



*Message from the Rick Baker; Chair
Governor's Municipal Mentoring Initiative
Mayor, City of St. Petersburg*

Right now, there are thousands of children in Florida who are waiting to be matched with a mentor. These children are falling behind and in danger of failing – and some will drop out of school.

While there is no shortage of children who need mentors, there is a shortage of people willing and able to help them. This shortage was the push behind the Governor's Mentoring Initiative, which grants state employees up to one hour of administrative leave per week to participate in programs that mentor children. The initiative also encourages businesses and civic organizations to sponsor similar programs.

Mentoring is a statewide effort, but it will require local action to be a success. That's why the governor is working with the Florida League of Cities who recently launched the new Municipal Mentoring Initiative, which is designed to encourage cities to follow the state's lead by allowing their employees to become mentors.

We already know the benefits of mentoring. Statistics show that young people who are mentored are less likely to use drugs, drink alcohol, skip school or get into fights. And we know mentoring can mark the difference between educational success and failure.

The City of St. Petersburg certainly recognizes the importance of education; it's one of the pillars of the Vision 2020 plan. And we have put our money where our mouth is by encouraging city employees to become mentors. Currently, more than 130 city workers spend one hour a week, on city time, to mentor young people who need help in school or life. I'm one of those city employees. And I am personally directing recruitment efforts throughout the business, faith-based and civic communities to encourage everyone to mentor.

I am a witness to what education and motivation can do. There's nothing like seeing success in a student's eyes, a success that he or she has never felt before. Success that is possible because you took the time to care and the time to help. Students' confidence rises along with grades.

I've seen mentoring work in our community, and I know it can work in others. The Municipal Mentoring Initiative, under the leadership of the Florida League of Cities in partnership with the Florida Institute of Government, is working to recruit more cities.

As chair of the Municipal Mentoring Initiative, I will be sharing St. Petersburg's example and doing my part to bring cities on board. I'm confident that mayors will see the inherent value in providing their employees with opportunities to help children succeed in school and in life, and I hope my enthusiasm for mentoring becomes contagious in every city in this state.

Mentoring provides a unique opportunity to change lives—a child's and your own. I encourage everyone to mentor. In this complex world, it is a simple way to make a difference.