

RISE

/rewind

Winter/Spring 2026



A LEGACY OF KINDNESS:

REMEMBERING TIM O'NEIL

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Some people have a way of making everyone around them feel seen. Tim O'Neil was one of those people.

For those in the community of Rhode Islanders Sponsoring Education who didn't have the chance to know him personally, his family describes Tim simply as "a good man"—thoughtful, loving, and deeply supportive. Being present for the people he cared about mattered to him most. And even beyond his own circle, Tim had a natural instinct to help anyone who needed it.

In fact, his family often jokes that Tim could "make friends with a lamppost." He had a rare ability to walk into any room and strike up a conversation with anyone—a corporate executive, a little old lady, or a child. Within

moments, people felt comfortable, accepted, and valued. Tim had a gift for making others feel special, like they truly mattered.

Education and opportunity were also things Tim believed deeply in. He saw education as a gateway—not just to knowledge, but to growth, exploration, and connection. A good education, he believed, opened doors to new ideas, new people, and new possibilities.

Helping others, though, wasn't something Tim overthought. It was simply who he was. Whether it was offering someone a drink, helping push a stalled car, or mentoring a young person, kindness came naturally to him. Making others feel good made him feel good.

Today, Tim's family believes he would be most proud not of anything he accomplished himself, but of the people he loved—his children, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, his mentee Lathan, and so many others whose lives he touched. (cont'd page 4)

Student Spotlight—*In His Own Words:*

Star 'Lin

Hi, my name is Star 'Lin, and I am a 9th grader at Bishop Hendricken High School. I love the sport of basketball and am very sports-minded, and I play whenever I can. I'm also a funny and kind person who tries to stay positive and respectful toward others.



My experience at Bishop Hendricken has been amazing so far. I really value the strong community, the sports programs, and the sense of brotherhood the school offers. The environment is like no other — everyone is welcoming, and people carry themselves with pride and respect.

I became part of RISE in 7th grade in 2023, when I attended St. Pius V Catholic School. I remember my mom telling me that I would have the opportunity to attend a private Catholic school, receive a stronger education, and

grow in my faith thanks to RISE. I was filled with joy and appreciation. It meant a lot to be given the chance to grow academically and set higher standards for myself.

One of the biggest challenges I faced before joining RISE was my education. Because of the opportunity RISE gave me, I've gained more confidence and knowledge than I think I would have otherwise. It helped me believe in myself and push to do better.

RISE has helped prepare me for what comes next in many ways — from becoming more independent to taking on responsibilities like advocating for myself. Being in an environment where people truly want me and others to succeed has helped me feel more prepared for the future.

I want RISE donors and supporters to know that the impact they are making is huge. It may seem like just a program to some people, but to students like me it is a great honor and opportunity. It shows that someone truly cares about the well-being and success of kids like us. Your efforts do not go unnoticed, no matter how big or small.

If I were speaking to someone who is thinking about supporting RISE, I would say: do it. You can change someone's life by giving them an opportunity that many students would not otherwise have. It is truly worth supporting.

Being a RISE student means being grateful for the support I've been given and using it to grow academically and personally. It means taking my education seriously, working hard, and showing responsibility and good character. I see it as a chance to build my future, give my best effort, and one day give back to others the way I've been helped.



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Over the past few months, I've had the privilege of visiting many of our students at their schools. These visits are always a highlight. Seeing our scholars in their classrooms, hearing about their goals, and witnessing the confidence they are building reminds me just how powerful the RISE community truly is. Our students continue to show incredible resilience, determination, and pride in their accomplishments.



At the same time, we are beginning the important process of reviewing applications for the next class of RISE scholars for the upcoming academic year. Each application tells the story of a young person with potential, determination, and hope for their future. It is both humbling and inspiring to read about their dreams and to think about the impact our community can have in helping them pursue those dreams.

While we are always focused on the work ahead, one of our most joyful celebrations is just around the corner. In May, we will gather for our annual Graduation Celebration to honor our graduating seniors. This event is one of the most meaningful moments of the year for our organization. It is a time when scholars, families, sponsors, mentors, board members, and supporters come together to celebrate the perseverance and success of students who have worked incredibly hard to reach this milestone.

Watching our seniors walk across that stage is always a powerful reminder of what is possible when a community comes together to support young people. Their accomplishments belong not only to them, but also to the many people who believed in them along the way.

Thank you for being part of the RISE community and for continuing to stand beside our scholars. Your support makes these moments—and these futures—possible.

With gratitude,

Kaitlin Della Grotta
RISE Executive Director

a legacy of kindness: Remembering Tim O'Neil *(cont'd from page 1)*

That spirit of care and encouragement now lives through the Tim O'Neil Scholarship Fund, ensuring that Tim's generosity continues to support students in Rhode Island who are working hard to build brighter futures.

For Tim's family, seeing his name connected to opportunity for young people feels deeply meaningful.

"It makes us so proud that Tim is continuing to help kids," they share. "It was always important to him. Knowing that his name lives on supporting these students just feels right."

If Tim could see the students benefiting from his scholarship today, his family believes he would feel humbled, honored, and incredibly proud of "his kids." And they hope every student who receives the scholarship feels not only hopeful and empowered, but also loved and supported.

They would want each recipient to know something simple and powerful:

Tim believes in you.

Creating the scholarship fund has also helped Tim's family find comfort in continuing the support and encouragement he would have offered himself. It brings them peace to know that he is still connected to the work that meant so much to him.

His story also holds an important lesson for others who may be considering getting involved. When Tim was first asked to become a mentor, he hesitated. He worried he might not have enough to offer a young person.

But he took the leap anyway—and that leap created a relationship that meant the world to both mentor and mentee.

His family hopes that example inspires others to step forward, too.

Because sometimes the smallest act—offering your time, your encouragement, or your support—can change a life.

And that's exactly the legacy Tim leaves behind: a life defined by kindness, connection, and the belief that every young person deserves the chance to succeed.

Today, the RISE community can help carry that legacy forward. By supporting the Tim O'Neil Scholarship Fund, donors ensure that more students can access opportunity, pursue their education, and break cycles that once limited their futures.

It was always important to Tim to meet the students, hear their dreams, and cheer them on.

In many ways, he still is.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Lathan



Background & Connection to RISE

Q. Can you share a little about yourself — where you are now and what you're currently doing?

A: Right now I currently hold a certificate as a CNA. I am working at a school as a 1:1 CNA with a kindergarten. I am also volunteering with the American Red Cross as a NHQ Volunteer Intake Team Member. Right now I am in the phase of waiting for a decision on getting into a Masters school for nursing at Columbia University. This is a 15 month program and I will receive a Masters Degree in Nursing.

Q. How old were you when you first became involved with RISE, and what do you remember about that time in your life?

A: I was about 10-11 years old when I started RISE. I started off with one mentor however from what I remember he had moved so it did not work out. Then I received another mentor and it was like a puzzle piece that was missing and Tim and I eventually ended up together.

Mentorship Experience

Q. You were also a mentee — how did that relationship impact you?

A: I learned a great deal about myself through my experience as a mentee. I never realized how positively having a mentor would affect me until I

went through this program. Having a mentor helped me view challenges differently and taught me how to grow as a person, even when I made mistakes. Tim taught me the importance of staying focused on my priorities and remaining organized and accountable. He consistently encouraged me to strive to be the best version of myself, both academically and personally. Knowing that Tim was always invested in my success and genuinely wanted to see me achieve my goals motivated me to push myself further. I truly believe I would not be where I am today without his guidance. I can still clearly recall many of the things Tim shared with me during our meetings, and his faith in me continues to inspire me to pursue my goals with confidence. Tim helped me believe in myself and showed me the value of being authentic. Being around him made me feel comfortable being myself, and that is something I hope to carry forward in my own life and future relationships.

Q: What's one memory with your Tim that has stayed with you over the years?

A: One memory with Tim that has stayed with me over the years is our tradition of going to Providence College basketball games. Before each game, we would always go to the same restaurant, where we would talk about life, catch up, and just enjoy each other's company. Then we would head to the game and end up yelling at the players and referees whenever things didn't go our way. Those days meant a lot to me because they showed how our relationship went beyond mentorship. They were moments of laughter, support, and genuine connection, and they're memories I'll always carry with me. Oh and if you know you know the "TURKEY".

Q: Did your mentor help shape how you see yourself or your future? How?

A: Yes, my mentor helped shape how I see both myself and my future. I always knew I wanted to work in the medical field, even though my path has changed along the way. Tim taught me that it's okay not to have everything figured out right now and that life unfolds (continued page 6)

Lathan

in its own time. He reminded me to have faith that I will end up where I'm meant to be. One moment that truly impacted me was when Tim shared his personal experience with cancer. Hearing how supportive his medical team was and how compassionately the nurses treated him made the medical field feel much more meaningful to me. I could see in his eyes how grateful he was for the care he received and how strong he was throughout that process. His story deepened my desire to pursue a career in healthcare and showed me the importance of being someone who supports and cares for others during their most difficult moments. Growth & Challenges

Q: What challenges were you facing as a young person, and how did Tim help you navigate them?

A: Being a first-generation college student, Tim was someone I could always count on. I felt comfortable being open with him about my college experience and anything I needed help with along the way. Since college was completely new to me and my parents and siblings had not attended college, navigating everything on my own was challenging.

While my family supported me throughout this journey, Tim was the person I could turn to for guidance on things they were unfamiliar with. Whether it was emailing a professor, asking for help in a course, or navigating college life in general, Tim was always there to offer advice and reassurance. His support made the college experience feel much less overwhelming and helped me gain confidence in myself.

Q: Was there a moment when you realized you could achieve more than you thought?

A: Yes, there was a moment when I realized I could achieve more than I thought. That realization came through Tim's constant belief in me. Even when I doubted myself or felt overwhelmed, he reminded me of my abilities and encouraged me to keep pushing forward.

Education & Career Path

Q: How did RISE/Tim/ influence your educational journey?

A: RISE and Tim played a major role in shaping my educational journey. Through the program, I gained guidance, structure, and support that I didn't have access to elsewhere as a first-generation college student. Tim helped me stay focused on my priorities, pushed me to stay organized, and encouraged me to believe in myself during moments of doubt. His mentorship made college feel more manageable and helped me approach my education with confidence and purpose.

Q: What are you most proud of accomplishing since graduating from the program?

A: Since graduating from the program, I am most proud of how much I have grown both academically and personally. I learned how to advocate for myself, ask for help when needed, and take responsibility for my goals. Navigating college as a first-generation student was challenging, but the skills and confidence I gained through RISE helped me stay motivated and continue moving forward despite obstacles.

Q: Did anything you learned through RISE carry over into college, work, or adult life?



A: I learned the importance of time management, accountability, and communication. Tim taught me how to be proactive, whether that meant reaching out to professors, seeking support at work, or staying focused on long-term goals. Most importantly, RISE taught me to believe in myself and to trust that growth comes with time and effort. It also reminded me never to take anything for granted, to appreciate the people who consistently show up for you, and to make the effort to stay connected by checking in on one another.

Looking Back

Q: If you could talk to your younger self on your first day with RISE, what would you say?

A: I would tell my younger self to trust the process and not be afraid to ask for help. I would remind myself that it's okay not to have everything figured out and that growth takes time. Most importantly, I would say to believe in yourself because you are capable of more than you think—and to speak up when things are not going well, rather than struggling in silence.

Q: What would you want donors and supporters to understand about the impact of their support?

A: I would want donors and supporters to know that their support truly changes lives. Their investment goes beyond academics, it provides mentorship, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Because of their support, students like me had access to guidance and encouragement that made navigating college and life feel possible and less overwhelming.

Q: How would you describe RISE in one word — and why?

A: Transformative – it shaped me into who I am today and gave me the tools, support, and belief I needed to grow in all aspects of my life and I will take it with me in everything that I do.

Giving Back & Perspective

Q: In what ways has your experience inspired how you show up for others today?

A: My experience with RISE and Tim taught me the importance of showing up consistently and being present for others. I try to be someone who listens, encourages, and offers support, especially to those who may feel unsure or overwhelmed. Because I know how much having a mentor meant to me, I try to lead with

patience, understanding, and reassurance. Tim had a great heart and he showed love to everyone and anyone he would encounter during our outings. It was nothing but laughter and joy.

Q: Do you see yourself mentoring or supporting young people in the future?

A: Yes, I absolutely see myself mentoring and supporting young people in the future. Being part of RISE showed me how powerful mentorship can be, especially for first-generation students or anyone unsure about their path. I want to be the person I needed like someone who offers guidance, encouragement, and belief when others are still learning to believe in themselves. Even now, in my current job, I find myself doing this by being there for others during challenging times or simply offering support when someone needs help. Mentorship, in many ways, is already a part of how I show up in my daily life.

Q: What does “success” mean to you now compared to when you were younger?

A: What success meant to me when I was younger was having everything figured out and achieving specific milestones. Now it means to continue to follow your dreams, even when you feel discouraged, and to understand that small steps can lead to your greatest achievements.

Closing

Q: What message would you share with current RISE scholars?

A: I would tell current RISE scholars to take full advantage of every opportunity and resource the program offers. Don't be afraid to ask for help, speak up when things are challenging, and trust that growth takes time. Most importantly, believe in yourself and the potential you have, small steps, consistent effort, and the guidance of mentors like Tim can take you further than you ever imagined.

Q: How has being part of the RISE family shaped who you are today?

A: Being part of the RISE family has shaped me into a more confident, resilient, and proactive person. The program taught me the importance of accountability, communication, and self-belief, and it showed me the power of mentorship and community.

partner school spotlight:

St. Pius School

Saint Pius V School in Providence is a cherished partner in the RISE community. This year, four RISE scholars in 7th and 8th grade are part of the St. Pius community, where they are known and valued as members of both the school family and the RISE family. In a recent letter of support, Principal Sr. Mary Amata shared that “our RISE students are truly transformed by their experience at the school, but more importantly, the school has been transformed by them.” Through student leadership, parish life, and extracurricular opportunities, the partnership between Saint Pius V and RISE continues to help students feel supported, connected, and encouraged to grow.



RISE is proud to announce the following Grant Awards for 2026:

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Q: *What first inspired you to become a mentor, and what drew you to your mentee specifically?*

A: I wanted to get involved in the local community and I have always loved working with children. When I found RISE it seemed like a wonderful program to volunteer my time to. I knew Aubrey and I would be a good match when I heard she was very active, she loves sports and physical activity which is something I also love doing. She is also an animal lover just like me, so I knew we would have a lot in common.

Q: *How would you describe your relationship with your mentee in three words?*

A: Long lost sisters.

Q: *What's one moment with your mentee that made you especially proud or moved you?*

A: We went ice skating for one of our outings and it was Aubrey's first time ever ice skating. She was frustrated at first (because she wasn't perfect at it immediately) but she got the hang of it so fast. She was having so much fun, but she noticed a little girl in the ice rink all alone holding onto the edge and repeatedly falling. Aubrey skated over to her and helped her up each time she fell, even offering her own hand for this girl to hold onto so they could skate together. It nearly brought me to tears. She didn't know this little girl at all but she wanted to show her kindness and help however she could--even if it meant she fell with her! I felt so emotional watching her and I think the world needs more people like that--and she's only 9!

Q: *What have you learned from your mentee that you didn't expect?*

A: That the K-Pop Demon Hunters soundtrack is actually pretty decent music.

How has mentoring impacted you personally or professionally?

A: Personally it has brought me so much joy. I feel like I have gained an extended family now with Aubrey and her grandma, Debra.

Q: *What does trust and connection look like in your mentoring relationship?*

A: Trust and connection for me means not forcing what

you want on your mentee. You have to listen to them both verbally and non-verbally, especially when they are so young. I think it's really important to be there for them in whatever capacity they need, even if they aren't fully articulating it. Trust and connection means meeting Aubrey wherever she's at (mentally, emotionally), and not demanding or expecting anything more. It means being reliable and maintaining a steady presence in her life.

Q: *What would you say to someone considering becoming a mentor?*

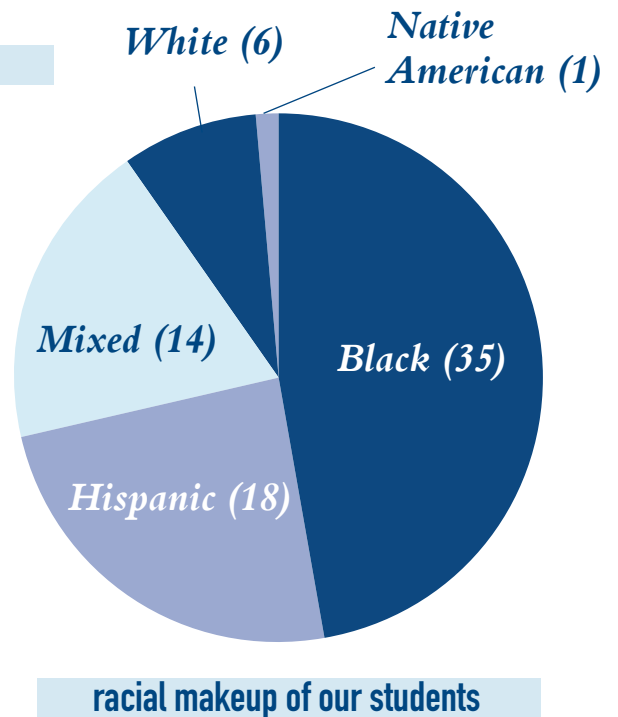
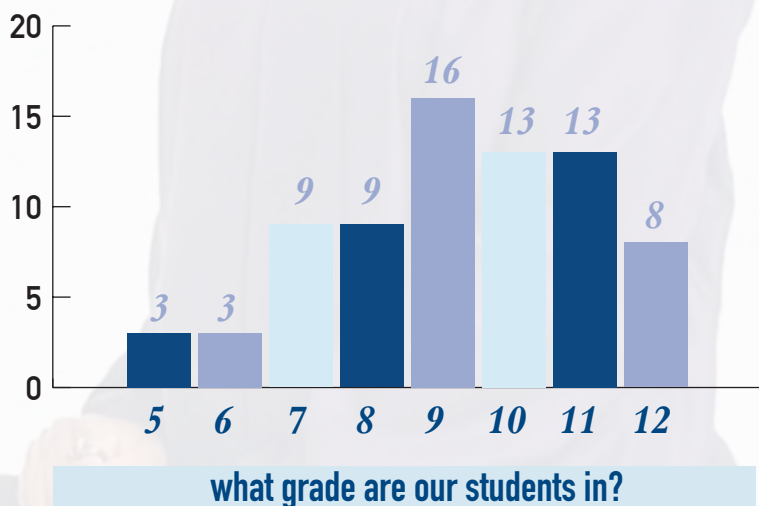
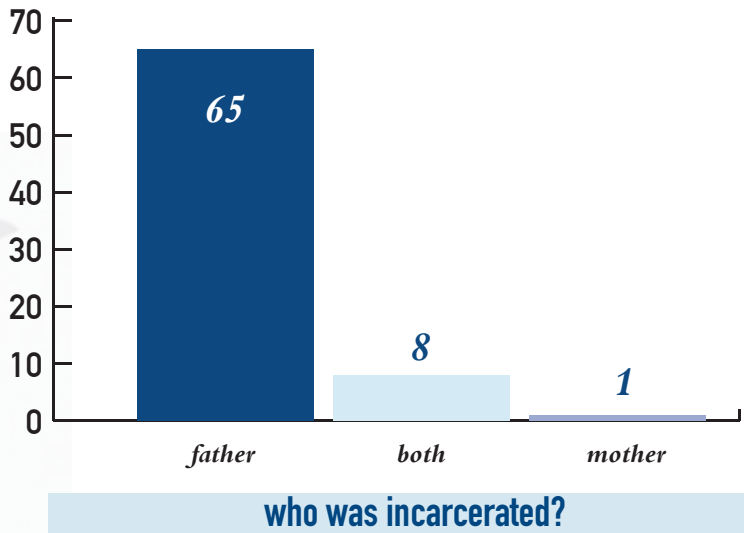
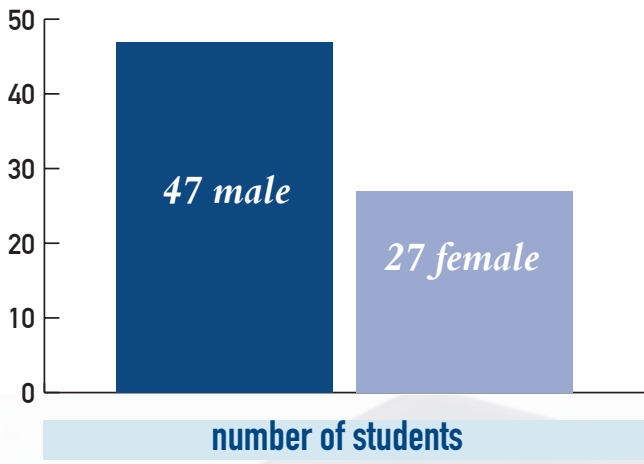
A: You absolutely should do it. You have no idea what talents and perspectives you have that could influence or positively impact a child. You don't have to be the best at anything; you don't have to be the smartest person or the greatest leader, you just need to be physically present and open to whatever opportunities present themselves. It is such a rewarding experience and I am so happy RISE exists.



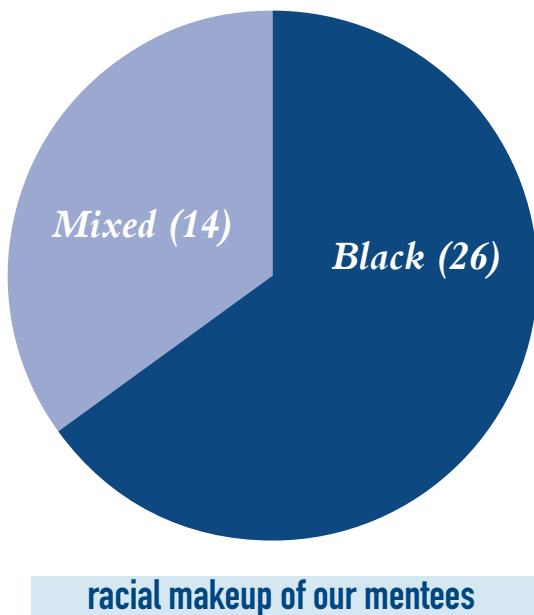
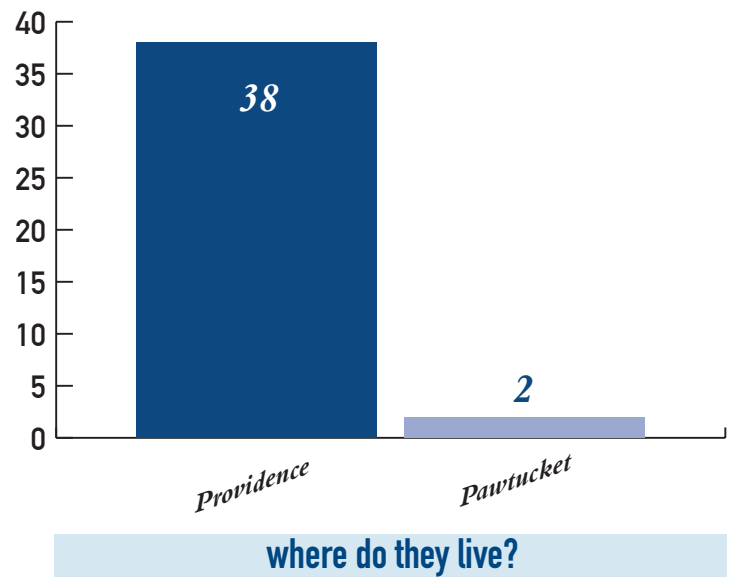
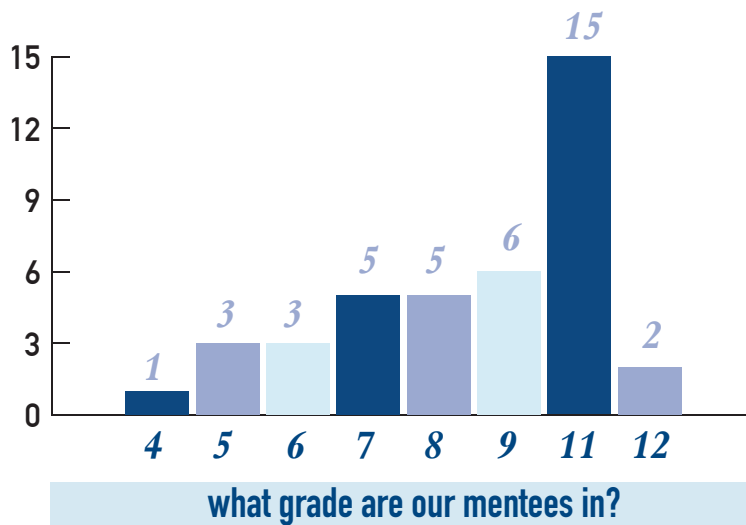
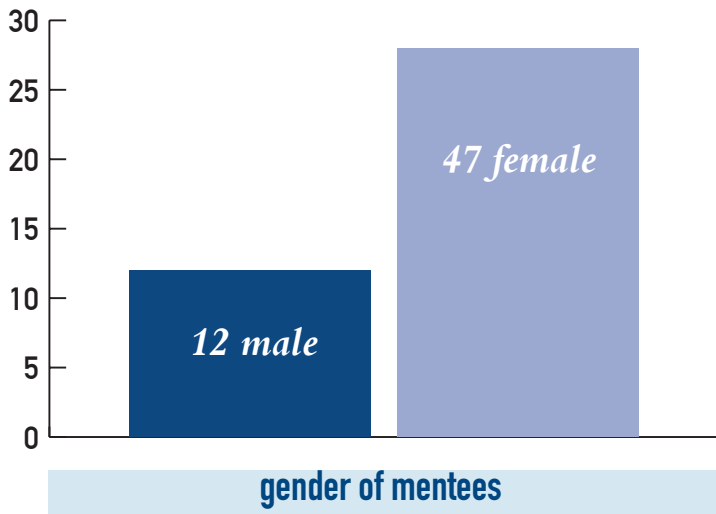
RISE Demographics



scholars



mentees



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681 Park Avenue, Suite 26
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