

*Creating a Positive
Middle to High School
Transition*

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Understanding Why We Need to Pay Attention to Transitions to High School

The transition to high school is a pivotal time developmentally in which successes and failures can strongly impact whether students will rise up to meet challenges or fall behind and never catch up (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cooney & Bottoms, 2002).

Research has found that students who experience a positive transition and successful freshman year, are more likely to stay in school and go on to graduate (McIntosh & White, 2006).

Research Findings.....

- *Student Achievement Declines between middle and high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).*
- *Declining Achievement during the transition to high school impacts decisions to dropout of high school (Balfanz, 2009).*
- *Behavior problems resulting in suspension increase significantly in the ninth grade (Jerald, 2006).*
- *Students who have transitioned to 9th grade report that academic ability, time management, ability to stay on task and social skills are important in high school (Zeedyk, et al., 2003).*
- *Social issues such as peer relationships, bullying and getting lost overshadow concerns about academics (Maute & Brough, 2002).*
- *The single most predictive indicator of high school dropout is the student's academic standing in the 9th grade (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).*
- *Research has shown that when there are several diverse transition activities, students are more successful in the following grade (Mac Iver, 1990).*

What We Are Hearing From the Students

In multiple research studies it has been found that students report three main areas of concern about the transition to high school:

1. Social

- a. Concerns reported were anxiety about being bullied*
- b. Making new friends*
- c. Fitting in*

2. Academic

- a. Challenging high school courses*
- b. Increased Rigor*
- c. Greater Workload*

3. Procedural

- a. Finding their way around a new building*
- b. New schedule*
- c. New teacher expectation*



Research Concludes that Four Components are Needed for a Successful Transition

- 1. Support Students Social Success*
- 2. Prepare Students for Academic Success*
- 3. Provide Students and Families with Accurate Information*
- 4. Work Collaboratively to Monitor and Adjust Transition Plans*



Providing Students and Families with Accurate Information

There can be a lot of anxiety when it comes to transition to a new school. One of the most effective ways to ease the anxiety is to provide ample information to students and families beginning in 6th grade.

Parent involvement in the transition process is crucial. When parents are involved in the transition process, research has shown the students are less likely to drop out of school.



Procedural Challenges

Many students experience stress and worry anticipating the high school experience and its complex environment (Haviland, 2005).

Eighty percent of ninth grade students in the public school system are moving to a new building.

Middle school students tend to worry they will get lost and struggle to adapt to the change.

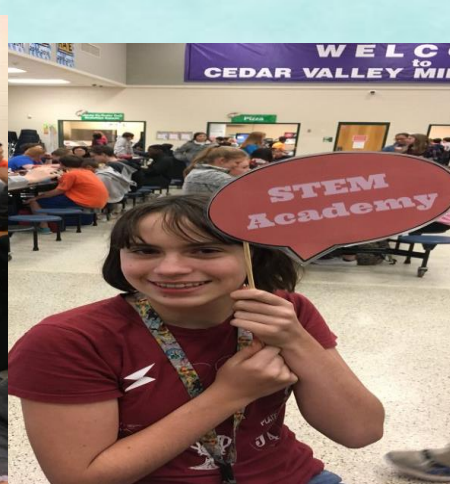
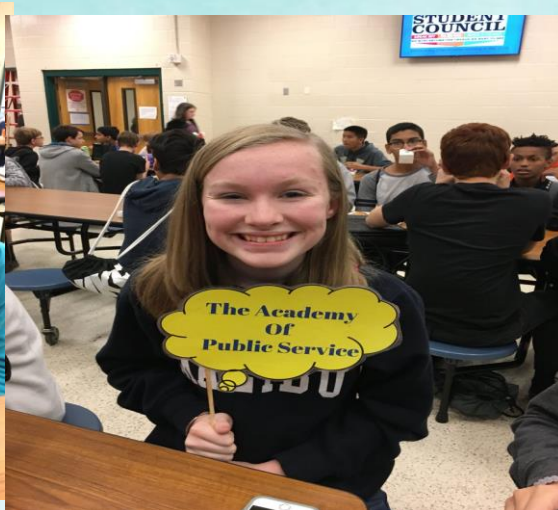
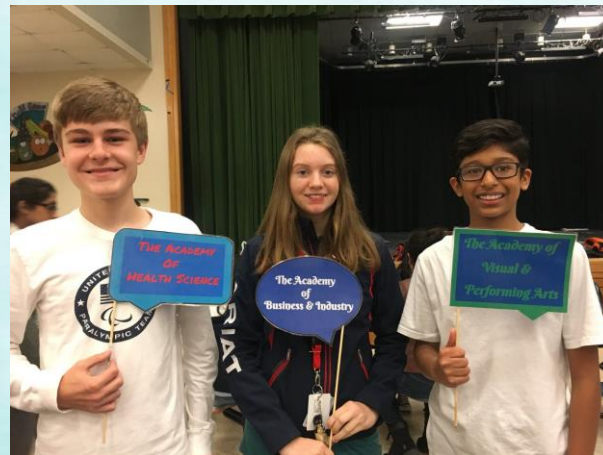


Strategies to Provide Information to Students and Families

(Start with one or two ideas and build from there)

- *Begin teaching high school common language and [graduation requirements](#) beginning in 6th grade*
- *Hold parent meetings to teach them the same common language lessons*
- *Ensure parents have the correct names of who to contact with questions*
- *If parents have questions...call or hold a personal parent meeting in order to help ease the anxiety*
- *Create a process for 8th grade parents and students to have a one on one parent meeting with their high school counselor even if it is only 5 - 10 minutes*
- *Hold parent community meetings at the high school geared towards middle school families*
- *Create a high school planning Saturday workshop for 8th grade parents and students.*
- *Hold extracurricular and club fairs at the middle and high school campuses*
- *Create a tour program for parents at the high school*
- *Transition newsletters and [websites](#) with information for parents and students*
- *Parents of high school students serve as ambassadors to parents of middle schoolers*
- *One on one conferences with students to review four year plans*
- *Invite middle schoolers to the college fairs held at the high schools*
- *Create a [transition guide](#)*





Providing Social Support

Friendships and social support systems are important for students to establish especially when they are transitioning to a new school. When students transition to high school it can disrupt students' social networks. Instead of spending time focusing on academics students will focus more on figuring out where they belong which can impact their success in high school.



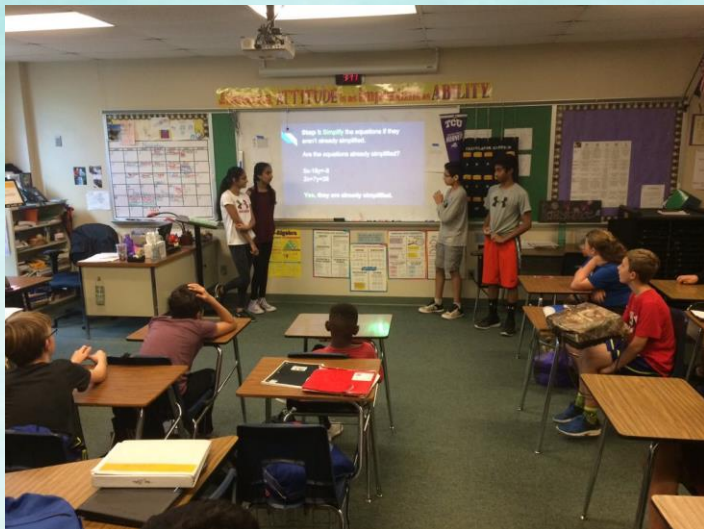
Social Concerns

Developmentally, ninth graders are struggling with their own sense of identity, self - esteem, and wanting to feel accepted socially at the same time they are being thrown into an entirely different setting with new challenges. From 8th to 9th grade, students rated themselves lower in their perceptions of themselves in the areas of appearance and self - worth (Reents, 2002).

Prior to entering high school , middle school students also reported stress worrying about whether upperclassmen might bully them which in turn can create feelings of fear and isolation, disengaging students from the educational process

Strategies for Providing Social Support

- *Invite high school students to the middle school to visit with students*
- *Establish academies or houses at the high school to create a common peer experience*
- *Create a summer camp day for incoming freshman*
- *Have a transition team meeting to prep for students who may need more support*
- *Invite established middle school mentors to continue to mentor the student in high school*
- *Invite clubs and organizations to create flyers to show students all their extracurricular options*
- *Have established organizations (band, athletics, newspaper....)create a big/ little program*
- *Middle/ high school Google Hangouts*
- *Invite 8th graders to supervised high school events (8th grade band night, football night.....)*
- *Hold extracurricular fairs at the middle school during the school day*



Supporting Academic Preparation for High School

Academic preparation has been shown to be the most important factor in whether a student will be successful in high school. It is important to provide students with opportunities to participate in rigorous and challenging courses in the lower grades.



Academic Concerns

The greatest concerns that students report during their transition to high school are academic in nature. Specific academic anxieties include being under prepared along with teachers and parents holding higher expectations. Students reported that they needed more information about what courses they should take in high school, graduation requirements, and resources available in high school (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005).



Strategies for Academic Preparation

- *Provide elementary students and parents with information about courses in middle school*
- *Teach students about the importance of the challenging courses in middle and high school (Classroom guidance lessons beginning in 6th grade)*
- *Provide intervention programs for students who are in need of added academic support*
- *Offer clubs to go along with the rigorous courses...LOTE clubs, math clubs, history clubs...*
- *Hold vertical planning meetings for teachers*
- *Create 4 year plans with students*
- *Create teams (School within a school)*
- *Work with middle school teachers to help identify AVID candidates*
- *Try to ensure students take at least one high school credit in middle school*
- *Career interest inventories completed in middle school*
- *Create a College Going Culture on the campus*

What students are Looking Forward to in High School

- *Increased Freedom*
- *More Course Selection Choices*
- *New Opportunities*
- *Fresh Start*
- *Increased Opportunities for Extracurriculars*
- *New Friends*
- *Increased Independence from Parents*



Working Together to Support a Successful Transition - Teamwork, Teamwork, Teamwork!

The most successful transition programs are typically the result of a vertical transition team.

The role of the team is to identify transition needs, develop plans, and monitor progress.

Successful transition programs bring teachers, parents, administrators, and counselors together to learn about the students, the data, and the requirements at the schools.



Strategies for Implementing a Transition Team

- *Identify a transition coordinator on every campus*
- *Include teachers and students on the transition team*
- *Hold regular meetings beginning in September to review data and determine activities*
- *Think about the anxieties students are expressing and create activities to alleviate those concerns*
- *Create an FAQ from one school to another. The middle school counselors often field questions from parents and might need an FAQ manual to draw answers from*
- *Share information (504 students, sped students, ESL students...)*
- *Develop activities together. Be willing to support each other with the activities*
- *Arrange times for teachers to meet and possibly shadow each other*

Fun Videos Created by McNeil High School and Round Rock High School in Round Rock ISD



To Summarize.....

Research findings conclude that the most successful schools see the transition between middle school and high school as a continuous process rather than a one time event. These schools involve students and parents to set up a transition program that will work to ensure academic and social success of the students.

Students that have a successful transition program are more likely to achieve higher academic success and attend school regularly.

The transition from one school to another can be challenging for many students and their families particularly when it involves a move to a new building and losing established routines, familiar staff, and support systems.

The transition to high school is becoming increasingly more important because of the high rate of course failure and dropouts that occur in 9th grade.

Developed transition programs will help ease the transition to high school by:

- *Building a sense of community*
- *Increasing a freshman's student knowledge of the building and the staff*
- *Allowing students to hear practical and useful advice from upperclassmen*
- *Familiarizing students with a new setting*
- *Helping students to understand graduation requirements*
- *Developing student to student support systems*
- *Addressing the instructional needs of the students*
- *Create connections to the community*

When students successfully make it from 9th to 10th grade they have an increased chance of graduating high school