PLANNING FOR A PEER TUTORING RESOURCE CENTER IN OAKLAND

Introduction

Peer tutoring is a student-led, site-based instructional strategy used to support improved academic achievement and social-emotional outcomes across the nation (and in Oakland) for more than 30 years. National research illustrates that students involved in peer tutoring show:

- higher academic achievement,
- improved relationships with peers,
- improved personal and social development, and
- increased motivation[1]

The Urban Strategies Council report, ***Planning for a Peer Tutoring Resource Center in Oakland***[2], looks at how Oakland schools can systematically incorporate peer tutoring – a model engaging students as instructors – and proposes a low-cost, resource-rich infrastructure in Oakland to enhance the use, expansion and sustainability of peer tutoring strategies and programs.

Planning for a Peer Tutoring Resource Center in Oakland examines promising practices and outcomes for peer tutoring; presents findings on current peer tutoring practices and capacity needs in Oakland schools; and makes recommendations for establishing a peer tutoring resource center in Oakland.

The report looks at how well peer tutoring operates not only as a general support, but as a strategy for improving academic and social-emotional outcomes for historically underserved populations, including children of color, children from low-income families, English Language Learners, and students with learning challenges or disabilities.

Who Benefits from Peer Tutoring and How?

The report examines research on the three main peer tutoring models, all of which focus primarily on reading and math content areas. Two of these models are same-age, classroom-based; and the third is cross-age, pairing older students with younger students. Much of the evaluation focused on students in elementary school, though there was significant research on outcomes for secondary school students.

Evaluations for all three models show short[3] and long-term gains[4] in academic achievement, and social emotional outcomes ranging from more likely to stay on task[5] to increased attendance and decreased numbers of disciplinary referrals[6]. The academic gains held true for average-achieving students as well as low-income, at-risk, low-performing, English Language learners, and learning disabled students. When race and ethnicity were identified in sample cohorts, students were often African-American children living in urban, low-income neighborhoods[7].

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[1] Burnish, Fuchs & Fuchs, "Peer-assisted learning strategies: An evidence-based practice to promote reading achievement," Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 15(2), pp. 85-91, 2005; and Topping, K., *Peer-Assisted Learning: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. Newton, Mass.: Brookline Books, 2008.

[2] This report was funded by the Schwartz Foundation and informed in part by meetings of the Schwartz Foundation Peer Tutoring Advisory Board.

[3] Veerkamp, Mary Baldwin, Kamps, Debra M., and Cooper, Lori, "The Effects of Class Wide Peer Tutoring on the Reading Achievement of Urban Middle School Students," *Education and Treatment of Children*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2007.

[4] Greenwood, C. R., J. Delquadri, and R. V. Hall   *"Longitudinal Effects of Classwide Peer Tutoring"* Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 81, pp. 371-383, 1989.

[5] Greenwood et al. 1989.

[6] Powell, M. Anne, "Peer Tutoring and Mentoring Services for Disadvantaged Secondary School Students," California Research Bureau, 1997.

[7] Students were identified as low-income in studies that disaggregated by socioeconomic status or in those evaluating students at Title I schools.

What are Current Uses and Goals for Using Peer Tutoring in Oakland?

Based on an informal survey of Oakland public, charter and parochial schools (K-12), we found that at least 25 sites in the Oakland Unified School District, parochial and charter schools are employing peer tutoring strategies or a formal peer tutoring program, often using a cross-age model focused on English Language Arts. This amounts to more than 14,000 students exposed to peer tutoring as either a tutor or tutee.

Interviews with school and district level instructional leaders revealed that students currently targeted for peer tutoring include those who are working at grade level or above, those who have below grade-level skills and are struggling academically, and those with learning or social emotional challenges. Social-emotional, school climate, and literacy outcomes were the most commonly addressed and impacted outcomes.

In the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), instructional leaders were particularly interested in using peer tutoring to support secondary school students requiring intervention because of below basic skills in literacy, learning difficulties, or because they are English Language Learners[8].

Faced with transitioning to a new curriculum for the Common Core State Standards for Math & Language Arts[9], Oakland teachers and instructional leaders identified literacy as a content area where they felt peer tutoring would have the most impact on academic and social-emotional outcomes. They ranked professional development for teachers; training for students; and access to the latest research, curriculum materials and evaluation tools as areas of capacity building they believed would best support the development of peer tutoring.

How Can Oakland Schools Expand Peer Tutoring Strategies and Programs?

Based on feedback from Oakland schools' staff, and analysis of current peer tutoring research, we recommend a phased model of implementation beginning with a **convening** to bring together peer tutoring practitioners, instructional leaders and literacy specialists. The convening will create an opportunity to share best practices, outcomes and create discussion tables around topics, including using peer tutoring strategies to impact literacy outcomes.

The convening will inform the **first phase of implementation**, identifying and collecting peer tutoring curricula, supporting materials, promising practices and other resources to share on a Peer Tutoring Resource Center website. This online "library" will respond to practitioners' needs, include a blog for sharing lessons and challenges, and will use conversations and feedback from the website to plan future convenings.

We recommend that the **second phase of implementation** include conversations about collaboration with OUSD, parochial and charter schools; and the identification of immediate school and system needs for building or expanding peer tutoring strategies. The next step would be developing a funding plan with interested organizations to support short and long-term capacity needs.

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[8] Interview with Sarah Breed, OUSD Literacy Manager; and Jody Talkington, Literacy Specialist, May 3, 2012.

[9] The K-12 Common Core State Standards for Math and Language Arts was approved by the California State Board of Education in August 2010; an implementation plan was approved in March 2012.