



# Instructional Support and Guidance Enable More Students to Prepare for the Next Step

High schools and middle grades schools are making special efforts to keep students in school and to help them look forward with confidence to the next stage of life. They are connecting students to adult mentors or counselors who assist them in setting goals and completing a program of study for college and career readiness. They are assisting middle grades students as they make the transition to challenging high school studies. And they are focusing on the senior year as an opportunity for leaders and teachers to accelerate efforts to prepare graduates for college, advanced training and careers.

## Connecting Students to an Adult Adviser or Mentor Who Helps Them Set and Prepare to Reach a Goal

### Teacher-Adviser Program Bridges the Gap Between School and Work

The successful adviser-advisee program at **White County High School** (WCHS) in Sparta, Tennessee, is based on administrative leadership, teacher buy-in and the need to build positive relationships between students and adults. The school enrolls approximately 1,200 students in grades nine through 12.

In 2000, the school made the decision to design and implement a comprehensive guidance system to address three purposes:

- Help students make career choices that will lead to meaningful, productive lifestyles.
- Enhance students' learning with practice in life and work skills.
- Bridge the gap between what is taught in the core curriculum and the skills necessary for success in the workplace.

“Even though we are a rural high school, we became alarmed at the growing dropout rate, increases in teen pregnancy and overall problems our students were having,” said **Lisa Will-Yoder**, a WCHS counselor.

### Connecting Students to School

While improving the program during the past decade, WCHS has seen a 14 percent decrease in dropouts and fewer teen pregnancies. “I believe the success of the program is due in part to the fact that each student has an adult adviser for all four years of high school,” Will-Yoder said. “Strong bonds develop between students and teachers that cause students to want to complete high school and do something with their lives in the future.”

Two different schedules have been used for the adviser-advisee program. Some years it has been offered for 20 to 25 students once a week during 20-minute homeroom sessions. In other years, it has been offered during clubs or in alternative schools. “Our primary target is the freshman academy, where ninth-graders take Freshman Focus, including the adviser-advisee program, as a class credit,” Will-Yoder said.



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The WCHS adviser-advisee handbook provides a curriculum for each grade level. Based on 11 skill areas, the curriculum includes monthly age-appropriate activities. Each activity has an objective, a step-by-step agenda and tips for the teacher-adviser. The skill areas are:

- Communication
- Decision-making and goal-setting
- Self-esteem, positive self-concept and character building
- Career exploration
- Job hunting
- Stress management
- Study skills
- Test taking
- Problem solving and conflict resolution
- Crisis intervention and peer pressure
- Abuse — physical, mental, sexual and neglect

### *Simple but Effective*

“Our goal is to make the program as simple and effective as possible,” Will-Yoder said. The handbook contains materials for each activity, making it possible for teachers simply to copy what they need in preparing for an advisory session. Teachers complete a monthly evaluation form to provide feedback for possible changes in the program.

Transition from the middle grades to high school was another concern for the school in designing and implementing the advisory program. “The change from the eighth grade to the ninth grade is huge,” Counselor **Kathy Bain** said. “Students are trying to find themselves, to figure out just who they are.”

The freshman curriculum — the most extensive of the four levels — is implemented in the freshman academy that opened at WCHS two years ago. All ninth-graders enroll in a Freshman Focus class that matches each student with a teacher-adviser for the entire year. Students keep the same advisers for the next three years. “Freshman Focus has proven to be a positive way for students to become productive high school students,” Will-Yoder said. “The advisory program enhances and reinforces who they are and who they need to become.”

Many revisions have been made since WCHS designed the advisory curriculum 10 years ago. Updates to the advisory program go hand-in-hand with changes in the curriculum. For example, the school replaced the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) with Gateway testing in the test strategy section of the program. To enhance writing scores, the school implemented “Writing Wednesdays” in the communication section.

“It is crucial for administrators to be on board for an advisory program to be a success,” Will-Yoder said. “Otherwise, there will be less buy-in from teachers.” Some teachers resisted initially, but the counselors supported the skeptical ones and made sure the curriculum included several activities each time to give teachers choices about their advisory lessons.

## **Advisory Program Improves School Climate and Student-Teacher Relationships**

**T**he advisory program at **Columbia-Greene Educational Center** in Hudson, New York, has revolutionized the way the faculty works with students and the way students plan and live their lives. The program is expected to be introduced in other schools in the state and SREB’s *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* network.

Columbia-Greene serves 650 students who attend for two and a half hours per day. About 15 percent pursue individualized education program (IEP) diplomas. Because they come from nine different sending schools, many students do not know their peers. It would be easy for students to feel disconnected and overlooked.

“Now that the advisory program is in place, all teachers take responsibility for welcoming students to the school, strengthening connections between students and adults, and giving students new opportunities to interact with each other,” said **Fred Root**, former principal and current SREB school improvement consultant.

### *Small Groups*

SREB consultants helped the center set up the advisory program. Small groups of students (fewer than 12 per group) meet with two advisers during two 45-minute sessions per month. Because the students are assigned randomly, they get to interact with students from other programs of study. Every adult at the school — teachers, assistants and custodians — works with a group of students, bringing a diversity of life skills and experiences to the program. “We expanded the concept of a village within the building,” Root said.

A 10-person committee, representing all positions at the school, planned the advisory program. The goals are to help students demonstrate communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skills; to provide a forum for students to interact with advisers on 21st-century skills to improve achievement; to promote a culture to connect students to learning; to create a safe, respectful learning environment; to promote positive student behavior; and to make students feel important and supported.



**“Students are grouped in circles rather than in rows. Teamwork encourages students to leave their comfort zones and participate in new experiences.”**

**Fred Root**

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It was not difficult to convince the faculty to climb aboard, since everyone saw the need for new solutions to student issues and challenges. School leaders met with faculty members individually and at faculty meetings in June and September before the mid-September kickoff for the program.

## *Information and Technology*

The curriculum for advisory sessions includes icebreakers to help students ease into the process. Advisers are given information and technology to use in individualizing and carrying out a theme for each session — such as good and bad job interviews. They use resources such as YouTube, Rachel’s Challenge (a program that emphasizes compassion in relationships with others) and Project Adventure (an activity to promote responsibility).

“Students are grouped in circles rather than in rows,” Root said. “Teamwork encourages students to leave their comfort zones and participate in new experiences.”

The advisers debrief after each session. They discuss what failed to work and how to make the next session better. They also answer questions such as, “How well did the advisory team work together in this session?” The advisers have found student-led and hands-on sessions to be very effective.

After the first year of the program, students and staff members responded to questions about the school climate and student and teacher relationships. Students revealed that they had set career and personal goals and had gained a greater sense of responsibility and ownership toward learning. One hundred percent of advisers said the program is valuable and makes a difference in students’ academic and social lives.

Data revealed an increase in students who were referred to the school social worker. “These students and their problems might have gone unidentified if not for the advisory program,” Root said. Teachers and students reported a positive effect on classroom behavior.

## **Students, Teachers and Relationships — a Shining STAR in a Diverse Community of Learners**

**L**eaders and teachers at **Van Buren High School (VBHS)** in Van Buren, Arkansas, are working to enrich the high school experiences of their 1,250 students. The student enrollment is 77 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Native American, 2 percent black and 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Approximately half of the students are ranked at the poverty level.

“Research has shown that one of the most important factors affecting whether or not a student graduates from high school is a feeling of being connected to school and having a positive relationship with a school adult who cares,” said Principal **Becky Guthrie**. VBHS embraced this research when it established the STAR — Students, Teachers and Relationships — advisory program.

The program began with a committee of teachers with a high level of interest in the welfare of the school and its students. The remainder of the faculty became involved after seeing the committee’s enthusiasm and participating in professional development at the beginning of the school year.

### *How It Works*

Each teacher is an adviser and mentor to 15 students, who engage in activities designed to promote a sense of belonging. The activities include getting to know the mentors and other students and participating in volleyball games, trivia quizzes and ropes course games.

Teachers receive training before each monthly STAR session, including participating in the activities before using them with their students. The STAR leadership team plans lessons and activities one semester at a time.

The STAR program has four major components:

- Setting educational and career goals — Students receive help in establishing personal and academic goals. Teachers hold students accountable for meeting the goals.
- Team building — Teachers help teams of students put the “fun” back into school so that they want to attend. Students and teachers participate together in intramural volleyball, with experienced players showing others (students and teachers) how to play. Team building enables teachers to get to know their students better so that they can provide proper guidance and support.
- Handling “tough issues” — Students focus on school and community topics such as suicide prevention and drug abuse prevention. The school uses a pre-made curriculum for this component. One resource used by the school is Chad Foster’s *High School 101* lessons for building tolerance and a safe school environment. A new curriculum on conflict resolution was introduced in spring 2011.
- Community service — STAR groups organize events such as “empty bowls,” a soup-and-crackers event to raise money for service projects such as Haiti relief, a canned food drive, breast cancer awareness and more than 70 other projects.

All activities for team building, career planning and community service are developed at the school.

Teachers were surveyed to find out their perceptions of the effectiveness of STAR activities they experienced with their students in 2009-2010. (See below.) Students and teachers will participate in 2010-2011 surveys.

<b>Teachers’ Perceptions of STAR Activities in 2009-2010</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Average Score (3 = agree; 2 = undecided; 1 = disagree)</b>
The methamphetamine video was valuable to watch and was age appropriate.	2.75
As a STAR adviser, I was comfortable watching the methamphetamine video with my students.	2.88
The volleyball playoffs are fun for my students.	2.21
The volleyball playoffs helped build team spirit in my STAR group.	2.04
The trivia game was worth the time to play because the questions were appropriate.	2.13
The trivia game was worth the time to play because it helped build team spirit within my STAR group.	1.92
The community service assignment is doable.	2.45
The community service assignment is valuable for building character in students.	2.62

“Our teachers feel responsible for their students and make a commitment to help guide them from the ninth grade to graduation,” Guthrie said. “The goal is to ensure that all students leave high school prepared for whatever postsecondary experiences they choose.”

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## Program Provides Tutoring, Guidance and Career Experiences to At-Risk Students

**L**incoln High School (LHS) in Lincoln, Arkansas, with leadership from Principal **Mary Ann Spears**, gives life to the *HSTW* belief that most students can master rigorous academic and career/technical studies. **The LHS program for at-risk students helped lower the dropout rate from 29 percent to 3 percent and increase the graduation rate from 71 percent to 97 percent between 2008 and 2009.**

More than 100 students at this high-poverty school participated in the Academic Center of Excellence program in 2009-2010. Directed by **Clay Hendrix**, the program provides an alternative learning environment through computer-based curricula, distance learning classes, and employability and workplace readiness skills using the Jobs for Arkansas Graduates (JAG) program.

LHS received a 21st-Century Community Learning Centers grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2009 to provide academic support for students during non-school hours. The program helps students meet state and local standards through homework assistance in core academic subjects such as reading and mathematics. It also offers art classes, technology instruction, “survival cooking” and other activities to encourage students to stay in school and graduate.

### Summer Experiences

Summer experiences focus on raising students’ reading, writing, social sciences and critical thinking skills. Twenty students from grades six through 12 enrolled in the summer program in 2010, where they participated in projects such as comparing the New Deal of the 1930s to the current economic situation. They also evaluated the contributions of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration in Arkansas and analyzed the need for similar programs today. “The summer program offers hands-on learning experiences to engage students in using a variety of skills,” said **Crystal Beshears**, program director.

During the school year, students have access to a computerized credit recovery program and an adviser/advisee program that meets every Monday and Friday. The advisory program supports students’ education and career planning and identifies services needed by students. “Guidance practices are integral in helping students prepare for postsecondary transition,” said **Rosa Killer**, special education resource teacher at LHS.

In addition to the core curriculum, LHS provides many electives and extracurricular activities aligned with students’ interests. **John O’Berski**, the school drama coach, helps students build self-confidence through the performing arts.



**Students in LHS programs experience real-world challenges and opportunities through field trips and lessons in life skills and job readiness.**

Another high-interest area is the broad field of agriculture. **Wes Newby**, agriculture instructor, guides students as they study and receive work experience in welding, mechanics, animal sciences, agricultural electric and power systems, forestry and environmental science, and greenhouse/horticulture/floriculture. The learning activities include clubs, shows, judging teams, sales, leadership camps and safety education.

Students in LHS programs experience real-world challenges and opportunities through field trips and lessons in life skills and job readiness. “In addition to guidance practices, students need a foundation of basic life skills to promote lifelong success,” said **Morgan Hunt**, special education resource teacher.

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## Standards-Based Guidance and Advisement Model Available Statewide in West Virginia



“When designing the program, we wanted to ensure that teachers had all of the needed resources and support at their fingertips.”

**Barbara Ashcraft**

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**R**esearch shows that a schoolwide student advisory program is an effective way to reduce the achievement gap and to ensure that all students have the same opportunities to prepare for postsecondary education and workforce success.

The **West Virginia Department of Education** (WVDE) has developed a standards-based, seamless advisory curriculum for grades five through 12 and Web-based lesson plans, easily accessible to schools in the state and across the nation. The West Virginia content standards and objectives allow schools to offer the curriculum for credit.

Known as LINKS — **L**earning, **I**ndividualized **N**eeds, **K**nowledge and **S**kills — the advisement system is designed to assist educators in helping students acquire knowledge and skills necessary for success in 21st-century schools and a global economy. **The program delivers academic, career and personal/social content standards; connects students with a caring adult; and increases collaboration among parent and community stakeholders.**

**Barbara Ashcraft**, school counseling coordinator for the WVDE and developer of the plan, cited several reasons the state needs the LINKS student advisement system:

- Only 72 of every 100 ninth-graders in West Virginia earn a high school diploma. Only 16 of these graduates earn a four-year degree within six years of graduation.
- More than 7,000 students drop out of school each year in West Virginia.
- Fifty-five percent of West Virginia students qualify for free and reduced-price meals.
- Students report that they lack skills in many areas covered in the advisory curriculum and indicate that they want more support in those areas.
- West Virginia employers report that the state’s graduates lack adequate workplace readiness skills.

The LINKS program has three main purposes:

- Help schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements by raising academic achievement, improving standardized exam scores, ensuring on-time transitions from grade to grade, and raising attendance and graduation rates.
- Support a positive learning culture by strengthening teacher-student relationships, improving classroom behavior, and informing and preparing school staff to assist students better and create a community of learners.
- Promote student success in school and life by fostering relationships with caring adults, helping students set career goals and connecting students with postsecondary options.

Tied to specific state standards, the LINKS topics include a host of personal development, educational and career-planning skills in a scalable, sequential manner. Lessons are available on topics such as decision-making; learning styles and interest inventories; career research units; organizational, study and test-taking skills; portfolio development; school success skills; personal finance and communication skills; senior projects; job readiness skills; and postsecondary exploration, planning and the application process.

LINKS includes a curriculum delivery schedule template with recommended topics by grade level as well as grade-level lesson plans and any required handouts and teacher resources. “When designing the program, we wanted to ensure that teachers had all of the needed resources and support at their fingertips,” Ashcraft said. “Schools have some flexibility in designing their own curriculum maps. They can decide what is taught when and can personalize the lessons for each school’s needs.”

The website containing the LINKS program provides many resources, including timelines for planning and implementation, sample schedules, blank curriculum maps, curriculum alignment tools and other information to help schools implement advisories or redesign systems that might not be effective.

LINKS is available online free of charge at the West Virginia Department of Education website at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/>.

## School Increases Parental Involvement in Student Success

Educators at **Carter High School** in Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, believe positive parental involvement is essential to help students achieve maximum academic, social and emotional growth. When low attendance at a parent conference night threatened the success of students at this rural school, a committee set new goals and made new plans to increase parental involvement. The committee included administrators, guidance counselors, the graduation coach and grade-level teacher-advisers.

Two months before conference night, all teacher-advisers received an overview of the conference goals and format and learned how to explain graduation requirements and other school policies to parents.

Each parent received at least two phone contacts — one to announce the conference and another to schedule an appointment for parents to visit with teachers. During the adviser-advisee period, students and teachers also called parents to make appointments. “We found that parents will answer calls from their children more readily than from the school,” Principal **Cheryl Hickman** said. The school also sent postcard reminders and made other follow-up phone calls.

### *Essential Information*

During conference night, parents met with teacher-advisers and students to discuss graduation requirements, four-year plans and class registration decisions. They also learned how students are assessed to measure academic progress.

Parents received a schedule of events throughout the year that would put them in touch with the school and provide more information about their children. The opportunities include attending meetings, serving on committees and scheduling individual meetings with teachers. Parents receive students’ progress reports every four and a half weeks.

The school set up registration tables for parents and students to keep track of who attended the event. It also conducted an award drawing for each group — dinner at a local restaurant for parents and cash prizes for students.

A parent portal allows parents to check attendance, grades, assignments and classroom activities online on a day-to-day basis. The high school sent parent portal user-name and password information home to parents in August and provided training in its use at parent conference night.

In addition to the school website, each teacher maintains a Web page where parents can keep up to date with class activities. Parents can choose to receive daily e-mail announcements from the school. A newsletter is published twice per semester to help parents stay informed about the school.

“As a result of extra planning, 79 percent of our parents participated in the conference night event,” Hickman said. “We are thrilled with the results and believe parents are now more knowledgeable about the school and our expectations. Parents, students and teachers had real conversations about current issues. We are planning for 2011, and our goal is 85 percent parent participation.”



“As a result of extra planning, 79 percent of our parents participated in the conference event.”

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## Two Middle Grades Schools Lead the Way in Establishing Advisory Programs

All 20 middle grades schools in the **Mobile County Public School System** in Alabama had joined *Making Middle Grades Work* (MMGW) by 2009-2010. Two of the schools — **Grand Bay Middle School** (GBMS) and **Lott Middle School** (LMS) — were the first to implement the MMGW Key Practice focusing on a guidance and advisement system that would provide mentors for all students. These schools established procedures and produced materials to help other schools develop and improve advisory programs for students in grades six through eight.

The purpose was the same for each school: to connect students to an adult adviser or mentor who will support them and assist them in setting goals and planning programs of study to achieve those goals. Each school created an advisement team that included the principal, a counselor and one or more lead teachers. The team correlated the adviser/ advisee program to the school improvement plan and district requirements. The three essential components of the program are curriculum, schedule and adviser training.

Counselor **Kathy Smallwood** and lead teacher **Sandra Morris** of GBMS and counselor **Jaclyn Snow-Weaver** of LMS decided to relieve their teacher-advisers of extra work by preparing as many advisement materials as possible. They scheduled the advisory session topics and made arrangements to copy the materials and distribute them to the teachers at least 48 hours before advisement day. Teachers at both schools emphasize the importance of not having to prepare extra lessons.

### Curriculum Topics

Advisement curriculum topics were selected from the counselors' monthly required topics and from teachers, students and parents. They include character development, reading and writing skills, career exploration, grades, attendance and discipline.

The advisory sessions are held every three weeks. Each 45-minute lesson consists of one whole-group activity featuring student discussions and one independent practice with follow-up materials. During independent practice, the adviser works individually with each student to review plans, grades and other matters.

Before each session, the advisement team leader briefs teachers on the lessons and helps them prepare for their roles in keeping the adviser/advisee process flowing smoothly. Responsibilities of teacher-advisers include helping students develop personal plans of progress, holding individual conferences, counseling referrals (attendance, family problems and social/personal issues), after-school and peer tutoring referrals, school nurse referrals, parent conferences, student progress monitoring, student and parent relationship building, student motivation, and referral follow-ups. Each adviser receives a binder of background information on the students in his or her group and keeps advisory materials in a folder for each student.

### Team Leaders

In addition to serving as team leaders for their school advisory programs, Smallwood and Snow-Weaver are liaisons between the district counseling program and school administrators and teachers. They keep track of all data connected with the advisory program as well as individual student information. Both counselors conduct follow-up surveys to determine changes that may be needed in the program.

“Students and parents play critical roles in the continued success of the program,” Smallwood said. Students are required to attend advisement sessions and to strive for excellence in every aspect of school life. “We ask parents to support the relationship between the student and his or her adviser and to be available to talk with school staff about the student’s progress,” Smallwood said.

These two schools and others in the Mobile school system offered suggestions for implementing an advisory program:

- Prepare and e-mail lessons and distribute copies of materials to advisers at least 48 hours before advisement day.
- Provide a script for advisers to use in an introductory parent contact and during an advisement session.
- Survey teachers for topics and correlate the topics to the counseling objectives.



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- Use homerooms to assign students, keeping the number of students per group as low as possible. Use all available staff members and distribute the students evenly.
- Identify unassigned staff members to substitute for absent advisers. Ask other staff members to help send information and monitor the advisement sessions.
- Assign special education students to their case managers for advisement lessons.
- Schedule the sessions during the morning hours and try to avoid Mondays and Fridays.
- Print a list of transfers and students who have withdrawn between advisory sessions.
- Use a numbering system that works with the school technology system and provide all staff members with a list of the numbers. For example, GBMS uses locker numbers to assign student advisory numbers.
- Schedule advisory activities to coincide with monthly school events. For example, talk about progress reports and grading midway in the first grading period.

“The advisory program allows every child on our campus to review grades, attendance and behavior with a caring adult,” Smallwood said. “We have taken advisory to the next level by connecting students with attendance and disciplinary issues to specific advisers and targeted interventions. We are seeing slight improvements and are looking forward to receiving data at the end of the year.”

## Technology Center Uses Guidance and Extra Help to Increase Students’ Assets

**M**id-East Career and Technology Centers, Zanesville Campus, in Zanesville, Ohio, uses the *HSTW* Key Practices to implement programs of guidance and extra help that develop assets that benefit students educationally, personally and socially. The result is a supportive school environment where failure is not an option.

### Guidance Program

The Zanesville Campus calls its guidance program IMPACT — Individual Assistance, Meaningful Learning, Personalization, Academic Rigor, Career and College Focus and Transition Support. Students’ homeroom teachers are their advisers and mentors, remaining with the same group of students for two years.



“The more assets a student has, the greater the chance of success.”

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The IMPACT program takes place bimonthly on Fridays. During the 40-minute period (made possible by a special Friday class schedule), the advisers use notebooks containing pre-planned lessons and activities. Each IMPACT lesson includes developmental assets, engaging activities and team-building activities.

“Developmental assets are 40 attributes that have been proven through research to promote student success,” said **Clint Linscott**, IMPACT planning team member. “The more assets a student has, the greater the chance of success.” Students complete a survey each year to tally their assets.

Assets are categorized as external or internal. Examples of external assets include support (from parents and others), empowerment (service to the community and personal safety), boundaries and expectations (family, school and neighborhood boundaries, adult role models and peer influences), and constructive use of time (programs and activities). Internal assets include characteristics such as commitment to learning, positive values (caring and responsibility), social competencies (planning and decision-making) and positive identity (sense of purpose and positive view of the future).

The IMPACT team also uses the *HSTW* Assessment, student and mentor surveys, and e-mail correspondence to collect feedback and to measure the effectiveness of the program. Students’ likes, dislikes and recommendations are taken into consideration in making improvements.

Much preparation went into developing the IMPACT program. The team, including members from all departments, attended conferences and participated in professional development together. They focused on the IMPACT mission statement — to offer programming to help develop assets that will benefit each student educationally, personally and socially — and devised a plan to present to the administration.

One message the center works to convey in the IMPACT program is the importance of understanding “how rules assist us in maintaining control within our personal lives as well as within our school community.” Students participate in classroom activities to demonstrate what could happen at school and in the community if rules were not set and enforced.

### *Extra Help Program*

The goals of the extra help program are to provide time for students to complete missing assignments, to help teachers be aware of students’ grades in different subjects and to empower students to want to achieve. “We want students to feel dissatisfied when their work is missing,” said **Suzanne Lewis**, extra help rewards director.

Homeroom teachers view and print their students’ grades each Wednesday. If students are receiving all A’s, B’s and C’s, they attend an Extra Help Reward assembly on Friday. Students with a grade of D or F in any class meet with their teachers on Wednesday to gather missing work. If they complete the work before Friday, they can go to the assembly. If they do not do the work, they use the Friday assembly period to work on missing assignments.

The rewards assemblies are designed to be enticing to students, inexpensive and something that the staff will support. Examples are dances, physical fitness programs, motivational speakers, college theater presentations and movies. **“The number of missing assignments decreased by 30 percent after we initiated the assemblies,”** Lewis said.

Another aspect of the program is the extra help motivation system that began in the fourth nine-week session of 2009-2010 and is currently running year-round. The purpose is to reward achievement and instill the concept that it is unacceptable to earn D’s and F’s. The rewards are tickets that give students certain privileges, such as going to lunch or leaving school early. Wearing hats is another popular option for students.

The better the grades, the more tickets students receive. “We believe very strongly that all students can get at least C’s in all classes,” Lewis said.

## **Developing Interventions to Prepare Students for Challenging High School Studies**

### **Career-Based Intervention Program Contributes to Success for At-Risk and Non-Traditional Students**

**E**ast High School (EHS) in Akron, Ohio, enrolls more than 850 students in grades nine through 12. Minority enrollment is 72 percent. Seventy-seven percent of students are classified as economically disadvantaged.

EHS has participated in *HSTW* since 1999 and is currently focusing on improving students’ writing and higher-order thinking skills. Tutoring is available during and after school. Quality career education programs offer nationally recognized certification in welding, automotives, hospitality and restaurant management, e-commerce and marketing, information technology and networking, and engineering and robotics.

To serve students identified as at risk or non-traditional learners, EHS provides an elective Career-Based Intervention (CBI) program that contributes to the success of these students. The program is designed to reduce freshman retention, engage non-traditional learners, improve career education program acceptance rates and raise the GPAs of at-risk students. CBI is a bridge between the middle grades and career/technical (CT) courses in grades 11 and 12.

### *Would Have Dropped Out*

**“Many graduates say they would not have finished high school without CBI,”** said **Bobbi Tidrick-Briggs**, who teaches physical science and mathematics to ninth-graders and math to 10th-graders.

To be eligible for CBI, students must be first-year ninth-graders with low academic achievement and the desire to improve their performance. They do not qualify for special education services. Their discipline records must be clean.

Middle-grades counselors or principals recommend students for the program. “Students must display willingness and the potential to raise their academic status,” Tidrick-Briggs said. “They must be sufficiently motivated to work on self-guided computer-assisted lessons without direct supervision.”



**“These students have the opportunity to develop a career focus early in the high school experience. They are encouraged to set career goals and take classes leading to success in a chosen occupation.”**

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## Remain Together

Thirty freshmen per year are accepted into the program. They are organized into two 15-member groups, are assigned to a core group of teachers and remain together until the end of the 10th grade. The groups attend core classes together and receive computer-based support to reinforce academic, study and test-taking skills needed for success in high school and on the Ohio Graduation Test.

CBI students take an extensive career-planning assessment early in the freshman year. The test focuses on interests, aptitudes, dexterity and occupational skills inventories. The results are analyzed and compiled into a list of jobs or career clusters for each student. Students take career foundation courses while enrolled in CBI and more advanced career education classes as juniors and seniors.

“These students have the opportunity to develop a career focus early in the high school experience,” said **Howard Lawson**, career education director for Akron Public Schools. “They are encouraged to set career goals and take classes leading to success in a chosen occupation.”

Students who previously were dissatisfied with what they were studying and saw no purpose in high school are now motivated to earn a diploma and prepare for further education and training after graduation. CBI instructors help students develop positive attitudes toward work, emphasize the importance of getting along with others, and promote a deeper appreciation and understanding of the community.

### EHS reports success with the CBI program:

- A total of 28 EHS students completed the CBI program in 2009. Fifty-seven percent enrolled in CT courses as juniors. Twenty-nine students completed CBI in 2010 with 67 percent signing up for CT courses in the 11th grade.
- Seventy-two of 256 (28 percent) of EHS freshmen were retained in 2010. Only five of 29 CBI students (17 percent) were retained in 2010.
- The reading performance of CBI students on the Ohio Graduation Test increased 20 percentage points from 2009 to 2010, while the social studies scores showed a 21 percentage-point gain from 2009 to 2010.

## Suburban High School Uses Multiple Strategies to Ease Transition to the Ninth Grade

**S**am Rayburn High School enrolls about 2,500 students in suburban Pasadena, Texas. Incoming ninth-graders not only are moving from a small pond (the middle grades) to a large pond (the high school); they also must switch from a block schedule with four 90-minute periods in the middle grades school to a traditional schedule with seven 45-minute periods in high school. “Students will be juggling more classes and needing to make more transitions between subjects each day,” Principal **Robert Stock** said.

The principal and a group of dedicated teachers worked together to implement a number of strategies to improve ninth-grade transition. “In looking for evidence of rigor, relevance and relationships in school improvement, we decided that our best opportunity to bring everyone on board was to ensure a smooth transition for students from the eighth grade to freshman year,” Stock said.

**Teacher visits** — Sam Rayburn teachers spend one day each year visiting feeder middle grades schools to meet the rising ninth-graders on their own turf. The following day, teachers from grade eight visit the high school. “These exchanges allow teachers to see what students learned the year before — or will learn next year — so they can plan instruction accordingly,” Stock said. For example, English teachers were assigning freshmen to read *The Odyssey* and were investing three days in teaching about the Greek gods in preparation for that unit. When they visited middle grades language arts classes, they found students reading *The Lightning Thief*, a fantasy-adventure novel based on Greek mythology, after studying Greek gods.

“Our teachers didn’t need to repeat lessons on the gods, so they gained three days to cover other material,” Stock said.

**Essays** — Eighth-graders write essays on “What Makes a Great College Student.” Their future high school teachers, guidance counselors and administrators use the essays to help determine students’ college aspirations and the extent to which they have been exposed to college expectations, as well as their current writing skills.

**First day of school** — The first day of school at Sam Rayburn is a freshman-only day. Student mentors from the upper grades help orient the new students, who receive class t-shirts and a photo taken with a cut-out cap and gown made by the art department to remind freshmen that the goal is to graduate in four years. The drama department presents a humorous fashion show of what to wear — and not to wear — to school. Incoming students tour the building and attend their first high school class — Rayburn 101. In this class, they learn about the advisory program, class and lunch schedules and anything else they want to know before starting high school.

**Advisory groups** — About 15 students per group stay with the same teacher for four years of high school. The groups meet twice weekly on Thursday and Friday. One session each week is devoted to college and career readiness. The freshmen calculate college costs and begin identifying scholarships and other options for postsecondary study. Sam Rayburn has many special education students, English-language learners and at-risk students. They are assigned to teams of teachers with no more than five students per team.

**Parent involvement** — Sam Rayburn asks parents of incoming ninth-graders to attend an orientation night to become familiar with the school. The Parent Connection program allows parents to set expectations for students and to receive notification when students fail to make the grades their parents want them to make. Parents of freshmen receive their children’s report cards at the school rather than through the mail. Pizza and hot dogs are served. This practice ensures that parents receive the reports and are able to ask questions if their students are falling behind in their schoolwork.

**Extracurricular activities** — Upperclassmen connect with former middle grades students who share common interests — a way to make new students feel more comfortable. The opportunities include football, basketball, volleyball, cheerleading and buddy camps.

## Team Teaching Promotes Freshman Success in Algebra

“Teachers to the second power” sums it up in describing mathematics teachers **Bonnie Barker** and **Carolyn Elswick**, who collaborate to help ninth-graders at **Scott High School** (SHS) in Madison, West Virginia, make higher grades in Algebra I.

While evaluating results from the previous school year, the two colleagues determined that they could reduce the dropout rate by helping more students — especially ninth-graders — master algebra. “Students failing algebra are the leading dropout population,” Barker said.

The administration supported the idea and made it possible for Barker and Elswick to pilot team teaching in a 90-minute block of scheduled instructional time in grade nine. The model that resulted from their efforts includes many features:

- The two teachers “share” students assigned to the class. Each teacher has 45 minutes of instructional time. Barker facilitates standards-based learning projects while Elswick uses a computer-based approach to focus on skill development.
- The team developed a pacing guide for the first nine weeks based on students’ strengths and weaknesses on state standardized achievement exams.
- They collaborated to “chunk” the course standards together in specific units and developed a website for communicating with students.
- They developed standards-based lessons for each unit with resources including QUIA ([www.quia.com](http://www.quia.com)), Thinkfinity ([www.thinkfinity.org](http://www.thinkfinity.org)), the West Virginia Department of Education’s Teach 21 website ([wvde.state.wv.us/teach21](http://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21)), Carnegie Learning ([www.carnegielearning.org](http://www.carnegielearning.org)) and The Solution Site ([www.the-solutionsite.com](http://www.the-solutionsite.com)).
- The teachers include a week-long project-based learning unit in each semester. One project asked students to use data from the local coal mines — a well-known entity in the community that connected students personally to the project.
- The team invited inclusion teachers to take part in planning for the class.
- Successful students receive extra credit points to serve as peer tutors to assist other ninth-graders in algebra.

In the computer-based approach to algebra instruction, Elswick uses software programs such as Cognitive Tutor and Plato. This strategy enables students and the teacher team to receive instant feedback on skill mastery. Technology is an integral part of the instruction, including graphing calculators, interactive whiteboards, Interwrite Mobi system and personal responders. The team teaches the same skills with and without technology to enhance students’ understanding of the concepts.

“Collectively, these strategies smooth the way into high school while helping students prepare for the next big transition — from high school to college and careers,” Stock said. “Seniors in 2010-2011 will be the first group to participate in four years of advisory. We will know after that time if the program has made a positive impact on students’ college and career readiness.”

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“It is important for both of us to be aware of what the students are working on in the other half of class. Each of us grades student assignments and then we combine our assessments for a course grade.”

**Bonnie Barker**  
Scott High School

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The two algebra teachers meet for a few minutes before and after instructional time to ensure coordination and continuity. “It is important for both of us to be aware of what the students are working on in the other half of class,” Barker said. “Each of us grades student assignments and then we combine our assessments for a course grade.”

When asked to evaluate the new way of learning algebra, students said they benefitted from the team teaching approach. They mentioned the use of technology, learning different ways to tackle a method or a process, and the positive impact of the course on their grades.

The results have included fewer ninth-grade algebra failures and higher state exam scores. The decline was from 20 students failing in 2008-2009 to seven failing in 2009-2010. Scores on the state standardized achievement exam in mathematics improved by 12 percentage points between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Other SHS teachers like the idea of collaboration and are developing plans to team up in English/language arts and social studies.

## Preparing Students to Plan 10 Years into the Future

**F**our-year plans. Six-year plans. What about preparing students to look 10 years into the future?

The Career Choices curriculum from **Academic Innovations** in St. George, Utah, engages students in an interactive learning process that helps them develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to examine their own lives, explore and evaluate a wide range of education and career options, and set reasoned and researched goals for the next decade.

“Studies show that students who can project themselves into the future and understand the consequences of their actions today are far less likely to drop out of school, become a teen parent or abuse drugs,” said **Dean Lapham**, certified trainer with Academic Innovations.

More than 4,000 schools and programs use the Career Choices curriculum to help eighth- and ninth-graders answer the questions: Who am I? What do I want? How do I get it? Offered for either a semester or an entire year, the curriculum culminates with students developing an individualized, online 10-year plan that shows them what it will be like to be self-sufficient and productive after high school, college and/or postsecondary training.

To maintain student motivation and direction, schools use the 10-year plan with students in guidance and advisement activities and in classes throughout high school. Students revisit and update their plans in academic classes in grades 10, 11 and 12. For example, the plans can be updated during social studies in the 10th grade after students study globalization; in English in the 11th grade after students read a novel or a work of nonfiction aligned with their career aspirations; and in conjunction with a senior project in the 12th grade as students prepare for college or workplace interviews and expectations.

“Career Choices is academics-based, integrates technology and is flexible enough to use with one student, a small group or a whole class,” Lapham said. “The curriculum speaks to all students and allows teachers and students to use creativity and customization.”

The curriculum and the 10-year plan align to George Washington University’s Freshman Transition Initiative and Course Standards for Freshman Transition Classes, as well as the U.S. Department of Education’s recommendations for successful dropout prevention programs. (For more information on the transition initiative, visit [www.freshmantransition.org](http://www.freshmantransition.org).)

“Students who develop 10-year plans see connections and relationships between what they are studying in school and gain a greater perception of the real world that makes it faster and easier to make the transition into a successful life,” Lapham said.

Visit [www.academicinnovations.com/swi](http://www.academicinnovations.com/swi) for more information on using a 10-year plan in guidance and advisement.

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## Preventing Dropouts by Keeping an Eye on Attendance, Behavior and Course Grades

**E**ducators need to identify, support and consistently monitor students who exhibit signs of dropping out of school. Countless students already have begun the dropout process by the middle grades. However, schools that identify, intervene and monitor can change the future for potential dropouts.

**Breaux Bridge Junior High** (BBJH) in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, has gone on the offensive to halt destructive actions and keep students on track for graduation. As one of the schools in **St. Martin Parish**, BBJH receives a weekly dropout early warning report that identifies students with one or more signs of academic disinterest, such as negative trends in attendance, behavior and course grades.

- **Attendance** — It is much more difficult to complete the teaching and learning cycle when students are absent from class.
- **Behavior** — Poor behavior thwarts the learning process in many ways. Teachers can encourage good behavior by engaging students in interesting activities and creating personal connections with students.
- **Course grades** — Lack of academic progress leads to disengagement in school and failure in further educational pursuits.

Principal **Denise Frederick** of BBJH asks teachers to meet in the data room weekly to review current statistics on their students. Generally, she provides a report that lists students who missed more than five days in a month or more than 10 days in a school year; students with more than three disciplinary referrals in the past month or more than five referrals in the semester; and students whose grade point averages (GPAs) are below 1.0 on a 4.0-point scale or whose averages have shown a decline of 1.5 points.

### *Teacher Teams*

Grade-level teacher teams interpret the data and discuss observations of and personal interactions with each student on the list. The combination of data and teacher input makes it easy to identify students who need extra attention.

“These students often have deeper problems that affect their performance at school,” Frederick said. “Students and their families may not value education. Students may fear failure, bullying or abuse. There may be economic issues, including student employment. Students may lack interpersonal connections at school and they may not have clear personal goals for adulthood.”

St. Martin Parish involves parents in the effort to support student success. All parents are asked to review their child’s performance via the parent command center, an online source of information on attendance, discipline and grades. The parish also uses a system to phone parents about absences, missed assignments or other matters of concern. A printed



“These interventions have given students ownership of their actions and an understanding that it is okay to make mistakes if we understand the lessons to be learned from the mistakes.”

**Denise Frederick**  
Breaux Bridge Junior High

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progress report is sent home every four weeks. For students earning failing grades, each progress report is accompanied by a failure notification report leading to a meeting for parents and teachers to discuss students’ individual concerns and possible interventions.

### *Multiple Resources*

After preventive measures have been taken, some students continue to show apathy toward learning. BBJH and the other parish schools use multiple resources to increase the odds of retaining and educating students.

- **Creating a climate of high expectations** — SREB school improvement consultants worked with BBJH to align instruction to state standards, create rubrics to guide student learning, and plan lessons to engage students in each stage of the learning process. Subsequent classroom observations at BBJH showed an increase in student participation and interest.
- **Building personal strengths and skills** — BBJH uses the acronym “UROAR” to describe expected behavior and academic achievement.

U: Adhere to the UNIFORM policy.

R: Treat all authority and property with RESPECT.

O: Observe the rights and needs of OTHERS.

A: ACT in a safe and healthy way.

R: Take RESPONSIBILITY for your learning.

- **Guiding and advising students** — BBJH students participate in advisory meetings each Monday. These small groups allow students to build personal connections with academic role models at school. Teacher-advisers guide students to consider their interests and aspirations in setting long-term goals. They monitor students' attendance, behavior and grades and discuss with students their progress toward personal, attainable goals beyond high school. Advisers encourage students to be mindful of their goals as they make academic decisions throughout school.
- **Allowing students to make up work** — The BBJH make-up center opens daily at 7:30 a.m. Teachers send make-up work to the teacher on duty. Students are expected to complete any work they were unable to do in class. The ZAP (Zeros Aren't Permitted) program expands on academic expectations by requiring students to redo substandard work and complete assignments. A test analysis worksheet is completed for non-proficient exams or work.

The worksheet is given to students along with the text or classwork they failed. It includes an area for each item that the student will work out and complete, using resources if necessary and documenting what was used by the student to correct the problem. Students are required to reflect on the problem and justify the answer by explaining why they previously were unsuccessful in mastering the skill.

- **Intervening and monitoring** — Students in need of specific monitoring sign a contract with clear parameters and expectations for weekly and quarterly results. Individual teachers track actions and interventions with students.

“These interventions have given students ownership of their actions and an understanding that it is okay to make mistakes if we understand the lessons to be learned from the mistakes,” Frederick said.

## Redesigning the Senior Year to Promote Success for Graduation and Beyond

### Senior Academy Raises Achievement of At-Risk Students

**J**ohn Adams High School is a large urban school in Ozone Park, New York. Located in the borough of Queens, the school is part of the New York City school system. Some 3,200 students are enrolled, including many at-risk students.

With a graduation rate of 54 percent, school leaders and teachers took action to keep more students in school by opening the Senior Academy during school hours. Previously, the school had created an alternative program that allowed credit-deficient seniors with jobs and family responsibilities to attend classes from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Assistant Principal **Steve Dorcely** led the effort to establish the Senior Academy under the guidance of Principal **Grace Zwillenberg**. Dorcely recruited a team of core-content teachers who had proven effective in raising students' scores on the New York State Regents Exams. These teachers were joined in the academy by a guidance counselor, **Lisa Yikiel**. Both Dorcely and Yikiel, who have had a great deal of experience working with special education and at-risk students, understand the needs of these students for emotional support and confidence building.

#### Academic and Personal Needs

The academy teachers provided instruction to meet the educational needs of students and established teacher-student relationships to show that adults at the school care about the success of each student. The guidance support services facilitated communication among students, teachers and parents. Students became knowledgeable about their transcripts and received regular updates on graduation progress and Regents Exams status. “They learned how to become their own advocates,” Dorcely said.

Because daily classroom attendance was a major goal in the senior academy, students were assigned to classes in one section of the building. “This grouping allowed us to monitor students more closely,” Dorcely said. Many students had failed to achieve in high school because they missed classes on a regular basis.

The Senior Academy day begins with an hour of guidance and advisory, during which Dorcely and a group of mentor teachers focus on the importance of academic success and goal-setting. The day concludes with another advisory period to support students in completing assignments, organizing materials and recovering credit by using Apex Learning's online program. Students also use online resources to prepare for the Regents Exams.



The academy teachers provided instruction to meet the educational needs of students and established teacher-student relationships to show that adults at the school care about the success of each student.

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Staff members in the academy have a common planning time that allows them to discuss students' progress and conduct student-parent-teacher meetings. The teachers constantly discuss, revise and implement differentiated learning strategies to meet the needs of students with various learning styles.

A total of 123 students met the requirements when the academy opened in the second semester of 2009-2010. These students were significantly credit-deficient and had posted mixed results on the state exams. Of the identified group, 93 students committed to earn graduation credits and pass the Regents Exams to graduate in 2010. **A total of 78 of the 93 students (almost 85 percent) achieved that goal and received a diploma from John Adams High School — an accomplishment that would have been impossible without the Senior Academy. The success of the academy raised the school's graduation rate to more than 61 percent. Dorcely expects the 2011 graduation rate to be significantly higher.**

"We were able to create a team of committed, student-centered teachers working together to help students meet high expectations," Dorcely said. "Their dedication and cooperation were crucial to the success of the academy. Students benefit when teachers collaborate toward a common goal. These student-centered discussions have led to positive outcomes in student performance and graduation rates."

## Reinventing Senior English: How to Create Engaging and Rigorous Units

**R**eading and writing too often are the weakest skills of new college students. As a result, these students detour through developmental courses for which they pay tuition but receive no credit. Research has shown that students who take even one developmental course are 50 percent less likely to finish college than students who go directly into credit-bearing courses.

"Clearly, we need to change the way we traditionally approach high school English, particularly Senior English, so that more graduates will be college-ready," said retired English teacher **Elizabeth Bailey**, now an SREB school improvement consultant. Bailey shared the steps for planning rigorous, high-interest, theme-based units for teaching students how to develop vocabulary, read critically, write effectively, research appropriately, speak and listen.

Bailey uses the unit design process described in the SREB guide *Planning for Improved Student Achievement: Ten Steps for Planning and Writing Standards-Based Units* to develop a unit for a reinvented English course.

- Identify the standards that will be taught and assessed in the unit.
- Choose a theme or big idea that is important to students. Some examples for high school seniors are survival, setting personal life goals, the nature of the world of work and solving real-world problems.
- Develop three to five essential questions. Questions should lead to logical, real-life connections between students and learning. The questions should be open-ended and require higher-order thinking. They should be real for the teacher as well as the student and should promote investigation and/or provoke curiosity. The essential questions for a unit titled "Community Connections" would include: How do I know what would be the perfect job for me? What can I learn from other people about fulfilling work? What controversial issues are related to my future career pathway? What do I need to do to prepare for my dream job?

- Build a text set. "When I plan a unit, I find sources everywhere I look," Bailey said. A text set should include a variety of works — literary and informational, long and short — in a mixture of genres. The major texts for the "Community Connections" unit would be *The Canterbury Tales* prologue by Geoffrey Chaucer and a non-fiction work by Po Bronson titled *What Should I Do With My Life?* Other resources are professional journals, video clips, magazine articles and interviews. "Reading is a critical part of every lesson," Bailey said.
- Create at least two summative assessments — a paper-and-pencil exam and a performance assessment. Relate the assessments to the targeted skills and content as well as to the essential questions. Bailey developed a template to help connect the standards to the assessments. "I had to know what I expected each student to do to demonstrate the level of mastery I taught in the unit," she said. Carefully analyze or "deconstruct" the assessments to identify the knowledge and skills needed by students to be successful. "This analysis points out what the teacher must include in the lessons leading up to the assessments," Bailey said. "Only then can the actual lesson planning begin."
- Plan each day's lesson in detail. Include engaging and innovative teaching strategies, whole-group discussions, team and individual skills practice, evaluations, and closing activities.

"Although data are incomplete, indications are that specific changes in what we teach and how we teach can make a difference in preparing more students for success in college," Bailey said.

**Broome High School** in Spartanburg, South Carolina, agreed to pilot an SREB transitional English course for seniors. More than 300 students took pre- and post-assessments of reading and writing readiness. After taking the reinvented English course, two-thirds of students met the readiness benchmarks on the post-assessment — an increase from slightly one-half on the pre-assessment. "Of the 304 students who took the writing pre-assessment, 124 showed improved scores on the post-assessment," Bailey said.

The content of the course was based on skills summarized in “English/Language Arts Readiness Indicators for Postsecondary Studies and Careers,” which are explained and expanded in the SREB publication *Getting Students Ready for College and Careers: Transitional Senior English* by Renee Murray and Gene Bottoms.

One Broome High School student said the course “...challenged me as a writer. I was required to write more often, proofread and put into my own words what I understood from what I read.”

Another student said, “We had more work to prepare us for college and the outside world. Compared with other English classes, we read a wider variety of books. That really held my interest as I learned how to read different types of materials.”

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## Implementing Strategies to Prevent Students from Dropping Out

### Dropping Out Is Not an Option at This High School

**C**redit recovery, an improved program of study, targeted extra help, intensive professional development — these four strategies are helping **LaSalle-Peru Township High School** in LaSalle, Illinois, increase the graduation rate and prepare students for college and careers.

The school enrolls 1,250 students, of which 85 percent are white, 12 percent Hispanic, 2 percent black and 1 percent Asian. The percentage of students considered low-income more than doubled from 12 percent in 2003 to 27 percent in 2009. The school also has a high mobility rate.

**Between 2003 and 2010, the graduation rate increased from 73.4 percent to 91.8 percent — an 18.4 percentage point improvement.**

**Credit Recovery** — Curriculum Director **Steven Wrobleski** attributes much of the improvement to the Attendance Advocacy Program (AAP), funded through a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education. The program served 14 percent of the student population in a nontraditional learning environment in 2009-2010. Three staff members work with 12 students in the morning and 12 students in the afternoon in three-and-a-half-hour sessions. Using the APEX Learning online curriculum, students take classes in a variety of academic subjects. Students are required to complete 10 hours at a job each week and to participate in community service projects. To underscore the seriousness of the program, the school requires students to sign a contract promising not to be absent or tardy more than three days.

One AAP student said, “I can get help whenever I need it. I can earn credits faster, and I can work at my own pace.” Another student said, “AAP allows us to make up for mistakes we’ve made. We do detailed reading, and a teacher and an aide are in the room to help us.”

**Improved Program of Study** — LaSalle-Peru Township High School eliminated all basic-level courses and increased the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and enrollment and the number of dual credit courses and enrollment through Illinois Valley Community College. The school offers the Project Lead The Way engineering curriculum and requires each 10th-grader to write a research paper on a career. Beginning with the class of 2012, each student will declare a major, selected from the three *HSTW*-recommended majors of mathematics and science, humanities and career/technology.

**Targeted Extra Help** — Math labs staffed by mathematics teachers are open each period of the day. Other programs include a freshman transition program, a summer bridge program for at-risk eighth-graders entering high school, and a school recognition and incentive program for good grades, attendance and behavior.

**Intensive Professional Development** — Teachers have participated in professional development on differentiated instruction (with follow-up training and feedback with a consultant); Project C.R.I.S.S., designed to help students of all abilities learn content information across the curriculum and throughout all grade levels (delivered by nationally certified on-staff trainers for new teachers and including refresher courses for other teachers); literacy across the curriculum; and technology training with whiteboards and laptop computers.



**“AAP allows us to make up for mistakes we’ve made. We do detailed reading, and a teacher and an aide are in the room to help us.”**

**AAP student**  
LaSalle-Peru Township High School

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## Learning Acceleration Program Gives Students Another Chance

A home-grown strategy known as the Learning Acceleration Program (LAP) is helping the **Public Schools of Robeson County** (PSRC) in Lumberton, North Carolina, lower dropout rates and increase graduation rates across the district.

PSRC includes six high schools, enrolling more than 2,000 students at the largest and 532 students at the smallest. The district enrollment is 42 percent American Indian, 31 percent black, 18 percent white, 6 percent Hispanic, 2 percent multi-racial and 1 percent Asian.

The district had 556 dropouts and a graduation rate of 60.5 percent in 2005-2006. “We had too many dropouts,” Superintendent **Johnny Hunt** said. “Even one is too many, but we had a problem that needed to be addressed.”

### Another Opportunity

To tackle the dual challenge of reducing the dropout rate and raising the graduation rate, the district developed the acceleration program to “provide students with another opportunity to experience success and feel they belong in an academic environment.”

The goal of LAP is to help students gain the credits to earn a high school diploma with their peers and to build students’ confidence that they can succeed. Students drop out for various reasons, and some may need only one or two more classes to graduate. “If we were faced by the same challenges that some of these young people have to handle, we might drop out too,” Hunt said.



“Students value peer support, so it’s crucial to get them back on track with their classmates en route to graduation.”

**Principal**  
Public Schools of Robeson County

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LAP is built on six core beliefs:

- Students learn at different speeds.
- Students need multiple opportunities to learn.
- Students learn in different ways.
- Students learn better in small learning communities.
- Students learn more effectively when technology plays a major role in learning.
- Many students learn better in non-traditional settings.

### Program Growth

While the program was developed primarily for seniors, it has attracted some juniors and sophomores as well as one or two overage ninth-graders. It enrolled more than 140 students in spring 2009, 160 students in fall 2009 and 180 students in spring 2010.

LAP students must be approved by the superintendent, the school principal and the LAP principal. Students must need at least one additional credit to be on track for graduation, be able to learn in an online setting and provide their own transportation.

The LAP curriculum includes 28 computer-based courses aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study required for graduation. Every course required by the state, with the exception of health and physical education, is offered through LAP.

- Five North Carolina exit standard courses
- Five career/technical courses in the business pathway
- Three English/language arts courses
- Three mathematics courses
- Two science courses
- Four social studies courses
- Two Spanish courses
- Two visual arts courses
- SAT and ACT preparation courses

### Staffing Pattern

The program operates in three locations in the district. It has a staff of 31, including a principal, two guidance counselors, two social workers, 18 graders, seven tutors and one visual arts teacher. “Not all LAP students have behavioral problems,” Hunt said, “but it helps to have counselors to make sure we are meeting the needs of students with multiple types of problems.”

LAP tutors are certified teachers with specialties in the areas they are teaching. “You must have passion for this type of work,” Hunt said. “You can’t be rigid, because the program is set up to be flexible for students who need non-traditional instruction.”

Each LAP facility has 20 desktop computers and 20 laptop computers. Students can “check out” the laptops to continue working from home. The program also provides Internet cards for students who lack Internet access at home and calculators for students who need them to complete their assignments.

None of the equipment has disappeared. “The fact that we still have all of the equipment is evidence that students are dedicated to this program,” Hunt said. “Students say they should have performed better in the past but are serious now about graduating. They are excited that they can get back on track.”

Principals at PSRC schools have seen the benefits of LAP:

- The principal of **Robeson County Career Center** said the program has helped introduce more students to the center. Students going there for LAP discover what the center has to offer and become interested in taking classes there to prepare for the future.

- One high school principal said LAP helped improve the graduation rate. The number rose from 59 percent in 2008 to 71 percent the following year and to 89 percent in 2010. The principal said he knows at least 12 students who would have dropped out of school if not for LAP.
- Another principal said the dropout rate at his school declined from 180 one year to 40 the next year, thanks to LAP. “Students value peer support, so it’s crucial to get them back on track with their classmates en route to graduation,” he said.

**Overall, the dropout rate in the Public Schools of Robeson County declined steadily after LAP was introduced — dropping from 556 in 2006 to 314 in 2010.**

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## School District Gives Students a Second Chance After Drug and Alcohol Violations

**F**or many years, students who violated the strict drug and alcohol policy of **Lake Hamilton School District** in Percy, Arkansas, were recommended for expulsion and removed from the school environment. These students were sent to an alternative school in a nearby school district during the expulsion period. The policy included students who possessed, used, distributed or were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at school. Most of these students chose not to return after being expelled; those who did re-enter often dropped out because they were behind academically.

**“While this approach removed students from Lake Hamilton, it did nothing to help the offending students deal with their abuse,” Superintendent Steve Anderson said.** “The district’s dropout rate increased, the graduation rate declined, test scores fell, and students’ opportunities to be successful in a career diminished.”

Lake Hamilton School District is a rural system enrolling more than 4,000 students at six schools on one large campus. **Lake Hamilton High School (LHHS)** received awards from SREB in 2006 and 2008 for exemplary implementation of the *HSTW* school improvement model. Both the Arkansas Policy Foundation and *Newsweek* magazine recognized LHHS as an outstanding high school.

### *Multi-Step Intervention*

In 2008, the Lake Hamilton school board adopted a policy to implement a multi-step intervention program to be known as Second Chance. Patterned after a program in Illinois, Second Chance was adapted to Arkansas school laws and approved by legal counsel from the Arkansas School Boards Association and the local school board attorney. The program is a collaborative effort involving the school district, the juvenile court system, local law enforcement, local counseling services and parents.

**Second Chance takes into consideration the needs of students, parents, the community and the school district.** Students’ needs include continuing education opportunities, intervention to prevent substance abuse, support for a healthy lifestyle without alcohol and drugs, skills in making positive choices, and continued participation in school and extracurricular activities. Parent and community needs include drug prevention education, financial and emotional support, increased awareness of available resources, and decreased risk of drug-related problems. School needs include reducing the dropout rate, increasing the graduation rate and raising student achievement.



**“Students in the program have the opportunity to stay in school and participate in all school activities, but they are faced by tough consequences in the program.”**

**Steve Anderson**

Lake Hamilton School District

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The Second Chance intervention involves a number of steps to ensure that students in violation of the school district's substance abuse policy get needed support to be able to finish their high school studies. "While the Second Chance program is designed to help students with substance abuse at school, the district still maintains a hard line against substance abuse," Anderson said.

**"Students in the program have the opportunity to stay in school and participate in all school activities, but they are faced by tough consequences in the program,"** Anderson continued. "These actions serve as punitive consequences for violating the policy and demonstrate to students and the community that Lake Hamilton is not going soft on drug and alcohol violations."

Participation in the Second Chance program involves a series of steps:

- The school principal follows policy by suspending the student and notifying law enforcement and the school superintendent.
- The superintendent sends an expulsion letter to the student and his or her parents.
- The student, parents, superintendent, principal and counselor meet to discuss options (either expulsion or the Second Chance program).
- The program is explained and the documents are completed. The student will serve a 10-day out-of-school suspension. Violations will be reported to law enforcement. The student and parents agree that the student will enter a six-week drug and alcohol education, counseling and testing program. The student also agrees to participate in a service learning project. Parents and the student agree to assume all or a portion of the cost of the program.
- After suspension, the student returns to school on disciplinary probation. He or she must exhibit exemplary conduct and maintain acceptable attendance and grades. The superintendent is notified of any violation or failure to meet all program requirements.
- The student and parents understand that any violation of the program agreement will result in immediate expulsion.
- The student and parents agree to waive the right to a school board hearing if the student is unsuccessful in the program.
- Parents meet with the superintendent to work out a financial arrangement for the student's participation in the program.
- The superintendent modifies the expulsion recommendation and admits the student into the Second Chance program.
- The superintendent sends a modification letter to parents, the principal, the counselor, the juvenile court clerk and Quapaw House Inc., the facility that provides student counseling and testing.

Quapaw House Inc. in Hot Springs, Arkansas, is committed to helping Lake Hamilton School District succeed with students in the Second Chance program. Licensed by the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services, the facility conducts weekly after-school meetings for Second Chance students and provides drug and alcohol education, chemical abuse counseling, drug and alcohol testing (minimum of twice per participating student), and prevention education and counseling. It provides follow-up and additional counseling services for parents and students as well as program data and support for school leaders, families and the juvenile court.

Since the Second Chance program began in 2008, the Lake Hamilton superintendent has received 97 expulsion recommendations, including 92 related directly to alcohol and drug abuse. Seventy-six of the 92 students were admitted into the Second Chance program. **Sixty-three (83 percent) of the 76 students completed drug and alcohol counseling and finished the school year. "Eleven students who previously would have been expelled have graduated from high school,"** Anderson said. **In addition, the school district has saved \$400,000 in two years in lost revenue that the expulsions would have cost the district in student funding.**

## Senior Projects: Making the Final Year of High School Meaningful

**S**enior projects have been used at *HSTW* schools for years to add value to the 12th grade. The Senior Project Center says good projects require students to model focused, rigorous and relevant independent learning and to demonstrate not only what they know but also how to apply skills to solve a problem. According to SREB's *Senior Project Guide*, a senior project integrates knowledge, skills and concepts from the student's program of study into one culminating project.

Whether it is called a senior project, a senior capstone, a culminating project or an exhibition of mastery, students usually grumble about having to do it. And it may take years for graduates to realize how a senior project affected their lives. One graduate told a former teacher, "You made my senior year stressful with the senior project, but I am thankful you did.

During my first semester of college, I had to do a team project, and the other team members were asking me how to do it."

### *Putting It All Together*

SREB school improvement consultant **Sandy Culotta** says a senior project provides an opportunity for students to choose areas that interest them; to conduct in-depth research; and to demonstrate problem-solving, decision-making and independent-learning skills. "A senior project gives students a purpose for school in an exciting and meaningful learning experience," she said. Some schools require a senior project for graduation.

Senior projects need to be designed around the six A's:

- **Authenticity** — The project is based on a real-world problem or question that means something to the student. It produces something of real value and involves a real audience.
- **Academic rigor** — The project is based on standards and involves problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills. It requires in-depth understanding and includes reading, research, writing, and an oral presentation.
- **Applied learning** — The project requires application of knowledge to a complex problem. It involves development of self-management skills and requires substantive interaction with other learners.
- **Active exploration** — The project requires real investigation using a variety of sources and includes field-based activities.
- **Adult connections** — The project allows contact with adult expertise and experience. It includes opportunities for students to get to know at least one adult and involves collaboration with others.
- **Assessment** — The project includes a variety of assessment tools. It involves students in shaping project criteria and includes practice assessment, performance assessment and adult involvement in assessment.

The components of a senior project are the four P's — paper, product, portfolio and presentation.

- The research **paper** is a formal paper that encourages students to develop and demonstrate proficiency in conducting research on a chosen topic. It should follow MLA or APA writing and formatting guidelines and be connected clearly to development of a product. The initial research can begin prior to the senior year.
- After the research and the paper are completed, students usually spend the rest of senior year working on a **product**. The product must challenge and stretch the student to complete a task requiring the application of previously learned skills in a new way or in a different environment.

Products are not demonstrations, posters or PowerPoint presentations; they are original models or designs, prototypes, lesson plans, or audio and video productions. The product should be something tangible that will exist after the presentation.

- Students should maintain a **portfolio** throughout the research, paper writing, and design and construction of the product. The portfolio is a presentation of the steps taken to complete the project. It also allows a student to self-reflect and self-evaluate. A portfolio can be useful in job or college interviews.
- The final step is a **presentation** of the student's research and product to a panel of judges. It allows students to experience a formal presentation and receive constructive feedback. Schools are encouraged to include judges from the business community, public service organizations and other groups that may be interested in a student's topic. The presentation is a two-way street, allowing students to present to a group of adults and giving adults opportunities to see what local high school students can accomplish.

High school leaders and teachers may request information and materials from many schools in the *HSTW* network that have had success in implementing senior projects. Some sources are **Sussex Tech High School** in Georgetown, Delaware; **New Orleans Public Schools** in New Orleans, Louisiana; **Cape May County Technical High School** in Cape May, New Jersey; **Dalton High School** in Dalton, Georgia; and **Sylvania Southview High School** in Sylvania, Ohio.

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## Tech Center Develops a Way to Assess Students' Readiness for the Future

**C**hamplain Valley Technical Education Center (CV-TEC) in Plattsburg, New York, works hard to ensure that its stakeholders — students, teachers, business and industry representatives, and postsecondary institutions — understand the value of the career/technical (CT) education available at the center. CV-TEC offers 30 CT programs to 700 juniors and seniors from 17 school districts. Students come from their home high schools for a half day, five days weekly for two years.

The state of New York has a program approval process for CT programs at technical centers. Schools seeking approval must compile information related to students' technical knowledge and skills, technical assessment results, evidence of articulation agreements with postsecondary institutions, dual credit or dual enrollment courses, work-based learning opportunities, and integration of academic content into CT courses. The school must document what students learn in a CT program by cross-referencing each lesson with New York state standards.

Principal **Thomas Ryan** said it takes about a year to compile the information for the program approval process. "The time is well spent in terms of benefits to students," he said. For example, students who participate in a state-approved program can earn one full credit in English and one full credit in mathematics and/or science in addition to CT credits if they complete the two-year program. Students may also qualify to receive a New York State Regents (standardized assessment) CT endorsement seal on their diplomas to let employers and postsecondary institutions know that they are the "cream of the crop," Ryan said.

## Assessment System

As part of the program approval process, CV-TEC developed an assessment system to measure students' technical knowledge and skills, workplace readiness skills, and program engagement.

- One-third of the assessment is a technical score that measures students' mastery of curriculum and job skills competencies in a CT program.
- Another third of the assessment is based on students' SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) workplace readiness score. This portion measures students' basic, thinking, interpersonal and employability skills identified by business leaders as necessary for job success.
- The program engagement portion of the system allows the school to gauge student participation in each class without giving a grade for attendance. Students who attend class earn a daily engagement score based on classroom procedures, timeliness, preparation, assignment completion and class participation. The overall engagement score counts one-third on a student's final CT score.

To provide students and potential employers with evidence of student success, CV-TEC issues three levels of graduation certificates to students for meeting specific criteria. All three certificates call for a portfolio, which is a graduation requirement.

- **Exemplary Technical Performance Certificate** — Students earn an average CT score of 90 or higher, have an attendance rate of 91 percent or higher, meet all job targets for the program and complete a portfolio.
- **Technical Performance Certificate** — Students have an average CT score of 80 to 89, have an attendance rate of 89 percent or higher, meet all job targets for the program and complete a portfolio.
- **Career Studies Certificate** — Students have an average CT score of 65 to 79, have an attendance rate of 80 percent or higher, meet all job targets for the program and complete a portfolio.

Teachers, business and industry representatives, and postsecondary institutions worked with CV-TEC to ensure that the certificates reflect the appropriate information. Employers were particularly interested in attendance. "Getting young people to show up is a concern in today's workplace," Ryan said. "Since the state does not allow schools to grade students on their attendance, the certificate provides a way to measure and report on that information."

Business and industry partners are thrilled with the certificates, Ryan said. "They can look at a certificate and tell what type of worker the student will be."

**The percentage of CV-TEC students earning an Exemplary Technical Performance Certificate increased from 21 percent in 2006 to 32 percent in 2010.** The percentage receiving a Technical Performance Certificate rose from 45 percent in 2006 to 48 percent in 2010, while the percentage earning a Career Studies Certificate declined from 34 percent in 2006 to 20 percent four years later.

"Many of our students have not been totally successful in a traditional high school setting," Ryan said. "This system reaffirms that they can learn the skills they will need in the future."



"Many of our students have not been totally successful in a traditional high school setting. This system reaffirms that they can learn the skills they will need in the future."

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## Reconnecting Potential Dropouts to Success in High School

**M**ore than 150 students are enrolled in the Phoenix Academy at **Herbert H. Lehman High School** in Bronx, New York. These students are 16 to 17 years old, have received from zero to six high school credits, and have a history of high absenteeism and academic failure.

Phoenix Academy is aligned with the personal needs and work schedules of students. It is founded on the principles of regular attendance, motivation to learn, a personal relationship with an adult mentor, and a clear path to success based on state exams and high school graduation requirements.

Parents are involved in students' commitments to attend school regularly and complete their work. The academy team used Google Docs online documents to develop a database of phone numbers and addresses of students and parents. Parents are invited to "town hall meetings" and family nights at the school.

A supportive classroom environment encourages students to succeed. Teachers investigated and analyzed the reasons — such as failure to do homework and failure to understand lessons — that cause students to become disengaged with their studies.

Then they collaborated to develop high-interest interdisciplinary lesson plans featuring authentic projects and problems to make learning real for students.

Teachers give timely feedback on student work, issue weekly and biweekly program reports, hold meetings with a guidance counselor to determine students' credit status, return graded papers as soon as possible, set goals with the students and make positive phone calls to students' homes.

Phoenix Academy had the best attendance record of any of the seven LHS small learning communities in April 2010 with 83 percent attendance, compared with 73 percent in the law academy and 64 percent in the business academy.

**The data speak loudly. Eighty-six percent of Phoenix students have achieved cohort status — the number of credits needed by a student to be considered part of his or her grade level. Seventy-nine percent passed the state English exam, while 81 percent passed the state algebra exam in 2009-2010.**

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This newsletter of “best practices” in implementing the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)*, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* school improvement models is based on presentations at the 24th Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in July 2010.

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