A CASE FOR NINTH GRADE ACADEMIES

Ninth Grade Academies prepare students both academically and socially for the rigors of high school

Studies show that a student's lack of preparation for high school is often attributed to academics and indeed is usually the case; however, many times the reason is as much psychological, emotional, and even biological. So often we forget that freshman enter high school at a critical moment in their development. We ask them to act, reason, and react as adults when their brains simply are not capable yet. Organizational skills, accountability, discipline, etc. are all still in the process of being developed, yet most teachers expect students to "know" how to operate with them. Additionally, students are not often taught the necessary skills needed to be successful in high school. Skills like how to study, how to use an agenda, how to take notes, how to navigate the hallways, etc. are overlooked under the erroneous assumption that students should come to school endowed with them already. Subsequently, 9 th graders who are not taught how to function in a high school are more likely to fail.

Ninth Grade Academies give students the opportunity to grow in an environment where learning is both engaging and relevant

How many times have you heard a student complain that school was boring? In the study "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts" a full 47% of students of questioned said, "The major reason for dropping out after the ninth or tenth grade was that classes were not interesting. [They] reported being bored and disengaged in high school and almost as many (42 percent) spent time with people who were not interested in school... Students who do not achieve in school tend to withdraw both academically and socially, most times out of embarrassment over low grades

Ninth Grade Academies require students to think about graduation early in their high school careers.

In most high schools, freshman students spend an entire class period meeting with counselors to discuss graduation requirements, credit accumulation, course requirements, etc. Why? Because senior year is so far away it is often difficult for freshmen to wrap their mind around the fact that how they perform in 9 th grade can effect where they find themselves in 12 th grade. Coming from middle school where semester grades are averaged together at the end of the year, most students don't understand that their first and second semesters are independent of each other; if they get an F 1 st semester and get an A second semester they're grade doesn't average out to a C. Because many don't understand how they collect credits many don't take their 9 th grade year seriously and start going in the wrong direction.

Ninth Grade Academies assist in decreasing the dropout rate

How a student does his or her freshman year is a strong predicator of whether they will graduate. Simply put, when students do not achieve academically their first year of high school the probability of them dropping out increases significantly. Here are some sobering statistics: Of the drop outs surveyed, 35% said they couldn't keep up with the work; another 43% said they missed too many days of school to catch up; 32% were repeaters and 29% expressed doubt that had they stayed in school they would have ever met the requirements necessary to graduate. 65% of 9 th grade dropouts reported missing an excessive number of classes the year they dropped out.

Ninth Grade Academies require students and teachers to expect the best of each other

Students who expect little from themselves produce little. Those who expect much produce much. The same applies to teachers. In the book, Pygmalion in the Classroom authors Drs. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson say,

There are many determinants of a teacher's expectation of her pupils' intellectual ability. Even before a teacher has seen a pupil deal with academic tasks, she is likely to have some expectation for his behavior.[...]Before she has seen a child perform, she may have seen his score on an achievement or ability test or his last year's grades, or she may have access to the less formal information that constitutes the child's reputation. There have been theoretical formulations, and there has been some evidence, most of it anecdotal, that the teacher's expectation, however derived, can come to serve as an educational self-fulfilling prophecy.”

In other words, students float to whatever level a teacher sets. Set it low and they stay low. Set it high and they reach for it.


Ibid, iii, 7