The transition from middle into high school can be perilous for some students. High school freshmen fail at an alarming rate. In a general sense, the environment, expectations, structure, and culture of high schools are different from middle schools. However, school leaders can implement transition programs that may promote success of 9th graders. Middle school and high school leaders can work together to facilitate student success. Educators have developed programs and systems to assist students in the transition from middle into high school. This article provides a discussion of the issues related to this transition and provides a review of related research and recommendations.

Isakson and Jarvis (1999) studied adjustments made by students when they moved from eighth to ninth grade. These authors discovered that attendance increased significantly toward the end of the eighth grade year and the beginning of the ninth grade school year, but attendance dropped after that. Stressors were the highest during the middle of the freshman year, but they decreased by the end of the year. The investigators ascertained that the higher the number of stressors a student reported, the lower the level of school membership; however, when support from parents or friends increased, stressors decreased and school membership increased.

Roles that educators play and structures within the educational system designed to facilitate a sense of belonging. This article provides a discussion of the issues related to transitioning to high school, characteristics of effective transition programs, and recommendations.
Connection to the School

If students do not feel connected to their school, academic performance may suffer. Research indicates that for many students a loss in achievement is associated with the transition from middle into high school (Alspaugh, 1998; Benner & Graham, 2009). Traditionally, one of the indicators of academic achievement has been grade point average (GPA). Isakson and Jarvis (1999) found that GPA decreased significantly between the end of the eighth grade and the end of the ninth grade. There was an inverse relationship between the number of stressors reported by students and GPA; a high number of stressors correlated with a lower GPA. Additionally, they found negative relationships between a student’s ability to make decisions and define personal goals, and both GPA and school membership. They suggested that “This may be because adolescents who are less autonomous turn to school as a way to help define themselves, resulting in higher grades and a greater sense of belonging to one’s school” (p. 22). That is, students who reported less autonomy at the end of eighth grade fared better than those who had more freedom at home.

Juvonen (2006) reported that students derive their sense of belonging to the school from perceptions of the social climate of the school and that social relationships help meet students’ belongingness needs. In a longitudinal study of over 105,000 students in 188 schools, Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas (2003) found that, regardless of SES, students’ perceptions of their connectedness to school was strongly correlated with multiple adjustment levels. They indicated that school programs designed to enhance social climate of the school were likely to support and improve the sense of belonging.

Becker and Luthar (2002) further argued that the minority students derive greater academic benefits if educators develop programs to facilitate student connectedness. When Hispanic students felt a sense of belonging at their school, Nichols (2008) found that there was a significant, negative correlation to absenteeism. While most students benefit from feelings of connectedness, those who are economically disadvantaged have stronger academic gains than other students if their belongingness needs are met at school (Juvonen, 2006). Even more compelling, Walton and Cohen (2007) found that if minority students perceive that the lack of connectedness is only temporary, engagement and achievement will rise because they expect to feel the sense of belonging in the near future.

Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) contended that connectedness is just as important in the school setting as it is outside the school, in part because a lack of a sense of belonging can impede student motivation. A sense of community has been linked to achievement motivation (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996). In a longitudinal study of 153 minority students, Sánchez, Colón, and Esparza (2005) found that a sense of belonging had a positive impact on academic outcomes. Students who felt that they belonged in school were more intrinsically motivated and worked harder. Additionally, students who felt a sense of connection to the school were less likely to miss school.

Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge (2000) investigated relationships among seventh grade behaviors, motivation, transition into the ninth grade, and adjustment to high school. The researchers ascertained that seventh grade behaviors and achievement were accurate predictors of ninth grade behaviors and achievement. Students who had more discipline referrals, uncertainty about the value of education, or negative expectations of their teachers and peers in seventh grade tended to be less well-adjusted and had lower achievement in ninth grade.

Connectedness has been positively linked with GPA (Anderman & Freeman, 2004),
particularly when students are involved in friendships that provide emotional support (Vaquera & Kao, 2008). Isakson and Jarvis (1999) reported a positive relationship between student perception of school membership and GPA. Similarly, Brand et al. (2003) found that grades were positively correlated with a perceived sense of belonging to the school community.

Although friendships are important to a sense of belongingness or connectedness, there can be downsides to friendships as well. Isakson and Jarvis (1999) reported that educators and parents should be aware that friends can have negative impacts on student achievement. Benner & Graham (2009) reported that transition to high school can be especially difficult for minority students. Friendship can be a significant factor (Riegle-Crumb & Callahan, 2009); however, Fredericks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004) found that peer group influences can have a negative impact on the engagement of minority adolescents. For minority students, the extent to which a student feels connected can have an even greater impact than it does for majority learners, possibly because majority students have relationships that are more emotionally supportive; overtures of friendship are more likely to be returned in kind (Vaquera & Kao, 2008). Another peer relationship issue that can be harmful to connectedness is bullying (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Additionally, Zee-dyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband, and Lindsay (2003) reported the negative effect that bullying has on a feeling of connectedness to school.

Students who are on-track to graduate are less likely to drop out of high school. Allensworth and Easton (2005) developed a measurement to predict if a student is on-track in order to assess the likelihood of graduation. The authors defined “on-track” as a function of two related factors: the number of credits earned and the number of Fs received in core content courses. Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008) agreed that students are considered off track if they do not earn credits in the time allotted to them. He indicated that failure of core content classes is an issue because students must make up courses, which will take away opportunities to continue in preferred content areas or take higher level courses.

Allensworth and Easton (2005) maintained that the large difference in on-track rates from school to school suggests that structure and culture are related to student achievement. They followed the progress of students in the Chicago public school system to determine the effects of being on-track for students. They found that 81% of students who ended the freshman year on-track went on to graduate within four years, and 85% of students graduated within five years. The relationship between being on-track and graduation did not change when other factors (e.g., background, elementary achievement, race/ethnicity, gender, and economic status) were considered, which indicated that the correlation is very strong. In addition, each of the two components, number of credits earned and number of F’s in core subjects, was highly predictive of graduation rate.

Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, and Francis (2007) indicated that students who were not earning enough credits to be on-track for graduation contribute to the ‘freshman bulge’. They stated, “Nationally, more than one third of students lost from the national pipeline fail to make the transition from ninth to tenth grade. Indeed, the ‘freshman bulge’ refers not to expanding youth waistlines but rather to the swelling size of freshman classes” (p. 124). Patterson et al. contended that the freshman bulge is in itself a predictor of graduation rates.

The dropout rates for high school students have been a concern for some time; Education Week (2010) reported that each year approximately 1.3 million students fail to graduate
from high school. Researchers and educators alike understand that a distressingly large number of students do not graduate from high school (Neild et al., 2008). It is also concerning that of the students who attend schools with a high percentage of minority students, 40% of students never make it to the tenth grade (Barr & Parrett, 2007). Poor academic achievement, especially when combined with antisocial peer groups, general deviancy, or low socioeconomic status (SES), has been linked to dropping out prior to the tenth grade. Thus, the level of success experienced in the ninth grade is crucial to retention of high school students. Educators have the power to address transition issues that lead to lack of persistence from ninth to tenth grade and should design interventions to assist students with the transition to ninth grade (Ascher, 1987; Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2001).

When students do not have positive relationships with other students and staff members, they experience a lack of social capital, which is not only inversely linked to academic achievement but is directly related to dropout rates (Becker & Luthar, 2002). Juvonen (2006) reported that belongingness was connected to decisions by youths to dropout or to remain in school. A 1993 U.S. Department of Education report indicated that one in four students who dropped out of school stated that they left school because they did not feel a sense of belonging. Similarly, Becker and Luthar (2002) found that the sense of belonging is adversely affected by negative academic experiences and students who drop out of school are more likely to have experienced alienation from the school.

Additionally, there is a relationship between academic achievement of ninth graders and the tendency to drop out of high school. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found a positive correlation between the level of ninth grade success and the potential to graduate; this variable was negatively related to drop out rate. Allensworth and Easton (2005) found that 81% of students who were successful in their ninth grade year, as indicated by number of credits earned, graduated from high school within four years while only 22% of students who did not earn at least five credits in their freshman year graduated after four years. Likewise, Neild et al. (2008) noted that the academic achievement of ninth graders is a strong predictor of eventual dropout rates. Specifically, the number of courses failed is directly correlated with the likelihood a student will drop out. They argued that unless high schools, especially inner city schools, address the transition problems of ninth graders high dropout rates will continue.

Another reason that students do not feel they are connected to school, and may elect to drop out as a result, is peer rejection (Juvonen, 2006). Juvonen defined peer rejection as “peers’ social avoidance of, dislike of, or reluctance to affiliate with a child” (p. 661). Juvonen asserted that, “Although a number of factors contribute to students’ premature school leaving, there is evidence indicating that socially disconnected students are at risk for the ultimate school failure” (p. 657). Therefore, it is imperative that students feel the sense of connectedness to their school. Participation in school-related activities can help students feel that connectedness, and may reduce the drop-out rate. If the system cannot facilitate the success of its students, then educators must expect that the dropout rates will continue to remain unacceptably high.

The Role of Educators

Many factors related to student engagement can be directly and indirectly influenced by educators. Effective teachers and a positive school climate are more important than student characteristics. “Ultimately, although engagement might begin with liking or participating, it can result in commitment
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or investment and thus may be a key to diminishing student apathy and enhancing learning” (Fredericks, et al., 2004, p. 82). Educators can make a difference in student engagement, which, in due course, is linked to achievement; this is especially true, when programs are designed to be multi-dimensional in nature (Brand, et al., 2003). Baker, et al. (2001) contended that schools play an overt role in student success and that multimodal efforts must be undertaken to ensure that student failure is not a direct result of the systematic organizational structures.

Teachers play critical roles in building a sense of connectedness between students and high school (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). Teachers who are considerate and caring are much more likely to ease the transition process for students while those who are inflexible and intimidating make it more challenging. Butts and Cruziero (2005) found that supportive, caring teachers with whom students can easily talk are of utmost importance for ninth graders. Principals, through effective leadership and appropriate professional development, can facilitate development of a school culture that is supportive and nurturing.

Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) identified work load as a major factor in a smooth transition into high school. They argued that students do not have much of an issue with the work itself, as it is doable. The problem lies in the sheer amount of work, especially because high school teachers do not tend to communicate with one another when making assignments; often, students have several large assignments to complete at once. These issues could be addressed through small learning communities, effective communication, a culture of student centered learning, and effective leadership.

Butts and Cruziero (2005) recommended that beyond using a variety of teaching strategies and employing engaging lessons, teachers must purposefully explain their expectations of new high school students. Akos and Galassi (2004) developed similar conclusions; they found that at the high school level parents, students, and teachers were heavily focused on academic concerns, including homework loads and difficulties of courses. High school students indicated that homework, grades, and new procedures were the most difficult components of the transition. To facilitate effective transition, they recommended that educators provide accurate information before the transition, ensure that teachers are friendly and supportive, offer new school orientations, and provide a study skills component within the curriculum. Finally, the researchers recommended that educators anticipate procedural and social concerns of students and plan to alleviate these concerns.

Butts and Cruziero (2005) suggested that students need orientation to high school, enrollment information, clear directions and layout about the building, as well as more information on credits and graduation requirements. Their recommendations were based upon negative student indicators including feeling lost and being forgotten, limited time with friends, and problems related to a larger school. Based on findings, schools in the study added a 95 minute block schedule, a parent and student orientation night, student identification badges, a closed campus policy for ninth and tenth grade students, and a reward system for attendance, citizenship, and good grades. These are systematic issues that can be addressed in all high schools.

Isakson and Jarvis (1999) recommended that coping skills be taught to freshmen. They also suggested that students with potential for a high number of stressors be identified and support provided. McIntosh & White (2006) argued that effective transition programs can help to reduce the stress of moving from middle into high school. Non-academic skills can be developed throughout the curriculum.

Libbey (2004) found that in order for a
student to feel connected, they needed to be engaged in school. Students who are engaged in school are less likely to have behavioral and academic problems, and will be more likely experience a sense of school connectedness (Juvonen, 2006). Fredericks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004) identified three areas of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Data from both teachers and students indicated a direct correlation between the level of engagement of students and academic achievement. They asserted that transition reform efforts should include student engagement components.

Juvonen (2006) asserted that students who enjoy social connections at school are more likely to do well than those who lack such connections or felt alienated. She argued that, “Social isolation, alienation, and lack of support increase educational risks” (p. 668). Similarly, Anderman and Freeman (2004) concluded that studies consistently demonstrated that perceived belonging was positively correlated to academic efficacy. Further, peer groups who adopt academic achievement as a value are likely to encourage students to do well in school (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Brand et al., 2003). Research suggests that educators should develop proactive programs to promote connectedness to school and to appropriate student groups.

Factors associated with lack of student success need to be addressed; for example, reductions in student achievement anticipated, at-risk students identified, and appropriate plans implemented (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). A first step is to use available data and to collect additional information as appropriate; many factors associated with the potential low achieving students must be known. Educators cannot wait for the students to fail; proactive interventions at multiple levels are necessary. The educators must develop and implement effective programs to promote student success; these include effective transitions from middle school to high school. It is imperative that ninth graders have a highly successful start in high school.

**Ninth Grade Transition Programs**

Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) identified seven themes related to the transition from middle to high school: the role of peers; school supportive strategies and activities; challenges due to unfamiliar processes and procedures; changes in scope of learning activities; confidence and success of students; homework issues; and roles of teachers. Ganeson and Ehrich found that friendships are very important to students; when ninth grade students enter high schools they lose some friendships but develop others as they become acclimated in high school. The need for friendships has also been noted by Letrello and Miles (2003) and Riegle-Crumb and Callahan (2009).

The ninth grade year is important because student success at this juncture has been linked to high school completion rates (Willet & Singer, 1991). Many strategies are available to promote successful transition to high school; however, research indicates that one or two strategies are not sufficient to meet the needs of all students. For a transition program to be successful, it must be a comprehensive program that incorporates numerous strategies (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Roybal, 2011). Some researchers suggest that there should be a minimum of three strategies (Baker et al., 2001; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998), though others argue that there should be at least five approaches (McIntosh & White, 2006; Roybal, 2011; Supovitz & Christman, 2005). The research indicates that the following interventions have been effective:

- Planning session between middle schools and high school teachers
Involvement of parents in high school activities
• Assistance for students with homework
• Incentive programs for attendance, grades and citizenship
• System to earn credit each semester or each quarter
• Block schedules for core classes
• Closed campus
• Small learning communities
• Celebrations of student successes

Fulk (2003) described an example of an action plan designed to create an environment that would promote freshman success. The school created a Freshman Focus Group comprised of teachers, administrators, and university faculty. The group implemented a three-stage action plan. The four top concerns of teachers were: poor study and test-taking skills; poor organizational and time management skills; non-motivation for school and a lack of student concern about grades; and a low rate of homework completion. The researchers recommended that proactive steps be taken: visits to schools with transition programs in place; expanded collaboration with feeder middle schools; faculty training on areas identified as greatest need, such as how to teach test-taking skills and note taking; peer mentors; decrease home room enrollment size; summer orientation for incoming ninth graders; student planners; and tutoring provided by university students.

Roybal (2011) conducted a multi-year study of a ninth grade transition plan in a comprehensive urban high school. The leadership of the school in collaboration with the staff implemented a freshman transition program consisting of five different strategies that, together, were designed to promote an operative transition, continued academic success, and eventually increase high school graduation rates. These programs (Freshmen Houses, Extended Learning Time, Peer Mentors, After School Tutoring, and Earned Off-Campus Privileges) provided an integrated approach to support entering freshmen.

Freshmen Houses were small learning communities, in which ninth graders were assigned to one of several cohorts. Each cohort was placed with a team of teachers, who were responsible for core instruction (English, science, and mathematics). The school implemented an Extended Learning Time (ELT) or an advisory class, in which students were enrolled with one of the Freshmen House teachers. This class included lessons on organization, study skills, note-taking, and skills associated with academic success. The structure of the class was a decision of the Freshmen House teachers; these classes met twice per week for forty minutes (Roybal, 2011).

The Peer Mentoring Program focused on support activities for entering ninth graders. Four to five upper-class students mentors were assigned to each Extended Learning Time class. The upperclassmen mentors met individually or in small groups with ninth graders to assist with various social, academic, or other school related issues. Students who had individualized educational plans (IEP) met with their case manager during this time and were not included in Extended Learning Time classes. In addition, all students were invited to attend voluntary after-school tutoring sessions. However, students with missing assignments or low grades were assigned to mandatory after-school tutoring. English and math tutors were available four days a week after school to assist students (Roybal, 2011).

The final strategy, Earned Off-Campus Privileges, was designed to specifically address attendance problems in after-lunch fifth and sixth period classes. Ninth graders were able to gain off-campus lunch privileges by earning five credits. Students were not permitted to leave campus for lunch until they fulfilled this
requirement. The essence of the strategy was that students had to be on-track to graduate with at least five credits before they could leave campus for lunch; that is, off-campus lunch became an earned privilege (Roybal, 2011).

Roybal (2011) indicated that based on qualitative data that the culture and climate of the school had significantly improved; however, the quantitative measures of change were relatively stable during the three year period of the study. Nevertheless, “One of the more critical changes made in the culture of the school was the evolvement ... into a learning organization” (p. 142). With reference to Senge (1990), Roybal explained how the ninth grade transition program had facilitated at least at a basic level each component of a learning organization— increased personal mastery, improved mental models, a shared vision, learning teams, and starting to think systemically. Roybal concluded that the implementation of the freshman transition program had enabled the leadership and the staff to collaborate and “by creating a stable environment that empowered teachers and encouraged their continuous active participation in development, implementation, and improvement of the five strategies [the principal] succeeded in creating at least the beginnings of a learning organization” (pp. 151-152).

Small Learning Communities

Many schools have implemented Small Learning Communities (SLC) to help students make the transition from middle school to high school. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) defined a SLC as essentially a small school within the larger school. Habeeb, Moore, and Seibert (2008) explained that SLCs involve teaming of teachers, usually in core courses, and students who are heterogeneously placed with the teams. Teams do not need to be physically separate from the school; though, they may be if logistics allow. Generally, teachers on each team have a common planning period.

Patterson et al. (2007) studied a pilot SLC program that took place in a Midwestern school. Fifty incoming freshman students were randomly selected from the 197 first-year freshmen enrolled in Algebra I to participate in the Freshman Academy. Students in the Academy had all of their classes with members of the cohort and shared four content area teachers and one physical education teacher. The balance of ninth grade students served as a comparison group. The results indicated that Freshman Academy students were significantly less bored in classes, believed that teachers were fair, and felt that teachers treated them respectfully. Relationships between the teachers and students were stronger for the Academy group. Additionally, for the cohort group, there were significantly fewer suspensions, better attendance, and higher rate of promotion to the tenth grade.

While Academy students had higher GPAs in science than those in the comparison group, overall average GPA was higher in the comparison group. However, students, teachers, and parents believed that the Academy experience was very positive. They appreciated the interdisciplinary aspects of the curriculum, the way teachers shared discipline responsibilities, and close relationships between teachers and students. One complaint students had was the lack of ability to meet other students because they spent the whole day within their cohort group.

McIntosh and White (2006) examined a school that had implemented a small school concept. All freshmen were housed in a separate part of the school building, which had its own principal, intervention specialist, and counselor. Teams of core content area teachers with common preps and lunches worked with a cohort of freshmen. The counselor worked closely with middle school counselors, and professional development was ongoing. Additional activities included recognition programs for students, additional interventions
from outside groups (e.g., drug and alcohol awareness programs), transition meetings with eighth graders and their parents, academic study halls, lessons on academic skills, and professional learning community time. Students reported that they enjoyed their core classes, lockers and lunch in the freshman wing, and they felt that their teachers really cared about them. In addition, fewer students failed classes and expulsion rates went down. Finally, teacher moral was high and students reported positive perceptions about the freshman wing.

**Peer Support Programs**

Another transition strategy is a peer mentoring program in which upperclassmen are assigned to support a group of freshmen students (Charlton, 1998; Lampert, 2005; Roybal, 2011). Such programs help freshmen socially acclimate to the high school (Ellis, Marsh, & Craven, 2009), support students academically (Lampert, 2005), and assist students with homework and study skills (Charlton, 1998). Lepper and Henderlong (2000) reported that peer tutoring can facilitate student motivation. For example, students who need extrinsic motivation may be willing to work harder in order to please their mentors. Deci (1975) indicated “the primary reason people are likely to be willing to do the behaviors is that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel (or would like to feel) connected, whether that be a family, a peer group, or society” (p. 64).

Charlton (1998) found that peer support programs had positive affects for both the mentors and the students. The mentees responded well to the personal attention that they received. The personal attention helped students develop socially, emotionally, and academically. At times, the academic gains went beyond the subject matter in which the student was being tutored; Charlton found gains in other academic areas as well. Mentors, or tutors, experienced gains as well. They were able to develop and refine their listening skills, and their self-esteem increased; they felt needed and appreciated. Additionally, Charlton (1998) discovered that teachers benefited from a well-run peer support program because it allowed them to focus more on individual students. Teacher workload became less stressful and they were able to use peer mentors to help reduce the imbalance between teacher-talk and student-talk.

Lampert (2005) described a peer support program in a Chicago area high school, in which student failure rates had become a concern. Most freshmen students were assigned to a once per week advisory class; students in other special programs did not participate. The advisory class was composed of 30 freshmen, five mentors, and one teacher. Mentors and teachers met with the freshman students to provide academic and social support. The student mentors met regularly with advisory teachers for training related to curriculum and skill development. The mentors utilized small study groups to help ninth graders complete assignments, provide learning strategies, and support as needed. The curriculum was designed around three basic areas: attachment, achievement, and awareness. Attachment was related to what students felt toward the school; this included encouragement of students to participate in clubs and activities as well as acclimatization. Achievement addressed study skills, test-taking skills, time management, stress management, reading strategies, and note-taking skills; the counselor monitored academic achievement of all students. Awareness related to students’ self-perceptions and healthy life decisions.

Lampert (2005) discovered that the failure rate after the first year had dropped 14% and participation in extra-curricular activities increased by 6%. Qualitative data indicated that students most enjoyed having a calm atmosphere in which to do homework and they
really appreciated the mentors. For their part, the mentors felt they became more responsible with their work, had a new understanding of their teachers, and were more appreciative of diversity.

**Academic Skills Classes**

The advisory program reviewed by Lampert (2005) also included a component related to concerns that freshmen often do not have the academic skills needed to be successful in high school (Neild et al., 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Because secondary level teachers are not always trained to teach skills such as reading and note-taking (Fulk, 2003), some schools have created a class for freshmen to help students develop those skills. A well-designed and implemented student success program can lead to a significant improvement in academics and behavior (Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007).

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) described a school that reduced freshman failure rates by nearly 8% through implementation of a student success program. This program was offered to at-risk students and taught study skills, organization, anger management skills, tolerance, and self-discipline. Students could continue classes in a study-skills format during their sophomore year, and become mentors to freshmen during their junior and senior years.

Motivational studies provide indicators related to programs successes. Deci and Ryan (2000) found that one of the reasons people cannot move from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation is related to feelings of lack of competence. They argued that in order for people to adopt extrinsic goals as their own, and internalize such goals, they must feel competent at related tasks. If a goal is internalized, it can become intrinsic; intrinsically motivated behaviors that stem from a sense of aptitude and effectiveness help satisfy innate human psychological need for competence. This applies to students as well.

“Students will be more likely to adopt and internalize a goal if they understand it and have the relevant skills to succeed at it” (p. 64). For example, academic skills classes provide students the knowledge and understanding that they need to be successful, or competent (Brigman et al, 2007). Such feelings of competence may lead to intrinsic motivation to perform well in school.

**Recommendations**

Research indicates that freshmen need effective transition programs to successfully move from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. Students have an innate need to belong, and for most, it is an essential component within their lives. Students who enjoy social acceptance and feel connected to school view education as meaningful on all levels; at the same time, students who feel excluded tend to interpret their school experiences as less meaningful. Effective transition programs should address the following key points:

- Schools should create an environment in which students develop a sense of belonging.
- Parents should be activity involved in high school education of their students.
- Multiple components need to be able to address the barriers to success of all students.
- Highly effective caring teachers are critical. Often, ongoing professional development will be required.
- Formative program evaluations should be conducted using the following indicators: credits earned, number of core courses failed, on-track to graduate, and measures of connectedness; as well as, traditional measures of student achievement.
- Formative evaluations should be the basis for continuous improvements of transitions programs.
Effective transition programs are necessary as students move from middle school to high school; existing programs can provide guidance. Educators must make a concerted effort to ensure that student belongingness needs are met. Effective transition to ninth grade has been related to indicators of school success; including achievement, dropout rates, credits earned, attendance, and behavior problems. Effective components include tutoring, cohort groups, peer support, motivation components, and skills development.

It is further recommended that educators develop plans that include multiple strategies, and align selected components with needs of the students. Resource allocation is necessary and should consider staffing, professional development, restructuring of programs and schedules, and facilities.

A freshman transition program can create a climate that enables staff members to develop at least a basic level of personal mastery, improve their mental models, come to a shared vision, begin to develop learning teams, and start to think systemically (Roybal, 2011). Roybal posited that if a school maintained such a climate over several years, the school could become a learning organization as defined by Senge (1990). As such, all stakeholders benefit (e.g.: students, teacher, community members, parents); specifically, freshmen profit from effective transition programs. By creating a stable environment that empowers teachers and encourages their continuous active participation in development, implementation, and improvement of a multimodal transition program, educational leaders can foster the beginnings of a learning organization. Appropriate leadership can ensure that such beginnings become a strong component of the culture of a learning organization.
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