

Ninth Grade Success

Strategy Guide 2.0

Strategy Vision and Description

In this guide, we define Ninth Grade Success as a comprehensive strategy designed to support first time ninth grade students with the transition to high school through the implementation of school structures, transition programs, and improved instructional support and intervention. The goal is to increase the 9th grade on-track rate, a measure of students who are able to meet expectations to move to 10th grade on-time.

Research has shown that the following components support the effectiveness of Ninth Grade Success and also point to the importance of Ninth grade in a student's success in high school and postsecondary. It is important to note that while there is evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of each component, these components are most effective when implemented together. The following components are derived from various articles and research that articulate what **Ninth Grade Success** should include:

1. An interdisciplinary Ninth Grade Success Team
2. Data system and analysis structures
3. Instructional Support for students
4. Transition Programs to support a strong start to high school

Note that there are organizations that have defined versions of a ninth grade success model or a ninth grade academy model that may vary slightly from this definition but are built on many of the same research findings about the importance of ninth grade. The organizations that CDE is aware of that are working with schools in Colorado on ninth grade success are listed in the additional resources section below.

Evidence Base

ESSA defines levels of research based on the quality of the study (Levels 1-4). CDE requires that schools and districts identify the research base for strategies that they select for their Unified Improvement Plans, and for applications for school improvement funds in the EASI application.

The research on **Ninth Grade Success** that is cited here meets the threshold for **ESSA Level 1-3**.

Necessary Preconditions

The following systems, structures, or practices enable a stronger and full implementation of this strategy. These practices serve as a foundation for the practices described in this guide.

- Scheduling approach that allows a common set of teachers to support a common set of students
- A data-management system that has the capability of creating dashboards that school staff can use to view student data and take notes on (not required but strongly recommended)



Contextual Fit

Possible Root Causes that may lead a school to consider the Ninth Grade success strategy might include:

- Large numbers of students not passing 9th grade courses, a large variation of approaches to grading, and/or inconsistent student engagement in courses.
- Lack of systems to support academic and non-academic intervention and recovery.
- Inconsistent progress monitoring of individual students and groups of students.

Is this strategy a good fit for your district/school?

The Ninth grade success program is a good fit for any high school who is working to better coordinate staff resources and to improve the number of students who move to 10th grade on-track. Particular attributes or approaches that may indicate a good fit include:

- High schools with high numbers or percentages of 9th grade students who struggle in courses or high numbers of incoming 9th grade students with early warning signs for disengagement.
 - High schools that have not been able to build clear connections and pathways for all students.
 - Large high schools that want to improve the connections that students have with school.
 - Staff willingness to work across content areas or departments.
 - Ability to schedule time for staff to collaborate around common students and where possible to assign dedicated staff to the 9th grade.
-

Core Components, Elements & Activities

The components of Ninth Grade Success can be implemented together, and schools should aim to implement all four components. Components 1 and 2 should be implemented together, while components 3 and 4 can be implemented with 1 and 2 or either earlier or later as part of a phased approach to implementation.

Core Component 1: Ninth Grade Success Team

Create a cross-disciplinary success team of ninth grade teachers and support staff that meets regularly to identify and implement individual and group strategies to support ninth grade students.

Elements or Activities	Description
Team Members	The Ninth Grade Success team is an interdisciplinary team of teachers and other school staff that includes counselors, social workers, or other non-instructional staff.
Team Focus	The team is dedicated to teaching and supporting only 9th grade students (if possible). This should also include non-instructional staff who support 9th grade students such as counselors or social workers.

Team Meetings	<p>The team meets every 1-2 weeks for discussions on student data and coordinated instructional practices. Ideally this time occurs during the day but may be after school. Meetings include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of summary attendance, behavior, and academic performance data about incoming students prior to the year and quarterly during the year. • Review of individual students to discuss progress and identify support options, especially for students identified as disengaging or falling behind. • Identification of common initiatives or strategies that all 9th grade staff will implement. • Identification of common areas of need and preventative approaches to support
Team Needs	<p>The Ninth Grade Success Team has dedicated planning time to design instructional support for 9th grade students. This may include the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of curriculum, lessons, or feedback on priorities for advisory curriculum. • Identification of groups of students that may need additional support. • Identification of common practices or learning experiences that all students should have.

Core Component 2: Data System and Analysis Structures

An effective Ninth Grade Success strategy requires a data system that provides real-time access to data concerning a student’s behavior, attendance, and course performance. The team should be able to disaggregate this data in a variety of ways including advisory or homeroom, class, student groups (e.g. students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students eligible for free or reduced price lunch) and student characteristics (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender). Regularly analyzing and reflecting on student needs will help the Ninth Grade Success team respond more effectively.

Elements or Activities	Description
Data management software and/or system	<p>A data system organizes regularly updated and accessible data, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance data that shows period by period attendance and is updated daily; • Behavior data that can be disaggregated by incident and time; • Course performance data that is consistently updated and can be disaggregated by course, teacher, and student groups; • Clear criteria for identifying students who are disengaging, falling behind, or needing extra support; • Ability to disaggregate data to identify trends across classrooms and subject areas or to examine overlap (e.g., students with high attendance who are struggling in course performance); • Tracking of a ninth grade on-track rate (defined as the percentage of students who make it to 10th grade with no more than 1 course failure) and 9th grade course passage rate disaggregated by course; <p>Teachers and other staff should have access to this data so they can see the full profile of a student’s performance.</p>

Analysis and use of the data at multiple levels	<p>School leadership uses data trends to inform decisions and adjust resources to support needs.</p> <p>The Ninth Grade Success team has protected time on a regular basis to analyze data on behavior, attendance, and grades to inform multi-level (individual and group) responses.</p> <p>Staff that are supporting students have access to data and can add intervention or support notes.</p>
Clear policies, agreements, and vision for data	<p>There are common definitions for when a student may be flagged and how responses will be coordinated.</p> <p>The Ninth Grade Success team (or ninth grade teachers) has clear agreements on the purpose of grading and has a developed common approach.</p> <p>There are clear policies, agreements, and practices on how to respond to student behavior and approaches to support discipline that ensures the best learning environment for all students.</p>

Core Component 3: Instructional Support for Students

Provide instructional support for ninth grade students to increase engagement and rigor in learning. This support may include content-specific academic interventions, tutoring, course-completion programs and social-emotional learning approaches.

Elements or Activities	Description
Instructional Support for students	<p>Ninth grade or whole school approaches for instruction may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common vision for instruction; • Focus on core instructional practices that engage all students; • Agreements on common practices and approaches to grading that support high expectations, student support, and clear opportunities for recovery and catch-up; and • Within year interventions and unit and credit recovery options for students who need additional support.
Student skill building support	<p>Student skill building includes the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Freshman Seminar advisory program, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Curriculum that provides structure and tools for teachers; ○ Opportunities for student planning, organization, goal setting, and reflection; and ○ Lessons and activities that increase student exposure to options and provide skill building practice. • A robust Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) process that builds on 9th grade experiences and prepares for 10th -12th grade exposure, experiences, and achievement. • Lessons or units for social emotional learning or essential skills development, practice and demonstration.

Core Component 4: Transition Program to support a strong start to high school

Based on data for incoming students, implement transition programs, training, and time for school staff to better understand 9th grade students and adjust school year plans.

Elements or Activities	Description
Data Analysis	<p>Attendance, behavior, and course performance data for incoming 9th grade students is analyzed and available to 9th grade staff to support the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of overall trends and potential areas of focus; • Identification of areas that may require rethinking, reinforcing, or redesigning tier 1 academic or behavioral systems; • Outreach to incoming families; and • Course planning.
Summer and school year transition programs	<p>Summer and school year transition programs include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer bridge programs for orientation and skill building for incoming students • Freshman Seminar advisory curriculum that provides opportunities for student planning, organization, goal setting, and reflection. • Planned academic interventions and support for students who need extra support. • Ongoing programs to ensure students are able to meet new expectations, explore new topics, and receive guidance, advice or follow-up as needed.

Guidance for Implementation

Implementation Element	Guidance or Considerations
<i>Staffing and Teams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership should be involved in setting the vision for the work and articulating how Ninth Grade Success can keep students engaged in learning and better prepared for what’s next. • A staff member, often a 9th grade principal, teacher leader, or counselor helps organize and facilitate the work of building a Ninth Grade Success team • All ninth grade team members should be involved in planning for implementation and in the ongoing work of engaging with ninth grade students.
<i>Training & Resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training is available on core practices of ninth grade success programs and individual components. There are organizations that provide this training and are currently working in Colorado, including two organizations on CDE’s advisory list that provide training on these core components. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Center for High School Success ○ Talent Development Secondary <p>In addition, the Network for College Success also provides this training currently to Colorado schools.</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many of the practices can be implemented with current staff if there is time for 9th grade teams to work on the project together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDE runs a Ninth Grade Success Grant intended to provide financial resources and technical assistance to districts who are interested in this implementation. CDE's EASI grant can be used to support schools and districts who qualify for this funding.
<i>Pacing</i>	<p>Schools and Districts can determine the best timeline for implementation. The following considerations may help determining the timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Component 1 may require scheduling changes or assignment adjustments that are easiest to make prior to the start of a school year. Component 1 is heavily reliant on component 2 so it is recommended that these components are undertaken in parallel. Components 3 and 4 could be done in parallel or may be done prior to or phased in after the other components.
<i>Progress Monitoring</i>	<p>The tracking of a ninth grade on-track rate and course passage rate disaggregated by course are the two main metrics to follow in progress monitoring.</p> <p>For students, schools and districts often track attendance, behavior, and course performance to see individual growth and trend data to see grade level progress.</p>

Sample Implementation Plan

Context: The following Sample Implementation Plan assumes that a school does not currently have a coaching system in place and is installing one for the first time. Note also that the dates given in the table below are suggested approximate ranges for the given activities. A true action plan should specify precise dates and date-ranges for each activity.

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
<i>Identify teacher/instructional staff members of Ninth Grade Success Team in upcoming year</i>	Identify instructional staff who will be involved in NGST, in order to adjust schedules to provide time for these staff members to participate fully in NGST.	March 1	School leader, Instructional Lead
<i>Identify & purchase a data management program</i>	<i>(if not already in place)</i>	March 1	School leader, Instructional Lead
<i>Implement data management program</i>	<i>(if not already in place)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preview dashboards that show comprehensive data about 9th grade students Provide training for staff on where to access and how to find additional information 	March - June	Instructional Lead or Tech Lead

<i>Adjust schedules for coming year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up structure for student schedules for shared teachers/students in the 9th grade. • Designate standing 45-60-min meeting every 1-2 weeks for NGST (ideally during day but could be after school); adjust schedules accordingly so NGST members are free during this time. • Designate 1 hour per week for designing instructional supports. This time can be asynchronous. 	February - May 1	School leader or designee (scheduler)
<i>Visit a school implementing NGS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an opportunity to understand the technical structures and the experiences of staff and students involved in current implementation. 	February – May 1	School leader or designee
<i>Identify other NGST members</i>	Identify additional non-instructional staff serving on NGST (counselors/social workers, etc.)	July 15	School leader, Instructional Lead
<i>NGST kick-off meeting and PD</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train on NGST role and expectations • Train on data management program usage, functionality, and expectations • Discuss and build common expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grading practices ○ Responses to student behavior ○ Approach to flagging students for additional support or intervention 	June (after school year ends)	School leader, Instructional Lead, NGST
<i>NGST kick-off meeting</i>	<p>Planning days: Time for ninth grade staff to prepare for the year that may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of data on incoming students • Planning for ninth grade orientation • Training or planning for instructional supports or intervention meetings 	August	NGST
<i>Ninth Grade orientation/summer bridge program</i>	<p><i>If applicable in Year 1</i></p> <p>Opportunity for incoming ninth grade students to participate in orientation (1-5 days)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to high school • Skill building opportunities • Meetings with counselors, teachers, and other staff 	August	NGST
<i>Weekly/Bi-weekly NGST meetings (ongoing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and analyze available data • Identify any individual students who may be disengaging or falling behind • Determine response or additional supports to put in place for identified students • Synthesize key takeaways or support requests for leadership 	Beginning in 2nd week of school	NGST

<p>Monthly leadership meetings (ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on data available and progress • Reflect on and respond to any outstanding requests from NGST • Re-allocate resources or support as needed 	<p>Beginning with first monthly leadership meeting after school begins</p>	<p>School leader, Instructional Lead</p>
--	--	--	--

Additional Resources

The following three organizations have previous experience in supporting schools and districts in implementing ninth grade success or academy models. Two have provided responses to [CDE’s Request for Information](#):

- [Center for High School Success](#)
- [Talent Development Secondary](#)

In addition, the Network for College Success is also a strong source of guidance for ninth grade success:

- [Network for College Success](#)
 - [Framework](#)
 - [A Capacity Building Model for School Improvement](#)
 - [Data Driven model](#)
 - [Freshman on-track toolkit](#)

The [Dropout Prevention Practice Guide from What Works Clearinghouse](#) identifies four recommendations, three of which have moderate or strong evidence (level 1 and level 2) and one which has minimal but strong rationale. These practices align closely to the components of the Ninth Grade Success project.

- Monitor the progress of students and proactively intervene when students who show early signs of attendance, behavior, or academic problems (Component 2)
- Provide intensive individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success. (Component 1 and 3)
- Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students’ capacity to manage challenges in and out of school (Component 3)
- For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support (Component 1).

Sources

Academic Studies Leading to ESSA Rating

Kemple, James and Corinne M. Herlihy. 2004. The Talent Development High School Model. New York: MDRC.
https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_584.pdf

Rumberger, R., Addis, H., Allensworth, E., Balfanz, R., Bruch, J., Dillon, E., Duardo, D., Dynarski, M., Furgeson, J., Jayanthi, M., Newman-Gonchar, R., Place, K., & Tuttle, C. (2017). Preventing dropout in secondary schools (NCEE 2017-4028). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/24>

Additional Sources Supporting Implementation of the Strategy

- [Practices for 9th grade transitions](#): This provides an overview of 9th grade transitions approaches and summarizes level 3 and 4 studies on the impact of these programs.
- Relationships matter: The Ninth Grade Success approach aims to establish and build strong relationships between trusted adults and students. A variety of research points to the impact these relationships have on student engagement in learning, long-term connection to school, and school achievement.
 - [Search Institute’s Development Framework](#) outlines 5 elements that are part of effective relationships
 - [What works clearinghouse – advising](#): This practice guide outlines four recommendations that have moderate and strong evidence. These strategies are a part of the Ninth Grade Success approach.
- [Focus on 9th grade](#): Ninth grade is an incredibly important year for students and students who make it to 10th grade on-track and on-time are three times more likely to graduate than those who did not.