

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

NINTH GRADE ACADEMY

The High Schools That Work model lists ten research-based practices that enhance student success in ninth grade. Here are five* of them:

- o Teacher collaboration
- o Actively engaged students
- o Guidance
- o Additional help
- o Keeping score of progress

Student-led conferences encompass all of these practices! It is not difficult to initiate student-led conferences, but carrying out such an idea does require that ninth-grade teachers work together. In spite of early reluctance, students do get engaged in the process and become aware of ways to keep track of their own advancement. During the process of getting the student portfolio for the conference, both students and teachers come to understand the student's strengths and identify where help is needed. Also in that process, guidance offered through the team and/or counselor assists students in goal-setting and self-advocacy. There is still time to initiate student-led conferences this spring.

*For the other five, see www.sreb.org, High Schools That Work.



JACK SAYS: "CHOOSE OPTIMISM"

The more stress a person feels, the more likely she or he is to develop a cold when exposed to a cold virus. People who cope with stress best have these things in common:

1. The sense of being in control of their lives.
2. A network of friends or family to provide social support
3. Personality factors such as flexibility and hopefulness.

The ability to relax deeply and quickly is an extremely useful way of coping with stress and other negative emotions.

Peer Observation: A Pathway to Growth

Teachers who love kids and who love teaching are already on their way to becoming really good teachers. According to Kim Campbell, a veteran teacher and a regular presenter at Nuts and Bolts, an excellent way to become a great teacher is to take the time to engage in peer observation of a colleague at your school.

Kim suggests finding a teacher of your choice who is willing to have you observe his or her class. In choosing, you may wish to select someone who shares your style or someone with a differing style to broaden your perspective. After making plans with your colleague, observe the class for a minimum of 30 minutes, beginning with the start of the class. If you can work it out so that the observation is during your prep time, the planning is obviously much easier.

As you observe, Kim proposes that you take notes on the following topics:

- **Routines and procedures:** What did you see or hear the teacher do or say that would be considered a routine or procedure?
- **Starting the class:** Describe how the teacher gets her/his class started.
- **Relationships:** What specific techniques did the teacher use to build relationships with students?
- **Transitions:** What does the teacher do to manage transitions in class?
- **Specific management techniques:** Make a list of any specific management strategies you saw the teacher using.
- **Inconsistencies:** Did you notice any inconsistencies in the way the teacher responded to students? If so, why do you think the teacher chose not to act or to ignore the situation?
- **Reflection:** After watching your colleague teach, what techniques or strategies will you add to your classroom management toolbox?

Although this is a busy time of year (when isn't it busy?), Kim says that engaging in this exercise will renew your commitment and give you fresh energy. "Try it," says Kim. "You'll like it!"