



PEER GROUP CONNECTION-MIDDLE SCHOOL

Equipping 8th Graders to Help Younger Students

Make a Successful Transition into Middle School

SUMMARY

Peer Group Connection-Middle School (PGC-MS) is a research-based program that supports and eases students' successful transition into middle school. Centered on the themes of *Identity, Community, and Leadership*, the program taps into the power of 8th graders to create a nurturing environment for incoming middle school students.

PGC-MS is the middle grades version of the Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) flagship program, Peer Group Connection-High School (PGC-HS), an evidence-based and school-based program that supports and eases students' transition from middle to high school. PGC has been recognized by the National Dropout Prevention Center as a Model Program demonstrating *Strong Evidence of Effectiveness*, its highest effectiveness rating, and evaluation results consistently demonstrate improvements in students' academic, social, and emotional skills, resulting in significantly lower dropout rates; improved grades; fewer discipline referrals; and avoidance of high-risk behaviors.

PROGRAM DESIGN

PGC-MS includes a year-long leadership course for 8th graders that meets daily and is taught by school faculty. Eighth graders typically receive course credit, service learning hours, or other relevant distinctions for participation. Through their leadership course, these 8th graders become trained peer leaders who meet at least three times per month with 6th graders in outreach sessions designed to strengthen relationships among students across grades.

- PGC-MS's launch begins with the assembly of a Stakeholder Team of administrators, faculty, parents, and community members who receive the training, tools, and resources necessary to implement and sustain PGC-MS effectively year after year.
- Carefully selected faculty members participate in a 10-day intensive train-the-trainer course over a 1½-year period to learn how to run the program and teach the daily leadership course.
- As part of their regular school schedule, carefully selected 8th graders are trained in the daily leadership development class to become peer leaders and serve as positive role models, discussion leaders, and mentors for 6th graders.
- These peer leaders work in pairs to co-lead groups of 8-10 sixth graders who participate in engaging, hands-on activities and simulations in supportive environments that enable them to practice essential academic, social, and emotional skills, such as decision-making, time management, teamwork, and communication.
- Toward the end of the school year, 6th graders utilize their newly acquired skills to plan a welcome for the next year's incoming class of 6th graders.
- PGC-MS also includes a parent involvement component. Peer leaders facilitate a Family Night event for 6th graders and their parents/guardians.

Over time, PGC-MS can have a significant impact on all schools – whether they are located in urban, suburban, or rural communities – at a cost of only a few dollars per students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about PGC-MS, please contact Dr. Margo Ross, Senior Director of Development, at 609.252.9300 x 113, or mross@supportiveschools.org. You can also visit our website at www.supportiveschools.org.