

HONORS MENTOR CONNECTION

Touching the Future

Pursuing advanced study under the guidance of a mentor

Honors Mentor Connection is an advanced learning experience for students who seek academic challenge and who are ready to explore their goals for the future. Honors Mentor Connection is a course offering of Intermediate District 287's Gifted Education Services. Each participating district includes Honors Mentor Connection in the school course offerings and reports the Honors Mentor Connection grade on the student's transcript. Students receive a letter grade that is weighted the equivalent of two full-year course credits.

Students who have the opportunity to study under the guidance of a professional have access to unique learning resources:

- Academic and professional expertise
- State-of-the-art equipment and facilities
- Professional conferences and publications
- Colleagues of the mentor
- Authentic experience-based learning immersed in the culture of the field
- Innovative processes of research, development, and/or production

It is through the kindness and generosity of the finest corporations, institutions, and individuals from throughout the metropolitan area that Honors Mentor Connection is able to provide extraordinary learning experiences for highly talented and motivated students guided by eminent professionals.

Developing an early professional reputation

Honors Mentor Connection provides more than the opportunity for academic challenge. It also provides the potential for the student to develop an early professional reputation through such activities as:

- Being a valuable member of the "team" on-site
- Producing a body of work of value to the mentor, the site, the profession
- Networking with colleagues of the mentor
- Producing/contributing to a paper submitted for publication
- Attending/possibly presenting at professional conferences
- Seeking a professional's advice on career and college selection

The mentor-protégé relationship should be mutually beneficial. The student seeks to make the experience valuable to the mentor as well find ways in their day-to-day work to contribute to the mentor's goals by such activities as:

- Analyzing data or processes, and preparing graphic renderings
- Reading and summarizing relevant professional literature
- Transcribing a score or writing program notes
- Reviewing a case, summarizing findings, or finding comparative cases
- Developing computerized presentations
- Raising informed questions, and discussing issues of the field
- Creating new techniques or mastering advanced skills
- Being attentive to public relations and ethical issues

Each Honors Mentor Connection student also develops a significant project, of professional-level expertise and quality, that also has real-world application. Ideas for the student's project are developed through mutual dialogue between the mentor and the student, based on the needs of the mentor and the skills and interests of the student. These projects are shared at an Honors Mentor Connection Scholars' Forum on the last Wednesday in April, where each student has a poster presentation to feature the project and the experience.

Networking with talented peers from throughout the metropolitan area

Honors Mentor Connection is designed to connect students with the professional community of their interest. When that door is opened, the students acquire a professional reputation based on the quality of their performance. To prepare students in this endeavor, Honors Mentor Connection provides training and support in its seminar series.

To fully understand the Honors Mentor Connection program, it is necessary to understand the peer/seminar component. Throughout the school year, students attend Honors Mentor Connection seminars featuring challenging speakers from the professional and academic communities in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. These seminars address selected topics that fall into three general categories: professional development, personal development, and leadership.

In September and October the seminars meet three times per week to prepare students for the mentorship. The students develop skills of value to the prospective mentors: advanced research skills, grant writing, professional readiness, and technical reading in the field of interest. From November through May students have seminars or special field activities once a week. The balance of their week is flexibly scheduled to prepare for and grow in their field.

The seminars take many forms: large group, small group, independent field activities, and special events offsite. Through the seminar series, Honors Mentor Connection students have the opportunity to develop friendships with other talented emerging leaders to last a lifetime. Students enjoy being surrounded by peers who are as highly focused and motivated as they are. The areas of focus are very different, spanning arts, sciences, and social sciences, but the passion is inspiring. Together they share and support one another in what students describe as “the most challenging and fulfilling experience of my high school career.”

Enhancing academic credentials

Students increase their academic credentials when they accomplish professional quality work in a variety of ways:

- Professional Portfolio demonstrating work product
- Product development with real application
- Seminar or conference presentation
- Performance, exhibit, or public presentation to showcase their work

Students competing for highly selective opportunities must seek ways to demonstrate their unique qualifications. Honors Mentor Connection participants demonstrate personal qualities that will set them apart from other candidates:

- Strong intrinsic motivation and dedication
- Maturity to independently shape and pursue advanced learning
- Flexibility and creativity in problem solving
- Sustained focus over significant time
- Commitment to challenge and quality
- Respect and loyalty

Honors Mentor Connection students enhance academic credentials and stand out amongst competition as they seek:

- The college of their choice
- Scholarships and national competitions in the art, sciences, and social sciences
- Honors programs, research opportunities, and other highly selective opportunities
- Employment opportunities that bridge to their future

Honors Mentor Connection coordinators work with the student and the school to develop an individualized plan addressing graduation standards. Students have access to the expertise of professionals, advanced-level materials, and state-of-the-art equipment. For students seeking honors or distinction, those advantages are vital.

Identifying appropriate candidates

Students who are successful in Honors Mentor Connection have the following characteristics in common:

- Passionate interest in their subject area, and the academic capacity for significantly advanced learning
- Capacity for rigorous experiential learning, thereby standing out in the college and scholarship selection process
- Motivation to develop a professional project and portfolio demonstrating academic potential
- Ethical standards and personal qualities that earn the respect and trust of colleagues
- Courage to take risks, the wisdom to seek guidance, and the desire to make the experience mutually beneficial
- Capacity for original thought and vision, for flexibility in new situations, and for making opportunities happen