art Room community.

- **Mentoring Program Coordinators (MPCs):** Eye to Eye staff that provide weekly coaching to Chapter Leaders in implementing the Art Room curriculum.
- **Chapter Advisors (CAs):** Faculty sponsors from mentor school. CAs support mentor and Chapter Leader recruitment, send recruitment email blasts, and identify mentor transportation to and from the Art Room.
- **In-House Advisors (IHAs):** Faculty sponsors at an in-house Chapter (K-12 school) who support both mentors and mentees.
- **Mentee School Sponsor (MSS):** Faculty sponsor from mentee school who supervises the Art Room weekly, is the primary point of contact for mentee families, and recruits mentees for programming.

Schools are encouraged to have as many CA, IHA, and MSS roles as works for their community to share in program responsibilities. Training for all roles is provided asynchronously through the Eye to Eye e-learning platform.

SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Scheduling should be weekly afterschool and needs to provide time for both community building and one-on-one mentoring.

The Art Room takes place after school, for 60 minutes. Each session opens with a 10- to 15-minute icebreaker to build community, followed by 30-35 minutes spent with mentors and mentees working together on the activity of the week. The final 10 minutes allows for students to share their work and reflect on their experience.

AGENDA

15 mins	30 mins	10 mins
Welcome & Open	Design and Create	Share and Reflect
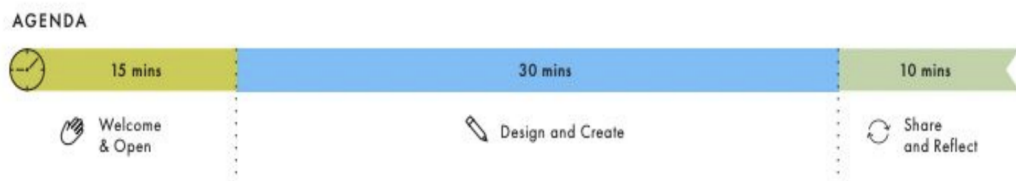
The recruitment and preparation process for Chapter Leaders, mentors, and mentees can start in either Fall or Spring. Once recruitment is complete, weekly Art Rooms are scheduled in alignment to the school calendar and begin in either late September or early February and end in early May.

Eye to Eye supports pairing middle schools with mentor sites if they do not have one.

Eye to Eye assists mentee school sites in finding a mentor site match for their program. Some schools may already have a match, such as K-12

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

schools or districts, before they join the Eye to Eye program; however, this is not a requirement for mentee sites to sign up.

SPACE & FACILITIES

The mentee school must have a dedicated space for the Art Room with materials that allow for different forms of expressions to meet the needs of neurodivergent learners.

The Art Room is located at the middle school campus. It should be a dedicated classroom space that is free from as much distraction as possible. Furniture should be easily movable to create space for different activities.

Mentors and mentees use the range of art materials provided so that mentees can engage in actions and expressions that mean the most to them and meet them where they are. Materials are stored at the middle school campus, and are shipped to the site twice yearly from Eye to Eye.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Pre- and post-surveys are collected from each mentorship site to improve Chapter and national programming.

To measure the impact of near-peer mentoring on positive identity formation, sense of supportive adult figures, and strengths-based mindsets, all Chapter Leaders, mentors, and mentees take a program pre-survey during their first Art Room, and a post-survey during their penultimate time together. Both pre- and post-surveys are included as part of Eye to Eye's curriculum, and youth and young adult voices drive programming.

In addition, the program uses weekly reports, real-time support, progress indicators, surveys, and feedback from mentors and mentees to track progress toward larger goals and measures. A middle of year survey goes to all Chapter members to get a pulse check on how the program is going and to gather recommendations for improvements.

Pre- and post-surveys are also used to measure the program's impact and growth across the year. All surveys are disaggregated by site and shared back with the Chapters to make them actionable. At the end of the year, a program letter includes the learnings and changes made to the curriculum based on feedback to improve the curriculum. 2021-2022 Impact Report

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[Eye to Eye](#) offers the following supports to help you implement their approach.

Partnership
Cost Associated, Funding Available

To bring the Near-Peer Mentorship program to your school, submit an interest form and a team member will get in touch.

Express Interest

Professional Development
Cost Associated, Funding Available

Eye to Eye offers virtual and in-person professional development workshops that are grouped into modules and cover neurodivergent teaching strategies. 📝Professional Learning

Express Interest

Reach

187	29	3,527	2,684
Schools	States	Mentors	Mentees

Impact

The Eye to Eye Near-Peer Mentoring model has proven to be successful for both mentors and mentees across three goals for impact. 📝2021-2022 Annual Report 📝2021-2022 Impact Report

Mentors in Eye to Eye reported feeling safe and supported, saw opportunities for youth collaboration, and gained confidence to mobilize.

- 78% of mentors reported positive experiences in Eye to Eye that made them feel safe and supported
- 88% felt that the program created opportunities for young people to work together and help one another
- 75% felt that the program helped them build confidence to mobilize

Mentees in the program reported positive experiences, saw improvements in self-identity and improved in core social and emotional learning skills.

- 84% of mentees reported experiencing positive youth development that made them feel heard
- 62% of mentees grew, or further maintained, their sense of positive self-identity
- 93% of mentees grew, or maintained growth in, one or more core SEL skills
- Mentees demonstrated lower levels of depression and anxiety by the end of the year than non-mentored peers in a quasi-experimental study. ACAMH Impact of Mentoring

Contact

Joshua Cruz
Associate Director of Partnerships
partnerships@eyetoeyenational.org
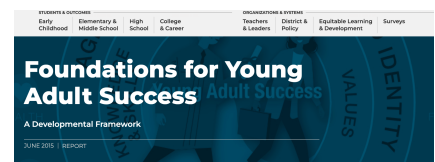
RESOURCES

[Eye to Eye Video](#)
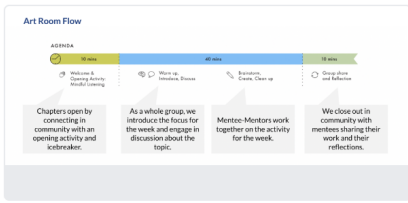An overview of Eye to Eye Near-Peer Mentorship program.

[Eye To Eye Program](#)
A visual of how the Eye to Eye program works connecting mentors and mentees to form a Chapter site.

[Foundations for Young Adult Success](#)
Foundations for Young Adult Success developmental framework from the University of Chicago.

[Eye to Eye Art Room Flow](#)
A visual of the art-based action-and-reflection cycle used for each weekly activity.

[Eye to Eye Example Activity](#)
Example of an Eye to Eye activity identifying strengths to make a playlist cover.

[Eye to Eye Competency and Values Cards](#)
Artifacts from a sample Eye to Eye activity to help students come up with their values.

[Eye to Eye Workbook Playlist Covers](#)
Artifacts from a sample Eye to Eye activity providing sample playlist covers.

[Eye to Eye Capstone Implementation Guidelines](#)
Guidelines for implementing the capstone project for one- or two-week arcs.

[Eye to Eye Sample Capstone Project](#)
An example of a capstone project that can be completed in the final weeks of the program.

[Eye to Eye Sample Art Room Report](#)
A sample Art Room report used to record progress and assess program impact.

[Eye to Eye Curriculum Overview](#)
An Overview of the Eye to Eye program curriculum, including the Scope & Sequence.

[Eye to Eye 2021-2022 Impact Report](#)
Eye to Eye's annual impact 2021-2022 report.

[Eye to Eye Professional Learning](#)

[Eye to Eye 2021-2022 Annual Report](#)

[ACAMH Impact of Mentoring Study](#)

A description of Eye to Eye's professional learning offering to lead inclusive classrooms.	Eye to Eye's 2021-2022 Annual Report.	Journal publication sharing findings on they positive impacts of the Near-Peer Mentoring program.