



*Improving Educational Outcomes in High Need,
Low-Income Rural and Urban Communities through a Middle School Transition
and Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Model*

**Education Innovation and Research Program – Early-phase Grant
Abstract**

The Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) is applying for an Early-phase Grant in response to *AP1: Supporting High-Need Students* and *AP 2: Improving School Climate*. The proposed 5-year project will develop a middle school transition and cross-age peer mentoring program for 6th grade students, known as *Peer Group Connection-Middle School (PGC-MS)*, into a replicable and scalable program that can serve as a prosocial approach to school discipline. The project will also investigate the efficacy of PGC-MS and equip us to provide schools across the country with tested resources to implement PGC-MS. PGC-MS is designed to improve social and emotional learning (SEL) and enhance student engagement to support academic and other school-related outcomes, including discipline. PGC-MS is the middle grades version of Peer Group Connection-High School (PGC-HS), an evidence-based program that supports and eases students' transition into high school. The proposed project will serve high-need 6th graders in 10 middle schools in low-income, rural communities in North Carolina and urban communities in Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. CSS and The Policy & Research Group (PRG) will partner to conduct an experimental study to measure program impacts on SEL (goal setting, growth mindset, decision-making) and student engagement. PRG will examine the extent to which these impacts translate into improved academic achievement and other school-related outcomes as demonstrated by decreased course failures and decreased discipline incidents. In each of 10 schools, incoming 6th grade students will be randomly assigned to either a treatment (PGC-MS) or control group. Approximately 150 students in each school will be assigned to these two groups, resulting in a total sample of approximately 1,500 students.