Nothing stays the same. Transitions are challenges that people of all ages must deal with throughout life. Students are faced with major changes in the educational environment as they progress from the elementary grades to the middle grades, from the middle grades to high school, and from high school and the technology center to postsecondary studies and careers.

Educators at all levels are researching and implementing strategies to accelerate student achievement at every stage along the way. This newsletter makes the case for transitional planning and helping students transfer smoothly to the next level.

The research is clear: Too many students drop out of high school, and too few students who enter college will graduate.

Can America’s schools change fast enough to ensure success for all students? Can schools provide engaging heads-on, hands-on learning to promote higher graduation rates and college completion rates?

“Not unless we challenge our assumptions, recognize the important roles of teachers and principals, and understand the concepts of engaging students in learning,” says Gary Gordon, strategic consultant for Gallup Inc. in Overland Park, Kansas.

The 2009 Gallup Student Poll sought the input of more than 70,000 students in grades five through 12 in 18 states and the District of Columbia. The poll predicts the likelihood of student success based on the concepts of hope, engagement and well-being — how students think about and experience their lives. The higher a school’s hope, engagement and well-being scores, the higher the achievement level.

About 50 percent of students surveyed are engaged in learning. “They are emotionally involved with, committed to and enthusiastic about school,” Gordon said. Thirty percent are not engaged. “They just want to know if it’s on the test,” he said. The remaining 20 percent are actively disengaged.

Gordon urges school leaders, teachers and parents to challenge three assumptions about America’s schools in order to make substantive changes in the way students learn:

**Assumption 1 — Selecting and developing educators based on knowledge and skills is the most reliable way to facilitate student success.**

Gallup research shows that this assumption is not sufficient. “We’ve all had teachers who were experts in the subject matter but only some of them could teach it,” Gordon said. When students...
in the poll were asked to name the class in which they learned the most, 53 percent said the most learning took place either when their teachers cared about and respected them or when their teachers made learning fun and used a variety of teaching methods. Nearly twice as many students learned the most when their classes were challenging than when they were easy.

Assumption 2 — A perfect curriculum or instructional technique will work for all students and teachers, eliminating differences in student learning. Gordon believes this notion creates the flavor-of-the-year approach in which administrators and teachers search for the newest and greatest content or method, requiring constant training and retraining. “This approach produces little sustained and substantive progress,” Gordon said. “It also devalues the teacher, implying that almost anyone can teach if they use the right methods.” Outstanding teachers motivate and relate to students. “They love working with students and seeing them grow,” he said. “They have passion for the subject and are passionate about teaching it. They are role models.”

Some comments by students in Gallup’s survey reinforce the importance of personalized teaching methods and challenging classes. The poll stems from a partnership between Gallup Inc. and America’s Promise Alliance to track students in the United States over the next 10 years. The following responses are from three students answering the question, “What made this teacher different?”

“My teacher understood the way I learned and worked. I was never criticized for my ideas or feelings, but I was met with questions and ideas that could change the way I looked at something.”

“She always pushed us to the limit. I have never been pushed so hard to achieve. She really took time to know each one of us. If we needed help, she was there to provide it after school.”

“He taught us a new way to write and think. It wasn’t the basic writing technique. He got you to open your mind and believe in yourself.”

Assumption 3 — Differences in workplace climates are largely irrelevant to schools because the working environment for teachers and students does not make much difference. “Employees don’t leave companies; they leave managers and working conditions,” Gordon said. Gallup’s workplace research identified 12 elements that matter in predicting productivity and turnover. (See sidebar.)

“Principals must take ownership of the school environment,” Gordon said. “Schools need to meet the basic needs of teachers and students, who must have materials and equipment to do the work expected of them. They need respect and recognition for their efforts. Teachers thrive when they have a sense of belonging and believe they are valued at the school.”

In summary, when educational systems and schools challenge these assumptions and understand how engagement makes a difference, more students will transition successfully from the elementary grades to the middle grades, from the middle grades to high school, and from high school to college and careers.

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Source: Gallup Inc. workplace studies

Twelve Elements That Matter in the Work (and School) Environment

- This past year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.
- In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
- I have a best friend at work.
- My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
- The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
- At work, my opinions seem to count.
- There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.
- In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right now.
- I know what is expected of me at work.

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Source: Gallup Inc. workplace studies

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Helping Students Make the Transition from the Elementary Grades to the Middle Grades

In much the same way that schools have worked together to ease the transition from the middle grades to high school, schools need to work together to provide better transitions from the elementary grades to the middle grades. Elementary students need to know the expectations of middle grades teachers, the organization and scheduling of middle grades schools and the importance of preparing for the future.

Elementary and middle grades schools need to communicate about the performance of elementary students so that middle grades schools can design interventions to close achievement gaps. The schools also need to pay attention to research on how students respond to middle grades schools, given students’ social, emotional and physical needs at the beginning of grade six.

Research shows a problem in the middle grades. Although the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that the early grades made progress in teaching reading and mathematics between 1992 and 2007 and students are leaving the early grades better prepared for middle grades instruction, the performance of eighth-graders has improved only slightly overall.

What happens in the middle grades not only influences performance in high school but also helps determine who will stay in school and graduate. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University followed sixth-graders through high school to find out who graduated, when they graduated and who dropped out of school. Their research identified certain predictors that pointed to the likelihood that sixth-graders would drop out and not graduate from high school.

According to the Johns Hopkins research, sixth-graders are more likely to drop out if they fail mathematics; fail English/reading/language arts; have behavior problems in school that lead to suspensions or have behavior problems in class that lead to a failing mark on a report card; or are absent 20 percent or more of the school year.

“Teachers in grades six and seven can no longer leave issues of high school readiness to teachers in grade eight,” said Yvonne Thayer, senior director for SREB’s Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW) initiative. “The beginning of the middle grades is the time to identify and respond immediately to students who are likely to drop out.”

Schools wanting to develop a transition plan between the elementary grades and the middle grades should consider these key research findings:

- Academic performance declines overall after students enter the middle grades.
- Students perform better if they are organized into interdisciplinary teams during the transition year rather than being in a departmentalized grade.
- Mathematics is heavily emphasized in grade four. During the transition year, mathematics moves from being among students’ favorite subjects to being among their least favorite. Mathematics never returns as a student favorite during the middle grades.
- Declines take place after the transition in students’ attitudes about school satisfaction, academic and non-academic subjects, and reactions to teachers.
- The transition is challenging for students. They are entering a new environment with new academic demands, new adults and authority figures, new and older students, and new facilities.
- Students have many questions prior to the transition to the middle grades. Their concerns are logistical, social/motivational and academic. Logistical concerns include a more complex environment, a larger campus, more students, and multiple teachers and classrooms.
- Students entering the middle grades are also entering adolescence — a time of relying much more on peers and wanting to be part of a group.
It is typical for students’ academic performance to drop upon entering the middle grades. Students are coping with tougher classes, more homework and a new set of academic expectations.

Middle grades schools tend to look at a student’s ability rather than emphasizing the effort a student makes to improve. As a result, many students have declining academic achievement.

Students become more task-focused if they are given the opportunity to work in groups, given choices in their assignments and rewarded for making the effort to improve.

“Transition studies are calling for a more comprehensive approach in which educators, parents and students work together to design and implement the best programs for helping students make the transition from elementary to middle grades schools,” Thayer said.

Preparing Middle Grades Students for High School

Leaders and teachers in middle grades schools are finding better ways to prepare students for the transition to the higher standards and expectations of high school. They are making courses more rigorous and are redesigning the school experience to help students adjust successfully.

Middle Grades School Partners With High School to Ensure Student Success

To increase the likelihood that their students will be successful in the ninth grade and graduate four years later, leaders at Bayou Blue Middle School in Houma, Louisiana, created a special partnership with Central Lafourche High School in Raceland, Louisiana, the receiving school for Bayou Blue students. “We want to make sure our middle grades students don’t fall through the cracks when they get to high school,” Principal Sharon Dugas said.

Raecheal Vizier, literacy coach and LINCS (Learning-Intensive Networking Communities for Success) instructional coach at Bayou Blue Middle School, reviewed data from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) showing the critical nature of a successful first year in high school. The data showed:

- Nearly one in three eighth-graders does not graduate from high school.
- Half of black students and Hispanic students drop out before graduation.
- More students fail the ninth grade than any other grade level.
- Grades eight and nine are defining periods for teenagers.
- Students who participate in transition programs are less likely to drop out of high school.

The plan for helping Bayou Blue students make the transition into high school includes establishing a transition team of teachers from the eighth and ninth grades, guidance counselors, and administrators early in the school year. The team works together to complete a variety of activities:

- Gather data on eighth-graders and transfer the data to the receiving high school. The data include benchmarking, progress monitoring, response-to-intervention (RTI) folders and a list of at-risk students.
- Establish a summer bridge program.

Eighth-graders will visit Central Lafourche High School in the spring to become familiar with new surroundings and academic expectations. Students will tour the building, receive a schedule and a map, observe presentations such as science projects, see performances and demonstrations of extracurricular activities, and hear about eligibility requirements from teachers and coaches.

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Fun and Games in a Middle Grades Science Class

Jill Cammer, science teacher at Chester Middle School in Chester, Virginia, is showing students how to have fun while learning scientific names and functions that will help them understand middle grades science and more rigorous courses in high school. She has developed more than 10 games that reinforce content and keep students involved in learning.

Students work individually or in teams to find the correct answers. Teachers prepare the materials, keep score and reward students for mastering the subject matter. “Students like to compete and will enjoy these games without prizes, but they will try harder if they know they will receive small, inexpensive tokens for winning,” Cammer said.

Here are summaries of five games Cammer uses successfully in her classes:

The Vocab Game: Promote students’ science vocabularies by listing three incorrect and one correct word or vice versa. Individuals or teams of students identify correct spellings.

Password: Students from one team give a member of the other team “clues” until the member identifies the word. If the vocabulary word is “locomotion,” students offer clues such as “dancing,” “running” or “jumping.”

The Fly Swatter Game: Create a large table containing 20 pictures or words from the unit being taught. Give one member from each of two teams a fly swatter. When you ask a question, the student that swats the picture or word first gets a point. For example, if you say “radial symmetry,” students would swat a picture of a jellyfish.

Betcha! $1, $3, $5 Game: This game requires fake money or Monopoly game money as well as an index card for each student. Students use notes, worksheets and the textbook to write three questions on the unit they are studying in class. The questions should be tough but realistic. Students ask each other questions; the harder the questions are, the more they are worth. “Students stay interested and find out if they know the content,” Cammer said.

Beach Volleyball Game: Divided into two teams, students use a soft inflatable ball to get the attention of opposing team members and ask them questions from the lesson. The teams lob the ball/questions back and forth until one team wins by answering the greatest number of questions correctly.

The excitement and motivation of students is evidence that Cammer’s strategies are working. “Students can’t wait to get to class to see what we are doing and learning today,” she said.

More details on games that are suitable for science classes and adaptable for other classes are available from Jill Cammer.

Giving Ninth-Graders Extra Support to Achieve in a High School Environment

More schools are focusing on how to increase students’ readiness for high school and reduce failure rates in grade nine. Districts can support ninth-grade transition efforts while high schools and middle grades schools can work together to connect the two stages of education.

High Schools and SREB Join Hands to Help Students Succeed in the Ninth Grade

Seeking success for ninth-graders, 10 high schools in Georgia’s DeKalb County School District have partnered with SREB to create conditions that will help students make the transition to high school and remain in school to graduate on time.

One key component of the redesign project is to give students an opportunity during the summer to get a jump-start on high school by learning about expectations and addressing academic deficiencies. The school district provided a framework for the schools to develop one-week summer bridge programs to include academic skills, high school orientation, and guidance and counseling. The district funded meals and transportation for each school and orchestrated a survey-based evaluation of the summer program.
Tisa Parker, summer bridge coordinator for DeKalb County, reported positive findings from the planning and implementation of the week-long transition programs:

- Most students are convinced that their educational experiences are important for life after high school.
- Ninety-four percent of students aspire to graduate from college.
- About three-fourths of students agreed that it is important to give their best and not to stop until they achieve their goals.
- Nearly all parents — 97 percent — agreed that the school is trying to prepare students for success in the ninth grade.
- More than 85 percent of teachers said students met the majority of their expectations, including being energetic, willing to learn, interested and open-minded.
- About 85 percent of teachers indicated that the program increased the confidence of students and familiarized them with teachers and administrators at the high school.
- Sixty-four percent of teachers considered the program to be very effective.

SREB encouraged academic and career/technical teachers to work together to plan summer bridge activities in the following areas: addressing academic deficiencies and strengthening habits of success; involving highly skilled teachers; using standards-based instruction; exploring careers; and using a theme to support integrated academic and career/technical learning.

Working Together at Avondale High School

The leadership team at Avondale High School in DeKalb County, Georgia, knew it would take the efforts of everyone to address the transition needs of incoming ninth-graders. Principal Tasharah Wilson encouraged participative leadership by expecting and supporting team members to take responsibility for various interventions.

Teachers have worked closely to help students meet the challenges of the freshman year. School leaders say students really care about going to the next level and not having to stay in the ninth grade. Promotion is important.

A variety of programs have been put in place to support ninth-grade transition at Avondale High School:

- **Double-dosing mathematics** — Incoming students underperforming in mathematics were enrolled in an SAT prep class taught with heavy utilization of tools such as the Geometer’s Sketchpad visualization software and interactive online simulations from Gizmos. Students received tutoring every day for one week. Eighty percent of students who enrolled in the SAT prep course passed Mathematics I.

- **Summer bridge program** — The program addressed the academic deficiencies of students as determined by state exams and feeder school staff. It also focused on successful high school habits to alleviate students’ fears of entering high school.

- **Freshman Academy** — Highly qualified teachers were invited to become part of the team to instruct ninth-graders in a small learning community atmosphere.

- **Involvement Equals Success** — This program included a variety of activities to encourage students to participate in the school culture. The activities included an anti-drug campaign, field trips to college campuses and sporting events, and attendance at a production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The school recognized students who received all A’s and were never absent.

- **Orientation and Belonging** — The leadership team created ways to help students feel connected to their new school. Thanks to a district initiative with Communities in Schools, students were guests at an ice cream social and two breakfasts — one for males and one for females. Male students received ties and females received pearl necklaces. As part of the Communities in Schools initiative, students are monitored in the areas of attendance and behavior, parent involvement, counseling, career awareness, special classes and programs, extracurricular activities and school resources.

Extra help was provided as part of an intensive guidance and advisement program. All students were assigned to a teacher-adviser who was also the student’s homeroom teacher. Extra-help opportunities included daily tutoring sessions, a Twilight School, course recovery, study group sessions, Saturday School and an online academy course offered by the district.

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Sometimes, all it takes to help students catch up with their peers is a targeted, carefully crafted plan.

Two high schools in Spartanburg School District One in Campobello, South Carolina, collaborated to develop and implement a ninth-grade English transitions course based on the HSTW-recommended model. Teams of teachers from the two schools — Chapman High School and Landrum High School — attended an HSTW transitions institute in 2008 to develop structured, skills-focused units that use a core text and supplemental texts to prepare students for high school English studies. Beth Pace is the literacy coach for both schools.

The process includes identifying eighth-graders at risk of failing English One in grade nine and enrolling them in the transitions course in the first semester of high school. Students receive an elective credit for the course in the fall and take regular English One in the spring. A 4 x 4 block schedule allows students to participate in two full English classes in the ninth grade and enter the 10th grade on schedule to complete all English requirements before graduation.

Following the HSTW summer institute, teachers met to complete a course curriculum that included the novels and skills to be taught, the number of units to be included and alignment with state standards. During the first year of implementation, the teachers engaged in joint planning to share feedback and to coordinate the use of materials. They also included benchmark assessments, using Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and other assessments to monitor students’ progress. The district provided strong support by giving teachers freedom and assistance to implement the transitions course.

**Results from Both Schools**

The schools administered the MAP tests three times to measure student achievement during the semester. Combining numbers from both schools, 29 students scored higher than their initial MAP scores (a 72.5 percent increase), while nine students declined (mainly three to five points) and two students remained the same.

At the end of the second semester, 17 students who took English One with the same transitions teacher passed the end-of-course exam, while nine failed. The schools believe this progress is significant, considering that all students were expected to fail English One without the transitions course.

When students took English One from a teacher other than the transitions teacher, only four students passed the course, while 12 failed. (Some students had moved out of the district.) A district analysis showed that students having teachers who used the HSTW transitions model had higher English One end-of-course tests scores than students with teachers who did not use the model.

“Students who probably would not have been successful in the past now have a chance to pass English and move on to the next grade level.”

Brian Sherman
Landrum High School

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Teachers from the two schools offered these tips for developing and teaching the transitions course:

- Attend the HSTW transitions institute to learn how to develop units — and how to use units developed by other teachers — for classroom instruction.
- Plan a rigorous and effective course to meet the needs of at-risk students. School leaders will need to give teachers time to meet and plan.
- Collaborate with teachers in the school and the district who are teaching the transitions course and English One.
- Identify the materials and novels for the course as well as targeted skills to ensure that students will be ready for English One.
- Refine the course by reflecting on what did and did not work.

“Students who probably would not have been successful in the past now have a chance to pass English and move on to the next grade level,” said Principal Brian Sherman of Landrum High School. “The transitions course gives students opportunities to be successful in high school and to feel good about their accomplishments.”

Principal Stephanie Mathis of Chapman High School believes teacher selection is the key to the success of the transitions course. “Teachers make all the difference through student engagement, other instructional strategies and emotional support,” she said.
Cross Keys High School viewed the ninth-grade transition partnership between the DeKalb County School System in Georgia and SREB as an opportunity to build a culture of success for its high-needs students. The school enrolls 70 percent Hispanic students. Eighty-four percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The 800 students at Cross Keys speak a variety of languages, lead transient lifestyles and often are undocumented.

Principal LaShawn McMillan recognized the need for a strong ninth-grade transition program and created a position to provide leadership and coordination to the redesign efforts. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in 2009 and continues to commit funds and support to the transition efforts.

Alisa Bouer-Schlitt, ninth-grade redesign coach at Cross Keys, believes relationships are the key to the school’s success in orienting incoming freshmen. One important relationship is working with feeder middle grades schools. Bouer-Schlitt travels to the feeder schools during the year, where she introduces herself to students and works with counselors to understand students’ needs. She also attends middle grades functions, visits classrooms, brings former ninth-graders to talk with incoming students and creates shadowing opportunities for middle grades students to spend a day with high school students. “Students need to know that they have at least one person they can go to at the high school when they have problems and issues,” she said.

Parent involvement is another factor in ninth-grade success at Cross Keys. Realizing the importance of family in Hispanic culture, Bouer-Schlitt and her colleagues invited parents to participate in a “boot camp” on how to help their students set academic and career goals. They send postcards home written in English and Spanish and hold conferences with parents at convenient locations in the community. “We need to accept parents where they are and share ways they can help their children,” Bouer-Schlitt said.

Cross Keys thinks it is important for students to believe they can succeed. As a result, the school has conducted four specific efforts to promote a culture of success:

- **Summer bridge program** — Sixty students attended a week-long program titled *Fight For Your Dreams*, which included gender-specific classes on teen pregnancy and gang-related activities. A former Cross Keys student spoke to ninth-graders during a field trip to a local university to send the message that Cross Keys students can attend college.

- **Pinning and pledge ceremony** — All ninth-graders and their parents were invited to a candlelight ceremony to pledge their commitment to high school graduation. Students received a “Road to Success” pin and heard from a former student.

- **Career Wheel exploratory course** — Ninth-graders participated in a series of six-week mini-courses on career fields such as visual arts, engineering, business entrepreneurship and marketing, and science. Students practiced study skills and developed portfolios.

- **Ropes Course field trip** — At-risk ninth-graders were invited to participate in a ropes course focusing on team building and collaboration. Students developed peer relationships and helped each other study.

Future plans call for more job shadowing opportunities and increased enrichment activities. Teachers will receive data books with achievement scores and other information to help their students succeed in high school studies.
Sophomore Center Works Hard to Help Students Adjust to High School

The Sophomore Center at Springdale High School (SHS) in Springdale, Arkansas, is committed to helping students make a successful transition into high school. SHS enrolls 1,800 students in grades 10 through 12; the sophomore year is the first year of high school for entering students.

Located in a fast-growing area of the state made famous by the Tyson Corporation, Wal-Mart corporate headquarters and the University of Arkansas, the high school has seen dramatic changes in student demographics. From a majority white student population 15 years ago, SHS has evolved into a multi-cultural setting where 56 percent of students are minorities — primarily Hispanic and Marshall Islander. Nearly half of students are English-language learners and more than 80 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

“The faculty and staff are challenged to help a diverse student population make the transition to the 10th grade and succeed throughout high school,” said English teacher Don Eichenberger of the Sophomore Center. They have met the challenge through high-quality instruction, constant teamwork and vigorous intervention when students are falling behind.

Four Teams

Sophomores are organized into four teams that share the same English, mathematics, science and social studies teachers. Teachers have two planning periods — one for individual planning and the other for team planning. They meet as teams with the assistant principal three days a week and with content area teams twice a week to work on curriculum and common assessments.

“Team meetings give us time to share ideas and materials to help students master the more rigorous high school courses,” said English teacher Scott Peckham. “These meetings are building strong professional relationships to support student learning.”

Five years ago, the Sophomore Center began phasing in MAX Teaching with Reading and Writing, a program developed by reading specialist Mark Forget to improve students’ reading, writing and learning skills. Using literacy-based instructional strategies became the centerpiece of change at SHS.

“Literacy skills give students the ability to succeed across a broad spectrum of learning. Literacy helps students achieve not just in one class but in other classes and in life after graduation.” — Don Eichenberger

Skills Acquisition Model

A key facet of the SHS transition program is the skills acquisition model, Eichenberger said. This phased process guides students from the introduction of material to independent mastery. “It shows students what they are going to work on in class, gives them guided practices from teachers, and puts them in groups to let them work cooperatively with their peers,” he explained. The goal is to provide the skills needed by students to master new materials on their own during high school and in the future.

According to Eichenberger, curricula are planned with end-of-the-year achievement in mind. “We set goals for what students need to know by the end of the year and then work backwards to construct a curriculum to meet those goals,” he said. Data are used constantly to modify the curriculum.

Springdale’s literacy-based efforts are being credited with producing positive results. “More students are succeeding at a higher level and fewer students are failing,” Eichenberger said. “The average Springdale student raised his or her reading level by three grade levels in one year as measured by the STAR reading comprehension test.”

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**Intervention Pyramid**

The Sophomore Center has developed a pyramid of interventions to assist students who need extra help and time to meet high school standards. Every three weeks, teachers identify students with grade, behavior and/or attendance issues. They meet with the students to make them aware of tutoring opportunities; they also contact parents by phone, by e-mail or in person.

In-school tutoring is made possible by shaving one or two minutes off each class to create a special period in the morning. Students who do not go to tutoring use the time for silent sustained reading.

A special form has been created to document student progress each week. Students who are not performing as expected may have in-team suspension during which they remain with a teacher all day to complete their work.

During the second three weeks, all four content teachers meet with students who have not shown improvement and notify parents of the lack of progress. “These power meetings are the best thing we have done to reach marginal students,” Assistant Principal Pete Joenks said. “We also meet with students to tell them how they have improved and to give them rewards such as movie passes and food coupons.”

If students continue to have difficulties during the third three-week period, teachers meet with students and parents to plan extra help, which may include doubling up on class time in subjects that are giving the students trouble.

“Sophomore Center teachers realize that they must look at what goes on inside classrooms, because meaningful activities and assignments motivate students to attend school and do their work,” Joenks said. Working with the school district’s director of professional development, five Sophomore Center teachers have volunteered to set up classroom “laboratories” to try new instructional techniques that other teachers can observe in action.

**Evidence of Success**

The Sophomore Center has reached its goal of lowering the sophomore failure rate to less than 10 percent. Attendance among sophomores has risen. Of 625 students who entered the Sophomore Center in 2006-2007, a full 90 percent graduated three years later in the class of 2009. “Our teachers are doing a fantastic job of getting students to want to be at school and work hard to get ahead and graduate,” Joenks said.

Springdale High School has been named one of the top 100 high-implementation schools in the *High Schools That Work* network.

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**Building a ‘House’ at Martin Luther King Jr. High School**

Martin Luther King Jr. High School in DeKalb County, Georgia, focused its summer bridge classes for incoming ninth-graders on the themes of overcoming obstacles, making decisions, reflection, evaluation and goal setting. Students participated in a culminating project to build a “house” by connecting all of their learning. They examined the economics of home ownership, calculated and plotted house dimensions, wrote poems and essays on homes, and related citizenship to owning a home.

Tosha Croom, ninth-grade coordinator, shared success data based on 23 percent of the incoming freshman class:

- Twenty-one percent of non-participating students had 10 or more absences during the school year, compared with none of the summer bridge participants.
- Only 3 percent of summer bridge students experienced multiple discipline infractions, compared with 39 percent of non-participants.

- Ninety-two percent of participating students were promoted to the 10th grade, compared with 73 percent of non-participating students.

The school attributes its success with the summer transition program to factors such as vertical articulation with feeder middle grades schools, the focus on academic readiness and habits of success in the curriculum and activities, the use of a theme to promote relevance and student engagement, guest speakers and other community connections, involvement of youth leaders, spotlight on club membership, and question-and-answer sessions for parents.

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Solving Mysteries at Clarkston High School

Clarkston High School in the DeKalb County School District in Georgia called its summer bridge program The Class of 2012 Recipes for Success and used elements of mystery to keep students interested. The program featured scavenger hunts, locker time and virtual tours, a mock school day, and presentations on “what not to wear.” Students did “mystery” research on the Internet in English, measured and developed scale drawings of the school building in mathematics, learned global and local map-making skills in social studies, researched organic and inorganic ingredients in science, learned cookie-baking steps in culinary arts, and applied team and organizational skills in all classes.

Joi Chester, the summer bridge coordinator at Clarkston, reported major differences between students who participated in the program and those who did not attend:

- Twenty-three percent of non-participating students had 10 or more absences during the school year, compared with none of the summer bridge students.
- Eighteen percent of summer bridge students had two or more discipline infractions, compared with 36 percent of non-participating students.
- Eighty-one percent of participating students were promoted to the 10th grade, compared with 42 percent of non-participating students.

Summer bridge students also passed more ninth-grade classes. Nine percent of summer bridge students failed one or more courses during the first semester of freshman year, compared with 45 percent of non-participants.

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Studying Current Events at Cedar Grove High School

The summer bridge staff at Cedar Grove High School took advantage of a real-time issue in the community — a drought affecting major water sources for residents of the Atlanta area, including DeKalb County. A total of 100 students attended the week-long program on the theme of energy and water conservation. Students developed a personal water conservation plan in English, studied water meter readings and bills in mathematics, and tested water quality and made presentations on the molecular aspects of water in science. They debated conservation issues and used National Weather Service data to determine average rainfalls.

Robert Hairston, summer bridge coordinator at the school, shared the following outcome data:

- Thirty-one percent of non-participating students had 10 or more absences during the school year, compared with 7 percent of summer bridge students.
- Nine percent of summer bridge participants experienced multiple discipline infractions, compared with 34 percent of non-participants.
- Ninety-four percent of summer bridge students advanced to the 10th grade, compared with 73 percent of non-participating students.

Summer bridge students also passed more ninth-grade classes. Nine percent of summer bridge students failed one or more courses during the first semester of freshman year, compared with 45 percent of non-participants.

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High Schools Focus on Preparing Students for College and Careers

Even with a high school diploma, many students may not be ready to enter college without needing remediation or to seek a promising career. High schools are using a variety of strategies to make sure every student has the knowledge and skills to avoid costly college remediation and to join the work force with the skills that employers require. These strategies include extra rigor, extra help, dual credit courses and other partnerships with postsecondary education, and industry certification in a chosen career. Ideally, the schools are using technology both to provide instruction and to acquaint students with the tools of modern education and the workplace.

College and Career Readiness: Preparing 21st-Century Students

Sam Rayburn High School in Pasadena, Texas, joined HSTW in 2007. Following an HSTW Technical Assistance Visit (TVA) in 2008, the principal surveyed the faculty to create a list of actions that would bring the most improvement to the school.

Four objectives emerged from more than 100 suggestions:

- Help students find a personal connection with the school.
- Make rigor a part of daily interactions.
- Increase the number of students taking PSAT and AP exams.
- Use community college resources.

The school launched a series of schoolwide and group activities to implement the objectives. It began by establishing a counselor-driven advisory plan that has relationship building as its core. The framework is the Washington State Navigation 101 curriculum, a life skills and planning program designed to help students make clear, careful and creative plans for life beyond high school. The curriculum encourages student engagement and parental involvement in raising student achievement. For more information, visit the Navigation 101 Web site at www.k12.wa.us/navigation101/curriculum.aspx.

Also under the relationships objective, the school launched a college- and career-readiness project that equated career preparation with college preparation. Seventy percent of teachers said they used college- and career-readiness activities in their classrooms one to three times per week. Seventy-eight percent of teachers said students participated in college and career lessons weekly. Teachers shared their instructional methods to increase the percentages.

Other examples of how teachers promote college and career awareness include:

- keeping an open dialogue with students on what it takes to be ready for the future.
- discussing why they chose the colleges and universities they attended.
- modeling the skills to be successful in college and on the job.

Another project to encourage students to strengthen their bonds with each other and the school was called Seniors Helping Seniors. Twelfth-graders in groups went into the community to assist senior citizens with projects such as painting, weeding and replanting.

In the area of rigor, the school developed a literacy plan that includes an hour of reading during fifth period each day. Students choose their reading materials or select materials recommended by their teachers. The goal for 2009-2010 is for every student to read 25 books.

To increase the number of students taking PSAT and AP exams and to use community college resources, counselors and teachers made extra efforts to encourage all students to pursue postsecondary education at the highest possible levels. San Jacinto Community College teamed with Rayburn High School to provide a shared counselor on the high school campus two and a half days each week.

“The college counselor’s office is filled with college information, occupational outlook handbooks, military information, registration forms and computers for students to use in doing research and applying to colleges,” Rayburn counselor Carmela James said. “Students receive special help with college searches, admissions applications, college essays, and SAT and ACT registration. San Jacinto provides college student volunteers to tutor Rayburn students through a grant-funded program known as G-Force.” The number of dual enrollment courses has grown from two to eight as students establish links with college-level opportunities.

By the end of 2008-2009, more than 100 college acceptances had been posted on a wall at school reserved for acceptance and scholarship letters. The value of scholarships awarded to Rayburn students rose from $842,323 to $2,914,696 in one year.

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The establishment of solid programs of study to help students make the transition from high school to postsecondary education and careers is a continuing need in education. Many challenges exist in offering effective programs of study, including a high and rising dropout rate, students who graduate without basic mathematics and science skills, students who think they are going to college but do not prepare, and high remediation rates for entering college freshmen.

James Stone, director of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE) at the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, lists the following issues in creating a program of study:

- **Engagement** — completing high school and postsecondary programs. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data show that a majority of ninth-graders in low-performing high schools begin the freshman year with significant reading difficulties. Poor reading ability is a key predictor of academic disengagement and, ultimately, of students’ dropping out. “The United States is now the only industrialized country where young people are less likely than their parents to earn a high school diploma,” Stone said.

- **Achievement** — academic and career/technical success and acquisition of industry credentials. NAEP scores show that the reading, mathematics and science achievement of 17-year-olds is either flat or declining.

- **Transition** — continued formal learning without the need for remediation and continuation into the workplace. “Nearly 30 percent of high school graduates require some remediation when they enter college,” Stone said.

The Perkins legislation requires state-approved programs of study for career/technical content areas. The programs should include secondary and postsecondary elements, coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant career/technical content in a coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses.

“Programs of study may include the opportunity for high school students to participate in dual or concurrent enrollment programs or to acquire postsecondary education credits in other ways,” Stone said. Schools will need to address dual enrollment options such as having students attend a community college, having a community college instructor come to the high school and having high school teachers teach community college courses.

Finally, a solid program of study should lead to an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the postsecondary level or to an associate’s or a baccalaureate degree.

Stone identified several characteristics of an enhanced program of study:

- validated academic and industry outcomes
- extended learning opportunities such as work-based learning and career/technical student organizations
- professional development for faculty and administrators
- seamless articulation of career/technical courses
- data collection to document outcomes
- ongoing collaboration between secondary and postsecondary levels
- pre-high school graduation remediation

“Programs of study require a career development framework that includes heightening the awareness of elementary students about future career opportunities, making it possible for middle grades students to explore careers, and giving high school students opportunities to investigate and prepare for future careers through work-based learning,” Stone said.

The NRCCTE released a report on programs of study in October 2008. The report, *What will be the impact of programs of study? A preliminary assessment based on similar previous initiatives, state plans for implementation, and career development theory*, is available at http://www.nrccte.org/.

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Technical High School Students Use Digital Portfolios

“Students, with their cell phones, have more technology in their pockets than we do in our classrooms — and we must figure out a way to teach them how to use it,” said John Thomas, former director of quality initiatives at Blackstone Valley Technical High School in Upton, Massachusetts. “In just a few years our technology has moved from floppy disks to CDs to flash drives. For success in the 21st century, the next level must be Web-based.”
Valley Tech requires students in grades nine through 12 to submit digital portfolios for evaluation at the end of each school year. Instructors use the portfolios to judge students’ performance in school and their qualifications for promotion, graduation, employment and postsecondary education.

Every student has an electronic file for storing work such as résumés; reflective writing assignments; academic, guidance and career/technical entries; job-shadowing experiences; and other evidence of achievement. Thomas encourages students to use the portfolios in the real world as part of the interview process. The portfolios will help students move to the next level in an increasingly competitive world, he said.

The school Web site provides resources for students and parents on the assignments, templates, checklists, rubrics and guidelines for satisfactory completion of a digital portfolio. Thomas encourages educators from other schools to visit the Web site at http://www.valleymc.edu/student_links.html. "Borrow freely from what you find," he said, "but if you make it better, send it back to us and we will put it on our Web site for everyone to use."

The portfolio requirement is cited as one reason for the success of Valley Tech students. The center achieved a 100 percent pass rate on state exams for the past six years, with 76 percent of students in the class of 2009 scoring at or above the proficient or advanced level in English/language arts and mathematics. Valley Tech has been named twice as an HSTW Pacesetter School.

Note: John Thomas is now director of the Center for Technical Education at Leominster High School in Leominster, Massachusetts.

Every student has an electronic file for storing work such as résumés; reflective writing assignments; academic, guidance and career/technical entries; job-shadowing experiences; and other evidence of achievement.

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College Partnerships Promote Rigor in High School Senior Year

Farmington High School (FHS) in Farmington, Missouri, is a rural school that enrolls about 1,200 students, including students who need help to make a successful transition from high school to college. Four years ago, the district set out to motivate students to take more challenging courses in the senior year. At that time, most FHS students were completing a rigorous academic curriculum in grades nine through 11 with relatively high student performance, but too many students were wasting the 12th grade.

In 2006 the Farmington R-7 school board approved a partnership between FHS and Mineral Area College (MAC) to allow FHS juniors and seniors to earn college credit. The College Now program provides three options: Students can take random dual credit courses; they can complete a 42-hour transcripted general education block at MAC, which is articulated statewide; or they can earn or make progress toward a 62-hour associate of arts degree at MAC.

Students earn credits from MAC through dual-credit courses offered at FHS during the school day, classes held at MAC’s main campus or its outreach center at FHS in the afternoon, and online courses and telecourses offered through MAC.

Why Participate?

Why should students participate in the College Now program? The program adds relevance to the senior year and introduces students to college while they are still in high school. It provides an opportunity for students to graduate from high school with an associate’s degree from an accredited institution. Furthermore, it saves students money. Tuition per credit hour for dual credit at MAC is estimated to be two-thirds less than tuition per credit hour at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

“While these incentives are strong, our goal is not for every senior to earn an associate’s degree,” said teacher and student adviser Brian Reeves of Farmington R-7. “The most important thing is to motivate students to use the senior year to do a better job of preparing for the next step after high school graduation.”

Students participating in the College Now program must meet the eligibility requirements for dual-credit courses established by the Missouri Coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE). They must be at least 16 years old, be a high school junior or senior, and have a grade average of B or higher.
Other Requirements

Enrollment in certain courses may have additional requirements. For example, students must score at least 19 on the ACT English section or score 66 or higher on ACT’s COMPASS writing test to enroll in English Composition I. They must score at least 22 on the ACT mathematics section or at least 67 on the COMPASS algebra test to take College Algebra. MAC and FHS offer 40 scholarships to students who meet all of the CBHE requirements and make a composite score of 24 or higher on the ACT.

FHS Principal Matt Ruble believes the College Now program has motivated more students to make the most of the senior year and has contributed to higher student achievement. In 2007 the average ACT composite score was 26.7 for students receiving the College Now scholarship. That score rose to 27.9 for scholarship recipients two years later. The number of completed dual credit hours increased from 435 in 2007-2008 to 600 in 2008-2009. Ruble estimates that about one-third of the 2009 senior class took dual credit courses.

Farmington High School received an HSTW Gold Award in 2009 for making the most improvement in implementing the HSTW design from 2006 to 2008 and had at least 50 percent of students meeting one or more of the readiness goals on the 2008 HSTW Assessment.

What’s next for FHS? Teachers must have master’s degrees in their content areas to be able to teach dual credit courses for college credit. Ruble said the district wants to establish a partnership with one or more four-year institutions to bring graduate-level classes to FHS teachers at the local level.

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Rethinking the Senior Year: Four Ways to Keep Students Interested in Learning

The senior year poses a problem for many high schools. Is there enough rigor and relevance to motivate students to prepare for the future? Have seniors mentally transported themselves to the next step in their lives, be it college or a career? Are they tired of the same old routine?

Former advisement directors Janice Dreis and Larry Rehage have developed a resource kit, Making Grade 12 Meaningful, in which they offer strategies for recasting the senior year of high school. They are concerned that the general curriculum experienced by most seniors fails to deliver the knowledge and skills that will serve them in the adult world, where they will find greater academic challenges, new social spheres and increased independence.

Dreis and Rehage believe seniors are capable individuals who are ready to make significant contributions to their schools and communities. Seniors need interaction and mentoring from adults other than their parents. They are eager to have a voice in what they are learning and are ready to apply what they have learned in the real world.

“Schools should embrace and support this period of transition and provide opportunities for seniors to use their knowledge and skills in meaningful ways,” Dreis said.

To combat “senioritis,” the two consultants recommend four programs that schools can implement to keep seniors engaged in learning. “Each program is designed to make the senior year more dynamic and to contribute to making the 12th grade the capstone of a high school education,” Rehage said.

Student-Driven Guidance Plan and Senior Institute — Seniors identify topics that they want to explore during guidance sessions throughout the 12th grade. The year culminates with a Senior Institute in the spring. Seniors and their teacher-advisers plan a full day of workshops and presentations using school and community resources on topics such as self-advocacy, money management, independent living, conflict resolution, making college count, legal issues and work-related situations. “In addition to being educational, the plan and the institute have the potential to help students make informed decisions about their lives beyond high school,” Dreis said.

Senior Instructional Leadership Corps (SILC) — Seniors become resources as they assist teachers in the classroom. An important component of this program is a monthly seminar that explores the teaching profession and allows students to learn more about topics such as the qualities of a good teacher, diverse learning styles, questioning techniques and classroom management. The program builds leadership qualities, enables seniors to give back to the school and promotes interest in the teaching profession.

Senior Project — This program engages students with their teachers and mentors from the community in doing research, writing reports and developing products that they present to a panel of adults. Projects can be career-based, academic, creative or service-oriented. In completing the projects, students interact with local business, industry and community service groups that serve as “classrooms” for life experiences.
Yearlong Senior Service Project — Seniors make significant contributions to the community by partnering with agencies such as Habitat for Humanity. They learn about economic, social and political issues associated with an agency and in turn make presentations to their peers and younger students about community needs and service opportunities. Seniors benefit by applying school-based learning to real problems and by cultivating leadership qualities and collaboration with students, teachers and community leaders.

More information on senior programs is available on the Web site www.twelfthgradeprograms.org.

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Senior Project: A Year-Long Focus on Independent Learning and College Readiness

For more than a decade, teachers at Northwest Rankin High School (NWRHS) in Flowood, Mississippi, have adapted and improved the school’s senior project. What began as an Advanced Placement (AP) English assignment to research, write and defend a paper on a controversial topic has grown into a schoolwide project. All seniors research and write a report, work with a mentor in a career field, develop a product and present the project to a panel of judges.

Northwest Rankin High School is a HSTW Pacesetter school for 2007-2010. It also received a HSTW Gold Award for improved implementation of the HSTW initiative.

Mickie Knight, technical writing teacher at NWRHS, said the senior project was created to solve the problem of seniors who avoided taking challenging courses and were disengaged from learning in the final year of high school. One outcome was an increase in graduation requirements for incoming ninth-graders so that the fundamental components of the senior project, such as oral communication, additional technology credits and technical writing, could be implemented schoolwide.

All students are required to take a two-part senior project class. The year-long class includes technical writing instruction and practice as well as a lab on advanced information tools for conducting research and for enhancing technological skills for the senior project presentation.

“Students are no longer wasting the senior year. They have become more self-disciplined and self-motivated as they prepare for further learning in college and the workplace.”

Mickie Knight
Northwest Rankin High School

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Students who fail to complete the course and the senior project are not allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony. “Students are no longer wasting the senior year,” Knight said. “They have become more self-disciplined and self-motivated as they prepare for further learning in college and the workplace.”

The schoolwide approach includes all teachers and all students, not just seniors. Incoming freshmen participate in a “reality fair” that provides an early introduction to the real-world aspects of the senior project. To prepare students for speaking in front of an audience, all students are required to make oral presentations in all courses each nine weeks in grades nine through 12.

Sample Senior Project Topics at Northwest Rankin High School

- Effects of prescription drug advertising on the community (Advertising)
- Effects of sustainable architecture on nature (Architecture)
- Effects of art therapy on children with long-term illnesses (Art Therapy)
- Effects of video teaching versus traditional teaching (Cinematography)
- How old school buildings will be repaired in the future (Drafting Design)
- How golf courses can benefit wetlands (Landscaping)
- Emotional effects of cystic fibrosis (Medical)
- Investigating myths of the nursing profession (Nursing)
- Preventing joint replacement in the elderly (Physical Therapy)
- Advancements in manufacturing technology (Technology)
- Zoonotic diseases (Veterinary Science)
- Positive effects of waterfowl banding (Wildlife Management)
In April of their junior year, students write a letter of intent to describe what they will research and produce for the senior project. The topics engage students in exploring medicine, science, architecture, advertising and other interests related to the community and the world. Students begin working with a mentor during the summer before the senior year. Each year, seniors visit 11th-grade classrooms to tell juniors what is involved in completing the senior project and to offer advice on doing an outstanding job.

The success of the senior project at NWRHS lies in a continuous increase in involvement of the entire school and the community. Each student selects an adult from the community who is a leader in the student’s area of interest. The mentor provides guidance and sets up opportunities for the student to engage in job shadowing in the field. Each mentor keeps a log of student visits and activities and serves on the judging panel for the student’s final presentation. Others serving on the panel are a teacher, an administrator, a subject-area expert and a community leader.

“The senior project has improved student achievement as well as student motivation,” Knight said. On the 2008 HSTW Assessment, more than 90 percent of NWRHS seniors reported completing “a senior project that included researching a topic, creating a product or performing a service and presenting it to the class or to others.”

Students who reported completing a senior project had mean achievement scores that exceeded the HSTW college- and career-readiness goals in reading and mathematics. On the other hand, students who did not report completing a senior project had mean achievement scores below the Basic level on the HSTW Assessment in all three subjects — reading, mathematics and science.

Giving Seniors the Tools to Build a Successful Future

The advisory focus team at Doss High School (DHS) in Louisville, Kentucky, has developed tools and techniques to help seniors prepare for life beyond graduation. Using the advisory system that is part of the schedule in grades nine through 12, the team has equipped teachers with strategies and materials to assist seniors in setting and achieving their goals for college and careers. “We also developed special activities to show seniors that we’re on their side and on their case,” said advisement coordinator Strauzie Collins.

DHS, which is part of the metro Jefferson County school system, enrolls 1,000 students. The student population is 49 percent black, 46 percent white and 5 percent other ethnicities, and 70 percent of students are economically disadvantaged at this Title I school.

The teacher-adviser program for 12th-graders includes success sessions, a senior summit and a culminating project consisting of a senior exit interview. Success sessions are held every other week to address students’ needs in the areas of interviewing, leadership and community service, college readiness and financial matters.

A senior summit is held each November to prepare seniors for life after high school and to connect students with people and resources that can help with the post-graduation journey. Six sessions focus on topics such as work force requirements and financial aid. The presenters are college and business representatives, community partners and former students.

“Two days of the summit are devoted to panel discussions by Doss High School graduates, including one from the previous year and two from several years ago, who discuss campus life, making the transition from high school to college, and being prepared for the next step,” Collins said. “These panels are very popular with our students, who benefit from talking face-to-face with young people who have experienced the same things they are going through.”

Exit Interviews

Senior exit interviews are a culminating project for Doss High School seniors. The interviews are a way for students to demonstrate to the faculty, parents and the community what they have accomplished in the past four years. Every senior participates in an interview over a period of two days. Volunteers from the school district and the community serve as interviewers.

Students have lots of assistance to help them prepare for the interviews. They acquire the necessary tools during advisory periods and the senior seminar course. Teachers have a senior interview curriculum to implement in the classroom to help students prepare for the event.

From a list of 10 senior interview questions, students must prepare to answer five of the questions in a 10-minute interview. Volunteer interviewers are made aware of the questions each student has chosen and are told to ask three of the five questions. Sample questions include:

- Evaluate the importance of individual and personal communication skills (writing and speaking). In which aspect of communication do you feel most proficient? Explain why. What specific experiences in your program of study helped you become proficient? How can you work to improve?

- Critical thinking requires classroom development and career connections. Select several classes that helped you develop your critical thinking skills. Explain how you were able to see a connection between school learning and real-world experiences. Cite specific examples.

- Critical thinking requires classroom development and career connections. Select several classes that helped you develop your critical thinking skills. Explain how you were able to see a connection between school learning and real-world experiences. Cite specific examples.

- During your high school career, emphasis has been placed on maintaining high standards and achieving goals. Explain why someone would want to maintain high standards. How have you used these standards to set and achieve goals in high school?
Community involvement has been stressed in the curriculum through magnet programs and extracurricular activities. Explain why community involvement is essential in becoming a well-rounded individual.

(Note: A list of all 10 senior interview questions is available from Strauzie Collins at the e-mail address below.)

Interviewers have a grading form to mark seniors as excellent, good or average on content, response and presentation. The interview score serves as a test grade in each class. The exit interview is a graduation requirement.

Ready for Success: Saving Students from College Course Remediation

Forty-two percent of community college freshmen and 20 percent of four-year college freshmen nationwide enroll in at least one remedial course. Statistics show that students who require remedial instruction take longer to graduate, spend more money on education over a longer period of time, fall behind other classmates, become easily frustrated and drop out at higher rates.

With these facts in hand, Itawamba Community College (ICC) joined with Shannon High School (SHS), Tech Prep and community organizations in Tupelo, Mississippi, to develop the Ready for Success program to be taught to students while in high school. The purpose of the program is to reduce the number of remedial courses taken by SHS graduates who enter postsecondary education. The course has three components: study skills and reading, English learning, and math learning. The course objectives are related to the objectives of the ACT and the College Board’s ACCUPLACER tests.

Prior to the beginning of the program in spring 2009, every SHS junior (140 students) took the ACCUPLACER test. All students received feedback on their performance. As a result, 27 students signed up for the Ready for Success program and 18 students participated in the program. The remaining nine students were unable to participate due to scheduling problems.

Marcus Simmons, Tech Prep coordinator at ICC, said traditional remedial college courses just don’t work. “Remediation in college is not the answer,” he said. “The answer lies in reaching students while they are in high school.”

To establish the framework for Ready for Success, a steering committee was organized to address student eligibility and requirements, program objectives, funding, scheduling and methods of implementation. The group also planned time lines, events and instruction, which includes direct teaching, tutorials and computer-based programs.

Participating students must: 1) be classified as juniors with at least 12 Carnegie units, 2) be working toward a high school diploma, 3) have taken the ACCUPLACER test to show need and 4) have obtained an unconditional written recommendation from the high school principal or counselor.

The program is free and is taught at SHS by ICC faculty members. Students receive three hours of instructional credit (elective credit) at ICC for successful completion of the program. Funding comes from the high school, the community college, Tech Prep and a grant from the Create Foundation.

Students in the pilot program went to class one block daily for one semester. Study skills, reading and English were taught on Mondays and Wednesdays; mathematics was taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays; special events and speakers were featured on Fridays.

Results of the pilot program showed a seven percentage point increase in English and a 10 percentage point improvement in mathematics in students’ scores from the pre-test to the post-test. Of the 18 students, three moved from Beginning English to Intermediate English, while another three made a two-level gain to English Composition I. Overall, 10 students were at the English Composition I level by the end of the course.

In mathematics, five of the 18 students increased their competency beyond College Math II to the Intermediate Algebra level, while another three students moved to the College Algebra level. When the course ended, three students had reached the College Algebra competency level and seven students had achieved the Intermediate Algebra competency level.

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“Remediation in college is not the answer. The answer lies in reaching students while they are in high school.”

Marcus Simmons
Itawamba Community College

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The Southern Regional Education Board’s Technology Centers That Work (TCTW) initiative and the Perkins Act share a goal to increase the number of students earning an industry certification. The purpose is to ensure that students are prepared for productive careers in accordance with modern-day standards.

“The participating TCTW schools in South Carolina are emphasizing industry standards, encouraging students to take certification exams and tracking the number of students who pass the exams,” said Rodney Kelly, TCTW consultant for the state.

To ensure that technology center courses and content meet standards, South Carolina is working with national entities to examine industry standards and school curricula. Teachers are required to align their lessons to industry standards and to include the standards in their lesson plans. Administrators follow up to make sure technology center programs adhere to standards.

“The state is also analyzing certification exams to determine which ones to recommend for their emphasis on intellectually demanding standards,” Kelly said.

Proof of Training

South Carolina technology centers emphasize the importance of industry certification for all program completers. Certification increases the credibility of a program, documents student mastery and provides a realistic view of the career and its demands for students wanting to enter that field. Another bonus is that industry leaders look for employees who are already trained — and certification gives proof of that training.

When students attend orientation programs at South Carolina technology centers, they learn about the importance of certification exams and receive encouragement to prepare for and take the exams. Center directors visit high school campuses to answer students’ questions and center counselors are equipped with knowledge about programs offering certification. Districts have a common course catalogue that lists available certifications.

Another way technology centers encourage students to take the exams is by celebrating student success. Some schools award certificates during awards day celebrations. Others announce certification results at feeder high schools or in news releases to local newspapers and radio stations. One school holds a Skills and Scholars Awards Night for students who earn industry certification.

Funding Exams

Industry certification exams are expensive, costing as much as $250 each. South Carolina technology centers tap a variety of sources to help students pay for the exams. Some of these sources include work force investment boards, the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), local school budgets, grants, student organizations and fees, Perkins funds and even proceeds from school snack machines.

The emphasis on industry certification is paying off in South Carolina. Dennis Nance, assistant director of Daniel Morgan Technology Center in Spartanburg, South Carolina, reports that 396 students took certification exams in 2009 and 82 percent of students passed. Mike Pearson, director of Hamilton Career Center in Seneca, South Carolina, said 86 percent of 313 students taking certification exams passed the exams.

Teachers are working to improve students’ scores by aligning standards, curricula and syllabi; using online sample tests; using a classroom test format that matches the certification test format; and emphasizing literacy across the curriculum.
High School Graduates Need Literacy Skills for College and Career Success

The demand for literacy skills is greater than ever before, but many high school graduates lack the reading and writing skills to succeed in college and careers. ACT Inc. reports that half of today’s high school graduates fall short of the college-readiness benchmark for reading, while one-third fail to meet the benchmark for English composition. Seventy percent of college instructors and 40 percent of employers are dissatisfied with the way high school graduates read and write.

Educators in most states use standards that address only the reading and writing skills needed by ninth- and 10th-graders, rather than high school graduates. The problem is compounded by the complex technical materials that students must understand to be an asset in the workplace. Furthermore, too few high school teachers have learned how to use instructional strategies to help students comprehend content-specific texts.

HSTW launched a project four years ago to focus on the essential literacy skills that all high school graduates need for success in college and careers. The HSTW publication Getting Students Ready for College and Careers: Transitional Senior English recommends three essential components: a thorough definition of standards, suggested teaching strategies, and sample assessment rubrics and test items.

Coauthor Renee Murray emphasizes that all three components are necessary to ensure that students meet readiness standards. “Teachers need to have a deep understanding of the literacy skills that students must master,” Murray said. “In teaching, they need to combine that understanding with the right materials and classroom activities and then follow up with assessments that reflect students’ mastery of the skills.”

Teachers may need additional clarification of standards. For example, a standard may simply state that students need to “summarize, paraphrase and categorize information.” Getting Students Ready for College and Careers: Transitional Senior English defines such a standard by including five tasks:

- Organize main and subordinate ideas hierarchically.
- Distinguish among summaries, responses and critiques.
- Create categories to identify and explain relationships in a text or across texts.
- Formulate a concise, coherent and accurate statement that expresses a fundamental idea, event or theme.
- Identify faulty or overly simplistic assumptions or conclusions.

“Teachers often need additional guidance in developing classroom activities to help students learn the skills,” Murray said. One approach that teachers might use would be to ask students to paraphrase a classic rock song and explain how modern language alters the meaning of the original.

The focus on teaching essential reading skills does not dilute the time needed to teach specific content. “Teachers first need to determine the content their students must master and then identify the reading and writing skills that will help students learn the content,” Murray said.

Getting Students Ready for College and Careers: Transitional Senior English is available for order on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org. Click on High Schools That Work and then Publications.

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School District Incorporates National Resources in Online Career Exploration Course

Columbus City Schools in Ohio has developed an online career exploration course that incorporates two major resources. The first is intoCareers, a career information system created by the University of Oregon and made available to Ohio schools by the Ohio Department of Education through its online Ohio Career Information System. The intoCareers e-mail address is cishelp@uoregon.edu.

The second resource is Learning for Life, a nonprofit organization based in Irving, Texas. The Web site is www.learningforlife.org. This resource focuses on life skills and work force readiness. It provides curricula, program development and access to community resources.

“Both organizations give our schools the necessary support to equip students with career exploration opportunities,” said Karmen McCaslin, district career and community resource coordinator for Columbus City Schools.

The online Career Passport to Success course, which was piloted in 2008-2009, is expected to be available to juniors at six high schools in the district in 2009-2010. Students receive one-half credit for completing the course.

The course is divided into seven sections:

1. Students develop an online portfolio where they keep information on all aspects of their career development: careers in which they are interested, results from interest inventories, a résumé, references, schedule/grades and a plan for courses in which they need improvement.

2. Students complete a career interest inventory to identify their personal skills and to match careers to their interests, skills and lifestyle choices.

3. The college/financial aid exploration section helps students investigate and identify colleges based on personal characteristics. Students select two postsecondary options, such as a college, a university or an apprenticeship. Each student writes a paper on a chosen postsecondary pursuit and investigates financial aid.

4. Students develop an Individual Academic Career Plan outlining the academic and career/technical courses they will need to take to achieve their goals.

5. Students participate in job-shadowing activities at local companies to get a taste of a chosen career.

6. In developing a career passport, students write about their primary and secondary career goals and develop a résumé.

7. Students participate in mock interviews that require a job application, a cover letter and a thank-you letter.

“This course is very beneficial to students. The job shadowing and the mock interviews are particularly valuable. In addition to career exploration activities, students get to take an online course like those they are likely to experience in college.”

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Columbus City Schools

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Create Programs of Study to Prepare Students for High-Demand Jobs of Tomorrow

As rapidly as the world is changing, it is hard to predict what the jobs of tomorrow will be.

“Instead of focusing on specific jobs, we must concentrate on preparing students for fields of study that will change in the future,” says Beth Green, HSTW school improvement consultant. She and HSTW school improvement consultant Gary Wrinkle have studied job forecasts and have assembled information to guide schools in ensuring that students are ready to compete in the new economy.

The World Future Society, a nonprofit educational and scientific organization based in Bethesda, Maryland, predicted in 2008 that the field of medicine will change to include more nano-technology, nano-implants and biotechnology. The future of transportation may include a world in which the automobile is not the most common form of travel.

Some of the broad fields where jobs will be needed in the future include law enforcement, medicine, rural development, education and families, agriculture, energy, water conservation, transportation systems and aeronautics. Most traditional jobs — such as automotive technician, hospital administrator, water treatment plant operator, restaurateur, home builder, architect, engineer and interior designer — will have “green” or environmentally friendly components through which individuals will find new ways of working and living.

Increasingly, educators are seeing the need to use data from sources like the World Future Society and local, state and national databases as they create programs of study to prepare students for the work force. For example, instead of teaching students to repair automobiles (a specific job), educators are developing programs of study to equip students to be successful in emerging transportation and logistical systems that may or may not include repairing engines.

“The work force is evolving to include energy systems, unusual or niche college majors, strategic intelligence, entrepreneurship, neuroscience and nano-technology, digital forensics and genetics,” Green said. “To accommodate a larger population living in diverse areas, especially urban areas, jobs of the future may include ways to increase sanitation and prevent disease. Workers may need to undergo diversity training and learn foreign languages.” Wrinkle says the creation of modern programs of study goes beyond naming courses and writing course descriptions. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 calls for academic and career/technical content presented in coordinated, non-duplicative progressions of courses. These programs should lead to industry-recognized credentials, certification, an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree. They may also offer dual or concurrent enrollment.

“Ideally, career/tech and academic teachers will develop courses using a series of projects from grade nine through postsecondary studies,” Wrinkle said. “The projects will engage and motivate students, require them to take ownership of the work, and demand literacy and numeracy skills and higher-level thinking. Projects based on real-world problems or questions give students a context for learning and provide the types of experiences needed for modern, rapidly changing careers rather than job-specific skills.”

Linda Hughes, guidance and counseling specialist for Education Service Center Region XIII in Austin, Texas, recommended that educators consult with local work force representatives to incorporate the employment needs of the community into programs of study. Business and industry representatives also can serve on advisory committees to review programs of study.

“Look for existing partnerships in the community to help with dual credit or articulated courses,” Hughes said. “Involve high school and postsecondary teachers in creating non-duplicated series of courses.”

Hughes also suggested using comprehensive guidance software programs to help students and their parents select a program of study. “It’s always a good idea to revisit data and revise programs of study annually to adjust to changing work force needs and students’ interests,” she said.

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