

# Dropouts Into Graduates



## The Learning Works Chasing Model

Lessons Learned for Districts and Schools  
Dr. Mikala L. Rahn, Sean Van Gundy,  
Dominick Correy

# History of Learning Works



- High-Risk youth started to come to our tutoring center in 2005-2006
- Convinced the school district to expand CIS in PUSD to our facility in March 2006
- Operated in essence as a dependent charter through June 2008
- Charter in June 2008 and opened September 2008
- Added middle school in September 2009

# History of Learning Works (cont.)



- WASC Accredited 2010 and renewed in 2013
- Added Homeboy partnership in January 2010
- Added artWORKS in Fall 2010
- Added Infant program in January 2013
- Added HopeWorks in Spring 2013
- Charter Renewed in Spring 2013 for Five Years

# Dissemination Grant



- Disseminate lessons learned in five key areas based on research and LWCS
  - 1) A Charter Model for Re-engaging Dropouts—The Learning Works Story with a focus on Rigor, Relevance and Relationships
  - 2) Prevention and Intervention—What Do We Really Know about Dropouts?
  - 3) The Chaser Model—How Do We Create Youth-friendly Schools?
  - 4) Serving Underserved Targeted Populations—Teen Parents, Foster Care, and Probation Youth
  - 5) A True Community School—A Partnership Model

# Dissemination Grant (cont.)



- Build the capacity of PUSD and John Muir HS to re-engage students
- Become a teaching location or laboratory school where people come to learn
- Develop a middle school parent engagement strategy to prevent dropouts
- Share all school curriculum, materials developed, and training electronically
- Continue to research the dropout problem and solutions

# Learning Labs



- The Chaser Model (February)
- Effectively Serving Teen Mothers and their Infants (May)
- Our Homeboy Partnership (June)
- A New Approach to Probation Youth (September)
- Middle School Prevention of Dropouts (October)
- A New Approach to Educating Foster Care (January)

# The Chaser<sup>®</sup> Model



- The Teacher and Chasers are the backbone of our program with a focus on Rigor, Relevance and Relationship. We lead with Relationship.
- Chasers find dropouts and continue to engage and re-engage them in school.
- The Chaser is the bridge back to school, and the promise of a fresh start.
- Chasers work with the poorest, most disenfranchised youth in our area, motivating, tutoring, mentoring, coaching, and chasing them to through school.

# The Chaser Model (cont.)



- Chasers transport students to services such as Planned Parenthood, probation appointments, health services, with a motto of NO EXCUSES to graduate.
- Chasers do whatever it takes to help the student achieve the goal of a high school diploma.



# Other Chasing Activities



Fieldtrips—Content Connection

Science

Social Studies

Visual and Performing Arts

Events

Chasing CAHSEE & other test requirements

Chasing special education, registration, etc. needs

# Typical Day for a Chaser



# Where do Chasers Come From?



- Me at first, Chasers later
- Learning Work Graduates
- There is a job description (full-time with benefits)

# Working in the Grey



## Our Principles

- Fresh start
- Forgiveness & unconditional love
- Safe haven
- Reality & potential
- Desire to give back and be heard
- Honesty
- Joy & fun
- Irrational commitment to students

# Working in the Grey (cont.)



What we learned in hiring....

- Prefer 21 years and older
- Challenge of females
- Must have valid driver's license and insurance
- Must not have traffic tickets (felons ok, but must be a good driver)
- Require postsecondary, but provide counseling and monitoring

# Working in the Grey (cont.)



What we've learned helps chasing...

- We needed vehicles
- Regular schedule, but available for crisis
- Need end of learning period chasing weekend
- Measureable goals and incentives
- Need someone assigned to monitor probation youth
- Need taxis and child support for parenting teens
- Needed a way to talk about drug usage with students (harm reduction)

# Working in the Grey (cont.)



## Characteristics....

- Moved on from past life, but incorporates it in the work
- Get addicted to doing good
- Good judgment
- Know when to ask questions
- Teamwork
- Know your limits
- Communication skills
- True understanding and commitment to mission



# Chaser Supplies

- Cell phone with ability to individual and group text
- Gas Cards
- Student Food
- I-Pads with SIS access
- Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Walkie-talkies
- Wish we had golf cart



# Chaser Training

- Health & safety: CPR, first aid, restraint training, youth health
- Our own curriculum
- Math and technology skills
- Teamwork
- Individual training

# Replicable or Not?



- What we have learned about the challenges to replicate in non-charter:
- There are constraints in regular school because of unions and hours which is a barrier to effective chasing
- Vehicle concerns about transporting students
- Hiring practices
- Hard to fund in current budget priorities
- Hierarchy is a barrier to equality or kinship

# Replicable or Not? (cont.)

What are the possibilities in non-charter:

- Chasers versus advocates—working on in-school dropouts
- Creating a Youth Friendly school where everyone is a chaser through culture change
- Staff development on poverty, youth development and engaging students
- Creating smaller structures: advisory periods, smaller learning communities, mentoring high-risk youth
- Using the data to find potential and real dropouts (Do something with the data!)
- Engaging effective youth-centered probation, mental health and policing practices
- Park sweeps, home visits, calls, etc. with relentless follow through
- Implementation of a Fresh Start policy

# Questions?

