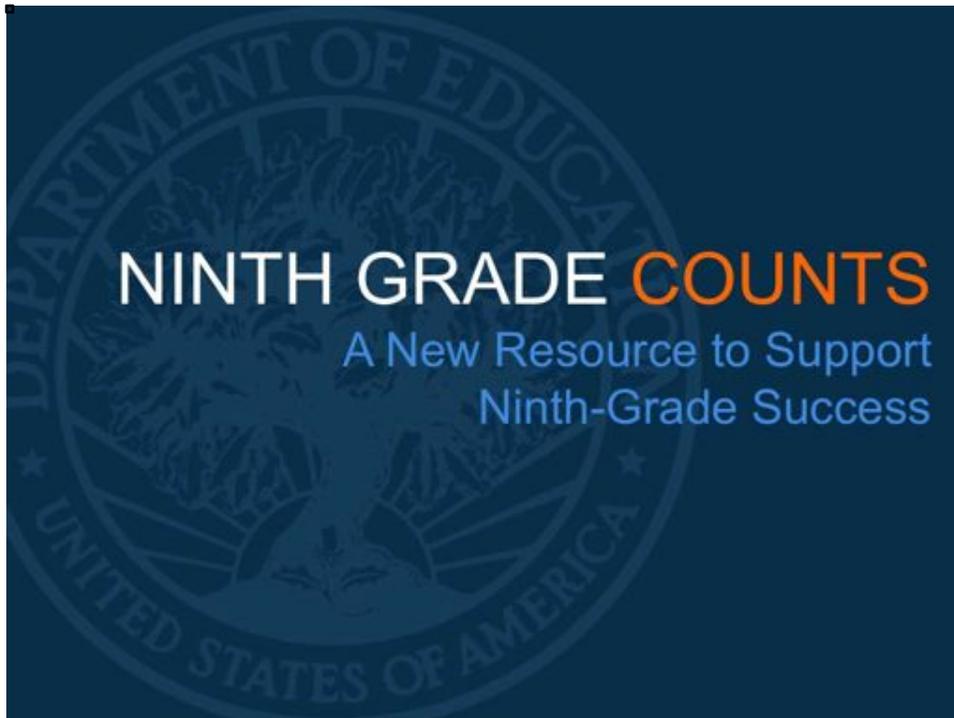


[MARY HASTINGS OPENS THE EVENT]

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to this Smaller Learning Communities Webinar on ninth-grade transitions.



This topic is first in a series of webinars that focus on ninth grade. Why? Because ninth grade counts--big time.

We want to share our rationale for developing a new resource, provide an opportunity to hear from grantees who have developed successful transition programs and to also hear from you.

HOUSEKEEPING

Make sure your phone lines
are **muted** throughout the
presentation to reduce
background noise



Before we get started, let's take care of some housekeeping. Please mute your phones throughout this presentation to reduce background noise.

HOUSEKEEPING

To ask a **question**, please type your question using the CHAT FEATURE and click enter



For those who are not familiar with the chat-room feature please look in the lower left corner of your screen and you'll see the chat room space where comments and questions will scroll throughout the webinar. If you want to add your comment or question, just go to the text box below the chat room, type it in, and click on the button to the right of the text box. We have folks standing by to respond to the chat room comments and questions as appropriate and will ask a few of the questions publicly after each presentation so all can hear the presenters respond.

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The webinar slides will be posted on our website within five days of the webinar:

slcp.ed.gov



You will be able to access these slides on the SLCP website listed on the screen.

Your Technical Assistance Team

Millennium Group International
tmgi.net

Great Schools Partnership
greatschoolspartnership.org

Center for Secondary School Redesign
cssr.us

So, who are we? We are the team from the organizations partnering to deliver technical assistance to SLCP grantees. The Millennium Group International is located in Washington, D.C; the Great Schools Partnership is in Portland, Maine; and the Center for Secondary School Redesign is located in Rhode Island.



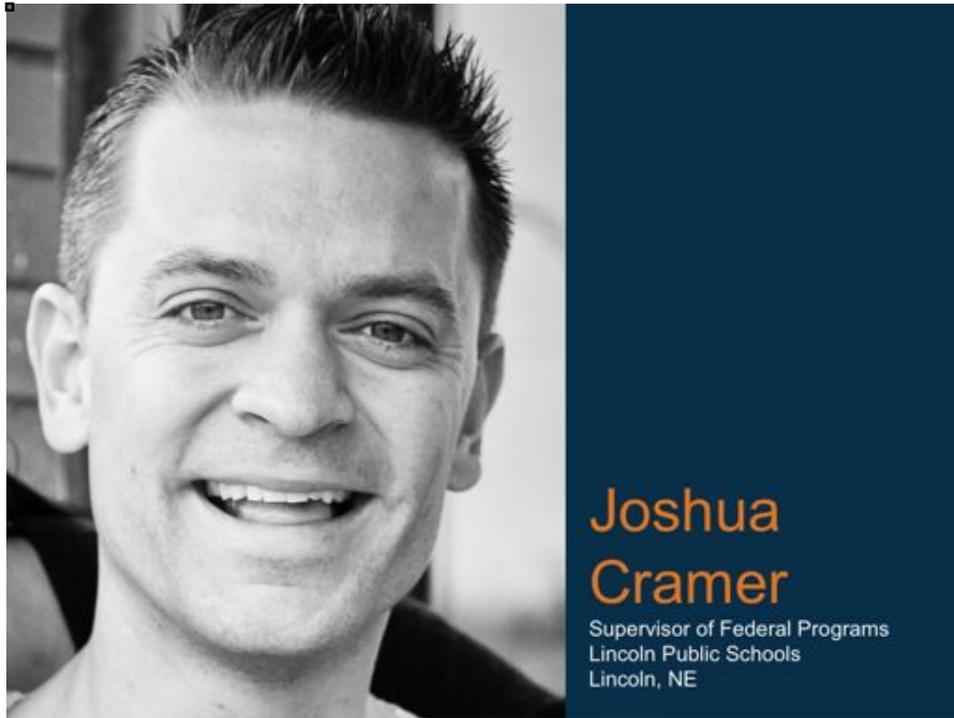
We are pleased to introduce today's presenters.



Dr. Leslie Rennie-Hill from Portland, Oregon, is a consultant for the TMG team. Leslie's research on the ninth grade informed the development of the tool. She will provide us with some compelling data about why ninth grade is both a minefield and a pivotal year for students.



Jill Able is the SLC site coordinator for the Lincoln, Nebraska, public schools.



Joshua Cramer is the district's supervisor of federal programs. The team from Lincoln Public Schools will share their approach to improving success in the ninth grade.



And we have Darlene Bruton, project director from Prince Georges County in Maryland, who will focus on her district's summer bridge program and strong collaboration with middle schools.



Stephen Abbott, director of communications for the Great Schools Partnership, as well as co-author of the guide with Pamela Fisher, will introduce the new guide and answer any questions that arise.



Finally, I'm Mary Hastings, from the Great Schools Partnership, is former SLC project director of a 2006 grant and facilitator for this event. Welcome all and than you all for being here today.

Why We Created this Webinar

1. To introduce a **new resource** for supporting ninth-grade success
2. To share **evidence-based** ninth-grade transition strategies
3. To learn from **fellow grantees** engaged in ninth-grade work
4. To start a **dialogue** on this critical school-improvement topic

We created this webinar to engage everyone in a conversation about improving transition to high school for all ninth graders. This is a critical time in a student's school life—and it can present a veritable minefield for some students.



Let me quickly review the goals for today's event.

Goal #1

Share proven strategies that will help you **accelerate ninth-grade learning** and put your students back on-track to on-time graduation



This is especially important in light of the fact that so many ninth-grade students arrive at high school already off the track for success.

Goal #2

Introduce research that will help you **reflect on** ninth-grade policies and practices



Leslie will be presenting the research to us.

Goal #3

Introduce a resource
designed to help you take a
more proactive approach to
ninth-grade success



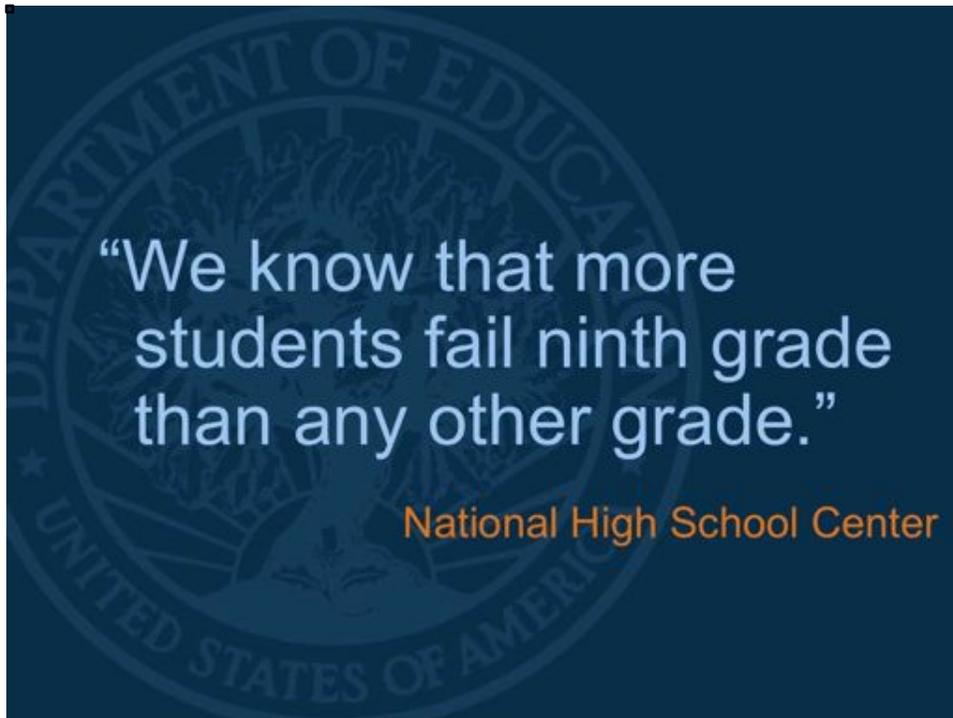
In both the school presentations and the presentation of the guide to follow, you will hear of many ways to move ninth-grade success forward.

Goal #4

Clarify the **Project Director's role** in ninth-grade work and address sustainability beyond the life of the SLC grant



You may want to ask some specific questions of the project directors presenting their roles in the ninth-grade work in their districts and schools.



Now, Leslie is going to lead us off with a review and summary of research of why ninth grade counts so much.

[LESLIE BEGINS]

Thank you, Mary.

I understand that the agenda for the webinar is in three parts.

First we'll share what we know and have learned through research and experienced in school – a combination of the research we conducted last year along with other studies.

Then we'll hear about ninth grade work in the field from our guest grantee presenters. These folks also contributed to the session we did at the Project Directors Meeting last November in DC – and I know they have many valuable insights to offer.

And finally we will share our evolving resource – our attempt to pull together best practices and research into a user-friendly guide.

Let's first talk about what we learned through our research study of ninth-grade best practices at SLC grantee sites.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Ninth grade announces, and often defines, a school's **commitment to equity** and to preparing every student for life



We know that a school's ninth grade reflects its equity culture and the assumptions adults in the school have about who is likely to succeed.

And...

Why Ninth Grade Counts

The messages students receive in ninth grade, and the self-beliefs they adopt, can **define their high school years**



The messages students receive regarding expectations and opportunities can *define* their high school years. When ninth grade is organized as a gatekeeper, opportunities and supports for students are limited and unequally distributed. When ninth grade is organized as a springboard, opportunities for student success open up.

Because...

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Ninth-grade performance is **highly predictive** of a student's likelihood of graduating



Ninth grade performance is highly predictive of a student's likelihood to graduate.

And... what happens in ninth grade gives students a strong message about their personal capability and value—whether they can succeed, whether there is help available, whether they'll be embarrassed if they seek help, whether they are worth someone's time and attention.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

The further a student falls behind, the **more difficult it is to catch up**



The further a student falls behind, the more difficult it is to catch up. Losing core credits in the ninth grade quickly puts students off-track.

Through our research and that of others we've learned how critical it is for students to pass their core courses. And the importance of what happens after a student fails a course—whether they can catch up and get back on track or whether they fall further behind.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Up to 40% of students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10-15% of repeaters go on to graduate



Here is a startling fact about our urban youth: Up to 40% of students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10-15% of repeaters go on to graduate.

This statistic gives me pause. The decision to have a student repeat ninth grade can be based on good intentions and a desire to ensure future high school success. Yet, the message conveyed by the decision to make a student repeat ninth grade, a message of failure, seems to counteract the intent—and cause unintended consequences.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Ninth-grade attrition is far more pronounced in high-poverty urban schools: **40% of dropouts leave after their freshman year**



Further, in high poverty schools, the data are compelling: Ninth-grade attrition is far more pronounced in high-poverty urban schools: 40% of dropout leave after their freshman year.

And if you are African American or Latino...

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Ninth-grade underperformance and dropout rates are **much more pronounced** for African American and Latino students



Ninth-grade underperformance and dropout rates are much more pronounced.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

Most high school dropouts
fail 25% of their courses in
ninth grade, but only 8% of
eventual graduates do



The damage is done in the ninth grade: most high school dropouts fail 25% of their core courses in the ninth grade.

They may continue to come to school and not drop out until later years, but once off-track, the students tend to get further behind academically and they can get overwhelmingly discouraged.

Why Ninth Grade Counts

In schools with strong transition programs, researchers found a dropout rate of 8%; in schools without such a program, the dropout rate was 24%

But there is hope. In schools with strong ninth grade programs including focused attention on successful transitions from eighth grade, researchers have found a dropout rate of 8%. In schools without such programs, the dropout rate was 24%.

Again, the data are compelling. Some organizations have developed an on-track measure to help identify those students needing attention and to inform principals, counselors, teachers, and central office administrators about the effectiveness of the eighth-to-ninth-grade transition and ninth graders academic success.

Again, the data is compelling. Some organizations have developed an on-track measure.

On Track: What does it mean?

Consortium on Chicago School
Research

Identified the primary off-track indicators

Used by Chicago Public Schools

Adopted by districts nationwide

FMI: ccsr.uchicago.edu



The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago was the first to develop an on-track measure that has been adapted now by many districts.

The Chicago measure identifies students as on-track if they:

1. Have not failed more than one semester course and...
2. Have accumulated the credits for promotion to tenth grade.

You can get much more information about the on-track indicator at the CCSR website.



As we noted earlier—as part of our SLC technical assistance last year we conducted research on the ninth grade programs at six large, diverse high schools. Our research consisted of site visits, interviews, and school observations as well as an analysis of their achievement and behavioral data.

This is what we learned...

Ninth-Grade Study [BACKGROUND]

Recent research indicates that the ninth-grade transition is a highly vulnerable point in the educational pipeline



We knew that the transition to ninth grade marks a highly vulnerable point in the education pipeline.

Ninth-Grade Study [What We Learned]

Ninth grade is either a
gatekeeper to opportunity
or
springboard to success



We found that the ninth grade can be either a gatekeeper that rations and limits opportunities or it can be designed as a springboard to academic success.

Ninth-Grade Study [What We Learned]

Ninth grade as **gatekeeper**

Assumption that students arrive ready for high school work and life

Belief that students need to take advantage of the opportunities provided

Perception that only some students are college material



When we identified a high school's ninth grade to be a gatekeeper:

Staff generally assumed that all students enter school at roughly the same level of academic ability and they designed courses as if all students are ready for high school work and life.

Staff believed that the school sets the table—provides the learning opportunities—and it's up to the students to take the initiative to get what they need, and...

Many staff acted as if only some of the students are “college material” who are worth their time and attention—that only some students should take more challenging, rigorous coursework.

Ninth-Grade Study [What We Learned]

Ninth grade as **springboard**

Assumption that all students need personalized support and attention

Belief that teachers need to guide students to make good choices

Perception that all students can succeed academically and go on to college



When we found a high school's ninth grade to be a springboard:

Staff assumed all students need personalized support and attention to succeed. They'd established systems to analyze data to determine each student's skill level, tailor course work and normalize extra support. They met regularly to plan strategies to remediate student failures and proactively maximize the likelihood that all students would be successful.

Teachers and counselors expressed their belief that adults need to guide students to make good choices and to encourage students to stretch to reach their potential.

Evidence was obvious throughout the school reflecting the belief that all students can succeed academically and go on to college—that each student is worth time and attention.

Ninth-Grade Study [What We Learned]

Ninth grade as **gatekeeper**

Courses, schedules, and curriculum built around teacher needs and desires

Academic courses and support are separated and uncoordinated

More resources are allocated to prestige courses and older students

Teachers tend to work in isolation



In gatekeeper schools, academic courses and support for students who are struggling or need extra help to understand or catch up are separate and uncoordinated. For example, no clear connection or accountability exists between Algebra class and the generic Wednesday afternoon tutoring available to students.

In gatekeeper schools, more resources are allocated to prestige courses like AP and Honors classes and older eleventh- and twelfth-grade students.

In gatekeeper schools, courses, schedules and curriculum are typically built around teacher needs and desires. Often teachers equate what and whom they teach with their own status within the school. Less experienced teachers are assigned to ninth grade; coaches have their planning period at the end of the day to facilitate their coaching demands and consequently minimizing their likely availability to students after school.

And, in gatekeeper schools, teachers tend to work in isolation—attending departmental meetings as needed.

Ninth-Grade Study [What We Learned]

Ninth grade as **springboard**

Courses, schedules, and curriculum are entirely built around student needs

Academic courses and support are deeply integrated

Adequate resources and staff are allocated to support incoming students

Teachers collaborate *regularly* within the school day



In springboard schools, academic courses and student supports for them are integrated. A student's need for extra help is normalized—it is to be expected that at some point a student will need to get more explanation or catch up—and that help is clearly accessible for students.

In springboard schools, adequate resources and staff are allocated to support incoming students—and even prioritized as in cases where particularly talented teachers who can engage reluctant learners in content are shifted intentionally to ninth grade.

In springboard schools, courses, schedules and curriculum are constructed around student needs identified as students enter ninth grade, and they are adjusted as student achievement, attendance and behavioral data indicate adjustments would improve student success.

And in springboard schools, teachers collaborate routinely—in SLCs, in PLCs, in departments. We found that teachers often collaborate initially in a more remedial way by focusing on student needs and behaviors that are problematic and require immediate attention. As teams develop and collaboration deepens and grows more comfortable, teams often move to a more proactive approach—rethinking what they are teaching, how they are teaching, and in what ways they can generate the most student success.

Is your school
operating like a
gatekeeper or a
springboard?



Please take a moment to think about your approach to ninth graders.

Is your school operating like a *gatekeeper* or a *springboard*?

Part of our rationale for developing a ninth-grade guide is to share what we've gleaned from our own and other's research—and to help high school educators be strategic and thoughtful about their approach, to be more springboard-like and proactive in their efforts to support the success of all students.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Everything begins with a culture
of **high expectations** and **equity**



Our ninth-grade study affirmed for us the critical importance of district and school culture—what people actually do each day as they interact with students and adults.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

All **programs** and **practices**
reflect the school's public
commitment to equity



And the degree to which the culture demonstrates equitable practices for all students. Not the same, one-size-fits-all type of practices but rather differentiated practices guided by student needs and abilities that can lead to equitable opportunities to learn and equitable success at meeting standards.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Success is driven by the
courage and **commitment** of
passionate school leaders



And we also learned that success is driven by the courage and commitment of passionate school leaders.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Schools that take a **proactive approach** to ninth grade get better results



Who choose to take a proactive approach to working with ninth grade students —by knowing their entering abilities, meeting their needs, and keeping an eye on any strategies likely to ensure their future postsecondary success.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Ninth-grade PLCs that meet regularly, review data, and collaborate on planning and teaching **are essential**



We also have learned that when teachers plan together regularly, review data, and modify practice, students' needs are more likely to be addressed. We found strong correlations between consistent teacher collaboration and increased student success.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Effective transition programs
need supportive policies and
adequate resources provided
by the **district** and **school**



We saw the benefits derived from effective ninth grade programs nested in supportive policies and adequate resources.

Ninth-Grade Study [What Works]

Support systems need to be
systemic and **integrated** with
core content-area courses



And finally, we've seen the positive impact that occurs when supports for students are systemic and integrated with core content-area courses.

Questions?

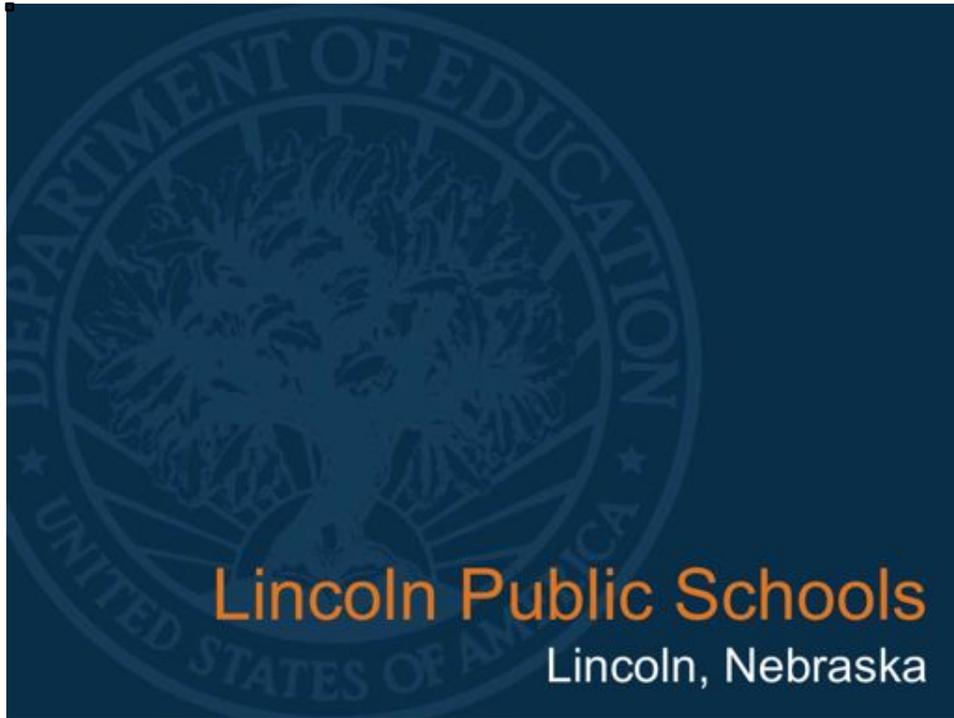


[MARY BEGINS]

Thank you so much for sharing your research with us, Leslie, and for helping us cross the bridge to practices in the field and the development of our tool.

Before moving forward to our grantee presenters, are there questions or comments? Mary reads pertinent questions for Leslie.

Our lessons learned from the field and current research inform our developing resource. You will have the opportunity to weigh in on what you think is important to include as you listen to the stories from your colleagues.



Please welcome the team from Lincoln Public Schools, Josh and Jill...

Lincoln High School

2011-2012 enrollment: 1,573

Mobility rate: 26%

Average daily attendance: 90%

Poverty rate: 61%

Percentage minority: 50%



[JOSH BEGINS]

LHS is a growing poor, growing minority, urban high school with increasing risk factors (mobility, crime, housing issues, etc.).

LHS has a strong history of partnerships; however, since 2001 there has not been a coordinated partnership development approach.

Lincoln High School

2009-2010 graduation rate: 66%

Asian: 86%

White: 72%

African American: 64%

Native American: 46%

Hispanic/Latino: 33%



LHS has the lowest overall graduation rates in the district and one of the lowest in the state. It has been on the PLAS schools list for the state of Nebraska.

Lincoln High School

2010-2011 graduation rate: **73%**

Asian: **+2 percentage points**

White: **+6**

African American: **+1**

Native American: **+9**

Hispanic/Latino: **+13**



The 7% jump in graduation rates came in year three of the SLC project. Every student ethnic subgroup saw substantial gains. This is the result of hard work by teachers and administrators. This is also the result of high school redesign efforts via the SLC grant project.

Lincoln High School

Grad-rate bump: **How was it achieved?**

Teaming

Advisories

Summer bridge

Link Crew

Partnerships



[JILL BEGINS]

Teaming

- Teaming started at LHS in 2008.
- All 9th and 10th grade students are on a team. Each team consists of 60 to 100 students.
- LHS has three 9th grade teams and two tenth grade teams. Each team has one lead administrator and common teachers for English, Science, and Social Studies.
- Each team meets 2 to 3 times each week to discuss student attendance and interventions, curriculum, and instructional strategies.
- Teaming administrators meet once a month to insure teaming strategies are consistent across teams. These meetings focus on student failure data and implementing study skills in classrooms. Data is collected and analyzed every 4-5 weeks. (see data slide)

Lincoln High School

Grad-rate bump: **How was it achieved?**

Teaming

Advisories

Summer bridge

Link Crew

Partnerships



Advisories

- In the 2011-2012 school year all students in grades 9-12 are in an advisory for 30 minutes each week.
- Advisory teachers will loop with students each year.
- As students progress through the Advisory program they will participate in a series of activities and lessons aimed at equipping students with the knowledge and skills for academic success both in and beyond high school.
- Survey data is being collected to measure the impact advisory has on relationships with students and their advisory teacher. This survey will be given to students each fall and spring to measure change over time.

Lincoln High School

Grad-rate bump: **How was it achieved?**

Teaming

Advisories

Summer bridge

Link Crew

Partnerships



Partnerships

- LHS has contracted with a community based after-school program called Lighthouse to offer an after-school tutoring program.
- Lighthouse staff comes to LHS 4 days a week after school for two hours each day. They offer a safe place for students to study as well as tutoring for students in a variety of subjects if needed.
- In the first three months of the program the average number of students attending the Lighthouse After School program was 23.4 and in first semester this year the average attending each day is 50.4 students. Based on the number of students attending each day this program is having great success.



These next three slides show some of the activities of the Link Crew and the Links Summer Bridge program.

To expand the impact of the LINKS Bridge program and improve the transition to high school for all freshmen, LHS started the Link Crew program in the Fall of 2011-12.

Link Crew is a high school transition program that welcomes freshmen and makes them feel comfortable throughout the first year of their high school experience.

A key feature of the program is the focus on trained mentors from grades eleven and twelve to be Link Crew Leaders; guiding members of the freshmen class to discover what it takes to be successful during the transition to high school and helping facilitate that success. By using students as mentors, the Link Crew program promotes leadership development.



Four components provide structure to the Link Crew program:

1. High School Orientation - Link Leaders and freshmen meet early in the year to start building the mentor relationship and to provide freshmen with information about how to be successful in high school.
2. Academic Follow Ups - Link Leaders support freshmen academic success and character development by engaging in structured visits during advisement.
3. Social Follow Ups - Link Leaders and freshmen connect outside the classroom by attending school events.
4. Leader Initiated Contacts - Link Leaders connect with their assigned group of freshmen as individuals and small groups.

Examples of activities organized by student leaders include teaching lessons in advisory, inviting all freshmen to join the leaders at a school sporting event, and hosting a Cocoa and Cram session to help Freshmen prepare for finals.

LINKS Bridge + Link Crew Programs

	Freshmen 2010-11 Semester 1	Freshmen 2010-11 Semester 2
Referrals	222	127
Suspensions	39	25
In School Suspensions	62	30
Attendance	92.5% (Semester 1)	94.2% (Semester 1)

Data was collected comparing freshmen from the previous year to the current 2011-2012 school year to see program effectiveness. This data compares the number of referrals, suspensions, in school suspensions, and attendance at LHS.



Summer Bridge

The LINKS Bridge program was developed and implemented in the summer of 2010 to connect incoming ninth-grade students to LHS and prepare them for academic success in high school.

The program is available to all incoming ninth graders and is communicated through a letter to the home of every incoming ninth grade student. Presentations are also done at each feeder Middle School to promote the program. In addition, a special invitation is sent to students identified by middle school counselors and teachers as at risk of failing in high school.

Students attend the LINKS Bridge program for a half-day, every day, for one week in early August.

Students participate in a variety of activities throughout the week to get to know each other and the teachers helping with the program.



One of the highlights of the program is the high ropes course. Students complete two challenge courses. One course promotes teamwork and the other challenges students to an individual course of overcoming obstacles.

Each year about 80 students out of a class of a little over 300 students have attended the program

Team Data

TEAM X - Toplyn							
Total Number of Students	76	74	72	74			
Total Number of Periods	532	518	511	518			
	MQ 1	Q1	MQ2	S1	MQ3	Q3	MQ4
Percent with 1 F?	24 =						
#Students/total students	21%	20 = 27%	15 = 20%	21%			
Percent with 2 or more F's?	21 =						
#Students/total students	28%	13 = 18%	20 = 27%	24%			
Percent of students with 1 or more F's	45 =						
#Students/total students	59%	33 = 44%	35 = 48%	45%			
Percent with an F in English?							
#Students/total students (includes non-teams)	8 = 11%	6 = 8%	6 = 8%	9 = 12%			
# Team Students failing Off/Non-Team							
English	2 = 3%	2 = 3%	1 = 1%	0 = 0			
#Students/total students							
Percent with an F in Social Studies?							
#Students/total students (includes non-teams)	9 = 12%	5 = 7%	6 = 8%	6 = 8%			
# Team Students failing Off/Non-Team							
Social Studies	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0			
#Students/total students							
Percent with an F in Science?	18 =						
#Students/total students (includes non-teams)	24%	10 = 14%	11 = 15%	7 = 9%			
# Team Students failing Off/Non-Team							
Science	3 = 4%	3 = 4%	1 = 1%	0 = 0			
#Students/total students							
Percent with an F in Math?	26 =						
#Students/total students	34%	18 = 24%	15 = 20%	24%			
Number of Students failing off/non-team							
Classes	37 =						
#Students/total students (includes all classes)	49%	28 = 38%	32 = 44%	35%			
Students with C's or better	17 = 22%	17 = 23%	18 = 25%	23 =			
#Students/total students	31 =			40 =			
Percent with 0 F's in all classes	31 =						
#Students/total students	41%	41 = 56%	37 = 52%	54%			
Pace Rate	444/532	453/518	424/511	448/518			
# of passed classes/total classes	= 83%	= 87%	= 83%	= 86%			
Overall Average Daily Attendance (% present)	93.29			92.48			

This slide indicates data collected on students on each team.

Lincoln High School

Our **leadership** journey

Grants management

Evaluation

Integration of work

Sustainability



[JOSH BEGINS]

LHS did not naturally take to the grants management process. Through a partnership with district office (Federal Programs Department) the grant reached a higher level of implementation between years 2 and 3.

Evaluation has been an ongoing issue. The lead evaluator was changed after the first year of the grant. This led to more authentic evaluation that tied student/teacher achievement to grant initiatives.

LHS is one of three high schools in Lincoln that received the High School Graduation Initiative Grant. The ongoing discussion about connectivity between HSGI and SLC is important to future student achievement.

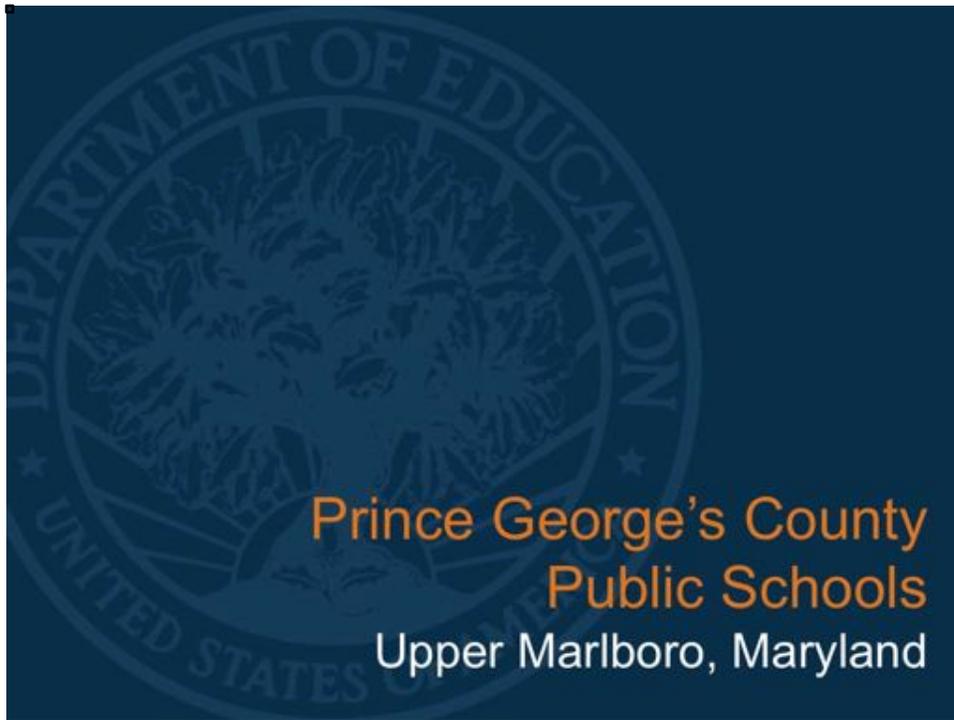
The LHS SLC project independent evaluation has moved sustainability conversation to the next level. In fact on March 20th of this month, district and building level representatives will be engaged in a three-hour strategic planning process about sustainability.

Questions for the presenters?



[MARY BEGINS]

Thank you, Jill and Josh. Now let's see what questions have come up for our Lincoln presenters.



Please welcome Darlene Bruton from Prince George's County Public Schools. Her colleague, Jessica Gitlis, the SLC program manager of DuVal High School will be responding to your questions and comments during Darlene's presentation. Darlene...

Prince George's County

123,317 students

2nd largest district in MD and 18th in US

205 K-12 schools

9,000 teachers and 18,000 employees

1.6 billion annual budget



[DARLENE BEGINS]

Thank you, Mary.

Prince George's County Public Schools is one of the nation's largest school districts. The district over 123,000 students, 205 schools K-12, 18,000 employees and a \$1.6 billion annual budget. The district serves a diverse student population from urban, suburban and rural communities. Blacks account for about 67.4% of the total population and Hispanics about 22.6%. The district serves students from over 144 countries, speaking 168 languages.

Prince George's County

Total SLC school enrollment: 7,983

Crossland: 1,361

DuVal: 1,581

Oxon Hill: 1,627

Potomac: 1,120

Suitland: 2,294



For the current school year, the five SLC schools have a total enrollment of 7,983 students. Overall the district has over 37,000 high school students.

Prince George's County

Ninth-Grade **Transition**

Increased middle school collaboration

Summer bridge programs

Grade-level advisories

Collaborative planning: interdisciplinary
and within content areas

Nationwide about seven thousand students drop out of high school every day. Over one third of all dropouts are lost in 9th grade. In Prince George's County, we recognize the importance of identifying students who are showing signs that they are at risk of dropping out high school, matching these students to interventions to get them back on track, and monitoring student progress. Far too many 9th graders are academically ill-prepared and others have become disengaged before reaching 9th grade. All of the SLC schools are using a similar approach to 9th grade transition.

In the next slides, I will speak briefly about our (1) **middle school collaboration**, (2) **summer bridge program**, and (3) **district efforts** to provide data to support the work in the schools.

Prince George's County

Ninth-Grade **Transition**

Data-driven decision making

Building teacher capacity

Focus on instructional practice

GOAL: closing achievement gaps
by tenth grade



These are the core components of our ninth-grade transition program.

Prince George's County

Middle School Collaboration

Visits to feeder middle schools

Participation in PTSA meetings

Eighth-grade parent information nights

Articulation meetings

Since the start of the SLC grant, the schools have taken a multi-faceted approach to ninth-grade transition. At times it has been an uphill battle to change the mindset and operational dysfunction that has existed around this process. From the middle school level there seems to be little incentive to get involved in the transition, as the students are preparing to exit middle school. From the high school, the focus has been, until recently, on the timely and efficient registration of students. In an effort to bridge some of the gaps in transition and to provide a better experience for students, parents, and teachers, the SLC schools have implemented several strategies.

All of these strategies are undertaken to ensure that all stakeholders—administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and students—are involved in the transition process. This is imperative regardless of the strategy.

Prince George's County

Middle School **Collaboration**

Transition team meetings

Middle school summer programs

Freshman orientation activities

GOAL: proactive planning, preparation,
and programs



Prince George's County

Jump Start to **Graduation**

Provided by all five SLC schools

15 days: 4 days/week, 5 hours/day

All rising ninth graders (capped at 150)

Academic and social preparation

The transition from middle school to high school can be very challenging for many students. The Jumpstart to Graduation Summer Bridge Program is designed to assist students to successfully transition from middle school to high school both academically and socially and to set their sights on graduation four years later. Students are introduced to key high school staff, including many of the teachers they will have in ninth grade. They preview the ninth grade curriculum for English 9 and Algebra 1; begin to establish a rapport with their teachers and peers; and learn about the importance of setting goals related to their college and career plans in ninth grade.

Based on all of the feedback received from teachers, they enjoy the program and feel that the experience is invaluable as they get to know some of their students during the summer program. Another great thing about JSTG is that the professional development and instructional strategies used in the program are carried forward into the school year.

Prince George's County

Jump Start to **Graduation**

Project-based learning

Service learning

College visit and team building

Gallery walk and closing celebration



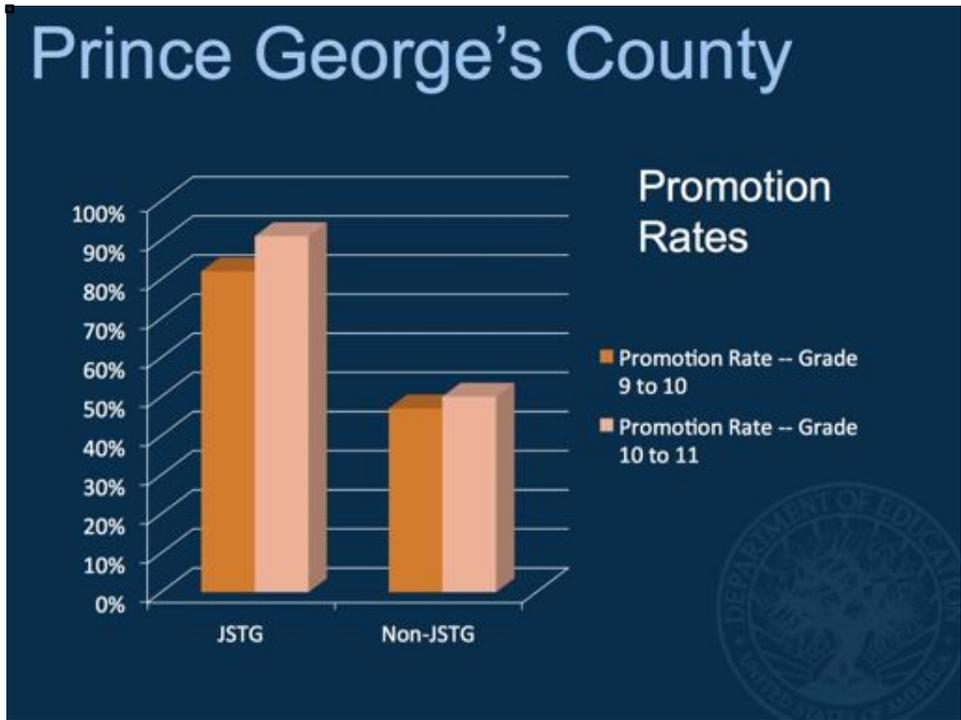
Here are the major components of our Jump Start to Graduation program.

Prince George's County

So what are the **results?**



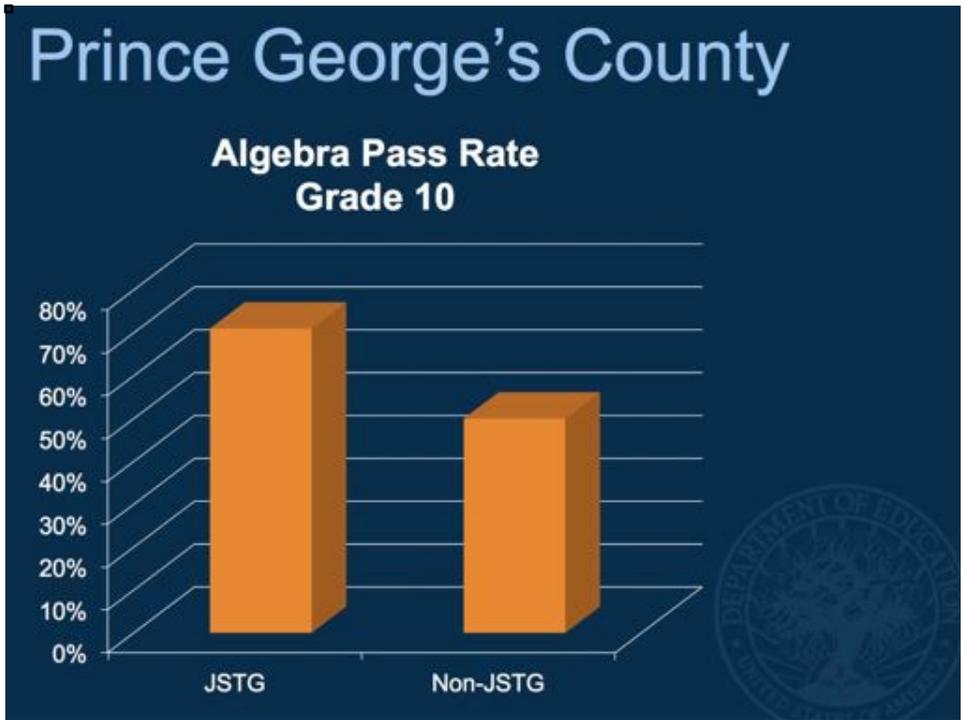
Now let's look at DuVal's first cohort of JSTG students who are now 11th graders. The data shows that the first cohort of Jumpstart students is making steady progress in several areas. The following slides show the significant improvement of the promotion rate and the passing rate for the High School Assessments (HSAs).



The promotion rate for JSTG students from grade 9 to grade 10 was 82% and 47% for non-JSTG students. This trend continued with the promotion rate from grade 10 to 11. The promotion rate for JSTG students was 91% and for non-JSTG students, 50%. Please note that the promotion rate of non-JSTG students also improved by 3%.

The data on the High School Assessments is also promising. In the state of Maryland, all school students must pass the four High School Assessments (Algebra 1, English 10, Biology, and LSN Government) as part of their graduation requirements. One of our district's goals is that all students will pass the High School Assessments by the end of tenth grade.

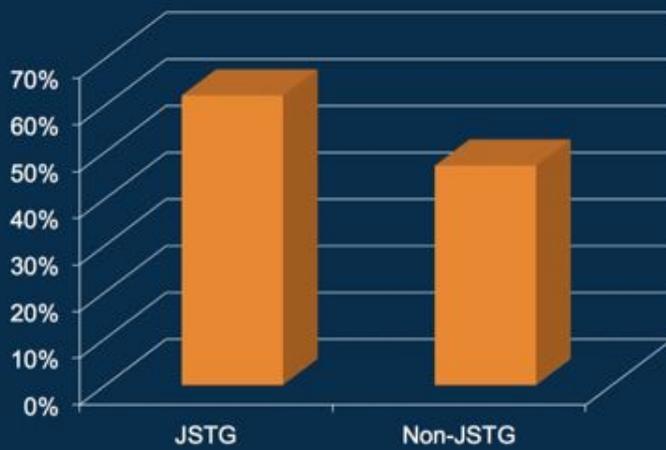
There is still work to be done but the HSA pass rate during grade 10 was significant.



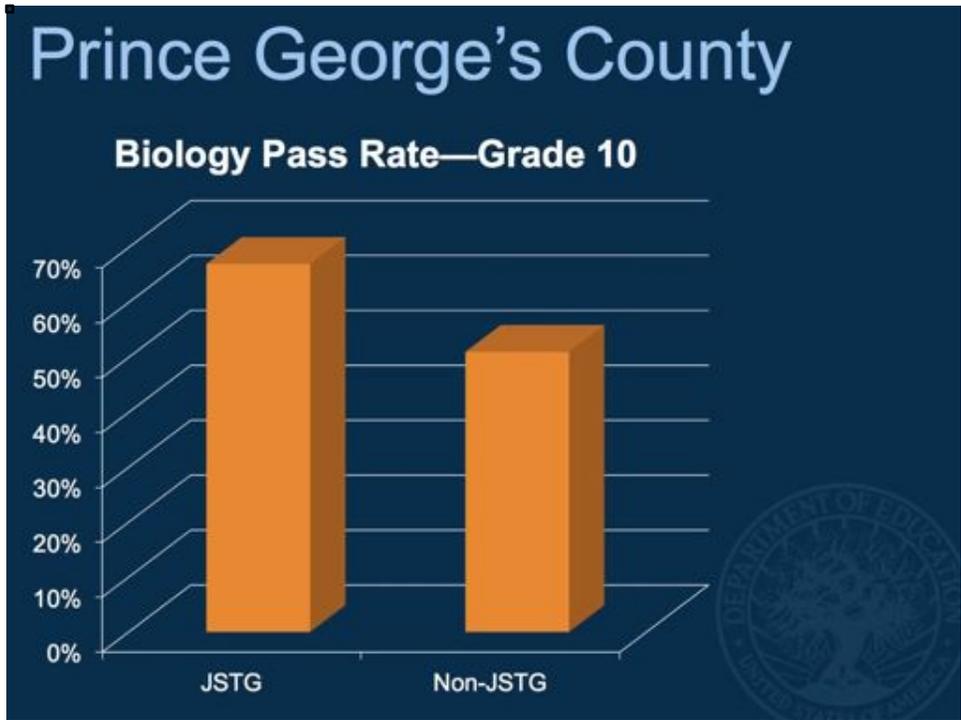
Algebra: JSTG (71%); Non-JSTG (50%)

Prince George's County

English Pass Rate Grade 10

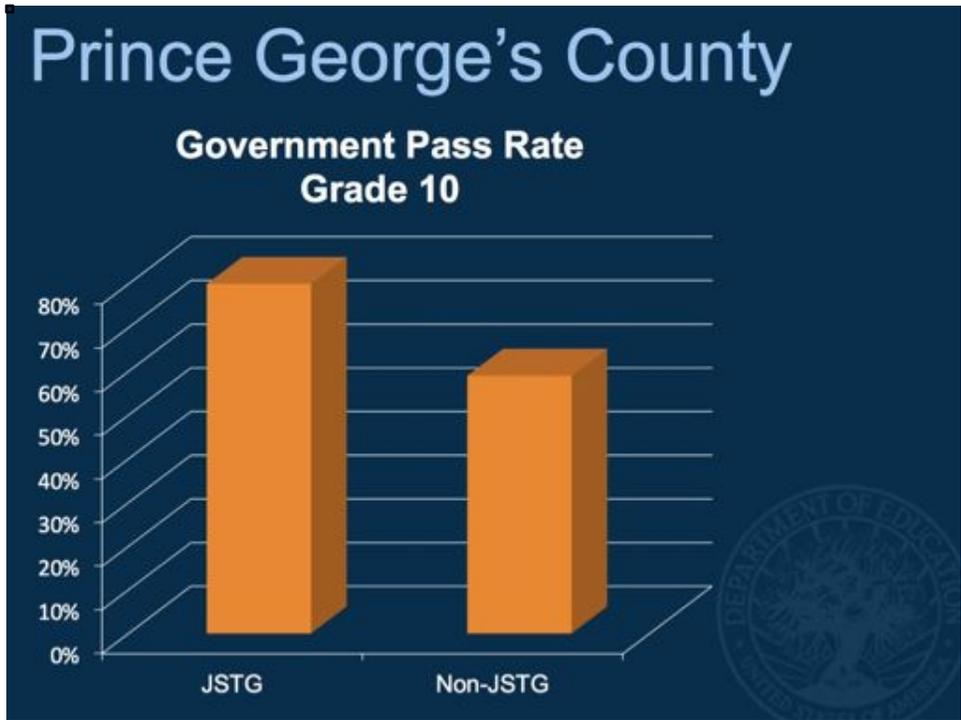


English 10: JSTG (62%); Non-JSTG (47%)



Biology: JSTG (67%); Non-JSTG (51%)

Results from this school year's October and January HSA test administration show continuous gains. Students will have one last opportunity to take the HSAs in April of this year. Let's look at this cohort's HSA pass rates from tenth grade in the four content areas.



LSN Government: JSTG (80%); Non-JSTG (59%)

Results from this school year's October and January HSA tests show continuous gains. Students will have one last opportunity to take the HSAs in April of this year. The next set of slides will show how well DuVal's tenth graders who participated in Jumpstart are doing compared to those who did not participate in Jumpstart.

Prince George's County

Current **tenth graders**

AVERAGE DAYS MISSED

JSTG students: **10 days**

Non-JSTG students: **18 days**



As you can see, the promotion rate for JSTG students from grade 9 to grade 10 was 82% and 47% for non-JSTG students.

This data shows that 35% more JSTG students were promoted from 9th to 10th grade relative to the entire 9th grade cohort. This trend continued with the promotion rate from grade 10 to 11. The promotion rate for JSTG students was 91% and for non-JSTG students, 50%.

Please note that the promotion rate of non-JSTG students also improved by 3%. The data on the High School Assessments is also promising. In the state of Maryland, all school students must pass the four High School Assessments (Algebra 1, English 10, Biology, and LSN Government) as part of their graduation requirements. One of our district's goals is that all students will pass the High School Assessments (HSAs) by the end of tenth grade.

There is still work to be done but the HSA pass rate during grade 10 was significant.

Prince George's County

Current **tenth graders**

DISCIPLINE REFERRALS

JSTG students: **none**

Non-JSTG students: **107**



Prince George's County

Current **tenth graders**

AVERAGE GPA

JSTG students: **2.0**

Non-JSTG students: **1.6**



Prince George's County

Current **tenth graders**

PASS RATE—ALGEBRA I

JSTG students: **53%**

Non-JSTG students: **42%**



Watch List Report														ORANGE: Students with attendance issues BLUE: Students with grade issues YELLOW: Students with both attendance and grade issues		
School Name	Student ID	SY 10 Grade	Age	Gender	Ethnic	Special Ed	504	LEP	Days Absent	Days Suspended	SY 10 Read Gr	SY 10 Math Gr	MSA Read PL	MSA Math PL	Feeder School	
DUVAL HIGH	000445975	08	15	F	3	N	N	N	10.0	0.0	C	D	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000447536	08	14	F	3	N	N	N	5.0	0.0	B	B	2	1	KENMOOR MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	100079986	08	15	M	3	N	N	N			A	C	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000450261	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	24.0	0.0	B	C	2	2	KENMOOR MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000441390	08	14	M	3	Y	N	N	8.0	0.0	B	C	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000453095	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	2.0	0.0	A	C	3	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000448156	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	10.5	0.0	B	B	3	2	THOMAS G PULLEN	
DUVAL HIGH	000443368	08	14	M	3	Y	N	N	15.0	17.0	C	E	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000450539	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	2.5	0.0	D	D	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000441773	08	13	M	3	N	N	N	3.0	0.0	C	B	2	2	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000424708	08	14	F	3	N	N	N	25.0	0.0	C	C	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000448831	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	7.0	0.0	E	D	2	2	ROBERT GODDARD FRENCH IMMERSION	
DUVAL HIGH	000425196	08	13	M	3	N	N	N	5.0	0.0	B	B	2	2	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	100237502	08	13	F	3	N	N	N			B	B	2	2	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000459201	08	13	M	3	N	N	N	0.5	0.0	A	B	3	2	KENMOOR MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000452078	08	14	F	3	N	Y	N	22.5	0.0	C	B	1	1	G JAMES GHOLSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000526644	08	14	F	3	N	N	N			A	B	3	3	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000545655	08	14	F	3	N	N	Y			C	A	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000545657	08	14	M	3	N	N	Y			B	B	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000448060	08	13	F	3	N	N	N	0.5	0.0	B	B	2	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000568426	08	13	M	3	N	N	Y			C	D	1	1	KENMOOR MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000452947	08	13	M	3	N	N	N	6.5	1.0	C	B	1	2	ERNEST EVERETT JUST MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	100209667	08	14	F	3	N	N	N			B	A	3	3	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000567712	08	14	M	6	N	N	Y			C	D	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000507785	09	16	M	3	N	N	N	4.5	2.0	E	E			DUVAL HIGH	
DUVAL HIGH	000429066	08	14	F	3	N	N	N	18.0	0.0	C	E	3	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000507783	09	16	F	3	N	N	N	25.0	3.0	E	E			DUVAL HIGH	
DUVAL HIGH	100145776	08	14	F	6	N	N	Y			C	D	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000499179	08	15	M	6	N	N	Y	8.5	0.0	C	C	1	1	KENMOOR MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000524615	08	13	F	6	N	N	Y			C	E	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000545120	08	14	M	3	N	N	N			B	C	2	1	G JAMES GHOLSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000503879	08	14	F	6	N	N	N	10.0	1.0	C	D	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	
DUVAL HIGH	000449286	08	13	F	6	N	N	N	27.0	0.0	B	C	1	1	THOMAS JOHNSON MIDDLE	

In order to monitor student progress, it is essential to have access to reliable data. The district has taken the lead to ensure that schools have the necessary data to support the specific needs of all students. Additionally, the district offers principals, leadership teams, teachers, and other faculty members ongoing professional development to ensure that they are equipped with the skills to analyze data and use the results to serve the academic and behavioral needs of students. The district provides a variety of data from multiple sources for use by district- and school-level staff. The Data Warehouse is a “one-stop” repository of district data designed to help monitor and track the performance of schools, administrators, teachers, and students. To specifically monitor rising ninth graders and freshmen during their ninth-grade year, the district provides a Freshman Watch List and Quarterly Success Reports.

Tables are color coded for easier review of the data. Students with Attendance issues are coded ORANGE; those with grade issues are coded BLUE; and those with attendance and grade issues are coded YELLOW. Report is used as a starting point to identify interventions for incoming freshmen.

Success Report - Q1

ORANGE: Students with attendance issues
BLUE: Students with grade issues
YELLOW: Students with both attendance and grade issues

School Name	Student ID	Grade	Age	Gender	Ethnic	Special Ed	504	LEP	Absences	English Gr	Eng Teach	Math Gr	Math Teach	Social Stud Gr	Soc Stud Teach	Science Gr	Sci Teach
DUNAL HIGH	000458091	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	C	Bryant	B	Erwin Lindsay	E	Mahmut	C	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000414382	09	15	M	3	N	N	N	17.0	D	Pierr	E	Ohunisan	E	Honecker	D	Howland
DUNAL HIGH	000441390	09	15	M	3	Y	N	N	0.0	C	Bryant	C	Erwin Lindsay	E	Mahmut	C	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000453095	09	13	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	B	Adams	A	Saxon	C	Cunningham	C	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000446156	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.5	B	Adams	C	Saxon	B	Cunningham	C	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000450539	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	B	Adams	E	Gomez	E	Cunningham	E	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000447173	09	14	M	3	N	N	N	1.0	B	Adams	C	Mahajan	E	Mahmut	C	Howland
DUNAL HIGH	000424708	09	15	F	3	N	N	N	22.0	E	Bryant	E	Burch	E	Mahmut	E	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000448831	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	3.0	B	Adams	D	Gomez	D	Cunningham	B	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000485196	09	13	M	3	N	N	N	1.5	D	Bryant	C	Gomez	B	Mahmut	C	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	100237502	09	14	F	3	N	N	E	0.0	B	Bryant	B	Gomez	A	Mahmut	C	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000458201	09	14	M	3	N	N	N	0.0	B	Hickson	D	Burch	C	Barnes	A	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000452078	09	14	F	3	N	Y	N	8.5	E	Bryant	E	Saxon	E	Mahmut	D	Park
DUNAL HIGH	000528644	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	1.0	B	Bryant	B	Mahajan	A	Mahmut	A	Park
DUNAL HIGH	000549655	09	15	F	3	N	N	Y	1.0	C	Coulbaly	D	Gomez	B	Mahmut	D	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000549657	09	15	M	3	N	N	E	0.0	C	Bryant	B	Saxon	A	Mahmut	A	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000448060	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	1.0	B	Hickson	C	Gomez	C	Barnes	B	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000588426	09	14	M	3	N	N	Y	0.0	A	Shin	D	Saxon	D	Barnes	B	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000452947	09	14	M	3	N	N	N	3.0	C	Bryant	C	Erwin Lindsay	C	Barnes	D	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	100310038	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	E	Bates	B	Erwin Lindsay	A	Barnes	E	Bond
DUNAL HIGH	100209687	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	D	Kerr-Clark	C	Mahajan	A	Mahmut	A	Dompneh
DUNAL HIGH	000567712	09	14	M	6	N	N	Y	0.0	E	Coulbaly	E	Gomez	E	Jackson	E	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000441511	09	14	M	3	N	N	N	1.0	B	Hickson	C	Gomez	D	Mahmut	C	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000507785	09	16	M	3	N	N	N	10.0	E	Adams	E	Mahajan	E	Hayes	E	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000429098	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	8.0	D	Hickson	E	Saxon	E	Barnes	E	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000507793	09	16	F	3	N	N	N	14.0	E	Bell	E	Ohunisan	E	Hayes	E	Park
DUNAL HIGH	000489179	09	15	M	6	N	N	Y	3.5	D	Coulbaly	E	Saxon	E	Mahmut	D	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000524815	09	14	F	6	N	N	E	10.5	C	Adams	E	Gomez	E	Cunningham	C	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000421012	09	15	F	3	N	N	N	3.0	C	McLeod	E	Chumbong	E	Barnes	E	Dompneh
DUNAL HIGH	000503879	09	15	F	6	N	N	N	3.5	E	Bates	E	Saxon	E	Barnes	E	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000449286	09	13	F	6	N	N	N	2.0	B	Adams	D	Erwin Lindsay	E	Cunningham	D	Toweh
DUNAL HIGH	000418337	09	14	M	3	N	N	N	1.5	E	Bates	E	Saxon	E	Barnes	D	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000434084	09	14	F	6	N	N	N	12.5	E	Kerr-Clark	E	Mahajan	E	Mahmut	E	Dompneh
DUNAL HIGH	000437823	09	15	F	6	N	N	N	2.0	D	Hickson	E	Gomez	E	Barnes	C	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	000450904	09	14	F	3	N	N	N	0.0	E	Bates	D	Saxon	E	Barnes	C	Prince
DUNAL HIGH	100238540	09	15	M	3	N	N	E	0.0	C	Hickson	D	Mahajan	A	Mahmut	C	Park

Quarterly Success Reports: generated each quarter to provide schools with current information on freshmen—grades and attendance. This report provides demographic information, attendance, and students’ teachers and grades for English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. Schools use these reports to monitor student progress and to assess interventions put in place.

So, what needs to happen to successfully transition students from middle school to high school?

Prince George's County

A Ninth-Grade Culture Shift

Forge a **strong partnership** with feeder middle schools

Offer a **summer-bridge program** for rising freshmen

Continue **rich data discussions**—district and schools

Build **teacher capacity** and their ability to make **data-driven decisions**

Schedule **collaborative planning** for teachers

Use **advisories** to build relationships



Let's face it...ninth grade is the “make-it-or-break-it year.”

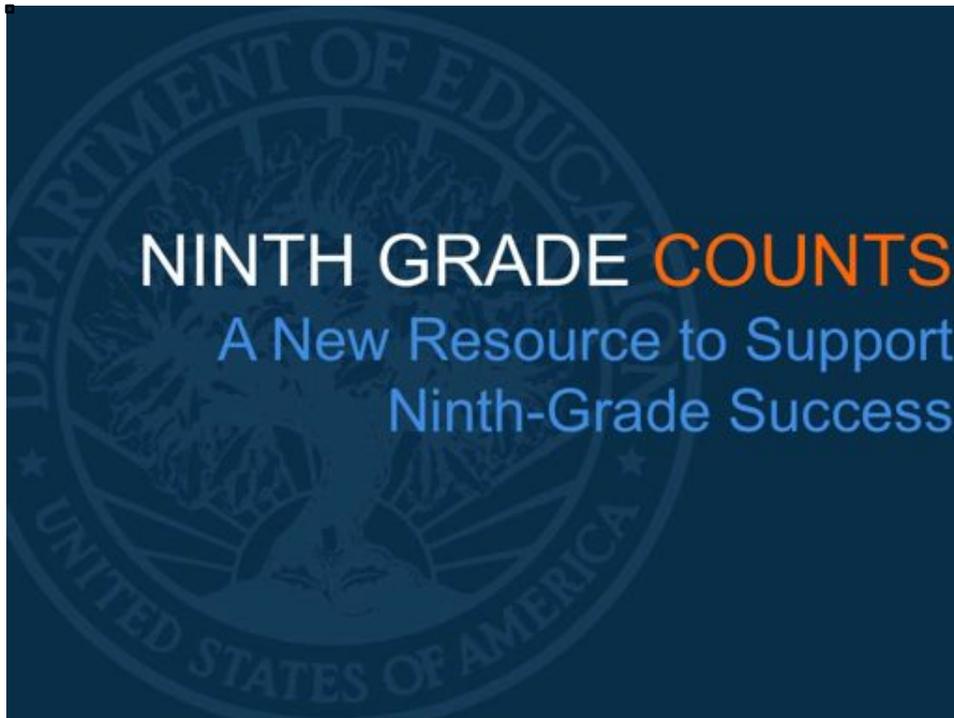
Our students arrive at our high schools with their own set of unique needs. Some are prepared to meet the rigors of high school and others are really not prepared at all. We must meet these students where they are and do everything in our power to help them to experience academic success. While the SLC schools have put many strategies in place which will ultimately have a positive impact student achievement, they are not there yet. Successfully transitioning 9th graders to high school requires a culture shift. We must...
[READ SLIDE]

Questions for the
presenter?



[MARY BEGINS]

Thank you, Darlene. Let's see if there are any lingering questions for Darlene.



Now, let me introduce Stephen Abbott, who will walk us through *Ninth Grade Counts*, a new resource that will help you strengthen the ninth-grade transition.

[STEPHEN BEGINS]

Thank you, Mary.

Hello, my name is Stephen Abbott and I'm the director of communications for the Great Schools Partnership and the co-author of *Ninth Grade Counts*, a new self-assessment and planning guide for Smaller Learning Community Program grantees looking to strengthen the transition into ninth grade and accelerate learning and postsecondary preparation for all students. My presentation today will provide a brief introduction to the tool and how it works. Please keep in mind that the first tool in the guide is still being developed, and that's why you haven't received a complete copy yet. The guide will be published in three parts, the first of which will be introduced today and officially released early this summer.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

A Guide to Strengthening the Freshman Transition

Based on research, site visits, interviews,
and first-hand leadership experience

Will reflect on where you are and
where you want to go

Provides a step-by-step process to
determine action-plan priorities



The guide is based on research—including the research that was discussed earlier in the presentation—on site visits conducted by the SLC technical assistance team, interviews with dozens of practicing educators, and first-hand leadership experience. My colleague and co-author, Pamela Fisher, was the principal of a high school that underwent a highly successful conversion to smaller learning communities, ninth-grade teams, and a more personalized first-year program. Today, nearly twenty years later, many of the practices she help implement are still in place and the high school is a nationally recognized SLC model.

The goal of this tool is pretty straightforward: we want to equip you with a simple, step-by-step process that you can use with your school leaders and faculties to take a honest look at where you are at and where you would like to go—in terms of both improvement strategies and student outcomes for ninth and tenth grades.

The point of departure for the tool is equity—how to ensure that every student gets a fair shot at success. As we have seen today, ninth grade poses some unique challenges, and this guide is a way to help clarify and simplify the process of addressing those challenges head on.

After a district or school works through the process—the self-assessment activity and three planning roadmaps—it should have a clear direction for its ninth-grade work and a set of concrete action-plan priorities.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

A three-part resource

Ninth-grade transition (systemic overview)

Summer-bridge programs

English language learners



As I mentioned earlier, *Ninth Grade Counts* will ultimately be a three-part guide—today, we’ll be introducing you to the first installment. The focus of this first tool is really on systems thinking—encouraging districts and schools to consider the systemic interrelationships that make or break the ninth-grade year for many students. For example: considering the ways in which district grading, reporting, assessment, and credit policies may either help or hinder goals of your ninth-grade program is the kind of thinking this guide is designed to stimulate.

The other two tools will provide a similar, but more focused, process for districts and schools working to create (1) effective summer-bridge programs and (2) support systems for English language learners. The second and third installments of the full guide will be published later this year.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

Keeping it simple

Assess + reflect

Plan + align

Implement + refine



Our general approach to creating this guide was to keep it simple. Really simple and focused. We wanted to distill some of the most important research findings and guidance, and present it in a way that would be useful to the practicing educator. The goal was to create an efficient, concentrated process that schools could tackle and complete in less than a day. In three-to-five hours, a school team or faculty could work through the process and come out the other end with a much clearer sense of where it wants to go in terms of ninth-grade support and interventions.

The first step: *assess and reflect*. Teams come together and engage in an honest appraisal of what's working and what could use some improvement. Having detailed performance data on hand would certainly be recommended during this part of the process. The next step is *plan and align*. Once you have your strengths and weakness, actions and priorities mapped out, it's all about thoughtfully integrating improvement strategies into your existing action plan. Finally, the guide can be revisited from year to year as part of an ongoing school-improvement process. There is a lot of information packed into this guide, and there are a lot of options schools can pursue when it comes to the ninth-grade transition, so no district or school is going to be able to take on everything at once. That's why the guide is also about prioritization—identifying the most critical needs and coming up with sound ways to address them.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

How it works

Systems Overview

Self-Assessment Activity

Best Practice → Current Practice
→ Prioritization + Planning



The guide has three major sections: (1) a graphic overview of an effective ninth-grade transition program from the district to the classroom levels—this was not included in the draft pages you received, but in the finished guide it will give you a sense of how all the moving parts fit together; (2) a self-assessment activity—this can be found on the first two draft pages you received, and I will describe it in greater detail in a moment; and (3) a series of three “planning roadmaps” that will help your school determine action-plan priorities for strengthening the freshman transition—again, the first of these three sections was sent to you yesterday.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

How it works

District + School Conditions

- Culture + Expectations
- Leadership + Resources
- Professional Development
- Policies + Accountability



This stage in the process is focused on the preconditions—what you can do to set the stage for a successful ninth-grade experience. As we know, less concrete factors—such as the relationships among teachers, the messages students receive, or the policies in place at the district level—can have a big impact on the effectiveness of any school-improvement process. That’s why we devoted this section to issues such as culture, expectations, resources, and leadership.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

How it works

Induction Programs + Planning

- Middle School Collaboration
- Grouping + Support Planning
- Orientation Programs
- Summer Bridge Programs

In this section, we broke out the preparation and planning activities that define a student's first experiences of high school life: orientation programs, summer learning, reviewing middle-school performance data early on and using it to guide planning and teaming strategies, etc.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

How it works

Instruction + Intervention Programs

- Learning Environment
- Personalized Instruction
- Academic Support
- Social + Emotional Support

As I'm sure all of you know, the foundation of any effective ninth-grade transition comes down to the quality of instruction and support that students receive. One great learning experience can change a student's worldview dramatically and set them on a different life path. And that's what this tool is all about: making ninth-grade the kind of learning experience that will keep more kids in school, accelerate learning, and put more students on track to graduation, college, and rewarding careers. In this section, we have addressed not only effective academic instruction and interventions, but also social and emotional support.

Self-Assessment Activity



Now I'm going to quickly walk you through the two draft sections you received yesterday.

SELF-ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY **DRAFT ONLY**

EXAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL
PROGRAM NAME HERE

A school vignette will appear here.

Self-Assessment Protocol

The following protocol provides an opportunity for districts and schools to engage in a self-reflective conversation about freshman success and ninth-grade transition strategies. The goal of the activity is to examine your district or school in terms of three different approaches to ninth-grade instruction and student support: *Reactive*, *Passive*, and *Proactive*. When it comes to successful transitions, proactive strategies are essential—a school community that strategically plans and prepares can ensure all students succeed as they transition into high school. Working in small groups, the protocol will help school leaders, educators, and staff assess where they are and determine where they would like to be—an essential first step in the action-planning process.

Purpose
To identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing ninth-grade transition strategies as a first step toward building a more effective program.

Structure
Divide into groups of four and assign the roles of facilitator and timekeeper.

Time
Between 60–90 minutes.

Protocol [Adapted from the School Reform Initiatives Save the Last Word for ME protocol]

1. Individually, read the three descriptions—*Reactive*, *Passive*, and *Proactive*—on the following page. Keep in mind that these descriptions are merely concise, illustrative profiles that are based upon a synthesis of research studies, observations, and reports from schools. Your district or school may closely resemble one of the descriptions or it may reflect elements of all three. The goal is to provoke thoughtful, self-reflective discussions about how your school is structured for ninth-grade success. While reading, participants should identify the specific features they consider to present the most accurate description of their school or district, and then select two or three passages they believe are particularly important.
2. When the group is ready, a volunteer reads one passage that he or she has found to be the most significant. **NOTE:** The volunteer should not reveal why the passage is significant at this time.
3. After pausing briefly to reflect upon what has been said, the other three participants will have one minute to respond to the selected passage and express what it made them think about and what questions it raised.
4. After the three have spoken, the first participant has three minutes to now explain why he or she selected the passage.
5. The group will conduct four rounds of seven minutes each. The same process is followed until all members have had a turn.
6. Participants then share their opinions and thoughts about the district or school's general approach, making sure to base their comments on concrete evidence, observations, and hard data as much as possible.
7. Each group makes a collective determination about where their district or school falls on the continuum and they cite three specific supporting examples that came up during the session. One group member should be the scribe for this exercise or the group may use a flip chart or computer to record the examples.
8. The groups reconvene and share their results with the larger group.
9. The large-group facilitator collects the results and examples for future planning, making sure that all participants receive copies.

Here we have the first half of the self-assessment activity. If the tool was printed, you would see the protocol of the left and the passive-reactive-proactive sections on the right. On the left-hand side of this slide, you can see that we have included a placeholder for a “school vignette.” The final version of the tool will feature four brief profiles of effective ninth-grade transition strategies from real SLC schools around the country. The purpose, of course, is to give you a quick snapshot of some of these strategies in action—that is, a few important takeaways and details about they play out in real schools.

On the right side, you will find the self-assessment protocol. The directions will be pretty self-explanatory, and it’s based on a protocol that my colleagues have used many times before and that seems to work quite well. The protocol is designed for small groups of four or five, and the activity should take between 60–90 minutes, depending on how much time you want to allocate for reporting out to the full group. This is kind of a “warm-up” activity designed to get your district or school thinking critically about how you approach the ninth-grade transition and about how all the parts work together. Honest self-reflection, robust dialogue, and systems thinking are the goals here.

DRAFT ONLY

Passive	Reactive	Proactive
<p>Ninth-grade teachers are provided with some data on incoming students, but there is no formal process for using data to inform ninth-grade practices and little collaboration or communication with feeder middle schools.</p> <p>Students who are entering below grade level or who have failed multiple middle school courses may be encouraged to pursue summer-school courses or tutoring at their own expense, but the high school does not provide a summer bridge program. All incoming students are given printed orientation materials—the student handbook, a course-selection guide—but actual orientation programs tend to be short, cursory, and sporadically offered. Parents may or may not access these materials. There are few or no policies governing ninth-grade support systems, interdisciplinary learning, or team planning. Ninth-grade teachers develop their own curriculum and work in isolation, and their classrooms are distributed throughout the building. Labeled course placements are made based on past performance, test scores, and teacher recommendations, and learning expectations may vary widely from course to course. Teachers, counselors, and staff provide a range of support opportunities to students, but the programs are largely elective. Even though many parents are not well informed about the options, they are still expected to request these services. Students who are in danger of failing, losing credit, or dropping out are referred to counselors or support specialists, who tend to work in isolation from teachers. Advisory opportunities are scheduled, but they tend to be disorganized, which results in squandered time when advisors do meet. Little time is devoted to interventions or postsecondary planning. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled twice a year, but parents are expected to make appointments with teachers; no special effort is made to contact the parents of struggling students. The district does not have an institutionalized professional learning community program, and teachers largely pursue their professional development independently. Grading, reporting, and credit policies penalize students for early missteps and failures, which puts many students in danger of losing courses and losing credits within a few months of starting ninth grade, which often results in forced repeat of ninth grade or enrollment in slower-paced fourth-grade classes that allow students to fall even further behind.</p>	<p>Ninth-grade teams request data and guidance from sending middle schools only after specific students have been identified as at-risk and off-track by high school staff. Summer bridge programs are provided only to a select number of students who have failed in middle schools or are identified as being at higher risk of ninth-grade failure. Optional summer orientation programs that introduce families to the high school's learning opportunities and academic expectations are offered, but attendance is often low and few efforts are made to advertise the programs or inform and engage the parents of at-risk students. Ninth-grade teams are in place, but team members are not given common planning time in the schedule, they teach other grade levels, and their classrooms are spread throughout the school. Students are placed into course levels based upon their prior academic record, and many lower-track courses offer less demanding content taught at a slower pace. Staff members identify high achievers and provide supplemental learning opportunities to ensure they are challenged. Intervention strategies are based on standardized expectations for student performance at a particular course level, not on identified student needs. When problems arise, teachers typically provide support to students on their own, not as an extension of team collaboration or an established intervention protocol. They refer students to counselors who meet with students only as needed and often send them to school and community-based resources for non-academic problems. Advisory time is used to teach "freshman success" skills, but students may not be paired with team teachers. Parents are invited to schedule individual teacher conferences twice a year, during which they are made aware of academic, behavioral, or attendance concerns. Teachers use data during collaborative planning time, scheduled as needed, to review student achievement and connect students with supports, such as after-school credit-recovery programs. Students are required to earn at least five credits for promotion to tenth grade. Those who fail to meet the criteria are offered summer-school options or they are assigned to repeat required ninth-grade courses in their second year of high school.</p>	<p>Ninth-grade teacher teams meet with middle school staff early in the spring to review data and identify students at risk of failure, dropping out, or entering their freshman year below grade level in reading or mathematics. The schools four to six week summer bridge and orientation programs are offered to all transitioning students and address not only academic preparation, but also strategies related to study habits, attendance, behavioral issues, and other social, emotional, and personal issues that can adversely impact learning and achievement. Teachers and counselors make an active effort to engage parents of incoming ninth graders during the middle school years and over the summer, ensuring that all students and parents are well informed about the high school's academic programs and support opportunities.</p> <p>Both the teachers and students on ninth-grade teams are given dedicated space in the school facility to encourage community building and a collective sense of responsibility for all students' success. Ninth-grade teams thoughtfully create balanced, heterogeneous academic teams and plan curriculum, instruction, and support collaboratively, using middle-level data to design appropriate supplemental and classroom-embedded interventions. All work is guided by brain-science research, developmental needs, and student data. The ninth-grade core curriculum engages students in authentic learning experiences that connect academic learning to real-world problems, student interests, and community issues. Literacy strategies and interventions are embedded in all ninth-grade core-content-area classes. Students exhibiting early warning signs, whether behavioral or academic, are provided with a range of appropriate support strategies that address both emotional and academic needs. Advisory groups meet regularly to review learning progress, discuss social issues, and develop a personal learning plan focused on college and career preparation. Regular communication with parents, in addition to encouragement and proactive support from ninth-grade team teachers and staff, are used to reduce chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and failures. Teachers are part of a professional learning community and use regularly scheduled collaborative planning time to review student data and refine lessons, instruction, and interventions. When standards are not met, all students are given multiple opportunities to revise work, retake assessments, and accelerate their learning. Standards-based grading, reporting, and assessment practices give students multiple opportunities to overcome early failures and catch up with their peers.</p>

On this slide is the second part of the self-assessment activity—the reading and prompt. The three sections—Passive, Reactive, and Proactive—come out of an in-depth research study conducted by members of the technical-assistance team. When they dug into the research and began visiting schools working to strengthen the freshman year, a pattern began to emerge: the most successful ninth-grade programs were the most proactive when it came to data collection, personalization, interventions, and orientation. The less effective schools, in terms of first-year outcomes, tended to be those that did not fully recognize or embrace the fact that ninth grade might demand specialized strategies—this would be the passive approach—while the reactive schools were those that recognized the need for additional support during the freshman year—perhaps because they had a significant dropout issue or a large number of course failures, for example—but their attempts to address the issues might have been too little, too late, or too scattered to have a significant impact. When faculties dig into these descriptions and discuss which elements seem to best represent their school's general approach to ninth grade, they should arrive at a more focused understanding of what's working or what needs to change. The goal here is to activate self-reflection and dialogue, not to force your school into any one of these boxes. If the activity produces perfect consensus, wonderful—you know the general direction you need to head in. If not, well, then maybe that's one of things that you might want to address first.

Planning Roadmaps



In the next slide, I'll walk you through a draft of the first of three planning roadmaps, which are designed to focus your school's action planning in three primary areas: the preconditions that need to be in place to create a strong transition program; how to effectively plan for and induct ninth-grade students; and how to teach and support them once they come through your doors.

DISTRICT + SCHOOL CONDITIONS DRAFT ONLY

EXAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL
PROGRAM NAME HERE

6

A school vignette will appear here.

Culture + Expectations

- The ninth-grade academic program is governed by universally high expectations, and administrators, faculty, and staff share a collective commitment to preparing all students for postsecondary success.
- The ninth-grade faculty and support staff embrace a no-excuses approach to helping all students succeed regardless of their background or past performance.
- School structures and practices—for example, a rigorous, untracked core curriculum and standards-based approaches to instruction, assessment, and reporting—reinforce high standards and equity.
- Ninth-grade staff embrace change, and practices are regularly modified or abandoned if they fail to produce equitable learning outcomes for all students.
- All staff members clearly and consistently communicate learning expectations to students, parents, and community members, and all students know they have to meet rigorous learning standards and that less challenging classes are not an option.
- From the moment they enter the school, educators and support staff keep students focused on the end goal: graduating prepared for college and careers.

Leadership + Resources

- Leaders embrace change with a sense of urgency, but they remain mindful of the need for transparency, strong communication, faculty buy-in, community support, and long-term sustainability.
- Shared governance promotes teacher leadership, self-accountability, and the autonomy needed to deliver just-in-time interventions.
- Resources are allocated to create the necessary preconditions for equity and student success—for example, math and literacy support programs are adequately funded and staffed to accelerate learning and close achievement gaps in these critical areas.
- Staffing assignments incorporate companion classes that supplement the regular curriculum and provide additional targeted instructional time for academically struggling students.
- School schedules do not pose an obstacle to academic support teachers and support staff have the flexibility they need to provide timely, responsive interventions to students.
- The district works with local nonprofits and businesses to multiply learning experiences and support programs for students, including mentoring, internship, and career-exploration opportunities.
- District and school leaders have committed necessary funding and staffing to achieve ninth-grade transition goals.
- Teachers are guided by the district to engage in advance planning and teach summer bridge programs for incoming ninth graders.

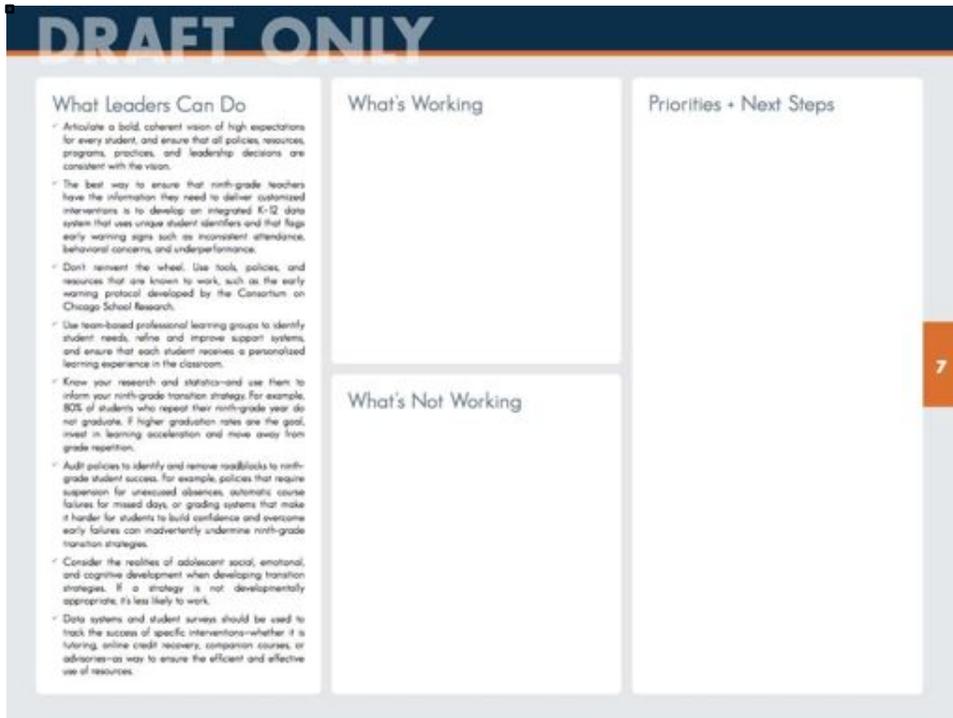
Professional Development

- All ninth-grade teaching teams participate in structured professional learning groups and use planning time to develop and refine common classroom-embedded interventions in all courses.
- Professional development addresses the ongoing reflection and use of data in curriculum planning, interventions, and formative assessments.
- All teachers receive training in learning-acceleration strategies for English language learners, special-needs students, and other subgroups.
- Ninth-grade teachers collaborative plan every week.
- A mentoring program helps accelerate the acquisition of strong instructional practices for new teachers assigned to ninth-grade courses.

Policies + Accountability

- The district policies provided clear and explicit guidelines on how middle schools and high schools will address the needs of all incoming students, including the collection and exchange of student data.
- Academic policies governing grading, course credit, grade promotion, grouping practices, and graduation decisions are based on proven practices and research, not tradition.
- An early warning protocol ensures all students and families receive timely interventions and necessary social services.
- District policies are regularly updated to remove roadblocks to access, whether they are found in the grading system, attendance policies, behavioral codes, or grade-promotion policies.
- District policies support formative assessment, standards-based instruction, and other strategies that measure the attainment of specific learning standards and that equip teachers with detailed data on the learning progress of individual students.

If you have had the opportunity to review the draft pages we sent you yesterday, you should have a pretty good sense of how the tool will work. All three sections, like the self-assessment activity, will include a school vignette relevant to the section. Each of the three major sections is subdivided into four subsections that address discrete areas—in this case, Culture and Expectations, Leadership and Resources, Professional Development, and Policies and Accountability. The subsections feature a selection of essential practices that research and site visits to SLC schools have revealed to be effective. Think of this section as an “idea generator,” not as a must-do checklist. If a school has the capacity and resources tackle most or all of these strategies—that’s great. But the most important thing is that you create a ninth-grade improvement program that works for your school or district and that meets the needs of your students and the requirements of your grant. The goal here: to help you zero in on some things that work and that can really make a difference for your students.



In each of the three sections, you will also find a column called “What Leaders Can Do” and three blank workspaces. The guidance for school leaders offers a few things to think about that go beyond specific action-plan strategies. These recommendations will be most relevant to program directors, superintendents, principals, and leadership teams, but I’m sure other faculty and staff will find them useful, as well. Again, this part of the process is not a checklist, but a way to get school leaders thinking about the leadership strategies they are using to shape their ninth-grade work. The last part of the process is getting some thoughts down on paper. In this case, really taking a hard look at what’s working when it comes to the ninth-grade transition and what’s not. When you get that down on paper and begin to see how everything fits together, it should give you much clearer sense of the direction you need to take and what your most urgent priority areas are. In the last column, you begin to map out those priorities so they can be addressed in your action plan—which is really the final step in this process. We intentionally decided not to build a separate planning process or template into this tool because we want the outcomes to be integrated into your action plan. One important takeaway here: the best ninth-grade strategies are not stand-alone programs or add-ons—they are embedded in the culture of the school and into every course and learning experience.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

A few things to remember

Concise, illustrative examples only

No two good schools need to look alike

You get out of it what you put into it



Just a few final things before we go to questions:

As I mentioned earlier, the profiles and strategies in this guide are merely concise, representative examples—they are not meant to be checklists and no tool or process—no matter how well devised—will be able to anticipate every factor or address every need. Schools are pretty complex ecosystems, as you know.

No two good schools need to look alike. The guide is not intended to remake your district or school in its image. The purpose is to help faculties engage in the kind of frank, constructive, forward-looking discussions that move them from where they are to where they want to be.

You will get out of it what you put into it. This truism is especially applicable to any sort of written tool or guide—it simply can't do the work for you. Yet this guide is not only based on research, but on other self-assessment and planning resources that have helped many schools achieve their goals. And we hope it helps you too.

Thank you.

NINTH GRADE COUNTS

Questions?

How can this resource help your work?

How can you get teachers involved?

What support will you need from
the technical assistance team?



[MARY BEGINS]

Thank you, Steve.

And now let's see what questions have come up during Steve's presentation. As we are looking at the questions you've posed, you may want to consider the questions on the screen for yourselves.

Thank you for
participating today



Thanks again to our presenters, our participant, and our technical assistance team for being part of this webinar. We really appreciate you taking the time to share with each other. The webinar is officially over at this time.



[END]