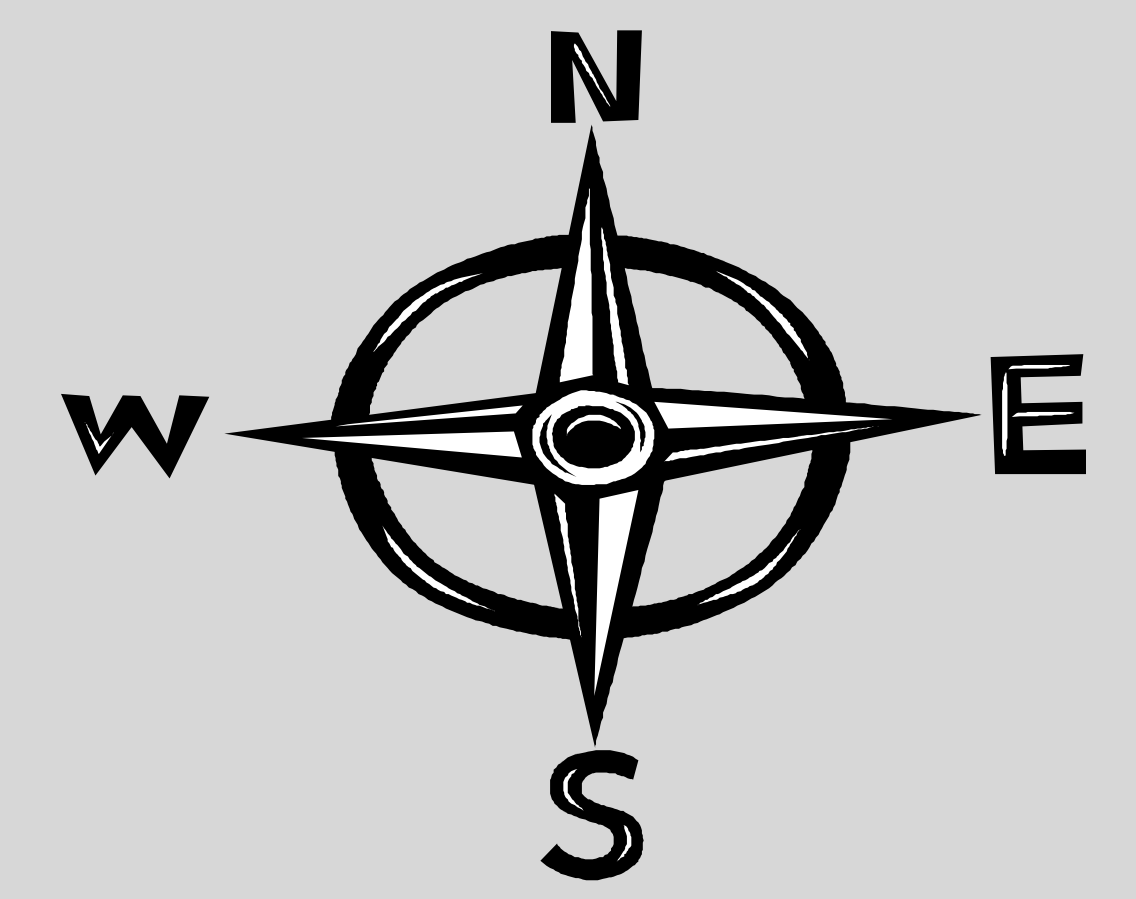


Preparing Students for a Successful High School Transition

Bill Crowson
XYZ High School



Introduction

The successful transition from grade school or middle school to high school continues to be one of the most crucial steps in a student's educational career. Research indicates this transition point is a powerful indicator of future academic success and graduation. Ninth grade students experience more drop-outs, academic failures, and retentions than all other grade levels (Alspaugh, 1998). In addition, ninth grade students who experience academic failure are more likely to experience continued academic failure in subsequent years and drop-out (Bandura, 1989). Schools have implemented a wide variety of strategies to address the high school transition, from one-day orientations, to freshman academies, to intensive study-skills courses. However, research has shown there is little evidence to indicate any specific strategy is more effective than another, and programs are often implemented based upon cost and available resources (Brown, 2010). Regardless of strategy, researchers have identified five areas that should be addressed upon implementing any transition program: building a strong data systems to identify students in need, addressing the cognitive needs of specific students prior to failure, personalizing learning and student involvement, addressing the needs of diverse student populations, and creating student connections to school and community (Herlihy, 2007).

References

Alspaugh, J. (1998) Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition to Middle School and High School. *Journal of Educational Research* (92), (1) 20.

Bandura, A. (1989). (Cited in Brown, 2010) Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 25(5), 729-735.

Brown, Emily S. (2010). Impact of Freshman Transition Interventions on Ninth Grade Academic Achievement. Diss. Liberty University.

Demond, Rebecca, Brown, R.D., and LaFauci, Jean M. (2006) Freshman Transition Programs: Long-Term and Comprehensive. *Principal's Research Review, Vol. 1, (4)*. NASSP

Demond, Rebecca, (2006). Freshman Transition Initiative. <http://gsehd.gwu.edu/gsehd/FTI>. George Washington University.

Herlihy, Corinne (2007) State and District-Level Support for Successful Transitions Into High School. *Easing the Transition to High School: Research and Best Practices Designed to Support High School Learning*. 6-18.

Goal: To increase the pass rate for high school freshman core courses (math, English, and science) to 75%.

Issue:

Over the past three years, there has been a steady decline in the freshman pass rate in core courses here at XYZ High School. As indicated in the graphic below, the freshman success (defined as passing a class with a C grade or better) in core classes (English, math, and science) has fallen to 40% during the most recent semester (Fall 2011), indicating a strong need for more proactive academic supports, as well as a data-based decision-making process. Teacher feedback has also indicated a steady decline in academic skill sets for incoming freshmen over the past three years, along with a steady increase in academic expectations due to changes in state standards. Currently, XYZ High School offers a Freshman Orientation Day prior to the start of school. This day is designed to welcome freshman students and to make sure that they are aware of things such as classroom location, lockers, schedule patterns, and extra-curricular opportunities.

Description of Goal:

Our objective is to design and implement an effective freshman transition program that maintains high academic expectations while providing effective supports for student success. This program will use data to initially place students, as well as monitor their progress. Students at-risk for failure will be identified prior to high school placement and all ninth grade students will be monitored by a Freshman Data Team (high school administrator, counselor, advisors, and classroom teachers) to identify and address potential shortcomings. Ninth grade students will continue to take Career Education in the fall. This curriculum will include transition goals as developed by the Freshman Transition Initiative, as well as explicit study skills instruction. The Freshman Data Team will meet once every two weeks to discuss data and strategies that are working. In addition, two additional freshman courses will be created allowing a strategic placement for ninth grade students in science and English (this system already exists for math), allowing us to place incoming students in classes that are appropriate.

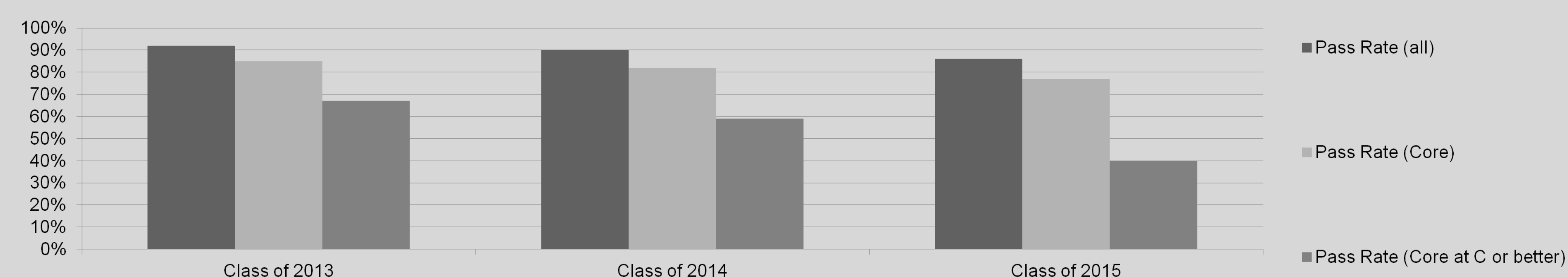
Options:

1. **Adding a freshman course designed to explicitly teach studies skills and strategies to incoming freshman students.** This option would require a cohesive curriculum (developed in-house or purchased) and would create pressure on our scheduling systems, both with staff and with student electives (fewer options would be available for freshmen students).
2. **Creating a ninth grade academy** (school-within-a-school model) is not necessary or plausible given our small student population (less than 45 total freshman students). We will be able to apply some of the school-within-a-school principles in our plan, but further delineation will not be needed.
3. **Continuing to offer only our Freshman Orientation Day as the only overt "stepping stone" to the ninth grade** has proven to be inadequate and fails to address both the specific needs of our incoming students and nor the needs that emerge once the school year has started.

Resource Allocation:

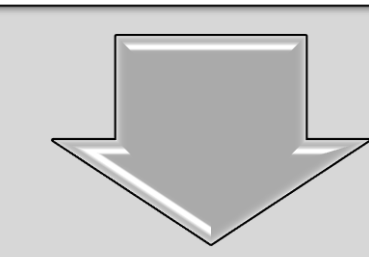
Implementation of this program will not require any additional funding or staffing. It will require a commitment of time for the development of curriculum for the additional science and English course, as well as time for data processing and meeting with the Freshman Data Team once every two weeks. We will continue to offer a Freshman Orientation Day. We currently have a Freshman Advisory period, which we will use to provide focused study skills instruction, as well as a Career Education course, which all ninth graders will take in the fall.

Freshman Pass Rate (Overall, Core, and Core at C or better) for Past Three Years:

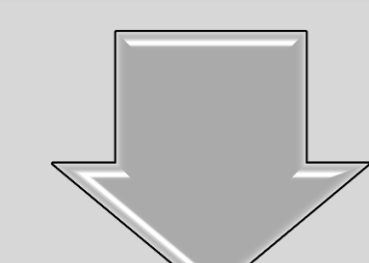


Implementation Plan

Spring 2011: Analyze OAKS and Explore data for current ninth graders and incoming eighth graders to assess high school readiness. Use this data to design core curriculum expectations and study skills curriculum for Advisory and Career Education courses. OAKS and Explore data will also be used for student placement in science, math, and English. Core curriculum teachers will jointly develop course expectations and class schedules to ensure that they are clearly understood and consistent across courses.



Fall 2012: Implement core course agreements and study skills curriculum into Advisory and Career Education courses. Begin data team process with core teachers, advisors, counselor, and administration (Freshman Data Team) to identify students who need additional assistance. Initial student placements will also be analyzed for accuracy and continuation. A Freshman Orientation Day will be offered prior to the start of school.



Winter 2013: Using the Freshman Data Team, analyze first semester data to assess initial student placement into core courses and to develop recommendations for second semester placements. Student survey data will be used to assess the efficacy of the study skills curriculum in both Career Education and Freshman Advisory classes.