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National High School Center Releases Resources on Ensuring a Smooth Transition into High School

Washington, D.C. – The National High School Center has released a suite of four new resources on how to support and guide a smooth transition into high school.

The National High School Center examines how some states and districts are currently easing the transition in its policy brief “State and District-Level Support for Successful Transitions into High School.” The National High School Center also offers a best practices piece based on key research in the brief “Toward Ensuring a Smooth Transition Into High School.”

“Ninth grade is a critical make-it-or-break-it year for many students and we wanted to highlight some of the best practices that are backed by research, as well as examples of what states and districts are doing now to ensure that entering high school students are well-supported,” said Joseph R. Harris, Ph.D., Director of the National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

As part of the suite of products on this topic, the National High School Center provides a snapshot of how one school is managing to make a positive difference for ninth graders through the “Managing the Transition to Ninth Grade in a Comprehensive Urban High School.” The National High School Center also provides a quick stats fact sheet on the ninth grade bulge, wherein a disproportionate number of ninth graders are held back in the ninth grade, many of whom drop out by the tenth grade.

Research on four urban school districts by MDRC suggests the transition to high school is challenging for many students, and up to 40 percent of students are disengaged and not promoted from ninth-to 10th grade on time. To address this problem, the brief focuses on five key challenges to support a successful transition into high school:

- Establish a data monitoring system to diagnose why students are struggling;
- Address the instructional needs of unprepared incoming high school students;
- Personalize the learning environment to focus on individual students;
- Build capacity within low-performing schools to address diverse student needs; and
- Create connections to the community, higher education, and employers to engage students and allow them to understand the relevance of their coursework.

The policy brief offers examples of initiatives and programs that schools, districts, and states have developed to assist transitioning students.

“In today’s globally competitive world, it is more important than ever for students to master rigorous coursework, graduation requirements, and graduation exams so they can make successful post-secondary transitions. Addressing the challenges of transitioning into high school is a step in the right direction towards ensuring that students are on track to graduate,” added Harris.

The issue brief presents findings from two studies conducted by MDRC on the Talent Development High School Model and its predecessor, Project Transition, that explain how school improvement programs can improve over time and also be strengthened further to meet the needs of more ninth-grade students. It also outlines the gains made when structural supports and instructional reforms are both successfully implemented in schools at the same time.

Additionally, the snapshot highlights the efforts of Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia, PA, to address concerns of uneven school performance and dropout through the use of the Ninth Grade Success Academy, a component of the Talent Development High School program. This school-within-a-school draws on a number of features specifically designed to help ninth-graders make a successful transition, including: personalized learning community; teacher teams; block scheduling and double-dosing; freshman seminars; report card conferences; an emphasis on attendance and grades; and a summer orientation.

The resources, authored by Corinne Herlihy and Thomas J. Smith of MDRC, a partner of the National High School Center, are available free-of-charge on the National High School Center’s Web site at <http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/>. Viewers are encouraged to sign up for the [National High School Center’ E-newsletter](#) to receive announcements of the latest tools, products, and research regarding high schools.

About the National High School Center

The National High School Center (www.betterhighschools.org), established in 2005, serves as a central source of expertise on high school-related issues for the Regional Comprehensive Centers, a national network developed by the U.S. Department of Education. The National High School Center is housed at the American Institutes for Research, located in Washington, DC. Subcontractors include Learning Point Associates, MDRC, the National Center for Educational Accountability, and WestEd.

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