

A mentoring relationship is just an e-mail away

By DEBRA SKODACK
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The two teens have shared a lot with their YouthFriends mentor, Candis Crain, during their senior year of high school.

Leo Sanchez debated presidential politics with Crain. Amber Vochatzer shared her dream of one day performing on Broadway. Both teens gave Crain details about prom.

What's unusual about these YouthFriends relationships is that they blossomed and grew entirely through e-mail. On Wednesday, Crain and the teens finally met over lunch.

The three are part of YouthFriends' e-mentoring program, in which students and mentors communicate weekly by e-mail throughout the school year. The program began at YouthFriends in 2000 and this year matched mentors with 390 area students at eight middle and high schools.

In a traditional YouthFriends program, adults meet with students at their schools each week for an hour.

At Bonner Springs High School, where Sanchez and Vochatzer will graduate this spring, 164 students – the entire senior class – were hooked up with 122 e-mentors. The high school's special education students did not participate.

"It's amazing how close the relationships are," said Larry Berg,



YouthFriends mentor Candis Crain (left) met with Bonner Springs High School seniors Amber Vochatzer and Leo Sanchez on Wednesday for the first time.

THE DETAILS

| For more information about YouthFriends e-mentoring, go to www.youthfriends.org.

YouthFriends and business partnerships coordinator for the Bonner Springs/Edwardsville School District. Berg and English teacher Chris Wood got the all-senior class mentoring program launched during the 2001-02 school year.

"It's a bridge from senior class to the real world," Berg said.

Denise Kruse, YouthFriends

board president, said she was surprised how close she has become to the students she has e-mentored at Bonner Springs. Kruse likes the flexibility of using the computer because she travels for work.

Kruse also sees the worth in involving the entire class.

"It shows that the program isn't just for at-risk kids," she said. "There are valedictorians, very involved kids."

Vochatzer said the students like the program's high-tech side.

"That's what we are used to now," she said.