



IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMS: PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS, STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES (GSS) has long been at the forefront of innovative youth development, education, and family services in New York City. Over the past four decades, we have forged strong and effective partnerships with NYC schools offering our unique expertise in serving youth and families in high-need neighborhoods. We currently serve over 15,000 NYC students annually and over the past five years, have directly assisted 5,500 youth to obtain their high school diploma.

In partnering with schools, GSS seeks to improve educational outcomes of students by providing opportunities for students to feel safe, develop a sense of belonging, and build tangible skills. A growing body of research evidence emphasizes these three types of developmental opportunities as essential mediators of academic achievement. To achieve impact, GSS programs apply a youth and family development framework and work on multiple levels within a school, addressing individual student needs and partnering with school leadership on community building and professional development efforts school-wide.

FOCUSING ON A CRUCIAL NEED

The consequences associated with dropping out of high school are well known. Its causes, however, are more complex. School drop-out is often the ultimate result for students who have encountered repeated barriers to learning over the course of their school careers, leading to poor academic progress, low school engagement, and, eventually, a diminished sense of the importance of education to their futures. School leaders know that when students enter a classroom, they bring with them a range of experiences that can affect their learning and educational progress. In our school-based programs, virtually all of our participants have been exposed to significant adversity in some form, from neighborhood violence, to homelessness, family instability, poverty, and/or mental health or substance abuse issues. The research is clear that trauma resulting from adverse life experiences can disrupt the brain's architecture, with long-term consequences for learning, and for social and emotional health. At the same time, and of pivotal importance, research also tells us that timely and responsive interventions and supports can protect against and even reverse negative outcomes, essentially reshaping the life trajectories of young people who experience such adversity.¹ Reaching these youth at-risk of becoming disconnected is crucial to ensuring that they have the opportunity to pursue their ambitions and contribute to society.



¹ Jensen, E. (2009). Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109074/chapters/How-Poverty-Affects-Behavior-and-Academic-Performance.aspx>

PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION

GSS partners with schools to offer a set of services and intervention strategies to directly address the barriers to learning associated with trauma for students most at risk for dropping out. Our success depends on several key factors:

Our Experience: GSS has worked within New York City schools since the 1970s. During this time, we have honed our expertise in delivering impactful services. We have led effective initiatives to establish long-term embedded partnerships within schools and communities, successful work-readiness and internship opportunities for youth, and high-traction educational pathways for off-track students, getting them back on the path to high school completion.

Our Approach: Underpinning all work at GSS is a commitment to our Youth and Family Development (YFD) model, which draws on the strengths and resiliencies of the participants we work with to provide the resources they need to transform their lives. The principles comprising the YFD model are strongly supported by the social science literature as among the most effective ways of working with youth.² These include:

- Establishing caring relationships between students and staff, ensuring positive interactions and promoting peer support networks^{3,4,5,6}
- Fostering high expectations by focusing on the inherent strengths of our students and presenting challenging opportunities.⁷
- Taking a holistic approach to youth and families and understanding important environmental factors that shape our students.⁸
- Providing opportunities for contribution by promoting youth and family voice in programming, building community and fostering leadership opportunities for youth.⁹
- Developing engaging and developmentally-appropriate activities that encourage curiosity and expose participants to new and challenging experiences.¹⁰

Our Staff: GSS understands the value of investing in a highly competent workforce of leaders who are in the forefront of our field. Internal staff training as well as the training we provide to human services professionals throughout the city, through our Human Services Workshop, help to ensure that all GSS staff and partners have the knowledge and skills they need to improve the life opportunities for young people. Mandatory GSS staff trainings include: principles of youth and family development, cultural awareness and sensitivity, professional skills development, and post-secondary high school planning. Staff also have the opportunity to participate in trainings related to increasing youth resilience, implementing trauma-informed practice, recognizing substance abuse, working with gang-affiliated youth, among other options.

2 Cahill, M. (1997). Youth Development and Community Development: Promises and Challenges of Convergence. <http://www.ydinstitute.org/resources/publications/PromisesAndChallengesOfConvergence.pdf>

3 Benson, P. et al. (2006). Positive Youth Development So Far: Core Hypotheses and Their Implications for Policy and Practice. <http://www.isbe.net/learningsupports/climate/pdfs/positive-youth-dev.pdf>

4 Masten, A.S. & Coatsworth, J.D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments. <http://www.udel.edu/educ/gottfredson/intel/pdf-duplicates%3F/masten.pdf>

5 What Works Clearinghouse. Check and Connect. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/interventionreport.aspx?sid=78>

6 Werner, E. & Smith, R. S. (1992). Overcoming the Odds: High Risk From Birth to Adulthood.

7 Education Partnerships, Inc. (2012). Research Into Practice: Importance of High Expectations. <http://gearup.ous.edu/sites/default/files/Research-Briefs/ResearchBriefHighExpectations.pdf>

8 Youngblade, L.M. et al. (2007). Risk and Promotive Factors in Families, Schools and Communities: A Contextual Model of Positive Youth Development in Adolescence.

9 Eccles, J. & Gootman, J. (2002). Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. <http://www.youthworkcentral.org/uploads/IOM%20Study%20Exec%20summary.pdf>

10 Harvard Family Research Project (2004). Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in Afterschool Programs. <http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/evaluating-out-of-school-time-program-quality/attracting-and-sustaining-youth-participation-in-after-school-programs>

All GSS staff in our partner schools are supervised by an experienced, master's-level staff member and meet with their supervisor weekly to check in about work-related issues. We believe that consistent and effective supervision both improves the quality of our work with students and fosters longevity among our staff so that crucial relationships with participants can be developed and nurtured over a long period of time.

Our Network: As an agency with deep roots in NYC, GSS has established numerous collaborations with corporate partners and other community-based organizations throughout the city and beyond, which allow us to bring opportunities into the schools rather than referring students outside. These partnerships help us to enhance our services, adding new and unique programming opportunities.

In addition, because we are a multi-service agency, GSS provides opportunities for participants to benefit from our network of programs in order to help them navigate high school and post-secondary opportunities, after they receive their diploma. In particular, students graduating from our high school programs have benefitted from our LifeLink college preparation and retention program.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Partnering with Schools: GSS partners with schools to fill gaps, not duplicate efforts. By combining our work with the skills and knowledge of professional teaching staff, we are able to improve student achievement. Research on the importance of social and emotional development to school success strongly supports that in order for students to succeed in high school and beyond, they need to develop particular skills, including engagement, self regulation, critical thinking and organizational skills, communication skills, persistence, and future planning (which, importantly, are key components of the Common Core).¹¹

Education research affirms what school leaders know intuitively: schools focusing solely on academic instruction and classroom management will likely fall short of their goals.¹² In an era of high-stakes accountability, schools are often compelled to direct all their resources toward academic-specific interventions. The “value-add” of a GSS partnership is that we focus on the social and emotional needs of students, allowing teachers to focus on academics. Together, we can meet the holistic needs of each student.

Providing a Relationship-Based Approach with Tailored Services: GSS works with a diverse portfolio of schools. Therefore, we do not put forward a standard package of services but rather, we mold our work to fit within the existing infrastructure of schools, also taking into account the unique needs of each school's population. We use what is known as a “primary person approach” in our school-based work, understanding the importance of a caring and nurturing adult through which students are able to obtain support, guidance and an enhanced sense of self-efficacy.¹³ As part of this relationship-based approach, we offer the following services:

- Individual and group counseling
- Attendance outreach
- Crisis intervention
- Family engagement
- Internal and external referrals
- Tutoring and academic support
- Regents preparation

11 NYC DOE College and Career Readiness Benchmarks - Academic and Personal Behaviors. <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/915D46C3-52C0-44C2-B0FD-76241E22E942/0/AcademicPersonalBehaviorResource.pdf>

12 Zins, J. et al. (2004). The Scientific Base Linking Social and Emotional Learning to School Success. <http://www-tep.ucsd.edu/about/Courses/EDS201/Social%20learning%20skills.pdf>

13 National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. (2008) IES Practice Guide - Dropout Prevention. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide.aspx?sid=9>

- Postsecondary preparation activities, including college and career planning and internships
- School community building, through student and family events and school-wide initiatives
- Leadership Development
- Mentoring
- Arts and recreation
- Technical assistance to DOE staff, including workshops on youth development practices

TAILORED SERVICES WITH SCHOOL-WIDE BENEFITS



Our work in schools often extends beyond a specific cohort of students and engages and impacts the whole school. We know that a caring school environment and a sense of connectedness can protect against risk factors for dropping out.¹⁴ Therefore, we often partner with school leadership on school-wide interventions aimed at community building. For instance, in Bushwick Leaders and Automotive high schools, GSS partners with school staff to organize school events and initiatives, such as Community BBQs and the Attendance Advisory and Tutoring Pizza Incentive programs, which award pizza parties for positive outcomes, such as high attendance at advisory, or participation in extra help or Regents prep sessions. Taking into account the high percentage of LGBTQ youth at University Heights High School, our staff worked with students to organize a gay-straight alliance at the school and enhanced efforts to bring awareness to the incidence of bullying and harassment. At Bronx Bridges High School, which has a large immigrant population, our staff provide enhanced outreach efforts to help families understand and navigate the education system, and services to help students acculturate while also developing cultural awareness within a diverse student body. Our programs have also offered professional development workshops for teachers and administrators, focused on the incorporation of youth development practices into the classroom.

¹⁴ National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. (2004). Essential Tools. Increasing Rates of School Completion: Moving from Policy and Research to Practice – A Manual for Policymakers, Administrators and Educators. <http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/dropout.pdf>

OUR IMPACT

GSS has a culture of high-level performance and data-driven decision-making. All of our programs collect data and track outcomes in order to ensure that we are having the greatest impact on youth and families with whom we work.

BUILDING SKILLS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

With the understanding that academic success is related not just to content knowledge, but also to key social and emotional factors, GSS in-school support staff work to create change within these domains in order to bring about academic achievement.

Promoting Safety and Belonging through School Culture Initiatives: Students learn better when they feel safe and secure in their environment and when they feel connected to their school community.¹⁵ After starting our partnership at Bushwick Leaders High School, GSS staff quickly learned that students had negative feelings about the school cafeteria, which had become a site of tension and conflict. In order to promote a more positive environment, staff created the Café Jam initiative, a school-wide event during the lunch period involving music, games and activities. In a 2011 survey, nearly 80% of students said Café Jam makes a difference in students wanting to attend school and almost three-quarters of students said it makes a difference in how supported they feel by each other.

Developing Resilience through Counseling Services: Many young people enter our programs having experienced adversity, both in the classroom and in their private lives. Through our counseling services, students gain a sense of support that they often times had been lacking and develop necessary coping skills to persist through challenges. In 2012-2013, GSS administered The Resilience Scale, a validated pre-post measure that assesses how well young people are able to cope with difficult situations in their lives. Results show that students who received individual or group counseling through our program at Bushwick Leaders were more likely than those who did not receive services to demonstrate increases in resilience, a skill that is linked to positive outcomes, such as academic success¹⁶: 74% of students who received counseling demonstrated an increase in resilience over the year, compared with 48% of those who did not. Resilience was measured based on a number of items, such as “I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life,” and “I feel that I can handle many things at a time.”

Nurturing Potential through Mentoring: The effectiveness of mentoring is backed by a strong research base, showing positive impacts on both mentors and mentees.¹⁷ We have mentoring components in several of our in-school support programs, using both adult-youth and peer models. In our Aiming High program at University Heights High School, a group peer mentoring program that links high school and middle school students, participants reported increased school connectedness, academic confidence and perceptions of responsibility.

- 100% of the students in Aiming High said they felt more connected to the UHHS community after having participated.
- Nearly 90% said they saw themselves as more responsible and 100% reported an increased confidence in their ability to lead.

These gains in key social and emotional domains are beginning to pay dividends in the classroom. Our students who participate in mentoring are outperforming the general high school population on numerous academic outcomes, including grade promotion and graduation.

15 Blum, R. (2005). Best Practices: Building Blocks for Enhancing School Environment. Johns Hopkins University. http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/military-child-initiative/resources/Best_Practices_monograph.pdf

16 DeBaca, C (2010). Resilience and Academic Performance. http://www.scholarcentric.com/research/SC_Resiliency_Academic_Performance_WP.pdf

17 DuBois, D. et al. (2002). Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth: A Meta-Analytic Review. <http://www.wmich.edu/evalphd/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Effectiveness-of-Mentoring-Programs-for-Youth.pdf>

Enhancing Learning Strategies through Academic Support: In order to succeed in the classroom, students need to develop learning strategies, such as time management, goal setting and other study skills.¹⁸ Academic Counselors in our programs work with students to ensure they have the skills and strategies needed to learn effectively, helping them to stay on track towards graduation and post-secondary plans. We also help our young people to become more invested in their academic success by encouraging them to directly connect school achievement to their future ambitions. At our in-school support programs at DeWitt Clinton High School and Bronx High School of Law and Community Services, 92% of students feel that the program has helped them to set goals for their future; and 94% of students at the High School for Teaching and the Professions and 100% at Bronx Collegiate Academy have reported improved goal setting.

IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

When students report improvement on social and emotional factors, such as stronger resilience, greater school connectedness and enhanced self-management skills, we know from the research that it translates to the classroom setting. Our program results support this.

Changing Academic Trajectories: In many of our in-school support programs, we provide targeted services for chronically truant students. Through our programs, our students have been able to improve attendance and demonstrate stronger academic progress than the school as a whole.

- At Automotive High School, students with histories of chronic truancy who attended our weekly group counseling sessions had an 83% attendance rate in 2013-2014, while the school-wide rate was 79%.
- In 2011-12, the most recent year for which credit data is available, students in our program at DeWitt Clinton High School demonstrated better academic progress when compared with the school as a whole. 57% of our students at DeWitt Clinton High School earned 10 or more credits over the course of the year, compared with 52% of the students school-wide.

Making a School-Wide Impact: Since GSS began its partnership with Bushwick Leaders High School, overall school attendance has steadily increased, the dropout rate has fallen, student suspension rate has been halved, and the school graduation rate has increased.

- The overall school attendance rate improved from 79%, prior to GSS' partnership with the school, to 84% in 2012-2013. Students who participate in our afterschool program at the school have an even higher average attendance rate of 94%.
- The student suspension rate dropped from 26% pre-GSS to 12% in 2012-13.
- The school graduation rate increased from 49% in 2010-11 to 70% in 2012-13.



18 Farrington, C. et al. (2012). Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review. University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Noncognitive%20Report.pdf>

TO LEARN MORE

If you would like to learn more about Good Shepherd Services' In-School Support programs, please contact Michelle Yanche, Associate Executive Director for Government and External Relations at 212-243-7070 or michelle_yanche@goodshepherds.org. Please also visit our website: www.goodshepherds.org

Good Shepherd Services is a leading youth and family development and educational support agency that works with over 26,000 program participants a year. We give young people in New York City the opportunity to take ownership of their future, making a difference today and for the next generation.

Good Shepherd Services works in 42 public schools in high-need Brooklyn and Bronx communities, to which we bring a profound belief in the strengths inherent in youth and the ability of individuals and families to transform themselves. Incorporating the most current thinking and research on effective practice, we surround youth and families with impactful individual, family and school-based services and support. We employ a rigorous business approach that emphasizes partnerships and optimizes public and private resources.

This report was produced by a workgroup of Good Shepherd Services' in-school support staff and the Good Shepherd Services Program Evaluation and Planning, Government Contracts and Foundation Support, and External Relations departments.