



CENTER FOR SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

# **Tapping Into the Untapped: How to use the most underutilized resource in your school building to improve student outcomes**

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# Who are we?

## Center for Supportive Schools (CSS)

- CSS partners with schools to help make school buildings a place where students want to be. We leverage the resources already in present in schools to create **safer and more supportive, engaging, and inspiring learning communities.**
- There are currently 230 schools operating CSS programs reaching about 50,000 students per year.
- We serve urban, suburban, and rural communities and work in public (including charter), private, and independent schools.



# Who are you?

- District and School Administrators
- Teachers
- Student Support Services Professionals
- Elementary Educators
- Middle Grades Educators
- High School Educators
- Government Leaders
- Community-Based and Nonprofit Leaders
- Business Leaders
- Funders
- Parents
- Students
- Who did we miss?

# Workshop Objectives

As a result of this workshop, we hope you will:

- understand the value of training and mobilizing students as effective peer mentors who contribute to a more positive school climate
- appreciate the challenges involved in school-based peer mentoring and understand best practices to address them; and
- understand the evidence supporting a school-based peer mentoring program that supports and eases students' successful transition into middle and high school by tapping into the power of older students as leaders, mentors, and positive role models for younger students.



# What is Peer Group Connection (PGC)?

A peer-to-peer group mentoring model that trains and mobilizes older/more experienced students to help ease the transition into school for incoming students and improve school culture and climate.

- **PGC for high schools:** 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders support 9<sup>th</sup> graders
- **PGC for middle schools:** 8<sup>th</sup> graders support 6<sup>th</sup> graders

Each of these programs uses a distinct and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

# School Connectedness

*- the belief by students that people in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals –*

is a powerful protective factor in the lives of young people and an important prerequisite to reduced bullying, greater academic achievement, lower dropout rates, improved grades, fewer discipline referrals, and fewer high-risk behaviors.

Blum & Libbey, 2004; <http://www.casel.org/basics/climate.php>

# My Teenage Self

Once upon a time, we were where our students are. Our experiences may have looked different from theirs, or our experiences may have looked similar. Almost across the board, though, adolescence wasn't—and isn't—easy.

To help establish context for considering programming that supports school connectedness and ensures that students make an effective transition into high school, let's begin with a quick visit back to that time and place when we, too, were teenagers...

# Directions

Working in groups of three, participants introduce themselves to one another and take turns sharing responses to any one of the following questions:

- *What is one memory you have about a time in school when you felt strongly **connected** to other students?*
- *What is one memory you have about a time in school when you felt strongly **disconnected** from other students?*
- *Think back to someone – an adult or peer - in your school experience who threw you a **lifeline**. He/she knew you and cared about you, and this person’s caring made a positive difference in your life.*

# Reflections

*What patterns did we see emerge in our memories of school connectedness and disconnectedness?*

*What might make it even harder for today's students to experience a sense of school connectedness?*



# Effective Peer Mentoring in Action

Let's watch a brief video that highlights an effective peer mentoring model known as Peer Group Connection (PGC) in Baltimore, MD.

(<https://vimeo.com/163602933>)

*What resonates with you?*



# PGC Curriculum

The PGC curriculum uses engaging, hands-on activities to address issues that have been shown to help reduce risk behaviors and produce positive student outcomes, including high school completion. Curriculum topics include:

- Sense of School Belonging
- Competence in Interpersonal Relationships
- Conflict Resolution, Anger Management, & Violence Prevention
- Bullying & Bystander Behavior
- Achievement Orientation & Motivation
- Goal Setting
- Coping Skills
- Decision Making
- Peer Acceptance & Resisting Peer Pressure
- Anger Management
- Stress Management
- Service Learning

# Impact of Peer Mentoring: What the Research Says

## Mentees experience improvements in:

- Connectedness to school and peers
- Competency, self-efficacy
- Grades, academic achievement
- Positive behavior and attitudes

## Mentors experience improvements in:

- Connectedness to school
- Self-esteem
- Empathy
- Communication and conflict resolution
- Relationships with parents

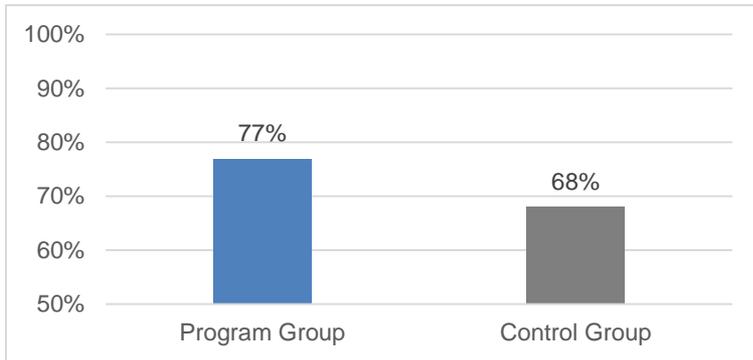


<http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/building-effective-peer-mentoring-programs-intro-guide.pdf>

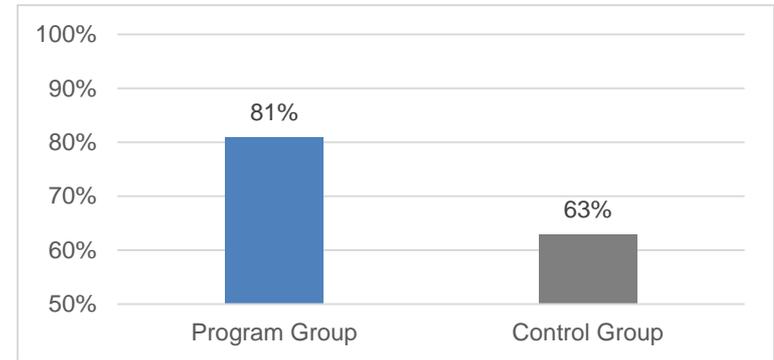
# Results

% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who graduated from high school

## All Students

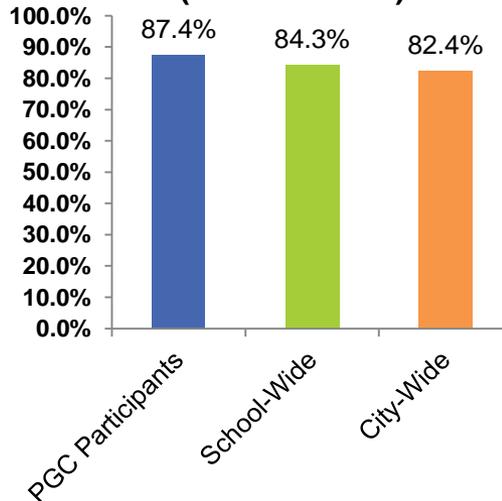


## Male Students

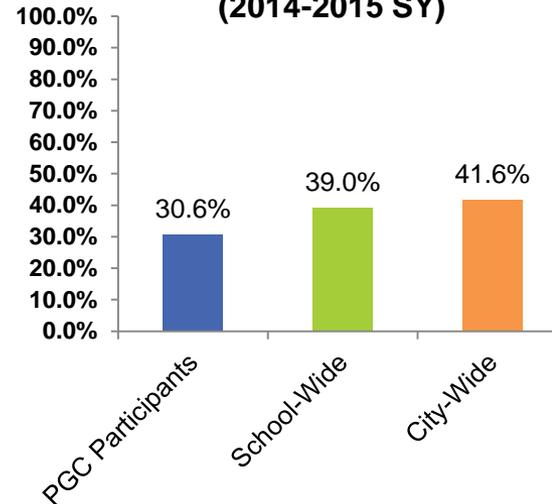


### Comparison of 9<sup>th</sup> grade attendance and chronic absence rates

#### Attendance Rates (2014-2015 SY)



#### Chronic Absentee Rates (2014-2015 SY)



# Other Results

- Higher grades
- Higher on-time promotion rates
- Better attendance
- Fewer discipline referrals
- Fewer instances of fighting and suspension
- Improved communication with peers and others

# What are steps to establishing effective peer mentoring programs?

- **Determine goals and objectives.** Establish goals, measurable objectives and expected outcomes as an initial task.
- **Develop a stakeholder team.** This group of invested individuals should bring different skills and resources that get a program started and support its sustainability. This team should meet regularly throughout program implementation to assess progress and troubleshoot challenges.
- **Choose skilled faculty advisors.** Faculty advisors should be authentically committed to program success and to working with peer mentors. Selected individuals should be able to model strong facilitation and leadership skills for peer mentors.

# Effective programs, continued

- **Implement a thorough peer mentor selection process.** Peer mentors should be a well-rounded and diverse group, representative of the student population. Consider recruiting students with existing leadership skills as well as students who would benefit from the opportunity to develop and practice leadership skills. Create an application process for peer mentors, which may include a student application, group and/or individual interview, and faculty recommendations.
- **Provide robust training.** Training for peer mentors should continue throughout the school year and:
  - Create a strong support network amongst the peer mentors,
  - Provide ongoing opportunities for peer mentors to learn and practice facilitation skills and mentoring activities, and
  - Provide regular opportunities for peer mentors to reflect on their practice.

# Effective programs, continued

- **Utilize an interactive, structured, and engaging curriculum.** Peer mentors should be supported by a structured curriculum that provides engaging, hands-on activities. The curriculum should be designed:
  - With attention to the stages of group development to help students form relationships in a safe, supportive environment,
  - To ensure both peer mentors and mentees remain engaged, with interactive and relevant activities, and
  - To incorporate reflective practice to support students' learning critical skills aligned to the goals and objectives of the program.
- **Integrate program into the school day and educational plan.** Student commitment and consistency will be significantly enhanced by integrating the peer mentoring program into the school day, within the daily school schedule of each participating student. Address scheduling logistics in advance to avoid challenges.

# Effective programs, continued

- **Involve parents.** Communicate regularly with parents about their child's participation in your program, whether they are a peer mentor or mentee. Consider leveraging peer mentors to facilitate family events that include engaging activities that help foster communication between parents and their children.
- **Evaluate.** Meet regularly throughout the year with your stakeholder team to assess your progress. Consider conducting both a process evaluation (to assess program implementation quality) and an outcome evaluation (to assess the impact of the program on participants). Student surveys are one tool that can be used to evaluate program outcomes.



# Reflections

*What stands out from list as most important to the success of a peer mentoring program?*

*What steps are missing?*

*Which step(s) do you think can be most challenging for schools? Why?*



# How Much Does PGC Cost?

The costs outlined below are a guide. In some regions, costs are substantially lower because they are subsidized by grant funds and generous donations. Cost is also determined by the number of students reached. Please speak to a CSS staff member directly about the costs for your specific school.

## Program Costs

**(paid to CSS)**

\$20,000 per year for 3 years  
to serve up to 125  
freshmen/80 6<sup>th</sup> graders

- Curriculum (3 sets)
- Training (11 days)
- Technical assistance

## Annual In-School Costs

**(not paid to CSS)**

\$2,000 - \$8,000 per cohort

- T-shirts
- Peer leader retreats
- Special events
- Stipends (Year 1)

# Questions, Thoughts, and Discussion



# Final Reflections

*What is something you've heard or thought about today that will stay with you?*

*What's one next step you would like to take back to your own school?*

*For additional information about peer mentoring and/or CSS, please contact:*

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