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## DUNDALK HIGH SCHOOL'S TRANSITION PROGRAM

Dundalk High School

Baltimore, Maryland

Dundalk High School is located in the southeastern area of Baltimore County and borders Baltimore City to the east. It is a small blue-collar community whose economic growth is dependent upon the steel mill, the shipyard, the Chevrolet plant, and other manufacturing companies. The school is a comprehensive high school with a student population of just around 1300 students. The students' ethnic composition is approximately 16% African American, 83% Caucasian, and less than 1% of other ethnic backgrounds. Historically, the area has suffered economically, and Dundalk High School's statistics have reflected that downward spiral. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunches hovers around 40+%, daily attendance is in the 90% to 92% range, and the number of students taking the SAT is nominal. Family finances are such that many students need to work once they turn sixteen, thereby putting the importance of education secondary to a job. Added to these other facts, the transient rate is in the area of 40%. The suspension rate is one of the highest in Baltimore County, and students often leave with the good intention of attending night school and pursuing the G. E. D.

In trying to combat all of the negative societal variables that affect the performance of Dundalk High School's students, the Action Team instituted an 8th Grade Transition Program. The objective of the program was to make the high school experience a cooperative effort that would include the parents, the students, the middle school, and the high school. In order to successfully pull all facets of the students' lives together, the Action Team, teachers, parents, school staff, and students have put into place a comprehensive package of activities that have impressed the parents and the community.

Initially, contact with students begins during their eighth grade year with a series of cooperative sporting and musical activities with the middle and high schools. Eighth grade students are encouraged to audition and perform in the high school's musicals and plays, and the athletic department schedules meets and games at the middle school. In addition, we give tickets to the high school's basketball, football, and baseball events to the middle school as performance incentives throughout the school year. In the spring of their eighth grade year, students come to the high school for an orientation program and tours of the building.

Additionally, since we are in constant competition with the magnet schools, an open house is held in the fall of the eighth grade year. Teacher volunteers telephone the homes of all incoming ninth graders and invite their families to attend the open house. This evening event in the school's auditorium includes a video of the comprehensive high school program, the technical programs offered at the vocational school, and the historical growth of Dundalk High School and the Dundalk community. Our slogan, "Your Community

School," is prevalent throughout the presentation, and banners with the slogan hang in each of the main entrance ways.

At the conclusion of the presentation, parents and students travel to the cafeteria where each of the high school's academic and elective departments and extra-curricular organizations have displays, videos, and student representatives describing either their curricula or activities. The N.J.R.O.T.C. cadets take families and students on a tour of the building. Throughout, there is entertainment provided by the school's choral groups and bands. The P.T.A. and the Alumni Association are represented, and refreshments flow freely throughout the evening. The community participation is phenomenal. Throughout the evening, nostalgia is quite evident as our incoming students' family members, many of whom are alumni of the school, stop to share their memories and experiences or comment on how the building has changed over the years since they walked the "hallowed halls" of Dundalk High School.

Around the winter break, we host a mixer for the faculties of our feeder schools at a local restaurant. This is done in hopes that teachers will see each level of education as part of a continuum and not a segregated stage of student development. We have also hosted a middle school/high school planning session so we can share with our middle schools the specific skills that students need to succeed on the high school level.

At the end of students' eighth grade year, we begin our Summer Home Visit Program. The high school's teachers and support staff volunteer to telephone and visit each home of the incoming ninth graders over the course of the summer. In its fourth year, this program has become quite talked about and welcomed by the community. In fact, as early as May, the school begins receiving telephone calls from middle school parents inquiring as to when someone will contact them to visit their homes.

After the initial telephone contact, appointments are arranged. At the prescheduled appointment time, teachers in teams of two visit with the families. A packet has been developed which includes important information about the school: telephone numbers, counselors, administrators, functional testing dates, community health agencies, everything and anything that will help parents to see that we are trying to help them educate their children. Each of the information packets is enclosed in a Dundalk High School pocket folder, and a DHS pencil and key ring or bumper sticker are included. During each meeting, teachers invite parents and students to attend an ice cream social, which is held the week before school starts. Again, parents and students are given a tour, and faculty, administrators, and other school personnel are on hand to dip the ice cream and socialize with families.

Once school is in session, we hold our annual Back-to-School Night for all of our families and students. This meeting is two-fold in that there is an administrative agenda as well as programs showing all of the activities in which students can become involved. We hope to entice students to take advantage of the opportunities available throughout their tenure at Dundalk High School, and to elicit support and encouragement from their families.

The administrators, faculty, and staff at Dundalk High School work diligently to overcome those forces not in our control by "bridging the gap" between the middle school and the high school experience. Over the past four years, we have shown improvement in our statistics: attendance is up from 89% to 92%; students passing the functional tests is approximately 96% across the board by grade 10; the number of students retained is down; the number of students dropping out of school has decreased. We are having an impact although it is a hard, uphill battle. Yet, all of us know that even the slightest of positive indicators means that one fewer student has fallen by the wayside - - and perhaps in this day and age that is the best for which we can hope.

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