

Leading the Way to a Smooth Ninth-Grade Transition

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April 28, 2006

Outline of Presentation

- Ninth-Grade Transition in Context
- Key Issues and Strategies
- A Practitioner's Perspective

Ninth-Grade Transition in Context



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Introduction and Overview

- Ninth-grade transition is a critical challenge of national importance
- Contextualizing ninth-grade transition
- Research is focused on urban high schools

Factors Involved in Ninth-Grade Transition

- New social environment
- Complex school structures
- Academic curriculum that is not engaging
- Students who enter high school unprepared
- Teacher quality
- Family resources and supports

New Social Environment

- Place where students either sink or swim
- Social engagement
- Sense of belonging and relationships
- School violence and bullying

Complex School Structures

- School environment can be chaotic
- Students fall through the cracks without needed supports
- Resources are needed to diagnose problems

Academic Curriculum That Is Not Engaging

- Academic curriculum that is not relevant and engaging
- Disconnect with student interests and background
- Lack of academic rigor and challenge

Entering High School Unprepared

- Low mathematics skills
- Low reading skills
- Low study skills

Low Teacher Quality for Ninth Graders

- Teacher quality in urban high schools
- Intense issues for students with disabilities and ELL
- Teachers who are uncertified and new to teaching

Family Support and Friends

- Family resources and background
- Low peer expectations

Conclusion

- Critical factors converge at the student, teacher, classroom, and school levels
- Strategies are being investigated

Key Issues and Strategies: What Does the Research Say About Ninth-Grade Transition?

James Kemple

Director

K-12 Education Policy Area

MDRC

Ninth Grade: Critical Point in Education Pipeline

- There are currently between 900 and 1,000 high schools in which graduation is at best a 50/50 proposition
- The majority of high schools with weak promoting power are located in northern and western cities and throughout the southern states
- In the 35 largest central cities in the United States, between 40% and 50% of high schools graduate less than half of their ninth-grade class

Why Focus on Ninth Grade?

Leaks in the Educational Pipeline

9th Grade Entrants

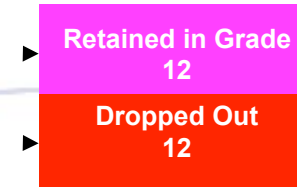
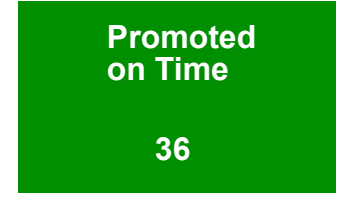
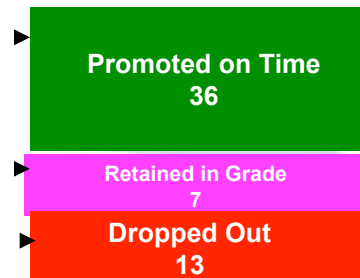
10th Grade Year Status

12th Grade Year Status

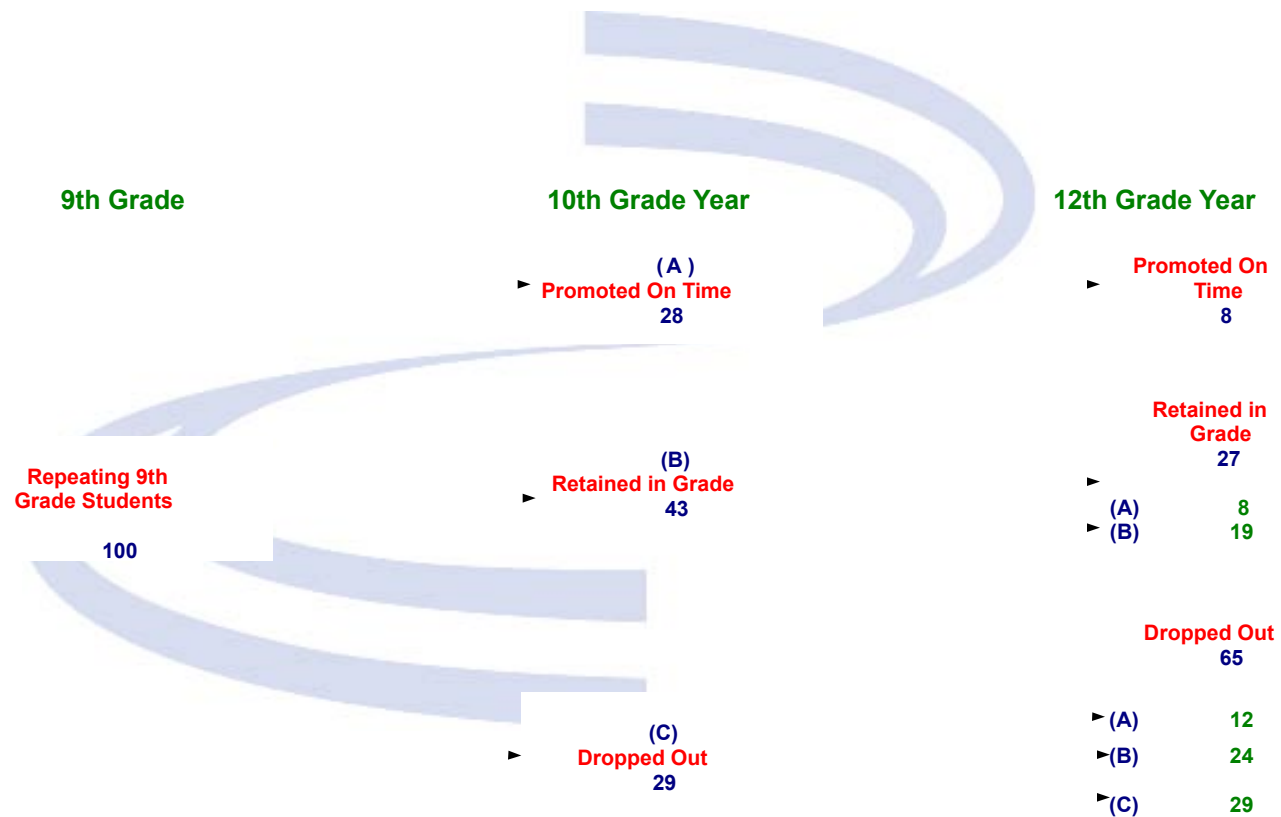
Summary Over Four Years

All 9th Grade Students

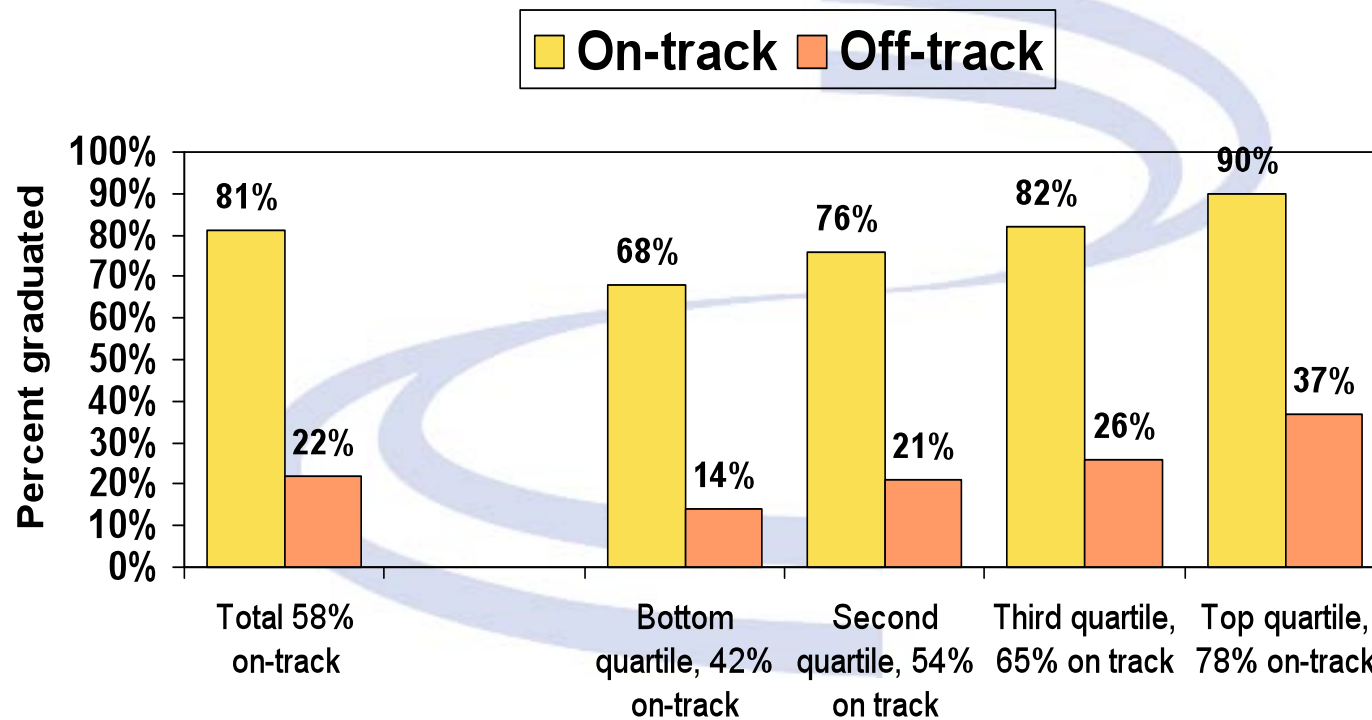
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What If Ninth Graders Do Not Get Promoted?



Four-year High School Graduation Rates by Freshman On-Track Status and by Incoming Reading and Mathematics Achievement: Students Entering High School in September 2000



Graduation rates and on track status of freshman by their entering eighth grade achievement, in quartiles

Key (Sources of) Problems in Ninth Grade

- Large, anonymous, “chaotic” places for early adolescents
- Low levels of literacy and basic math skills
- Mixed expectations that promote and reinforce tracking
- Limited capacity for teachers and staff to address diverse student needs
- Lack of relevance and connection to community, employers, higher education

English Language Learners (ELLs)

- At least two very different transitions
 - Transition from middle school
 - Transition from home countries and other languages
- Additional problems
 - ESL proficiency level driving course selection
 - Lack of availability of rigorous subject matter courses
 - Segregation of ELLs in lower-performing schools and within high schools

Issues Related to Student With Disabilities

- Problems that **all students** experience are the same problems that impact students with disabilities
- Requirements for graduation influence instruction and learning
- Expectations for post-school outcomes may affect student engagement
- Capacity of educators may be limited.
- Services related to transition may be limited

Strategies to Address the Problems

- Small learning communities
 - Ninth-grade academies
 - Four-year theme-based academies
- Curriculum
 - Supplemental literacy and math courses
 - Rigorous curriculum
- Guidance
 - Teacher-adviser systems
 - Academic monitoring and counseling
- Continuous professional development

Additional Strategies to Support ELLs

- Deep, ongoing teacher professional development to enhance teacher expertise to work with English Language Learners
- After-school enrichment courses for ELLs
- Seminars during the ninth grade offered to ELLs that explicitly explain what it takes to go to college in the U.S. system

Strategies to Support Students With Disabilities

- Academic and instructional interventions
- Vocational and postsecondary education interventions
- Family and community interventions

Small Learning Communities

- Small, self-contained groups of students who take classes together from interdisciplinary teacher teams
- Key component of several comprehensive school reform models
- Two configurations to support ninth grade
 - Ninth-grade academies
 - Four-year theme-based academies

Small Learning Communities/Ninth-Grade Academies

- Self-contained units are located in own part of the school building, often with own entrance
- Units are staffed with academy leader, dedicated teaching faculty, and social services personnel
- Teaching teams with common planning time are primary vehicle for personalization and solving individual student problems
- Teams within the academy include teachers from several disciplines who are responsible for about 100 students
- Culture of academic purpose and success is maintained

Small Learning Communities/Four-Year Theme-Based Academies

- Small learning communities (SLCs) are the school's basic structural unit
- Dedicated teaching faculty and leadership team within each SLC are responsible for about 150 to 350 students
- SLCs organize around themes such as health, hospitality and tourism, performing arts, science and technology
- Students stay in their SLC for most classes and across multiple years, creating multigrade communities

Curricular Reforms: Supplemental Literacy and Math Courses for Ninth Graders

- Talent Development's double-dose, catch-up courses
 - Strategic Reading
 - Transition to Advanced Mathematics
- Enhanced Reading Opportunities program
 - Supplemental literacy course for students two to five years below grade level

Curricular Reforms: Some Evidence of Effectiveness

- Talent Development and Enhanced Reading Opportunities have been evaluated using rigorous quasi-experimental and experimental designs, respectively
- Talent Development's catch-up courses are part of comprehensive set of strategies that produced substantial gains in attendance, academic course credits earned, and promotion rates for first-time ninth-grade students
- Enhanced Reading Opportunities findings: Stay tuned

Curricular Reforms: Raising Expectations in Chicago Public Schools

- Chicago Public Schools (CPS) began requiring students to complete a more rigorous course of study beginning with the freshman class of 1997-98
- CPS also introduced a range of initiatives to help students through HS to counter a possible increase in dropouts
- From 1993 to 2000, overall outcomes improved but were much attributable to shifts in student population because CPS ended social promotion and higher achieving students began staying in the system because of ES and MS reforms
- Also, a clear association was observed between new rigorous curriculum and increases in student performance

Guidance: Best Practices of High Schools That Work

- Teacher-adviser system is recommended to ensure that all students and their parents receive information and advice to develop a six-year plan
- Students should begin to think early about career and educational aspirations
- Students must understand the level of effort and educational preparation needed to meet their goals
- Guidance curriculum should be tailored to the school and taught on a regular schedule

Guidance: Teacher-Adviser in Practice First Thing First's Family Advocacy System

- Each student is paired with a staff member—generally a teacher in the student's SLC
- Advocate meets regularly to monitor academic, social, and emotional progress
- Advocate serves as the key liaison between the family and school
- Family Advocate Period: A specific time is reserved for students and staff to meet in a group setting
- Advocates receive initial training, a guide, and ongoing professional development

Guidance: Academic Monitoring and Counseling

- Talent Development's report card conferences
 - Adult SLC team member meets one-on-one with each student
 - Students receive help to analyze the report card and plan for improvement
 - Teacher teams develop strategies for students performing at different levels (passing all course, passing three, passing two, etc.)
- On-track indicators, as developed by CPS
 - Identify students who need recovery strategies
 - Are used as progress indicator in school accountability system

Professional Development

- Continuous, on-site teacher coaching
- On-site, content-based professional development linked to curriculum materials
- Summer and monthly seminars in content and instructional strategies
- Teachers working with colleagues to align curricula with state and local standards
- Common planning periods to develop strategies for individual students

Results From Comprehensive Approaches

- Talent Development and First Things First produced substantial and sustained improvements in student performance, at least in flagship districts
- Curricular and instructional components, not just structure, appear to be necessary conditions for affecting ninth-grade transition
- External support from developers appears to play a critical role in effective implementation
- A systematic planning process is recommended to develop details of implementation and gain support within schools and district

High School Transitions: A Practitioner's Perspective

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Former superintendent, principal, and
teacher

The Big Question: How Do We Ease Transition Into High School?

- How do we build a community of responsibility in schools?
- How do we ease transitions so that all children are successful?

Schools Can Be High-Performing Organizations

“In schools...the main problem is not the absence of innovation but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects.”

Michael Fullan 2001

Some Observations From the Field

- Low expectations for student achievement
- Minimal articulation between feeder and HS
- Many students on failure track long before HS
- Capable students not taking college prep classes
- Guidance counselors overloaded/misused
- Rush to classify by high socio-economic status parents
- English Language Learners classified for services
- Special education students rarely declassified
- Need for students to be accelerated

Who Takes Responsibility for Poor Performance in Ninth Grade?

- High school teachers point to middle school teachers
- Middle school teachers point to both ES and HS teachers
- Elementary school teachers point to parents and community factors

Strategies for Easing Transitions

- Communicate high expectations for all students
- Plan articulation meetings
- Provide professional development
- Empower guidance counselors
- Get parents to be more involved
- Encourage visits to MS or K-8 prior to transition
- Encourage eighth graders and parents to visit HS
- Assign HS buddies / teacher mentors

Strategies for Easing Transitions, Continued

- Monitor student progress; intervene
- Hold programs in ES / MS and during summer prior to HS
- Use ninth-grade academies, teams, houses, homerooms, advisories, etc.
- Locate classes within close proximity of one another with same peers
- Hold regular planning meeting with feeding school principals
- Put in place supports and structures at the Central Office

Schools Need to Focus on Key Leverage Points

- Instructional leadership
 - Meta-analysis by Marzano et al. (2005) found a significant correlation between principal leadership and student achievement
- Interaction between teacher and student

Cambourne (1995); Marzano et al. (2005); Resnick (1999)

Leadership Matters: What Effective High School Principals Do to Ease Transitions

- Set directions
- Develop people
- Redesign the organization (school)

Liethwood et al. (2004)

Principals Need to Apply These Strategies to Transitions

- Setting directions
 - Develop a schoolwide Theory of Action
 - Focus everyone on supporting students
 - Get everyone on board
- Developing people
 - Make the case for change
 - Provide support to students, staff, and parents
- Redesigning the organization (school)
 - Develop structures
 - Provide resources and incentives
 - Evaluate progress and hold people accountable

Continuing This Important Conversation

- Dialogue with experts and Regional Comprehensive Centers through our “members only” Web site: www.betterhighschools.org/membersonly
- Public Web site: www.betterhighschools.org
- Email: helpfor@betterhighschools.org