



# Evidence in Action

## *A K20 Center Research Brief*

### Effects of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program within a Randomized Controlled Trial

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2022*

#### Introduction

This intervention brief explores the "Effects of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program within a Randomized Controlled Trial" by Jenner et al. (2022). The authors address the critical issue of high school dropout rates, particularly during the transition from middle to high school, often referred to as the "9th grade shock." This period is associated with significant declines in academic performance and increased dropout rates. The study evaluates the effectiveness of a cross-age peer mentoring program – Peer Group Connection High School (PGC-HS) – designed to mitigate these challenges by fostering supportive relationships and enhancing school engagement.

#### Methodology

##### Research Design:

The study employed a randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of the PGC-HS program on ninth-grade students.

##### Sample:

The sample included 1,351 ninth-grade students from eight high schools in North Carolina. Students were randomly assigned to either the intervention group, which participated in the PGC-HS program, or the control group, which did not receive the mentoring support.

##### Data Analysis:

The analysis included intent-to-treat (ITT) analyses to estimate the overall impact of the program and compiler average causal effect (CACE) estimates to assess the impact among students who actively participated in the program.

#### Results

The study found that the PGC-HS program had a modest but potentially meaningful impact on several ninth-grade outcomes. While the program did not significantly affect academic metrics such as credit attainment and attendance, it did reduce disciplinary events and improve self-reported school engagement and postsecondary expectations. Students who regularly



attended the weekly peer group meetings reported higher levels of decision-making skills and peer norms for academic achievement.

## Application into Practice

To replicate the PGC-HS program in a school context, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Identify Peer Leaders:** Select 11th and 12th-grade students who demonstrate leadership potential and train them to lead peer groups.
2. **Form Peer Groups:** Organize ninth-grade students into small peer groups, each led by a pair of trained peer leaders.
3. **Weekly Meetings:** Schedule weekly meetings where peer groups engage in structured activities designed to build academic, social, and emotional skills.
4. **Monitor and Support:** Regularly monitor the progress of the peer groups and provide ongoing support and training to peer leaders.

By implementing these steps, schools can create a more supportive environment that helps students navigate the challenging transition to high school, potentially reducing dropout rates and improving overall student engagement.

## Work Cited

Jenner, E., Lass, K., Walsh, S., Demby, H., Leger, R., & Falk, G. (2023). Effects of Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program within a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 16(3), 473-500.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2022.2130119>