

# BEST PRACTICES FOR GRADE 9 TRANSITIONS

November 2017



In the following report, Hanover Research describes research-based strategies to support students before, during, and after they transition to Grade 9. This report includes a special focus on supporting English Learners as they begin their high school career.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Executive Summary and Key Findings .....</b>             | <b>3</b>  |
| INTRODUCTION .....  | 3         |
| KEY FINDINGS.....   | 3         |
| <b>Section I: Importance of Grade 9 Success .....</b>       | <b>5</b>  |
| CAUSES OF GRADE 9 FAILURE .....                             | 5         |
| MULTI-GRADE SUPPORT SYSTEMS.....                            | 7         |
| <b>Section II: Pre-Entry Strategies .....</b>               | <b>11</b> |
| MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIES .....                              | 11        |
| Early Identification and Data Transfer.....                 | 11        |
| Orientation.....  | 12        |
| Family Outreach.....  | 13        |
| SUMMER PROGRAMS.....  | 15        |
| <b>Section III: Strategies for Grade 9 and Beyond .....</b> | <b>18</b> |
| GRADE 9 ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES .....                     | 18        |
| Advisory Programs.....                                      | 18        |
| Grade 9 Academies and Teacher Teams .....                   | 19        |
| GRADE 9 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES .....                      | 21        |
| Catch-Up Courses .....                                      | 21        |
| Professional Development.....                               | 24        |
| BEYOND GRADE 9 .....  | 25        |
| Career Exploration .....                                    | 25        |
| Credit Recovery.....  | 26        |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

The following report draws from empirical research and expert literature to identify strategies to support incoming Grade 9 students as they make the transition from middle school to high school. Throughout the report, Hanover identifies special considerations for supporting the academic and social needs of English Learners (ELs) during the Grade 9 transition. The report comprises three sections:

- **Section I** presents an overview of the causes of Grade 9 failure and comprehensive approaches to supporting students through the Grade 9 transition.
- **Section II** describes recommended transition support activities during the middle school years and summer before Grade 9 entry.
- **Section III** describes organizational and instructional strategies that high schools employ to ensure that Grade 9 students can meet the rigors of the high school curriculum.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Districts should consider implementing a multi-grade system of transition supports for incoming and current Grade 9 students.** As students transition from middle school to high school, they find themselves in environments that are larger and less nurturing, with more demanding courses. Therefore, districts should implement a comprehensive set of universal and targeted intervention programs that extend from Grade 8 (or earlier), through Grade 9, and beyond. Such a proactive approach to ensuring successful Grade 9 transitions should include an articulated commitment to support ELs and targeted supports for ELs. EL-specific supports may be delivered through separate programs or skilled in-classroom differentiation, depending on the needs and size of the EL population.
- **Teachers at the middle and high school levels should work together to inform incoming Grade 9 students and their families about the academic and social expectations of high school.** Orientation activities for middle school students may include in-class discussions about what to expect in high school, visits to the high school building, and structured interactions with current high school students. Districts should also help middle and high school leaders implement a multi-modal communication strategy to ensure that families of incoming Grade 9 students understand the importance of Grade 9 and how they can support good decision-making in high school. Finally, districts should translate materials into EL home languages and work to ensure that EL families feel welcome when they visit both middle and high schools.
- **School districts should also consider creating a summer bridge program to support student engagement and academic skills acquisition during the months leading into**

**high school.** Such bridge programs should focus on foundational academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as the development of good learning habits. An effective summer bridge program that serves ELs should include targeted supports, such as direct instruction in academic vocabulary relevant to the Grade 9 curriculum.

- **At the high school level, school leaders should consider organizing Grade 9 students and staff into advisories, teacher teams, or even a Grade 9 academy.** During small-group advisories, teachers can lead students in discussions of academic and social issues, goal-setting, and study skills. ELs may benefit from EL-specific advisories or seminars that focus on these topics. Grouping core content teachers into Grade 9 teaching teams (with approximately 120 students per team), allows teachers to develop stronger relationships with students and collaborate to provide targeted interventions to struggling students. Some schools create small learning communities called Grade 9 “academies” that provide personalized and supportive instruction tailored to the needs of Grade 9 students.
- **Furthermore, high schools should consider providing “catch up” courses for struggling Grade 9 students.** For example, a transitional algebra course that focuses on conceptual mathematics skills may help students succeed in algebra. An ELA catch-up course should focus on interdisciplinary reading, writing, and communication skills as well as general study skills. Districts may consider offering specialized classes for Grade 9 ELs that provide extended instructional time and targeted language support for core content areas.
- **Districts should ensure that all high school students engage in career exploration and have opportunities for credit recovery.** Career exploration can range from whole-school initiatives (e.g., career academies) to individual lessons incorporated within a core content or advisory course. ELs, in particular, can benefit from the motivation and English practice opportunities offered through career exploration.
  - Districts should also provide credit recovery options to students who have failed core courses, either during the school year, during the summer, or online. However, districts should also carefully review the extent to which available credit recovery options—particularly online programs—present language barriers to ELs.

## SECTION I: IMPORTANCE OF GRADE 9 SUCCESS

Researchers have identified a troubling pattern in Grade 9 achievement, often referred to as the Grade 9 “bulge.” The Grade 9 “bulge” refers to the notable percentage increase in students who are enrolled in Grade 9 compared to Grade 8, often due to high rates of Grade 9 retention.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, national data show an enrollment decrease from Grade 9 to 10, which suggests that many students drop out of high school altogether in or after Grade 9.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Grade 9 is a particularly important period for adolescents, as Grade 9 course failure is highly predictive of whether a student will graduate from high school.<sup>3</sup>

This section describes the causes of academic failure in Grade 9, and common district-wide and school-wide approaches to supporting students as they begin their high school career.

### CAUSES OF GRADE 9 FAILURE

**As students enter high school, they experience more challenging academics and less social-emotional support.** Compared to middle school, high school is often a more isolating environment with more challenging academic standards, as described below in Figure 1.1. As a result, Grade 9 is typically one of the most challenging years in a student’s educational career.

**Figure 1.1: Academic and Social Challenges of the Grade 9 Transition**

| ACADEMIC CHALLENGES  | SOCIAL CHALLENGES   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students who are accustomed to smaller, more nurturing learning environments find themselves in larger schools, with <b>larger classes</b>, and more teachers who do not have the time to learn every student’s name.</li> <li>▪ Courses in high school are often more demanding than in middle school, and <b>students assume greater responsibility for learning content</b> and completing assignments on time.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compared to elementary and middle schools, high schools are <b>less personalized environments</b>; they typically have larger and more diverse student bodies and students may not have opportunities to build strong relationships with teaching staff.</li> <li>▪ Even the process of <b>changing classes</b> for different subjects can feel alien to an incoming Grade 9 student.</li> <li>▪ High school is a time when students become more independent of their parents, experience <b>greater peer pressure, and, potentially, bullying</b>.</li> </ul> |

Source: Breakthrough Collaborative, Education Partnerships, Inc.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Campioni, A. “Dropouts and the 9th Grade Bulge.” University of California-Los Angeles.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/9thgrade.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “The First Year of High School: A Quick Stats Fact Sheet.” National High School Center, March 2007. p. 2.

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501080.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Challenges of the Ninth Grade Transition.” Breakthrough Collaborative, February 2010. p. 1.

<https://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/sites/default/files/Feb%202011%20Research%20Brief-9th%20grade%20transition.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [1] Ibid., p. 2.

[2] Williamston, R. “Transition from Middle School to High School.” Education Partnerships, Inc., April 2010.

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538706.pdf>, p. 1.

In addition, Grade 9 is a time when students undergo rapid personal and social-emotional development. In a 2011 report for the U.S. Department of Education, researchers asked teachers at six high schools to explain the challenges that their Grade 9 students face. The teachers reported challenges ranging from managing challenging coursework to establishment of personal identity:<sup>5</sup>

- **Development of self-regulation and self-management capacities.** Teenagers learn how to set goals, pursue those goals, and judge consequences. During this period, students transition from the social status of a child (who requires adult supervision) to that of an adult (who is responsible for his or her own behavior). However, teachers noted that new high school students are slow to realize that “everything they are doing in ninth grade counts.”
- **Development of a personal identity.** Adolescents transition from defining themselves as part of a family (as sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters) to defining themselves in relation to their peers. In many districts, students transition from being with the same students for Grades K-8 to larger settings with peers who attended other elementary and middle schools.
- **Development of academic behaviors and intellectual capacity.** In high school, students move from simple concrete reasoning to developing more capacity for abstract and analytical thought. Compared to middle school, coursework in high school is more disciplinary and requires students to learn and apply their knowledge in a variety of ways.

In addition to academic and social challenges, **ELs often struggle in Grade 9 due to insufficient support from their schools.** Many ELs enter high school with a record of poor academic performance in middle school. Researchers and school leaders note that “many districts and schools have little or no experience with [ELs], and they may not have the infrastructure, programs, resources, or staffing in place to serve them adequately.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, the EL population in a single school or district may have diverse educational backgrounds and language abilities, as shown in Figure 1.2, on the following page. Notably, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) and long-term English learners (LTELs) may require intensive support during the middle-to-high school transition.<sup>7</sup>

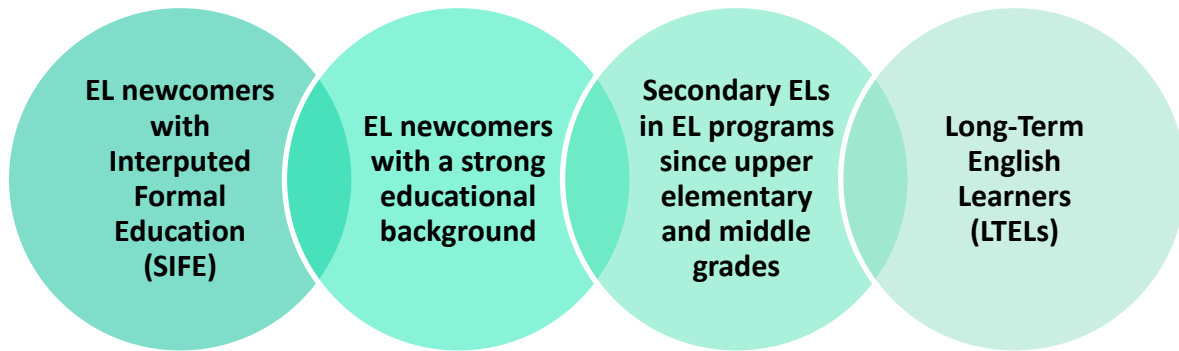
---

<sup>5</sup> Bulleted content adapted from: Warren, C. et. al. “Final Report on the Study of Promising Ninth Grade Transition Strategies: A Study of Six High Schools.” U.S. Department of Education, March 2011. pp. 14–16. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/ninthgradecounts/ninthgradestudy2011.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> “Ninth Grade Counts: Strengthening the Transition into High School for English Language Learners.” U.S. Department of Education, November 14, 2012. p. 25. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/ninthgradecounts/ellwebinarslides.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Lara, J. and S. Harford. “Middle-to-High School Transition for English Language Learners: Promising School-Based Practices.” JLara Educational Consulting, 2010. p. 7. <https://secure.edweek.org/media/final-middletohighschool.pdf>

**Figure 1.2: EL Population Categories**



Source: JLara Educational Associates<sup>8</sup>

## MULTI-GRADE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

**Grade 9 transition supports should begin in middle school and extend through the high school grades to graduation.** While empirical research to support specific Grade 9 transition strategies is often limited, experts agree on the need to implement a comprehensive set of universal and targeted intervention programs that extend from Grade 8 (or earlier), through Grade 9, and beyond.<sup>9</sup> The 2011 U.S. Department of Education report, described above, provides one of the most detailed and comprehensive frameworks for this type of multi-grade support system. Based on the findings of extensive research in six high schools, the report’s authors present a framework “for building a coherent set of supports to facilitate students’ transition into high school.”<sup>10</sup> As shown in Figure 1.3, on the following page, the framework outlines supports for students beginning in middle school and describes strategies to improve the Grade 9 experience and provide ongoing support for at-risk students as they exit Grade 9. Sections II and III of this report discuss these strategies in detail.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see: [1] “Challenges of the Ninth Grade Transition,” Op. cit., pp. 4–5.

[2] Williamston, Op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 10.

**Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework for Supporting the Transition into High School**

| Advance or Early Preparation for HS Entry   | Improve Grade 9 for All Students   | Provide More Supports for High-Need Students   |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Data provided to HS for rising Grade 9 students</li> <li>•Orientation for students about HS expectations</li> <li>•Identification of rising Grade 9 students at risk of not graduating</li> <li>•Targeted summer workshops for at-risk entering Grade 9 students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Create Grade 9 Academies or SLCs</li> <li>•Provide separate Grade 9 space</li> <li>•Dedicated Grade 9 teacher teams</li> <li>•Grade 9 advisory or guidance supports</li> <li>•Strengthen instruction in core academic areas</li> <li>•Provide explicit literacy instruction for Grade 9 to strengthen higher level thinking skills</li> <li>•Introduce students to high school study skills</li> <li>•Use data to monitor Grade 9 student progress and behavior for early signs of failure, and to target additional academic support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small group instruction for targeted Grade 9 students</li> <li>•In-school and/or community social/psychological supports for targeted Grade 9 students</li> <li>•Tutorial assistance for struggling Grade 9 students</li> <li>•Afterschool and weekend classes for Grade 9 students</li> <li>•Credit recovery options to make up/complete courses</li> </ul> |

Source: U.S. Department of Education<sup>11</sup>

**Schools should take a proactive approach to supporting ELs during the Grade 9 transition.**

In a 2012 report, the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) compares “proactive” approaches to transition support to “passive” and “reactive” approaches that provide limited targeted support to ELs. Many schools exhibit reactive approaches to EL transition support, meaning they provide standard interventions to ELs and engage in some data review and collaboration, but do not provide intensive and coordinated supports to ensure that all ELs succeed. Proactive approaches to transition support, meanwhile, include clear articulation of the need to support ELs, use of data to identify struggling students and provide individualized support, train teachers on how to support ELs, and engage in consistent outreach to EL families.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1.4 on the following page lists the characteristics of schools with a proactive approach to supporting their Grade 9 ELs.

<sup>11</sup> Figure content adapted from: Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Abbott, S. and M. Hastings. “Ninth Grade Counts: Strengthening the Transition into High School for English Language Learners.” Great Schools Partnerships, 2012. p. 5.  
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slc/ninthgradecounts/ninthgradecountsellguide.pdf>



**Figure 1.4: Characteristics of Schools with a Proactive Approach to Supporting Grade 9 ELs**

- ✓ The vision and mission explicitly celebrate the school's multicultural and multilingual student body.
- ✓ The school has a research-based EL program that is fully funded by the district and outside sources, provides a diverse array of support services, and has well-articulated EL policies, placement procedures, and classification criteria.
- ✓ The school recognizes the distinct social, emotional, and academic needs of long-term and newcomer ELs, and all teachers and support specialists employ evidence-based strategies to accelerate language and learning acquisition.
- ✓ The school has robust early warning systems to collect, analyze, and monitor data on ELs prior to and after entering grade 9.
- ✓ The district offers specialized EL training to all staff, and professional learning communities help teachers embed EL-specific support strategies in every course.
- ✓ Multiday orientation and summer-bridge programs are provided to all incoming long-term and newcomer ELs to address academic preparation, language development, acculturation, and confidence building.
- ✓ The school provides common planning time every week for EL teachers, support specialists, and mainstream teachers to discuss support strategies for ninth-grade ELs.
- ✓ Long-term and newcomer ELs are given the same challenging coursework as English-speaking students, and bilingual texts and intensive academic-language support accelerate readiness for grade 10.
- ✓ The school's research-based intervention system includes in-school, after-school, one-on-one, and classroom embedded support strategies continually monitored to determine effectiveness.
- ✓ A variety of programs for grade 9 ELs and their families help them plan and prepare for college and careers, including information nights, college visits, and a postsecondary resource center.
- ✓ All school staff intentionally and repeatedly emphasize that postsecondary success is attainable for every EL, and ELs and their families are regularly surveyed to ensure that the messages are being heard.
- ✓ The school works collaboratively with social-service and mental-health organizations to integrate school-based and community-based support for long-term and newcomer ELs and their families.

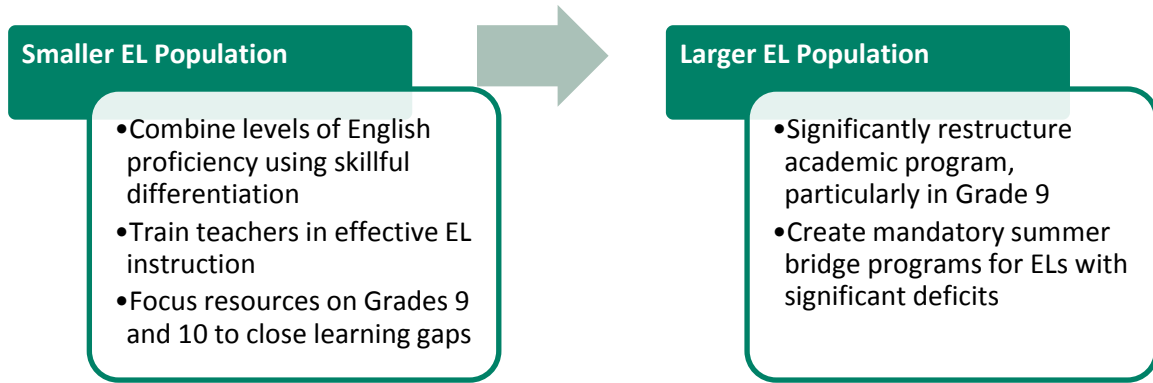
Source: Great Schools Partnership<sup>13</sup>

**Schools should design Grade 9 transition supports for ELs according to the size and needs of the EL population.** Schools with small EL populations and limited staff resources may be able to provide sufficient transition support to EL and other student groups through differentiation and supplemental teacher training, as shown in Figure 1.5. Larger schools with significant minority populations often undertake school-wide restructuring efforts, such as the creation of Grade 9 academies (see Section III).

---

<sup>13</sup> Figure content taken verbatim, with minor edits, from: Ibid.

**Figure 1.5: Transition Supports for ELs**



Source: U.S. Department of Education<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Figure content taken verbatim from: “Ninth Grade Counts: Strengthening the Transition into High School for English Language Learners,” Op. cit., pp. 36–37.

## SECTION II: PRE-ENTRY STRATEGIES

The pre-entry strategies described in this section are designed to prepare students for the rigors of high school and alert teachers to the unique needs of incoming Grade 9 students.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIES

At the middle school level, districts should implement a series of universal programs as well as targeted supports for at-risk students. For universal supports, districts should use student data to identify students at risk of Grade 9 failure and provide students and their families with multiple opportunities to learn about the expectations of high school and the critical importance of Grade 9. In addition, experts recommend that districts invest in pre-entry orientation programs during the summer to provide extra support to students at risk of Grade 9 failure.<sup>15</sup>

### EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND DATA TRANSFER

**Research supports the use of middle school academic and behavior data to identify students at risk of high school failure.** While few researchers have attempted to identify valid early indicators of Grade 9 failure specifically, multiple studies support the use of middle school achievement and attendance data to identify students at risk of dropping out in high school. The most predictive indicators of high school success fall within the categories of attendance, behavior, and course performance – often referred to as the “ABC” indicators.<sup>16</sup> For instance, research conducted in The School District of Philadelphia, and published in the journal *Educational Psychologist*, found that Grade 6 students with attendance below 80 percent, course failures in ELA or math, and/or who received out-of-school suspension had a 69 percent chance of dropping out before high school graduation.<sup>17</sup> In Grade 8, poor attendance and ELA or mathematics course failure are associated with at least a 75 percent chance that a student will drop out before high school graduation.<sup>18</sup>

|  |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>THE ABC INDICATORS</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Attendance</b><br/>Attendance below 80 percent</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Behavior</b><br/>Suspensions and expulsions</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Courses</b><br/>Failing one or more core academic courses</p> |
|--|

**Middle schools should transfer data about incoming Grade 9 students to high schools as early as possible.** High school counseling and teaching staff should receive incoming student data before the end of the prior school year so that teachers can use the data during their

<sup>15</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Bowers, A., R. Sprott, and S. Taff. “Do We Know Who Will Drop Out? A Review of the Predictors of Dropping Out of High School: Precision, Sensitivity, and Specificity.” *The High School Journal*, 96:2, 2013. p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Balfanz, R., L. Herzog, and D. Mac Iver. “Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions.” *Educational Psychologist*, 42:4, 2007. pp. 227-229. [http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/preventing\\_student\\_disengagement.pdf](http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/preventing_student_disengagement.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Neild, R. “Using Early Warning Indicators to Identify Students at Risk of Dropping Out.” Johns Hopkins University. [https://www.ets.org/c/15481/ppt/neild\\_sessionIV.ppt](https://www.ets.org/c/15481/ppt/neild_sessionIV.ppt)

summer planning. In addition, the Grade 9 teachers should have the opportunity to speak regularly with Grade 8 teachers to learn about at-risk students, their needs, and the success of interventions and supports provided to the student to date.<sup>19</sup>

**Middle school teachers should collect and share data on ELs' language performance and progress toward grade-level goals.** For example, EL teachers at Miami Coral Park Senior High School in Florida maintain binders for all ELs with color-coded information detailing their mastery of specific language skills and areas in which they need additional support. Grade 9 teachers at the school use this information during their collaboration time to adjust instruction for these students.<sup>20</sup> Middle school teachers and EL specialists could prepare similar inventories of student data to share with teachers at the high school level.

## ORIENTATION

**Districts should provide repeated and consistent information to students about the academic and social expectations of high school.**<sup>21</sup> To do so, districts employ a wide array of orientation activities, ranging from in-class discussions about the transition to high school to pairing Grade 8 students with peer or adult mentors at the high school level.<sup>22</sup> For example, Countdown to High School, a Grade 9 transition program for students in Boston Public Schools, includes teacher-led discussions with students about the following topics:<sup>23</sup>

- Selecting the right high school
- Transportation
- Attendance
- Change in academic expectations
- Lack of structure around after-school time
- Reduced communication with families

In addition to these discussions, the Countdown to High School program includes activities that encourage students to engage in self-reflection. In their final term of Grade 8, students create a “personalized portfolio of work that incorporates aspects of reading, writing, and discussion” around three topics: “who I was,” “who I am,” and “who I will be.”<sup>24</sup> The six-week

---

<sup>19</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Abbott and Hastings, Op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see: McCallumore, K. and E. Sparapani. “The Importance of the Ninth Grade on High School Graduation Rates and Student Success in High School.” *Education*, 130:3, Spring 2010. p. 450. Accessed via EBSCOhost

<sup>22</sup> “Oregon Gear Up Toolkit: The Transition to High School.” Oregon State University, 2013. p. 6.

<http://oregongearup.org/sites/oregongearup.org/files/toolkits/transitiontohighschooltoolkit.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Bulleted content adapted from: “Scope and Sequence.” Countdown to High School, 2010. p. 1.

<https://cd2hs.wikispaces.com/file/detail/Scope%20and%20sequence.doc>

<sup>24</sup> “8th Grade Pathway Project.” Countdown to High School, 2010. p. 3.

<https://cd2hs.wikispaces.com/file/detail/8th%20grade%20pathway%20project.doc>

project, called the “Pathway Project,” includes a “life map” of major events in the student’s life, a letter to self, a character self-sketch, and a series of reflective writing activities.<sup>25</sup>

Orientation programs may also include **opportunities for incoming students to meet older students and other rising Grade 9 students from other schools**. For many students, the transition to high school involves the disruption of existing friendship networks and the creation of new peer relationships. Thus, it is important not only to help students develop new social networks, but also to help them develop positive relationships with older students. Structured interactions between Grade 8 and Grade 9 students may include:<sup>26</sup>

- Meetings
- Letter-writing
- Picnics with older students

One study of a structured interaction program, published in 1999, found that offering incoming Grade 9 students the opportunity to meet their peers had positive effects for socialization, self-esteem, achievement, and attendance in Grade 9.<sup>27</sup>

## FAMILY OUTREACH

Experts emphasize the need to **educate students and families about the importance of the Grade 9 transition**.<sup>28</sup> While schools usually provide information about the middle-to-high school transition in student meetings with counselors, during school visits and orientations, it is equally important to communicate the plan to parents. By including parents in the transition process, districts can help ease student and parent anxiety about the transition and assist parents in reinforcing good decisions on the part of students. Figure 2.1, on the following page, presents recommended strategies for communicating with parents and students about the transition to high school.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Mizelle, N. and J. Irwin. “Transition from Middle School into High School.” National Middle School Association, 2005. p. 4.  
<http://www.temescalassociates.com/documents/resources/transition/transitionfrommiddleschoolintohighschool.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Cognato, C. “The effects of transition activities on adolescent self-perception and academic achievement during the progression from eighth to ninth grade.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Middle School Association, October 1999. As described in: Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Christie, K. and K. Zinth. “Ensuring Successful Student Transitions from the Middle Grades to High School.” Adolescent Literacy. <http://www.adlit.org/article/32116/>

**Figure 2.1: Communication Strategies for Parents and Students**

- Invite parents to participate in a conference with their child and the high school counselor about course options and schedules.
- Make sure parents and students understand how academic success is defined in high school and what they will need to know and can do.
- Provide lessons on how and who to approach when questions and concerns arise in the new school.
- Ask parents to visit the high school with their children in the spring and again in the fall.
- Invite parents to spend an entire day at the high school to help them understand what their child's life will be like.
- Involve parents in planning transition activities that will support students and parents during the transition. Include them on the transition team.
- Connect middle school parents with parents of current high school students.

Source: Education Partnerships, Inc.<sup>29</sup>

**Schools should translate materials and leverage community leaders to ensure that parents of ELs know how to support their student(s) during the Grade 9 transition.** In addition to language barriers, EL families may be unfamiliar with how the U.S. school system works.<sup>30</sup> Schools can support families by translating information into students' home languages and engaging bilingual staff members to help with outreach. In addition, *Colorín Colorado's Guide for Engaging ELL Families* suggests that schools could train staff to communicate with EL families in simplified English by phone. In addition, the guide recommends that districts set aside time during the school day for communication and ask parents which mode of communication they prefer (e.g., phone, email, text message). Community leaders and parent volunteers may be able to help with outreach as well.<sup>31</sup>

As some ELs and their families may feel intimidated by the school environment, middle and high school leaders should ensure that ELs feel welcome at their new school.<sup>32</sup> By creating a welcoming and vibrant atmosphere, schools let families know "that the school is an integral part of the community and that they are valued members of that community."<sup>33</sup> In particular, *Colorín Colorado* says that ELs and students from diverse backgrounds should "see themselves" throughout the school.<sup>34</sup> Figure 2.2 describes strategies that schools can use to increase the visibility of diverse families throughout the school.

<sup>29</sup> Figure content taken verbatim from: *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Breiseth, L. "A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders." *Colorín Colorado*, August 2011. p. 17. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/112/Engaging-ELL-Families.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Abbott and Hastings, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Breiseth, "A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders," *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

**Figure 2.2: Strategies to Increase Visibility of Diverse Families**

- Make sure parents know how to get into the building, especially if doors are usually locked during the school day.
- Post signs in multiple languages.
- Display student work on the walls.
- Display student and family photos on the walls.
- Display the maps and flags of students' native countries.
- Display a large map in the front lobby where parents can mark their native countries with a pin.
- Enlist a bilingual morning greeter to welcome students and families.
- Ensure that your bilingual staff and volunteers are visible throughout the building.
- Create a parent room (such as a lounge or classroom) with bilingual information and magazine subscriptions, a bulletin board, a lending library, and a computer.
- Include bilingual books in the school library and classrooms.
- Consider playing music in the front entryway or lobby.

Source: Colorín Colorado<sup>35</sup>

## SUMMER PROGRAMS

Increasingly, schools have developed intensive programs – sometimes called “summer bridge” programs – for incoming students identified as at risk of struggling in Grade 9. These programs “help stem summer learning loss, enable students to catch up, enhance understanding of the new school, and provide bridging activity.”<sup>36</sup> Such programs contrast with quick, universally attended programs that do not fully support students who need transition support the most.<sup>37</sup>

In a guidance document for districts seeking to implement a Grade 9 summer bridge program, the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) advises districts to draw from talented teaching staff and community partners to implement the program. The summer bridge curriculum should focus on both the academic and social skills necessary for success in Grade 9. In particular, schools may consider using personalized and project-based learning strategies to “enhance student engagement, skill acquisition, and relevance.”<sup>38</sup> Figure 2.3, on the following page, describes eight high-impact practices for summer bridge programming, as described by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE).

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Campioni, Op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> [1] Warren, Op. cit., p. 18.

[2] Abbott, S. and K. Templeton. “Using Summer Bridge Programs to Strengthen the High School Transition.” Great Schools Partnership, 2013. p. 4. <http://greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Ninth-Grade-Counts-3.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Bulleted text taken with minor changes from: Abbott and Templeton, Op. cit., p. 4.

**Figure 2.3: Eight High-Impact Practices for Summer Bridge Programs**

1. Student data are used to identify students who are at greater risk of failing, dropping out, or struggling in high school – and identified students are proactively targeted for participation.
2. Student data are provided to teachers before the program begins, and teachers personalize instruction and supports.
3. There is an intensive academic focus on the foundational reading, writing, math, and academic skills that are critical to success in high school and in all content areas.
4. Courses and learning experiences are taught by experienced, skilled, and qualified teachers—ideally, the same teachers who will instruct program students when they enter Grade 9.
5. The curriculum is based on clear learning goals and expectations that have been aligned with Grade 9 courses and standards.
6. Teachers, counselors, and advisors embed social and emotional development into all learning experiences, and they help students prepare for the challenges they are likely to encounter in Grade 9.
7. The curriculum includes orientation activities for both students and families, assistance with study skills and organizational habits, and proactive postsecondary-planning guidance.
8. Educators and support specialists intentionally build relationships between students and adults—specifically, between students and the teachers, counselors, advisors, and mentors who will instruct and support students in Grade 9.

Source: MADESE<sup>39</sup>

The GSP further recommends that summer bridge teachers meet regularly with each other and with Grade 8 teachers to establish performance benchmarks and track student progress. At the end of the program, the teachers should prepare a report on the student’s progress for delivery to Grade 9 teachers.<sup>40</sup> The GSP highlights a summer program for students in Portland Public Schools, described in Figure 2.4, on the following page.


---

<sup>39</sup> Figure content taken verbatim, with minor edits, from: “Summer Bridge Program for Rising Grade 9 Students.” November 12, 2013. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. pp. 20–21. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/news/2013/1112SummerBridge.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Abbott and Templeton, Op. cit., p. 4.



**Figure 2.4: District Spotlight: Portland Public Schools**



The **Portland Public Schools** “Step Up” program is described as an “on ramp” to high school. The district uses attendance and middle school course grades to identify “academic priority” students who are eligible for the one-week program. The program leverages partnerships with community organizations to provide extra staffing, facilities, and to pair students with an adult mentor. Through a series of positive and self-affirming experiences, students in the program identify personal behaviors that may help or impede their success and discuss future educational aspirations. The program includes outreach and regular communication with the students’ families, including translation resources for non-English speaking families. Step Up communicates to parents that course failure, poor attendance, and behavior issues increase the chances that their child will not complete high school. Early data suggests that the program is effective: 70 percent of Step Up students earn all required core course credits in Grade 9 (compared to a district rate of 59 percent) and 98 percent move on to Grade 10.

Source: Great Schools Partnership<sup>41</sup>

Researchers emphasize the importance of academic English skills to secondary-level ELs’ academic success. Teachers should preview the Grade 9 curriculum and identify concepts and terms that may be unfamiliar to ELs and use the summer session as an opportunity to pre-teach the following:<sup>42</sup>

- Say and write the word
- Provide definitions (with familiar terms)
- Discuss what is known about the word
- Provide examples (and non-examples)
- Engage in extended discussions/activities with the word
- Create sentences with the word

The final point – creating sentences with the word – allows students to use the new vocabulary that they have learned in the context of the functional vocabulary (common words like “in,” “at,” “with”) that they may have learned earlier.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Rivera, M. “Teaching Academic Language to English Language Learners” presented at the SECC English Language Learners Institute, 2008. p. 15.  
[http://www.sedl.org/secc/events/08/esl-institute/files/19\\_rivera\\_eslinst08\\_acadlang\\_pres.pdf](http://www.sedl.org/secc/events/08/esl-institute/files/19_rivera_eslinst08_acadlang_pres.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Robertson, K. “Increasing Academic Language Knowledge for English Language Learner Success.”  
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/increasing-academic-language-knowledge-english-language-learner-success>

## SECTION III: STRATEGIES FOR GRADE 9 AND BEYOND

This section describes organizational and instructional strategies to support incoming Grade 9 students once they enter high school.

### GRADE 9 ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

#### ADVISORY PROGRAMS

Through advisory programs, school staff meet with individual students or small groups of students on a frequent basis (often multiple times per week) to provide targeted academic and social-emotional supports. Advisories can be used to address a variety of topics, including:<sup>44</sup>

- Academic and social issues;
- Academic goal-setting;
- College preparation and counseling;
- Study skills; and
- Adolescent development issues.


The advisory period is a time for teachers and counselors to build strong relationships with a small group of students, review student performance, and provide one-to-one support to Grade 9 students. In some schools described in the 2011 U.S. Department of Education report, the advisory program is more intensive during the first semester. For example, at one high school described in the report, the advisory class met twice per week during the first six weeks of Grade 9, and then once per week for the remainder of the year.<sup>45</sup> Other schools enhance their advisory programs with dedicated space for Grade 9 students and community service projects. For example, Figure 3.1, on the following page, describes the advisory program at a charter high school in Minnesota.

---

<sup>44</sup> Tocci, C., D. Hochman, and D. Allen. "Advisory Programs in High School Restructuring." Teachers College (Columbia University), 2005. p. 5. [http://www.tc.columbia.edu/ncrest/aera/aera2005\\_advisory.pdf](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/ncrest/aera/aera2005_advisory.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 20.

**Figure 3.1: School Spotlight: High School for the Recording Arts**



The **High School for the Recording Arts (HSRA)**, a charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota, uses an advisory program called “Alpha House” to help students navigate the transition to high school. Alpha House is a self-contained space, with computers, a comfortable couch, and an advisor on staff. As part of the Alpha House program, students do research and think about who they want to be in the future, and what it will take to get there. Students build strong peer relationships during group projects and community service activities. In addition, the Alpha House advisor is available to provide guidance and encouragement to students as they work through the challenges of their Grade 9 year.

Source: KQED<sup>46</sup>

**Schools can use advisory programs and other supplemental programs to provide social and academic support to ELs.** It is important to keep in mind that many ELs and students at risk of failing do not have the basic study skills and habits that are required for high school success.

<sup>47</sup> Schools can help ELs develop study skills through:<sup>48</sup>

- Individual work with students to demonstrate effective ways of studying and accessing knowledge;
- Readiness seminars that focus on study skills, time management, and note-taking;
- College readiness seminars; and
- Computer-based software programs (e.g., Destination Math-English and Achieve 3000 Reading).

In addition, some schools assign incoming Grade 9 ELs a Grade 10 or Grade 11 mentor who speaks the same language who can serve as a buddy and provide “helpful hints” to their mentee.<sup>49</sup>

## GRADE 9 ACADEMIES AND TEACHER TEAMS

**Many districts structure support for Grade 9 students by creating a small learning community for the students in that grade, often called a Grade 9 “academy.”** A 2008 report from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) defines a Grade 9 academy as “a year-long, uniquely designed school program that provides ninth graders with the resources and support they need.”<sup>50</sup> In the report, the NCDPI identifies the following four features of a Grade 9 academy:<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Korbey, H. “From Eighth to Ninth Grade: Programs That Support a Critical Transition.” KQED, July 8, 2015. <https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/07/08/from-eighth-to-ninth-grade-programs-that-support-a-critical-transition/>

<sup>47</sup> Lara and Harford, Op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Cook, C., H. Fowler, and T. Harris. “Easing the Transition to High School.” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, October 2008. p. 2. <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/intern-research/reports/9thgradeacademies.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

- **Authentic learning experiences:** Experiences that connect students to the world outside of the school environment, such as community outreach and research projects, that require students to be knowledgeable of and investigate societal challenges.
- **Personalization:** Implementing this strategy includes but is not limited to more classroom-based staff, smaller class sizes, and more accountability (e.g., teacher-parent communication).
- **Rigorous and relevant instruction:** The Grade 9 program is rigorous and relevant to students.
- **Professional learning and collaboration:** Teachers have greater opportunities to collaborate, design curriculum and instruction, and gain insights from their peers.


Similarly, Grade 9 teacher teams facilitate greater staff collaboration and personalized student intervention. Using a teaming system, a small group of Grade 9 students (e.g., 120 students) shares the same group of teachers for core subjects. Teachers are provided with common planning time to discuss individual student issues and share strategies to address those challenges.<sup>52</sup> Several high schools report that the formation of Grade 9 interdisciplinary teacher teams are an effective means to provide consistent and personalized support to students.<sup>53</sup> Figure 3.2, on the following page, describes the teaming model at a high school in New Jersey that was profiled in a 2014 publication of *Educational Viewpoints*.

---

<sup>52</sup> Kemple, J. and C. Herlihy. "The Talent Development High School Model." MDRC, June 2004. p. ES-2.  
[http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full\\_584.pdf](http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_584.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Gotlieb, N. "Edison Sees Dramatic Improvement in Ninth-Grade Performance." *The Journal (Minneapolis)*, January 23, 2017. <http://www.journalimpls.com/news/schools/2017/01/edison-high-school-ninth-grade-science-on-track/>

**Figure 3.2: School Spotlight: Chatham High School**



**Chatham High School** in New Jersey implemented a Grade 9 teaching team – comprising the Grade 9 Algebra, Social Studies, English, Biology, and Spanish teachers – as a strategy to improve the Grade 9 experience. The team is based on best-practice models of middle school teams. The school chose to implement the teaming structure over a Grade 9 academy or orientation program because it met the needs of students without necessitating changes to the school schedule.

Team members identified consistency, communication, classroom interventions, professional development, and data analysis as key focal points for the group. The team collected and analyzed a variety of data indicators, including marking period grades, assessments, homework, and class participation. The team meets for one classroom block every four days. The team discussed the data, individual students, and challenges they experienced in the classroom. Research also played a central part in the meetings, as teachers regularly discussed articles about grit, character, peer-assessment strategies, and other topics. The teachers then developed an intervention plan that could be implemented and monitored over time.

In addition to fostering collaboration, the teachers report that teaming has had a positive impact on students. “I believe the consistency we’ve created among our classes gives the students a sense of routine and structure that they need at this point in their education,” explained the school’s Grade 9 mathematics teacher. Preliminary data also suggest that students have improved their academic performance under the teaming system.

Source: *Educational Viewpoints*<sup>54</sup>

## GRADE 9 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

### CATCH-UP COURSES

**Intensive catch-up courses provide extra support and instructional time to students at risk of failing a core course in Grade 9.** For instance, some schools support Grade 9 mathematics achievement through the use of “double-dose” algebra courses.<sup>55</sup> As the name suggests, double-dose algebra models provide students with double the typical amount of instructional time for algebra. However, research suggests that double-dose algebra can have a mixed impact on Grade 9 algebra achievement. A 2010 evaluation of double-dose algebra courses in Chicago Public Schools found that the introduction of double-dose mathematics led to improved test scores for both high-skill students (who did not receive double-dose classes) and low-skill students (who did receive double-dose instruction.)<sup>56</sup> However, the introduction of double-dose algebra did not correlate with reduced course failure rates, and coincided with lower algebra course grades among higher-skilled students.<sup>57</sup> The researchers note that concentration of low-performing students in the double-dose intervention classes negatively impacted students’ attendance and effort in class. As a result, the researchers recommend

<sup>54</sup> Walker, D. and D. Groh. “High School Teaching Team Supports 9th Grade Transition.” *Educational Viewpoints*, Spring 2014. pp. 34–36. <http://njpsa.org/documents/pdf/Viewpoints/HSTeachingTeam.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> [1] “9th Grade Academy.” Montgomery County Public Schools. [http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/gaithersburghs/departments/ninthgrd\\_academy.aspx](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/gaithersburghs/departments/ninthgrd_academy.aspx)  
[2] Warren, Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Allensworth, E. et al. “Are Two Algebra Classes Better than One?” Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2010. p. 5. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Double%20Dose-7%20Final%20082610.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

that districts “consider coupling double-dose with more comprehensive strategies designed to improve attendance and other academic behaviors in all courses.”<sup>58</sup>

**An alternative to the double-dose algebra model is a transitional algebra or mathematics catch-up course**, which would be offered to low-skill students before they begin an algebra course, rather than concurrently. In a transitional course, students first learn conceptual skills associated with algebra. The transitional algebra course can be offered using the same amount of class time as a double-dose algebra course; that is, the transitional algebra course can be offered for two class periods in the first semester of Grade 9, followed by a two-period course of regular algebra in the second semester. A review of the literature by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) determines that the transitional course model is more effective than the double-dose model.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, a report published by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) recommends that districts offer low-achieving Grade 9 students a “mathematics catch-up course.” The catch-up course would be a one-semester, 90-minute course that would be followed in the second semester by Algebra I. The catch-up course should focus on foundational skills using interactive and relevant instructional strategies, outlined below in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: Components of a Grade 9 Mathematics Catch-Up Course**

- Multi-day standards-based units designed around essential knowledge and skills students must master to be ready for Algebra I.
- Opportunities to apply algebra and pre-algebra skills to solve real-world problems that provide a reason for learning the mathematics content and processes needed for Algebra I.
- Opportunities for group learning, study teams, and projects resulting in individual and group grades.
- Exposure to reading and writing strategies appropriate for the mathematics classroom, with opportunities to explain orally and in writing solutions to problems representing various levels of complexity.
- Use of technology, including hand-held devices and software, to solve applied problems.
- Homework assignments to practice what was learned in class and deepen understanding of mathematical concepts by applying knowledge in unfamiliar situations.
- Policies of revising work until it meets clearly understood scoring guides and rubrics for earning grades.
- Varied classroom assignments coupled with both written and performance assessments to help teachers monitor students’ mastery of the essential mathematics readiness indicators.
- Intentional teaching of the habits and skills used consistently by independent learners.
- Use of re-teaching strategies with extra time for students failing to achieve at the expected level.

Source: Southern Regional Education Board<sup>60</sup>

**Districts can use the same “catch-up course” model to support students who struggle in English language arts.** As shown in Figure 3.4, the ELA catch-up course should focus on

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Sorensen, N. “Supplementary Learning Strategies to Support Student Success in Algebra I.” American Institutes for Research, September 2014. p. 7. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/dropout/learningsupports092414.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Figure content taken verbatim from: Bottoms, G. “Redesigning the Ninth-Grade Experience.” Southern Regional Education Board, 2008. p. 9. [http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08v06\\_9th-grade\\_redesign.pdf](http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08v06_9th-grade_redesign.pdf)

interdisciplinary reading, writing, and communication skills as well as general study skills.<sup>61</sup> Some high schools provide catch-up support using the literacy lab model, where Grade 9 students with identified reading difficulties use a computer-based program to accelerate learning and catch up to grade level reading standards.<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 3.4: Components of a Grade 9 ELA Catch-Up Course**

- Multi-day units designed around essential standards and literacy strategies to master grade-level reading and writing skills.
- High-interest and grade-level reading content that students must master to succeed in college-preparatory English and other core academic classes.
- Opportunities to apply communication skills to real-life problems that connect reading and writing to success in high school, further study, and a career.
- Written and performance assessments to help teachers monitor students' achievement on the essential English/language arts reading and writing readiness standards.
- Intentional teaching of the reading and writing strategies students can use to succeed in all classes.
- Engaging reading and writing assignments that use a variety of materials and media typical of those students will experience in different high school classes.
- Opportunities for group learning, study teams, and projects resulting in individual and group grades.
- Homework assignments to practice and deepen unfamiliar concepts learned in class.
- Use of technology and software applications to advance students' reading, writing, comprehension, analytical, and study skills.

Source: Southern Regional Education Board<sup>63</sup>

**Schools should embrace a “no excuses” approach to supporting Grade 9 ELs.**<sup>64</sup> This means that everyone in the school is involved in ensuring that ELs succeed. Many schools support ELs through core content area catch-up classes that are specifically designed for ELs. For instance, one high school in New York state provides a suite of catch-up courses to support ELs across all content areas. The catch-up programming includes:<sup>65</sup>

- An accelerated English class
- A three-term Algebra class
- A two-term Life Science class (prior to the Regents Living Environment class)

Researchers note that this model of extended instructional time for required course “makes it easier for [EL] students to meet the high school credit requirements.”<sup>66</sup> For example, some high schools in Long Beach Unified School District in California offer Long Term English

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 7–8.

<sup>62</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Figure content taken verbatim from: Bottoms, Op. cit., pp. 7–8.

<sup>64</sup> Abbott and Hastings, Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Lara and Harford, Op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Learners (LTELs) an English “companion course” that offers scaffolded support for the core Grade 9 English course and is taught by the core course teacher.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, experts recommend that schools provide intensive English language development courses to ELs, with the goal of achieving reclassification by the end of Grade 9. In particular, these intensive courses should include practice in structured academic talk, such as think-pair-share and Socratic dialogue. Schools with large populations of long-term English learners may consider providing “heritage classes” that provide explicit literacy instruction to students in their native language, in addition to English-language support. Teachers should regularly monitor student data in order to identify and provide “just-in-time” interventions to EL students.<sup>68</sup>

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Schools should provide content area teachers with professional development on how to support ELs in their classroom.** “Given the number of myths about language learning that exist,” write researchers from the National Clearinghouse for English Acquisition, “it is necessary that teachers develop a basic understanding of how language is learned and accordingly, the research-based practices that support that learning.”<sup>69</sup> Professional development may include training on the following topics:<sup>70</sup>

- Language acquisition and communicative competence (the interplay of first and second acquisition, the second language acquisition process);
- Curriculum and instruction (coordinating standards, access to the subject matter content, differentiation, academic vocabulary and oral language, reading, writing, and technology);
- Content assessment (accommodations);
- Culture and education; and
- School and home communities.

Schools could recruit EL teachers to lead staff development activities and may choose to add EL-specific modules to regular professional development sessions.<sup>71</sup> Schools can also support the integration of EL supports into instructional practice by including the use of EL strategies in teacher observation rubrics. Recommended criteria for such rubrics may include promotion

---

<sup>67</sup> “Ninth Grade Counts Webinar II: ELL.” U.S. Department of Education, 2012. p. 12.  
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/ninthgradecounts/ellwebinarslides.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Abbott and Hastings, Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Ballantyne, K., A. Sanderman, and J. Levy. “Educating English Language Learners: Building Teacher Capacity.” National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008. p. 29.  
<http://www.ncela.us/files/rcd/BE024215/EducatingELLsBuildingTeacherCa.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “Professional Development for General Education Teachers of English Language Learners.” National Education Association, 2011. p. 3. [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB32\\_ELL11.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB32_ELL11.pdf)



of oral language use, focus on academic language development, and promotion of cultural diversity.<sup>72</sup>

## BEYOND GRADE 9

### CAREER EXPLORATION

**Career exploration activities help students understand the relevance of their studies and develop post-secondary education and career goals.** The SREB notes that career exploration activities “can pique students’ interest and help them see how their classroom studies link to life after high school, motivating them to stay in school.”<sup>73</sup> Career exploration can range from whole-school initiatives (e.g., career academies) to individual lessons incorporated within a core content or advisory course. Some schools that adopt a SLC or academy model may choose to organize multi-grade academies around a career interest or theme.<sup>74</sup> Figure 3.5, below, describes career exploration activities recommended by a school district in Maryland and the West Virginia Department of Education.

**Figure 3.5: Career Exploration Activities**

| MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS <sup>75</sup>  | WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION <sup>76</sup>  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Montgomery County Public Schools, in Maryland, prepared a “Career/College Planning Guide” for Grade 9 students that includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activities for students to reflect on their time management and decision-making skills.</li> <li>▪ A “countdown to graduation” tracker that lists recommended assessments that students should take (e.g., PSAT) and engagement (e.g., with counselors, college fairs) that the student should consider at various points in their high school career.</li> <li>▪ A list of various career assessments and career academies that are available to students in the district.</li> </ul> | <p><i>The West Virginia Department of Education provides materials for teachers and counselors to lead students in a career research activity. During the activity, students:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use online tools, such as Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data and Career Cruising, to learn about the education requirements, earnings, and job outlooks for a variety of careers.</li> <li>▪ Make a list of courses they must take in high school to enter the field, and brainstorm where they can go for post-secondary training, if necessary.</li> <li>▪ Present their findings to the class.</li> </ul> |

<sup>72</sup> Samson, J. and B. Collins. “Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness.” Center for American Progress, April 2012. p. 15. [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/ell\\_report.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/ell_report.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> Bottoms, Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Warren, Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Getting Started: Career/College Planning Guide for Ninth Grade Students.” Montgomery County Public Schools. [http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/careercenter/pdf/gettingstarted\\_9.pdf](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/careercenter/pdf/gettingstarted_9.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> “Student Workbooks - 9th Grade.” West Virginia Department of Education. <http://wvde.state.wv.us/counselors/links/students/workbooks-9.html>

**Career exploration activities not only engage ELs but can support their English language development.** Career exploration programs help ELs become part of their wider community and envision and experience themselves being treated as adults. If career exploration includes a job placement opportunity, the students will be able to practice their English among fully proficient speakers and expand their oral language skills.<sup>77</sup> For example, Minneapolis Public Schools published a multi-lesson career exploration unit for high school students that helps students both improve their English and learn about careers. Activities include:<sup>78</sup>

- The creation of a list and comparison of jobs found in their home country and jobs found in their current community;
- The development of questions about careers and practice interviewing with other students in the class; and
- A guessing game where students draw a card with an occupation listed on it, and the other students ask the first student questions to guess the occupation.

To make the career exploration lessons accessible to ELs, teachers must carefully introduce and explain career-related technology and allow students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with concepts that may be new to them, such as graduation requirements and the structure of their transcript.<sup>79</sup>

## CREDIT RECOVERY

Credit recovery programs provide students who fail a course in Grade 9 with the opportunity to retake that course. Such programs typically target students in Grades 11 and 12, but summer credit recovery programs can also be used to ensure on-time promotion of struggling Grade 9 students to Grade 10. Credit recovery programs can take many forms, including:<sup>80</sup>

- Traditional classrooms during school hours;
- Self-paced learning and open enrollment;
- Evening and weekend programs;
- Summer school;
- Learning centers; and
- Student-teacher correspondence.

---

<sup>77</sup> Allen, L., N. DiBona, and M. Chavez Reilly. "A Guide to Involving English Language Learners in School to Career Initiatives." Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory, 1999. pp. 9–10.  
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/files/publications/ell.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> "Career Exploration Unit for the Beginning ELL Student." Minneapolis Public Schools.  
<http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/careerexploration.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Bulleted text taken with minor changes from: Watson, J. and B. Gemin. "Using Online Learning for Credit Recovery: Getting Back on Track to Graduation." International Association for K-12 Online Learning, September 2015. p. 10.  
[http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/iNACOL\\_UsingOnlineLearningForCreditRecovery.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/iNACOL_UsingOnlineLearningForCreditRecovery.pdf)

A growing number of schools have begun using online credit recovery programs as a lower-cost and more flexible alternative to in-person courses. However, many critics say these courses are not sufficiently rigorous.<sup>81</sup> In 2015, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning published a report describing effective online credit recovery programs. The report observed that the most effective programs are not entirely online, but instead use a blended learning model. Specifically, the report identified the following key lessons of successful, blended credit recovery programs:<sup>82</sup>

- **Many successful online credit recovery programs have a significant face-to-face component for student supports.** The blended approach provides expanded counseling, tutoring, and support services, including face-to-face contact with teachers who provide not only subject-area support, but also guidance on effective study skills.
- **Online programs, with the help of an instructor, motivate students as they undertake self-paced learning in a blended environment.** Students' individual learning preferences and interests can be integrated and curriculum can be adapted to meet the students' needs in online courses, which may make them more engaging to some students than traditional face-to-face classes. In addition, programs that use online courses can address mobility issues of students who move regularly from one school in the district to another.
- **The teacher can use adaptive software and course management technology to design personalized instruction for students in need of credit recovery.** Diagnostic testing allows students to proceed once they demonstrate mastery. Personalized content selections and activities can offer multiple support options for students who need specific help and can keep students engaged.

In a guidebook for districts seeking to implement a blended credit recovery program, the U.S. DOE recommends that districts consider peer-to-peer support strategies. Such strategies may include tutoring, peer-led discussions, and non-academic supports. For example, Honors Grade 11 and 12 students at a high school in Alabama provide tutoring support to struggling Grade 9 and 10 students.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Butrymowicz, S. "Students Short on Educational Credits Turn to 'recovery' Programs." Hechinger Report, April 2010. <http://hechingerreport.org/students-short-on-educational-credits-turn-to-%E2%80%98recovery%E2%80%99-programs/>

<sup>82</sup> Bulleted text adapted from: Watson and Gemin, Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> "Blended Credit Recovery: Strategies for Integrating In-Person Instruction into an Online Credit Recovery Program." U.S. Department of Education, February 2014. p. 16. [http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/resources/blended\\_credit\\_recovery.pdf](http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/resources/blended_credit_recovery.pdf)

**Online credit recovery programs may present unique obstacles to ELs.** Students with limited English may struggle to interact with online programs that are delivered entirely in English without any in-person support. Even though a growing number of online course providers now offer programs for ELs, they may not align with the specific needs and language backgrounds of a diverse group of students.<sup>84</sup>

ELs may benefit from specialized credit recovery courses offered during the summer. For example, in a 2017 study, a Stanford University researcher evaluated the impact of a summer credit recovery program for newcomer ELs (students who had been in the U.S. for three years or fewer). The study was inconclusive as regards short-term academic impacts, but the researchers noted that added instruction and practice in English was beneficial for students. The researchers further noted that use of summer time for instruction mitigated the loss of school year instructional time to English language classes.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Costa-Guerra, B. and L. Costa-Guerra. "Do Online Courses Help or Hinder English Language Learners' Experience With Math Credit Recovery?" ELearn, 2015. <http://elearnmag.acm.org/archive.cfm?aid=2745842>

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, A. "Causal Impact of Summer Credit Recovery on High School English Learner Outcomes." Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2017. p. 17. <https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/42/Causal%20impact%20of%20summer%20credit%20recovery%20on%20high%20school%20English%20Learner%20outcomes.pdf>

## PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds client expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php>

## CAVEAT

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties that extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every client. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Clients requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.



4401 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 400

Arlington, VA 22203

P 202.559.0500 F 866.808.6585

[www.hanoverresearch.com](http://www.hanoverresearch.com)