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**United Way of
Southwestern Pennsylvania**

United Way's 'Be a Middle School Mentor' program expands to Mon Valley
KeyBank supports program expansion with three-year funding commitment

Pittsburgh, Pa. (Aug. 2, 2017) – United Way of Southwestern PA will expand its 'Be a Middle School Mentor' program into the Mon Valley, along with an additional Pittsburgh Public School location, thanks to a three-year, \$375,000 grant from KeyBank, along with a collaboration with the Consortium for Public Education, and new research that supports the efficacy and value of the program. As a result of the expansion, this year alone nearly 70 additional middle school students will have a mentor in the upcoming school year.

Mentoring program expands to more schools, including new school district

Now in its ninth year, the 'Be a Middle School Mentor' program will expand to include Clairton Middle School, Founders Hall Middle School in McKeesport, Woodland Hills Intermediate School and Propel North Side. United Way also plans to look for new ways to engage parents and mentors and provide opportunities for students to prepare for the transition to high school. In total, United Way seeks to engage more than 400 mentors to pair with 400 local middle schoolers across 21 schools.

"As part of United Way's United for Children initiative, 'Be a Middle School Mentor' helps to prepare students for high school and beyond, and encourage them to dream big by providing a positive role model in their lives," said Damon Bethea, mentoring projects director, United Way. "We are thrilled to reach even more students through this proven program."

'Be a Middle School Mentor' is the largest school-based mentoring program in the region, matching hundreds of successful adult mentors with middle school students to learn about real careers and jobs, develop big dreams for their future, understand the importance of doing well in school, build character, and have another caring adult role model.

KeyBank announces a three-year grant to support expansion

A three-year funding commitment to United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania for 'Be a Middle School Mentor' was recently announced by KeyBank in conjunction with the First Niagara Foundation to carry out the philanthropic legacy of First Niagara Bank, which it acquired nearly one year ago. Since 2010, First Niagara, now KeyBank, has invested a total of \$1.2 million to United Way's regional mentoring program.

“KeyBank is pleased to provide continued support for the region’s largest mentoring initiative with a multi-year grant to assist in the program’s expansion and ongoing development,” said Todd Moules, regional president for KeyBank in western Pennsylvania. “Helping youth in our community to thrive, learn and become successful adults is important to both our mission and business.”

Research shows mentoring fosters better attendance, higher grades, student positivity

Earlier this year, United Way released compelling research about the positive impact of ‘Be a Middle School Mentor.’ The data included input from students, mentors and, a new perspective, mentees’ parents. The research, conducted by experts from the Learning Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, provides a deeper look at how mentoring impacts education, attendance and character.

“After seeing the direct impact mentors are having on local students through this data, we were encouraged more than ever to expand the program,” Bob Nelkin, president and CEO, United Way of Southwestern PA, said. “At United Way, we focus on preventable programs that have been proven to deliver results. This study really helped us see that ‘Be a Middle School Mentor’ is improving the lives of youth throughout our community. We are especially grateful to KeyBank for this longstanding partnership that is a model for other corporations.”

The evaluation reflects findings from the first seven years of the program. Interestingly, this study included feedback from parents, something United Way had not had the opportunity to formally assess in previous years. One hundred percent of parents surveyed responded that their student got into less trouble at school after becoming involved with ‘Be a Middle School Mentor.’ **And more than 90% said their student was more positive about school, had better attendance and seemed more responsible.**

The study also focused on how ‘Be a Middle School Mentor’ has evolved; how the program impacts mentees’ awareness of careers; whether or not the program impacted student grades and attendance; and more. Researchers found that students reported positive relationships with their mentors and learning about more careers. Additionally, the data reflected better attendance with each year from mentees along with higher grades.

‘Be a Middle School Mentor’ is part of United Way’s United for Children impact work, which focuses on building strong academic skills and character through relationship-based initiatives and meaningful programs. United for Children programs help local students grow and learn skills to equip them to become successful adults.

‘Be a Middle School Mentor’ is recruiting volunteers for the 2017-2018 school year. Community members and local businesses can learn more or sign up to mentor by visiting www.beamiddleschoolmentor.org.

About United Way of Southwestern PA – United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, serving Allegheny, Westmoreland, Fayette and Southern Armstrong counties, leads and mobilizes the caring power of individuals, the business community and organizations to help local people in need measurably improve their lives. United Way creates long-lasting change for the betterment of our community.

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