

GLENBROOK HIGH SCHOOLS
Office of the Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services

TO: Dr. Michael Riggle
FROM: Rosanne Williamson
CC: Board of Education
DATE: January 21, 2015
RE: **Academic Program Review – Peer Group**

Purpose & Scope:

As part of the 2014-2015 District Initiatives, the Board requested informational academic program reviews once each semester. The scope of these presentations is intended to provide the Board with a broad overview of particular academic programs or areas and is not intended to serve as a program evaluation.

Focus:

The focus of this presentation is the district-wide Peer Group program that has been in existence for over forty years. Ms. Margaret Sullivan will present information regarding the history, mission, current structure, opportunities and challenges facing Peer Group. In addition, Peer Group teachers and current Peer Leaders will be available for questions.

Presentation Overview:

History:

- Began October 1974 in response to concerns regarding substance abuse
- Funds were made available by the US Office of Health, Education & Welfare
- 27,778 freshman served since 1974

Mission:

- Assist Freshman students in coping with pressures of adolescence
- Support the positive influence of peers on each other
- Encourage cooperation, instill sense of belonging & acceptance, develop relationships & provide useful information

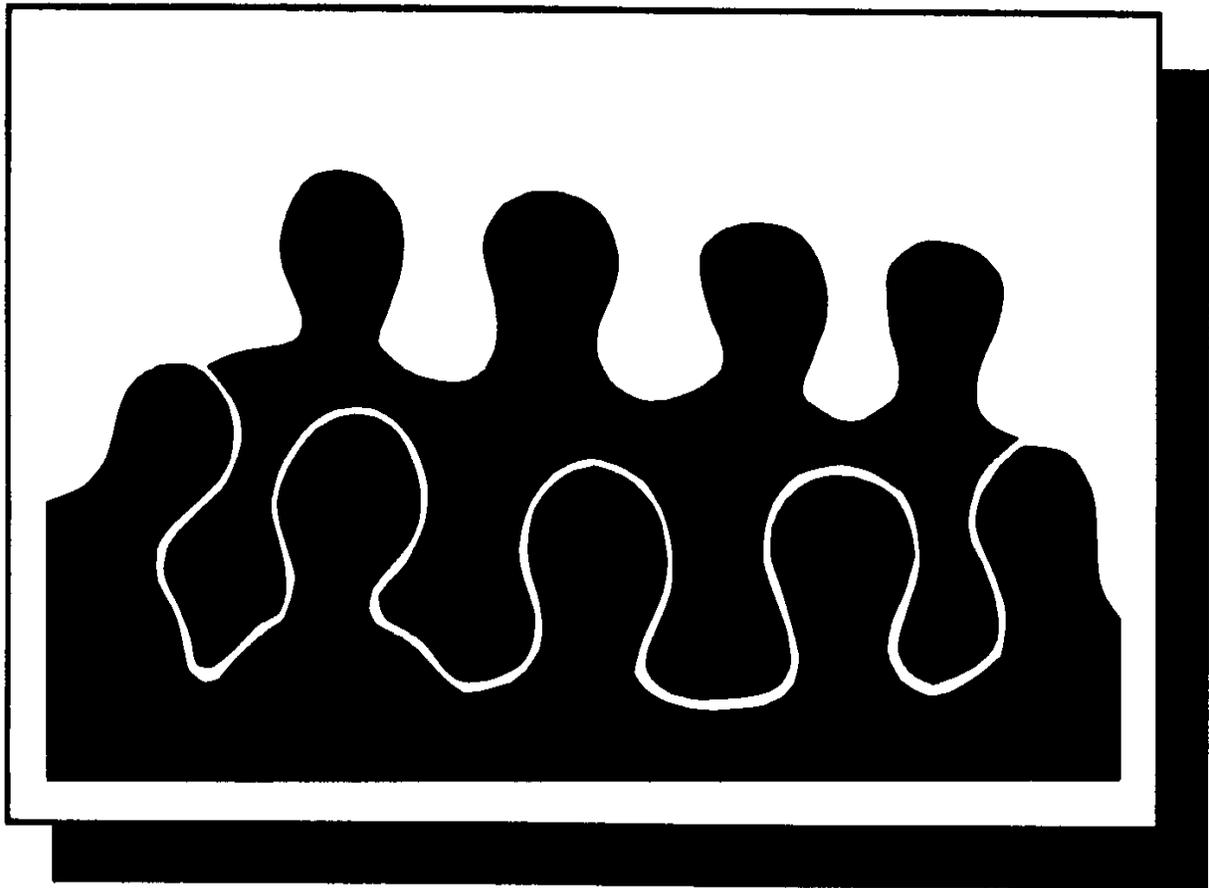
Structure:

- Senior co-leaders guide groups of 8-12 freshmen in their transition to high school
- Peer Group classes meet twice a week during Student Resource Time (SRT)
- Staff advisors supervise senior Peer Leader groups
- Senior leaders participate in training to develop leadership skills and work year-round with staff advisors
- Senior Leaders are selected through an application process

Challenges & Opportunities:

- School-wide ownership
- Student ownership
- Curriculum responsive to issues facing students in today's society
- With transition of leadership, growing population & staff turnover need to reacquaint stakeholders with the goals of the program
- Transition to block schedule at GBS

Northfield High School District #225



Peer Group Leadership Program
January 26, 2015

History of District Peer Group Program

Prior to and especially during the early 1970's, parents and educators alike were becoming more and more alarmed by the increased nationwide use of drugs by adolescents. At that time, the Office of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) made funds available to public schools for the purpose of training school personnel to deal with drug and abuse problems. In response, one of the affirmative actions taken by the District #225 Board of Education under the direction of James Lacivita, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, was the creation of the Peer Counseling Program.

From experience and research, there is strong evidence to suggest that many teenagers are most vulnerable to "outside pressures" during their initial year in high school. The transition from middle school to high school is often a lonely, anxiety-laden period of adjustment. Freshmen must learn to cope with new peer and "system" demands. The Peer Group Counseling Program is seen as one approach that can successfully help make this transition less difficult.

Since October 1974, the Peer Counseling Program has evolved to maintain ethics and standards for the peers advisors and leaders. These standards are a root of the current Glenbrook Peer Group Leadership Program, because of its relevance and importance for everyone involved in peer support. Over time, this District Program has brought together staff and student leaders from both schools to unify and strengthen the goals of the curriculum and build a bridge between the communities of both schools.

Mission Statement

The Glenbrook Peer Group Leadership Program was founded in 1974 to help participating students have a positive experience in high school and better cope with the pressures of adolescence. Recognizing the influence of peers on each other and affirming our faith in the abilities of teens to help each other, upper-class Peer Group Leaders meet with underclassman in small groups. Within these groups the leaders encourage cooperation, the development of relationships and the exchange of useful information. For most students, the results are a feeling of belonging and acceptance, which help support them in their daily lives, in and out of school.

Current Peer Group Advisors

GLENBROOK NORTH	GLENBROOK SOUTH
* Margaret Sullivan	* Joy Cooper (John Klasen)
Lee Block	Stephanie Fuja
Karen Cunningham	Rosie McManamon
Bryan Halpern	John Meyer
Peggy Holecek	Courtney Middleton
Craig Loch	Dave Schoenwetter
Maureen McDonough	Mike Vodicka
Penn Phillips	Ben Widner

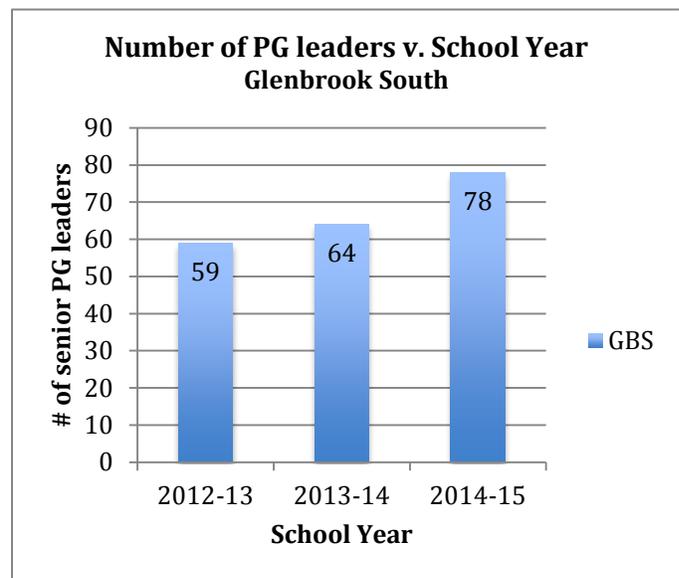
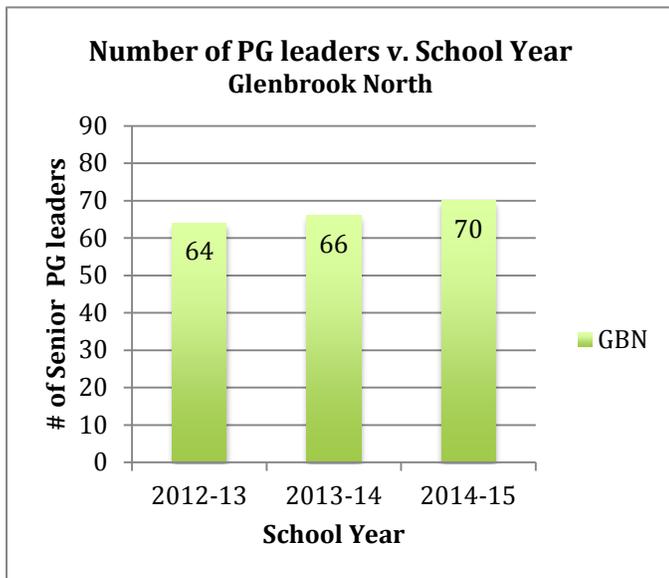
* Denotes Program Coordinator

Senior Peer Group Leaders

Senior leaders work cooperatively with a co-leader in order to guide a group of freshman through their high school transition. Students are working in groups with eight (8) to twelve (12) freshmen. The staff advisor supervises leader groups in close proximity. During senior time, advisors guide senior leaders in developing leadership skills throughout the year.

Total Number of District Peer Group Leaders Since 1974:

4, 670 Senior Leaders



Selecting, Training, and Development of Leaders

The selection phase employs a clear, systematic and careful procedure for screening and selection that includes establishing appropriate criteria of characteristics belonging to individuals. Formal and informal surveys are done to match individuals with established and desired characteristics. Finally, interested individuals fill out an application, solicit recommendations, and participate in a group interview.

Quality training is the next step to prepare our future student leaders. They are trained in the knowledge and skills they will need to be effective in the peer support role. The training program that is implemented is reflective of the goals of the peer group program. Student leaders and staff advisors commit to a forty (40) hour week of training during the summertime preceding the senior year. Training includes exercises specializing in confidentiality issues, communication skills, problem solving and decision-making strategies, and their role as a peer helper. In addition, emphasis on techniques to guide groups through stages of development is relevant. Finally, training should be viewed as an ongoing process, one that is never truly completed.

Goals for Peer Group Leaders

To develop leadership skills:

1. By learning group leadership skills to
 - a. evaluate and plan group meetings.
 - b. encourage the active participation of group members.
 - c. encourage cooperation and develop cohesion in a group.
 - d. work cooperatively with another person to co-lead a group.
2. By using the decision-making process as a model for helping to
 - a. understand the importance of personal goals and values in behavior.
 - b. Assist freshman in applying the decision-making process.
3. By learning how to communicate with others to
 - a. express thoughts and feelings to others.
 - b. be responsive to the thoughts and feelings of others.

Goals for Freshman Peer Group Members

To experience high school in a positive way:

1. By making a positive academic adjustment to
 - a. identify and discuss academic concerns (such as final exams, relationships with teachers, academic pressure, and competition).
 - b. develop possible solutions to academic concerns.
2. By making a positive social adjustment to
 - a. identify and discuss personal concerns (such as friendship, peer pressure, and loss).
 - b. function effectively as a member of a group within the school.
 - c. feel good about participation in a group.
 - d. become involved in the school community in a positive way.

Freshman Peer Group Members

Total Number of District Freshman Served Since 1974:

26,778

Glenbrook North High School

Total Freshman Participating in Peer Group = 392

Available:

Freshman enrolled in
Student Resource Time
(SRT)

Not Available:

Freshman enrolled in
Guided Studies,
Study strategies,
Math enrichment, or
an 8th class.

Glenbrook South High School

Total Freshman Participating in Peer Group = 386

Available:

Freshman enrolled in
Student Resource
Time (SRT)

Not Available:

Freshman enrolled in
Guided Studies,
Study strategies,
Math enrichment, or
an 8th class.

District Events and Support of School Projects

Peer Group Staff Advisors and Leaders are the essential, active leaders in the following:

1. Back-to-School Party for Northbrook and Glenview residents through Glenbrook Foundation
2. Freshmen Orientation – Team building activities, building and academic schedule orientation, and question & answer session
3. Eighth grade registration tours
4. All School Workshops – Facilitation of discussion and processing of topics

Challenges and Opportunities for Continued Growth of Program

Staffing

It is important that the success of the program not be dependent upon the particular person, or personality, who happens to be coordinating it at any given time. In this regard, a sense of program ownership should be maximized through weekly staff meetings held during common planning time. The staff needs to continue to educate themselves regarding “hot topics” for freshman and address these topics while retaining or increasing the number of 2nd semester freshman in the program. It is important that staff advisors are teachers representative of departments across the school. This gives ownership of the program to the entire school and not just the counseling department which results in significant and broad support – an important element in a program like this. Each school must prepare for a transition as coordinators Ms. Margaret Sullivan and Mr. John Klasen change roles. Scheduling and logistics for both student leaders and staff will need to be addressed.

Peer Ownership

The program should strive to maximize a high level of ownership and involvement on the part of the peer helpers themselves. An agile curriculum that remains current regarding issues students face growing up in today’s society will maintain student engagement in the program while instilling in freshman a future commitment to the program through their interest in becoming Peer Leaders their senior year. This commitment will also support and sustain a school culture consistent with the mission of Peer Group.

Public Relations

Staff will need to make a concerted, ongoing effort to keep faculty, staff and organizations in the broader community well informed about the Peer Group program and instill support for its goals. With the transition of new Peer Group program coordinators and a growing population of students and general staff turnover, efforts to reacquaint faculty and staff with the goals of the program will be important.

Transition to Block Schedule at Glenbrook South

Prior to the block schedule, Peer Group advisors and leaders at Glenbrook South accessed freshman students for Peer Group strictly out of the three lunch periods. This presented a number of challenges including: getting students to attend freshman groups regularly instead of sitting in the cafeteria with their peers, tracking attendance consistently across all periods, managing our inability to access all students in the larger lunch periods, and encouraging new students to join second semester particularly after they became comfortable with who they sat with at lunch. Our hope was that transitioning to the block schedule would allow us to access a greater population of the freshman class. While our attendance this year is far more consistent than in past years, we have learned from unforeseen changes during first semester what to do in the future to maximize opportunities so more students can participate in a Peer Group. Moving forward, we need to work to ensure that the number of seniors assigned to each block is balanced with the number of freshmen assigned to SRT so that we can run the maximum number of groups possible. As a program, we are committed to accepting more senior leaders to best attend to the freshman class while maintaining the integrity that keeps us strong.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **When does a freshman have Peer Group?**

Freshmen have Peer Group during their Student Resource Time (SRT). Freshman will have an opportunity to elect to participate in a Peer Group. They will have Peer Group every other day (except Fridays) for forty-five (45) minutes. At Glenbrook North, the other forty-five (45) minutes of their SRT is spent in a manner of their choosing, such as completing homework, seeking help from a teacher, or independent study in a resource center. At Glenbrook South, students are in study hall for the additional forty-five minutes.

- **What does a Peer Group consist of?**

A senior leader group consists of eight (8) to twelve (12) students who are instructed and supervised by a staff advisor.

A freshman group consists of two (2) senior leaders, typically one male and one female, who will lead a group of eight (8) to twelve (12) freshmen. The staff advisor monitors attendance and behavior.

- **What specific topics do senior leaders discuss with the freshman?**

Different groups will have different issues that arise, but typically, senior leaders discuss many of the following topics: study habits, time management, possible clubs or activities available at school, peer pressure, communication skills, school resources, healthy dating habits, qualities of “true” friends/relationships, coping skills for freshman situations, etc.

Acknowledgments

The Glenbrook Peer Group Program has developed over forty years and reflects the contributions of past and present staff advisors, support staff and administrators:

Jack Adams	Ruby Allen	Craig Ameel
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Margaret Sullivan	Mark Tantillo	Barbara Varenhorst
Paul Vignocchi	Mike Vodicka	Katie Wargaski
David Weber	Brian Wegley	Jerry Wicks
Ben Widner	Rosanne Williamson	Ed Young

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A special word of appreciation goes to Mr. James Lacivita, retired Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, for his insight and guidance. Mr. Lacivita's commitment to the development and growth of the Glenbrook Peer Group Program has been instrumental to its success.