



Overview of the PLUS Program

The Peer Leaders Uniting Students (PLUS) Program was originally developed in 2002 and has been implemented in 515 schools in 13 states throughout the United States. In total 1852 staff members and over 13,890 students have been trained in the PLUS model. As a result, over 200,000 students participate in student led PLUS activities each year in schools implementing PLUS. PLUS, a student voice and participatory action program, offers a comprehensive approach to student-led school climate improvement, and includes activities for youth-led school climate data collection, synthesis, and dissemination; school community forums facilitated by young people; and relationship and connectedness-building activities led by young people throughout the school year.

Central to the PLUS Program is the recruitment of a “PLUS Team” of 25-30 students that represent a cross-section of influential students across the campus. This team of students is responsible for the planning,

implementation, and evaluation of all elements of the PLUS program.

Student members of the PLUS team are selected by school adults based on their leadership and influence characteristics, which are outlined by the PLUS program. Among PLUS student selection considerations are an application process, large group forum interaction, and panel interview which assesses a student's potential social influence on the campus, communication and listening skills, compassion, intellectual responses, and relationships with others.

PLUS is designed to be integrated into a school's master calendar; PLUS Team students attend the PLUS class as part of their regular academic day. This approach allows young people who are not ordinarily able to stay after school due to family and/or work obligations to participate on the PLUS Team. The PLUS class is facilitated by a PLUS-trained school adult, referred to as the PLUS Advisor. Time during the PLUS class is used for two major purposes: (1) PLUS Team students receive training from their PLUS Advisor in principles of effective peer leadership, including training in facilitation, conflict resolution, and communication skills; (2) PLUS Team students plan upcoming PLUS activities (e.g., PLUS Data Collection, PLUS Forums, PLUS Climate Activities, described below).

PLUS Data Collection: The PLUS Team gathers quantitative and qualitative data from participants during the peer led activities. Data gathered from online surveys and student led focus group discussions drive the planning process and the calendar of activities to be implemented by student leadership throughout the school year. By using data as a source in the decision making process, PLUS Activities direct student leadership programs and school administrators to needed universal interventions.

As part of the implementation kit, PLUS Teams are equipped with an online survey instrument (Direction Survey) that serves to gather quantitative data reflecting the norms of a student body. Each month the PLUS Team members, with the help from the PLUS advisor, who is in direct communication with the administrators and stakeholders network, develop a survey to gather the behavioral data from a random sample of the 15-25% of the student population. Surveys are developed from a bank of questions that schools can choose from. Students often take the surveys at PLUS forums, during classroom time, or at lunch through the use of mobile devices such as tablets, laptops and cell phones. The PLUS Team, along with the guidance of administrators, stakeholders network,

and PLUS Advisor, will identify the behavior impacting school climate in the data findings and plan universal intervention activities that target the needed behavior. The activities planned out in the PLUS Class are a result of data integration in the overall program development.

PLUS Forums: The PLUS Team is charged with facilitating a minimum of 1 PLUS forum every month during an academic year (9 total forums). The monthly forums are attended by a sample of students who represent a diverse cross section of the student body. There 7 categories of activities that make the agenda of the Forum. These activities researched based and designed to create an opportunity for students to bond with other students and build student connections, while simultaneously going through a series of conversations that lends the opportunity to foster their pro-social norms as a student community. Each month a new sample of 50-60 students, representing all sub groups on the campus, are invited to participate in the forums. The Forums give these students a voice to discuss school climate issues and their experiences at school. The forums last for a total 2 ½ hours on a high school campus.

Qualitative data is gathered as a result of PLUS Team leaders (peer to peer) facilitating small and large group discussions to identify critical issues impacting their campus. Each forum implements 6-8 small focus groups with up to ten participants in each group. Upon completion of each forum, student participants receive a PLUS shirt, signifying their commitment to the student community, and they are invited to engage in the calendar of activities outlined by the PLUS Team. This process creates a larger community of young people participating in meaningful activities that reflect the needs of their community.

PLUS School Climate Activities: Gathering the quantitative data using the survey instrument and the qualitative data from the student led forums once a month, provides valuable insight to not only assess school climate, but to accurately implement activities that address the critical needs that impact school climate. The needs include, but are not limited to, bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, gang prevention, suicide prevention, and bias and racism. . If cyberbullying suddenly begins to spike in the data findings each month, the PLUS Team would immediately develop a plan to address the behavior with a universal intervention activity to be implemented the following month. By allotting a school period in the day to

oversee PLUS, the student led activities being implemented are a direct result of the data findings.

In addition to the monthly PLUS forums, the PLUS Team is tasked with leading 2 school climate lunch activities each month, 1-2 after school programs each month, 1 Community Service project each semester, and a continuous effort to implement social marketing strategies that include public service announcements, classroom visits, and cross age peer educational opportunities with middle and elementary school students.

The calendar of activities outlines a pattern of experiences that are directed by the data findings. PLUS Teams select from an online bank of activities that are categorized by behavior (eg. bullying, harassment, racism, school connectedness, etc). PLUS Teams analyze data and fill in the calendar of activities each month with the needed activities that reflect the behavior impacting school climate.

In order to support schools to engage in full implementation of PLUS, the following training and supports are provided:

Component 1: Training. A 2-day in-person training of school adults responsible for supporting the PLUS Team will be implemented (Training

of Advisors). Participants learn how to: Utilize student leaders to target core campus issues impacting School Climate using data trends to track and monitor progress; Develop a calendar of activities to engage all students in meaningful participation and measure how activity implementation impacts school climate; Align Program Development with school safety plans, MTTs interventions and stakeholders network needs; How to Identify, select and train student leaders; Fundamentals to student led forums: organization, implementation and evaluation; Data collection: Collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data that reflects school climate.

A 1-Day in person training of the students (Student Training) who represent the PLUS team at the school site is implemented. The objectives of this 8-hour training include: Learn the qualities and responsibilities of being a facilitator of group activities, forum implementation and effective facilitation strategies, Foster student leadership skills for improving communication & listening, strengthen student knowledge of youth trends and data, learn conflict mediation strategies, how to apply learning situations to activities, social marketing strategies to create behavior change school wide, and establishing a calendar of activities that align with data findings.

Component 2: Online resources: access to online survey tool portals, class curriculum, resource center; and PLUS Program online implementation kit. These online tools include: Direction Survey. Includes an online survey development and data analysis portal, which enables PLUS teams to analyze school wide trends by developing monthly online surveys from a bank of over 300 categorized questions to administer surveys throughout a school year. For program planning, an activity development and resource center supplies PLUS teams over 100 lessons and activities to choose from that serve as interventions for identified behaviors to be included in their calendar of activities throughout the school year.

PLUS Team Development online Curriculum. PLUS Team Development Teacher Guide and Student workbooks- Classroom curriculum serves as a resource to help an advisor develop the skills of the youth leaders who will be facilitating the activities of the PLUS Program. A variety of lessons have been tailored to enhance the skills of the PLUS Team member. Activities include situation and scenarios, listening and communicating, self discovery, team discovery, emotional assessments, and facilitation strategies.

PLUS Program Development Manuals - Manual 1: PLUS Program

Development Prepares a school site with the implementation strategies to establish the PLUS Program on a school site. Advisor will develop a strong understanding on how to gather data, select student leaders, organize community efforts, and establish a foundation for the PLUS Program to be successful. Manual 2: Establishing a Commitment to Actions, Identity and Purpose Guides an advisor through the steps to train, prepare and implement a PLUS Forum on campus. The PLUS Forum is the core of the PLUS Program and the source for student connections and data gathering and Manual 3: A Guide to Ongoing Actions Leads an advisor to a variety of activities to sustain the PLUS identity on a campus. All activities focus on team building and enriching the student community on a campus.)

Component 3: Implementation Coaching. All district and site-level coordinators receive implementation support directly from the PLUS developers. Implementation support will include supplemental training and individualized coaching on data collection and management, youth leadership, parent engagement, stakeholder network development, and school-wide awareness building. Aspects of ongoing support include: Data Development to analyze data and seek to build on a set of actions that will

define the program development needed on each campus. Student Development -PLUS Team Summits: All PLUS Team leaders in each district will unite to build a cohesive identity that will reflect a district wide PLUS team. School Wide Awareness seminars will enhance the social marketing of the PLUS Program initiatives. Curriculum Development Workshops that train the PLUS Teachers to facilitate the PLUS Program classroom curriculum.