

# TRANSITION PLANNING FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

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## Research on Middle School Transitions

- Transition to high school is associated with a decrease in:
  - social support
  - academic functioning: grades, school attendance, academic motivation
  - mental health functioning: increased depression, delinquency, and substance abuse
- Transition is also associated with an increase in:
  - academic stressors
  - social stressors (Hussong, 2007)

## Research on Middle School Transitions

- Success or failure during the 9th grade year often sets the tone for a student's entire high school career
- If a student is successful during their 9th grade year, there is likelihood that the student will graduate and enjoy their high school experience (Silverthorn, 2005)
- There is a heightened risk of school-drop out related to negative educational experiences (Hussong, 2007)

## Student Perspective

- 8th grade students worry about their experience transitioning to high school and some view it as difficult
- Akos & Galassi, 2004 found that 8th grade students were primarily concerned with an increased workload, difficulty of classes and getting lost at school
  - Students later reported that academic and social changes, and feeling disconnected from school were the most difficult aspects of the transition process
  - Students also reported liking high school less than middle school

## Student Perspective

- This research study (2000-2001 school year) showed that an increase in transition preparedness activities in 8th grade allowed for a smooth transition for students into 9th grade
- Activities included the following:
  - Campus visits from the freshman principal, counselor, activities director, and former students
  - Registration
  - Students discussed their concerns about attending high school and had many of their questions answered

## Students with Special Needs

- Researchers interviewed twelve, 9th grade students, six with learning disabilities and six without learning disabilities
- The major research question was:
  - "What transition activities did the students find helpful, and were there differences between the experiences of those with learning disabilities and those without?" (Letrello, 2003)

## Interview Results

- Students with learning disabilities indicated that they relied more heavily on help from peers and teachers to be successful in the ninth grade year than did students without learning disabilities
- Students with learning disabilities were involved in less activities than students without, which limited them from making new friends.
  - Talking to their 8th grade teachers and future high school counselors before the transition helped them get acquainted with the high school. (Letrello, 2003)

## Developed Recommendations

- Middle school should have as many activities as possible to prepare students for the change to high school
- Transition groups should be formed at the middle school to plan for the transition to 9th grade
- Student's needs and fears regarding the move to high school should be assessed and addressed in eighth grade
- Students with special needs should have continuous support from teachers and staff during the transition and after they enter high school
- Students entering 9th grade should be encouraged to get involved in extracurricular activities (Letrello, 2003)

## IDEA's Definition of Transition

- Transition services: (section 56460 CA ed. code)
  - coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability.
  - Designed to be a result oriented process.
  - Focused on improving the academic and functional achievement.
  - Facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation.

## IDEA

- IDEA looks at transition as a function of the IEP.
- IDEA focuses on high school to post high school transition.
- Because regulations focus on high school to post high school regulations, there is a lack of transition services at the middle school level.
- Many high school teachers feel that incoming Freshman are not prepared for high school (academically and socially).

## Transition as a Process

- IDEA's definition limits to focusing on post high school preparation.
- Process rather than one time thing.
- Preparing students for high school:
  - Academically
  - Emotionally
  - Socially

## Discussion

**Are students at your middle schools prepared for high school?**

**What practices are implemented at your school district to prepare students for the transition into high school?**

**What can be done to help students transition?**

## Retail Programs

- Transitions Curriculum Learning Kit (Pearson Assessment)
- A self-advocacy program to help students prepare and be successful their freshman year in high school.
- Teaches students with learning disabilities the skills to successfully make the transition to middle school, high school, or college.
- Students learn lessons in self-advocacy, responsibility, and how to develop strategies for academic success.
  - Materials includes videos with unscripted student interviews, a self-advocacy handbook, student work guide and individual student transition booklets.
    - [Interview sample](#)

## Retail Programs

- Transitions A High School and College Preparatory Curriculum for Middle School Students. (Debbie Branker Harrod, Maureen Hornung)
- High School and College Preparatory Curriculum for Middle School Students
- Discusses the importance of the academic, social and emotional attainment necessary for student readiness in high school.
  - Workshop series that addresses relevant topics focusing on the issues surrounding the preparation process for junior high students.
  - Designed for a wide range of groups and sites so that practitioners may adapt it to their respective and individual needs
  - Eleven sessions are explicitly mapped out in an easy to follow format.
    - Available for purchase or free download at <http://www.lulu.com/content/386454>

## Retail Programs

- 2007-2008 Getting Ready for High School Guide, ([schoolguide.org](http://schoolguide.org))
- Developed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education
- Series of low cost guides to provide students, parents, counselors and teachers with information and resources for better transitions
  - 64-page booklet that has two main chapters and a resource section.
  - Designed to help middle school students plan for high school and for life after graduation.
  - Students identify interests and skills, begin career exploration, and create an Action Plan for high school that includes a four-year course of study focused on reaching their goals.

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- 6 to 8 week group with 5 – 10 students
- Target group: SDC & RSP students
- Psycho-educational in nature
- Incorporates ideas from William Bridges
  - *Bridges, W. (1980). Transitions: making sense of life's changes; strategies for coping with the difficult, painful and confusing times in your life.* Massachusetts: Perseus Books

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Incorporates ideas from:
  - William Bridges
    - *Bridges, W. (1980). Transitions: making sense of life's changes; strategies for coping with the difficult, painful and confusing times in your life.* Massachusetts: Perseus Books
  - School-Connect Website
    - *School-Connect: Optimizing the High School Experience* (n.d.) Selected sample lessons. Retrieved March 2, 2007 from <http://www.school-connect.net/curriculum.htm>

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Objectives
  - Prepare
  - Address fears
  - Teach new skills

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- General flow of each session
  - Intro to session topic
  - Structured conversation
  - Structured activity
  - Closing thoughts/comments

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week One
  - Introductions
  - Establish group rules
  - Pass out High School materials
    - Map
    - Sample bell schedule
    - Website address

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Two
  - Transitions put us in reverse!
  - Use flow chart to demonstrate William Bridges model:
    - Endings
    - Neutral Zone
    - Beginnings
  - Draw favorite memories of Middle School – “what will you say goodbye to?”

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Three
  - The Neutral Zone!
  - This summer, what will you do to prepare for High School?
    - Grizzly Retreat
    - Visit campus to become familiar with it
    - Practice social skills

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Four
  - New Beginnings
  - Who determines who we should be?
    - How do we get reputations or get placed in a clique?
    - What can we do to change that?
  - Draw the REAL you in High School

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Five
  - Beginnings Part Two – Academic Success
    - What is a block schedule?
    - What are our work/academic habits?
  - Self assessments on study habits, work styles, learning styles, etc.
  - Develop list of questions for High School Counselors & Teachers

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Six
- What takes us off task?
  - Use School – Connect Handout 3.6.3 “Distractions and Curveballs”
- Do role plays and discuss strategies
- Provide answers to student questions from last week

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Seven
- Meet with Middle School Alumni
  - Panel presentation
  - Give former students chance to be the experts!
- Q & A
- Social Time

## SAMPLE GROUP MODEL

- Week Eight – Closing Session
- Review Objectives
- Complete Evaluations
- Draw Hopes & Dreams Mural

## References

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