The Problem with Attendance:
Using Continuous Improvement to Tackle Root Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

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Warm-Up

With a neighbor:

- Brainstorm 2-3 interventions for chronic absenteeism and write on post-its.
- Stick post-its on the wall.
Mission

Good Shepherd Services goes where children, youth, and families face the greatest challenges and builds on their strengths to help them gain skills for success. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

Good Shepherd Services leads in the development of innovative programs that make a difference in the lives of children, youth and families today.
Good Shepherd Services programs promote well-being, learning, growth, and change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>FY2018</th>
<th>Participants Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Support, Counseling &amp; Foster Care</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through 11 programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through 2 programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through 31 programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterschool &amp; Community Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>14,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through 38 programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Justice Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>through 10 programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The numbers represent participants served during the fiscal year 2018.
Core Structures of our GSS School Model

We start with an understanding that the academic gap IS the social-emotional gap and that change is slow. In order to have impact with our students it is necessary to be patient and build trust.

- Youth and Family Development and Trauma-Informed Approach
- Primary Person
- Shared Leadership
- Small, Safe Environment
- Targeted Population
Core Program Services

- Counseling
- Group Work
- Community Building
- Family engagement
- Future Focus
Multiple Pathways Models

Transfer High Schools

• Small, academically rigorous, full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who are behind in high school or have dropped out.
• Students are between the ages of 15 to 21 and have completed at least one year of high school.

Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCS)

• Evening academic programs designed to meet the needs of students who might be considering dropping out because they are behind or because they have adult responsibilities that make attending school in the daytime difficult.
• Students between the ages of 17.5 and 21, who are in their fifth year of high school and have earned at least 17 credits.
• Students attend part time and in the evening.
Attendance Problem

![Chart showing average daily attendance with two categories: 80%+ and <80%. The 80%+ category has a higher percentage of graduate students, while the <80% category has a higher percentage of negative discharge cases.]
Improvement Problem

A. DEFINE Program Planning
B. MEASURE Data Collection & Management
C. LEARN Analysis & Reporting
D. IMPROVE Using Findings and Insights
Example of Variability

Program Graduation Rate 16-17
## Different Types of Measurement for Different Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>IMPROVEMENT</th>
<th>ACCOUNTABILITY</th>
<th>RESEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
<td>Develop and evaluate changes in practice</td>
<td>Identify exemplary or problematic performers (teachers, schools, districts)</td>
<td>Develop and test theories about the relationships between conceptual variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What?</strong></td>
<td>Outcomes and processes that are the object of change</td>
<td>End of the line outcomes</td>
<td>Latent variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How often?</strong></td>
<td>Frequently as practice occurs</td>
<td>Usually collected once a year (after the fact)</td>
<td>Typically once or twice per study (after the fact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Testing your theory</strong></td>
<td>Sequential tests</td>
<td>No theory to test</td>
<td>One large test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample size</strong></td>
<td>“Just enough” data, small sequential samples</td>
<td>Obtain 100% of available, relevant data</td>
<td>“Just in case” data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Conditions of Use?</strong></td>
<td>Data shared in a low-stakes, safe environment conducive to change.</td>
<td>Publically available. Formal collection process to assure appearances of neutrality and objectivity.</td>
<td>Meets scientific standards that are held in the field.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuous Improvement
“A focused learning journey”

DEFINITION: Particular acts of inquiry, or projects, that aim for quality improvement that involve multiple iterative cycles of activity over extended periods of time.

3 Core Improvement Questions:
• What is the specific problem I am trying to solve?
• What change might I introduce and why?
• How will I know whether the change is actually an improvement?

Definition adapted from Learning to Improve by Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, LeMahieu
GSS Improves Fellowship (IF) Theory of Change

- Bring together a network of program experts
- Equip them with research-backed tools and methods for continuous improvement
- Develop the will and skill to test new solutions

- Make a difference on the identified problem (Severe Chronic Absenteeism)
- Adapt successful continuous improvement strategies to more problems

- Document and spread effective practices
- Cultivate a culture and practice of improvement across the agency

Participants receive high-quality supports

Participants receive high-quality supports
GSS Improves Fellowship Timeline

1. Introduction to Continuous Improvement [August]
   - Fellowship Overview
   - Understand Problem and System
   - Student Input
   - Coaching

2. Review Student Input
   - Explore Research & Solutions
   - Coaching; Finalize Plans

3. Network Progress Meeting [November]
   - Plan for Measurement
   - Reflection

4. Progress share-out; Iteration brainstorm [December]
   - Reflection
   - Planning for share out

5. Sharing & Spreading
   - Coaching and Documentation
   - GSS Share Out [April 2019]
Hear From GSS IF Fellows

Research and Service High School:
David Gray, Program Director
Sequoia Worrell, Advocate Counselor

Click here to view
**ACT**
- Next steps: Adapt, adopt, abandon

**PLAN**
- What’s your change?
- What’s your prediction?
- Plan to conduct test

**STUDY**
- Compare results to prediction
- What did you learn?

**DO**
- Execute test
- Collect data, document observations
GSS Improves Fellowship Severe Chronic Absenteeism Fishbone

Medical Issues
- Stress and health
- Addiction / substance abuse
- Medical issues
  - Stress and health
  - Addiction / substance abuse

Lack of Sleep

Lack of Support
- Caregivers with chronic illness/addition
- Lack of home support and positive role model
- Living independently

Violence
(Homeless; runaway)

Commute
- Used up fare
- Distance from school (foster care)
- Safety concerns

Employment
- Work schedule

Lack of Support
- Caregivers with chronic illness/addiction
- Lack of home support and positive role model
- Living independently

Language Barrier

Mindset
- Motivation
- Seeking immediate reward, money
- Doesn’t see future; no pathway/plan
- Lacks confidence they can finish
- Feels stupid – school’s not for me (fixed mindset)

Trauma
- Loss of a parent/family member
- Suicide

Academic frustration
- Does not understand classwork, feels too far behind
- Struggling with passing Regents
- Lack of teaching

Incarceration & Court

Unstable Housing
(Violence (Gang, teen dating, domestic))

Hunger

Adult Responsibilities
- Student is head of household
- Pregnancy
- Work & financial responsibilities
- Caregiver in family
- Parenting: Childcare issues

Peer Influence / Pressure
- Friends aren’t going to school
- Unhealthy friendships lead to unhealthy choices

Mental Health
- Depressed
- Bipolar
- Anxiety

Transportation
- Used up fare
- Distance from school (foster care)
- Safety concerns

Cultural Expectations
(e.g. marriage, work)

Lack of Sleep

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Too many of our students are severely chronically absent (<80%)
Our Theory of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If we... [CHANGE IDEA]</th>
<th>...we will address ... [ROOT CAUSE]</th>
<th>...and then students will... [PRIMARY DRIVER]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Brooklyn</td>
<td>...engage students in an 8-week fashion and technology program, supported by counselor and teacher</td>
<td>...lack of connections in the building and negative peer pressure and unhealthy friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>...offer peer groups with ACs who focus on peer support, self-love, and self-care</td>
<td>...social anxiety and strengthen coping strategies for mental health issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Service</td>
<td>...map students’ paths to graduation, and have caring adult check in regularly on progress</td>
<td>....academic fatigue and fixed mindset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...leading to attendance of 80% or greater
Takeaways

Reflections on fellowship:
• Pick a good problem. And understand it from a young person’s perspective.
• Make space and time for improvement.
• Be explicit and intentional about building skills.
• Take a leap and get started.
• Celebrate and learn from failure.
• Focus data conversations on practices, not just programs.
• Testing small changes doesn’t mean small impact.

Reflections on chronic absenteeism:
• Attendance is not the problem. Young people are not the problem.
• Helping students build connections to multiple people and fostering belonging are key strategies.
Questions?
Brainwrite Exercise
Stay Connected

• Presentation materials will be posted online at http://www.readyby21.org/nmagenda
• Tweet about your session! #rb21
• Find resources and tools at the new forumfyi.org!
• E-mail Ali (aliholstein@gmail.com) or Rachel (Rachel_Forsyth@goodshepherds.org)

Learn More About Continuous Improvement

• Good Shepherd Services Improves Fellowship Google Site: https://sites.google.com/view/gss-improves-fellowship/home
• Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better by Bryk, Gomez, et al.
• The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance by Langley et al.
• Free EdX Courses in Continuous Improvement, led by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

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