
FRESHMEN TRANSITION PROGRAM

North High School

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Freshmen have fears coming into high school: lockers, dances, peer pressure, getting lost, appearances, grades, work load, lunch seating, social status, and others. North High wanted to make these worries either disappear or not seem so overwhelming. The school's staff and Partnership Coordinator developed a yearlong transition program to help incoming freshmen and their families start the high school years on the right foot.

In December, North High hosted a "Preview Night" for eighth graders and their families. Students and their families came to see the high school, learn about course offerings, and receive a heartfelt welcome from the high school administration and staff. In addition to the open house, incoming freshmen families received the high school newsletter so they could learn about the exciting opportunities at North High. In July, incoming freshmen received a letter from the principal, an English teacher, and the Partnership Coordinator welcoming them to North High and explaining additional programs that would ease ninth graders into their high school years.

One of these programs that helped facilitate a smooth transition was "Freshmen First Day." The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the School Board approved the first day of school to be for freshmen only at the two district high schools. A small group of staff developed "Freshmen

First Day" for North High. They presented the purpose and schedule to the rest of the staff to gather their support. A follow-up was conducted with the freshmen asking them what they found helpful, what information they wished had been shared with them, and how the day could be improved. Freshmen feedback included:

- "I felt less afraid of high school."
- "I knew what to expect the next day when everyone was in the building."
- "I got to meet my teachers and see who else was in my classes."
- "Walking the halls with only freshmen was nice since we were all new together . . . the next day when all the upper classmen were there, I was more confident."
- "I knew who had the same lunch period so I knew who to meet for lunch."

For fall 2003, North High will improve the "Freshmen First Day" based on student suggestions. They will also incorporate materials from Link Crew (www.linkcrew.com). Link Crew is a freshmen transition program that is built on the belief that students can help students succeed. All North High freshmen will have an upper-class student advisor who will have completed the necessary training, which includes a one-day training in the spring and a three-day training in the summer. The freshman-upper classman relation-

ship should help facilitate a successful transition to high school.

New this fall is the Freshmen Family Picnic. The picnic will allow North High to share information and answer parent concerns and questions. The parents will have the opportunity to network with one another, tour the building, meet staff, and receive assistance in registering online for EdLine. (EdLine allows parents to access their students' grades, homework, and other important information. The Partnership Coordinator has asked some employers to make computers available for parents to check their students' progress.) For those families that do not register for EdLine at the picnic, they have another opportunity at Back to School Night.

Also new this fall is a three-ring binder for each freshmen family. The binders will help families organize important information during their students' high school years. Dividers will indicate places for the Family Handbook, newsletters, report cards, acknowledgements, and other important information. In the past, only students had a copy of school procedures, rules, and regulations in their agendas/planners. The Family Handbook will make it easier for parents to have access to this information, especially when their students have their agendas at school.

North High has implemented several activities that will assist incoming ninth-grade students and their families. Their efforts should help more students start their high schools years in a positive way, setting the

foundation for a successful high school experience.

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