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## **Mentors shape brighter futures**

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One of the high points of life as a superintendent is high school graduation. During last year's ceremony I noticed two of my dear friends in the audience. Both were there to see their grandchildren graduate. Both have made a considerable difference in my life and helped to shape my future.

Art Burkall and Fran Duplissis have been my mentors. I met Art while working full time at Shaw-Walker and attending community college part time. Fran I met later on in my role as a special education teacher. While they never officially signed up for any such job, one was instrumental in my continuing college and the other pushed me to do more beyond the role of classroom teacher. Had it not been for Art, I would not have left my job and gone off to college. Had it not been for Fran's continuous encouragement to do more, I would not have been a school administrator. Such is the power of a good mentor.

This past February, the Muskegon County Mentoring Collaborative held an audience with W. Wilson Goode, the former mayor of Philadelphia. Reverend Goode is the director of the nationally acclaimed "Amachi" Program. Amachi is a mentoring program for children whose parents have been incarcerated.

Reverend Goode described his life as a youth growing up in a large urban city and later about the positive, life changing impact that Amachi mentors have made in the lives of thousands of children. Because of their efforts, kids not only stayed in school but many continued on to higher education. His message to the audience was to get involved with the youth in your community. Make connections with kids and young adults. Do it one kid at a time but do it.

The role of a good mentor is to model and encourage, to act as a cheerleader for the mentee. A mentor is a person who sees the gifts that their mentee has and brings them forward to grow and expand. Mentors listen, they help present options, and they advise but don't preach or criticize. It is the relationship of trust between the mentor and mentee that is the important component. Mentors come from all walks of life. They may be involved in formal mentoring programs or they may be informal such as coaches, ministers, activity directors or even neighbors.

Research has shown that students involved with mentors have improved self-esteem, fewer discipline problems, better attendance at school and they often earn better grades. Mentors can assist kids in dealing with their social, emotional, and academic needs.

Right here in Muskegon County there are a number of mentoring programs. The Muskegon County Mentoring Collaborative, Men in Mentoring, Big Brothers and Sisters, the Muskegon County Cooperating Churches group, Dare to Care, and the Journey 4-H Mentor program to name just a few. Muskegon Public Schools also has an exemplary student mentoring program.

To learn more about becoming a mentor, visit [www.michigan.gov/mentormichigan](http://www.michigan.gov/mentormichigan). Click on “Becoming a Mentor” and enter your zip code. A number of mentoring opportunities in your area will appear. Any of the featured organizations would love to have your help as a mentor for children and young adults here in Muskegon County.