ATTENDANCE CIRCLES

**Top Five Reasons Why Kids Miss School (according to School Attendance Officers)**

Mental health issues (anxiety #1)

Physical health issues

Family dysfunction and family not supportive of school

Not interested in school, bored with offerings

Work not completed, anxiety around workload

**Additional Information from SAOs**

Teen parents

Cultural barriers to learning

Need to work

Substance abuse

**Attendance Circles**

Foster students’ connection to school through supportive community problem-solving

Engage students in how chronic absence impacts themselves, their families, and others.

**The Circle Process**

Helps students understand how school community is impacted

Focuses on harms created by low attendance, rather than the rules

Gives school officials a deeper understanding as to why a child is struggling and insight into systemic issues that contribute to poor attendance

Provides insight about what can be done to make things rights.

**Best Practice for a Successful Program**

Consistency and structure

Administrative support and understanding

Teacher support and understanding

Student engagement

A plan to maintain student engagement

Co-facilitators

Older kids with younger kids is better

Attendance numbers – just high flyers is not good – less than 18 is probably better

Check with counselors to determine appropriateness

Meet with each student to determine interest, and obtain parent permission if necessary

Bringing passes personally

Don’t follow plan necessarily, organic process

Humor is very important

Consistent, uninterrupted, confidential area, circle of chairs (no tables)

6-12 sessions or continue meeting indefinitely

In FCPS’ high schools there was 50%-60% improvement but connection was the most important

No Mondays or Fridays

Earlier in the week or day but not first thing

Approximately 45 minutes

You have to have food! Budget, PTSA, community

Food builds community – breaking bread together

Not during May – Remediation groups

Maintenance: check in weekly with facilitator – names on wall to check in

Fairfax HS: level 2 group mentor the level 1 group

Find out why student misses, build data, teacher refusal? In FCPS teacher refusal is the lowest reason students don’t attend circles

No single school abandoned Attendance Circles.

**Lesson Learned**

No quick fixes. It is a process, and rewards are likely “slow to come”

Stay true to principles, not punitive

Groups with mixed grade levels provided peer-to-peer support

Every group is different…some will sail and some might sink

Consider nature of group before making changes – be wary of adding new students during mid-semester

Prevent bad banter