

# BUILDING A NINTH GRADE ACADEMY

From: *Creating a Ninth Grade Success Academy: Guidebook for the Talent Development High School* by [William F. Morrison](#) and [Nettie E. Legters, Ph.D](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Ninth graders are adolescents undergoing the difficult transition from middle school to high school. As they face the social, emotional, physical and intellectual challenges of this stage of their development, it is easy for them to feel overwhelmed, confused, and alone. Most students who drop out make that fateful decision in their first year of high school. **In a typical urban high school, the senior graduating class is often only one-third as large as the number of students who entered the school as freshmen.**

Urban ninth graders, many of whom have little support or positive reinforcement outside of school, need an especially caring, consistent, disciplined, and engaging school environment. They must constantly be challenged and encouraged to learn and to stay in school. Helping students to achieve success in the ninth grade will go a long way toward solving the dropout problem and ensuring brighter futures for at-risk students.

Schools can ease the transition to high school and help more students stay in school and earn promotion by creating a Ninth Grade Success Academy—a school-within-a-school uniquely designed to provide ninth graders with the challenge and support they need. A strong Success Academy serves as a bridge that spans the rough waters of adolescence, enabling students to cross the threshold into high school and continue on, better prepared academically and socially for the rigors of high school and post-secondary education.

## SOME EVIDENCE

Research evidence shows that the Ninth Grade Success Academy is living up to its name, with major gains in student attendance and promotion rates, and with important changes in school climate.

For example, student attendance during the first year of the Ninth Grade Success Academy at Baltimore's Patterson High School, the first Talent Development High School in the United States, increased by nearly ten percent, without the end-of-the-year fall-off that schools often experience. In the second year of Patterson's Success Academy, daily ninth grade student attendance was often above 80%, which was substantially higher than most of the ninth grade attendance at most of the other large, non-selective high schools in Baltimore.

**Attendance at Patterson High School  
Compared With District High School Average (1993-1997)**

	Patterson High School Grade 9	Rest of District Grade 9
Pre-Planning Year 1993-94	61.9%	72.1%
Planning Year 1994-95	65.6%	68.6%
Implementation Year 1 (1995-96)	73.6%	66.3%
Implementation Year 2 (1996-97)	77.4%	68.8%

## FURTHER EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

The Success Academy focus on attendance halts the decline in attendance at the end of the school year.

In large urban high schools, it is not unusual for 50% of students to be held back in the ninth grade. Because poor attendance is the major reason why students receive failing grades in their courses, the improved attendance in Patterson's Success Academy also has resulted in a much greater number of ninth graders passing their courses and earning promotion to tenth grade. **Eighty-five percent of Patterson's ninth graders earned promotion at the end of the Success Academy's first year of operation**—a complete reversal from two years prior to the establishment of the Success Academy when only 15% earned promotion.

**Comparison of Ninth Grade Student Attendance  
At Patterson High School, 1993-1997**

<b>September</b>	1994-96	74.7
	1996-97	80.1
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+5.4</b>
<b>October</b>	1994-96	70.0
	1996-97	76.3
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+6.3</b>
<b>November</b>	1994-96	63.4
	1996-97	73.7
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+10.3</b>
<b>December</b>	1994-96	62.0
	1996-97	66.8
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+4.8</b>
<b>January</b>	1994-96	60.0
	1996-97	79.5
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+19.5</b>
<b>February</b>	1994-96	62.9
	1996-97	73.8
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+8.6</b>
<b>March</b>	1994-96	66.5
	1996-97	75.1
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+8.6</b>
<b>Year-to-Date</b>	1994-96	65.6
	1996-97	75.0
	<b>Gain</b>	<b>+9.4</b>