

## Mentoring can change child's life, attendees told at breakfast meeting

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By Catherine Pritchard

About 60 adults came to E.E. Smith High School Thursday morning to eat breakfast, chat and listen to heartfelt pleas that they invest an hour of their time each week in mentoring a child.

"You take an hour out of your day, and that's about it," said Natasha Scott, the Cumberland County school system's executive director of student services.

And the payoff can be huge, speakers said at the breakfast, which was organized by the school system.

Robert Hines, president and CEO of the United Way of Cumberland County, said when he lived in Arizona, he was a mentor for about four years to a homeless student. The student's grades were dismal when Hines first met him. By his next report card, Hines said, they'd risen to As and Bs.

Hines said many people confuse mentoring with tutoring. They're not the same, he said.

Mentoring is "about a child having someone to have a conversation with," he said.

Naviyea Adams, a sophomore at E.E. Smith, said mentoring has changed the course of his life. While at Nick Jeralds Middle School, he said, he was on the wrong path, aiming to be in a gang. Then he was invited to join a mentoring group at his school and was paired with school social worker Roy Mayhew, who became his mentor.

The experience "really changed my heart and my perspective," said Naviyea, who's 15. He said Mayhew is still his mentor, and he himself now works with students at Jeralds and talks to them about making good choices.

The breakfast was one of a number of mentor-recruiting efforts being mounted by the school system and other members of the Cumberland County Mentor Advisory Council. The council, whose other members include the United Way, mentoring organizations and other groups, is aiming to double the number of mentors in the county.

"We need to continue to grow," said Melody Chalmers, E.E. Smith's principal. "Our students face challenges and obstacles."

Chalmers said mentors can play key roles in the lives of children and not just those from less advantaged homes. She said she grew up in a stable family and both of her parents were college-educated. But she needed mentors nonetheless.

"This is really a community effort and outreach to our children," Cumberland County Schools Superintendent Frank Till Jr. said. "We've come together to see if we could make a difference."

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