

Somers High School Peer Leadership Program

The Peer Leadership Program in Somers High School is dedicated to helping students make a successful transition from middle school by creating a sense of community and fostering deeper relationships between students, their peers, and the adults in their school lives. Personalizing the learning environment addresses the challenges students face and offers them an ongoing opportunity to ask questions and get helpful, positive responses from students and staff who are trained to anticipate and respond to the unique developmental needs of these students.

We kick off the year by offering a welcoming and informative freshman orientation day in late August. During this event, freshmen are given a tour of the building, meet their upper class peer leaders, are placed in mentoring groups of approximately 10 students, and begin a year-long relationship that will hopefully benefit both mentor and mentored alike. Then, once every six days, throughout the school year, the junior and senior peer leaders meet with their freshman mentoring groups and facilitate a planned activity with them. Topics for those activities include "Getting to Know Each Other," "Making Choices," "Truth and Honor," "Setting Goals," etc. Students explore and discuss issues and share diverse perspectives on a variety of social and academic topics that are relevant to their lives now and in the immediate future.

Peer leaders also attend a class in Peer Leadership. That class meets an additional three days in the six day cycle. It is graded like any other academic course and students receive one credit for the year. The course is designed to help prepare leaders for their interaction with their younger peers and also to facilitate growth and skills that the peer leaders will find useful in their academic and adult lives. They learn to plan effective meetings, communicate clearly, be a better listener, consider a variety of ideas and perspectives and extend themselves beyond the boundaries of their own ambitions.

Junior and Senior students that wish to serve as Peer Leaders and be enrolled in the Peer Leadership course, must apply and be accepted by a committee of teachers, staff and students. They must have a history of academic success, demonstrated traditional and non-traditional leadership abilities, and an interest in pursuing a challenge that will further develop their interpersonal skills. Some of the essential qualities we look for in candidates are the following:

- Strong communication skills
- Willingness to work with and lead others
- Responsible and self-disciplined
- Positive role model
- A demonstrated respect for diverse ideas and personalities
- Enthusiasm and sense of humor
- Dedication and commitment

Successful candidates must make a commitment to the mandatory training and program events listed below.

1. THREE DAYS IN THE LAST WEEK OF AUGUST
 - Preparation for the opening of school and Freshman Orientation Day
2. TWO-DAY LEADERSHIP RETREAT IN MID-LATE SPRING.
 - An introductory training event, off campus.
3. ENROLLMENT INTO THE PEER LEADERSHIP COURSE
 - Class meets every-other day for a full year
4. ADDITIONAL MENTORING SESSIONS.

- Leaders meet with their mentoring group once every six days throughout the school year. They must prepare for and attend each of their scheduled mentoring sessions.
5. FOLLOW-UP TRAINING RETREATS AND WORKSHOPS
 - Scheduled on or off-campus, throughout the year.
 6. SCHOOL / COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS
 - Initiated, planned and implemented by leaders.

Topics of Study and Practice:

- Organization and Preparation
- Facilitation skills
- Strategies, skills and practices of exemplary leaders.
- Habits of Mind
- Self-assessment / peer assessment of leadership skills
- Working in learning teams; peer observations, sharing feedback, planning group goals and/or assignments.
- Experiential learning cycle.
- Stages of Group Development.
- Inspiring a shared vision; community service.
- Enabling others to act; developing respect and trust, recognizing the power of teamwork, problem-solving, conflict resolution.
- Modeling the way; self-reflection, leadership practice; values clarification.
- Encouraging the heart; motivation, honor, etc.

Roles and responsibilities of Peer Leaders include:

- 1) **Peer Mentoring:** helping freshmen students make the transition into Somers High School.
- 2) **Peer Tutors:** Helping students meet the academic and social challenges of high school life.
- 3) **Orientation Guides:** Participating in the planning and implementation of a dynamic and welcoming orientation day event.
- 4) **Role Models:** Provide leadership and a personal example for appropriate and productive behavior.
- 5) **Outreach workers:** reaching out or acting as a door opener for those that are troubled or lonely.
- 6) **Referral Agents:** Helping students get connected to appropriate resources and assistance.
- 7) **Discussion Leaders and Facilitators:** Planning and implementing activities and discussions on topics of concern.
- 8) **Service Participants:** coordinating and assisting with service projects that benefit others in the school and community.
- 9) **Conflict Mediators:** Assisting others to resolve disputes, keep the peace and access the appropriate resources for resolution.
- 10) **Critical Friends:** Educating and enlightening others in the mission to create a more understanding, tolerant and supportive community.

For more information, please contact Jean Schult at Somers High School. Phone: (914) 248-8585 E-mail: JSchult@somers.k12.ny.us