Attendance & Truancy Among Virginia Students

Session Eleven
Creating Opportunities for Peer Learning

Presentation Description
Module twelve provides a framework for schools and school divisions to use when seeking to create opportunities for peer learning among staff.

Participant Goals
- Educators will learn how to create opportunities for peer learning and exchange on effective attendance practices
- Educators will learn how to use their data to identify bright spots that can share successes and create a space to discuss common challenges.

Facilitation
Have the participants review the module and reflections. Each reflection is designed to help participants further their understanding and learning of key concepts, frameworks, and strategies for reducing chronic absence.

> " *Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."*
> - **Helen Keller**

Warm Up - Reflection One

What peer learning opportunities currently exist for principals, teachers or staff in your school or division?

Warm Up Notes

Reflection Two

Does this approach make sense to you? How would you adjust it?

The Value of Peer Learning

- Peers are believable messengers. They're in the trenches with other educators.
- Peers can share among themselves more openly and honestly than with outsiders.
- Peers know the locality, schools and student population. They often face common challenges.
- Peers often have solutions that can help one another so they avoid re-inventing the wheel.

Purpose of a Typical Peer Learning Network

To create a peer learning community in which teams can:
a) analyze their attendance data
b) learn about and develop strategies for reducing chronic absence
c) craft a plan for addressing chronic absence
d) implement their approach to reducing chronic absence starting in the next school year.

Reflection Notes

Reflection Three

What are the opportunities in your school or division for creating a network?

Cycle of Inquiry for Peer Learning

1. Assess the Level of Chronic Absence
2. Vet Results for Accuracy
3. Mine the Data
4. Share the Results
5. Generate Solutions
6. Use Data to Set Targets
7. Try Out Interventions
8. Assess What Did and Did Not Work

How Can You Create Peer Learning Opportunities?

- **Create a new peer network:** Bring a group of schools or educators together to meet regularly about attendance practice: what works and what doesn't? Provide a facilitator who can guide the network through a cycle of inquiry.
- **Piggyback on an existing network:** Build in time during an existing meeting for peer learning.
- **Join an online learning network:** Take advantage of online resources.

Reflection Notes

Reflection Four

Do you know any Bright Spots in your division? Would this process work for your community?

Finding Bright Spots

A key step to promoting peer learning is finding the schools and educators who are reducing chronic absence and then learning from the practices they use.

WHAT WORKS IN OUR COMMUNITY?
A toolkit for identifying promising local practice

Attendance Works

Use Data to Identify Bright Spots

- Once you have calculated your chronic absence levels for all the schools in your division, compare them to see which schools stand out for having low levels of absenteeism.
- Pay particular attention to schools that have low levels of chronic absence despite school characteristics and student demographic factors that are associated with high levels of absenteeism.
- School leaders can do the same analysis to look for Bright Spot classrooms.

How to Identify a Bright Spot

- Look at schools or classrooms with low chronic absence rates.
- Examine rates from year to year – are they consistent or are there significant improvements needed?
- Compare to schools with similar student populations
- Assess proportion of students in challenging circumstances: living in poverty, special education, English language learners.
- Assess school size and neighborhood composition.
- Confirm data with school principal or attendance clerk and plan a site visit.

Reflection Notes

Reflection Five

Look at this analysis from three schools in Oregon. What does it show you about the conditions that contribute to chronic absence? What does it show you about these schools?

Data Can Tell the Story

Characteristics	School #1	School #2	School #3
Region Type	Rural	Town	City
K-2 Enrollment	218	75	215
% ED	72%	100%	82%
% ELL	5%	16%	64%
% SPED	17%	5%	12%
% Non-White	36%	33%	83%
Chronic Absence			
Predicted Rate	24%	28%	22%
Actual Rate	1%	7%	6%
Difference	-23%	-21%	-16%

Reflection Notes

Reflection Six

Think for a minute, who would you invite on a site visit and what would you hope to produce?

Site Visits Can Uncover What Works

Once you have identified possible Bright Spots, plan site visit to assess attendance practices and policies. Here are some questions to consider:
- What do you want to learn from this site visit?
- Are you looking for practices to share district-wide?
- Are you seeking to understand what works and what does not work?
- Are you seeking to understand what motivated the school community to become focused on attendance?
- Do you want to identify how the district office can support sites through providing data, resources, professional development?

Site Visit Logistics

- **Who should go?** The site visit is a collaborative learning opportunity for the leaders in your district, as well as a chance to build capacity and buy-in, so consider including key district leaders, funders, or a principal who is widely respected by her colleagues.
- **Do you want a written product?** Determine if you want a case study or a PowerPoint summary, and who the audience will be before the site visit. For written products, ensure you have a strong writer involved in the process.
- **What questions should you ask?** Attendance Works has sample interview protocols.

Reflection Notes

Reflection Seven

What opportunities or products would work best for sharing what works in your community?

Sharing What You Learn

Once you've identified Bright Spots and promising practices, you need to put them in a position to share their success:

- Invite attendance leaders to speak at staff professional development sessions
- Host a recognition ceremony for schools beating the odds on attendance (PALs)
- Ask these educators to lead or participate in peer learning networks bringing together several schools to talk regularly about reducing absenteeism

Documenting What You Learn

- Create a PowerPoint that principals can share with staff
- Write a brief or case studies documenting the Bright Spots and their promising practices
- Develop a local community toolkit with messaging materials and step-by-step instruction for instituting promising practices

Reflection Notes

Learn More

Before moving on with the additional modules, we would like to encourage you to learn more about this issue. Specifically, please consider reading/viewing:

- Positive Outliers Toolkit (which includes sample questions for site visits)http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-school-districts/positive-outliers-toolkit
- Principal Attendance Leader award: http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-school-districts/nominate-a-principal/