

Members of the Academy

Administration

Carol Townsend
Lynn Girdlestone
Heidi Salva

Counseling Department

Lorrie Wojkowski
Leo Cintron
George Bushey
Kim McEwen

Faculty

Nicole Barker
Heather Burger
Paul Caban
Michael Capuana
Kristin Ciesielski
Janice DiIorio
Natalie Gallagher
Leslie Gracz
Maria Hoch
Steven Kolbert
Amy Proctor
Shelly Seymour
Kristen Thomas
Stacy Walker
Gina Zawistowski

Other high school faculty, as well as the middle school administration, counselors, and 8th grade teachers also attend meetings.

DEPEW HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN ACADEMY

I. Introduction

Research over the past several years has indicated that making the transition from middle school to high school is a crucial part of the development and success of each student. In addition, communication among teachers, students, and parents is critical to ensure that the anonymity and apathy cited as the leading causes of high school problems (Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution, 1996) are avoided.

By concentrating on student attendance, discipline, academic performance, and school structures, we can implement a comprehensive plan to help students make a successful transition to high school. The Depew High School Shared Decision Making Committee and the Building Improvement Committee have acknowledged several areas that need improvement, and as a result, the Freshman Academy was developed. Within those areas of improvement, we have recognized a number of strategies that can help our students find success. We identified the freshman as one of the target groups to make an impact and a difference in a student's attitude and experience in high school.

The Freshman Academy has been meeting regularly to discuss the specific concerns for the ninth grade students. The academy has listed the following concerns:

- Weakness in skills, such as organization and study skills
- Students that are not academically successful have a greater risk of having behavior and attendance issues
- High level of immaturity and irresponsibility
- Increase in number of students failing classes
- Limited number of teachers who want to teach ninth graders
- Too little communication and involvement with parents
- Too little communication with middle school teachers

- Students who fall behind their freshman year have a greater risk of not graduating in four years and dropping out than any other year

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) research provides extensive proof of the need for measures to be taken to help ease the transition of students to and through ninth grade. Among the compelling statistics they have released are the following:

- More students fail ninth grade more than any other grade of school.
- Poor and minority students are twice as likely as others to be retained.
- Students who repeat at least one year are three times more likely to drop out of school than students who have not failed a grade.
- 60% of students with multiple risk factors in eighth grade graduate from high school on time, compared to 90% of other students.
- The performance of students in Algebra I is the single most reliable indicator of their earnings at age 25.
- Half of the teens and young adults with criminal records and/or substance abuse problems do not read well.
- Among 14-15 year-olds who struggle with basic reading and mathematics skills, 20% drop out of school within two years.

Published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* offers a series of recommendations that provide a powerful and challenging vision of the 21st century high school. *Breaking Ranks* report reflects the belief that “teaching and learning must provide the focus for high school reform,” and emphasizes that “the high school of the 21st century must be much more student-centered and above all much more personalized in programs, support services, and intellectual rigor.” The Freshman Academy model is based on a comprehensive approach using research-based strategies to understand and deal with the characteristics and needs of freshman students.

II. Mission of the Freshman Academy

To provide the necessary support for freshman students to be academically successful during their first year in high school.

III. Goals for the Freshman Academy

The Freshman Academy has developed the following goals in an effort to improve attendance, support for at-risk students, behavior issues, and academic success for all students:

- Empower teachers to develop new strategies to improve academic success
- Improve the student transition into high school
- Build developmental assets by creating teacher/student connections
- Increase communication and involvement of parents in the educational process
- Increase attendance and a desire to come to school
- Build school pride and a sense of belonging
- Increase graduation rate
- Decrease drop out rate

IV. Components of Depew High School's Freshman Academy Plan

The following components are research-based and have been used in several freshman success plans across the country:

Teaming

- Develop Interdisciplinary Teams
- Have a concentrated, dedicated freshman staff
- Develop a culture of collaboration among staff

Scheduling

Scheduling students into two academic teams with a dedicated staff of common teachers for each team consisting of:

- Using a block schedule of core academics creating continuous learning
- Develop flexible scheduling opportunities with a block of time throughout the day for the four academic classes and LOTE

Common Planning Time

- Develop a culture of collaboration among staff
- Have team meetings to discuss individual team's success and strategies
- Regular meetings of academy members to discuss and share instructional strategies
- Interdisciplinary connections and units

Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Teams (Common practice, policies, and learning through an interdisciplinary approach)

- Student Centered
- Common planning times
- Interdisciplinary connections
- Consistent rules, procedures, and expectations
- Develop a culture of reading
- Common files kept on students
- Rewards and recognition at the Awards Consortium
- Increase pro-social activities and involvement for freshman such as field trips, and involvement in HS activities such as homecoming and follies week.

Consistent and common policies and procedures

- Adopt middle school color-coding for academic classes
- Develop common expectations, policies and procedures. Some possibilities are classroom rules, homework policy, and sharing of teacher detention
- Use of agendas/weekly planners with follow-up
- Create close physical proximity for freshman students – having each team or all freshman in one centralized location for their core academic block
- Team letter to incoming freshman during the summer before their freshman year
- Development of “Homework Hall” to assist struggling students with homework

Parental Communication

- Parent meeting during 8th grade year
- Informational letters to parents prior to freshman year
- Supply list and survival guide brochures for parents
- Increase parental contact
- Have team-specific activities
- Develop a freshman page on the Depew website
- Have common parent/teacher conferences
- Parent meetings throughout freshman year

Strategies for at-risk students NEED MORE

- Incorporate T.E.A.M. individual success plans for students at-risk

Continuous Improvement Plan and Professional Development

- Visit on-going successful high school freshman academies
- Training with BOCES and Angela Stockman on developing a strong team and academy strategies
- Provide training opportunities for working with the at-risk population (MSAT Training)
- Inservice on strong instructional strategies, effective lectures, organizers, and grouping for lesson application

Communication with students prior to high school

- Introduction to Elective's Orientation in January of 8th grade year
- Parent meeting in February of 8th grade year
- 9th Grade Orientation in August of 9th grade year

Guidance Support

- Career Exploration and Goal Setting
- Advisory Time – Bring Guidance in for groups, social and study skills sessions
- Meetings/conferences with individual students
- Incorporate, develop, and strengthen life skills and Character Education, and Community Service

Communication with Middle School

- Improve communication with 8th grade teachers
- Understand team approach at the middle school and how to successfully work as a team

Building and District Support

- Presentations to the faculty and monthly updates through Email and Faculty Meetings
- Presentation to department chairs and district level administration
- Presentation to the Board of Education and to the community