



## Research Brief

### Special needs of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students

**Question: What are the special needs of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and programs to help meet those needs?**

**Summary of Findings:**

The transition from middle school to high school is a critical period in the lives of most teenagers as they adjust to new expectations, programs and environments. Many also experience fear about fitting in with their peers. Research bears out that 9<sup>th</sup> grade is a crucial time when students decide whether or not to stay in school and that decision is usually based on their academic success. According to one piece of research reported by Legters and Kerr, more than 60% of high school dropouts "...failed at least 25% of credits in 9<sup>th</sup> grade" (*Easing the transition to high school: An investigation of reform practices to promote ninth grade success*). There also tends to be a decline attendance and an increase in discipline problems among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.

As part of the secondary reform efforts, NASSP (National Association of Secondary School Principals) published *Breaking Ranks II*, a list of recommendations for all high schools. It states that all programs should: provide a high level of core knowledge to every student; have meaningful personal connections with students; guide students with personal planning for their high school career and beyond; adapt the instructional program to the different ways in which students learn; use time flexibly; distribute leadership among teachers, parents, students and administration; and provide continuous staff development. These suggestions are essential in reaching out to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students so that they are encouraged to stay in school, feel that they can be successful and have a strong sense of purpose and goals. The research continuously mentions the importance of personalization, students developing personal bonds with adults that include tailored support and students connecting with the course content so that they see its relationship to real life. Based on extensive research cited by Hertzog, there was "...an 8% dropout at schools with such a program versus a 24% rate at those without" (*Isolating 9<sup>th</sup> graders: Separate schools ease the academic and social transition to high school-bound students*).

#### Components of successful programs

There are numerous types of programs that have been tried and/or are being used to work with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.

- Goals  
Have been developed by the stakeholders, have been based on the needs of the given student body, are realistic and have the support of the school community.
- Physical space  
One critical component is for them to have their own physical space, whether that is a specific 9<sup>th</sup> grade wing, community, school-within-a-school, or separate building.
- Math and language arts



## Research Brief

Another commonality is that in the majority of programs, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students receive a double dose of math (usually algebra I) and language arts time for the entire year. Students who fail this at the end of their first 9<sup>th</sup> grade semester can have a clean start and repeat it the second semester.

- **Rigorous and meaningful curricula**  
Students who feel engaged and stimulated by the curricula tend to stay in school and make better grades than those who do not.
- **Support**  
All students are connected with caring adults who guide them, help them plan for their present and future, and push them to move on to higher levels.  
Teachers are supported by administration and staff in their work with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, by providing time for collaboration, common planning and on-going staff development.
- **Buy in**  
This comes from the district office, school administration, staff, community, parents and students. All have been educated in the purposes and importance of providing a specific 9<sup>th</sup> grade program. All teachers in the program want to teach and work with this age group.
- **School-based assistance teams**  
These teams consist of the student's teachers, counselor, parents/guardians, other support personnel and people from appropriate agencies who are involved in the student's life.

### Sample program structures

- **Teams**
  - Students are heterogeneously grouped in small teams of 100-125 who are shared for two-thirds of their day by the same 4-5 teachers. This appears to be a common structure.
  - Teachers and students are together for two years.
- **Advisory/Special Homeroom/Freshman seminar**  
Students are with one specific teacher and in addition to dealing with the usual school business, this time includes things like welcoming them to the world of high school and how to navigate it, providing study skills, dealing with peer relationships and developing school and career plans. This was most often cited as a part of the daily schedule.
- **Summer program for incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders**
  - This can be offered to both students who are considered to be "at risk" and not "at risk" to provide a balance. Courses could be in math and language arts and/or teen leadership.
  - For "at risk" 8<sup>th</sup> graders, this can be a transition program where middle school and high school teachers work together with identified students to help the students during a summer course in their areas for growth and after school once they are in high school.



## Research Brief

### Online Resources:

- **Breaking ranks II: An executive summary**  
This provides a comprehensive list of the recommendations for high schools and components each should encompass.  
[http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/institutes\\_2005/documents/Ollarvia\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/institutes_2005/documents/Ollarvia_executive_summary.pdf)
- **Building a ninth grade academy**  
A brief description of Talent Academies is provided with specific data about Patterson High School's ninth grade program in Baltimore.  
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/pdf/NinthGradeAcademy.pdf>
- **Easing the transition to high school: An investigation of reform practices to promote ninth grade success.**  
Extensive research and report on ninth grade transition programs in Maryland are presented.  
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/legters.pdf>
- **Essential supports for sustaining interdisciplinary teams: Lessons from two departmentalized high schools**  
Descriptions and analysis of two high school programs where grade level teams were planned and/or implemented are provided in this extensive article.  
[http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=48666&CID=599&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=48666&CID=599&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF)
- **Freshman GPA rises, ineligibility decreases during first and secondary quarters**  
This is an on-line newspaper from Blair High School in Maryland that describes the success of their 9<sup>th</sup> grade program.  
<http://silverchips.mbhs.edu/inside.php?sid=5301>
- **Helping middle school students make the transition into high school**  
An overview of components to help students make a successful transition into high school is presented in this article.  
<http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-1/high.html>



## Research Brief

- **High schools told: Get goin' on freshman**  
A brief article on some of the components of different proposed freshman programs in Chicago, Detroit and Baltimore.  
<http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/arch/02-97/027main.htm>
- **Inclusion: A demonstration model for the new millennium**  
This is a description of proposed programs for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades in one high school in Seattle.  
<http://www.newhorizons.org/spneeds/inclusion/teaching/pilot5progress.html>
- **Isolating 9<sup>th</sup> graders: Separate schools ease the academic and social transition to high school-bound students**  
Information and statistics on 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and their needs are presented in this article. It also includes a brief description of an 8/9 setting in Utah.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0JSD/is\\_59\\_3/ai\\_83698551](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JSD/is_59_3/ai_83698551)
- **Making progress toward graduation. Evidence from the Talent Development High School Model**  
An executive summary of research on ninth grade programs that follow the Talent Development model is provided.  
<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/408/execsum.html>
- **Ninth grade bulging and not from obesity either**  
Possible reasons why there has been a bulge in 9<sup>th</sup> grade are described.  
[http://www.susanohanian.org/show\\_nclb\\_news.html?id=280](http://www.susanohanian.org/show_nclb_news.html?id=280)
- **NPR: State Seeks to Smooth High School Transition**  
This is a description of the advantages of the ninth grade program in Texas.  
<http://www.hbhs.k12.nh.us/hbhshome/instpractices/Documentation%208-18/9th%20grade%20transition.htm>
- **On course for success**  
An analysis and results of a study of 10 high schools located in poverty areas with a high number of minority students where the curricula help provide readiness for college is presented.  
[http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/success\\_report.pdf](http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/success_report.pdf)



## Research Brief

- **Opening doors to the future: Preparing low-achieving middle grades students to succeed in high school. 2002 Outstanding practices**  
An extensive publication that “describes the efforts of 15 schools to address systemic change needed to help low-achieving students move successfully from middle to high school.”  
[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/28/0c/98.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/28/0c/98.pdf)
- **Organizing schools into small learning communities**  
Lessons learned from 2 middle and high schools located in rural and urban areas are shared in this piece.  
[http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&&SID=1&DID=48670&CID=600&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&&SID=1&DID=48670&CID=600&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF)
- **Personalizing learning to prevent failure**  
In lieu of retention, some suggestions for methods to use with students who are under and low achieving are presented.  
[http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/sec.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=48918&CID=501&VID=2&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=False&specialSearch=False](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=48918&CID=501&VID=2&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=False&specialSearch=False)
- **School dropout prevention program**  
A list of reasons why students dropout of high school and suggestions to prevent it are provided.  
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/dropout/dropoutprogram.html>
- **Small learning communities**  
The components for establishing successful small learning communities are outlined in this article.  
[http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=52982&CID=893&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=52982&CID=893&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF)
- **Statement on a call to action: Transforming high school for all youth**  
An overview on NASSP’s recommendations for legislation to support and improve high schools is provided in this article.  
[http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/sec\\_news.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=50372&CID=1&VID=167&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=False&specialSearch=False](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec_news.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=50372&CID=1&VID=167&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=False&specialSearch=False)



## **Research Brief**

- St. Louis breaks up troubled H.S. at midyear  
A brief description of reasons why St. Louis restructured their high schools to include a special program for 9<sup>th</sup> graders is presented.  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/01/25/20stlouis.h25.html>
- Talent development high schools  
This web site has active to links to various aspects of the Talent Development program.  
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/about/model.htm>
- The LSS small learning communities  
A brief list of the lab for student success communities project is cited in this piece.  
<http://www.temple.edu/LSS/slc.htm>

### **Specific schools/programs**

- Aldine Independent School District  
This site has active links to the four ninth grade schools in this district outside of Houston, Texas.  
[http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/schools/specific\\_campus.cfm?CampusNumber=081](http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/schools/specific_campus.cfm?CampusNumber=081)
- Central High School  
A descriptive summary of the school's ninth grade program, complete with active links to other of the school's programs.  
<http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/central/ninthgradesuccessacademy.htm>
- Edison/Fareira  
Their newsletter with reference to a ninth grade success academy.  
[http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/gratz/career\\_academy.htm](http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/gratz/career_academy.htm)
- Germantown High School  
A very brief description of the ninth grade program is provided.  
<http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/central/ninthgradesuccessacademy.htm>
- Rhodes High School  
This article provides the reasons why this high school implemented a ninth grade program and the results on their retention rate.  
<http://www.catalyst-cleveland.org/08-00/rhodes.htm>



**The Principals' Partnership**  
<http://www.principalspartnership.com>  
Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

## Research Brief

- **Roosevelt High School**  
This is an article by the principal describing the different academies that have been introduced at the school, including a ninth grade academy.  
<http://www.acumen-corp.com/rhs/warmack1article.htm>
- **Seattle Public Schools-Small Learning Communities**  
This site describes specific programs for grades 9 & 10 in their four high schools.  
<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/slc/index.dxml>
- **Simon Gratz High School**  
A brief description of the career academies for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.  
[http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/gratz/career\\_academy.htm](http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/gratz/career_academy.htm)
- **Talent Development High School**  
An overview of the entire school's programs that includes a brief description of their ninth grade program.  
<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/ModelDetails.asp?ModelID=30>

Submitted Date: 2/27/06

By: Dr. Karen Walker Lebanon Valley College

<http://www.principalspartnership.com>

This is provided as a service to educators by The Principals Partnership and Union Pacific Foundation, neither of which assumes any responsibility for the content of the brief or the positions taken by the authors or the Web sites or other authors whose works are included. This research brief reflects information currently available and is not the official position of The Principals Partnership or Union Pacific Foundation.

Disclaimer: All URLs listed in this site have been tested for accuracy, and contents of Web sites examined for quality, at the time of addition. Content accuracy and appropriateness, however, cannot be guaranteed over time as Web sites and their contents change constantly. The author takes no responsibility for difficulties which may result from the use of any Web site listed herein. Please notify the [Webmaster](#) if you find any dead links or inappropriate material.

Permission: You may use or download content for research or educational purposes, or for your personal, noncommercial purposes, provided you keep unchanged all copyright and other notices with them. No other use of any content is permitted. You agree that you will make only lawful use of this research brief, and will only use these briefs in compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations. You agree that you will make no use of the research that violates anyone else's rights, including copyright, trademark, trade secret, right of privacy, right of publicity or other rights.