

Research Brief

Transition and Freshman Orientation

Question: What are ways to successfully orient freshman to high school?

Summary of Findings:

Research indicates that academic achievement from middle school to high school decreases while behavior problems, suspensions and expulsions increase early in ninth grade. Hertzog and Morgan found in their research in Georgia and Florida, that those high schools that just did building tours and meetings with school counselors for strictly registration purposes, had the highest drop out and retention rates in ninth grade (*Building bridges between middle schools and high schools*). The literature in this area repeatedly reiterated that the transition into high school is not a solitary event but one that takes place over time. Students entering high school look forward to having more freedom, choice, friendships and extracurricular activities. They also have several fears that include: taking tougher courses, having more homework, making bad grades, getting lost, not making friends, not being liked, being bullied, being teased, and not feeling safe. Schiller stated that scholastic transitions are "...a process during which instructional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations" (*Transition from middle school to high school*).

There are numerous programs and ideas that can take place over time to welcome and orient freshman to high school.

Transition programs from eighth to ninth grades:

- ninth grade students meet with eighth grade students a few times throughout their eighth grade year, then continue meeting with them in their ninth grade year
- eighth grade students shadow ninth grade students for a day
- pen pal writing-eighth grade students write to ninth grade students
- high school teachers and counselors visit eighth grade teachers and counselors



- eighth grade students, parents and teachers visit high school for tours, skits and lunch
- parents meet separately with the counselors, teachers and high school students
- summer enrichment program for incoming ninth grade students
- January orientation, this allows for ample time to work with and welcome eighth graders to high school

Freshman orientation:

- high school teachers and counselors, use information and recommendations provided by the middle school teachers
- freshman are in teams for core courses
- advisory program where issues such as surviving high school, organizing skills, respecting each other, bullying and resolving issues and practicing academic integrity are discussed
- mentor/mentee program, where a freshman is mentored by a junior or senior to increase school involvement and reduce poor grades.
 - mentors meet together and discuss their freshman experiences, what they would have liked to have known/experienced, their strengths and fears, and how this information should be translated to freshman. This could also be presented to the eighth grade at the matriculating middle schools
 - mentors call mentees to invite them to orientation, then take them on a tour of their classrooms, introduce them to their teachers, provide tutoring and survival tips
- freshman/senior buddy-student council hosts orientation and a buddy takes several freshman on a tour. During this time parents are in a separate meeting. On the first day of school, leaders wear freshman buddy shirts, so freshman can feel free to approach them with questions/concerns.
- student council hosts pizza party for freshman-this gives students a chance to meet new people
- annual freshman mixer during the first weeks of school-for freshman only to meet new people
- Fish Camp-for a full day, freshman visit different stations throughout the school to learn about clubs, activities, grades and their effect on GPA, classes needed for graduation, getting around the school, go through an inflatable obstacle course
- freshman field day-done the day before school begins, advisory/homerooms work and play together
- freshman survival kits put together by student council, mentors, or student leaders
- freshman picnic prior to the opening of school or within the first two weeks

Online Resources:

- A big high school made smaller: When their new school opened in 2001, educators realized that in order to make sure no students fell through the cracks, they would have to make the big, crowded high school seem small
This is a description of a freshman mentor/mentee program located in a Southern California high school.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HUL/is_4_34/ai_n13717100
- A difficult transition
This article is written from a high school perspective about what students need in middle school in order to make a successful transition to high school.
http://www.sullivan-county.com/nf0/june_2004/transition.htm
- Breaking the barriers between middle school and high school: Developing a transition team for student success
A description of a transition team is provided in this article.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_199804/ai_n8802257/pg_1
- Building bridges between middle schools and high schools
These are responses on a list-serve about transition programs from middle and high school teachers and two professors.
<http://www.middleweb.com/INCASEbridge.html>
- Building school spirit
This article includes a brief description of a freshman mentor/mentee program.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3962/is_200009/ai_n8927529
- Easing the transition to high school: An investigation of reform practices to promote ninth grade success

This study begins to address the gap between middle and high school by examining the types and effects of practices aimed at promoting ninth grade success.

<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/legters.pdf>

- Helping your middle school child make the transition to high school
This piece was written for parents about ways to help a child's transition from middle school to high school.
<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=1108>
- How to help adolescents navigate the path to and from middle school
This article is written for the high school freshman about things they can do to feel more comfortable about entering high school.
http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/On_Target/transitioning_hs/transitioning_hs_2.pdf
- Make the jump less of a bump
A short article packed with ideas about a variety of ways to approach freshman orientation is provided.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3962/is_200702/ai_n17197953
- Making the most of summer
Having students establish activities for the school year, including an extensive freshman program are described in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3962/is_200505/ai_n13637046
- Meeting the challenge: The transition to and through ninth grade
This is an extensive report on the need for a freshman transition program.
<http://www.greenville.k12.sc.us/district/teachers/trans1.asp>
- Put out the welcome mat
Establishing a welcome committee along with descriptions of things they can do are provided in this article.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3962/is_200702/ai_n17197950

- Transitions from middle school to high school
The importance of communication with parents about the transition is briefly described in this piece.
<http://www.nmsa.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/TransitionfromMStoHS/tabid/1087/Default.aspx>
- Transitions take teamwork
A thorough description of different aspects of a successful transition program from middle school to high school is provided in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3962/is_200310/ai_n9336250

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