

THE ADVOCATE



Be a Champion

Great expectations motivate National Honor Society students to become champions in school and community.

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Make the Time

Business Horizons helps Iowa students connect the dots between classroom learning and real-world applications.

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Turning Your Minutes into Teachable Moments

It doesn't take a lot of time to become an advocate for activities.

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Setting the Stage for High School Success

Activities + Mentoring = Smooth Transitions

BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

Change is inevitable. Many times, it brings a welcome shift in scenery and new opportunities for growth. But change can also feed anxiety and fear. For young people transitioning from the familiar territory of middle school to uncharted high school terrain, change can be overwhelming, even debilitating. A quality freshman transition program that utilizes peer mentors and extends an early invitation for activities involvement is a necessity in helping students successfully navigate the journey into high school. And the time to start planning for next year's new students is now.

In a literary review prepared for the Boomerang Project, an educational consulting company that focuses on enhancing student success through transition programs, Ann Stoltz, PhD, has documented the research indicating that a poor orientation to high school results in reduced academic achievement and attendance, increased disciplinary issues, and less frequent participation in activities.¹ Additional peer-reviewed studies indicate that dropout rates are lowest in schools with extensive, well-executed transition programs.²

Advance Planning

Mike Smith is a professional speaker and leadership trainer, and the president of Difference-Makers, Ltd. His workbook, *Transitions, Rethinking High School Orientation as the Foundation of Student Engagement*, is the culmination of more than 20 years of experience in helping ➔



schools develop engaging transition programs. Smith points out that an effective orientation program is not a hurried, one-time effort, but a series of well-designed activities that can set the tone for a student's entire high school experience. "No first impression is as important as the first impression of high school," said Smith. "In those first few hours, decisions are made that will determine each student's degree of involvement, commitment to the educational process, realization of personal responsibility, expectations for behavior, and attitude. We need to create an atmosphere where all kids are supported."

Unfortunately, some schools wait until the last minute to address the needs of their incoming students. Consequently, there are limited resources and little time for a positive, dynamic transition. By planning the next transition program *right now*—no matter when right now is—educators can ensure a more effective experience that promotes positive expectations, addresses preconceived worries, and helps kids find a place to belong.

Micah Jacobson, cofounder of the Boomerang Project and lead trainer for the organization's innovative Link Crew and WEB transition programs, refers to the transition program as a "leverage moment" in which a little bit of input can result in a lot of output. He recommends that stakeholders deliberately attend to the development of a quality program rather than assuming that young adolescents have the skills to make the transition on their own. He also cautions against getting too comfortable with a program that seems good enough but isn't really addressing the students' needs. Jacobson recommends that educators follow these strategies when developing effective orientation goals:

- **Remember the Three Keys:**

Safety, Information, and Connections. Transition programs should be designed to help kids feel physically and emotionally safe, provide easy access to information, and offer students opportunities to develop connections with supportive people who care.

- **Have a Meeting of the Minds.**

At a minimum, administrators should schedule an annual one-hour meeting with key stakeholders to review the status of the school's transition program. Educators should ask: Does our program meet the needs of students and staff? What are the goals? How will we know if our program is successful? After these questions are discussed, educators can begin to look for markers to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of an existing program or to determine key elements for a new plan of action.

- **Assign a Focused Role.**

The administrator should assign responsibility for the coordination of the transition program to one person. The role should be a clearly defined, valued responsibility and not lumped into a catch-all category.

- **Remember that Practice Makes Perfect.**

Transition programs should be visible, well-defined, and repeatable year after year. Students and staff should be able to rely on the process and be given opportunities to offer feedback.

In addition to using these helpful strategies, the best orientation programs reach out to incoming freshmen while they are still in middle school or junior high. The Freshman Mentor Program (FMP) at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, IL, is one program

that begins building connections with students—and their parents—during the eighth grade year.

Stevenson's FMP provides an ongoing orientation to high school that familiarizes students with the school's physical layout, policies, programs, and traditions. Throughout the process, each student has access to a support group consisting of peer mentors, a faculty advisor, and an academic counselor. "Kids have a lot of anxiety about the transition to high school. When we take the time to listen to their concerns, we are reminded that we felt the same way when we were in school," said Zara Dittman, Stevenson's FMP coordinator. "As adults, we often seek out mentors and training programs when we start something new. It makes sense to provide these necessary supports to our students."

The transition process for Stevenson's students starts early in the eighth grade year and includes a structured calendar of monthly events. First, the high school principal and a group of current Stevenson students visit with parents at all applicable junior highs. The visit resembles a town hall meeting, and parents are able to ask questions of not only the principal but also the representative students. In January, incoming students and their parents attend a meeting together. The goals are to ensure that parents and their children receive the same information and to encourage a dialogue within families about their vision for the next four years. In February, parents and students meet with an academic counselor to discuss course selection. These meetings facilitate communication and rapport with an adult advocate at the high school.

Extending an Early Invitation

One of the most impactful transition events is Stevenson's cocurricular fair in March. The fair provides an opportunity for incoming students to investigate all of the high school's activities, including sports, student leadership, the arts, and special interests. Adult advisers, coaches, and students who participate in each activity are on-site to share information. "High school is a time to get involved and explore new opportunities. We want our students to know that you do not have to be a star athlete or a skilled artist to participate," said Dittman. "Activities can calm fears by offering students a place to belong, and there is truly something for everyone."

Andy Costanzo, a veteran educator and the current student activities coordinator at Interboro High School in Prospect Park, PA, has based much of his school's transition program on strategies modeled by Stevenson. He believes that his school's activities fair is critical to the process, noting that students who are already heavily involved in a sports or music program might seek participation without being prompted, but the majority of incoming students need an invitation or they won't sign up. "It's important to promote continuity with activity involvement before students arrive on the first day of high school," he said. "By then, it's often too late to get kids involved. The chance to see what is available in advance and to talk to experienced high school students really reduces the intimidation factor." In addition, activities fairs allow interested students to make connections and sign up to receive information about areas of interest in the months leading up to high school.

The Importance of Peers

Along with an early introduction to activities, peer mentoring is a must for any effective transition program. Boomerang Project cofounder Jacobson explains that adolescents learn better and faster from their peers. "The challenge is to help students transition from a kid-centered, adult-run world to a kid-centered, kid-run world where kids are expected to be more responsible for

“As adults, we often seek out mentors and training programs when we start something new. It makes sense to provide these necessary supports to our students.”



themselves,” said Jacobson. “This can be overwhelming, especially for students who don’t have the necessary skills. We know that the transition is smoother for kids who have a helpful older sibling. Peer models allow us to replicate that experience for every kid.”

Zittman considers the connection between peer mentors and freshmen to be the most valuable part of the transition program. At Stevenson, mentors are selected after a comprehensive application process and receive extensive training prior to the start of their mentorship. A dedicated freshman orientation day at the start of the school year pairs new students with an assigned mentor. Peer mentors even ride the school buses on orientation day so that incoming freshmen will be greeted by a friendly face. Mentors spend the rest of the day meeting with small groups to answer questions, provide tours, and offer a synopsis of what to expect.

Throughout the year, mentors continue to serve as trusted guides. The Stevenson schedule includes freshman advisory sessions four days a week during the school year. In addition to providing opportunities for students to hear important messages from the school superintendent, counselors, and administrators, the advisory time allows peer mentors to offer team-building activities and additional guidance. Zittman explains that the bond between mentors and freshmen benefits the entire student body. “The relationship between the mentors and their students breaks down the divide between lower and upper grades,” she said. “Positive feedback from parents and our new students reaffirms the significant role of the mentors. And mentors develop people skills and the ability to think on their feet. More importantly, the mentors learn that their most essential role is to work behind the scenes to empower others.”

Costanzo agrees that the opportunity for incoming students to learn from their peers is invaluable. At Interboro High School, mentors begin preparing for the arrival of a new crop of students well in advance. Mentors attend team-building sessions and hear about the social and emotional issues that accompany high school transition. Costanzo explains that the majority of mentors sign up because of their own experiences as freshmen. In his program, Costanzo also assigns several students the responsibility of monitoring the overall

program. These student leaders use Remind (**remind.com**), a free texting application for schools, to send regular messages to the other mentors, advising them of upcoming responsibilities and encouraging them to follow up with the freshmen throughout the year. “Peer mentoring with students who are close to the age of the incoming students is by far the most effective way to address the transition to high school,” said Costanzo. “Our current mentors all say that as incoming students, they would have been lost without their own peer mentors. Their experiences with the program were so positive that they want to give back by serving as mentors to others.”

For many adolescents, the transition to high school creates significant challenges. A properly planned and executed transition program designed to help new students succeed is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the school community. “The old adage that ‘the strong will survive’ is not an acceptable option in the case of high school orientation,” said Smith. “We need to help our students find firm footing from the beginning by supporting important connections and empowering student leaders to guide the way.” A well-planned program that uses encouragement from student mentors, invites activity participation early in the process, and provides trusted sources of communication can help students transition to high school with confidence and the skills to succeed. ●

TO LEARN MORE about the important transition from middle school to high school, watch this video and review additional resources from the Boomerang Project: a4sa.org/LinkCrew.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ann Stoltz, “Why Worry About Ninth Graders?,” The Boomerang Project, 2005.
- 2 Nancy Mizelle and Judith Irvin, “Transition from Middle School to High School. What Research Says,” *Middle School Journal* 31, no. 5 (May 2000): 57-61, <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=Nancy+Mizelle+and+Judith+Irvin+&id=EJ623706>

TRANSITION & ORIENTATION RESOURCES

a4sa.org/resources



THE BOOMERANG PROJECT The Boomerang Project is home to the internationally recognized high school and middle school transition programs, Link Crew and WEB. To date, the Boomerang team has trained more than 9,000 educators to effectively utilize peer mentorship at their schools.



TRANSITIONS BY DIFFERENCEMAKERS, LTD. From DifferenceMakers, Ltd. and Mike Smith, *Transitions* is a comprehensive freshman orientation program designed to help students feel welcome through mentoring, activity involvement, and advanced planning.



STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN MENTOR PROGRAM The FMP at Adlai Stevenson High School provides all students with a supportive environment that helps ease the adjustment from junior high to high school. Stevenson’s program is so effective that educators from across the country use key concepts from FMP in developing their own programs.



WHY WORRY ABOUT NINTH GRADERS? This report, prepared for the Boomerang Project by Ann Stoltz, PhD, references research regarding the importance of the transition from middle school to high school and the potential impact on academics, the dropout rate, and the overall well-being of students. *Provided with permission from the Boomerang Project.*

National Honor Society Goes Above and Beyond Academics

SINCE 1921, the National Honor Society (NHS) has recognized high school students who demonstrate excellence in scholarship, leadership, service, and character. But NHS affiliation is more than just an accolade. At Marian Central Catholic High School in Woodstock, IL, membership in NHS provides students with opportunities to serve as champions in their school and community.



Marian Central Catholic High School students Dane Johnson, Justinne Ignacio, and Pam Atadero assist with a winter coat drive.

Throughout the school year, Marian NHS members participate in multiple service projects and serve as tutors to peers in need of academic assistance. Last year, Marian’s NHS chapter furthered their school’s efforts to create a community of caring by joining forces with other student-led groups to participate in service work. “It was an inspiring experience for all of us,” said Bethany Bucci, Marian’s NHS president for 2013-14. “There is no greater feeling than helping others and seeing the direct effects of our efforts.”

Glenn Pinnau, EdD, has been Marian’s NHS adviser for 16 years. In 2007, he received the Rynearson Adviser of the Year Award, an NHS honor acknowledging an adviser’s commitment and energy. Pinnau explains that three key factors—responsibility, critical thinking, and initiative—help

his students stay motivated and productive. Establishing high expectations for students from the beginning and then allowing them to be responsible for their own successes and failures are important parts of Pinnau’s philosophy. “As role models, the members of our chapter pledge to treat themselves and others with respect and to seek out opportunities to serve. Students come to understand that these are more than just words,” said Pinnau. “They also learn to take initiative and to look for what needs to be done instead of waiting for instruction to do it.”

Pinnau offers this advice for advisers who want to create successful leadership programs in their schools:

- **Realize good leaders have setbacks.** You must let your students make mistakes. Let them fail, but be there to provide support and help them learn from their failures.
- **Be patient.** It takes time to develop good leaders. It also takes time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each student. Getting the right people into the right roles is key to accomplishing great things.
- **Stay focused on the big picture,** which is to help students grow into responsible, ethical citizens.
- **Maintain the continuity of the chapter.** Do not reinvent the wheel every year. Have experienced members train and guide new members.

According to Bucci, her adviser’s philosophy allows students to successfully engage in service projects while building real-world skills. She credits her NHS experience with shaping her development as an effective leader. “Our adviser trusted us with absolutely everything and treated us like responsible adults,” she said. “He held us accountable but had confidence in us. We were able to dream big and were taught the skills we needed to help those dreams come to fruition.”

Fueled by great expectations and lessons in altruism, Marian’s NHS students are empowered with the skills and the desire to become lifelong champions. ●

TO REVIEW RESOURCES from National Honor Society and to read more about student-led service events organized by NHS chapters, go to nhs.us.

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Business Horizons: Educators Bring the Real World to School

IN TODAY'S EVER-EVOLVING marketplace, real-world skills in leadership, decision making, and creative thinking are as necessary for success as traditional academic aptitudes. At Gilbert High School in Gilbert, IA, educators are doing more than just preparing their students for life after high school. Through a hands-on, action-oriented business initiative, students are experiencing the real world, right now.

Business Horizons (BH) is a program of the Iowa Association of Business and Industry Foundation. For more than 30 years, BH has been educating young people about the practical skills they need to be successful in the workplace. Business Horizons is typically offered as a weeklong summer activity for high school students who want to learn more about the business world. But Gilbert educators wanted all of their students to experience the program's benefits, so for more than a decade, BH has been an important part of the school's education equation.

At Gilbert High School, Business Horizons is presented as a three-day workshop in alternating years, so that every student participates as a junior or senior. Throughout the course of the program, students hear from area experts who volunteer their time to share personal stories about topics such as marketing, customer service, corporate giving, entrepreneurship, and honesty in the workplace. Teams of students are charged with developing a new product, making financial decisions, creating a marketing plan and a television infomercial, and preparing and delivering a formal presentation to professional investors and to younger students at the school.

Principal Layne Billings believes that the BH program is a great example of putting education into action. "Our goal is to give kids experiences that promote authentic, intellectual work," he said. "This program develops high-order thinking and helps students feel like they are getting ready for real life. It allows students to understand why the skills they are learning in school are important and how they can apply these skills to the business world."

In addition to the skills gained through the development of a business plan, students also benefit from the connections



Gilbert High School students work with an adult mentor to develop a business plan for a product they created through Business Horizons.

created with area businesspeople who volunteer their time to provide guidance and feedback. Hope Bossard, the district's director of curriculum and school improvement, believes that the opportunity to work with successful businesspeople provides a unique learning experience that can't be duplicated by a textbook. "The program is a critical piece of what we do," said Bossard. "Practical applications presented by the right people with the right message can literally change a student's life in a short amount of time. Students are fully engaged and are learning lessons that are impacting the decisions they make about their future."

By making the time to bring creative, hands-on business applications to school, Gilbert educators are helping their students develop important connections between education and relevant, real-world applications. ●

TO LEARN MORE about Business Horizons, go to businesshorizonsiowa.org.

TO VIEW infomercials from Business Horizons' students, go to the organization's YouTube channel at a4sa.org/Infomercials.

ACTIVITY CONNECTION

Literacy in Action: Read All About It

EDUCATORS AT Oak View Middle School in Andover, MN, have discovered that combining student activities with great literature is the perfect way to promote literacy. The school's One Book, One Community initiative stems from a national program that encourages the enjoyment of reading and the development of community through shared reading and discussion. The initiative was developed in 1998 by a literacy enthusiast at the Washington Center for the Book in Seattle, WA. Since then, similar programs have been connecting communities all across the country.

Media specialist Linda Schonning explains that Oak View educators discovered One Book, One Community six years ago, when they were searching for a way to promote reading among adolescents. The program, which invites all students to read the same carefully chosen book, has become a much-anticipated annual tradition. The school's principal and members of the Parent Teacher Organization read proposed books,



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select a title for the year, and help with distribution of free books to students and staff.

Throughout the year, a series of reading-related activities keep students engaged. A Walk, Run, Read program in February invites students and staff to walk or run a mile inside the school and then read together before the school day begins. “In February, it’s the middle of winter in Minnesota and very cold,” said Schonning. “The teachers who start their morning with Walk, Run, Read believe that it jumpstarts their day and energizes their students.” Other popular activities include trivia games, guest readers, and a question-and-answer session with the author via Skype or WebEx.

At Jacob Wismer Elementary School in Portland, OR, parent volunteer Nina Kelley creatively coordinates book selection with activities that will appeal to the K-5 audience. A teacher by trade, Kelley selects a book most students have not read and includes an animal to pique elementary-age interest.

For the past two years, the books’ characters have included a hamster, and the school has adopted a pet hamster to boost student engagement. Teachers sign up to house the hamster in their classrooms for a day, and students answer questions about the book in exchange for a chance to feed the special pet. The school has also developed an interactive website with audios of teachers reading various chapters.

The program is simple and inexpensive, and it unifies families and the school community. “The students make lifelong memories with this program,” said Kelley. “Students who may not have been chapter-book readers are being introduced to chapter books in a fun way. Families benefit because it gives them a good excuse to pause and do something fun and educational together. The staff benefits by reading to their own families at home, sharing the book with their students, and extending what we are doing as a school into fun classroom activities.”

The Wismer program also incorporates community service. At the end of the project, students are invited to donate their books to a children’s book bank that serves area children. ●

TO LOCATE One Book projects in your area, visit read.gov/resources.

TO LEARN MORE about reading programs for elementary students, go to readtothem.org.

MAKE THE TIME

turning your **minutes** into **teachable moments**

It doesn’t take a lot of time to become a significant champion for student activities.
Small, incremental adjustments to your regular routine can add up quickly and will make a huge difference.



spend 3 minutes

in the halls connecting with individual students, talking about their interests, and suggesting opportunities to connect their interests with activities.



take 5 minutes

a day to personally acknowledge, praise, and thank an adviser, coach, or sponsor for their time and commitment to student activities.



take 10 minutes

each week to learn more about the research linking student activity participation with academic performance. Share what you’ve learned in individual conversations with all stakeholders.



Imagine what might happen if you and your colleagues took these simple steps:

Agree to advise a club, coach a sport, or sponsor a cocurricular activity.

Offer to let a new club, like the chess club or robotics team, meet in your classroom after school while you’re grading papers or preparing lesson plans.

Team up with your school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Volunteer to lend your talents, insight, and experience in support of student activities.

Recruit uninvolved students for specific projects to give them a taste of involvement.



Make the Time.
Alliance for Student Activities
a4sa.org

THE ADVOCATE

The Advocate is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

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Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact advocate@a4sa.org

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