In August 2018, Good Shepherd Services launched a pilot fellowship with school-based programs to come together, learn from one another, and generate new ideas to try in their own contexts. Informed by methods of improvement science, fellows are part of a network that will help GSS get better at solving pressing problems. Fellows worked on the urgent problem of high rates of chronic absenteeism by generating and testing theories of improvement.

**Key Improvement Questions:**
1) Why are students chronically absent?
2) What can we do about it?
3) How will we know if our efforts are an improvement?

### South Brooklyn’s Theory of Change to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

**[ROOT CAUSE]**
Students lack connections in the building and face negative peer pressure to not attend school.

**[DRIVER]**
Students need healthy relationships with adults and peers at school.

**[CHANGE IDEA]**
Students in different attendance tiers will engage together in an 8-week fashion and technology program, supported by counselor and teacher.

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**Student Feedback**
- "I feel like this program brought us all together"
- "My relationships grew stronger with some people and I also got to meet new people"
- "Sometimes I only came [to school] because the program was that day"

**Attendance Data**
- Daily attendance (to date) is higher for all 10 participants.
- Compared to last year, the groups’ average attendance is up 22 percentage points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Participant Attendance</th>
<th>66%</th>
<th>88%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19 (so far)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plan**
**What’s your plan? What’s your prediction? How will you make it happen?**

After a root cause analysis, conversations with students, research and brainstorming, fellows planned to recruit students for an afterschool program in fashion and technology, a partnership with Pioneer Works. Since data showed students with connections graduated at much higher rates, they would intentionally recruit students who were chronically absent, in hopes they would build relationships with staff and students who had better attendance.

**Do**
**Execute Plan. Collect Data.**

Students participated in the 8-week program that culminated in a fashion show. Initially, 13 students were recruited, and 10 participated regularly. The school gave the participants surveys in December to get their feedback and measure whether students felt connected to each other.

**Act**
**Adopt, Adapt, or Abandon.**

The school is testing new ideas, like incentives and daily outreach completed by 9:30am for all students. They hope to use data to see if additional outreach has an impact. The school will partner with Pioneer Works on additional projects this year. One of the participants is organizing a fashion show at the school.

**Study**
**Analyze the results and compare to predictions.**

Although three students never really engaged in the program, attending no more than once, the remaining 10 students all showed growth in attendance from last year. Students expressed that the program connected them to others, and some said it motivated them to attend school, especially on certain days.

**Takeaways from Fellowship**
- Consider how long it will take to assess and who will do it
- Find out what excites students, not just what we want to implement
- Spend more time brainstorming, creating the plan
- Be intentional about staff involved (interest in topic, relationships with students)