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By Jay Hertzog and Lená Morgan
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I NTRODUCTION

"Educators and parents must remember that successful transition programs are not simply a meeting with the high school counselor and a student tour of the high school facility. Rather, transition is an on-going event in the life of the student, from childhood through adulthood." (1)

This monograph will explore the middle to high school transition programs of six Connecticut high schools. The Professional Studies Committee sent questionnaires to 174 public and parochial high schools. We received 52 responses (30%). We were encouraged to find that almost one third of our high schools had developed programs which contained creative transitional elements. These schools had begun to go beyond the traditional freshman orientation approach. Of the schools responding, we have selected six which are the most comprehensive, creative and generally cost effective. Some of the new ideas you will read about include:

- Teaming arrangements
- At-risk programs
- Parent involvement initiatives
- Interdisciplinary enrichment programs
- Retreat experiences
- Multi cultural considerations
- And more

All of the transition programs presented are unique. Six of the school profiles contain basic program information and the name and phone number of a contact person for your convenience. One school, East Hartford High School, has developed a program which is sufficiently comprehensive to warrant a more detailed presentation.

We believe that our research is timely in part because of an article about transition programs by Jay Herzog and Lena Morgan in the January 1999 issue of the NASSP Magazine "High School." Herzog and Morgan wrote the overview section specifically for this monograph.

We congratulate the schools profiled in this monograph for their progressive initiatives and encourage other schools to follow their lead.

David D. Perry, Chairman
Professional Studies Committee

Freshman Transition
at
EAST HARTFORD HIGH SCHOOL

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■ **GRADE EIGHT TO NINE ORIENTATION PROGRAM**

East Hartford High School has a freshman orientation program for freshmen before the beginning of the academic year. During the orientation upperclassmen educate incoming students about East Hartford High School. They go over rules, guidelines, activities, and

other programs of the school. Freshmen students also receive their school schedule and a tour of the school. Upperclassmen answer any questions/concerns that the freshmen may have. Through the Freshman Orientation Program, East Hartford High attempts to make the transition from middle school to high school easier for new students and welcome them to the high school.

■ **CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT FOR FRESHMEN**

The curriculum at East Hartford High School provides varied programs for students to enable them to secure that type of education best suited to meet their particular needs, interests, and abilities. It is designed to prepare the student for further higher education or for entry into the world of work.

The selection of sound change to meet individual needs is of foremost importance. Planning takes into account the setting of realistic goals in terms of interests and abilities.

Acquisition of knowledge, however, is but one element of a good education. Proper work habits, honesty, dependability, the ability to get along with others, and the development of positive citizenship traits are also essential components.

■ **TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR INSTRUCTION**

- East Hartford High School has a team approach in 9th and 10th grades.
- We address staffing needs by assigning 4 teachers in each of the following subjects: math, science, English, and social studies.
- On a weekly basis, the teachers of math, science, English, and social studies get together to plan for their teams.
- The numbers of courses assigned to each teacher is about 4 to 5. The classes that the teachers teach are of the same "prep" but, occasionally, some teachers may teach a class that is different.
- Students are promoted by the number of credits which they earn. Promotion is based on the following minimum requirements.
 1. To Grade 9: Promotion from 8th grade or special decision by the Planning and Placement Team.
 2. To Grade 10: 4.25 credits
- Freshmen are not academically graded differently from the rest of the student body. The only difference is that 9th and 10th grade students are housed because they are on teams and 11th and 12th grade students are not housed because they are not on teams.

- Teams are determined on the following basis: The 8th grade teachers determine who is in what team based on the student's math ability. For example, the students who are in the high ability math classes are placed in the IDEA team (students of high ability) and students in the general math classes are placed in the general team, etc. The following is a more indepth description of grade 9 teams.

At East Hartford High School, ninth graders are assigned to interdisciplinary teams working with four teachers (math, science, English, and social studies) for 190 minutes every day. Students complete course work described by the individual disciplines as well as several units involving all disciplines. These units cross the content areas and help students make connections that accurately reflect life experiences. All students can earn honors credits by completing honors extension activities.

The ninth grade teams provide a supportive atmosphere for students while rigorous standards are encouraged and maintained. There is frequent contact between the teachers and students' families; parents are urged to take an active part in their child's education. Teams may mail newsletters home, hold evening gatherings for families, or have parent conference during the day. We encourage parents to call their child's team teachers at any time.

In addition to the core team subjects, students may enroll in a foreign language and will be assigned to other courses during the parts of the day they are not on a team. These other courses may include semesters of wellness education, art, music, technology education, band, etc.

Grade 9 Major Academic Courses

- English 1
- General Science
- World Geography / World History 1
- Math

■ IDEA TEAM (INTERDISCIPLINARY ENRICHMENT ACADEMIC PROGRAM)

Students are selected for this program based on middle school academic performance, teacher recommendation, and test results. This program provides students with a rigorous preparation for the world of higher education. In addition, independent research in topics of student interest is encouraged.

The grade 9 program is available to approximately 50 ninth grade students who have achieved at an advanced level and who meet the criteria of the program. The students will travel as a team for two years for their core honors academic subjects.

Courses that freshmen students take:

- English I
- The Development of Civilization
- Freshman Biology
- Geometry

The major objective of this unique program is to prepare able students for honors and Advanced Placement courses during their junior and senior years. This program maximizes the students' learning experiences and their opportunities for admission to competitive colleges and universities. These students are closely monitored by the team teachers who include the members of the East Hartford High School IDEA Program.

- Selection Criteria — The following criteria are considered for participation in the grade 9 program:
 - I. Successful participation and achievement in the Grade 8 IDEA Program at East Hartford Middle School.
 - II. Scores above the 80th percentile for the district on any seventh or eighth grade nationally normed standardized test.
 - III. Written recommendation from the grade eight academic team, particularly the 8th grade science teacher, and/or the foreign language teacher.
 - IV. Grade 8 CMT scores at or above the state goal on the writing sample and the reading test (DRP).
 - V. Membership in the National Junior Honor Society and/or a grade point average at or above 3.5 in grade eight.
 - VI. An exemplary academic portfolio including samples of work from each of the academic disciplines.

■ ADVISOR / ADVISEE -- MENTOR / MENTEE PROGRAM

East Hartford High School has counselors who assist and advise students on academics. We also have the SAC (Student Assistance Center) that assists students who have social problems. The Freshmen Friends' Program and Freshmen Buddies Program mentioned on the list of activities are student run programs that assist/guide freshmen students.

- 1. Start Retreat** — Students from diverse cultural backgrounds / experiences attend a two day camp retreat. The students participate in various workshops and activities that gear them towards learning about each other's cultures and respect for each other. Students learn to gain respect for each other by working together to overcome obstacles in physical activities. Students discuss racism / prejudice and learn about different perspectives of critical issues.
- 2. Freshmen Barbecue** — This is a barbecue held by East Hartford High for students new to the school. The barbecue enables students to meet other freshmen students as well as some upper-class students who host the event. They also participate in various games such as volleyball, Indian Chief, etc. It is a fun event that helps them become more comfortable at East Hartford High.
- 3. Freshmen Buddies Program** — On the day of the freshmen orientation, upper-class students prepare freshmen for the first day at the high school. They teach students about the rules, guidelines, activities, and programs of East Hartford High. They also give a tour of the school to freshmen students and answer any questions/concerns they may have.
- 4. Freshmen Friends Program** — All the upper-classmen are assigned 2 to 3 freshmen students whom they must contact and with whom they develop a friendship. This program allows freshmen students to become friends with upper-classmen who can help them become better acquainted at East Hartford High. It is an extension of the Freshmen Buddies Program and allows the continued interaction of freshmen students with upper classmen during the school year.
- 5. Dances** — East Hartford High has various dances which allow freshmen students to meet and interact with upper-classmen. They can also get involved in decorating and preparing for the dance.
- 6. PRIDE** — This is a program which congratulates freshmen students who are doing well in their academics every month. On PRIDE night students are rewarded with good food, games, and prizes for their excellence and dedication to their schoolwork.

7. Student Council — Freshmen students can be involved with the Student Council that runs various activities throughout the school year. They run such programs as PRIDE, dances, DECA Food Drive, Blood Drive, Start Retreat, etc. Freshmen students can acquire leadership skills by participating in many of these activities and attending leadership camps that Student Council members attend.

■ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

There is a parent-teacher organization at East Hartford High. The parents are very supportive of the school administration. They are involved with many of the school activities and programs during the school year. Parents are encouraged to participate in the freshmen transition program and school activities/programs. They also do fundraisers and provide money for scholarships that are given to the students of East Hartford High.

■ NINTH GRADE TRANSITION PROGRAM

■ Transition Program

The Ninth Grade Transition Program was designed to reduce the ninth grade retention rate. Targeting at-risk students, this program provides academic tutoring while allowing the student to develop a connection to the high school through a relationship with a full-time staff member. The tutors serve not only as instructional aides, but often provide support to the students on a more personal level. Each tutor is assigned to a ninth grade team and works closely with the team teachers by aiding in classes and participating in team meetings. Tutoring is provided to each student during his/her study hall and after school. In addition to collaborating with staff and faculty, the tutors also maintain weekly contact with student's parents to provide updates on progress and areas of concern. The program also consists of social work interns who provide weekly social skills groups focusing on study skills, time-management, and goal setting.

■ Summer Program

The Summer Transition Program is a three week enrichment program geared towards improving eighth grade students' academic and social skills, in preparation for the transition to high school. The program runs Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Academics address the four core subjects with a concentration on English (reading comprehension and writing skills), and mathematics (fractions, percentages, and measurement). Students also participate in workshops covering a variety of topics including: study and organizational skills; conflict resolution; anger management; guidance orientation; and orientation to the high school.

Eligibility criteria for participation in the Summer Transition Program is based primarily on eighth grade quarterly report cards. Any student who fails two or more academic classes is placed on an "Alert List" that is updated each quarter. The final list of students is compiled following the fourth quarter report cards in conjunction with the East Hartford Middle School teaching staff recommendations. Approximately fifty students participate in the program.

■ After-School Homework Support Program

The After-School Homework Support Program was created to provide a structured environment where students can receive assistance with daily assignments and projects. There are two staff members available Monday through Thursday from 2:15 p.m. until 3:20 p.m. to tutor students. All students in the transition program are encouraged to participate in the After School Program. Incentives and monthly awards are given to students who work well and show effort.

■ CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

The primary mission of East Hartford High School is to sustain and profit by a richly diverse environment that will enable all students to develop those intellectual skills, acquire the essential knowledge, and develop the personal character needed to become responsible citizens capable of adapting and succeeding in a changing world. East Hartford High School provides such opportunities for freshmen students through various programs/activities and academics. The following is East Hartford High School's mission statement.

The primary beliefs of East Hartford High students are the following.

- * every individual is unique and has worth
- * all individuals can learn
- * people learn best in a safe, nurturing, and healthy environment
- * schools help students discover and develop their inherent potential
- * performance is directly related to expectations
- * schools provide a meaningful and diversified education for all students
- * schools foster an understanding and appreciation of cultural and ethnic diversity
- * schools prepare students for the responsibility of citizenship in a democratic society
- * schools can improve
- * learning is a life-long process
- * people learn in different ways and at different rates
- * learning encompasses mistakes as well as successes
- * education is a cooperative effort among students, teachers, parents, and the community at large
- * schools utilize the commercial, industrial, natural, and human resources of the global community
- * students must recognize the necessity for, and develop, moral, and ethical conducts in society
- * individuals and organizations are accountable for their actions
- * education and daily life are interconnected
- * progress requires change

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

We evaluate the effectiveness of our program by student evaluations that are done at the end of the year. The "Ninth Grade Transition Program" packet includes an in-depth description of how many students benefitted from these programs vs. those who did not.

■ OTHER

The following are other special programs offered to all students at East Hartford High School. In a continuing effort to meet the diverse needs of all students, East Hartford High School offers the following special programs.

- Adaptive Physical Education -- Provides alternative activities for students with physical restrictions, limitations, or disabilities.
- Bilingual Education -- It is offered to those students who qualify. An evaluation process and parent permission are required.
- English as a Second Language -- This assists students who do not yet speak and understand English well enough to succeed without such help.
- Gifted and Talented Education -- Recognizes the specific needs of advanced learners and students with exceptional talent in drama, art and music.
- Home Instruction -- This provides in-home tutoring for students unable to attend school due to illness or disability, as documented by a physician.
- Reading Courses -- Strengthen reading and other language arts skills.
- Social Work Services -- Support students with personal, family, or school-related problems.
- The Special Education Resource Program -- Is designed to provide appropriate and beneficial academic and vocational experience for students with identified learning handicaps.
- Speech and Language Services -- They are available to students with significant disabilities in these areas.
- Summer School

** Please note this is just a brief overview of the programs/activities for freshmen students at East Hartford High.

■ GRADE EIGHT TO NINE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Planning with grade eight teachers, students and parents begins in February and ends in June -- prior to high school entrance. Some of these planning activities include:

- February* — guidance counselors go to the middle school to talk with small groups (15) of students to discuss the Program of Studies.
- March* — Freshman Orientation: a half-day program consisting of activities with music, drama, elections and tour of building. Evening parent orientation.
- May* — Two-day Project Adventure at Camp Hazen. The freshmen and their junior mentors are involved.
- August* — Summer orientation: handbooks, schedules, lockers, etc. passed out; Freshman Academy explained.

<i>Freshman Transition</i> at EAST LYME HIGH SCHOOL	
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■ CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT FOR FRESHMEN

All freshmen take the Freshman Academy, first semester. This is an orientation to all elective programs. Freshmen take two five-week mini-courses.

■ TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR FRESHMEN

During Freshman Academy, freshmen academic teachers are available for team meetings and to meet with guidance.

■ ADVISOR/ADVISEE PROGRAMS

Junior mentors sign up to tour with the freshmen in February and August. They write and maintain contact with them during the summer. There is an orientation picnic in August. At-risk students are part of the TARGET program. This is an advisor program linking one student with one teacher. They meet once per week to review progress for that week. The teacher advocates for that student.

■ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent "coffees" are held four times per year for freshmen parents.

■ AT-RISK STUDENTS

Students who do not "graduate" from grade eight and are "socially promoted" are given the option of a summer school program specially designed for them. This program includes special summer reading lists, counseling by a grade nine counselor, academics and field trips. This is taught by special education and guidance departments. Students are organized into small groups of ten. In the fall, they belong to the TARGET program. This program involves one student and one faculty member. They meet once per week to review weekly progress. The teacher troubleshoots for the TARGET student.

■ CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

Mission statement objectives which are manifested in the Freshman Orientation Program include:

- * A connection with success in the real world
- * The Freshman Academy is career oriented
- * The program is consistent with state and national standards

■ EVALUATION

Evaluation is completed by teachers and students.

Freshman Transition
at
GLASTONBURY HIGH SCHOOL

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■ **GRADE EIGHT TO NINE ORIENTATION PROGRAM**

Peer educators (peer helpers) visit the middle school to explain school policies to eighth graders and answer their questions. There is an open house in August during which upper-classmen give incoming

freshmen a tour of the high school building.

“Big Brothers and Sisters” are volunteers from the junior and senior classes who do all they can to make ninth graders feel welcome at Glastonbury High School. Each spring some three hundred juniors and seniors volunteer to spend time in the fall acclimating freshmen to a larger facility, to a different schedule and to new procedures. During the summer they write notes, make telephone calls, and sometimes treat little brothers and sisters to lunch. Many come in during Open House in August to function as guides to entire families. In short, the Big Brothers and Sisters are a group of young people committed to making GHS a nicer place to be. (See Appendix D for a complete outline of the “Big Brothers/Big Sisters” obligations.)

■ **CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT FOR FRESHMEN**

Academic progress of freshmen is monitored more closely by an assistant principal, but there are no specific adjustments in curriculum made for ninth graders.

■ **TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR INSTRUCTION**

A modified team approach is used at Glastonbury in all grades. In the freshman year teaming is used in certain English, social studies, math, science, and health classes. A common planning period (but not an extra period as in middle school) is provided when possible.

■ **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

There is an orientation program for parents in the winter of eighth grade. All department heads are in attendance and give presentations on their offerings in 15-minute sessions. Course selection sheets are handed out and explained.

■ **PROGRAM FOR FRESHMEN AT-RISK STUDENTS**

The Mentor Program is directed at at-risk students (see Appendix C). Middle school counselors identify eighth graders in need of extra support at the high school. High school counselors schedule as many of the identified students as possible into mentored study halls staffed by eight volunteer teachers. No more than seven students are assigned to each study hall. The mentor teachers encourage good study habits, monitor student progress, maintain contact with students' teachers / administrators, request intervention strategies, and help build students' self-esteem.

■ **CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT**

Glastonbury's mission statement calls for the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of every student. The transition program's focus on close monitoring of academic progress and its peer educator program to provide

student-to-student support address two parts of this goal. While freshmen do not take physical education, they are strongly encouraged to become involved in extracurricular activities in order to address the third aspect of the mission statement. (Ninth graders make up one-third of all athletic teams.) Glastonbury also aspires to be a place where people like to be together. The Big Brothers and Sisters program addresses this goal by trying to make freshmen feel respected and welcome.

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

There is no formal evaluation of the program, but dropout and failure rates have remained low.

Freshman Transition
at
NORWICH FREE ACADEMY

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■ **GRADE EIGHT TO NINE ORIENTATION PROGRAM**

Because NFA is a school of choice, recruiting students is a priority. NFA coordinates visitations and shadowing options with the seven sending towns and nine sending schools. The Director of Student Affairs, along with guidance and the ninth grade principal, creates a number of opportunities for eighth graders to learn about NFA.

* High School Night -- NFA participates in five "high school nights" offered by sending towns and communities. These nights are dedicated to families who wish to understand what each high school offers in their area. As an independent high school, we work hard to market NFA by bringing faculty and students to these presentations.

* Eighth Grade Tours -- Eighth graders from sending schools visit NFA with their class to tour the campus and meet faculty and staff. Guides are NFA students. The eighth graders visit the ninth grade house, the athletic facilities, cafeteria, museum and library.

* Shadow Program -- Any incoming eighth grader has an opportunity to shadow a ninth grader for a day. Students and their families arrange visits through the Director of Student Affairs. Students are then assigned to a unit and the eighth grader follows the schedule of a ninth grader.

* Homecoming also provides prospective ninth graders an opportunity to visit during our Open House of Homecoming Weekend. Families are given a tour of the facilities and given the opportunity to ask questions about NFA.

* House Principal Visits and Lectures -- The ninth grade house principal visits each sending school in the spring to answer questions about what it takes to be a successful ninth grader. In addition, he speaks to the parent council early in the year to describe campus-wide expectations and issues concerning ninth graders.

* Summer of Grade Nine

* All ninth grade families are invited to attend parent orientation conferences held in August over a three day period. Appointments are made with ninth grade faculty to discuss the following: (1) students' schedules; (2) tips on getting a good start; (3) traveling the campus. Parents and students are instructed to explore the campus and find the location of their homerooms, classes and bathrooms/water fountains/lockers, etc. Teachers are paid for their participation in this program.

* Ninth graders meet together in a Class Assembly to introduce the faculty and staff important to ninth graders. This short assembly gathers the class for the first time.

* "Town Meetings" are held early in the fall semester to establish unit identity and share some essential information for incoming freshmen. These meetings are held on a monthly basis to reinforce and introduce the following: (1) Campus safety; (2) activities and sports; (3) upcoming events; (4) the NFA experience; (5) issues and answers for ninth graders. The house principal may call meetings of units to address specific issues suggested by the unit teachers.

■ **CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT FOR FRESHMEN**

* Each unit works to coordinate cooperative curriculum efforts and team projects. Ninth grade faculty also work cooperatively across units to create projects between two units.

* Teams are dedicated to reinforcing, encouraging and enhancing excellent study skills, including test taking, note taking, homework completion, organization skills, task commitment and consistency of effort to school work. In addition, skill sets and content are taught to build a foundation for further studies.

■ TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR INSTRUCTION

* The NFA Ninth Grade House was created in the 1989-90 school year. Ninth graders are housed in the Cranston building and broken into smaller units (pods/teams). Students entering ninth grade are placed randomly into five units with approximately 110 students in each unit. Special education resource room support is provided for students with IEPs; students with 504 Plans are followed by a 504 Coordinator.

* Core staff work with world language, physical education, health, fine and performing arts, business and technology staff to round out a comprehensive introduction to a student's high school experience. The units are designed to provide a core of four teachers (English, history, math and science) a common planning time to meet regularly to discuss unit issues, and meet with the two dedicated ninth grade guidance counselors and support services personnel to discuss student academic and social progress.

* Students are placed heterogeneously in English and history; there are regular and advanced sections of Integrated Science (a program that has replaced biology for ninth graders); and Math Applications or Algebra 1A. Some more advanced math students may take geometry with tenth graders outside their unit. To ensure the success of the heterogeneous English and history classes, class size is targeted at a maximum of twenty.

■ ADVISOR/ADVISEE -- MENTOR/MENTEE PROGRAM

* Following NASSP's "Breaking Ranks," NFA has formed a committee to investigate and redefine the advisor / advisee program popular in middle level education. This year is dedicated to researching the concept and recommending a program that best meets the needs of our student population. We have successfully implemented this program in various forms on two occasions.

■ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

* The NFA Parent Council meets regularly throughout the year and addresses both ninth grade house and school wide issues.

* Student Support Team meetings are set up for students having difficulty. Parents are invited along with other personnel in order to develop a plan of support.

■ PROGRAMS FOR FRESHMEN AT-RISK STUDENTS

* Students who are identified by the sending schools as at-risk are monitored pro-actively by the house principal who meets with them within the first week of school.

* Students who fail to meet the minimum requirements of 2.5 credits in ninth grade are placed in a 9R homeroom in the ninth grade house the following year. They do not go to classes with the rest of the ninth graders, but are given a schedule to help make up work so that they may graduate with their class.

* "Roots and Wings," a program designed for tenth graders who, despite academic potential, did not succeed as ninth graders, is being piloted in 1998-99. This is a unit of four core teachers (math, science, history and English) working with students in a continuing program for three academic school years. Students in this program are non-special education, unmotivated students who appear to need some extra push if they are to be successful.

■ CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

* The teams are dedicated to reinforcing, encouraging and enhancing a student's ability to transition from middle school to high school, class to class, teacher to teacher and broader NFA campus; socialization with peers, including civility, kindness and understanding of all students and staff; independence, freedom with responsibility; and implementation of early academic plans in the first quarter.

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

* In the spring, all ninth grade faculty meet for professional development and evaluation of the ninth grade program. Faculty are given tasks to reflect on the past school year, create goals for the following school year and create action plans for future success. The past three years have been devoted to discipline, interdisciplinary studies, parent involvement and communications among faculty and staff.

■ GRADE EIGHT TO NINE OIENTATION PROGRAM

Freshman Transition
at
SACRED HEART OF HAMDEN

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Sacred Heart Academy is a private day school for girls, grades 9 through 12. The school takes a very personal approach for its incoming freshman class. Upon acceptance, each students receives a letter of welcome from members of the Key Club, and all incoming students and parents are invited to an orientation program in February. At this orientation program, the administration and admissions director present an overview of what the families need to know prior to entering Sacred Heart. Packets containing registration forms, schedules, curriculum guides, placement test forms, and other necessary forms and information are distributed at that time. Appropriate staff members explain the contents of these packets in depth. In April, the eighth grade girls are invited to attend a "Big Sister / Little Sister" party with ninth grade students. The incoming students are given an opportunity at this time to purchase used textbooks. The Key Club plans a pizza social for May to introduce new students to upperclassers, faculty, and coaches. At this time, the students also learn about the variety of co-curricular activities in which they can become involved, such as clubs, music, drama, sports, and others. This information is also distributed in printed form.

An evening orientation program is presented in August, just prior to the opening of school. Students and parents attend, and receive the student handbook, calendar, and other information pertinent to the students and their families.

The first day of classes is for freshmen only; there are members of a group called Peer Connection to assist the new students in acclimating themselves with schedules, lockers, purchase of books, and other facets of life at Sacred Heart Academy.

Students who are involved in the Peer Connection group offer advice and support to freshmen students throughout the course of the year.

■ CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENTS FOR FRESHMEN

A freshmen seminar program called L.E.A.R.N. (Lifestyle, Exercise, Attitude, Relationships, Nutrition) is conducted during the first semester. These sessions focus on study skills, time management, interpersonal relationships, and transitioning to young adulthood. The program emphasizes self-respect, values, and an optimistic outlook on life.

Sacred Heart schedules its classes on a six-day cycle for period rotation. L.E.A.R.N. meets once during each scheduling cycle, with students being taken out of study hall. The seminar meets from September through December. It is non-graded, non-credit, but it is required of all students. The seminar has a set curriculum, which includes the following topics:

- * Self-esteem
- * Relaxation / Stress Management
- * Drugs / Alcohol in Perspective
- * Suicide: Recognition of Signs and Prevention
- * Peer Pressure
- * Decision Making
- * Time Management
- * Eating Disorders / Nutrition
- * Coping with Parents / Siblings

These topics are discussed in an order which the teacher decides, based on the needs of the students, input from them, or happenings which may make any given topic more timely or relevant. There is not a set textbook for this course.

Students are required to keep a notebook / folder for handouts and other information, and a booklet is given to the students for their discussion of time management. Counselors may also offer input as to topics and format. Two members of Peer Connection assist in each seminar.

This program has been in existence in one form or another for twelve years. The L.E.A.R.N. format is in its second year.

There is no difference in grading for freshmen.

■ TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR FRESHMEN

There is no formal teaming, although some students are selected to be placed in an honors track. Those students function as a "mini-team," taking all of their classes as a group.

■ ADVISOR/ADVISEE -- MENTOR/MENTEE PROGRAM

All students have available to them an advisor / advisee program for their entire four years at Sacred Heart. A faculty member is assigned to all students to advise them on matters of academics, course selection, and other issues. They meet on a regular basis.

■ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are offered seminars on a regular basis throughout the year. These seminars focus on topics related to coping with their daughters throughout their teenage years. Parent involvement is highly encouraged by the administration and faculty at Sacred Heart Academy.

■ PROGRAM FOR FRESHMEN AT-RISK STUDENTS

Peer tutoring is available for students who are identified as being academically at-risk. Teachers are also available for extra help after school, and work to modify their lessons to help students on a continuing basis.

■ CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

The principal, assistant principals, and admissions director discuss the school's mission statement during the spring orientation. The curriculum is designed to follow every aspect of the school's mission statement.

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

Students, moderators, and administrators evaluate the orientation program on an annual basis each year. This is done by means of a checklist evaluation form presented at the end of class. The form does have space for comments, and students are encouraged to provide feedback.

■ GRADE EIGHT TO NINE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Currently eighth graders are provided four opportunities to learn about their future ninth grade program:

- * Torrington High School faculty presentation in preparation for ninth grade course registration.
- * Individualized parent and student conferences with high school guidance counselors as part of ninth grade registration.
- * Freshman summer tours of Torrington High School.
- * Parents' Night at Torrington High School.

<i>Freshman Transition</i> at TORRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL	
Contact Person:	Dr. Gary Lambour
Phone Number:	860-489-2294

Future plans are to implement a freshmen orientation course that will run from one to two marking periods.

■ CURRICULUM ADJUSTMENT FOR FRESHMEN

While there are standard curriculum adjustments built into the ninth grade curriculum, the ninth grade teacher teams do constantly adjust for individual student learning needs. Through ongoing analysis of student work, teachers strive to provide instruction and assessment that maximizes student learning and measures of that learning.

■ TEAMING ORGANIZATION FOR INSTRUCTION

The Ninth Grade Team Program consists of four teams of four teachers each. Each team offers instruction in English, science, social studies and mathematics. Each teacher on the team has one common team planning period per day in addition to his individual personal planning period. (See Appendices E & F for additional information on Torrington's Team Model.)

■ ADVISOR / ADVISEE -- MENTOR / MENTEE PROGRAM

Currently, we do not offer an advisor/advisee or mentor/mentee program. Students are introduced to their guidance counselors on the first day of school, and are encouraged to meet with them as needed.

■ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are involved in the Ninth Grade Team Program in the following ways:

- * Parents are part of the ninth grade registration as outlined earlier in the first section of this report.
- * Parents are sent a ninth grade parent letter.
- * Parents may request individual or team teacher conferences.
- * Ninth grade parent training sessions are planned for future implementation.
- * Proactive parent phone communication.
- * Team and individual student progress reports to parents.
- * Teams schedule conferences with parents and students to discuss concerns.

■ PROGRAM FOR FRESHMAN AT-RISK STUDENT

While there is no specific program for ninth graders categorized as At-Risk, all ninth graders are eligible for an array of support services available at Torrington High School. Teachers are encouraged to consult with support staff regarding any student concerns.

■ CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

We feel that the overarching goals set forth for the ninth grade are well aligned with Torrington High School's statement of purpose and student and faculty expectations. More specifically, the goals of the Ninth Grade Team are:

- * To raise all students' level of motivation and academic achievement.
- * To promote student success, respect and responsibility while reaching for the future.
- * To create an environment that promotes social growth and development.
- * To create an instructional environment that promotes teacher interaction and supports student learning.
- * To improve student management as related to academic expectations, attendance and behavior.

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

A comprehensive assessment plan was developed to investigate the impact of the teams on Torrington High School. The evaluation had two components, a "summative evaluation," which focused on the effects of the teams on the students (in areas such as social skills, attendance, and discipline) and a "formative evaluation," designed to investigate the effectiveness of the teams themselves. Information collected over the course of the year included teacher and student rating scales, team rating scales, portfolios, and attendance and discipline information.

Overall, the preliminary assessment data suggest that the teams have been extremely successful, not just for students, but for the overall climate of the school. When comparing the ninth grade students who were "on teams" to the previous year's freshmen (who were not), there was a decrease in the number of overall discipline referrals, and fewer in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Loss of credit hearings, which are related to student attendance, decreased significantly, and more students made the honor roll. Teachers were asked to log their telephone calls and conferences, and reported that there was an increase in the amount of communication with parents. While the complete data has not yet been fully analyzed, in the pre/post questionnaires many students reported an improvement in their overall attitudes about school and in the amount of homework being completed. Finally, when 10th grade teachers were asked to rate the behavior of the students who had been on teams, and it was compared to their rating of the students from the year before (who were not on teams), the teamed freshmen demonstrated better organizational skills, better behavior, and were felt to be more academically motivated.

■ OTHER

The following is a brief outline of critical aspects of the Ninth Grade Team Model:

- * Four subjects per team -- English, mathematics, social studies, and science.
- * Four regular education teachers per team.
- * Four teams to serve the incoming ninth grade.
- * Team planning time.
- * Teams offer flexible student schedules and groups within teams.
- * Ninth grade team assigned building level and administrative support.
- * Special education support provided in terms of cooperative / team teaching and consultation by special education teacher.
- * Electives and freshmen orientation class provided outside core team classes.
- * Maintain an average of approximately eighty students per team.

OVERVIEW

by
Jay Hertzog and Lená Morgan
Center for Transition Studies
Augusta State University
State University of West Georgia

Familiar comments heard from those who teach ninth grade students are that the middle school does not prepare students for the academic rigor of the high school and that the middle school approach is too "touchy feely" with not enough content. It was comments like these that peaked our interest in the topic of transition as we sat around one afternoon discussing what happens to students in ninth grade. With one of us having a good bit of high school experience (Lená) and the other having a considerable amount of middle school experience (Jay), we decided to find out what happens to eighth graders from the time they leave the middle school in early June until they enter the halls of the high school in late August or early September.

Initially, we involved 1,000 students in a research project conducted in south Georgia. To our surprise, we found that there was a statistically significant decrease in five out of nine domains on a student self perception instrument as they moved from eighth grade in middle school to ninth grade in high school. In particular, the students in our study decreased in their perceptions of: physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and, most alarmingly, global self-worth. In fact, the only domain in which a significant increase was noticed was in close friendships.

A colleague, Steve Lozeau, from Wisconsin, used our design for his doctoral dissertation and expanded our work to include a longitudinal look at students from the beginning of eighth grade until the end of ninth grade. His findings found that students did not experience any significant change from the beginning of grade eight until the end of grade eight. However, by the conclusion of grade nine, the males in his study had reached an all time low in the self-perception of their physical appearance, while the females were at an all time low in the self-perception of their global self-worth.

To test our hypothesis that the implementation of transition practices between the middle school and high school has a significant effect on the success students find in high school (particularly ninth grade), we enlisted the support of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. From their membership list, we randomly selected 400 high schools across the nation. An analysis of our data indicated that there was no significance between the setting of the school (urban, suburban, small town, or rural) and drop out or retention rates. We also found no significance when looking at whether or not the school implemented block scheduling (caution needs to be exercised here, however, because most of the schools utilizing the block schedule had been using it for one or two years).

Through the use of multiple regression techniques, we found that the dropout rate was significantly lower for schools which implemented nine or more transition practices. Schools which fell into this category had a coordinated plan between the middle school and the high school. In fact, those schools which incorporated activities into their transition program that were deemed above and beyond, i.e., mentoring programs, summer programs, advisor/advisee programs, had significantly lower dropout rates than those schools which did not have programs such as these. Among the common practices discovered from the data were:

- * Ninth grade counselor visits to the middle school for curriculum and registration
- * Parent's Night
- * High school co-curricular program explained to eighth grade students by high school personnel
- * High school curricular and homework expectations explained to eighth grade students by high school personnel
- * Building tour of the high school
- * Ninth grade registration activities directed by high school personnel conducted by eighth grade personnel

Although the above mentioned activities do not constitute a complete transition program, they are, nonetheless, a beginning. Additional activities that we have found include, but are not limited to: professional development for ninth grade faculty to help them understand the difference between a 14 year old freshman and an 18 year old senior; parent coffees with the administrator(s) from the high school; academic fairs; co-curricular fairs; and ninth grade only lunches. From our work with schools around the country, we have found that successful transition programs (those which produce the lowest number of students retained in grade and dropout rates) are those which involve all of the stakeholders in the program design and implementation. This includes eighth and ninth grade parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and students. In addition, these programs begin in the fall of the eighth grade year and do not culminate at least until the end of the ninth grade year. By implementing this approach, a sense of ownership is instilled in all of the players and students conclude their ninth grade year with a map of their future. Above all, the key to successful transition is that transition is a process, not an event.

APPENDIX A

Dear CAS Member Principal:

The Professional Studies Committee needs your help planning their 1998-99 monograph. The topic we have selected is Freshman Transition Programs. We are looking for creative, pro-active freshman (transition from grade 8 to grade 9) programs designed to ensure a more successful 9th-grade year. Please take a few minutes to answer the following related questions. These questions represent "rough" ideas and potential criteria by the committee. The answers will help the Professional Studies Committee to identify those programs appropriate for the publication. The answers to these questions require more than a one-word answer. Please use the separate form provided and give us as much information as you can.

1. Do you have a freshman "orientation" program?
2. If yes, briefly describe the program. Please consider the following ideas when writing your response.
 - Are there activities in grade 8 to help prepare students for the transition?
 - Are grade 9 activities planned throughout the year as well as at the beginning?
 - Do you have a team approach? If so, how do you address staffing needs? E.g. planning time, numbers of courses assigned to a teacher, availability of electives, etc. How are teams determined?
 - Is there parental involvement at any level in this process?
 - Are the freshmen academically graded differently from the rest of the student body? Are they housed differently?
 - If you don't team, are there other organizational structures or curriculum changes you have put in place to help students in grade 9 be successful?
 - If you have large numbers of grade 9 students not promoted to grade 10, do you have a program to address this?
 - Do you have a mentor/mentee or advisor/advisee program? If so, how does it work?
 - Do you evaluate the effectiveness of your program? If so, how?

Please return your completed responses to Tom Galvin at the CAS office by October 20. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely yours,

David D. Perry, Chair
CAS Professional Studies Committee
Principal, North Branford High School

APPENDIX B

RESPONDING SCHOOLS

Although six Connecticut high schools are profiled in this monograph, many more schools responded with interesting programs. These programs were not as complete as the six discussed here, yet they all had different, individual components which are worthy of note and possible investigation. The responding schools are:

- Granby Memorial High School
- New Fairfield High School
- Hamden High School
- Windsor High School
- Greenwich High School
- Windsor Locks High School
- E.O. Smith High School, Storrs
- Putnam High School
- Pomperaug High School, Southbury
- Stratford High School
- Berlin High School
- Thomaston High School
- Wamogo Reg. High School, Litchfield
- Seymour High School
- Montville High School
- Fairfield High School
- Griswold High School
- Norwich Free Academy
- Portland High School
- Crosby High School, Waterbury
- Hartford Public High School
- Hyde Leadership School, Hamden
- Waterford High School
- East Lyme High School
- Newington High School
- Daniel Hand High School, Madison
- Coginchaug Reg. High School, Durham
- Cromwell High School
- Foran High School, Milford
- Terryville High School
- Northwest Catholic High School, West Hartford
- Westbrook High School
- West Haven High School
- Wolcott High School
- Rockville High School, Vernon
- Litchfield High School
- Wilton High School
- Bolton High School
- Bloomfield High School
- Enfield High School
- Enrico Fermi High School, Enfield
- The Gilbert School, Winsted
- Stonington High School
- Cheshire High School
- W.F. Kaynor RVT School, Waterbury
- East Haven High School
- Morgan High School, Clinton

THE MENTOR PROGRAM

The Mentor Program at Glastonbury High School has been in place since 1987 and has continued to meet the needs of young people identified as at-risk by the counseling staff at Gideon Welles Middle School. The criteria for selection includes:

- a. Poor or sporadic attendance
- b. Low self-esteem
- c. Academic performance below potential
- d. Immaturity as reflected in behavior problems
- e. Diminished ability that leads to low motivation and low grades
- f. Weak family support structures

Operational Procedures:

In February, guidance counselors from the middle school submit names of students who can benefit from additional support services at the high school. Counselors at the high school schedule as many students as possible into mentored study halls staffed by eight volunteer teachers. We try to keep the numbers low -- seven maximum.

Mentor teachers' study hall responsibilities include:

- a. Encouraging good study habits
- b. Monitoring student progress, academic and behavioral
- c. Maintaining contact with students' teachers / administrator
- d. Requesting intervention strategies involving guidance counselors and other school personnel
- e. Building the student's sense of self-esteem.

In addition, teachers meet during the year to share ideas, to hear speakers on relevant issues, or to voice concerns and problems.

Major Advantages:

- a. Mentors have access to information that allows for a personal and immediate approach to student problems (cut slips, progress reports, schedules, homework assignments).
- b. Mentors have an overall view of student performance and a direct link to administration, which result in early intervention.
- c. Students realize the benefits of a support system provided by a team of staff members (mentor teachers, guidance counselor, teachers, psychologists).
- d. Students establish a bond with a trusted adult that allows them to seek help with problems and concerns that impede the education process.

APPENDIX D

BIG BROTHER / SISTER OBLIGATIONS

Glastonbury High School

1. Plan to invest approximately 10 hours in this project. Do not sign on if you are going to be away from most of the summer or if you cannot be here for Open House. If you think you will be nominated for National Honor Society, please keep track of what you do and submit to me. Committee members will call and I will need specifics on your contributions.

2. Obligations will run the gamut on how comfortable your little brother or sister is at the high school.

Some possibilities:

- a. Clarify distorted views on school rules and policies -- attendance especially. Ninth graders who do not understand the attendance policy may be afraid to stay home when ill.
- b. Schedule -- M/T Week explanation. Arrange to have lunch together the first few confusing days.
- c. Encourage participation in some school activity -- not necessarily your own. This will be a good ice-breaker -- a chance for students to get to know others.
- d. Take special care with students new to the system. New students really have a greater problem adjusting -- they do not have buddies from Gideon Welles with whom to share frustration. Give them extra time -- check-in with phone calls -- watch to make sure of adjustments during lunch. Please sign up on a separate sheet if you would like the added responsibility of a student new to the system.
- e. I also need students willing to work with special children -- freshmen coming in challenged emotionally or physically. Special sign up sheet available.
- f. If you have found an adult you trust here and have had positive experiences as a result, share that with your charges. Encourage your little brothers and sisters to find someone in authority to lean on when needed.
- g. Once you have received your letter with students' names, addresses and phone numbers, make contact. Call or drop a postcard. Let your charge know you are there to answer questions, to help. If you are going to be away, leave a note a parent can drop in the mail -- it need not be long but a message to say I am away, will make contact after a certain date. I will try to have assignments out before the end of July.
- h. If some unforeseen circumstance makes you unavailable for Open House in August, make an effort to walk students through the school, to meet their parents and to answer their questions. Try to find someone you know who has volunteered for the program who will be here to "adopt" your students.
- I. In other years students have come to decorate some homerooms the day before school began -- they put balloons, crepe paper inside -- wrote notes on the board. It was neat -- would love that to happen again.

If you do not have time to fulfill these obligations, please take your name off the list now. I will appreciate your recognizing this now to getting a call in the summer after I have made an assignment.

CAUTION: THE EXTREMES

- a. Do not be disappointed if you have students who do not appear to need you. Some have older brothers and sisters (real ones) here and they know the system pretty well.
- b. Do not try to solve the problems for students experiencing real difficulty making the transition here. Refer him/her to me or a guidance counselor.

OVERVIEW OF NINTH GRADE TEAM MODEL

Torrington High School

The following section will provide an overview of the ninth grade team model as proposed for implementation at Torrington High School.

A. Overarching Goals

1. To raise all students' level of motivation and academic achievement.
2. To promote student success, respect and responsibility while reaching for the future.
3. To create an environment that promotes social growth and development.
4. To create an instructional environment that promotes teacher interaction and supports student learning.
5. To improve student management as related to academic expectations, attendance and behavior.

B. Enabling Strategies

1. Use of course wide performance learning and assessment.
2. Use of cooperative learning.
3. Use of inter and intra disciplinary instruction.
4. Increased exposure for all students to a high level curriculum.
5. Provision is made for enhance monitoring of student performance and unified student interventions.

C. Critical Aspects of Ninth Grade Team Model

1. Four subjects per team -- English, mathematics, social studies, and science.
2. Four regular education teachers per team.
3. Four teams to serve the incoming ninth grade.
4. Team planning time.
5. Course levels limited in number, i.e., no more than two to three levels of any subject.
6. Teams offer flexible student schedules and groups within teams.
7. Ninth grade team assigned building level and administrative support.
8. Special education support provided in terms of cooperative/team teaching and consultation by special education teacher.
9. Electives and freshmen orientation class provided outside core team classes.
10. Maintain an average of approximately eighty students per team.

NINTH GRADE TEAM TEACHER OBJECTIVES
Torrington High School

Each team will be asked to work to achieve the following:

1. Develop and implement at least two interdisciplinary units.
2. Develop a protocol for the use of weekly team planning times.
3. Employ a protocol for the analysis of student work as part of team planning.
4. Develop and implement a student management plan.
5. Develop and implement performance based instruction and assessment.
6. Assist in the dissemination of Ninth Grade Team information to peers, parents, and the students.
7. Assist in the training of teachers new to the Ninth Grade Team.
8. Assist in the collection of student data for team evaluation.

NOTES

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