

Program Pillars

Middle School and High School Transition Support and Preparation

What is it and why is it important?

Transition programs provide a bridge for youth during a difficult transition period between middle and high school. High school can be a difficult transition for any young person: a larger school with multiple classes, unfamiliar classmates, more homework, and greater importance placed on grades. Transition support and preparation programs target youth before they leave middle school and provide the needed support to successfully transition to their new high school campus and their high school after-school program.

A surprisingly large number of youth, especially youth in urban areas, drop out during their first year of high school. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that up to 40% of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10–15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004)¹.

Successful transition support and preparation after-school programs spend time ensconcing youth into the high school after-school environment long before youth enter the high school campus. They keep in mind that ninth graders perceive less support and monitoring from teachers and principals and generally like school less than they did in middle school (Barber & Olsen, 2004)².

What form does a middle school to high school transition support and preparation take in afterschool programs?

After-school programs are uniquely situated to bridge this gap between middle and high school, some argue better than any other institution. Strong after-school transition support and preparation programs start attracting youth to their program before they step foot on a high school campus by developing strong relationships between the after-school staff and their incoming youth. Young people who feel supported, who know they have activities to participate in and people who can help them with challenges, are more likely to stay in school. The most successful programs:

- Engage existing middle school programs by working closely with middle schools and their existing after-school programs to educate and recruit 8th graders.

¹ Balfanz, R., & Letgers, N. (2004). *Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation's dropouts, where are they located, who attends them?* Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At-Risk, Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved March 9, 2007 from http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/graduation-gap/edweek/Crisis_Commentary.pdf

² Barber, B. K., & Olsen, J. A. (2004). Assessing the transitions to middle and high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 19(3). Retrieved March 9, 2007 from <http://jar.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/1/3>

- Demystify the realities of high school in the eyes of youth, educating them about the academic, enrichment and interpersonal supports available to them the moment they step on campus.
- Engage parents by raising their awareness of supports and services available for youth when they enter high school
- Engage teachers and school staff, both in the middle school and high school, educating them of the resources available to their students.

Where can I get more information?

Easing the Transition to High School: Research and Best Practices Designed to Support High School Learning, National High School Center. The transition from middle school to high school represents a significant event in the lives of adolescents, one that necessitates support from and collaboration among teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators at both educational levels. Successful transitions place particular emphasis on ninth-grade initiatives and can create one of strongest bridges from middle to high school and beyond. http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_TransitionsReport.pdf