

Ninth Grade Transition Academy

Clip 2 – How they expanded the program to middle school and upper high school grades

Becky Harrison: After we, we are in our 10th year of our freshman program, and about three years ago we began to realize that we needed to work on the transition from 8th grade. We needed to start working with our students before we got them. And so we began some strong articulation with the two middle schools that feed into us. First of all, talking to them, making sure they knew what our 9th grade program was like, and us physically spending time on their campuses talking to the students. We start in the fall of the 8th grade year meeting with students on the middle school campus talking about the things they're going to be able to do when they get to Caprock. Talking about the expectations of them when they come to Caprock, and at that same time we began to look at data from the 8th grade. We studied the 8th grade data pretty intensely so that we can build in some summer programs, several academic camps during the summer, to work on 8th grade skills with these kids based on their State tests and the weak areas. We pull them in for two-week camps where we work on their 8th grade skills to make sure they come to us with strong 8th grade skills, especially in math and science. And we also use that data in the placement of students in math and science for our freshman program. We do a ratio of ready-to-need kids based on their 8th grade State test. We try to build the math and science classes when there's one ready, one needy kid, a kid who did not pass the 8th grade State test, to three ready kids who did pass. So that the ratio in the room is

smaller, the kids needing the individual attention, and a teacher can give a smaller group the extra help, the individual attention that they need. And then to that first six weeks of school we do a six-week academy after school for that same kind of kid whose skills are weak, but working on 8th grade skills. Even though they're enrolled in 9th grade and we got them in classes all day, after school we still try to go back and bring up some of the 8th grade skills that they may be weak in.

Some of the other things that we do with the middle schools that we have started in the last couple of years is combine staff development so that we're all getting the same skills, differentiated instruction, rigor and relevance. We've gone through together so that instructional strategies and some of that kind of stuff is the same from the middle school on up. And then the last thing we really focused on is the ELL kid and the special ed kid, and working with the middle schools to begin to try to move those kids into regular classes, inclusion co-teach kind of classes in the middle school so when they come to high school they can function in the regular classroom a little bit more. So there's really strong articulation with us going to the middle school. You know, so much of the time we expect middle schools to come to us. And we've tried really hard to get on their campus, meeting with their teachers and their administrators and the kids to start that transition on their level, on their ground, in their buildings so that a better product comes to us in the 9th grade.

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