

Blueprint is brought to you by Jack Berckemeyer, Kim Campbell, Debbie Silver and Dedra Stafford and is written by Judith Baenen.

NINTH GRADE ACADEMY

Mid-year exams coming up? You'd do well to remember that most high school dropouts are students who failed at least 25 percent of their ninth-grade courses, while only 8 percent of high school graduates experienced the same difficulty (Letgers&Kerr, 2011). For some of your students, the exam counts as 60 percent of their grade! Without proper preparation, many ninth graders are likely to fail.

When these students were in the middle grades, they experienced tests and assessments, of course, but rarely any that covered several weeks' worth of learning, as some ninth grade exams do. You can lower your schools' failure rate by assisting your ninth-grade students as they prepare for exams.

What kind of test? Different test formats demand differing study techniques. True/false tests require a broad range of knowledge about the material as well as close-in reading for comparison. Multiple-choice tests are easier – recognition plays a big part in getting the answer right. Fill-in-the-blank or short-answer tests also provide clues in the text. Essay exams call for a wide range of skills, but often look for knowledge of key concepts rather than details. If students know in advance the type of test, you can help them study accordingly.

How to study? In ninth grade, each teacher should spend time teaching students how to study for the subject as well as for exams. Some students think that they should just reread the material or "think" about the information presented. Others study useless details while ignoring major ideas. A few give up before they start because they don't know how to break down into smaller parts what seems to be a huge task. Ninth graders need guidance on organizing study procedures.

What else? Remind ninth-graders to take these exams seriously, to get help if they don't understand something, and to try to eat right and get sleep before the exams. We want our ninth graders to be successful so that they will continue their high school journey. Help them get over the exam hump right away.



JACK SAYS: "CHOOSE OPTIMISM"

Anger is often a sign that something needs to be changed. It can lead to that change or to apathy. One can seek the source or displace it somewhere else. The deliberate optimist tries to figure out what needs to be fixed and works to make things better.

Jack Berckemeyer is the head of the Berckemeyer Consulting Group and owner and director of Nuts & Bolts Symposiums. JackBerckemeyer.com • NutsandBoltsSymposiums.com

Three Myths About Student-Led Conferences

More and more schools are moving toward holding student-led conferences for at least one of the conference sessions offered each year. Nearly everyone involved finds such experiences beneficial for students, teachers and parents. This is especially true when parent portals already report grades and even comments. Parents and guardians are more likely to choose to attend a conference if their child is leading the session. Beware, however, of these myths about student-led conferences.

MYTH – A portfolio is just a scrapbook of a student's work.

Far from being a scrapbook, a portfolio is a carefully-planned selection of a student's work. A good portfolio shows growth in the subject, effort at overcoming weaknesses, and special successes. Students should be guided in their choices, but the final portfolio should be theirs.

MYTH – Students are on their own to make a student-led conference work.

Student-led conferences are learning experiences – like all other experiences that take place in a classroom. Students need guidelines for both portfolio development and the actual procedures in the conference. Time to rehearse is essential.

MYTH – Parents don't need to be involved until the conference.

Because student-led conferences might be new to them (and certainly aren't what they knew from their own early school experiences), parents and guardians must be offered opportunities to know in advance what the conference will entail. A letter outlining the goals and process of the conference should be sent out a few weeks ahead, and reminders should be provided at the beginning of the conference.

Parent surveys indicate that parents think student-led conferences are positive experiences in virtually every grade. Parents leave with a better knowledge of their child's performance and classroom activities. Avoid these myths to make sure your conferences are on track for success.