



Improving Transition From the Middle Grades to High School and From High Schools and Technology Centers to Further Study and Careers

Every step in a student's life is important for future success. Schools are building stronger frameworks of curricula, instruction and assessments to prepare students to move from one learning environment to another with maximum results as they journey toward adulthood.

Identify Middle Grades Students Unlikely to Complete High School and Get Them Back on Track for Graduation

Leaving Nothing to Chance: Proven Structures to Enhance Learning in the Middle Grades

Peter Alba Middle School (AMS) in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, joined the *Making Middle Grades Work* (MMGW) initiative in January 2006. Since that time, it has made significant progress in building a framework for continued success for all students. In fact, the school was named an MMGW Pacesetter School in 2011.

"We leave nothing to chance when students enter our building," Principal **Rhonda Mayfield** said. "We focus on providing successful school experiences for all students. Even after students enter high school, we invite them back to Alba if they need additional tutoring in math in the ninth grade."

AMS has excelled in providing extra help for special education students in general education classes. Each incoming student is placed on a tier from I to III. The groupings are based on Alabama's tiered service delivery model that calls for targeted academic and behavioral interventions for Tier II students and intensive interventions for Tier III students. Tier II and Tier III students are strategically placed and monitored throughout the year.

Timetable for Action

The school has developed a yearly timetable for delivering services to students.

February — The district makes it possible for Individualized Education Program (IEP) team leaders from AMS to meet with feeder schools to discuss students' needs based on their IEPs, behavior intervention plans and other documentation.



March — A committee from the school visits each feeder school to meet with the principal and other key personnel to review the records of incoming students. They develop a plan for implementation on the students' first day at AMS. The committee talks with all fifth-graders about their transition from the elementary grades to the middle grades.

April and May — Teachers have a full day to collaborate on developing a strategic plan for the coming year. Meeting by grade level, they pool their knowledge about students to make recommendations for grouping students. The information is used when schedules are developed.

Based on students' class schedules, administrators and the local education agency representative develop a schedule for collaborative teaching. Regular education teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals are scheduled by period, based on the level of services needed per

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classroom. By the time school is out for the summer, teachers and paraprofessionals know their assignments for the coming year.

June — A master schedule is developed based on tier groupings and other recommendations from the grade-level meetings.

August — A plan is in place as the new academic year opens, and resource teachers begin to provide services. Collaborative planning takes place daily with common planning times. During the first month of school, case managers contact and meet with as many parents as possible to solicit their support for student success. Bi-weekly data meetings begin in the second week of school, allowing regular education and resource teachers to meet together by grade level. Resource teachers play an active role in providing input for all students.

A Professional Learning Communities in Action (PLCIA) form is used to record the results of the meetings. The forms are placed in a binder with each teacher's data for future reference. During the fourth and seventh weeks of each quarter, student groups meet with their mentors to discuss progress and develop plans of action to ensure success. All special-needs students meet with their case managers. All other students are grouped randomly among faculty and staff.

Helping Middle Grades Students Succeed Through Conversations and Interventions

Teachers at **Rosemore Middle School** (RMS) in Whitehall, Ohio, are helping protect students from failure by developing “watch lists” of students and meeting in teams to develop targeted interventions. RMS enrolls 640 students, of which 46 percent are white, 29 percent are black and 15 percent are Hispanic and 10 percent are other ethnicities.

“After the school joined *MMGW* and received a Technical Assistance Visit report, we began to focus on at-risk students and how to improve attendance, student achievement, teacher buy-in, and the understanding of students and parents,” said **Alisha Wilson**, *MMGW* coordinator.

The watch list works this way: Students scoring D's or F's are placed on the list. If it is the first time on the list, the student receives an alert form that is copied and sent home for a parent's signature. When a student appears on the list for the second time, he or she receives academic intervention, and a teacher-parent-student conference is held. A parent must sign the form. Students who show improvement receive an improvement letter that parents see and sign.

“The watch list is the meat and bones of our efforts to prepare students for high school,” said RMS teacher **Sarah Danner**. Using advisory groups of 12 to 15 students, teachers track the forms, make phone calls to parents as needed and help guide one-on-one interventions for students. They constantly monitor students' progress.

RMS teachers use a grade analysis list to view the disaggregated grades of at-risk students. Grades are given numbers, such as 1 for most in need of attention and intervention and 9 for least in need. The school has a number of teacher-led teams to focus on collaboration in improving student achievement. The opportunities include core team meetings (weekly), content area meetings (twice weekly), building leadership team meetings, staff meetings (weekly), focus groups and e-mail reminders.

SREB consultant **Heather Sass** helped the faculty learn to use a tuning protocol to look at student work. Teachers meet biweekly by grade or content area. “We discuss what is good and what needs to be changed,” Danner said.

Interventions Through the Year — Before- and after-school tutorial sessions take place throughout the year. All students, including those taking Algebra I, have access to assistance. Other interventions include second and third delivery of subject matter, DORA/DOMA (online reading and math assessments) and Voyager Math. AMS adopted the *MMGW* recommendation of 25 books per year. The Accelerated Reading Program is the foundation for a schoolwide literacy program.

From January through March, teachers target at-risk students in reading and math. Through a Title I program, they provide extended-day services twice a week in preparation for the state assessment. In August 2008 the school held its first algebra camp — an intensive two-day program to prepare students for Algebra I in high school. Older students serve as peer tutors. AMS also developed a schoolwide literacy plan to incorporate common vocabulary into all classes. The theme is “Lifelong Literacy.”

“We have worked hard to instill high expectations for everyone on our campus,” Mayfield said. “Alba Middle School has made Adequate Yearly Progress every year since 2007-2008. This is a tribute to our faculty, staff and students.”

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“We have changed from a culture of low expectations and blaming students for failure to one of setting high expectations and doing everything possible to prepare students to be successful.”

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The communication aspect of the program includes a parent-guardian contact log to ensure that every parent or guardian hears from someone at the school on an ongoing basis through the year. Teachers talk with parents about schedules and ways to help students succeed. The log is on the school's shared drive to give access to every certified staff member.

Failure rates at RMS have declined overall and in every grade. The percentage of failures at the school dropped from 15.7 percent in 2009-2010 to 8.6 percent in 2010-2011. The decreases amounted to 8.7 percent in the sixth grade, 1.6 percent in the seventh grade and 1.5 percent in the eighth grade from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011.

“The school has developed an atmosphere of high expectations by incorporating the *MMGW* Key Practices,” Wilson said. “We have changed from a culture of low expectations and blaming students for failure to one of setting high expectations and doing everything possible to prepare students to be successful.”

Improve Student Transitions From the Middle Grades to High School

Summer Bridge Program Raises Expectations and Builds Enthusiasm Among Incoming Ninth-Graders

A summer bridge program known as Freshman Jam gives rising ninth-graders at **Theodore High School** (THS) in the Mobile suburb of Theodore, Alabama, an enriching experience with high school life.

Angela Bentley, who teaches English/language arts to freshmen, and **Kim Gray**, social studies teacher, coordinated the program in summer 2010. They enlisted student council members and other student leaders to help conduct the program and serve as mentors to new freshmen. The upperclassmen received community service credit for time spent with incoming ninth-graders.

The Freshman Jam began after new students registered and received their schedules. For two days, the students stayed busy meeting new classmates, finding their lockers and engaging in activities designed to instill enthusiasm and determination to complete high school and continue with further education and training. They enjoyed a fashion show presented by upperclassmen, joined in a pep rally with the THS band and cheerleaders, and wore Class of 2015 T-shirts with the slogan “Graduation Is Our Destination.”

Each student attended hour-long sessions representing the courses they would take in the ninth grade. Academic teachers discussed classroom expectations and requirements for success in each subject.

As a follow-up activity during graduation week at the end of the year, the freshmen were organized into groups to visit three college campuses, including a vocational/technical college, to see firsthand the realities of postsecondary education. Students learned the importance of the ACT college entrance exam and explored ways to finance college. Former THS students visited the high school to answer questions from ninth-graders about college life.

“The ultimate goal of Freshman Jam was to ensure that incoming ninth-graders would have a successful freshman year,” Bentley said.

Data from the third quarter of 2010-2011 showed that Freshman Jam participants had fewer absences, tardies and discipline referrals than nonparticipants. Participants outperformed nonparticipants with higher final quarter averages in all courses.

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Meeting the Needs of Ninth-Graders in a Freshman Academy

Ninth-graders present unique challenges to a high school. In recent years, many high schools have chosen freshman academies or schools-within-schools to give students in grade nine a solid foundation to help them graduate on time and achieve success in the future.

Three years ago, six high schools in the **Jefferson County Public Schools** system in Louisville, Kentucky, opened freshman academies. Ten other schools in the district began offering freshman academies in 2010-2011.

As part of a Vanderbilt University study of programs designed to assist students in the transition from the middle grades to high school, **Bryan Duffie**, superintendent of Westside Consolidated School District in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and **Rebecca Towery**, a teacher with Stafford County Schools in Fredericksburg, Virginia, produced a research report titled “Louisville Freshman Academies:

Merging Academics and Community.” The report focused on four of the original six schools with freshman academies in the Jefferson County system.

The schools enrolled from 870 to 1,257 students. Black student enrollment ranged from 32 percent to 60 percent.

While the schools varied in physical and organizational structure, they shared characteristics that proved to be positive in building a sense of community for freshman students:

- A separate space for the freshman academy
- An advisory program
- A common lunch period
- Freshman-only events
- Ownership by teachers, counselors and administrators
- Connections between students and a significant adult at the school

“It was individual. We were separate and got noticed,” one former ninth-grader said of the academy experience in Louisville.

Data from the study showed a number of positive outcomes as a result of freshman academies:

- Average absences per student declined from 4.8 to 2.3 in a trimester.
- Average course failures decreased from 1,045 to 179.
- The average retention rate (ninth-graders not moving to grade 10) decreased from 61 to 36.
- The average grade-point average (GPA) rose from 1.88 to 2.17.
- Comprehensive School Survey results showed a high correlation in student satisfaction items.

The researchers identified six factors that impacted student achievement in the academies:

1. Freshman-only teachers
2. Common planning periods
3. Enhanced parental communication
4. Frequent progress reports
5. A specific curriculum for the advisory program focusing on academic skills
6. Extended School Services

“Teachers saw the common planning period as a cornerstone of the academy program,” the researchers said.

The Vanderbilt study identified best practices at the schools they visited:

- Staff selection was purposeful, including the principal and self-selected and/or hand-picked teachers who wanted to be part of the academy.
- The academy had sufficient resource allocation and prioritization of funding.
- The academy principal was present and available on a regular basis.
- Common planning periods for all academy teachers included time for parent/teacher/student meetings and teacher engagement that carried over to the students. The common planning time made it possible for teachers to develop personalized and consistent lessons.
- Student successes and positive behaviors were recognized frequently through freshman-only assemblies, field trips and other events.
- Early intervention and communication, such as progress reports and deficiency notices, were consistent with parents and students and across classes.
- Districtwide freshman academy meetings provided opportunities for teachers to share best practices, discuss challenges and examine data. Experienced academies mentored new academies, and teachers organized into professional learning communities.

The researchers identified key tasks for schools to consider in improving their freshman academies:

1. Establish coordination between high schools and middle grades schools. Ideally, the coordination would be districtwide, focusing on curricula, expectations and K-12 requirements. Schedule meetings of middle grades and high school leadership teams and subject-area teachers. Discuss skill/content expectations and challenges, evaluation methods and a freshman orientation before ninth-graders enter high school.
2. Address freshman failures by developing a plan of action for “repeaters” and “tweeners.” Develop a strong support system and an advisory period, credit recovery options, and summer and after-school programs.
3. Avoid rigid tracking of students. The academy should not be another way to replicate the hierarchy that may already exist in the high school.
4. Connect the freshman academy to the rest of the high school and to other academies that may exist at the school. Promote co-teaching opportunities and special projects.
5. Develop an advisory program that emphasizes academic skills, social and life skills, and planning for the future.
6. Increase interaction with the community, including partnerships with universities, business and industry, and nonprofit organizations to provide mentoring and service learning.

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Identify Ninth-Graders At Risk of Dropping Out and Prepare Them to Graduate From High School

Education and the Community Join Hands to Establish an Academy for Students Lacking Academic Skills for College



Education, business and political leaders have joined forces in **Clark County, Arkansas**, to assist students who are unprepared for college-level studies.

The idea for a combined intervention effort arose in 2008 after the **Education Renewal Zone/Henderson State University** collaborated with Arkadelphia Public Schools, a rural district of 2,000 students, to develop a program to use ACT’s EXPLORE exam to assess the progress of eighth-graders. Data revealed that 78 students planning to attend college did not meet the benchmark scores in English, math or reading.

Combining resources, the community established Arkadelphia College Preparatory Academy (ACPA) and invited all ninth-graders failing to meet one or more ACT college-readiness benchmarks to apply for admission. The purpose was to intervene with students to prevent the need for remediation in college.

Educational Partners

A number of educational organizations collaborated to establish ACPA, including the Southwest-A Education Renewal Zone, Arkadelphia Public Schools, Henderson State University, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkansas Department of Education, Dawson Education Services Cooperative, Ouachita Technical College and South Arkansas Math and Science Center.

In addition, State Representative **Johnnie Roebuck**, SREB board member, and the Clark County Strategic Planning Committee were instrumental in the development of ACPA. Financial support for ACPA was provided by Southern Bancorp and the Ross Foundation of Arkadelphia.

Forty of the 78 rising freshmen accepted the invitation to attend ACPA. These students were transported to the Henderson State University campus four Saturdays during spring 2009. They also attended a two-week “boot camp” in June. Teams of high school teachers and college professors used a hands-on, student-centered approach to focus on teaching English, reading and math to small groups of 10 students. A module was designed to address study skills and career planning strategies. Thirty-three of the 40 students completed the academy.

Success Factors

Academy organizers point to several factors contributing to success: personalization of the learning experience; use of a variety of student-centered, culturally responsive instructional strategies; and use of various learning styles, multiple intelligences and brain research. Teacher teams were committed to seeing that students used inquiry-based learning as well as higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.

Students retook the EXPLORE exam at the end of the pilot academy. Results showed that 68 percent of students increased their composite scores, 20 percent showed no significant change, and 12 percent declined.

In 2009, the name of ACPA was changed to **Southwest Arkansas College Preparatory Academy** (SWACPA). Forty-eight students from **Gurdon High School** and **Centerpoint High School** were invited to join students who completed the pilot phase. The Cabe Foundation of Gurdon and the Olds Foundation of Amity became financial partners in the initiative.

Additional Days

Five academy days were added during fall 2009 with teachers following the same instructional format as in the previous spring. Thirty-seven of 44 ninth-graders completed the academy. EXPLORE data showed that 81 percent of these students increased their composite scores, 8 percent showed no change, and 11 percent dropped one point.

Students from the pilot academy took the PLAN exam in fall 2009. A follow-up exam showed that 74 percent (20 students) improved their composite scores while attending the academy.

SWACPA began fall 2010 with 136 students from grades nine, 10 and 11, including 25 students from the pilot group. Twenty-two returning students made significant gains between the EXPLORE exam taken as eighth-graders and the ACT exam given at the end of the junior year.

Culture of Achievement

The academy maintains a culture of achievement. Students attend an induction ceremony at the beginning of each academy, during which successful speakers from business, industry and public service challenge students and parents to take advantage of the opportunity to attend the academy. As students complete the academy, they frequently are asked to envision a successful future for themselves. A special celebration takes place at the end of the year to recognize student growth and accomplishment.

As a result of community partnerships forged during the planning and implementation stages of the academy, future graduates have access to another benefit — the Arkadelphia Promise Scholarship. This scholarship, available to all Arkadelphia High School students who qualify for the Arkansas Challenge Scholarship (ACS), funds the difference between what the ACS pays for tuition and the highest tuition and mandatory fees charged by Arkansas public colleges and universities.

Superintendent **Donnie Whitten** of Arkadelphia Public Schools said next steps for the academy will be to increase the number of participating students, continue to seek funding sources, create a four-year academy with residential requirements for upperclassmen and reduce remediation rates for high school seniors entering college.

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Intervention Pyramid Builds Success for Students in a Freshman Academy

The majority of students who do not pass the freshman year of high school will drop out — and the majority of students who drop out will live in poverty.

Pincipal **Casey Jaynes** of **Logan County High School** (LCHS) in Russellville, Kentucky, frequently reminds his staff of such sobering facts about the ninth grade. The transition to high school is a major move, involving loss of familiarity and comfort that students have enjoyed in the elementary and middle grades. A freshman who fails two or more classes at LCHS does not advance to the 10th grade.

LCHS is in a rural farming community that has shown a lack of desire for education. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 36 percent of the population failed to earn a high school diploma, only 10 percent of the population received a bachelor's degree or higher, and less than 45 percent of LCHS graduates enroll in postsecondary education.

The current LCHS enrollment is 1,100 students in grades nine through 12 with a student population that is 94 percent white, 5 percent black and 1 percent other ethnicities. Nearly half of students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Unacceptable Rate

“While the 2007-2008 rate of 15 out of 275 freshmen being retained is relatively low, we considered the rate unacceptable and began focusing on a solution,” Jaynes said. The result is a multi-level intervention program created and supported by teachers to help students develop study skills and the work ethic needed to succeed in high school and beyond.

LCHS opened a freshman academy in 2003-2004. Students are organized into two teams — the Blue Cats and the White Cats — to advance the small learning communities approach of giving new high school students a sense of belonging. The academy has five teachers per team — English/language arts, math, science, social studies and practical living. An assistant principal, a counselor and two special-needs teachers are assigned to the academy. Students attend five 53-minute classes in the academy and take two 45-minute electives outside the academy at the end of the day. They also participate in a 20-minute study and reading session

each day during which they read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey and *On Starting High School* by Lynne Marie Rominger and Suzanne Packard Laughrea.

Students and parents attend a freshman orientation, and parents receive phone invitations from teachers to attend conferences throughout the year as needed.

Intervention Levels

The LCHS intervention pyramid has five levels:

First progress report (4.5 weeks) — A student failing two or more classes meets with a parent and a teacher team to discuss a second-chance program. Each student is assigned to a teacher mentor and is urged to participate in tutoring to increase success in academic classes. The parent signs weekly progress reports sent by the school. The student is placed on counselor watch to receive weekly progress checks by the freshman guidance counselor.

First nine weeks report cards — Students failing two or more classes experience all of the first progress report interventions as well as losing privileges such as field trips and assemblies. They sign an academic probation contract and participate in mandatory tutoring in a failed subject area until the winter break. These students may be referred for testing for special needs.

First semester report cards — Students failing two or more classes after experiencing all previous interventions are enrolled in mandatory remediation instead of elective classes. A peer mentor is assigned to each student. Students are placed on assistant principal watch, with weekly progress checks by the freshman assistant principal.

Third nine weeks report cards — Students failing two or more classes may be referred by a teacher team to the alternative school if grades are insufficient to pass classes. If a student is not referred to the alternative school, he or she receives all of the first semester interventions as well as mandatory after-school credit recovery.

End of year — When all interventions have been applied and the student is retained as a freshman, he or she will be referred to the alternative school.

Requirements are also in place on the intervention pyramid to address the problem of students with unexcused absences or tardies.

Fewer Retentions

The freshman retention rate at LCHS was cut in half – from 20 students in 2001-2002 to 10 students in 2010-2011. The number of students involved in the intervention plan declined from 47 at the highest point in 2008-2009 to 26 at the highest point in 2010-2011. The number of students involved in the plan at the end of the year increased from eight in 2008-2009 to 10 in 2010-2011.

Freshman academy teachers **Miranda Logsdon** and **Amy Taylor** list these lessons learned from implementing the intervention pyramid:

- A common planning and meeting time is essential.
- Teachers must create and support the plan.
- Avoid teacher overload.
- View the plan as a work in progress.
- Support from the board of education is vital.
- Plan carefully for orientation and implementation.
- Communication is key.

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Struggling Readers Gain Literacy Skills in a One-Year Reading Intervention Program for Ninth-Graders

Eastview High School (EVHS), a large, suburban school in Apple Valley, Minnesota, in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, is implementing a successful intervention program for ninth-graders who read below grade level. The results have been impressive.

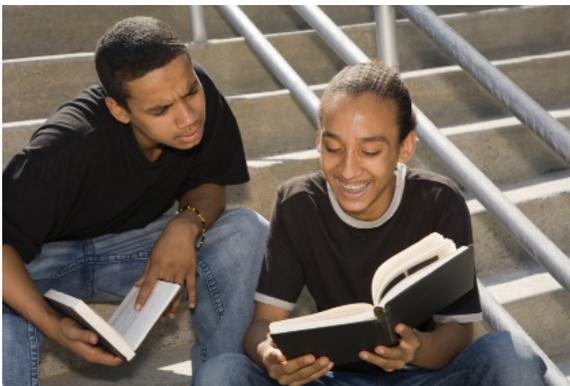
In the 2009-2010 school year, every freshman in the reading program showed growth in total Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores from fall to spring. Thirty of 44 students (68 percent) met an individual goal (improving by at least one point in all three areas of the DRA 2 rubric). Students in the program exhibited a mean and median 10-point gain on the Northwest Education Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) exam, compared with a mean four-point gain for students reading at grade level.

The program received the Minneapolis Exemplary Reading Program Award in 2011.

Jennifer McCarty Plucker, former reading coordinator and literacy specialist at EVHS, said the term "intervention" is preferable to "remediation." "Intervention connotes faster, not slower; more, not less; and higher, not lower," she said. Plucker is now K-12 intervention specialist for the district.

Successful Strategies

The EVHS program uses five strategies designed to build students' reading skills by providing opportunities for students to read and using a variety of methods to engage students in reading high-interest texts.



"Studies have shown that reading engagement trumps socioeconomic status as a correlate of reading achievement."

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- 1. Give students time to read.** Research has shown that high-achieving students read more than low achievers. Students who consistently place in the 10th to 30th percentiles on standardized state assessments (two-plus levels below grade level) take an elective course called Academic Literacy 9, which provides a year of instruction alongside a regular English 9 class. The class gives students more time to read and focuses on improving students' motivation, engagement, fluency and comprehension.

Licensed reading teachers conduct classes of no more than 10 students each. Teen-friendly reading zones in the classroom contain pillows, comfortable chairs and shelves of high-interest books of various genres to make it more inviting for ninth-graders. The walls are covered with inspirational quotes such as, "A room without books is like a body without a soul" and "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

A minimum of 25 minutes of each 50-minute literacy class period is reserved for students to read silently for enjoyment. Some books that are popular with EVHS ninth-graders are *Ana's Story: A Journey of Hope* by Jenna Bush; *Compound* by S. A. Bodeen; *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins; *L. A. Candy* by Lauren Conrad; *Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment* by James Patterson; *Street Pharm* by Allison van Diepen; and *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher.

- 2. Use a homegrown approach.** Instead of purchasing a commercial reading program, teachers evaluated resources (including auditing those already available in schools and classrooms), considered students' needs and consulted recent research to build a classroom library of high-interest novels as well as leveled academic texts for strategy instruction. **The district supported teachers with professional development on how to accelerate students' reading skills.** When teachers analyzed why some students have trouble reading, they found that students with problems at home actually want to use reading as an escape mechanism.

One strategy Plucker found effective was to place a box outside classrooms for students to figuratively place their "drama." Students were encouraged to mentally place any of their distractions, concerns and problems in the box and "escape" into a great book or other engaging literacy activities that would help them cope. "Studies have shown that reading engagement trumps socioeconomic status as a correlate of reading achievement," Plucker said.

- 3. Use the right strategies.** Teachers help students learn to think as they read. When teachers learn what comes naturally for each reader, they begin to hone students' skills in other areas. For example, when students read difficult texts filled with descriptions, teachers encourage them to make "mental movies" as they read. When they read current events articles, they are urged to ask questions.

Instead of making the classroom an electronics-free zone, teachers ask students to reflect on what distracts them from reading. Teachers work with students to develop goals for taking control of distractions.

Another important component of the intervention program is determining the literacy skills used by students outside of school and linking those skills to academic tasks. Teachers use online discussion forums, videos, digital posters, podcasts, texting and classroom social networking sites to engage students and allow them to use existing skills for academic purposes.

- 4. Select activities that appeal to teens and are age-appropriate.** Working with struggling readers, teachers may look to elementary school colleagues for ideas that they can modify for older students. The best example is guided reading. The techniques are different, but the principles are the same. Students are placed in small groups for Collaborative Reading Enhanced Work (CREW). The group instruction is known as CREW Time. Additionally, teachers give teens choices of what kinds of materials to read. They use technology to generate discussions online. They also organize reading materials by genre rather than by author. Students and teachers set goals for the number of books to read during the year. They chart progress and keep records of classroom engagement. Students also participate in the schoolwide Drop Everything and Read program.

Plucker had success showing films (usually based on books) such as “Antwone Fisher” or “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas” with closed captions. “Students can’t help but read the English at the bottom of the screen,” she said.

Many students come into the program very reluctant to read aloud, yet they need to work on fluency. Adolescent readers typically resist reading in front of their peers, but they do not seem to mind reading aloud to a computer. Students do “cold” readings of children’s books as podcasts. After a week of disguised fluency exercises (games and theater activities), students re-read the same book and compare the expressive second version to the “cold” first reading. This approach has been so successful that ninth-graders beg for the opportunity to read books to elementary students.

- 5. Celebrate success.** EVHS sponsors an evening reception and awards ceremony at the end of each school year. Plaques and awards are given to students for improved reading skills, number of books read, most improved reader and number of “super reads” (books with more than 200 pages or outside their preferred genres). The Lightning Award is given in many co-curricular activities and is highly coveted. In the reading program, the award goes to the student who epitomizes the mission of the class by buying into the process, being a leader, becoming an avid reader and using scholarly behavior to accelerate reading skills. Each student receives a certificate of achievement and positive words about his or her academic growth. The event closes with an “open mike” session for students to share their experiences with reading intervention during the past year.

Using Career-Based Instruction to Prepare Ninth- and 10th-Graders for Career/Technical Programs

Teacher **Bobbi Tidrick-Briggs** is enthusiastic about the Career-Based Instruction (CBI) program at **East Community Learning Center** (ECLC) in Akron, Ohio. “CBI students outperformed other ECLC students in reading, math, science and social studies on the Ohio Graduation Test in 2011,” she said. “The percentage of students signing up for career courses in the 11th grade reached 100 percent.”

ECLC enrolls more than 850 students in grades seven through 12. The student population is 75 percent black, 20 percent white and 5 percent other ethnicities. Eighty-three percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 27 percent of students have disabilities. The mobility rate is 42 percent.

Quality career/technical (CT) programs are available in the 11th and 12th grades. Students have access to nationally recognized certifications in welding, automotive, hospitality and restaurant management, e-commerce and marketing, information technology and networking, and engineering and robotics. The school benefits from a supportive alumni association and an active VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) student organization.

The CBI program is an elective “bridge” between eighth-grade studies and 11th- and 12th-grade CT programs. The intent of the program is to reduce freshman retention, engage non-traditional learners, improve career education acceptance rates and raise the GPAs of participating students.

As many as 30 students are chosen for the program each year and remain in the program for two years. Students must be first-time ninth-graders, have taken a CT class in grade eight, be willing to improve low academic achievement and have scored average or above average on the Ohio Achievement Test in grade eight. They must be nontraditional learners who are recommended by a middle grades principal or counselor.

Students in the CBI program take two to three core subjects with a CBI teacher and participate in a CBI intervention period that includes homework completion, test taking and study skills improvement. They complete career exploration projects to become familiar with career choices. Students benefit from differentiated instruction, more one-on-one time with a teacher, computer-based learning, daily intervention time, and mentoring and career advisement.

The percentage of CBI students signing up for CT courses in the 11th grade rose from 57 percent in 2009 to 67 percent in 2010 to 100 percent in 2011.

Academically, the CBI students equaled or outperformed their peers in regular ECLC classes on the Ohio Graduation Test in 2011.

Percentages Passing the Ohio Graduation Test in 2011		
	CBI Students	All Other ECLC Students
Writing	67%	67%
Reading	89	69
Math	100	58
Science	67	39
Social Studies	67	52

“The CBI faculty constantly strives to improve the program and increase student success rates,” Tidrick-Briggs said.

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Set Sail for Success: Designing and Sustaining an Effective Ninth-Grade Academy

Administrators, teachers and counselors at **Mary G. Montgomery High School** (MGMHS) in Semmes, Alabama, have combined their efforts for the past four years to help freshman students complete the voyage to graduation and beyond. Using the school nickname, “Vikings,” as a theme, the ninth-graders “set sail for success” by chanting a freshman pledge and voicing their new goals to “show up, act right and be responsible for success.”

The heart of the freshman academy at MGMHS is a belief that major actions should be taken to help vulnerable ninth-graders avoid failing and dropping out. School leaders and teachers are dedicated to student success:

- Two buildings and 25 classrooms known as the freshman quad host 90 percent of freshman academy classes. (Band, physical education, art, chorus, gifted classes and home economics are electives that require specific facilities.)
- The freshman academy director/assistant principal, the freshman counselor and the freshman intervention teacher are housed in the quad and have offices in the same room. This proximity provides an added opportunity for communication and teamwork.

- Academy teachers choose to teach ninth-graders because they want to improve achievement and reduce the dropout rate.
- All teachers in the first year of the academy met and worked two weeks prior to the start of school to develop common goals, a theme, a motto, rules and procedures.
- Academy teachers attend orientation, registration and all other activities related to ninth-graders.

“Sink or Swim” Two-Day Summer Orientation — Staff and seniors at the school conduct a summer program that builds the confidence of ninth-graders and the leadership skills of upperclassmen who are assigned as mentors to small groups of incoming freshmen. An older student becomes a friendly face to a nervous newcomer on a campus of 2,000 students.

Focus on Staying in School — **Stephanie Lesley**, assistant principal and academy director, reminds freshmen early and often of the importance of transition points in their lives, including moving from the middle grades to high school. “More students fail ninth grade than the three other high school grades combined,” she said. “Students who fail ninth grade are more than twice as likely to drop out of school.” She also lists the

potential consequences of dropping out, including drug use and incarceration. The school offers daily after-hours sessions for credit-deficient students.

Communicating Expectations to Teachers, Students and Parents — The academy director sends weekly e-mail messages to teachers and models teacher-student interaction, and teachers maintain contact with students and parents. Teachers are encouraged to get to know their students; to emphasize active engagement in the classroom (bell-to-bell teaching and research-based strategies); and to use interactive classroom lesson planning, including video clips and movie trailers to stress goal setting by students.

To encourage the use of engaging activities, the academy director lobbied the central office, and as a result, the academy became one of two freshman academy programs to receive 25 Smart Boards for academy classrooms. “Teachers have received professional development and have become astute users of the Smart Boards,” Lesley said. Via e-mail, mail, newsletters, note cards and phone calls, students and parents receive information on intervention and remediation programs as well as schedules for freshman assemblies, progress reports and report cards.

Active Involvement — Clubs, teams and organizations are recognized during the first freshman assembly of the year. Speaking to those who have not yet joined, Lesley cites a statistic that students who become involved in school activities are 75 percent more likely to graduate.

Celebrating Success — All freshman assemblies include recognition and awards for students and teachers who have excelled in some aspect of teaching and learning. In addition, freshman accomplishments are announced to the entire school and freshman students are rewarded with breaks and “Fun Fridays.”

Data-Driven High Standards — Academy teachers complete data sheets on all ninth-graders to share with other teachers. The sheets, summarizing academic achievement, attendance, discipline incidents and any failing grades, are analyzed to schedule students for extra help, intervention and counseling. Teachers are reminded to use attendance and counseling resources at the school and to contact parents about lagging attendance. “If you wait for someone else in the building to notice a problem with your student, it may be too late,” Lesley warns.

Required Participation in Extra Help — Ninth-graders who fall below a 70 percent average in Algebra I, Algebra IA, Algebra IB or Biology I are assigned to remediation. A classroom teacher or the school’s problem-solving team makes referrals as needed throughout the semester. Remediation takes place during an elective class one day per week. Students make up any missed work without a penalty and continue remediation until they achieve a 75 percent average at one of several interim check points or at the end of nine weeks. Freshman Counselor **Rachel Graham** and Intervention Specialist **Ken Boatman** monitor grades and attendance closely.

- Upperclassmen assist struggling students through tutoring and discussions of high school expectations.
- The READ 180 software program helps freshmen who are reading below grade level.
- Students have access to a literacy coach and support in taking the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE).

Vision of Success — Students who maintain a B average are eligible to participate in a weekend tour of college campuses in the Southeast. While there, they meet with MGMHS alumni to talk about preparing for college and meeting expectations, including campus rules.

The Right to Wear White — Ninth-graders at MGMHS wear khaki pants and black shirts. Students in grades 10 through 12 wear khaki and white. Freshmen understand that they have to “earn the right to wear the white.” Repeaters who earn seven credits by the end of the first semester participate in a promotion ceremony so that they can wear white shirts beginning in January. **The number of repeaters in 2009-2010 dropped from 108 to 58 at the end of the first semester and to eight at the end of the school year.** The group that did not pass to the 10th grade cited reasons such as pregnancy and family illnesses.

The promotion rate from grade nine to grade 10 was 88 percent in 2008-2009, 90 percent in 2009-2010 and 88 percent in 2010-2011. “We are not satisfied,” Lesley said. “We will continue to tackle scheduling problems, failure rates in core classes, retention and dropout rates, and other factors as we work diligently to support incoming freshmen.”

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Turning Repeaters Into Leaders: One School's Efforts to Improve the Success of Ninth-Graders

NOTE: The following article contains more information on intervention efforts for ninth-grade academy students at Mary G. Montgomery High School.

Students who earn fewer than seven credits in the ninth grade (and thus have to repeat the grade) at **Mary G. Montgomery High School** (MGMHS) in Semmes, Alabama, are considered “most likely to drop out.” Repeaters in the freshman academy are eligible to participate in a variety of intervention strategies designed to help them earn credits to become sophomores and to lower the dropout rate at the school.

“Once students reach the age of 16 or 17, they cite many reasons for dropping out,” said **Stephanie Lesley**, assistant principal and freshman academy director. “Repeating students have the added burden of being over age and under-credited. They often are unmotivated, bored and not involved in the school and the community. Family problems may contribute to poor attendance or behavioral issues.”

Educators have learned that the following strategies work for potential dropouts: small groups, peer tutoring and mentoring, cooperative learning, journaling, hands-on projects, family engagement and adult mentors at the school. Freshman Academy Counselor **Rachel Graham** was assigned to prevent ninth-grade failures and dropouts and to get repeating students to pass to the 10th grade as quickly as possible. She recognized that success with repeaters requires a broad spectrum of strategies, including academic, social, emotional and practical support.

Graham began by scheduling each repeating ninth-grader into a class called Strategies for Academic Success. Each class has 10 to 15 students. In addition to teaching two blocks of this class daily, she handles referrals of academic, attendance, social and personal matters. Sharing an office with the academy director and an intervention specialist has made it possible for Graham to confer with them on grades, discipline, attendance and family support and to decide on the best plan of action for each student.

Student-Friendly Text — Students in the Strategies for Academic Success class were assigned Sean Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. They wrote daily journals, participated in lively discussions and analyzed actions and consequences. Covey's book is designed to help teens improve self-image, build friendships, resist peer pressure and achieve goals. Graham incorporated additional habits such as developing study and life skills, prioritizing tasks and getting along with others. “I want students to like coming to school, working as a team and seeing that hard work pays off,” she said.

Off-Campus Events — Graham worked with students, parents, and occasionally probation and resource officers to organize field trips as learning experiences and rewards. Students gained valuable experiences in job skills and teamwork by volunteering at Habitat for Humanity, an international food festival and an adult daycare center. They spent one day off campus at the local community center where they worked in teams on a variety of activities.

Freshman-Only Events — Repeating ninth-graders participated in freshmen-only assemblies, a movie day and fiestas and were eligible for a weekend college tour.

Extra-Help Tutoring — Tutoring is available after school and on Saturdays. The intervention teacher and the counselor work closely with struggling students and their families to ensure they know about extra-help opportunities and bus transportation. Credit recovery is another option for students to receive credit in core classes. Students are eligible for this service if they fail a core class with an average of 49 to 59. The credit recovery classes are small, with 10 to 15 students. The size allows for more interaction with the teacher. Credit recovery classes are computer-based so that students can work at their own speed with the help of the computer's remediation prescriptives and the teacher. Students may recover their credit in as little as four weeks and can continue to work toward an additional credit in the same semester.

Peer Mentors — A peer mentoring program known as Freshman Academy Mentors Investing in Leading Youth (FAMILY) is unique to the school and was copyrighted by Lesley. Older students are carefully selected to provide services such as one-on-one academic help, peer mentoring, social and behavioral intervention and academic advisement about issues that lead to failure. They provide role models for the younger students, particularly in acquiring successful school strategies.



“When repeaters are successful, they are assigned to be mentors for new ninth-graders, many of whom may be experiencing the same feelings about school that the repeaters know so well.”

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Positive Publicity — The local newspaper published an article about the students with the theme, “I Want to Make It.” Several students were interviewed about circumstances that make it difficult to focus on school — including family situations, expulsion for bad behavior and even homelessness. One girl pointed out, “If you drop out, you’re not going to get a good education and you’re not going to be paid as much. You’ll struggle a lot, like my family does.” She is right: According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education, the average income of a high school dropout is much lower than that of a high school graduate.

Sixty students were enrolled in Strategies for Academic Success in 2010-2011. Thirty-four are still attending MGMHS and are passing their courses. Nine enrolled in the Goodwill Easter Seals GED program. “When repeaters are successful, they are assigned to be mentors for new ninth-graders, many of whom may be experiencing the same feelings about school that the repeaters know so well,” Graham said. “In doing so, they are truly becoming leaders instead of repeaters.”

Students appreciate the individual attention they receive in the class. One student repeating the freshman year for the third time said, “The difference this year is when I start to fail, someone is there to catch me.”

Advising Undocumented Students About Entering Colleges and Universities

The College Board estimates that 65,000 undocumented immigrant students living in the U.S. for five or more years graduated from high schools in the United States in 2009. While many of these students are college-ready, the majority of them are unable to enter U.S. colleges and universities. Counselors and teachers need to be familiar with state laws as well as admission, residency and tuition requirements at state-funded institutions of higher education.

“My purpose is not to change or influence anyone’s views on immigration,” said **Cichele Fields**, smaller learning communities coordinator and provider of English-language Learner (ELL) instructional support at **Apopka High School** in Apopka, Florida. “My purpose is to inform educators and others who work with young people about the issues facing undocumented immigrant students.”

No Policies in 32 States

“Thirty-two states have no policies regarding undocumented students,” Fields said. “In these states, it is typically left to the individual institution whether or not to accept undocumented students. Students must pay international or out-of-state tuition and are ineligible for federal and state financial aid.” On the other hand, some states have passed legislation that specifically prohibits undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition benefits, Fields explained.

“Each year since 2001, the DREAM Act has been introduced in the U.S. Congress,” Fields said. The legislation would allow undocumented students to attend college if they entered the country before age 16, have been in the country for at least three years, have graduated from a United States high school, have no felonies and are in good standing in the community.

Educators can support undocumented students by providing career counseling and by helping them conduct research on colleges and apply for financial aid. The following actions are what students say they need the most:

- When talking about college readiness, include information on policies for undocumented students, even if none is enrolled in your classes or your school.
- Don’t make assumptions about a student’s effort. Ask questions and offer support.
- If the student offers information about his or her legal status and you are uncomfortable discussing it, find someone who can help.
- Be aware of organizations in your community that help undocumented students, and make that information available to students.

The Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling polled Illinois schools and a number of schools in other states before developing a resource titled “College Advising Guide for Undocumented Students.” The guide is available online by entering the title in a search engine.

A doctoral student in career and workforce education at the University of South Florida, Fields is interested in speaking with teachers who want more information or with teachers and students who want to share their stories.

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Prepare 12th-Graders to Enter Careers and Postsecondary Education Without Needing Remediation

Destination Graduation: Equipping Students for Success in the Future

Theodore High School (THS) in Theodore, Alabama, offers a program known as Destination Graduation to help students stay in school and graduate on time. The purpose of the program is “to provide multiple pathways for students to complete high school and successfully transition to college and careers.”

The four pathways of Destination Graduation are college preparatory, fine and performing arts, career technology and military. The program’s success is evidenced in its 90 percent graduation rate and the achievement of all goals for the school to maintain its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status.

A Destination Graduation committee reviews schoolwide data on dropout, retention and failure rates. It also collects and analyzes data on the perceptions of students, parents, teachers, staff members and community leaders on the effectiveness of the program and the extent to which it is meeting community needs.

Graduation Exam

Committee members meet with every junior and senior failing to pass all parts of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), a requirement for graduation and a component of AYP. Parents are invited to attend the meetings.

Small groups of 10 to 15 students participate in conferences designed to provide support and guidance. Each student develops a goal-setting document known as the Hard Work Café, which contains a passing score for each segment of the AHSGE and a record of the student’s scores to date. The students also develop action steps for passing the exam.

“Students review and highlight the least mastered objectives of the most recent test results to get a better idea of where they need to concentrate,” Principal **Ronnie Rowell** said. Students have access to online programs and study resources specific to the AHSGE that they use during advisement sessions.

Student Recognition

“We believe in recognizing and honoring students when they reach milestones,” said **Andrea Dennis**, freshman academy coordinator. Certificates are given quarterly for honor roll status and attendance. Students who achieve the A/B honor roll and make A’s on end-of-quarter tests (districtwide common assessments in core content areas) celebrate at pizza or ice cream parties each semester. At the end of the year, parents and community members are invited to attend assembly programs honoring the achievement of students from each class.

In addition to Destination Graduation, THS provides programs at each grade level to encourage and assist students as they prepare for graduation and beyond. Ninth-graders may participate in the PSAT and Freshman 101 and 102, advisory periods during which students explore academic, social and career-related topics; 10th-graders may take the PLAN college readiness test; 11th-graders have access to ACT prep, Advanced Placement (AP) courses and the Evening Educational Options Program featuring accelerated course offerings, a computer-based curriculum and intense social supports; and 12th-graders have FASTWeb scholarship and financial aid resources and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Some of these programs are offered across grade levels.



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Program Gives At-Risk High School Students a Chance to Succeed

The Leadership Program (TLP) provides opportunities for seriously at-risk students in New York City to succeed in school and life. Working with 200 schools in the city's five boroughs, TLP helps students through mentoring, counseling, a violence prevention curriculum and after-school programs.

One of the newest and fastest-growing TLP initiatives is RISE (Re-Integrating Students through Education). It was developed with the Bronx Office of Schools and Youth Development to improve student attendance, a factor taken into consideration on the New York state report card. More recently, RISE has expanded to address student behavior.

Working with six Bronx schools, RISE connects overage, under-credited students with adult mentors who motivate students and hold them accountable for graduating from high school. "We remember teachers who inspired us," said **Christopher Williams**, TLP's director of social work services. "We remember people who supported and challenged us to succeed."

Two Groups of Students

Students enter the RISE program after being referred by school deans. They are designated as either "reintegrating students" or "transitioning students."

- Due to age or lack of credits, **transitioning students** will be unable to graduate from high school before they "age out" of the school system. RISE works to find alternative learning placements such as GED programs for these students. Prior to securing the placements, RISE facilitates its Organized for Life curriculum that includes résumé writing workshops and mock interviews. A RISE mentor works with students throughout the preparation process and contacts them weekly during the first four months and monthly during the next eight months.
- **Reintegrating students** are ninth- and 10th-graders who are one semester and one birthday away from becoming transitioning students. The goal is to help these students reintegrate to grade-level-appropriate credit status and maintain graduation eligibility. Each reintegrating student is assigned to a mentor who provides support and works to ensure that the student attends school daily. Mentors use their students' cell phone numbers to follow up on absences. They don't ask, "Where are you?" or, "Why aren't you in school?" Instead, they ask, "What's up?" or, "How are you?" RISE wants to know what is happening to prevent school attendance and how to motivate students to come to school on a regular basis.

Mentoring Sessions

Mentors conduct at least one 30-minute mentoring session per week to focus on students' goals. When a student enters the program, he or she signs a Partnership for Success Agreement outlining three personal goals and how to reach each one. After four weeks, students outline new goals, trying to improve upon what they have accomplished so far.

"As students achieve their goals, they build confidence that they can succeed," Williams said. "For students who may have experienced very little success in their lives, the program shows that they can achieve goals and be successful."

The RISE program has seen improvements in attendance, grades and attitudes toward school. Teachers' opinions of these students have changed. "Students are coming to class, and teachers are expecting more of them," Williams said. "Higher teacher expectations have led to more student success."

In its first year, RISE worked with 50 students, including 27 transitioners. One year later, 23 of the 27 transitioning students had persisted in GED or equivalency programs. Similarly, three-fourths of the reintegrating students moved to the next grade level after one year in the RISE program.



"Students are coming to class and teachers are expecting more of them. Higher teacher expectations have led to more student success."

Christopher Williams
The Leadership Program

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The National Work Readiness Credential: A Pathway to Career and College Readiness

Many initiatives and research-based reports today are focusing on the critical question of how to prepare students for college and careers and how to demonstrate to employers that graduates have the skills to succeed.

The National Work Readiness Credential (NWRC) is an effort to provide such evidence to potential employers. It resulted from a joint effort by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and a host of organizations and individuals, including the National Institute for Literacy, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Governors Association, the National Retail Federation Foundation, Junior Achievement Worldwide, and policymakers from Florida, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Washington and the District of Columbia.

The NWRC is a national portable credential that defines, measures and assesses the knowledge, skills and abilities that job-seekers will need to succeed in entry-level work in the 21st-century workplace. Tests on the four NWRC major skills of reading, oral language, math and situational judgment are delivered via computer in a certified test center.

The NWRC is based on 10 foundational skills known as Equipped for the Future. Of these 10 skills, “Take responsibility for learning” drives the instruction and learning in all test areas.

- Reading
 - Take responsibility for learning.
 - Read with understanding.
 - Observe critically.
 - Cooperate with others.
 - Use information and communications technology.
- Oral Language
 - Take responsibility for learning.
 - Speak so others can understand.
 - Listen actively.
- Mathematics
 - Take responsibility for learning.
 - Use math to solve problems and make decisions.
 - Use math to solve problems and communicate.
- Situational Judgment
 - Take responsibility for learning.
 - Resolve conflict and negotiate.
 - Cooperate with others.

Catherine Snow is supervisor of literacy, GED and training programs at **Champlain Valley Educational Services, CV-TEC Division**, in Plattsburgh, New York. She explains how CV-TEC developed its own curriculum to help prepare students for the NWRC exams and to further equip them for success. “We do more than just prepare students to take the tests,” she said.

For example, CV-TEC has incorporated the New York Department of Labor’s CareerZone website into the curriculum. “This website allows students to seek information online about job availability, salaries, and the training and skills needed to perform in a modern high-tech environment,” Snow said.

The curriculum also provides opportunities for students to complete a variety of self-assessments related to postsecondary education, training and jobs. “An intensive job exploration opens up pathways that students didn’t know were available,” Snow said. Business leaders attend every class to talk about what employers want in an employee and how to access the many career opportunities that are available today. “Our students get full support from their teachers and a guidance program,” Snow said.

CV-TEC Director **Barry Mack** sees the value of the NWRC and has worked with the CV-TEC staff to fully implement the NWRC and 21st-Century Skills as an assessment for 2011-2012. All career/technical students will prepare to take the assessment, which will measure their performance as “exemplary,” “proficient,” “novice” or “needs improvement” in the areas of communication, interpersonal relationships, decision making and lifelong learning skills.

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Successful Senior Projects: Creating an Educational Milestone

For the past two years, every senior at **Willow Springs High School** (WSHS) in Willow Springs, Missouri, has completed a senior project representing a year of planning and work in conjunction with teachers and community mentors. WSHS is a small rural school that enrolls 350 students, 26 percent of whom are living at or below the poverty level. Despite the remote location of the school and the lack of business and industry, students produce outstanding senior projects.

All of the rules and guidelines for senior projects are contained in a 70-page senior project guidebook that is updated annually for students, teachers and community representatives. The comprehensive guide contains chapters titled General Information, Guidelines and Instructions, Student Checklists, Assessments and Forms.

Early in grade 12, each student signs a commitment form and submits a research topic. English/language arts teachers work with the students to narrow the topics as needed, discuss possible adult mentors in the community, estimate costs of the projects and review timelines for completion. “Many products have no costs, while others may require money for materials,” said **Marty Spence**, English teacher and senior project coordinator.

Paper, Product, Presentation

A 10-page research paper, a tangible product and an eight- to 10-minute presentation are the components of the senior project, which is a requirement for graduation and weighs heavily in the final English 12 grade for each student.

Students keep journals of their activities on the senior project, including what they do on the project each week and how they feel (frustrations and successes) about what they have done. They also complete a senior project reflection that becomes part of the judges’ portfolio. Students reflect on the problems they encountered during the project, how they managed their time, what they learned from dealing with others, the satisfaction they gained from completing the project, what they learned about themselves and what they would have done differently. They also record and justify the grade they expect to receive on the project.

The senior project guidebook lets students know that their presentations will be evaluated on knowledge of content, presentation format, delivery, appearance, visual aids, product, the stretch/risk/challenge factor, and a question-and-answer period. The scoring guide for the research paper is the 6 + 1 Trait scoring guide for writing plus an evaluation of the paper’s thesis and documentation.

Mentors’ Roles

Mentor roles are outlined in the guide. These roles include helping students organize their projects, supervising students as they complete their projects, documenting that students have invested a certain number of hours in the project and completing an evaluation/verification form at the end of the project.

The culmination of the assignment is Senior Project Night, an event during which each senior presents his or her project to a panel of five to eight judges from the community. Approximately 150 to 200 community representatives volunteer to be judges. Others attending the event include parents, grandparents, siblings and friends.

Many students design their senior projects with community service in mind. As a result, many nonprofit community organizations benefit from fundraising and community service activities conducted as a result of senior projects.

Monetary awards of \$100 each are awarded to the five seniors whose projects score the highest number of points. These winners present their projects to 11th-graders to make them aware of the graduation requirement and to encourage them to begin planning for a senior project.

“The senior project, which we have been developing and refining for 10 years, gives me an opportunity to help students accomplish tasks they didn’t know they could accomplish,” Spence said.



“The senior project, which we have been developing and refining for 10 years, gives me an opportunity to help students accomplish tasks they didn’t know they could accomplish.”

Marty Spence
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Rural School Makes Strides by Involving Parents in the Guidance Program

Leaders, teachers and counselors at **Indian Land High School** in Fort Mill, South Carolina, have worked to develop a culture and climate to increase the support of parents in developing and implementing students' education and career plans. Parental involvement is nearly 100 percent at each grade level.

This rural school enrolls 719 students, with a student population that is 70 percent white, 20 percent black, 5 percent Hispanic and 5 percent other ethnicities. Fifteen percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

"We believe in treating all parents with integrity and respect," said **Brenda Ishmael**, director of school counseling. "Parents need to feel welcome at the school. They need to know that their questions will be answered."

The school's aim is to involve parents and students in conversations with guidance counselors about goals and aspirations, talents and skills, programs of study, college readiness, career pathways, school resources, and positive approaches to planning for success. Beginning in the middle grades, parents of eighth-graders are invited to visit the school that their students will attend the following year and learn what to expect in the ninth grade. "These meetings are well attended, with standing-room-only crowds in the cafeteria," Ishmael said.

The counseling staff begins 12 weeks of 12-hour days at the end of January during which they meet with the parents of every rising ninth-grader. These meetings focus on individual graduation plans, career exploration and the ninth-grade schedule and include a tour of the high school. Indian Land had 100 percent participation in these meetings in January 2011.

Counselors schedule individual meetings with students and parents in the 10th and 11th grades. In addition to individual education plans, career exploration and course selection, these meetings begin to focus on college entrance requirements. More than 99 percent of parents participated in 2010-2011.

Individual meetings for seniors and their parents are scheduled early in September each year. They include a transcript audit, SAT and ACT reviews, and a discussion of postgraduation plans. **The participation by parents of seniors in 2010-2011 was 98.6 percent.**

Indian Land works constantly to overcome obstacles that prevent parents from attending school conferences. Some of the barriers include work schedules, lack of transportation, language barriers and incarceration. "Some parents had educational experiences that left them hostile to and/or distrustful of schools," Ishmael said. Many times, students with the greatest academic needs are the ones who lack parental support.

"There are no specific answers to these barriers, but we try to address the needs of each parent so that they can support their students in making the transition to college and careers." For example, if a family speaks only Spanish, the school arranges for a translator to attend the meeting.

To make the guidance program effective, the former principal at Indian Land removed the oversight for testing from the guidance department so that counselors could focus more closely on meeting with and getting to know students and their families. Testing is now a part of the administrative team's responsibilities.

Evidence exists that the emphasis on parental involvement and school culture is having a positive effect. The 2010 graduation rate at Indian Land High School was 77.8 percent, up from 75.4 percent the previous year. The 2010 South Carolina report card identified Indian Land as an "Excellent" high school.

At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, parental participation reached 100 percent for returning students. Students not attending a scheduling conference before the end of 2010-2011 did not receive schedules. When these students returned to school in fall 2011, their parents were required to accompany them to participate in a conference before the students received schedules.

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Incorporating College Success Techniques Into Dual Credit Courses

The dual credit program for agribusiness and agriscience (ABAS) at **Middle Tennessee State University** (MTSU) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is designed to improve the transition of high school students to a college campus where they will complete a degree. The program gives students the extra support and skills to be successful college graduates. MTSU offers both dual enrollment and dual credit options to high school juniors and seniors.

- Through **dual enrollment**, a high school student takes a college course taught by a college professor. College instructors manage course content and assessments, and college credits can be transferred to other institutions. The Tennessee Hope Scholarship pays a portion of the expenses.
- With **dual credit**, high school students receive college credit for a high school course taught by a high school teacher. The course content and assessment are approved by a college and presented by a high school faculty member. College credit can be used only at the issuing institution. There is no tuition.

Dual credit is seen as a “toe in the water” college recruitment tool that gives students a sense that they can succeed in high school and in college. Dual credit students — often at risk of dropping out — can benefit from accelerated instruction. The approach also improves college retention rates by giving students a vision of what lies ahead in postsecondary education.

Alanna Neely, agribusiness and agriscience (ABAS) instructor and dual credit coordinator at MTSU, was instrumental in creating the ABAS dual credit program that allows students to gain at least three hours of college credit while still in high school. She received a Perkins IV reserve grant of \$157,000 to begin the program in 2008-2009 and an additional \$119,500 in Perkins funding for the 2011-2012 school year.

The first goal of the MTSU dual credit program is to enroll students in a dual credit course at the secondary level. Students simultaneously participate in an ABAS course at the postsecondary level. The desired outcome is for students to achieve admission to a postsecondary institution and to meet the requirements for transitioning to that institution. Another outcome is to increase career placement in agriculture for students concentrating in agriculture — thereby lowering dropout rates.

Through the leadership of agriculture education teachers at the secondary level and the dual credit coordinator at the postsecondary level, students are exposed to vital college success techniques. As a result, more students will transition to a postsecondary program and students will be better prepared for college classes. The intent is to improve college retention rates.

Other goals of the program are to establish a stronger alliance between secondary and postsecondary agricultural education programs across Tennessee and to establish professional development as an important part of the plan to implement dual credit in an agriculture education course. The desired outcomes are to build a strong alliance between high school and university faculty and staff and to ensure that high school and university faculty are equal partners in implementing future dual credit courses. An additional objective is to maintain rigor and relevance in the courses.

“The dual credit program aims to build college success techniques in students,” Neely said. Many strategies are included in the DVD “Cracking College: 7 Secrets of Savvy Students” by Justin Baer.

- Choose the best courses.
- Study smarter, not harder.
- Use “college friendly” time management.
- Excel in large classes.
- Succeed with less stress.
- Practice the art of exam preparation.
- Turn B papers into A papers.



“We believe we are reaching students who have not decided about college. We are building their confidence that they can succeed in postsecondary education.”

Alanna Neely
Middle Tennessee State University

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- Get outstanding letters of recommendation from professors.
- Find school-sponsored exam repositories.
- Locate the ultimate place to study.
- Balance social life with academic life.
- Schedule more free time.
- Ace finals.

The dual credit agriculture course uses one textbook with study questions and guides, PowerPoint presentations and four preparatory exams. Students write a research paper and complete a computer activity to answer the question, “What will I do after high school?” They also take a final comprehensive exam.

The MTSU dual credit coordinator visits each participating school to make presentations on the secrets of college success, to conduct the “What will I do after high school” activity, to give test reviews and to conduct individual student advisement.

Nearly 1,600 students from 30 schools in 16 counties are participating in the dual credit program at MTSU. The subject areas include greenhouse management, agribusiness/finance and leadership. Enrollment grew 20 percent to 30 percent in two years.

The group of 18 schools in 10 counties that received grant funding in 2008-2010 received more than 180 computers, multi-media DVDs, LCD projectors and textbooks. Fifteen non-grant schools in 10 counties enrolled more than 1,125 students.

“We believe we are reaching students who have not decided about college,” Neely said. “We are building their confidence that they can succeed in postsecondary education.”

This newsletter of “best practices” in implementing the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)*, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* school improvement models is based on presentations at the 25th Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, in summer 2011.