

Ninth-Grade Intentional Focus

Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, Maryland

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Anne Arundel County Public Schools created an Intentional Focus on Ninth-Graders three years ago in response to the growing concern that too many students entered high school but did not graduate. They dropped out in frustration. They dropped out for financial reasons. They dropped out for myriad social and emotional reasons. And they dropped out feeling disconnected from any part of their high schools.

School officials dug into the data and found that the district lost most of these students in ninth grade, with a disproportionate number of the students coming from poverty and/or African American or Hispanic populations.

The central office teams redesigned the high school principal meetings to build their leadership capacity and provide them tools to complete the work. They examined the data of prior ninth-grade students who were not successful and ran two tests to determine which data points in eighth grade predicted a lack of success in ninth-grade. They called this list Early Warning Indicators.

The principals networked to determine the best methods to reach students before they enter ninth grade and to



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meet families early. They worked to share the best structures for the first day of high school, including a real red carpet at some schools. They acted on their belief that relationships are the cornerstone of a successful ninth-grade year by designating people in each building to assure that each ninth-grade student at risk connects with an adult in the building to provide support.

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM SEEK TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS TO ACHIEVEMENT?

The district attempted to remove several barriers to student success in ninth grade. First, school officials changed the work of high schools by allowing them to focus on one thing. Yes, all data points are important, but they used the image of all arrows flying in the same direction—resources, data monitoring, family conference time. This allows school staffs to focus on one set of students for a common purpose.

EVIDENCE OF THE PROGRAM'S SUCCESS

Anne Arundel schools chose people for this work who believe in children, and their efforts proved so successful that they have turned the beliefs of more faculty members and central office personnel. Every high school faculty member and all central office personnel can name the Ninth-Grade Intentional Focus and describe its work. After three years, this work has become part of the fabric in the schools and school system.

The district had 95.88 percent of ninth-graders matriculate to 10th grade last year, with the first school reaching 100 percent. Almost every school reached 90 percent, with eight schools passing 95 percent. These students are now on track for success in the 10th grade and on the trajectory to graduate.

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