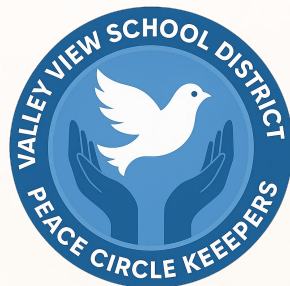


Making Peace Circles Work

**A Tiered MTSS Framework for Everyday
Classrooms and Student Needs**





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Our Peace Circle Team



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What are Peace Circles?

Peace Circles are a structured process of communication where students and staff gather in a circle so every voice is heard and valued.



What are Peace Circles?



Rooted in Indigenous traditions and restorative justice practices, circles are now used in schools to build community, strengthen relationships, promote equity, and repair harm. They create safety, belonging, and connection—the conditions for learning.

Theoretical Foundations for Using Circles in Schools

- The Whole Child Approach
- The Importance of Relationships in Child Development and Learning
- The Importance of School Climate & Culture and a Sense of Belonging
- Positive Discipline
- Trauma- Sensitive Learning Environments
- Mindfulness Practices

(Circle Forward pgs 6-7)

[Circle Process Infographic](#)

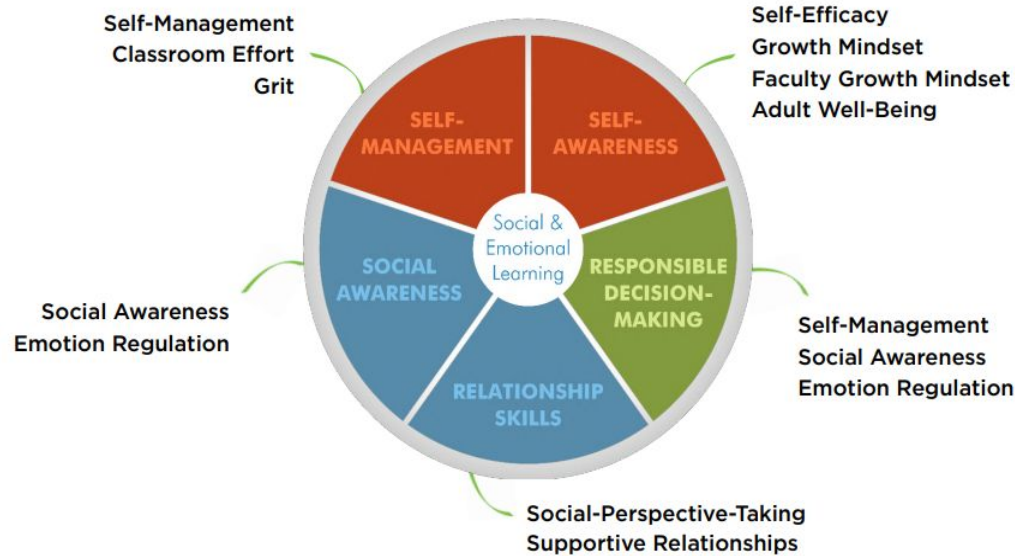


How Circles Support Social-Emotional Learning

Circle routines build belonging, engagement, and SEL skills



HOW PANORAMA'S SEL MEASURES ALIGN WITH CASEL'S FRAMEWORK



Self-Awareness

Use voice, reflect, build confidence

Self-Management

Managing emotions, attention, and responses.

Social Awareness

Listen, show empathy, value perspectives

Relationship Skills

Communicate, connect, build trust

Responsible Decision-Making

Use evidence, think critically, solve problems

Senate Bill 100 and the Every Student Succeeds Act

No Child Left Behind

Success determined by academic standards.

Federal targets and interventions for schools; punitive system of responses.

Accountability and data for student sub-groups.

Each state defines and addresses truancy which typically emphasizes court based, punitive, interventions.

Every Student Succeeds Act

Success determined by academic & nonacademic standards.

States set goals; supportive framework.

Accountability and data for student sub-groups.

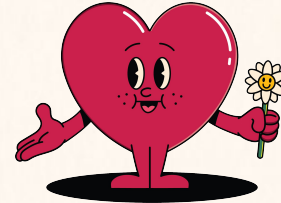
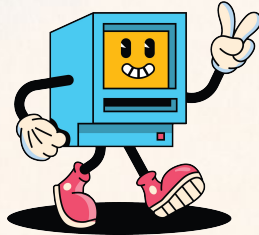
Chronic absence is a required reporting & optional school quality metric. It emphasizes prevention and early intervention.

How Circles Support Social-Emotional Learning

VVSD Portrait of a Learner



Adaptive learners can change their thoughts and actions when things are new or tough, keep trying even when it's hard, and listen to different ideas to solve problems.



Empathetic Citizens are kind, respectful of others' opinions and differences, and try to understand how others think and feel.



Effective Communicators share ideas with kindness and respect, ask questions to understand, and talk things out to solve disagreements peacefully.

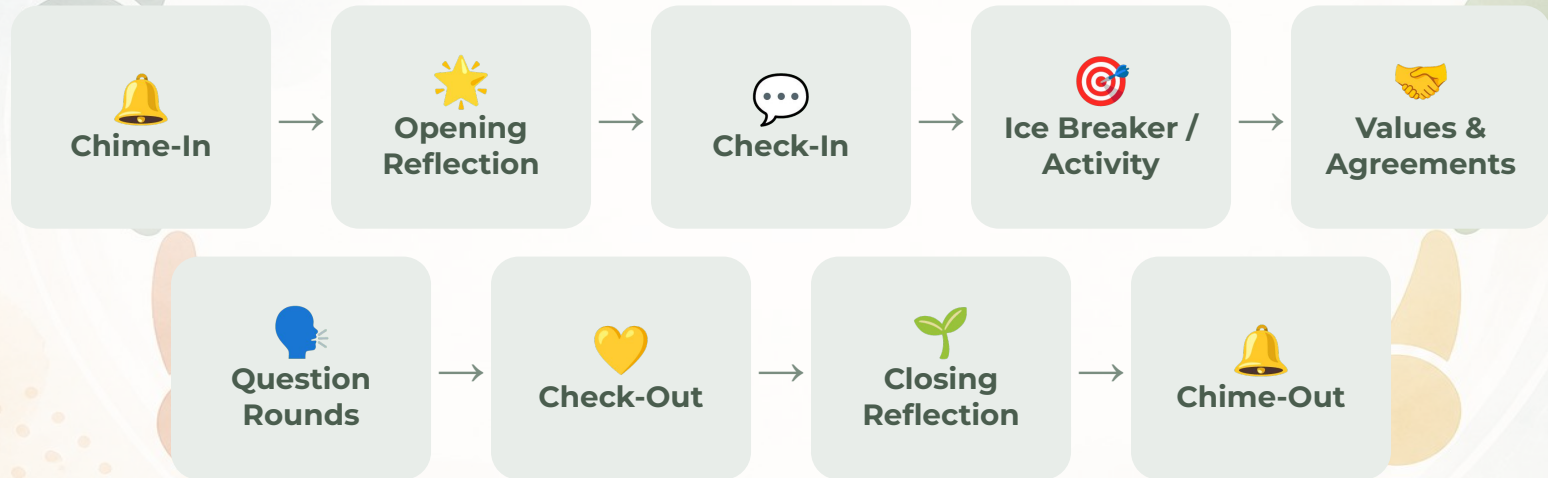


Critical Thinkers look at the whole picture, think carefully about how their choices will affect others, and use creative ideas to fix tough problems.



The Circle Process

Elements of a Circle



Setting Up Your Circle

CHIME



TALKING PIECE



CENTER CLOTH



SITTING IN
A CIRCLE



VALUES

-  Respect
-  Deep Listening
-  Confidentiality
-  Speak from the Heart

Writing Your Circle Lesson Plan



- ❖ Identify your goal
- ❖ Consider your circle participants' interests and relationships
- ❖ Do you need/have time for an icebreaker?
- ❖ Find your reflections
- ❖ Develop your questions

Circles

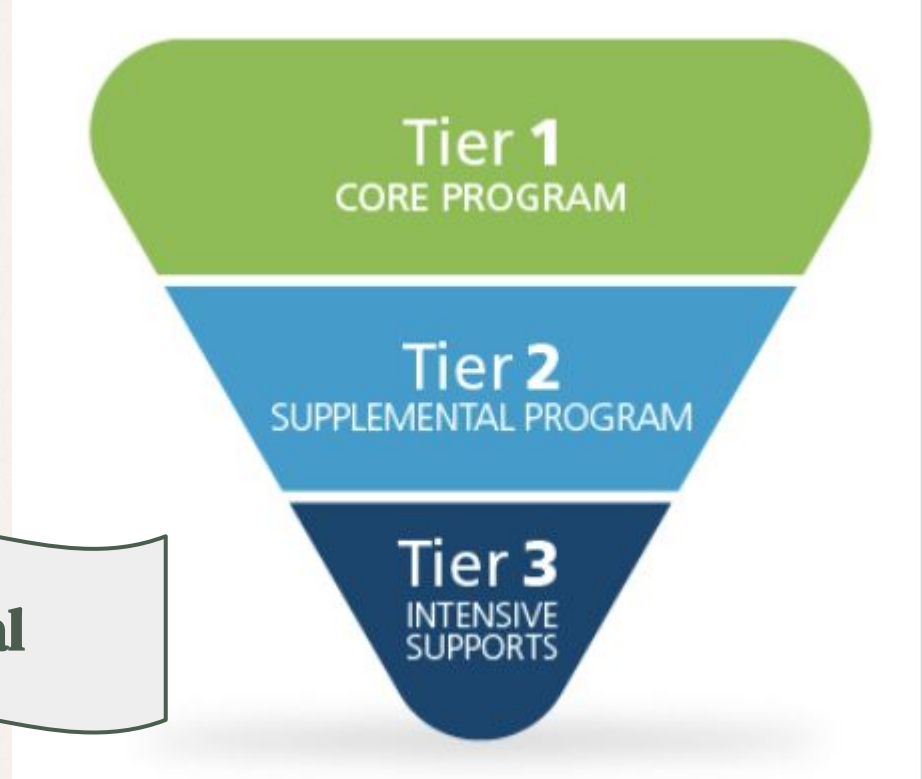


Circles Staff Resource Page

Belonging	Regulation/Self Control	Motivation	Social Awareness
<u>Personal Identity Wheel</u>	<u>What Are Your Triggers?</u>	<u>Understanding Motivation</u>	<u>Being Left Out</u>
<u>Belonging</u>	<u>Think Before You Speak</u>	<u>Increasing Motivation</u>	<u>Empathy in Action</u>
<u>Including Others</u>	<u>Check Yourself</u>	<u>Start Small</u>	<u>What is Normal?</u>
<u>I Belong</u>	<u>Listening to the Silence</u>	<u>What Motivates Me</u>	<u>Finding Belonging in the World</u>
<u>Exploring Values</u>	<u>Daily Weather Report</u>	<u>What is Motivation?</u>	<u>Positive Assertiveness</u>
<u>Getting Acquainted</u>	<u>Managing Emotions During Group Work</u>	<u>Lack of Motivation</u>	<u>Communication 101</u>
<u>Just Be Yourself</u>	<u>Being Accountable</u>	<u>Avoiding Motivation Killers</u>	<u>Active Listening</u>
<u>Respect</u>	<u>Choosing How to React</u>	<u>Making Checklists</u>	<u>Problem Solving</u>
<u>Getting Along With Others</u>	<u>What Choices Do You Have?</u>	<u>Enjoy Your Success</u>	<u>Conflict Resolution</u>
			<u>Cooperation and Teamwork</u>
<u>Pre/Post Assessment Form</u>	<u>Pre/Post Assessment Form</u>		<u>Self Esteem</u>
			<u>Pre/Post Assessment Form</u>

Using Circles in a Tiered Model

Tier 1 - Universal



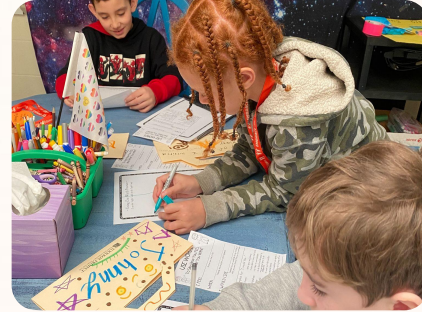


Community Circles



- Whole-class circles to build connection and belonging schoolwide.
- Morning Meetings K-5 & Advisory (6-8)
- Grade Level Meetings at Elementary
- Universal SEL Lessons
- Helped students feel connected and successful throughout the school day.

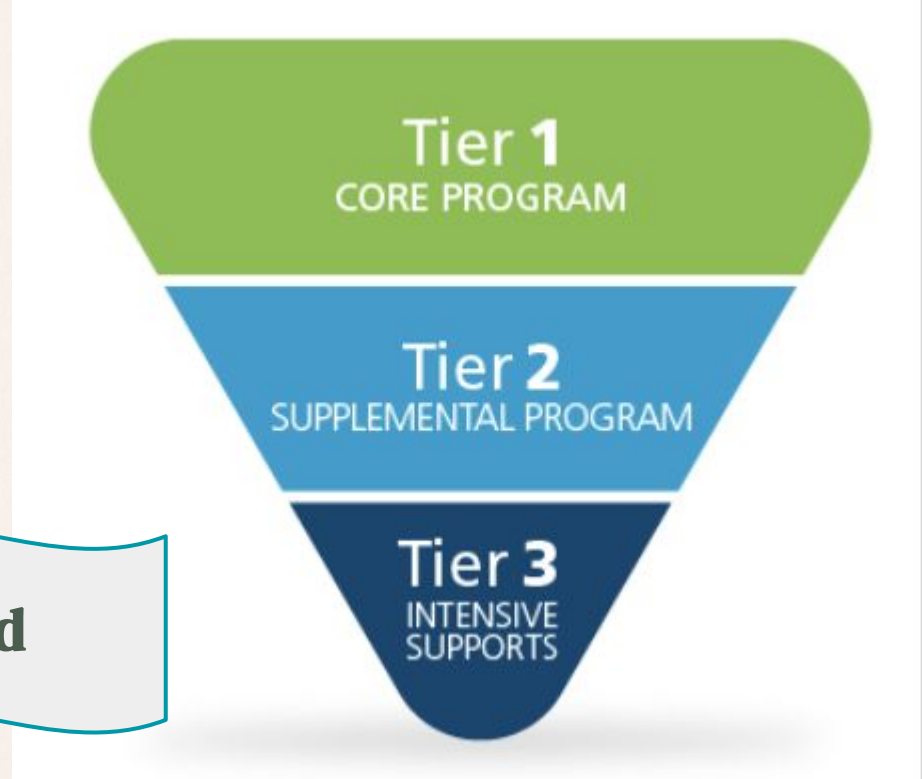
Academic Circles



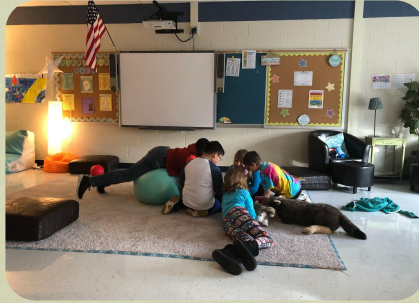
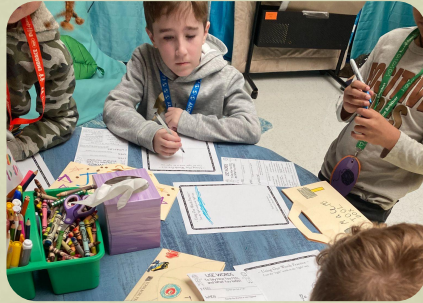
- Every student has a voice and a way to participate
- Students think, question, and build ideas together
- Confidence, connection, and communication grow

Using Circles in a Tiered Model

Tier 2 - Targeted



Intervention Circles



- Identified students needing added support, connection, or skill-building through Panorama data, staff observations, and student needs.
- Matched students into purposeful circles based on needs and strengths.
- Monitored progress through feedback and staff input.
- Celebrated growth and supported classroom success.

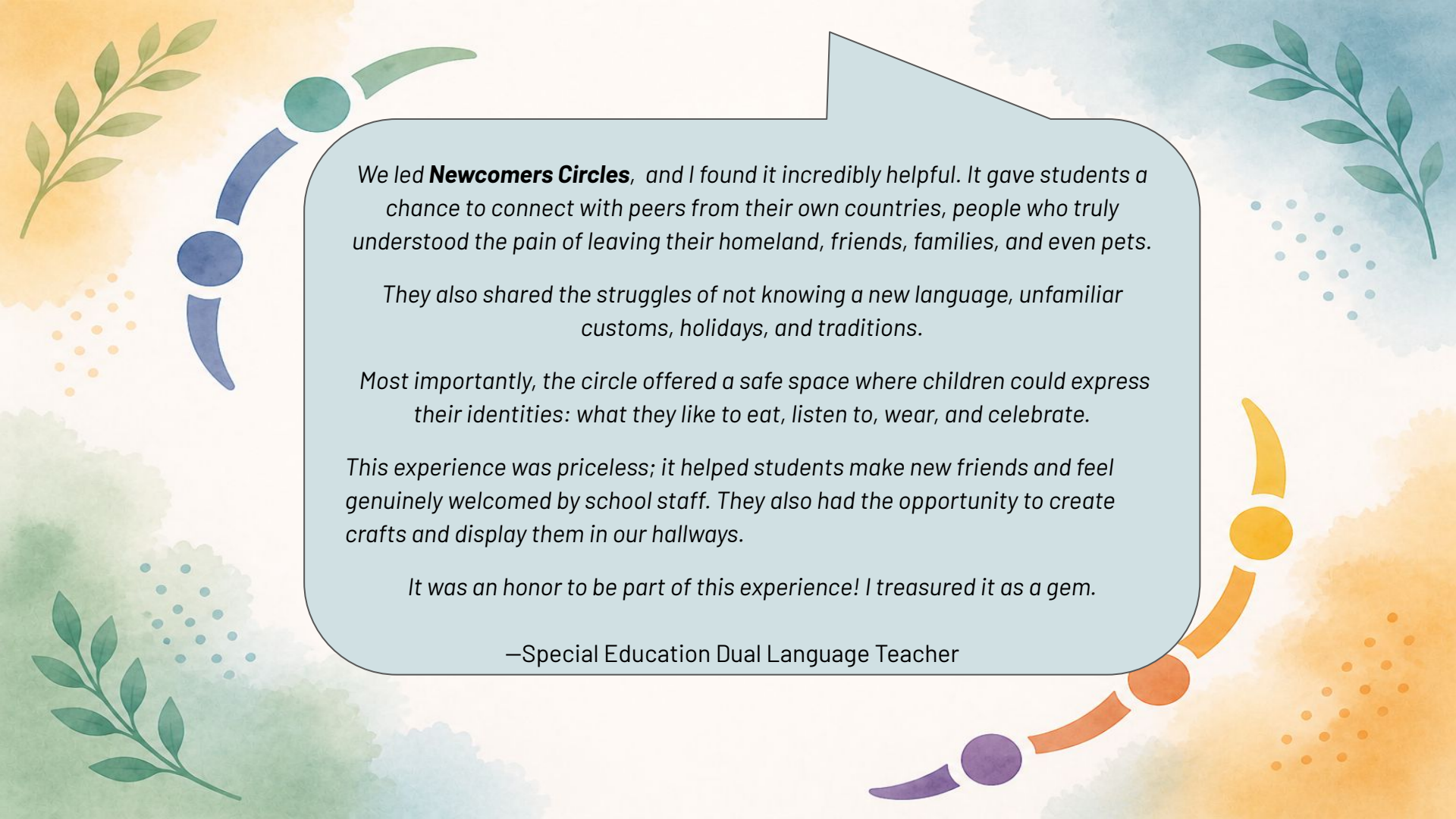


Newcomer Circles—Elementary



Build belonging through targeted support

- ★ Feel seen, valued, and welcomed
- ★ Connect with peers and trusted adults
- ★ Share names, interests, and experiences



We led **Newcomers Circles**, and I found it incredibly helpful. It gave students a chance to connect with peers from their own countries, people who truly understood the pain of leaving their homeland, friends, families, and even pets.

They also shared the struggles of not knowing a new language, unfamiliar customs, holidays, and traditions.

Most importantly, the circle offered a safe space where children could express their identities: what they like to eat, listen to, wear, and celebrate.

This experience was priceless; it helped students make new friends and feel genuinely welcomed by school staff. They also had the opportunity to create crafts and display them in our hallways.

It was an honor to be part of this experience! I treasured it as a gem.

—Special Education Dual Language Teacher

Advisory at the Middle School



- 20 minute Circles during advisory
- 1 day a week during an intervention cycle
- 9-12 week intervention cycles
- Staff scheduled in partners to lead 3 Circles per week
- Circle Keepers: deans, counselors, social workers, teachers, coaches

Circles



Circles Staff Resource Page

Belonging	Regulation/Self Control	Motivation	Social Awareness
Personal Identity Wheel	What Are Your Triggers?	Understanding Motivation	Being Left Out
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Getting Along With Others	What Choices Do You Have?	Enjoy Your Success	Conflict Resolution
			Cooperation and Teamwork
Pre/Post Assessment Form	Pre/Post Assessment Form		Self Esteem
			Pre/Post Assessment Form

I liked the calmness and making new best friends from 7 and 8th also learning things that i did not know also learning harder words.

What did you like about Circles?

I liked the activities we did, and all the new people I got to learn more about and become friends even. I

i liked that the circle was a safe space to talk about our feelings



LITERALLY EVERYTHING.

It helped me come out of my shell and this group helped me make bonds with others.

I get to relax and be more calm.

Circles changed me. I talk more than I used to and I love Circles because we did 2 rounds with the same people.

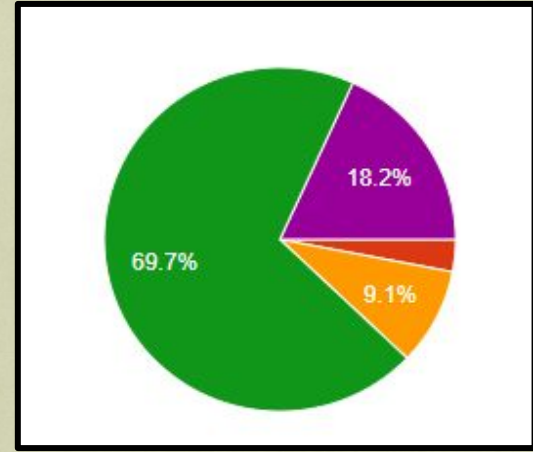
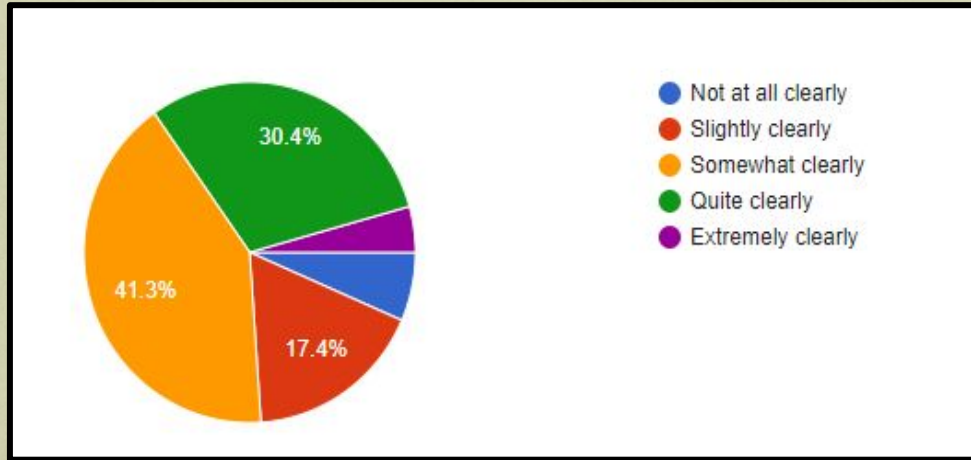
I liked being able to express myself with a good group and had fun.

No teacher is yelling and I can start my day off good





How clearly are you able to describe your feelings?

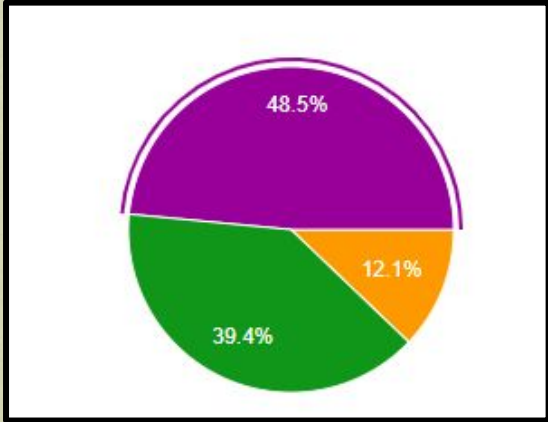
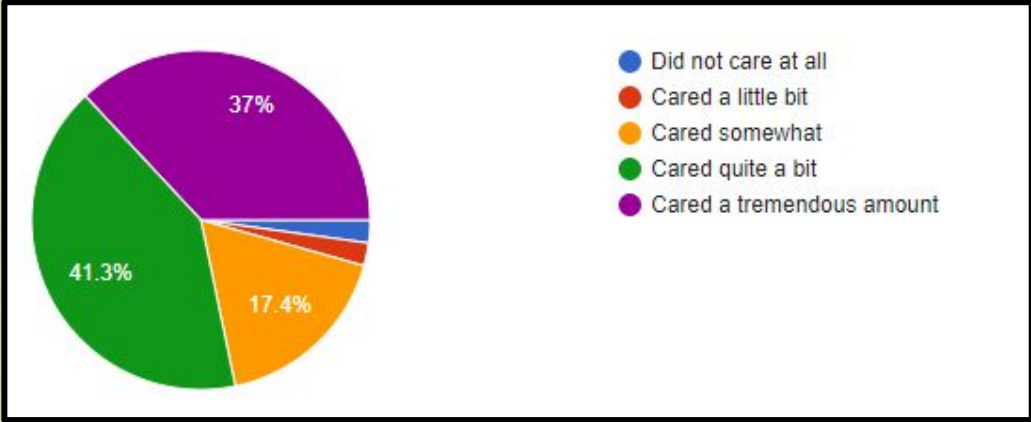


% responses "Quite clearly" and "Extremely clearly"

Total growth: +53.2%



How much did you do you care about other people's feelings?

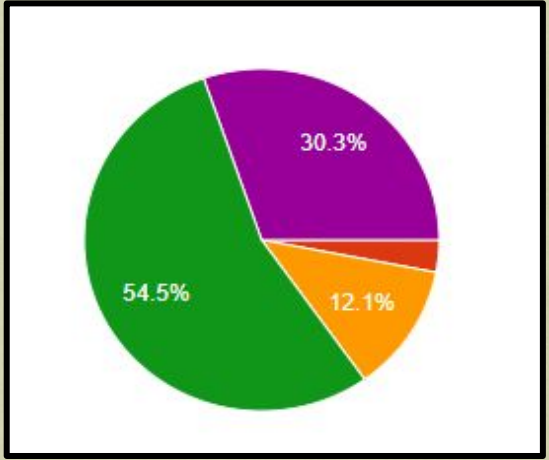
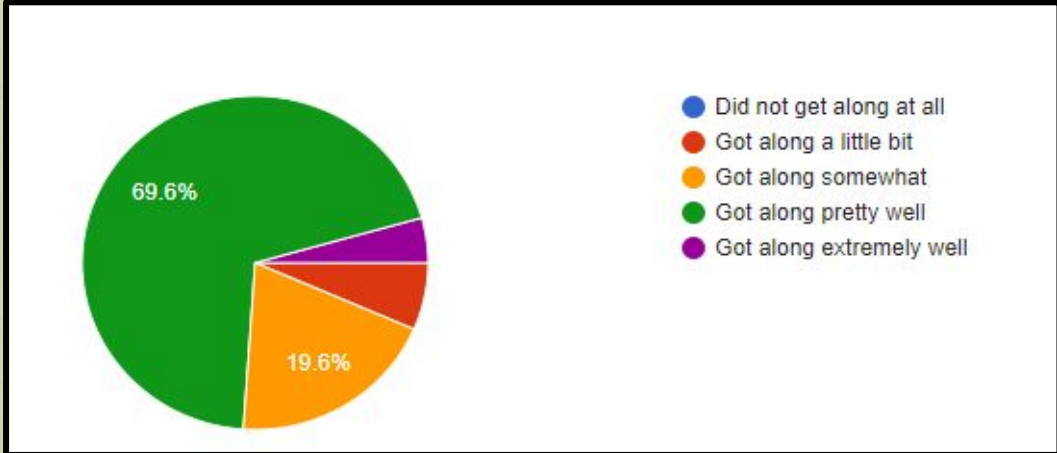


% increase in responses selected as "Cared a tremendous amount"

Total growth: +11.5%



How well do you get along with students who are different from you?

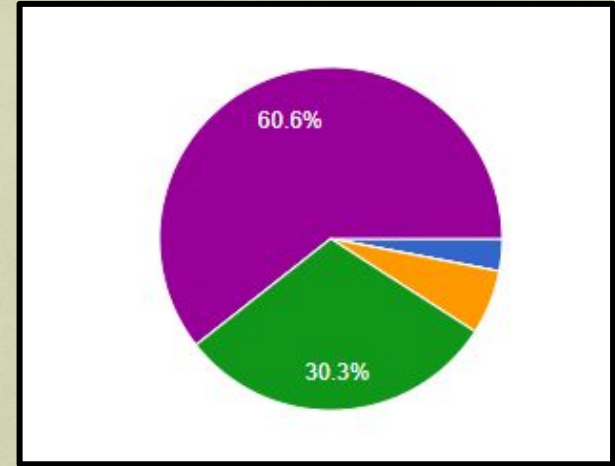
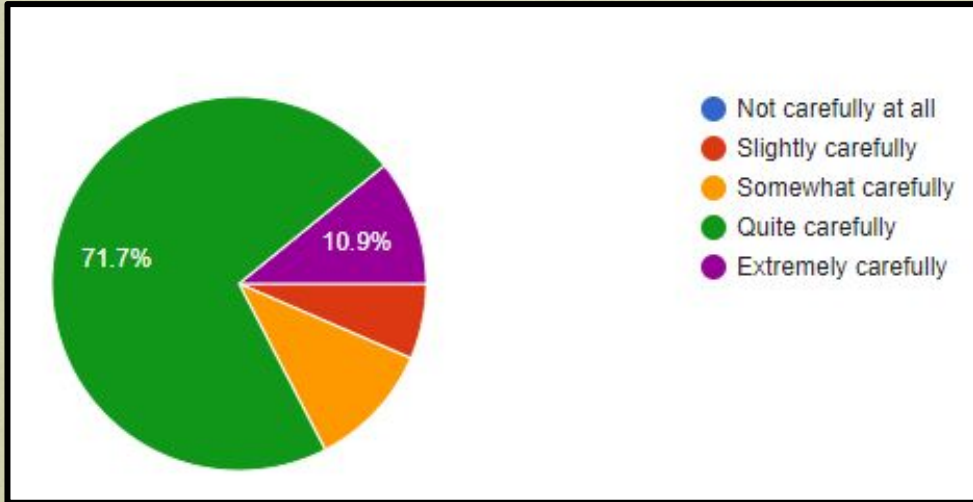


% increase in responses selected as "Got along extremely well"

Total growth: +26%



How carefully do you listen to other people's points of view?

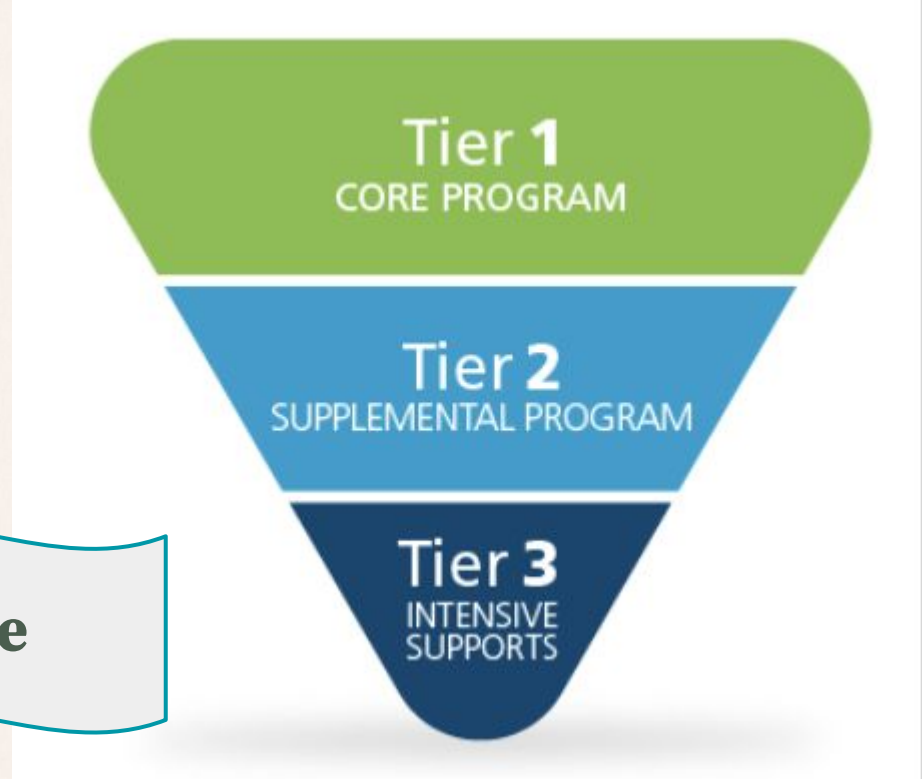


% increase in responses selected as "Extremely carefully"

Total growth: +49.6%

Using Circles in a Tiered Model

Tier 3 - Intensive



Restorative Circles



- **Response to conflict • Space to be heard**
- **Repair and rebuild through guided conversations**
- **Reconnect, solve problems, and move forward**

Special Education Self Contained Classroom- MS & HS—Elementary



Universal community
& Skill Building



Academic tier 1-3

Jane Addams Middle School Girls Volleyball Team



13-Week Volleyball Peace Circle Curriculum

Week 1 Team Values-Building Peace Circle

Review some of the peace circle steps in italics while going through this peace circle.
A Peace Circle is a safe space where everyone gets a chance to speak, listen, and connect. It helps our team build trust, communicate better, and support each other—on and off the court.

Chime In

We start the circle by listening to a chime.
The sound helps us:

- *Arrive in the moment*
- *Take a breath*
- *Focus our attention*
- *Enter the circle respectfully*

When the chime rings, we stop talking, breathe, and get ready to begin.

Invite players to take a slow breath in and out as the chime sounds. "Let the sound remind us we're entering a space where everyone contributes and every voice matters."

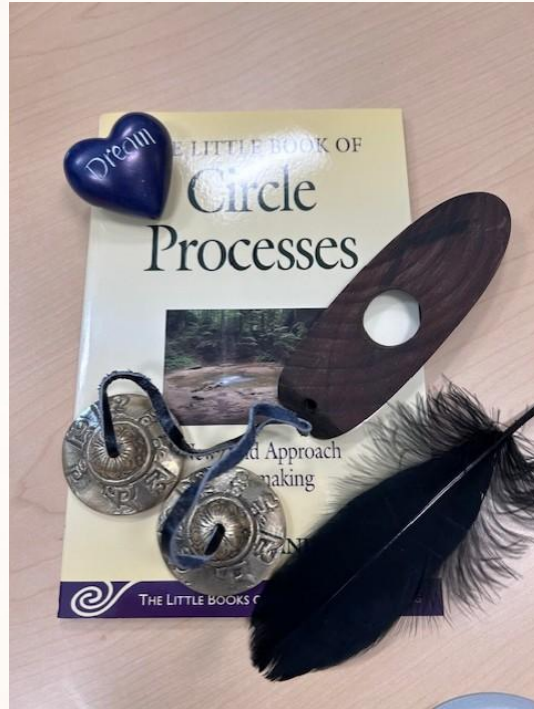


21st Connections After School Program

29 staff in 5 buildings trained



Staff Circles



Journey of Training

Our Starting Point (2015)

- Training with Robert Spicer
- Administration and select staff
- Established foundational understanding

Sustained Growth (2020–2025)

- 3 day Gros Institute training through Lewis University
- Expanded staff access (student services and small number of teachers)
- Shift to application

District-Led Training (2024–Present)

- Piloted three one-day trainings
- Increased access and streamlined training
- Focus on implementation

Training Pathway

- **Introductory / Community Circles**

- Learn structure and purpose
- Access district resources
- Create and implement circles

- **Academic Circles**

- Embed curriculum into circles
- Increase engagement
- Elevate student voice

- **Restorative Circles**

- Proactive restorative curriculum to establish norms
- Teach staff how to run a restorative circle for conflict mediation



Ongoing Circle Keeper Support

- Refresher trainings
- Co-facilitation support
- Lesson development



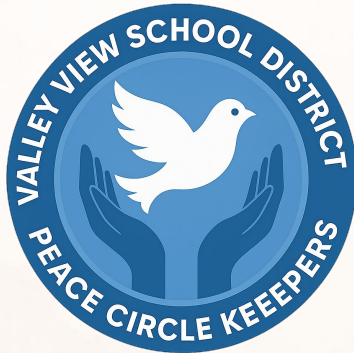
Future Training

- Circles for SLPs
- Circles for Multi-Needs
- Expanded role-based access
- Family Circles
- Student Led Circle Training



District Reach

- 220+ staff trained
- All buildings represented
- Excludes early childhood



Questions.....



.....Thank you!

Additional Resources

CASEL: Community-Building Circles Guide: This tool includes planning considerations, a set up checklist, a recommended circle process and planning template, and four sample circle scripts for middle and high school classrooms.

Circle Forward: Essential resource for circle lesson plans, prompts, and openings/closings.

Circle Process Infographic

Lewis University--Gros Institute Training Information

Panorama Playbook: Focused on building circles tied to belonging, engagement, and emotional regulation.

Kay Pranis: Author of *The Little Book of Circle Processes*, focusing on belonging and responding to conflict.

Dr. Robert Spicer: A national leader in Restorative Justice

VVSD Resource Folder