



Good Shepherd Community Schools: Creating safe, engaging and inclusive learning communities (December 2017)

GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES has long been at the forefront of innovative youth development, education, and family services in New York City. Since the 1970s, we have forged strong and effective partnerships with NYC schools offering our unique expertise in serving youth and families in low-resourced neighborhoods. We serve more than 30,000 young people and families annually.

Community schools are rooted in the understanding that non-academic factors such as poverty, inadequate access to health care, and other environmental factors must be addressed in order for students to succeed academically and access opportunities.ⁱ In our community schools, [Good Shepherd](#) 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 types of developmental opportunities as essential mediators of academic achievement.ⁱⁱ To achieve impact, Good Shepherd programs apply a Youth and Family Development approach to work on multiple levels within a school community. Our programs address individual student needs and partner with students, school staff, partner organizations and families on school-wide efforts.

In 2016-17, Good Shepherd partnered with five community schools in the city, serving nearly 2,500 students in Brooklyn and the Bronx; this year, we added two more schools. Combining our signature Youth and Family Development approach and trauma-informed practices with high-quality evaluation and impactful services, we have already seen tangible results: **improved graduation rates and attendance**. We also focus on and have partnered to improve the conditions necessary for effective learning, including safety, community, high expectations and opportunities for social and emotional development.



How GSS Works

Partnering with schools, families and communities, Good Shepherd helps youth achieve academic and non-academic success by creating a safe, engaging and inclusive learning community. We strategically collaborate with school administration and staff to respond to the individual needs of students and families, deepen parent engagement, and connect students and families to community resources and opportunities. Our success depends on several key factors:

Our Experience: Good Shepherd has worked within New York City schools for four decades. During this time, we have honed our expertise in delivering impactful services. We have established 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 School Partners: Together, Good Shepherd and our partner schools address the holistic needs of students. 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 a sense of belonging, along with key skills such as self-regulation, critical thinking communication, persistence, and future planning (which, importantly, are key components of the Common Core). In an era of high-stakes accountability, schools are often compelled to direct all their resources toward academic-specific interventions. By combining our work with the skills and knowledge of pedagogical and support staff, we are able to improve student achievement.

We realize integrating school and Good Shepherd staff into one cohesive team is essential to providing the right supports to students at the right times. It is essential to share data in both directions and explore it together. When assessing our community's needs and assets, we have worked with our partners to get feedback from everyone in the building, as well as families and community stakeholders.

Our Approach: Underpinning all work at Good Shepherd is a commitment to our [Youth and Family Development \(YFD\)](#) approach, which draws on the strengths and resiliencies of the participants we work with to provide the resources they need to transform their lives. Our YFD approach is comprised of seven strategies that are strongly supported by the social science literature as among the most effective ways of working with youth.

- We value and build caring and trusting relationships.
- We create safe and welcoming spaces.
- We have high expectations of ourselves and others.
- We offer paths forward through connections and consistency.
- We promote opportunities for contributions and leadership.
- We inspire growth and change through engaging activities.
- We invest in a strong mission driven organizational structure.

Good Shepherd also integrates into our programs a [trauma-informed approach](#). As a recognized leader in the field, Good Shepherd Services created the Center for Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) to respond to the increasing needs for training, promising practices and interventions, policy development, and advocacy across the agency and within our larger New York City community.

Unfortunately, many of our students have experienced trauma from family dysfunction to neighborhood violence to upheaval. In 2016-17, as one example, [1 in 5 of the students in our high school community school programs were homeless](#). 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.ⁱⁱⁱ 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 adversity. Building trusting relationships with staff and peers is just one way students can build their resilience and skills to become successful in school. When crises arise within or outside of the school building, we work with our partners to respond in a thoughtful and coordinated way.

Our Staff: Good Shepherd understands the value of investing in a highly competent workforce. To ensure that Good Shepherd staff and partners have knowledge and skills they need to support young people, we offer extensive internal training as well as training to human services professionals throughout the city, through [The Workshops](#). In 2016-17, we trained nearly 250 non-Good Shepherd professionals including social workers, guidance counselors, school counselors, and teachers from school-based programs, schools, and other programs across the city. Mandatory Good Shepherd staff trainings include: principles of youth and family development, cultural awareness

Providing a Relationship-Based Approach with Tailored Services:

Since each school community is different, we do not put forward a standard package of services. 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. As part of this relationship-based approach, we offer the following services:



Social and Emotional Support

- Individual and group counseling
- Attendance outreach
- Crisis intervention
- Family engagement and parent support
- Mental health counseling and referrals



Enrichment and Skill-Building

- Tutoring and academic support
- Postsecondary planning & application support
- Educational and college trips
- Success mentoring
- Arts & recreational activities
- Financial literacy training
- Health & mental health education
- Advisory



Community Building

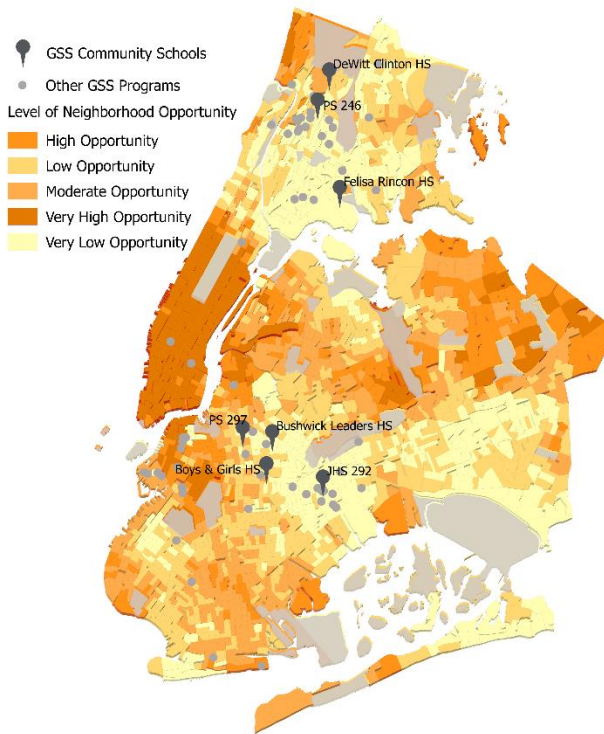
- School-wide engagement activities
- Community service / Service learning
- Leadership development for students
- DOE collaboration & technical support
- Participation in school committees and collaborative initiatives
- Health and service referrals and coordination

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, growth mindset, restorative practices, implementing trauma-informed practice, recognizing substance abuse, working with gang-affiliated youth, among other options.

All Good Shepherd staff in our community schools are supervised by an experienced Community School Director (CSD) and meet with their supervisor weekly to check in about work-related issues. We hire CSDs who have direct practice experience grounded in youth development. In larger schools, another clinical supervisor may work directly

with counselors and social work interns. Afterschool directors also report to CSDs and oversee afterschool staff and activities. 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 students and families can be developed and nurtured over time. In our efforts to provide as many students as possible with a primary person, the majority of our community school teams are made up of counselors, social workers, and social work interns.

Our Community Schools are in Good Shepherd's Core Neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx



Our Network: As an agency with deep roots in NYC and over 80 programs, Good Shepherd has established numerous collaborations with corporate partners and other community-based organizations throughout the city and beyond, which allow us to bring opportunities into schools rather than referring students outside. These partnerships help us to enhance our services, adding new and unique programming opportunities. For example, the team at P.S. 297 identified the need for nutritional services, which led to a partnership with Common Threads, an organization offering cooking and nutrition programs to children in low-income communities. At P.S. 297, Common Threads provided free parent workshops and helped revive the school garden. Our corporate partners, such as Barclays and Bloomberg, engage in corporate volunteer projects ranging from STEM workshops to college and career preparation to recreational art activities related to holidays or other special occasions.

In addition, because we are a multi-service agency, Good Shepherd provides opportunities for students and families to benefit from our network of programs. In particular, students graduating from our high school programs have benefitted from LifeLink, our college access and retention program. Court-involved students have been linked with our network of youth justice programs to help them get back on track. Our two Single Stop centers in Brooklyn provide families with hands-on assistance in applying for public benefits and connect them to resources they need to attain higher education, employment, and financial stability. When families are struggling, we have programs that offer counseling, advocacy, emergency assistance and referral services to keep them intact and safe.

Our Impact

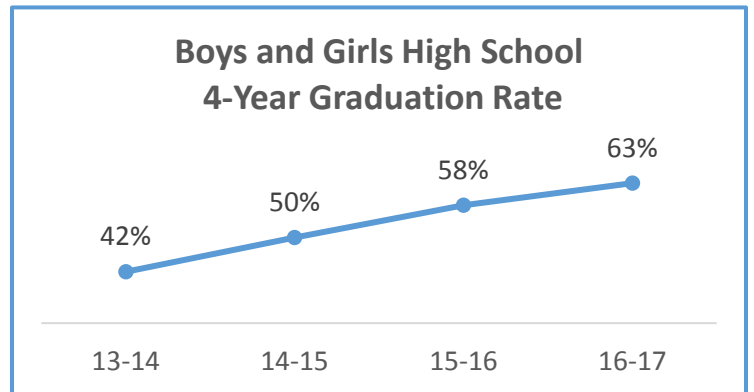
Good Shepherd is committed to continuous improvement and using data to learn about our programs and students. In addition to DOE data sources, most school-based programs use the Efforts-To-Outcomes (ETO) database to record counseling and outreach notes, group and school-wide activities, and postsecondary planning. Our Program Evaluation and Planning (PEP) department works with programs to develop logic models and customize tools to track activities and [outcomes](#). Leadership from our five community schools from Brooklyn and the Bronx also convene quarterly to share practices and review progress.

What we achieved

Our community schools have demonstrated clear gains in attendance and academic progress, which reflects on the success of the partnership we have with our schools. Together, we have been able to achieve results.

Attendance and Academic Achievement

- **More Graduates:** Boys and Girls and DeWitt Clinton both saw higher graduation rates last year (+5.2% pts and 2.2% pts respectively). Prior to our partnership at Bushwick Leaders High School, the school graduation rate was 49% (2010-2011). In the 2016-17 school year, the **4-year graduation rate rose to 73%**, outperforming their DOE comparison group.
- **Higher Attendance:** At Boys and Girls High School and DeWitt Clinton High School, **attendance in 2016-17 was the highest it has been in 5 years**. Participants in Boys and Girls afterschool program had 92% average attendance (n=122), compared to 81% for the rest of the school.
- At P.S. 297, the percent of students at **Level 3 or 4 on state ELA exams increased** from 11% in 2014-15 to 25% in 2016-17.
- We seek to have a sustaining impact, and we have seen this with our high school students who stay within our network into college. Overage high school graduates who attended our LifeLink college access and retention program at Bronx Community College **graduate from college at higher rates** than comparison students, and even higher than the general BCC population.^{iv}



How we achieved it

When students report improvement on social and emotional factors, we know from the research that it translates to the classroom setting. In order to succeed in the classroom, students need to feel connected, see a future for themselves and develop learning strategies, such as time management and goal setting. Counselors in our programs work with students to ensure the conditions necessary to learn are present. This means helping students to build key factors like resilience and growth mindset, strengthen school and peer connections, develop the skills and strategies needed to learn effectively, and remove obstacles to learning, such as trauma and inadequate eye care and nutrition.

Social-Emotional Skills

- Students we work with show **increased belonging, growth mindset, contribution, and sense of peer and adult support**.
 - Students at Boys and Girls High School who attended the afterschool program more frequently showed more growth in their connections to peers, and those who attended more often were more likely to increase their sense of belonging in school.
- In 2016-17, 966 parents were surveyed from across our 24 afterschool programs in the Bronx and Brooklyn: 97% of parents identified that their child built positive relationship in the program, and 89% reported that their child became more confident in his or her ability to learn.

Health & Mental Health

- In 2016-17, more at least 700 students in our community schools received individual and/or group counseling.
- At DeWitt Clinton high school, Good Shepherd staff **coordinated the vision testing for more than 1,200 students** in 2016-17; nearly 500 students received new glasses. Students continue to be tested each year.
- According to the 2016-17 NYC Schools Survey, in all of our community schools, more teachers felt they had access to school-based supports to assist in behavioral and emotional escalations than in the prior year.
- Through a partnership with Food Bank for New York City, DeWitt Clinton and PS. 297 were able to provide nutritional assistance. **On average, Clinton served 600 children, adults, and seniors per month.**

Engagement in School, Community and Future

Connection to School

- At Boys and Girls High School, **84% of surveyed parents said their child feels safer because of our after-school program.**
- In our other school programs, we've seen how relationships and connections to adults and peers in the school impact attendance. At South Brooklyn Community High School, students who felt connected to a greater number of staff members at the end of the year had an average attendance nearly 20 percentage points higher than those with fewer staff connections (84% versus 66%).

“At the beginning of the school year, I wasn't coming at all because of family issues. But, because of Good Shepherd, they encouraged me to come and I feel better about myself because of them”

- DeWitt Clinton Student

Connection to Community

- Youth from our high school community schools participated in the Good Shepherd Youth Summit, an annual agency-wide youth development and leadership project in which program participants from our network of child welfare, juvenile justice, and school-based programs conduct research on issues they see in their communities and create their own solutions. 76% of Summit participants *strongly agreed* that there is power in community and collaboration and that **they are an agent for positive change.** One student said “I learned that my opinion and voice truly matter if we want to make a change.”
- At South Brooklyn Community High School, the percentage of students who reported feeling connected to their communities increased by 30 points in one year.
- At DeWitt Clinton, a significantly higher number of students reported having a stronger connection to community by the end of the school year: 47% strongly agreed they feel connected to others in the community compared to 13% at the start of the year.



Connection to Future

- At Boys and Girls high school, students attended college visits to local CUNY schools as well as four-year colleges, such as Howard University and Morgan State University. On the NYC School Survey, **90% of Boys and Girls students agreed that adults encourage them to continue their education after high school.**
- At DeWitt Clinton Community High School, our **Student Success Center served all seniors, and helped 171 students complete college applications** in 2016-17. Most remarkably, most of them were helped by 11 fellow seniors who were trained as youth leaders by College Access: Research and Action and GSS staff.

This report was produced by a workgroup of Good Shepherd Services' community school staff and the Good Shepherd Services Program Evaluation and Planning Department.

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ⁱ Belay, K., Mader, N., Miller, L. (2014) Scaling the Community School Strategy in New York City: A System Building Guide. (2014) Center for New York City Affairs & Children's Aid Society. http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5480bf6ce4b0c27762ea40c2/1417723756238/CommunitySchools_NYCFINAL.pdf

ⁱⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://acestoohigh.com/2015/05/31/resilience-practices-overcome-students-aces-in-trauma-informed-high-school-say-the-data/>

^{iv} Data provided by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment at Bronx Community College.