Peer-to-Peer Support Programs

August 2024

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Programs
Programming Guidance

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North Carolina Center for Safer Schools

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Table of Contents

In accordance with the General Assembly of North Carolina Session 2023 Session Law 2023-78, The North Carolina Center for Safer Schools is providing guidance for the development of peer-to-peer programming. This guidance document is designed to assist with the creation, adoption and implementation of peer-to-peer programming. It is a tool for Public School Units to utilize to help support their peer-to-peer programming processes and understand the program opportunities offered by the Center for Safer Schools. This guide provides a framework and resources for PSUs while emphasizing the importance of local adaptation and legal compliance. This guidance should be adapted based on specific needs, legal advice, and evolving best practices particular to each distinct district. This document is a resource and not a definitive word. *Each PSU should seek direction from their local legal counsel.*

ESTABLISH PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

G.S. 115C-47 (68) Peer-to-Peer Student Support Programs. – Local boards of education shall require peer-to-peer student support programs be established at all schools with grades six and higher and are encouraged to implement peer-to-peer student support programs as appropriate in other grades.

G.S. 115C-316.1 (5) Coordinating and providing training for students in peer-to-peer student support programs that address areas such as conflict resolution, general health and wellness, and mentoring. The Center for Safer Schools will support school counselors in the administration and delivery of peer-to-peer student support programs.

Youth peer-to-peer support programs provide a framework for students to support, mentor, and/or educate their fellow students. These programs emphasize the relatability of peers to address various academic, social, and emotional needs within the school community. Some common types of youth peer-to-peer programs include:

1. Peer Tutoring:
   - Students who excel in certain subjects tutor their peers who need additional help. Peer tutoring can improve academic performance, enhance understanding of subject matter, and foster collaborative learning and healthy relationships.
2. Peer Mentoring: (Cross Age Mentoring)
   - Older or more experienced students mentor younger or less experienced students, providing guidance and support. This mentoring can ease transitions (e.g., from middle to high school, or when changing schools), build self-esteem, and encourage positive behavior.
3. Peer Mediation:
   - Trained student mediators can help resolve conflicts among their peers through structured dialogue and negotiation. This mediation can reduce incidents of bullying, promote a positive school climate, and teach conflict resolution skills.
4. Wellness Programs:
   - Peer educators share educational information and lead discussions on topics such as mental health, substance abuse, and nutrition. Wellness initiatives can increase awareness, promote healthy behaviors, and encourage peer-led programming.
5. Peer Leadership Programs:
   - Students take on leadership roles, organize activities, and serve as role models for their peers. Leadership programs can develop leadership skills, foster a sense of responsibility, and enhance community engagement within the school.

Peer-to-peer mentoring can be successful in schools because it leverages the power of social connections, relatable role models, and interactive learning experiences. Peer-to- peer mentoring can address academic, social, and emotional needs, as well as foster a supportive school environment.

Relatability and Shared Experiences

Peers share similar experiences, challenges, and environments. This often makes it easier for them to relate to each other's problems and successes. Students often feel more comfortable discussing issues and seeking help from someone who is closer to their age and may have encountered similar experiences.

Role Modeling and Social Learning

Individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions by observing others. Peer mentors serve as positive role models, demonstrating effective behaviors and attitudes. When mentees see their peers succeeding; socially, academically, or otherwise, they are more likely to emulate those behaviors.

Increased Engagement and Participation

Peer mentoring often involves collaborative learning methods and problem solving. This mutual interaction can be more engaging and more conducive to active participation. Mentoring relationships encourages both mentors and mentees to take ownership of their learning, fostering a sense of responsibility and motivation.

Improved Academic Outcomes

Peer mentors can provide tailored academic support, focusing on specific areas where mentees need help. This personalized approach can address needs and gaps in understanding

more effectively than in a larger classroom setting. Mentors can offer immediate, specific feedback, helping mentees to correct mistakes and improve their understanding in real-time.

Development of Social and Emotional Skills

Peer mentors can provide emotional support, helping mentees cope with stress, build protective factors, and develop empathy. Mentors and mentees can improve their communication skills through regular interactions, learning to express themselves clearly and listen actively.

Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

Regular positive interactions with peer mentors can help increase the self-esteem of mentees, helping them feel more confident in their abilities. Mentors can also benefit by developing leadership and interpersonal skills, increasing their confidence and sense of competence.

Fostering a Sense of Community

Peer mentoring programs promote a sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community. This can create a supportive network where students feel connected to each other. Through peer interactions, students gain exposure to diverse perspectives, fostering cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Cost-Effectiveness and Scalability

Peer mentoring programs are cost-effective as they leverage the existing student body to increase their awareness, provide support, and seek adult consultation which can reduce the need for additional staff and resources.

Encouraging Lifelong Learning and Mentorship

Peer mentoring instills a culture of continuous learning and sustainable skills. This culture encourages students to seek and provide support throughout their professional and personal lives. The skills gained through mentoring such as leadership, empathy, and communication are transferable to future educational and personal endeavors.

Creating peer-to-peer programming in schools involves establishing structured programs where students can support, mentor, and learn from each other. These programs can enhance academic performance, social skills, and emotional well-being among students. Implementing peer-to-peer programming in schools requires careful planning, training, and continuous evaluation and oversight. Peer-to-Peer Programs can foster an environment where students can support and learn from each other, schools can enhance academic achievement, build stronger social connections, and promote a positive school culture. Below you will find a helpful step-by-step guide to creating effective peer-to-peer programming in your school:

Define the Objectives and Goals

- Identify Needs: Conduct surveys or focus groups to identify the specific needs of the student population. It is important to gather information from a diverse population of students, staff, administration and after school activity leaders.
- Set Clear Goals: Establish the intended outcome of the program, such as improving academic performance, enhancing social skills, or providing emotional support.

Design the Program Structure

- Select a Model: Choose a peer-to-peer program model that suits your school's needs, such as peer tutoring, peer mentoring, peer counseling, or peer leadership.
- Program Scope: Decide on the scope of the program – will it be school-wide, district wide, targeted to specific grades, or focused on certain areas (i.e. safety violence prevention).

Recruit and Train Peer Leaders

- Recruitment: Identify and recruit students who are willing and able to serve as peer leaders. It is important to have a dedicated administrator, teacher or counselor who will serve as the peer leader liaison and monitor recruitment, as well as the needs of the peer leaders.

- Training: Provide comprehensive training for peer leaders. This should include:
    - Communication skills
    - Conflict resolution
    - Confidentiality
    - Academic tutoring techniques (if applicable)
    - Emotional support strategies (if applicable)

Develop Program Materials and Resources

- Guidelines and Manuals: Create guidelines and manuals for peer leaders to follow, ensuring consistency and clarity in their roles.
- Resources: Provide necessary resources such as tutoring materials, access to school facilities, and contact information for support services.

Implementation

- Scheduling: Set up a schedule that works for both peer leaders and participants. Ensure it doesn't interfere with their regular classes.
- Supervision: Assign staff members to supervise and support the peer-to-peer sessions, providing oversight and assistance when needed.
- Location: Designate specific areas within the school for the sessions to take place, ensuring a comfortable and conducive environment for learning, interaction and privacy.

Promote the Program

- Program Awareness: Use school announcements, flyers, social media, and parent newsletters to provide information about the program.
- Enrollment: Facilitate an easy enrollment process for students who wish to participate as peer leaders or as mentees.

Monitor and Evaluate

- Feedback Mechanisms: Regularly collect feedback from both peer leaders and participants through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
- Assessment: Evaluate the effectiveness of the program by tracking program objectives; academic performance, attendance, and behavioral changes, access to resources, etc.
- Adjustments: Use the feedback and evaluation data to make necessary adjustments to the program, ensuring continuous improvement.

Provide Recognition and Incentives

- Recognition: Recognize the efforts of peer leaders through certificates, awards, or acknowledgments to parents, caregivers and/or teachers. Peer mentees may also be recognized however thought must be placed on the discretion and privacy of how this recognition occurs.
- Incentives: Offer incentives such as community service hours, leadership credits, or small rewards to motivate and retain peer leaders.

Implementation and Impact

- Training and Support: Successful peer-to-peer programs provide comprehensive training for participants to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. This might include training in communication, conflict resolution, academic tutoring techniques, or health education.
- Regular Meetings and Supervision: Regular meetings and supervision by teachers or counselors ensure that peer programs run smoothly and effectively. Supervision helps maintain the quality and integrity of the support provided.
- Positive School Climate: These programs contribute to a positive school climate by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel connected and valued.

There is much potential for success with peer to peer mentoring, but there are also risks involved. Schools must pay attention to several critical areas if they want to effectively reach their program goals without harm.

Mentors and mentees may have difficulty understanding their roles. Holding the role of a trusted person providing guidance is not an easy responsibility for a teenager. Teen mentors will need substantial training on the role of a mentor, guidance on being supportive to others, and instructions on where to turn for help with problems that are beyond their power to address.

Program expectations that might be obvious to an adult may need to be spelled out to youth early and often, such as the importance of timeliness or the need to call in if they are unable to make a meeting. Mentees may not understand how a mentor can help them reach their goals, feel awkward or embarrassed working with a peer. Some mentees may feel that a referral to the program is a form of punishment for poor behavior, maladaptive coping skills, inability to regulate emotions or for academic performance. Mentors and mentees need adult supervision, guidance and explanation about how they will be working together and what the limitations of the mentoring relationship are.

Peer mentoring relationships may struggle with quality, consistency and the concept of do no harm. It could be traumatic when mentors fail to show up for meetings with their mentee or seem disinterested in the relationship. Mentees may feel rejected, and there is potential for them to internalize negative feelings about themselves, the mentor or the program.

Peer mentors can experience vicarious trauma, also known as compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress. This can negatively impact the mentor's mental health and can lead to emotional and psychological changes. Peer mentors require consistent adult leadership and generous time to process and debrief in a private and confidential setting.

The adult supervisor must be attentive to early warning signs and intervene as needed to ensure the well-being of the mentor.

Peer mentors can sometimes provide negative role modeling. School-age mentors can be extremely influential for other students. This is a powerful role for teens and there is the potential that they could model negative behaviors and attitudes for their mentee. It is important to continuously monitor mentors to ensure they are not encouraging negative, antisocial or delinquent behaviors. Developing a screening process that uses a variety of tools and activities to assess applicants will help you find mentors who meet the program criteria. Thorough applications, personal statements, references, and counselor and teacher recommendations will offer a more in-depth view of the young person desiring to become a peer-to-peer mentor.

Mental Health First Aid Training - Youth, Teen & Adult

Identify. Understand. Respond.

[Mental Health First Aid](#) is an evidence-based, early intervention course that teaches participants about mental health and substance use challenges. Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental illnesses, builds understanding of their impact, and overviews common supports. This training demonstrates how to offer initial help in a mental health crisis and connect persons to the appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help care.

- For Youth: Provides adults who work with youth the skills they need to reach and provide initial support to children and adolescents (ages 6-18) who may develop a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care.
- For Teens: Teaches high school students how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health or substance-use issues in their friends and peers.
- For Adults: Offers instruction on how to recognize signs of mental health or substance use challenges in adults ages 18 and older; includes how to offer and provide initial help and how to guide a person toward appropriate care if necessary.

In four out of five school shootings, the attacker told people of their plans ahead of time

Sandy Hook Promise's *Say Something* program teaches elementary, middle, and high school students to recognize the warning signs of someone at-risk of hurting themselves or others and how to say something to a trusted adult to get help. The *Say Something* program aligns seamlessly with any school's existing social skills and wellness curriculum, instruction, and programming. Students build essential competencies, including how to empathize with others and seek help when needed (relationship skills) and how to identify problems and analyze situations, as well as solve problems in an ethically responsible manner (responsible decision-making). This proven, life-saving program is available to schools and youth organizations nationwide at no cost to PSUs.

Say Something Anonymous Reporting System (Grades 6-12)
Public School Units (PSUs) can choose to include Grades 4-5 in the 2024-2025 school year

When it comes to preventing and intervening in a crisis, early information is a crucial component. One of the best ways that school communities can ensure that information is given thoroughly, quickly, and effectively is to implement an anonymous reporting system and the supplemental training and practices that support full-scale use.

The *Say Something* program's educational components integrated with the technological capabilities of this anonymous reporting system provide a powerful layer to help ensure safer school climates. With the *Say Something* Anonymous Reporting System

(ARS), students become *upstanders* who report warning signs and threats to trusted adults by text, app, phone, or website. Tips are vetted and triaged by highly-skilled crisis counselors in our accredited, bilingual National Crisis Center. Local school/law enforcement response teams are promptly alerted to life-safety reports to ensure swift intervention in critical safety issues.

Students Have Knowledge

Experts agree that students usually know more about threats of violence from other students than adults do. The information that students have is crucial to a meaningful, timely response to a potential crisis. In order for them to share that information, they must have a trusted means to do so and the training to know when to use it.

Adoption

School districts statewide are working with Sandy Hook Promise to offer training to school staff and students on the free online app where secure and anonymous safety concerns can be reported to help at-risk individuals before they hurt themselves or others. The North Carolina statewide rollout of *Say Something* began in 2019 and districts and schools continue to adopt the system. The NC Center for Safer Schools provides Sandy Hook Promise's support for *Say Something Anonymous Reporting System* at no cost to PSUs.

SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) Promise Club

SAVE Promise Club network — the largest student-led anti-violence clubs in the U.S. — empowers young leaders of all backgrounds to take an active role in violence prevention. By teaching, modeling, and reinforcing the key messages of our Start with Hello and Say Something programs, youth foster kinder, more inclusive schools and communities. SAVE Promise Clubs can be a standalone club or embedded into an existing club or student leadership organization. Each club receives curated resources to plan events, activities, and projects to ensure safe schools.

Note: If your district is using the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System, you must have an active and current SAVE Promise Club.

Register your school here

Start With Hello

 Start With Hello Elementary, Grades K-5, is a digital program that includes an interactive storybook, videos, activities, and projects. This curriculum contains essential questions, lesson plans, educator practices, and project ideas that help students boost belonging, build empathy, and social awareness. *Start With Hello* Middle and High School is an age-appropriate version of the award-winning program that teaches empathy to empower students to end social isolation. Includes a video training for students, an Educators' Guide, and a handbook to help schools build and reinforce a culture of inclusion. Can be done remotely, virtual-live, or in-person.

Register your school here

Resources:

Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). *A framework for safe and successful schools* [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

ASCA: ANM-Effectiveness-Research.pdf (schoolcounselor.org)
- *ASCA National Model, 2008*

NAESP: http://www.naesp.org/resources/1/Pdfs/LLC2-ES.pdf
- *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do, 2008*

NASP Professional Standards: http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards.aspx
- *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services, 2010*

NASRO: https://www.nasro.org/clientuploads/NASRO_BestPractices21.pdf
- *Best Practices School Resource Officer Recommendations*

NASSP: http://www.nassp.org/school-improvement
- *Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement, 2011*

SSWAA: NASW Practice Standards & Guidelines (socialworkers.org)
- *NASW School Social Work Standards, 2012*

NC Center for Safer Schools partners with Sandy Hook Promise to provide these *Peer to Peer Supports* for Public School Units!

- **SAY SOMETHING PROGRAM:** Sandy Hook Promise's no-cost *Say Something* program teaches elementary, middle, and high school students to recognize the warning signs of someone at-risk of hurting themselves or others and how to say something to a trusted adult to get help.
- **SAY SOMETHING ANONYMOUS REPORTING SYSTEM:** With the *Say Something* Anonymous Reporting System (ARS), students become *upstanders* who report warning signs and threats to trusted adults by text, app, phone, or website.
- **SAVE PROMISE CLUBS:** SAVE Promise Club network — the largest student-led anti-violence clubs in the U.S. — empowers young leaders of all backgrounds to take an active role in violence prevention.
- **START WITH HELLO:** *Start With Hello* Elementary, Grades K-5, is a digital program that includes an interactive storybook, videos, activities, and projects.