

Why 9th grade academies?

Research shows that separating ninth-grade students allows them to become better acquainted with the rigors of a high school curriculum in an environment that also allows them to mature and grow both academically and socially. Of equal importance, freshman academies are structured to give each student more individual attention, which translates into increased academic performance, fewer absences, and fewer behavior disturbances.

The increasing number of non-promoted ninth grade students both nationally and locally has become a critical focus point among all educators. Additionally, statistics indicate the importance of creating Ninth Grade Academies, as schools with operational transition programs reflect a dropout rate of only 8% on average compared to schools without transition programs at an average of 24%—three times higher (NHSC).

Mission

It is the mission of the Ninth Grade academies to assist the incoming freshman make a smooth transition into high school and meet the rigorous high school standards.

Freshman Academy Themes

Research points to 4 critical ingredients for sustaining SLC's that foster Ninth Grade Academy success—Authentic Learning Communities, Personalization, Rigorous and Relevant Instruction, and Professional Learning and Collaboration.

Authentic learning experiences can be defined as those experiences that connect students to the world outside of the school environment. For example, internships, community outreach, college and business partnerships and research projects that require students to be knowledgeable of and investigate societal challenges.

Personalization may be one of the most difficult challenges encountered by classroom teachers. With the large number of distractions both inside and outside the classroom setting, it becomes increasingly important for schools and teachers to utilize the personalization strategy. Implementing this strategy includes but is not limited to more classroom based staff, smaller class sizes and more accountability (i.e. student attendance and teacher-parent communication).

Rigorous and relevant instruction is a strategy that enables students to overcome the barriers often associated with race, poverty, language or initially low academic skill. Academies that wish to prepare all ninth grade students with the tools needed to successfully transition to high school will need to develop curriculum and instruction that is demanding and relevant. Authentic learning experiences, personalization and relevant instruction work interdependently with one another, promoting a greater chance to engage students academically.

The last strategy focuses more on the **development of teachers**. Professional learning and collaboration provides teachers with greater opportunities for collaboration, curriculum and instruction design, and to gain insights from their peers. This development not only increases the morale of teachers, but also transcends the learning environment, which ultimately benefits the students.

Goals of the Freshman (9th Grade Academy)

Objective 1: Increase the percentage of students passing from 9th to 10th grade and being on target to graduate.

Objective 2: To decrease the number of students losing credit or failing one or more courses during their freshman year.

Objective 3: To increase the GPA of freshman students

Objective 4: To increase the GA Milestones scores of freshman students in Algebra and ELA.

Objective 5: Increase the number of students eligible for extracurricular activities.

Student Benefits

- Increased academic achievement,
- Reduced discrepancies in the achievement gap that plague poorer children and, too often, children of color,
- Increased student attendance, attitudes and behavior,
- Reduction isolation that often seeds alienation and violence,
- Promotion positive feelings about self and others,
- Increased number of students matriculating to 10th grade,
- Lower student drop out rate,
- Increased extracurricular participation rate,
- Development student awareness of academic/career options,
- Stronger student-teacher relationships,
- Enhancement of student ability to apply academic content and the Skills For Success: Learning, Thinking, Technology, Interpersonal, and Communication skills in real world and workplace settings,
- Integration of academic and technical skills, and
- Involvement of each student along with his/her parent/guardian in a guidance and advisory system.

Staff Benefits

- Shared mission, beliefs, and values that forms a basis for action,
- Reduction of teacher isolation, a de-privatization of practice,
- Collective responsibility for students' success
- Increase in teacher satisfaction, morale,
- Powerful learning through sharing, observing, and discussing teaching methods and philosophies,
- Collective focus on student learning,
- Opportunities for conducting action research projects,
- Increase in understanding of teacher's role in helping all students achieve,
- Personal professional development opportunities to develop expertise in the knowledge and skills of teaching,
- Development of new relationships,
- Opportunity to develop curriculum,
- High levels of teacher empowerment, and
- Potential leadership opportunities.