

## THE COUNSELOR'S CLASSROOM

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### TRANSITION TIME: PREPARING RISING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR THE MOVE

By Julia Taylor, MA of the [American School Counselor Association](#) for [GuidanceChannel.com](#)

High school is full of choices that can make or break a student's future. Students are expected to complete assignments, become leaders, and participate in clubs, activities, and athletics. On top of that, they need to maintain a high GPA, set career goals, and select the right college. They must also learn to navigate the social landscape of high school, which often becomes the center a teenager's world. For many teens, these social and academic pressures can be daunting, exciting, anxiety provoking, and fearful – all at the same time. However, an effective transition program can address these students' questions, fears, and concerns.

C. Jay Hertzog from The Center for Transition Studies found that middle and high schools that only conducted a building tour and assisted 8th grade students in registration had the highest dropout and retention rates. On the other hand, the most successful middle level transition programs offered a number of activities that gave students an inside look into the real world of high school. They included activities that (a) provided students and parent's information about the new school, (b) offered students social support during the transition, and (c) brought middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curricula and requirements.

A successful transition program needs to be approached as a process, not just an orientation. Below you will find suggestions on how to develop a quality transition program that helps students feel comfortable and confident as they move into this new stage of their lives.

1. Ask a high school counselor to visit your local middle schools and hold information sessions during lunch to address student questions.
2. Show middle school students a slide show of high school life.

3. Allow middle school students to write their questions/concerns and submit them to high school students. This will eliminate students' apprehension about asking valid questions in fear of sounding stupid. They will also learn that they share common fears.
4. Ask current freshman what their biggest fears were and invite a few of them to speak to the soon-to-be freshmen to dispel any myths. Also invite other high school student leaders to talk about life in high school.
5. Review your high school's program of studies and four-year plans, as well as your state's testing procedures and graduation requirements.
6. Define what a GPA is and how it works. Bring a sample transcript of a high school senior who has received a few Ds and show how much it affected his or her GPA. Often students don't realize how difficult it is to raise their GPAs after receiving a few low grades. Many freshmen think that they can "fix it" later
7. Explain school discipline procedures and let students know that colleges review discipline records, as well. Point out that sometimes one suspension can keep a student out of a good school.
8. Toward the end of the year, invite the rising high school students to the school for an open house. Hold an activity fair and have school clubs collect email addresses. Ask your coaches to set up tables and collect contact information from interested athletes. If space permits, have a pep rally to show your school spirit. Hand out goodie bags with school information and a spirit remembrance such as a cup, plastic football or pom-pom.
9. Add a "rising freshmen" section on your website that includes courses available, credit and graduation information, and all school policies.
10. At the end of the summer when scheduling is complete, host another open house where students can pick up their schedules and meet their teachers. Invite parents to attend an information session at the same time in the auditorium. Hold an ice cream social, coffee, breakfast, or barbeque afterwards to encourage interaction between faculty, staff, administration, counselors, and parents. Also make sure the school store is open.
11. If possible, arrange for freshman students to start a day early. This allows students to get accustomed to their schedules, find their lockers, adapt to lunch procedures, and become acquainted with the staff without being intimidated by the upperclassmen.
12. Provide teachers with helpful suggestions for connecting with all students early on. Research suggests that if a student has one adult in the building whom they can trust, they are more likely to complete school.
13. Encourage school and community involvement and explain how it relates to college transcripts and building relationships. Also point out the correlation between grades and extracurricular involvement.

14. Hold multiple parent information sessions as parental involvement plays a vital role in high school success.

15. Invite a local university admissions officer to speak at the parent information and student information sessions about the importance of starting off right.

16. Keep the lines of communication open at all times. It is extremely important to let students and parents know that school counselors are available to answer questions and offer help.

17. Lastly, transition programs provide an ideal opportunity to accountability. School counselors should prepare quick pre- and post-tests for parents, students, and teachers to ensure their needs are met. You can also end your post-tests with an open-ended question about how to make the program better.

### **Resources**

[American School Counselor Association](#) (ASCA) Secondary School Listserv.

Hertzog, J.C. & Morgan, P.L. (n.d.) [Building Bridges Between Middle Schools and High Schools](#). The Middle Web.

The School District of Greenville County. (May, 2002). [Meeting the Challenge: The Transition To and Through Ninth Grade](#).

### **FEATURED RESOURCE: STRONG STUDY SKILLS SERIES**

The STRONG Study Skills Series is designed to help middle and high school students improve their academic standing while developing the learning skills that will increase confidence and self-esteem. The activity books systematically approach study skills, reading, writing, and math with easy-to-learn techniques and hands-on exercises from real-life situations. Students will learn how to manage their time more efficiently and get more out of the time they spend studying.

The 4-part program begins with the interactive Study Skills Unit where students evaluate where they are academically, their attitudes about school, and how to set realistic goals. Here students actually learn how to learn! Each unit builds upon the last until students are self-motivated because of their new understanding of how to study and succeed in school. Titles in the set include:

[Improve Your Study Skills](#)

[Improve Your Reading Skills](#)

[Improve Your Writing Skills](#)

[Improve Your Math Skills](#)

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For over 30 years, SVM has been producing the highest quality guidance and health programs. From the start, SVM's mission has been to enhance learning and help teachers get students thinking and talking about the difficult issues they face every day. SVM's reputation as the recognized leader in the field of guidance and health, is built on its ability to present tough-to-teach topics in a realistic, non-judgmental, and captivating manner. SVM prides itself on consistently providing educators with award-winning programs in such areas as: anger management, bullying & harassment, character education, violence prevention, conflict resolution, drug abuse prevention, sex education, career education, health, and parenting skills.

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## **ABOUT JULIA TAYLOR, MA**

Julia Taylor is a freshman counselor for Loudoun County Public Schools in Virginia and is the Regional Conference Chairperson for the Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA).

## **ABOUT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION**

Professional school counselors everywhere share the same vision to support their schools by serving their students. School counselors know that guiding students toward personal and social development leads to improved academic achievement. Through their partnership with principals and teachers, school counselors help prepare today's students to become tomorrow's adults.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) responds to school counselors' unique needs, helping them grow individually as professionals and providing them with real tools to guide their students. As an international nonprofit organization founded in 1952, ASCA has the benefit of foresight and hindsight. It has grown to fit counselors' changing needs through social and educational movements from desegregation to standardized testing. Responding to the needs of counselors as voiced by counselors has enabled ASCA to remain vital and forward-thinking.

ASCA serves as the voice of school counselors on Capitol Hill and helps members ensure their voices are heard in state legislatures. ASCA has active government affairs representatives who monitor activities in Congress, the Department of Education and throughout Washington to advocate on behalf of school counselors' interests: funding, certification, student-to-counselor ratios and more.

A full-color bimonthly magazine, *School Counselor* provides practical information and how-to articles to help school counselors help their students and themselves. Each issue has a focus on something school counselors care about, from public relations to grief counseling, as well as departments and columns covering a range of topics. Professional School Counseling is ASCA's award-winning bimonthly academic journal, providing peer-reviewed articles on school counseling theory, research, practice and techniques. The journal and the magazine together provide counselors with the most well-rounded and up-to-date information in the field.

For more information, visit [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org) or call 703.683.ASCA.

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