



**Harvard Family
Research Project**



Resource Guide for High School Transitions: Annotated Bibliography

Harvard Family Research Project

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Introduction

Smooth transitions from middle to high school and from high school to college are associated with students' improved academic achievement, emotional well-being, and college readiness. Supportive transition practices that engage families and schools help students enter ninth grade prepared to be successful in high school, college, and career. Families in particular often need assistance understanding how they can best support learning and development once their children reach adolescence, as evidenced by the dramatic decline in family engagement that tends to occur as students move through middle school and into high school. This bibliographic resource provides a selected listing of journal articles, research briefs, and other resources that focus on the transitions into and out of high school as well as general high school and college readiness. These resources address a variety of topics related to high school transitions including family engagement, school practices, and student outcomes. The resources in this guide are organized into the following categories:

- **Family Engagement and Transitions: Middle School to High School**
- **Family Engagement and Transitions: High School to College and Career**
- **School Practices and Transitions: Middle School to High School**
- **School Practices and Transitions: High School to College and Career**
- **General High School, College, and Career Readiness**

Links are provided to resources which are publicly available on the Web, and DOI links are provided for those journal articles which may be available online for a fee.

Family Engagement and Transitions: Middle School to High School

Crosnoe, R. (2009). Family-school connections and the transitions of low-income youths and English language learners from middle school to high school. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(4), 1061–1076. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0016131>

This article examines the impact of different patterns of family–school relations on math and science placements of students beginning high school. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, the study focuses on low-income youth and English language learners and finds that students were placed in higher level math classes when families, middle school staff, and high school staff all interacted with each other or when middle school staff interacted with both families and high schools; this effect was especially pronounced for students who were English language learners.

Hill, N. E., & Chao, R. K. (Eds.) (2009). *Families, schools, and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice*. (pp. 53–72). New York: Teachers College Press.

This book presents emerging research that can help families and schools understand how to support student achievement during the transition to middle and high school, including effective strategies to help parents remain involved in their adolescents' education.

Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(3), 740–763.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015362>

This article reveals that, among middle school students, parental involvement that focuses on academic socialization—such as sharing expectations for achievement and developing academic and career goals—has the greatest impact on academic achievement of all types of parental involvement. Parental involvement at this level should also foster middle school students' growing autonomy and positive decision-making skills.

Rice, J. K. (2001). Explaining the negative impact of the transition from middle to high school on student performance in mathematics and science. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 37*(3), 372–400.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00131610121969352>

This study examines the effect of the school environment and parental support structures on student academic progress during the transition from middle to high school, using 5 years of data from the Longitudinal Study of American Youth. The author finds that school safety and academic environment concerns are related to poor student performance in science and mathematics.

Smith, J. S., Feldwisch, R., & Abell, A. (2006). Similarities and differences in students' and parents' perceptions of the transition from middle school to high school. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 29*(10), 1–9.

<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No10/tabid/810/Default.aspx>

This qualitative study examines students' and parents' perceptions of the middle to high school transition in a large public school district in the Midwest. Students' positive perceptions about the transition include opportunities to make new friends and choose academic courses, while their negative perceptions include concerns about having too much homework and getting lost. Parents, meanwhile, have concerns about their children facing peer pressure and bullying.

Family Engagement and Transitions: High School to College and Career

Dabbah, M. (2008). *Help Your Children Succeed in High School and Go to College*. Oak Brook, IL: Ronald McDonald House Charities.

http://www.meencanta.com/hacer/guide_for_parents_and_educators.html

This audio-visual tool and accompanying facilitator's guide, sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities and Hispanic American Commitment to Educational Resources (HACER), help trainers conduct productive workshops for Latino families about supporting their children during high school and the transition to college.

New Visions for Public Schools. (2008). *Aiming Higher: Is your 9th grader on track for college?* New York: Author. <http://www.newvisions.org/aiming-higher-is-your-9th-grader-on-track-for-college-english-0>

This resource, designed for families of students in New York, explains the necessary steps to high school graduation and college attendance, including information about Regents exams, coursework, attendance, and grades.

Savitz-Romer, M., Jager-Hyman, J., & Coles, A. (2009). *Removing roadblocks to rigor: Linking academic and social supports to ensure college readiness and success*. Washington, DC: Pathways to College Network and the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/uploadedFiles/Pathways_To_College_Network/About_Us/Pathways_Publications/Roadblocks.pdf

This publication provides definitions of the types of supports students and families need from their schools in order to prepare for the rigors of college. It includes a model of potential support structures for practitioners and policymakers.

School Practices and Transitions: Middle School to High School

Bottoms, G. (2008). *Redesigning the ninth-grade experience: Reduce failure, improve achievement, and increase high school graduation rates*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08V06_9th-grade_redesign.pdf

This report reveals that involving families in conversations about their children's coursework and postsecondary plans with teachers and advisors is an important element of programs that successfully improve the experiences of ninth graders and promote academic success in high school. The report recommends holding orientation programs for middle school students and their parents to help them better understand the expectations of students in high school and to recommend ways to prepare for ninth grade.

Bottoms, G. (2010). *Summer strategies for successful transitions from middle to high school*. Baltimore, MD: The National Summer Learning Association.

http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/resmgr/publications/2010.nsla_connections_bottom.pdf

This article offers strategies and best practices for teachers and district practitioners to use in order to better prepare students for the transition from middle to high school. Intended for use in the summer before high school, these strategies include engaging a cross disciplinary planning team, involving parents, fostering a supportive environment, providing an accelerated curriculum, and teaching habits of success.

Cauley, K. M., & Jovanovich, D. (2006). *Developing an effective transition program for students entering middle school or high school*. *Clearing House*, 80(1), 15–25.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.80.1.15-25>

This article outlines the most common developmental needs of adolescents before and during the transition period, offers suggestions for creating effective transition plans, and highlights successful transition strategies from the relevant research. The authors find that comprehensive transition programs that span the spring and summer prior to the transfer and continue into the fall can be effective in alleviating the concerns of students and families. Effective programs target students, parents, and teachers; promote collaboration and communication between the sending and receiving schools; employ strategies to reduce students' social, academic, and procedural concerns; and target students most at risk of struggling with the transition.

Horwitz, A., & Snipes, J. (2008). *Supporting successful transitions to high school* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools.
http://www.cgcs.org/publications/CGCS_SuccessfulTransitions.pdf

This research brief documents the common reasons that student fail the ninth grade, highlights key strategies for promoting successful transitions, and provides recommendations for districts and schools to better support student transitions into high school. The authors find that comprehensive reforms, which combine structural changes with purposeful curricular and instructional interventions, can help students have successful transitions into high school, but that structural changes alone are insufficient. Recommendations include: targeting ninth graders for transition interventions, engaging students with challenging academics, developing systems to target interventions to students' needs, and strengthening literacy curriculums across all school levels.

Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Easing the transition to high school: Research and best practices designed to support high school learning*. Washington, DC: National High School Center.
<http://betterhighschools.org/pubs/#TransitionIn>

This toolkit focuses on the transition from middle to high school, and includes a fact sheet, a policy brief, an issue brief, and a snapshot of successful transition practices used in one school. The authors' review of relevant research finds that successful transition programs rely on collaboration among parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators; create strong connections between middle and high schools; and focus interventions on ninth grade students.

McCallumore, K. M., & Sparapani, E. F. (2010). The importance of the ninth grade on high school graduation rates and student success in high school. *Education*, 130(3), 447–456.

This research review emphasizes the importance of the middle to high school transition in student retention and success in ninth grade. It offers strategies for school practice including: increasing communication between middle and high schools, implementing transition programs or freshmen academies, and offering orientation nights for incoming ninth grade students and their families.

Oakes, A., & Waite, W. (2009). Middle-to-high-school transition: Practical strategies to consider. *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Newsletter* (May 2009).
http://www.centerforcsri.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=669&Itemid=5.

This newsletter focuses on how practitioners can support the transition from middle to high school and includes three examples of collaboration between middle and high schools. The authors find that collaboration among middle and high school staff and involvement of families are two strategies that support students in making successful transitions.

Smith, J. S. (2006). Examining the long-term impact of achievement loss during the transition to high school. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 17(4), 211–221.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4219/jsge-2006-409>

This study examines the impact of the transition from middle to high school on later college success using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study. The author finds that high achieving middle school students who experienced achievement loss in the ninth grade were more likely to drop out of or leave their first college than high achieving middle school students who did not experience achievement loss in the ninth grade.

School Practices and Transitions: High School to College and Career

Bangser, M. (2008) *Preparing high school students for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment* (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research. http://betterhighschools.org/pubs/usergd_prepare.asp

This issue brief describes best practices for policymakers to improve students' transitions out of high school into college or career. Effective programs begin before junior year, provide comprehensive supports for struggling students, align high school expectations with those of colleges and employers, and engage families and students through college and career counseling.

Moss-Coane, M. (Host), Bailey, T. (Guest), & Merlino, J. (Guest). (2011, June 8). The challenge of preparing students for college and, once they are there, finish [Radio broadcast episode]. In M. Moss-Coane (Producer), *Radio Times*. Philadelphia, PA: WHY Y Radio. <http://why.org/cms/radiotimes/2011/06/08/the-challenge-of-preparing-students-for-college-and-once-they-are-there-finish/>

On this WHY Y radio program, guests Thomas Bailey of the Teachers College at Columbia University and Joseph Merlino of the 21st Century Partnership for STEM Education discuss college readiness and how high schools can work with colleges to prepare students for college level coursework.

Tierney, W. G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N., Hurd, N. F. (2009). *Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do*. Washington, DC: Institute of Educational Sciences. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher_ed_pg_091509.pdf

This report recommends that high schools provide more in-depth information about the college financial aid process to parents and students earlier in students' high school careers. The report also provides evidence from research to support this recommendation and tips about how to implement this recommendation in high schools.

General School, College, and Career Readiness

Ascher, C., & Maguire, C. (2007). *Beating the odds: How thirteen NYC schools bring low-performing ninth graders to timely graduation and college enrollment*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/BTO_report.pdf and <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/CollegePathwaysRubric.pdf>

This study identifies four key strategies used by schools to prepare low-performing ninth-graders for timely high school graduation and college enrollment: academic rigor, networks of timely supports, college expectations/access, and effective use of data. An accompanying rubric, based on this research, allows high schools to evaluate their work around these four dimensions.

Dougherty, C. (2010). *Using the right data to determine if high school interventions are working to prepare students for college and careers* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research.

http://betterhighschools.org/docs/NCEA_CollegeCareerReadiness.pdf

This research brief describes how to develop and use data systems that both identify entering ninth grade students who are struggling academically, and target interventions to help those students graduate from high school prepared for college. Recommendations include collaboration between the state education agency, local school districts, and research universities to build a longitudinal database with multiple statistical analyses of that data in order to find the best combination of interventions; analysis of student growth and performance levels based on students' level of prior academic preparation; and adoption of a mentality that readiness for the transition from high school to college and career begins in elementary and middle school.

Hooker, S., & Brand, B. (2009). *Success at every step: How 23 programs support youth on the path to college and beyond*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

<http://www.aypf.org/publications/SuccessAtEveryStep.htm>

This compendium examines 23 successful programs that help youth complete high school ready to achieve success in college and their future careers, and includes a logic model illustrating the necessary steps in preparing youth for college.