MISSISSIPPI
MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION
toolkit

MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

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MISSISSIPPI STATE
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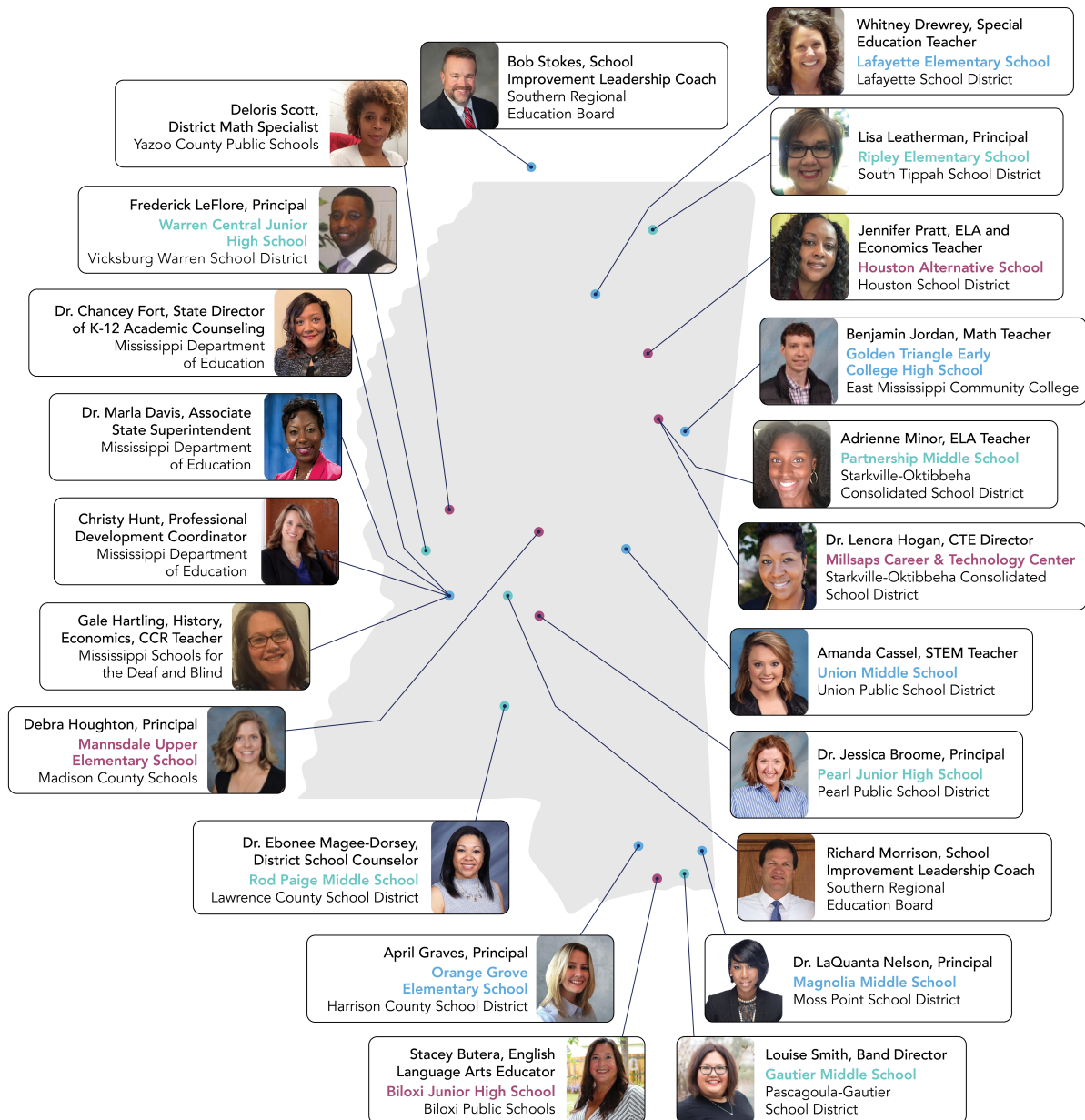
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PURPOSE

The *Mississippi Middle School Transition Toolkit* was developed for educators, counselors, and administrators to provide educators and families with activities and information needed to effectively support students transitioning into middle school, during the middle school years, and transitioning into high school. Research suggests that students' experiences with middle school transitions have a direct impact on their odds of graduating from high school. Furthermore, students who are not prepared to transition to ninth grade run a significantly higher risk of not passing ninth grade, suffering discipline issues, and struggling to fit in socially. Although the social concerns of students are important, research indicates there must be a balance. Too much focus on social fears and expectations can diminish time that could be spent on academic preparation and transition. A balance of transition activities and academic content is needed.

In response to these concerns, this toolkit provides research-based transition activities that encompass the whole middle school experience for students while engaging other stakeholders in the process. In addition, many of the activities can be modified to meet the needs of new administrators, counselors, and/or staff as they aim to learn more about their school, incoming students, and families. The practices outlined in this document provide guidance to any local level team aiming to create a positive academic and social experience for middle school children.

It is important to note that all activities provided in this toolkit do not necessarily need to be used, nor is this a comprehensive list of transition activities. Some activities may be a better fit than others based on school and/or district needs, and some may serve as a foundation to build more relevant activities for your local context. This toolkit may also be personalized by adding more activities or information where appropriate.

DEVELOPING A TRANSITION TEAM

A transition team is responsible for successful, smooth transitions by providing essential tools, techniques, and methodologies to help students adapt or move from one program, school, or component to another. Planning effective transitions involves a wide range of stakeholders, creating a collaborative transition plan with supports tailored to individual student needs. A transition team's driving question should be, "*What do our students need in order to be successful when transitioning into and out of this school?*"

A complete district transition team includes representatives from each school in the district, a team chair responsible for scheduling and presiding over all meetings, as well as teachers, counselors, school administrators, and parent representatives from each school.

A complete school transition team includes representatives from all grade levels in the school; a team chair responsible for scheduling and presiding over meetings; teachers, counselors, school administrators, and parent representatives; and representatives from the feeder elementary school and feeder high school.

Transition team responsibilities should include (but not be limited to) implementing the transition plan, developing a budget for activities, identifying potential funding opportunities, advocating for policy and community change, and building relationships among key partners to identify needs, goals, and resources. This team should also create an annual transition plan and calendar that engages each of the partners and recruit volunteers to assist with middle school transition events and activities.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

There are five themed sections in the toolkit: *Communication, Culture, Instruction, Family Engagement, and Social Emotional Learning.* Each theme is described below along with an explanation of why it is a theme within this toolkit. Within each themed section are selected activities that include an overview, implementation strategies, recommendations for best practices, considerations for select populations and counselors, and digital resources.

Each activity is also visually coded according to one or more of the following transition groups:
        E= **E**lementary to middle school years
        M= **M**iddle school years
        H= Middle school to **H**igh school years

Communication	Culture
<u>Communication</u> Good communication between the school and family is an important part of a school's overall plan. Understanding children's families, language, and culture is valuable as teachers prepare to help children learn. When critical information is shared, families benefit because they can then promote learning at home. Ultimately, children benefit from improved communication because connecting the home and school creates a seamless relationship that helps children learn and succeed. Open lines of communication contribute to smooth transitions between grade levels and school buildings.	<u>Culture</u> In any school, there are observable practices we can see every day, such as processes, structures, and patterns. There are also things happening below the surface that are not as easy to see like relationships, identity, and connections. The latter practices influence the former, but they are often neglected while trying to "fix" the observable systems. Successful schools recognize the importance of nurturing the root of school culture that lies in those below-the-surface practices. By doing so, students have less trouble transitioning within a system that operates this way.
<u>Instruction</u> In a technology-driven, ever-changing society, teachers are now preparing students to be successful not only in school but also in their future careers. Because students will be headed down multiple pathways, teachers must create learning experiences that reflect both students' current and future interests. One strategy that can create smoother transitions between schools and even into postsecondary plans is personalized learning. By preparing lessons that cater to students' individual needs, teachers make education more relevant and engaging.	<u>Family Engagement</u> Involving families in their child's education can lead to improved student success. Intentional family involvement is particularly helpful to diverse populations and those who are least likely to finish school. By creating opportunities to welcome families to the school, the school culture is positively impacted, and families are more likely to engage with educators throughout the school year. If engagement practices are implemented throughout the district, students and families can transition more easily between grade levels and school buildings.

<u>Social Emotional Learning (SEL)</u>
During middle school, SEL is vital to developing the whole child. As students navigate through middle school, educators and counselors must intentionally support their self-awareness, self-management skills, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. While academic content is often the focus when preparing for instruction, the skilled middle school teacher prepares lessons that support the developing middle school child. Counselors serve an integral role in supporting social emotional learning by providing relevant resources to teachers and by developing meaningful relationships with students. By focusing on these critical pieces of development, students are primed for smoother transitions between grade levels and school buildings.

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNITY WALKS/RIDES

TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Community walks/rides are intended to serve as learning opportunities for teachers, administrators, and counselors as they seek to learn more about the school community and neighborhoods where students and families live. These activities can increase cultural awareness and better inform staff as they develop culturally relevant learning materials and strategies to meet the needs of their students. This activity can also foster personalized learning opportunities as schools aim to build positive relationships between students, their families, and the community.

Timeframe

This activity is recommended to be scheduled prior to the beginning of school.

Outcomes

- Gain a deeper understanding of the community and neighborhoods the school serves
- Increases and improves relationships, connections, and communication between the school and families

Implementation

1. Schedule when the community walk/ride will take place prior to the first day of school.
2. Identify and coordinate modes of transportation and routes of travel (e.g., school buses, vans, walk, etc.).
3. Publicize the event through the school's communication plan. Details should include the exact day and routes for the community walks/rides.
4. Determine how school staff will be grouped (e.g., by grade level or content area).
5. Provide training (with the help of the school counselor) for all staff prior to participating in this event. Training should include, but not be limited to, a clear purpose for the community walks/rides, behavior norms during and after the event, and potential questions or writing prompts for staff to consider or think about as they participate. (See the "Considerations and Tips for Success" section below for potential questions and writing prompts.)
6. Upon returning to the school, allow time for staff to reflect on the community walk/ride and their responses to the questions. Provide opportunities for staff and school leadership to discuss questions and how this event can inform and impact the school culture and instruction.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- If this event is designed to meet the community and greet potential students, consider, with parental consent, inviting upper-class students to attend, meet prospective students, and promote the school.
- If this event will be used to meet the community and students, it is recommended that it be promoted using the school's communication plan. Also, during this event, staff should wear school colors/t-shirts so they will be recognized. Other considerations for promoting the event would be to decorate all school buses/vans for the event.
- This event could also include a stop where all staff (regardless of whether they are walking or riding) will have the opportunity to come together at a central location within the community for a brief, specified period to speak to the community or pass out school spirit items such as pens/pencils. This location should be conducive to a large crowd (e.g., a public park or a parking lot).
- If a planning committee is used, the committee should meet to identify all routes and properly plan for any necessary stops along the route. The committee should also provide information for each route and the amount of time needed to complete this event.
- If transportation, weather, or other concerns arise, consider hosting this event virtually or by providing routes to individual staff. If implementing this activity individually, set a time for staff to meet face-to-face or virtually to reflect and discuss their experience.
- Potential questions or writing prompts for staff to consider as they participate in this event include:
    - What did you discover about the neighborhood that you were not aware of?
    - What is one exciting feature about the community that you discovered?
    - How does this event shape your understanding of the community of students you will teach this year?
    - Are there any aspects of the community that you may be able to use as you craft lessons/activities that you did not consider prior to participating in this event?
    - As I toured the _____ neighborhood, I noticed that _____.
    - As I walked on _____ Street, I was very surprised to learn that _____.
    - One thing our student guide, _____, helped me understand about the _____ located near the school is that _____.
- If hosting a large community meeting, consider having school spirit items (e.g., t-shirts, planners, pencils, bumper stickers, etc.) to hand out to community members during this event.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

Article: Learning for Justice
https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/community-walks-a-day-of-learning-for-schools

Considerations for Counselors

- Research, plan, and provide training and materials/supplies to all staff and the administrative team prior to the event.
- Develop a schedule to meet with teachers in teams or individually to collaborate on how to develop culturally relevant learning environments for students.

Resources

- I Convinced My Teachers to Walk Our Students' Neighborhoods. It Changed Our School. https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/8/7/21121006/i-convinced-my-teachers-to-walk-our-students-neighborhoods-it-changed-our-school
- Edutopia: Community Walks Create Bonds https://www.edutopia.org/blog/community-walks-create-bonds-understanding-shane-safir
- Principal Walks 160 Miles Through Neighborhoods https://cbs4indy.com/hoosiers-finding-hope/principal-walks-160-miles-through-neighborhoods-to-encourage-students/

DEVELOPING A SCHOOL COMMUNICATION PLAN
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Developing a school communication plan is essential to effectively communicating with families, students, the community, and local organizations on issues or events that involve the school or district. Through multiple media and communication pathways, schools can promote their vision and mission, family and community engagement, and student success.

Timeframe

Prior to the beginning of the school year and revised annually

Outcomes

- Builds relationships between the school, students, families, and community
- Provides clear, consistent messages that reflect one common voice, the vision, and the mission of the school
- Promotes family and community engagement

Implementation

1. Perform a communication audit prior to developing a school communication plan. A communication audit takes a snapshot of the current communication efforts, the climate for communication, the issues and image perceptions, and the communication needs and patterns of your target audiences. (The National School Public Relations Association provides additional guidance for local education agencies [LEA] at https://www.nspra.org/nspra-communication-audits.)

2. Train the school transition team and other staff how to develop and implement a communication plan that includes short- and long-term goals with action steps for each, based on results from the communication audit. (It is recommended that this plan be revised annually.)

3. Evaluate the types of communication that best support the vision and mission of the school and monitor their usage (e.g., school newsletters, welcome to families, middle school family surveys, posts on the school website or Facebook pages, etc.). Identify the target audience and form of communication that will be used to reach each group.

4. If publishing student images and/or student work samples is a part of the communication plan, ensure that proper documentation is on file.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Establish a set time of the week/year/term and which form of communication will be used for each target audience. It is essential this process is established to minimize stakeholders and staff missing information and/or important deadlines.
- All forms of communication should be created and delivered in all languages represented within the school.
- Hard or electronic copies of all school correspondence should be archived in a central location and accessible for all stakeholders.
- Communication should be intentional, organized, planned, and up to date.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- The National Education Association has identified 10 strategies for schools to consider as they work with English learners. That resource is accessible at https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/communicating-ell-families-10-strategies
- All communication should be tailored to meet the needs of all students and their families.
- Meet with families of alternative or new students to provide a copy of the communication plan that outlines how families, students, the school, and the community communicate and share information on events and any issues that may impact their child.

Considerations for Counselors

- Inform the communication team of relevant dates and events that need to be sent to families from the counselor's office.

Resources

- Strategic Communications Success Planning Guide (Battelle for Kids) https://battelleforkids.org/docs/default-source/documents/bfkcommunicationssuccessplanningguide.pdf?sfvrsn=2
- Steps to Creating a School Communications Plan (Campus Suite) https://www.campussuite.com/blog/3-steps-creating-school-communications-plan
- School Communication Planning Guide (Campus Suite) https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/296999/School-Communication-Planning-Guide.pdf
- Creating a School Communication Plan (Bright Minds Marketing) https://www.brightmindsmarketing.com/blog/creating-a-school-communication-plan/
- Flagler County Public Schools (Sample Communication Plan) https://flaglerschools.com/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=11734387

FAMILY SURVEYS

TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Family surveys offer families the opportunity to provide feedback on school-related issues and the overall school culture. Through intentional questions, schools can gain valuable data and insight related to key initiatives, projects, programs, routines, instruction, and activities that impact students and the school's culture.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Increases communication between schools, families, and students on schoolwide issues
- Gains recommendations and anonymous feedback that may impact school culture, student supports, parental outreach, and overall achievement
- Strengthens relationships that exist between the school and family by making families feel valued

Implementation

1. Using the school's transition team or other school groups, determine which upcoming initiatives, projects, or issues are necessary for review through a survey. Once determined, schedule when these surveys will be given, collected, and analyzed.
2. Based on the intended audience, collaborate, and develop items/questions for each survey to ensure the right data is collected. Surveys should be brief and aligned to the intended purpose. (See the Resources section of this activity for example surveys.)
3. Using the school's communication plan, determine how the school will share the purpose of each survey with families and/or students and how they may access and return each survey.
4. Analyze and organize the feedback from collected surveys.
5. If appropriate, share the results of each survey with stakeholder groups.
6. Best practices recommend that action steps are created based on the issue or event that the survey was based on.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Allow for the completion of surveys in person.
- Provide paper copies of the survey for any family that may not have digital access.
- Some surveys can be completed over the phone.
- Communicate directly with families of new students as well as students transitioning from alternative school on how to access and complete surveys.
- Incentives could be provided to families and students who complete the surveys.
- Provide onsite computer access for families and students to complete surveys.
- Once action steps are taken, be sure to have a process in place to monitor, track progress, and implement all new goals or actions established as a result of the data.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Be sure that all surveys are provided in languages represented within the school.
- Collaborate with staff to offer ADA-compliant access to surveys.

Considerations for Counselors

- Counselors should collaborate as part of the survey development team. Counselors usually have direct communication with families and students.
- With leadership approval (and if appropriate), follow up with families or students who do not complete surveys.

Resources

- The Ohio State University
  https://u.osu.edu/familyschoolpartnerships/surveyingfamilies/
- Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (Family Engagement Surveys)
  https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Family_Engagement_Surveys.pdf
- Family School Relationships Survey
  https://www.panoramaed.com/family-school-relationships-survey

PASS THE TORCH MEETINGS
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Pass the torch meetings are like vertical team meetings. They are not intended to only focus on academic skills, concepts, and assessments. They also provide time to collaborate, examine, and determine what social skills and supports are needed for students to move through all middle school transitions.

Timeframe

Prior to the beginning of school and at the end of a school year

Outcomes

- Supports understanding of student needs and interests (academic and social) to ensure all students transition throughout middle school successfully
- Develops effective collaboration and shared responsibility across grade levels and content areas
- Promotes communication between grade levels on expectations, curriculum, and what is needed to ensure students successfully transition into and through middle school
- Identifies support structures or wrap-around services that may be necessary to assist incoming students

Implementation

1. Prior to the beginning of school, teams should meet to determine the dates, scope of work, purpose, and materials needed for each Pass the Torch Meeting.
2. Topics to consider for meetings can include, but are not limited to:
    a. Assessment data
    b. Student work samples
    c. Standards across grade levels
    d. Scheduling
    e. School culture
    f. Discipline issues
    g. Student-to-student interactions
    h. Parental involvement
3. Other topics for discussion during the pass the torch meetings could include collaboration to plan and implement school events and topics for the student-led communication team.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- These meetings may be organized by content area or other grouping, and they should focus on holistic data about students.
- Prepare questions for team members that prompt relevant discussion toward known transition issues or concerns. Interview families and/or students about their experiences with middle school transitions. If common themes emerge, identify necessary resources and supports, then develop the agenda accordingly.
- Possible questions to include in these surveys:
    - What has been your experience with middle school transitions?
    - What are your greatest concerns?
    - What positive experiences occurred as part of your child's middle school transitions?

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- English learners and special education teachers should be included in each meeting to provide expertise on research-based practices for supporting select populations of students.
- Supports should be discussed and implemented for students who will be new to the school or transition from an alternative school setting.

Considerations for Counselors

- Take an active role in each Pass the Torch Meeting.
- Work with the administrative team to ensure that the necessary materials and resources are available in print or electronic form for all team members.

Resources

- Transition by Design: The Power of Vertical Teams
  https://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/linc/linccurriculummodule/Transition%20by%20Design_%20The%20Power%20of%20Vertical%20Teams.pdf
- Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/OAE/college-and-career-readiness-standards
- Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards Scaffolding Documents
  https://mdek12.org/ese/ccr
- Mississippi Digital Learning Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/DLResources
- Mississippi ELA Instructional Planning Guides
  https://mdek12.org/secondaryeducation/englishlanguage
- Mississippi Science Instructional Planning Guides
  https://mdek12.org/secondaryeducation/science
- Mississippi Access for All Guide
  https://issuu.com/rcumedia/docs/afa_2.0
- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/Secondary%20Ed/sel_standards_final_1.21.21.pdf
- Mississippi Family Guides to Special Education Services
  https://www.mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources

STUDENT-LED COMMUNICATION TEAM
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Student-led communication should be a part of the overall school communication plan. This activity is separate from the "Developing a School Communication Plan" activity and places emphasis on student voices within a school.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Increases student awareness of school-related information and the likelihood of student engagement
- Empowers students to take an active role in the school communication plan, scheduled events, and projects
- Provides students with the opportunity to use their technology, presentation, speaking, and critical thinking skills
- Provides opportunities for students to make connections with other students, staff, families, and the community

Implementation

1. The school transition team or other staff advisors should develop and outline the basic structure of the student-led communication team.
2. Establish the application and selection process for creating the student-led communication team. The selection process should include student interviews.
3. Conduct training for all students who are selected. Training should include speaking tips, digital media, and video production (if applicable). This training could also include speakers from a local television station or newspaper journalists. Most universities have a communication department that may offer valuable resources and may provide additional guidance for the team training.
4. Identify a list of school-related issues, topics, events, and/or projects that will involve the student-led communication team (e.g., writing, delivery, graphic design, outreach, etc.).
5. Scripts should be developed collaboratively between the student-led communication team and advisor(s) that promote the vision and mission of the school and align to the school's communication plan.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Establish an approval process for all student-led communication products.
- Cell phones should be permitted for capturing, editing, and producing videos.
- Hard or electronic copies of all student-led communication should be archived in a central location and accessible for all stakeholders.
- If your district has a CTE center that offers digital media and technology, television broadcasting, or graphic design, contact the instructor to collaborate on training and allow them to suggest the appropriate equipment needed for students to effectively produce short videos for specific topics.
- Students should be trained and understand how to use licensed images, videos, and music.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure all materials are accessible and in a format that supports all students.
- Provide closed captioning for students and families that are hearing impaired.
- Ensure the student team is representative of the entire student body.

Considerations for Counselors

- Assist the leadership team in identifying the criteria for the selection process.
- Identify school-related information that could benefit from having a student voice included in and/or leading the work.

Resources

- Legal Basics for Broadcasting in School
  https://morningannouncement.com/legal-basics-broadcasting-school/
- Student-Produced Morning Announcements
  https://www.wevideo.com/education-resources/lesson-plans/student-produced-morning-announcements
- 20 Video Project Ideas to Engage Students
  https://ditchthattextbook.com/20-video-project-ideas-to-engage-students/
- Personal Skills vs. Professional Skills: What's the Difference?
  https://www.livecareer.com/resources/resumes/basics/job-skills-values
- National Communication Association
  https://www.natcom.org/
- Mississippi State University Department of Communications
  https://www.comm.msstate.edu/
- University of Mississippi Department of Communications
  https://jnm.olemiss.edu/about/
- Jackson State University Department of Communications
  https://www.jsu.edu/communication/
- University of Southern Mississippi Department of Communications
  https://www.usm.edu/communication/index.php
- Alcorn University Department of Communications
  www.alcorn.edu/academics/schools-and-departments/school-of-agriculture-and-applied-sciences/media-and-communications

NOTES

CULTURE

A SHARED VISION AND MISSION
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

A shared vision and mission across a district create a focus on equity and ensure all students and families are a vital part of its overall mission and should be considered in the planning and execution phases of individual school initiatives. A shared vision and mission also help guide staff, counselors, and administrators to make decisions that will impact a school's culture, instruction, and overall experience for all students transitioning through middle school.

Timeframe

Prior to the first day, with slight revisions as needed

Outcomes

- Promotes and encourages consistent messaging and alignment of district and school initiatives, practices, and policies
- Provides a sense of ownership and accountability for students, families, school, and community
- Offers empowerment and collaborative experiences for school staff and students

Implementation

1. Review the MDE's Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan as an overarching guide.
2. Review the school's current vision and mission statements with school staff. During this staff development, create a discussion protocol or break the staff into groups for a discussion of the school's vision and mission statements. Questions or discussion points to be considered may include, but are not limited to:
   a. Do the school's vision and mission statements align to the district's overall vision and mission statements, and how do they foster positive school transitions for middle school students?
   b. Do all activities, extracurricular events, clubs, and organizations align and support the current vision and mission statements of the school and district?
   c. In what ways can the school's vision and mission be promoted within the school community?
3. Based on the feedback from the whole staff, develop a team that would create a short list of broad, attainable goals and specific, measurable outcomes for each goal.
4. Ensure the alignment of resources, professional development, activities, and projects throughout the year that will further the vision and mission of the school and ensure inclusion of all stakeholders.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- When developing the vision and mission of the district and individual schools, consider where the school and district are currently and set measurable goals for the current school year, for three years, and for five years.
- Use each school's communication plan to share the vision and mission.
- Correlate new school- and district-related programs and initiatives to the goals set by the school and district.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Establish a transition process for families of new students and students returning from an alternative school setting.
- Provide translated copies of the vision and mission to English-learning students and families.
- Provide differentiated materials based on the needs of each select population of students and families.

Considerations for Counselors

- Provide a student orientation that reviews the expectations, vision, and mission of the school/district.
- Provide a comprehensive counseling program with a vision and mission statement that is aligned with the school's vision and mission statement.
- Make sure to include the vision and mission statements in all communication from the counseling department.

Resources

- Mississippi Department of Education's Strategic Plan
  https://www.mdek12.org/MBE/StrategicPlan
- Eighteen Vision Characteristics of Successful Middle Schools (AMLE)
  https://www.amle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AMLE_SMS_Summary_Color.pdf

CULTURAL DIVERSITY CELEBRATIONS

TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Cultural diversity celebrations promote inclusion, diversity, and equity throughout a school and student body.

Timeframe

Throughout the year

Outcomes

- Creates a culture of inclusiveness for all ethnic and cultural groups within a school
- Celebrates diversity among the student body and staff
- Builds strong relationships between students, staff, families, and school communities
- Increases feelings of belonging and trust for staff, students, and families
- Honors various cultures and their contributions to society
- Fosters a positive school culture

Implementation

1. Create a core planning committee for each celebration. This committee should consist of the same staff members to ensure consistency across all events; however, the overall team may change from event to event to reflect the ethnicity/culture being celebrated.
2. Create a schoolwide calendar that will include tentative dates for all celebrations and events. The planning team should research observances, ethnic, cultural, and historical events that are relevant to the student population, school, community, or district. (e.g., Hispanic Heritage Month, Women's History Month, etc.).
3. Engage student leaders and families to collaborate with the core planning committee to assist in the planning of all celebrations, activities, and details. Recruit, identify, and invite volunteers from the community to partner with the planning committee to assist with specific events.
4. Engage key departments within the school to support certain activities as part of the celebration. For example, consider how the art, dance, media, and/or English departments may be utilized in event planning and the day of the event.
5. Use the school and district communication plan to announce and promote all events.
6. Provide authentic learning opportunities at each event that can be transferred to the classroom. This can be done through a collaborative list of writing tasks, class discussions, and/or projects.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Research all activities and details that will be included in each celebration to ensure they are culturally sensitive and appropriate prior to hosting each celebration.
- Reach out to family members to participate in celebrations as presenters, volunteers, and/or organizers.
- To create community partnerships through this event, consider collaborating with local universities or community colleges and international student organizations.
- Opportunities should be given for the planning teams, students, and others involved to receive feedback and to reflect on each event.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure that students from select populations are given an opportunity to participate and/or perform in each celebration.
- Provide translation services for any student and/or family if needed.
- Provide a virtual viewing option, if available.

Considerations for Counselors

- These events could provide opportunities for counselors to identify and build support groups for subgroups in a school.
- Create SEL experiences and/or lessons based on cultural events.
- In collaboration with the school planning team, reflect each year on the events held to determine what needs to be modified for each celebration and event.
- Collaborate with the planning team to identify culturally relevant locations for field trips that can be incorporated into certain celebrations, for example, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum http://mcrm.mdah.ms.gov/.

Resources

- Celebrating Your School's Cultural Diversity
  https://www.edutopia.org/blog/celebrating-your-schools-cultural-diversity-clare-roach
- Family and Community Engagement
  https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education/family-and-community-engagement
- Family and Community Involvement: Reaching Out to Diverse Populations
  https://sedl.org/pubs/family29/2.html
- The Official Mississippi Tour Guide Website
  https://www.mississippitourguide.com/
- Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience
  https://www.msarts.org/
- Delta Blues Museum
  https://www.deltabluesmuseum.org/

GET TO KNOW YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOL GAME
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

The *Get to Know Your Middle School Game* is a great way for incoming students transitioning from elementary school to middle school to get to know their new building (if applicable). This activity will also help transitioning students to meet key staff and gain a better understanding of what supports they offer.

Timeframe

Prior to the first day of school for students

Outcomes

- Introduces new students to key staff, personnel, and faculty and their availability, especially when students need help in academics or other areas
- Acclimates students to their new school

Implementation

This activity can be created in multiple ways. Below are two ways that students can participate in this activity.

Paper Version

1. Have several copies of the school building floorplan created, printed on cardstock, and laminated, if possible. This floorplan should be colorful and resemble a game board. Consider enlisting the help of the art or the CTE graphic design departments within the school/district to do this. The total number of game boards needed will depend on how many student groups will be formed.
2. Using cardstock or other material, create two separate stacks of cards as defined below. Shuffle each stack of cards separately and place a rubber band or paper clip around each stack. Put both stacks in a small plastic bag. Ensure you have one plastic bag per game board.
   a. Stack 1 will include individual cards that have the picture and name of each key staff member within the building (e.g., principal(s), grade level counselor(s), nurse(s), librarian, tech specialist(s), resource officer, etc.).
   b. Stack 2 will include the duties, roles, and/or responsibilities of key staff in student-friendly language. During student orientation, students should be placed in small groups of no more than five. This will allow students to meet new people and start building new relationships at their new school.
3. Provide each group of students with a game board and a plastic bag of each set of cards.
4. To play, each team of students will work together to match each card from Stack 1 with a card from Stack 2 and place them both on the Game Board.

Digital Version

1. Create a team of students and staff or consider contacting the district CTE center's graphic design instructor for assistance in developing a digital game board.
2. The team should collaborate on what the digital game should include and what graphics should be used. Consider using the mascot or other graphics that are part of the school. This will further promote the school culture and spirit.
3. Based on the design of the digital game board, determine which platform will be used (e.g., PowerPoint or Google Slides).

4. If using a digital game, here are some things to consider:
    a. Will the digital game be easily accessible on a smartphone or tablet?
    b. Collaborate with the district IT department.
    c. If students do not have a device, how will they access the game?
    d. Who will be the contact person for any problems downloading and playing the game?

NOTE: This activity is meant to foster collaboration, teamwork, and relationship building at the onset of the school year. It is not recommended that this activity be seen as a competition between groups. The person facilitating this activity should set the procedures and expectations for this activity as such.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Determine how students will adhere cards to game boards and how the game boards and cards will be collected at the end of the activity.
- Prepare "answer boards" ahead of time that include how each set of cards should be placed on the Game Board.
- If using a digital game, provide devices or use student ambassadors to train and instruct students on how to access and use the digital game.
- It is important that key locations are clearly labeled within the building (e.g., library, front office, clinic, gym, cafeteria, etc.) and on the Game Board prior to implementing this activity.
- Determine how students will be placed into groups. During registration, you may consider giving each student a number, colored name tags, sticky dots, or pencils indicating their group for this activity.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- The game, whether a paper or digital version, should be accessible in all languages represented within the school if possible.
- Refer to MDE's *Access for All Guide 2.0* and Family Guides for Student Success for recommendations on how to accommodate all students.
- Communicate the purpose of this activity with parents beforehand. This will make it easier for them to participate and engage in the activity during the orientation.

Considerations for Counselors

- Be available to meet with students and their families as students navigate through the game.

Resources

- Create a Digital Board Game
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y66K3gneTY&ab_channel=PaulHamilton
- Technology for Teachers: How to Create Your Own Online Board Game
  https://www.freetech4teachers.com/2020/07/how-to-create-your-own-online-board-game.html
- How to Create Digital Games in Your Lessons
  https://www.lbenglishteacher.com/blog/2020/4/19/how-to-create-and-play-board-games-in-your-online-lessons
- Thirteen Virtual Games to Play in Your Elementary Classroom
  https://www.edutopia.org/article/13-virtual-games-play-your-elementary-classroom

JUST LIKE ME
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Just like me provides an opportunity for students from select populations (i.e., special needs, English learners, transfer students, gifted students, etc.) to identify other people in the world or school who have faced the same or similar challenge as theirs and how they became successful in life.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Improves the school climate and culture for students from select populations by providing them with a sense of belonging within the school and the larger community
- Assists in building acceptance and sensitivity among the student body for students from select populations
- Helps develop research and project development skills among students from select populations

Implementation

1. Although this activity was developed initially as an individual project, it can also be used to bring awareness of the challenges some students within a student body may be facing.
2. Prior to assigning this project, the purpose needs to be clearly defined by all teachers who will include this activity as a classroom assignment. Determine if this will be done collaboratively as a group, or by individual students. (This would be a great way for students from select populations to bring awareness of their specific challenge(s).)
3. Students will research individuals (current or past) who have faced or are facing the same or similar challenges as they are facing. For each project, identify the following information on the person(s) researched:
   a. Name
   b. Current age
   c. Where were they born and/or currently live?
   d. Photographs from various stages of their life
   e. Their current role/profession/career and the story on how they reached their highest potential regardless of the challenge or challenges they faced.
   f. Any additional information that would be considered important.
4. Projects should be facilitated by classroom teachers, elective teachers, or special education teachers. Project supplies, such as construction paper, card stock, index cards, and/or poster board, should be provided or requested at the beginning of the project. Digital projects should also be considered using online graphic design tools and apps.
5. Presentations: to create a culture of inclusion and acceptance, students should have the opportunity to share their project with each other, their families, and/or a designated class of their peers.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- A reflection piece could be added where students identify how their challenge(s) are like that of the person they researched and what they learned.
- The school may opt to modify the activity to make it part of a larger assignment for all students during the school year.
- If the school is implementing the Student 2 Student Mentor Group as outlined later in this toolkit, this would be a great project for the student pairs to develop together during the school year.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- This project can be modified for students from any special population. For example, if this project is done for English learners, the school may want to see if videos that include some of the same elements described above are available in public domain.
- Share a printed copy of the MDE Family Guides to Special Education with families that have a child with one of 13 eligibility categories. Each guide provides helpful and practical resources, strategies, and tips for parents.

Considerations for Counselors

- Work with the special education department as needed to make this project successful.
- If the student body presentation option is chosen, as indicated in the "Implementations" section above, counselors may want to work with the school leadership team to draft talking points to be shared in each classroom/school assembly prior to the student body presentations to ensure sensitivity and respect during all presentations.

Resources

- Mississippi Department of Education Family Guides to Special Education
  https://www.mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- Famous People with Disabilities
  https://www.inspiringlifedreams.com/famous-people-with-disabilities/
- 15 Inspiring People with Disabilities
  https://www.disabilityfriendlylv.com/15-inspiring-famous-people-disabilities/
- Celebrities With Disabilities
  https://www.topcounselingschools.org/rankings-30-celebrities-you-didnt-know-have-learning-disabilities/

STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: M

Overview

A *student ambassador program* is a student leadership program where students represent a school as an ambassador demonstrating leadership, good judgment, maturity, honesty, and integrity. The students within this program mentor other students, model leadership skills to classmates, and foster a positive school culture.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Offers students an opportunity to demonstrate interpersonal 21st century skills in communication, collaboration, leadership, and flexibility
- Inspires students to develop as leaders
- Ensures incoming families and students feel welcome in the school setting by fostering relationships with current students
- Provides a layer of authenticity to support a student-centered school focus
- Builds a positive school culture

Implementation

1. Allow 6-12 months to develop a plan for this program.
2. Bring together the school's transition team or leadership team, selected members from the staff, and current eighth grade ambassador students (other grade levels may be included), to be a part of the advisory group that implements this program.
3. The advisory group should determine and outline details in the following areas:
    a. Dates and times of meetings
    b. Application process and rubric for selection of student ambassadors
    c. Expectations for the program
    d. Roles, expectations, and duties of selected student ambassadors
    e. Training details for student ambassadors
    f. Expected calendar of events
4. Using the school's communication plan, communicate with all stakeholders about the overall purpose of this program, the application process, and the expected calendar of events.
5. Collect applications at the end of the school year. It is recommended that the application window remain open for at least two weeks.
6. Plan an orientation event to train and build relationships among current and new Student Ambassadors.
7. Identify activities throughout the school year that Student Ambassadors may lead or facilitate.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Consider the number of students per grade level that you would like to serve as Student Ambassadors.
- Publicize the categories for selection criteria such as academic, behavior, attendance, teacher and community recommendations, student questionnaire, etc. Be sure to identify metrics that are not numerical in nature (e.g., school spirit, outstanding volunteerism, etc.).

- Identify activities at the beginning of the school year that student ambassadors could be involved in.
- The selection process should be objective and transparent.
- Celebrate ambassadors for their leadership throughout the year and design time for team building, community networking, and leadership mentoring.
- Encourage selected ambassadors to have a voice in the program. This includes talking to peers and serving as a voice for all students.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure all students are afforded an opportunity to engage, lead, and perform in the Student Ambassador program.
- Ensure the program is representative of the student body.
- Make all materials accessible.

Considerations for Counselors

- Consider being highly visible in or even leading the Student Ambassador program.
- Provide mentor training for Student Ambassadors to help students transition successfully or receive help with academics throughout the year.
- Consider how Student Ambassadors might lead and/or assist with activities and events aimed at bullying prevention, cultural awareness, community service, peer mediation, PBIS, tutoring, and staff appreciation.

Resources

- Gulf Shores High School Student Ambassador Application (sample)
  https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1581438181/gulfshoresalgov/gcup8dtjndxiswh2wt3k/GSHSAmbassadorApplication1.pdf
- Hillcrest High School Ambassador Application (sample)
  https://www.greenville.k12.sc.us/hillcrest/Upload/Uploads/2016HHSAmbassadorPacket.pdf
- Davis Drive Middle School Student Ambassador Program
  https://slidetodoc.com/student-ambassador-program-davis-drive-middle-school-wake/
- Lewis F. Cole Middle School Student Ambassadors
  https://flms.flboe.com/curriculum/clubs___organizations/student_ambassadors

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Student-led conferences replace the traditional parent/teacher conferences and are primarily led by the student. Facilitated by teacher advisors, the student schedules to meet with their family to discuss topics such as class performance, goals for the school year, strengths, and opportunities for growth. Because middle school work and grading expectations will be new for students and their families, these conferences provide a more relaxed environment for discussing student progress and potential steps for improvement.

Timeframe

Twice a year

Outcomes

- Creates a non-threatening environment for students to communicate with their teachers and family about their schoolwork
- Increases student accountability and ownership of their academic and social growth
- Demonstrates 21st century skills in the areas of collaboration, communication, and organization
- Maximizes family engagement
- Promotes self-reflection

Implementation

1. Each student should be assigned a teacher advisor from the faculty and staff.
2. The teacher advisor should develop a checklist of work samples that all students will be required to collect in a binder or through electronic means throughout the year. These work samples (e.g., academic assignments, writing samples, collaborative projects, Individual Success Plans (ISPs), etc.) may be collected from a variety of sources/classes.
3. Staff should develop this checklist as a team and an accompanying rubric for each work sample.
4. Student binders should be checked periodically prior to the date of the conference. Teachers should meet with students individually to discuss their student conference binders and to develop talking points or guidelines for the upcoming conference.
5. The date and time of each conference should be communicated by the teacher and the student. This communication should be developed with the student and include an outline of what will be discussed at the conference and how the conference will be conducted.
6. Identify dates throughout the school year where students will be able to participate in a practice session before their conference. This will assist the student in being prepared for the real conference.
7. During the actual conference, students will discuss the work samples collected as well as their ISPs while the teacher asks the students the pre-developed prompts (see the "Considerations and Tips for Success" sections below for examples). Families may also ask probing questions throughout the conference. The probing questions will allow the families to learn more about their student's classwork. (See suggested probing questions in the "Considerations and Tips for Success" section below.)
8. After the student-led conference, the student should be given the opportunity to reflect on the conference with their teacher advisor and discuss what might be done differently in the next conference, if anything.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Include time in the first conference to briefly discuss the Individual Success Plan (ISP) state requirement process. If the student is an eighth grader, find time to briefly discuss the Graduation Endorsement Options.
- Consider providing a virtual option for the first conference.
- Ensure that families know that student-led conferences are a vital part of communication between students, families, and the school.
- Consider implementing small group (advisory/homeroom) cohorts for this activity.
- Use a series of pre-developed prompts for students to respond to and/or probing questions for parents to ask during the conference. For example:
  - In your own words, describe this assignment to your family.
  - Describe what steps you used to solve this problem.
  - What did you mean when you wrote _____?
  - How do you feel about the grade you received on this activity?
  - What part of this project did you like the most? Least? Why?
  - I see that you _____ right here. Can you explain your thought process?
  - How would you explain this activity in your own words?
  - What are your goals for the upcoming year?

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Provide scripts and templates translated into other languages if needed. Provide interpreters if needed.
- Conferences should be independent of IEP/504 meetings.

Considerations for Counselors

- Provide short, anonymous surveys to students and families after each conference to collect feedback on the process. Use that feedback to modify processes for the second conference, if necessary. If the surveys are not anonymous, use the feedback to work with the teacher advisor to modify the second conference appropriately.
- Provide dates and times to discuss student ISP completion and how it is part of the overall academic plan for each student.

Resources

- Mississippi Individual Success Plan (ISP) Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/CTE/OCCSS
- Mississippi Graduation Endorsement Options
  https://www.mdek12.org/ESE/diploma
- Student-Led Conferences and Forms (samples)
  https://asgl-lausd-ca.schoolloop.com/student-ledconferences
- Leaders of Their Own Learning: Chapter 5: Student-Led Conferences
  https://eleducation.org/resources/chapter-5-student-led-conferences
- 4 Ways Student-Led Conferences Can Impact Your School
  https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/student-led-conferences/#download

NOTES

INSTRUCTION

AP FOR ALL RALLY
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: M, H

Overview

An *AP for all rally* can be used to promote and support the increase and access to advanced courses for underrepresented students. This activity should be included when students are selecting classes for the upcoming school year during the transition into, through, and out of middle school.

Timeframe

Spring semester

Outcomes

- Increases enrollment diversity in advanced courses at the middle and high school levels
- Creates additional communication with students and families on academic achievement opportunities
- Improves high school graduation rates through the effective promotion of accelerated courses

Implementation

1. Consider using the transition teams from the middle and high school to analyze data from all Advanced Placement (AP) courses currently offered at the school/district level. Additionally, consider analyzing data from previous years. Some potential guiding questions to consider when analyzing this data are as follows:
   a. What are the current enrollment numbers for AP/accelerated courses?
   b. What are the student demographics?
   c. What identifiable barriers prevent or hinder certain groups of students from enrolling in advanced courses?
   d. Does diversity exist in the current AP teaching staff given new licensure requirements for adding an AP endorsement? (See the note in Appendix A of the MDE K-12 [Licensure Guidelines](#).)
   e. What are the current course prerequisites for students? And how have parents been notified about this information?
   f. What promotional or informational communication is currently being used to increase or encourage students to enroll in AP/accelerated courses?
   g. How do we, as a school, communicate with parents about advanced/AP course offerings?
2. After analyzing data, determine key goals for promoting advanced courses and how to provide better access and awareness for all students. Identify necessary strategies to promote course completion for all students and how these strategies and information will be used in the AP for all Rally.
3. For the AP for All Rally, develop a variety of formats to promote this event using the school's communication plan. (e.g., flyers, newsletter, emails, etc.).
4. Strategically plan all details for the rally to coincide with the selection of classes for the upcoming school year. (Especially for those students that will be transitioning to the high school.) (See the "Considerations and Tips for Success" section below for suggestions.)

5. As part of the rally, include students that have taken or are taking AP/accelerated courses, their families, and teachers. If either of these groups will be speaking with students/families, provide guidance on their participation and expectations related to their positive experiences as they encourage enrollment for the upcoming school year.
6. As an extension of the AP for All Rally, have each department set up a booth equipped with the following, but not limited to:
    a. Information about each course prerequisites or co-requisites, if applicable.
    b. Allow previously and currently enrolled students and family representatives to work the booths. Those working the booths should be able to provide guidance, helpful tips, and talking points that encourage enrollment and participation.
    c. Provide all visitors with an interest form where potential students and their families can leave their contact information for the guidance counselor and/or department chair to reach out to discuss potential enrollment for the next year.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- If using booths, decorate the event space for the rally.
- Include the school band, pep squad, or cheerleaders in the event. Refer to the links provided in the "Resources" section below.

Considerations for Select Student Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Provide families from targeted sub-groups with detailed information about the rally in two different formats over one month (e.g., Week 1: mail personal, handwritten invitations home; Week 4: make a personal call inviting the family to the event, etc.). Make the invitations personal by using the families' names in the correspondence.
- Be sure that invited speakers are representative of the entire student body and teaching staff.
- Consider having a translator for the event, if needed.
- Refer to the MDE's Access for All 2.0 and Family Guides for Student Success for additional strategies for working with families.

Considerations for Counselors

- Work with selected staff to analyze the data outlined within the "Implementation" section above.
- Work with the transition team and staff advisors to promote the rally and identify the list of invited speakers (students, teachers, and families) for the event.

Resources

- Mississippi Accelerated Programs Guidance and Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/ESE/Accelerated-Programs
- Advanced Placement Insights for Parents/Families
  https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-insights-parents-families.pdf
- Advanced Placement Conversation Starters
  https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/conversation-starter.pdf
- Equity and Access in Advanced Placement
  https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/excelerator/AP-Equity-and-Access_IB_June-2012_FINAL.pdf

COLLEGE & CAREER EXPOS
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: M, H

Overview

College & career expos allow students to begin exploring their college and/or career options based on their interests and abilities as identified in their Individual Success Plans (ISP). This activity can be used as a guiding tool for discussions between students, families, and school staff on future careers and what classes need to be taken as students transition to high school.

Timeframe

Once or twice a year

Outcomes

- Demonstrates a real-world connection between career aspirations and classwork
- Exposes students to potential career pathways, colleges, and businesses
- Provides opportunities for students to explore and identify which employability skills will be important to their career choice or interest

Implementation

1. Begin assembling a committee to plan the College and Career Expo at least six months prior to the scheduled date. This committee should include members from the transition team and staff from the local CTE center.
2. The committee should determine expectations for the expo and what outcomes students should demonstrate upon completion.
3. Have students complete an interest and career aptitude inventory prior to planning the College and Career Expo to inform the committee which career pathways and/or colleges students are interested in. The results of this survey should be added to the student's Mississippi Individual Success Plans (ISP). These inventories will provide guidance on the needs of each event.
4. Invite participants from CTE centers, local industries, colleges, and other businesses to participate in the expo. This will give middle school students and families an opportunity to see and hear from businesses within their communities. In the invitation, include the purpose, expectations, and intended student outcomes of the expo.
5. Use the school's communication plan to promote the event and to provide detailed information for families, students, staff, and other community partners.
6. Identify and secure a location large enough to accommodate the expected audience.
7. Locate and prepare the following items that may be needed for the expo:
    a. Tables and chairs for each business/college/community member
    b. Space for conversations to take place between each participating business/college/community member and students and families who are interested in their field or programs
    c. Clear signage at the event indicating entrance, exit, and names of participants
    d. Layout of the event space to identify where participants will be located

Other Expo Options:

   a. If hosting an expo is not feasible, consider a project-based approach where students develop a presentation on the career and/or college they are interested in and why.
   b. Tour the local CTE center. These centers provide an excellent source of information and connections to career pathways.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Consider including students, families, teachers, and staff as part of the planning team.
- Compile a list of public and private universities and contact information at the end of each school year to communicate early and often on when this event will occur.
- If colleges or universities are not able to attend, request access to virtual tour options. Also consider scheduling face-to-face visits.
- After completing interest inventories and researching careers, students could create a final project to share their plan for pursuing their career pathway.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure that the expo offers information that is of interest to all students.

Considerations for Counselors

- To develop meaningful conversations, identify issues of inequity and barriers to postsecondary access and success for specific student populations.
- Have a working knowledge of the Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards and CTE pathways.
- Have a working knowledge of the Mississippi graduation options. This knowledge will assist with scheduling and updating student ISPs as they transition to high school.

Resources

- Mississippi Individual Success Plan (ISP) Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/CTE/OCCSS
- Mississippi Graduation Endorsement Options
  https://www.mdek12.org/ESE/diploma
- Get2College
  https://get2college.org/
- Career Exploration in Middle School
  https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ACTE_CC_Paper_FINAL.pdf
- Tri-County Early College High School
  https://www.tricountyearlycollege.org/zerogravitygames
- O*Net Online Career Exploration
  https://www.onetonline.org/
- Princeton Review-College Fairs
  https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/college-fairs
- Organizing a College Fair
  https://www.breathitt.k12.ky.us/userfiles/291/Classes/31228/ResourceTips%20for%20Planning%20a%20School-Based%20College%20Fair.pdf
- ASCA Middle School Career Conversation Starters
  https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/a7fbb087-9d84-4697-a176-6672dcff3584/Career-Conversations-Middle-School.pdf

REALITY FAIR

TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: M, H

Overview

A *reality fair* is an interactive financial literacy tool that allows students the opportunity to figuratively experience some of the financial challenges they may face once they are living on their own. The event involves students rotating through different booths where they are assigned a career with a salary. The students must then pay bills and manage other life expenses with their available funds. This hands-on experience simulates real-life financial decision-making opportunities based on a fictitious chosen career, starting salary, and grade point average (GPA).

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Creates a better understanding of the financial aspects of life after high school
- Enables the student to recognize the correlation between academic achievement and potential financial success
- Develops a stronger understanding of basic financial concepts through hands-on financial decision-making
- Creates financial literacy in students and equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to manage money effectively
- Facilitates financial conversations to create a better understanding of the student's future financial needs
- Simulates the importance of creating and maintaining a budget
- Teaches the importance of a credit score and its impact on financial security and purchasing

Implementation

1. Using the school's transition team or other advisor staff groups, research the style, format, and design simulation for the event the school would like to host. (See the "Resources" section below for examples.)
2. Determine the dates and location to hold the reality fair.
3. Using the schools' communication plan, begin promoting the event for students and families.
4. Prior to the event, cross-curricular teams should develop lessons to provide students with the knowledge they need around budgeting and common expenditures that could give insight into life after high school graduation.
5. Review the digital resources provided below on how to plan and implement a reality fair. The planning team should also inquire within the community about any organization that may provide this type of event for students. If so, communicate that this will be an event for middle school students.
6. Develop guidance for students on the expectations for behavior and engagement during the event.
7. Provide multiple ways for families, volunteers, and students to give feedback on their experience after the event has occurred.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Plan the Reality Fair in advance to effectively include students, families, teachers, and the community.
- Consider what a Reality Fair for families might look like. Identify what information could be provided to families on employment opportunities, college planning, budgeting, and college- and career-readiness skills.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure that all information related to the Reality Fair is translated into languages for all students/families.
- Provide visual and verbal communication for all students.
- Ensure that the Reality Fair is inclusive of all student groups.

Considerations for Counselors

- Identify community leaders from various financial institutions who could be influential members of the planning committee for this event.
- Help facilitate parent and community involvement.
- Assist with the planning of SEL activities and lessons that could be included as part of the event.

Resources

- Hosting a Reality Fair on Financial Well-Being
  https://www.ncuf.coop/financial-well-being-for-all/reality-fairs/
- Financial Reality Programs
  http://financialreality.org/programs.html
  Curiosity Matters: College- and Career-Readiness Resources
  https://everfi.com/k-12/college-and-career-readiness/
- Massachusetts Financial Fair Toolkit
  https://www.mass.gov/media/6536/download
- The Mint: It Makes Perfect Cents
  http://www.themint.org/teens/

SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Summer bridge programs are usually one- to four-week programs but can be modified based on resources and local context. This activity can be used as a tool to assist transitioning students build positive relationships with staff and their peers, as well as build the culture of the school. This program can also be used to support students in developing and strengthening their skills in math, reading, science, and social studies. This is achieved through a blend of technology, small group instruction, manipulatives, hands-on labs, and project-based learning.

Timeframe

During the summer

Outcomes

- Supports students in forming positive and supportive relationships with peers and adults
- Builds student capacity and efficacy
- Connects students with campus leaders, helps them navigate campus, and acclimates them to the academic and social norms of their new school setting

Implementation

1. Assess the current needs of the transitioning students through analysis of data. Examples of data that could be considered include current state assessment scores, alignment team or Pass the Torch Meetings, transition team recommendations, counselor's observations of social emotional needs of incoming students, or surveys from families.
2. Develop a team that will collaborate with the school's transition team to implement each activity during the Summer Bridge Program.
3. Once the team is established, determine dates and key details about the program. For example:
   a. How will teachers be identified for teaching roles?
   b. How will students register?
   c. Will transportation be needed?
   d. Will lunch or snacks be provided? If so, what funds will be used to pay for them?
4. It is recommended that Summer Bridge Programs include all students. Lessons and activities need to be innovative, challenging, responsive, empowering, and engaging for all students who will be transitioning throughout middle school. Lessons and activities also need to support the school's vision and mission.
5. In addition to academic lessons, a Summer Bridge Program can offer opportunities to incorporate social emotional learning lessons provided by the counselor(s), as well as experiential learning experiences.
6. Once dates and staff are determined, using the communication plan of the middle school, communicate with families, students, and the school community on the purpose, dates, and location of the planned Summer Bridge Program. This communication should also include contacting the local newspaper or news station for publication throughout the event.
7. Develop student surveys to gain suggestions and feedback.
8. Determine how to track attendance, behavior, and program performance.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Ensure that the experience is presented in a fun, engaging, and relevant manner.
- Plan an event to introduce the beginning of the program.
- Celebrate the awards/accomplishments/achievements of individual students upon completion of the program.
- Engage community partners to sponsor field trips, participate in hands-on learning experiences, and/or invite as guest speakers.
- Utilize multiple data points to help plan the overall experience and resources for maximized student engagement.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure that all materials are accessible for all populations.
- Ensure that English learners and special education teachers are engaged to support student growth, utilizing IEPs and documented areas needed for support.
- Develop a plan that will include any new students or students transitioning from an alternative setting.

Considerations for Counselors

- Create focus groups for support during the Summer Bridge Program experience.
- Review progress and attendance to celebrate growth and goal outcomes.
- Create sessions for emphasizing and discussing topics of social emotional learning.
- Create opportunities for students to interact both socially and academically during the program.

Resources

- Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/OAE/college-and-career-readiness-standards
- Mississippi Individual Success Plan (ISP) Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/CTE/OCCSS
- Mississippi Graduation Endorsement Options
  https://www.mdek12.org/ESE/diploma
- PBIS
  https://www.pbis.org/
- Attendance Works
  https://www.attendanceworks.org/
- AMLE This We Believe
  https://www.amle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AMLE_SMS_Summary_Color.pdf
- Building Bridges: A Summer Program for Middle School Students
  https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj11216/f/Building%20Bridges%20Issue%20Brief.pdf
- Planning Your Summer Bridge Program
  https://tacc.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-01/career-oriented_summer_bridge_program_planning.pdf
- This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents
  https://www.uww.edu/Documents/colleges/coeps/academics/This_We_Believe_Exec_Summary.pdf

NOTES

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

FAMILY CURRICULUM FAIR FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, MATH, AND SCIENCE
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

A *family curriculum fair for English language arts (ELA), math, and science* is an activity that engages families and students by providing an overview and course expectations of grade-level courses in ELA, math, and science.

Timeframe

Once a semester

Outcomes

- Provides collaborative learning activities for students and families
- Introduces content-specific resources to support students throughout each course
- Initiates and promotes family engagement in core content areas
- Increases student accountability

Implementation

1. Determine the date(s) for each event. This activity is different from an open house and should be held separately.
2. Identify whether each grade level staff will host and plan its own fair or if this will be a schoolwide event. The planning staff should meet to identify which standard(s) and/or skill(s) will be focused on, and what resources are needed to accommodate those skills.
3. Using the identified standards and skills, plan and develop activities for families and students to engage in. Families should gain an understanding of what their student will be learning after being exposed to the key standard(s) and skill(s) (e.g., If students are completing science fair projects, this activity would include all information, resources, and opportunities to purchase supplies for creating a science fair project.).
4. Through the school communication plan (outlined in the "Communication" section of this Toolkit), publicize these events during the school year and throughout the community.
5. The planning team should identify a method for gathering feedback from all attendees. This process should be simple and easily accessible throughout the event. Be sure to request feedback from all staff who planned and hosted the event.
6. Provide families with an FAQ about the course and add resources they can access to support their child's learning.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Rehearse all activities ahead of time to ensure all materials and resources are available and easy to use.
- Include all grade-level teachers in these events.
- Select a location in the building that will accommodate a large group and possible breakout groups (could be classrooms) and identify a designated central location for families and students to receive information and guidance.
- If permissible, provide refreshments during the event. If applicable, collaborate with the district's CTE culinary arts program to provide these refreshments. This will support collaboration and CTE promotion across the school district.
- All information given and provided to families and students should be written in parent-friendly language with minimal educational jargon.
- Provide a sign-in sheet for families and students to document attendance.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Share a printed copy of the newly developed MDE Family Guides to Special Education with families that have a child with one of 13 eligibility categories. Each guide provides practical guidance, resources, strategies, and helpful tips for parents.
- Ensure all information is translated into languages representative of the student body.

Considerations for Counselors

- Help staff identify at-risk students to send personalized invitations to their families inviting them to the event.
- Have a counseling station for families to visit during each event.
- Work with the leadership and planning team to evaluate the feedback received at the event.
- Conduct follow-up sessions and conversations with students and families that attended. If personalized invitations were sent, follow-up with those families (especially if they did not attend the event).

Resources

- Mississippi Public Broadcasting Content Area Videotaped Lessons
  https://education.mpbonline.org/mpb-classroom-tv/
- Mississippi Department of Education Family Guides to Special Education
  https://www.mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources
- Mississippi Learning at Home Resources for Families
  https://mdek12.org/LearningAtHome
- Canva for Education
  https://www.canva.com/education/
- Mississippi CCRS Family Guides for Student Success
  https://www.mdek12.org/OAE/OEER/FamilyGuideTrainingMaterials

"I'M GRADUATION BOUND" SERIES
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

The *"I'm graduation bound" series* is intentional activities, resources, and events that are carefully threaded across the year to provide families consistent opportunities to engage in and ensure their child is on track to graduate.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Increases communication between school, family, and surrounding communities
- Improves school and district graduation rates
- Equips families with the knowledge they need about Mississippi's public school graduation requirements
- Provides an inherent structure of alignment and support for the school, students, and family to help students graduate on time

Implementation

1. Develop a list of topics based on middle school transition groups (E, M, H). Possible topics include, but are not limited to:
   a. ACT preparation
   b. Career exploration
   c. Certifications in technical fields
   d. Diploma options and requirements
   e. FAFSA: What is it? What should middle school families and students know?
   f. ISP (Individual Success Plan)
   g. Learning to set goals
   h. MAAP and MAAP-A Assessments
   i. Planning for college
   j. Developing resumes: What purpose do they serve, and why are they important?
   k. How to begin searching and identifying scholarships
   l. WorkKeys: What are they, and how is this assessment part of career exploration?
2. Identify the necessary staff who will need to be involved in the planning and implementation phases. Create a small team at the elementary, middle, and high school levels within the district who will plan, coordinate, and execute all events/activities in this series and the subsequent calendar of events.
   NOTE: The events/activities in this series need not be provided in the **s**ame format each time. Consider a variety of formats for executing the series. For example, the school may decide to host face-to-face ACT workshops for parents and students alphabetically by last name across several evenings in the fall for eighth graders and facilitate virtual office hours to help parents and students with ISP completion in the spring. Each district should identify how they will carry out the calendar of events based on the needs of the families and community they serve.
3. By using available resources or by creating new ones, each district team should ensure all events are scaffolded in nature. Each activity/event should provide an overview of information shared at the previous activity/event to support those families that may have been unable to participate.

4. Publicize each activity/event using the school's communication plan.
5. After each activity/event, provide a method for collecting feedback from all attendees.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Host activities/events to accommodate working families.
- Invite community businesses to participate.
- Partner with Get2College for ways to engage families and students in what is needed for high school graduation and college preparation.
- Consider using Student Ambassadors (outlined in the "Culture" section of this Toolkit) to welcome families and students to each event.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Ensure all students and families are invited and encouraged to attend.
- Provide all information in a format that accommodates all families and students represented at the school.
- Offer virtual sessions for families that are not able to attend. Ensure that those families are provided with contact information if they have any questions.
- Be mindful of cultural holidays or events and try not to schedule activities/events during those times.

Considerations for Counselors

- Counselors should be a part of each planning session and event.
- Provide resources for families on social emotional learning and how it will change as students transition in/out of middle school.

Resources

- Mississippi Individual Success Plan (ISP) Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/CTE/OCCSS
- Mississippi Graduation Endorsement Options
  https://www.mdek12.org/ESE/diploma
- Get2College Resources
  https://get2college.org/

PARENT ACADEMY
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: M, H

Overview

A *parent academy* consists of workshops for families that have students transitioning into high school. Each workshop provides information and resources that support a student's academic and emotional well-being and college- and career readiness.

Timeframe

Monthly, during the spring semester of eighth grade

Outcomes

- Provides support for families and students to better understand procedures and processes at the high school
- Develops communication between the high school and incoming students and their families
- Families become full partners in their student's preparation for college and/or career

Implementation

1. Assemble a team that includes staff from the high school(s) and middle school(s) that can offer content expertise on the suggested topics listed below. Identify whether external partners are needed for additional content expertise.
   a. High school tour that would include CTE centers, athletic facilities, and a meet and greet with the staff and faculty ("who's who" at the high school).
   b. Academics: include information for enrolling in dual credit/dual enrollment courses.
   c. State assessments
   d. Behavioral supports
   e. CTE
   f. Counseling
   g. Extracurricular activities
   h. Family and school relations
   i. Graduation diploma options
   j. JROTC
   k. Scheduling and grading policies
   l. Social emotional learning and mental health
   m. Special education
2. As a team, set a calendar of events and publicize through the school's communication plan (outlined in the "Communications" section of this Toolkit).
3. Identify the necessary resources and activities to be shared at each event. All events should be tailored to only one topic listed above and include at minimum:
   a. A sign-in sheet
   b. A brief overview of the previous session
   c. Resources/tools
   d. Exit survey/question
   e. Information for the point-of-contact at the school
4. Reconvene the team periodically to identify modifications needed for the next event and considerations for additional supports, resources, or tools.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Research other districts or states to see how they implement parent academies or events that are similar.
- Provide incentives for families and students who participate.
- Consider inviting a job or military recruiter to the fair to provide additional resources for families.
- Consider hosting some events virtually for families that are unable to attend.
- Partner with local agencies for support.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Consider having school personnel (e.g., special education teachers, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, etc.) to help answer questions that may arise.
- Consider having a translator for English learner populations.

Considerations for Counselors

- Develop ways to follow up with families that attend each event.

Resources

- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/Secondary%20Ed/sel_standards_final_1.21.21.pdf
- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning At-Home Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/LearningAtHome/SEL
- Mississippi Department of Mental Health
  http://www.dmh.ms.gov/

NOTES

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

NO BULLIES HERE
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M

Overview

No Bullies Here serves as a schoolwide campaign to prevent and report bullying occurrences among students. Students will learn the characteristics of bullies and how they can handle situations effectively when encountered by a bully.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Prevents the occurrences of bullying behavior among students
- Encourages a schoolwide anti-bullying culture
- Provides students with the skills they need to handle bullies and diffuse conflicts

Implementation

1. The transition team, in partnership with the counseling department at the school, should plan and implement a schoolwide anti-bullying presentation/program. This program should consist of the different types of bullying, including:
   a. Cyber
   b. Emotional
   c. Physical
   d. Verbal
   e. Other
2. Prior to implementation, it is recommended that counselors, experts, and national organizations are consulted and part of the training for all school staff on bullying. Topics to consider as part of the school's program and campaign include, but are not limited to:
   a. Any school- or district-level policies on bullying
   b. Prevention
   c. What is bullying
   d. How to recognize a bully
   e. What motivates someone to be a bully
   f. How to report bullying
3. Develop a method for ensuring all students in the school participate in the program. Small groups are ideal because this will allow students to ask and answer questions.
4. At the conclusion of the presentation/program, have students could take a "No Bullies Here" pledge where they pledge not to participate in any bullying activities or allow themselves to be bullied.

5. Give all students a copy of the "No Bullies Here" pledge for their student-led conference binder. (See information on this in the activity Student-Led Conferences found within this section of the toolkit.)

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Host bully awareness activities throughout the year.
- Consider including small skits by staff or members of the student ambassadors to illustrate key points in the presentation.
- Provide a safe space for students to report bullying (e.g., text alert system, dedicated email address, hotline, etc.).
- Post anti-bullying material around campus and any school or district rules that prohibit bullying.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- All students should be included in this program.
- Ensure all bullying material is accessible for all students in a format that accommodates their needs.

Considerations for Counselors

- Use the Social Emotional Check-Ins (described in the next activity of this Toolkit) to ask intentional questions of students which may reveal potential bullying.
- Work with the SEL Transition Team to prepare the presentation/program.
- Locate additional resources that may be necessary to meet the needs of the student body.
- Contact the MDE about required mental health training for school districts. For more information, call (601) 359-3461.

Resources

- U.S. Stop Bullying Website
  https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school
- Bullying 101 for Middle Schools
  https://pacerteensagainstbullying.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/bullying-101-tab-2021.pdf
- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/Secondary%20Ed/sel_standards_final_1.21.21.pdf
- Bullying Prevention in Middle School
  https://cisnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MB3A-Bullying-Prevention.pdf
- Mississippi (MDE's) Suicide-Bullying Prevention Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/SBR

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL CHECK-INS
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Social emotional check-ins provide families with resources, support, and information to help them better understand their middle school child. Each check-in equips parents with relative resources to help gauge their child's social emotional health throughout the school year.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Enhances family knowledge of social emotional health
- Engages families in ways to support their student(s) socially and emotionally throughout each middle school transition
- Forges an intentional partnership between the family and the school in monitoring the well-being of the child

Implementation

1. Review *Mississippi's Social Emotional Learning Standards.* Based on expertise within the school and/or district and the community, create a schoolwide SEL team (see page 9 of the SEL Standards). Each team will focus on one of the five (5) SEL domains (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making).
   a. Community members should be representatives from social emotional health organizations that will help the team identify resources for students and parents. In addition, they can locate or provide professional learning opportunities for staff where appropriate.
2. Work as a team to develop a comprehensive survey/questionnaire that can be distributed to families. Questions should be designed to help staff identify which domain(s) a student could possibly be struggling with based on family/student responses to the survey/questionnaire. (See the "Resources" section below for tools that could be used or prompts that can be modified to assist with the survey/questionnaire design.)
3. Determine how the survey/questionnaire will be distributed and collected from families. (e.g., an email address or mailing address.) Things to consider for SEL surveys/questionnaires:
   a. The SEL team, in collaboration with the school's transition and leadership teams, should come to a consensus on whether the survey/questionnaire should be anonymous. If they will not be anonymous, collaborate with counselors and district staff on how these types of surveys/questionnaires should be given and received.
   b. Teams should have alternative ways in place for families to complete surveys.
4. Allow the leadership team to oversee the evaluation process of all survey/questionnaire results.
5. Each team will use their SEL domain as a framework for developing a series of check-in sessions to span the course of the academic year.
6. Publicize the calendar of events on the school's website and other social media platforms used by the school.
   a. If the surveys/questionnaires are not anonymous, contact families by phone or mail. Share the entire calendar of events and draw their attention to the sessions that they may find the most beneficial based on how they replied to the survey/questionnaire.

7. All sessions should be aligned to the specified SEL domain and include at the minimum:
    a. A sign-in sheet
    b. An opportunity to gather information about the student's progress since the previous check-in
    c. A brief overview of the previous session
    d. Conversation starters
    e. Resources/tools
    f. Exit survey/question
    g. Contact information for the school SEL-lead and/or community programs
8. The SEL teams, along with the transition and leadership teams, should meet throughout the year to monitor progress, identify modifications needed for the next sessions, and consider any additional supports, resources, or tools needed.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Staff will need to be familiar with and/or trained on Mississippi's Social Emotional Learning Standards.
- Teams should meet individually and collectively throughout the year to ensure alignment and consistency across supports.
- Offer small group check-in sessions, if appropriate.
- Consideration should be made to not overlap the day and time of the sessions in the event families would like to attend multiple sessions.
- Consider planning a few check-in sessions during school breaks (e.g., spring, Christmas, fall, etc.) or extended school closures.
- Ensure families that attended are contacted after each event to provide support or other resources, if appropriate and needed.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Provide all information in a format that accommodates all families and students represented at the school.

Considerations for Counselors

- Counselors should work in tandem with the schoolwide social emotional learning team and, where appropriate, oversee the development of check-in sessions.
- Help identify issues/trends that are occurring within the student body that may need to be included in a particular check-in session.

Resources

- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/Secondary%20Ed/sel_standards_final_1.21.21.pdf
- Mississippi Social Emotional Learning At-Home Resources
  https://www.mdek12.org/LearningAtHome/SEL
- CASEL's SEL Reflection Prompts for Students
  https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/SEL-Reflection-Prompts.pdf
- 50 SEL Prompts for Middle and High School Students
  https://s18670.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Allstate-50-SEL-Prompts.pdf

- A Parent's Resource Guide to SEL
  https://www.edutopia.org/SEL-parents-resources
- CASEL's Personal Assessment and Reflection Tool
  https://saanys.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SEL_Adult_self-assessment.pdf
- Anxiety & Depression Association of America
  https://adaa.org/
- National Centre Against Bullying
  https://www.ncab.org.au/bullying-advice/bullying-for-parents/types-of-bullying/
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
  https://www.sprc.org/
- Trauma Resource Center Websites
  https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/resources/trauma/trauma-resource-center-websites.aspx
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
  https://www.ncld.org/
- Substance Abuse
  https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

STUDENT 2 STUDENT MENTOR GROUPS
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

Student 2 student mentor groups pair all first-time incoming students from the elementary school with an upperclassman at the middle school. As students interact throughout the school year, both parties improve their social, community, 21st century, and academic skills.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Creates confidence in students transitioning into middle school
- Cultivates student relationships across grade levels
- Provides opportunities for upperclassmen to practice and demonstrate 21st century skills
- Promotes a culture of collaboration that encourages student success

Implementation

1. Determine the goals and expectations for the *Student 2 Student Mentor Group* program at the school and share this information with all families and students.
2. Develop a selection process for students who would like to become mentors. Utilize the transition team to be advisors for mentor groups.
3. Develop the criteria for how students will be paired using available data at the school. This might include, but not be limited to, academic performance, extracurricular involvement, talents, and teacher recommendations.
4. Develop a calendar of events detailing all activities and events that students will be involved in throughout the school year and ensure all families and students receive this information. Some activities that may be considered include:
   a. Arts & crafts
   b. Attending a football game or other sporting event
   c. Back-to-school dance
   d. Canned food drive
   e. Christmas gift exchange
   f. Creating holiday cards
   g. Community service projects
   h. End-of-year dance
   i. Field trip
   j. Fundraiser
   k. Ice cream social
   l. Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)/Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternative (MAAP-A) study sessions
   m. Organized game day (e.g., kickball, board games, etc.)
   n. Outdoor lunch
   o. Pizza party
5. Host separate meetings for the incoming students, the upperclassmen, and the staff. All meetings should include brief details about each activity on the calendar, behavior and communication expectations, and protocols for providing feedback and/or reporting issues.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Set up short, informal face-to-face or virtual meetings for each student pair and their parents to meet during the summer. Assign a staff member to facilitate the meetings.
- Consider providing mentors (upperclassmen) with some talking tips or conversation starters prior to each event.
- Ensure activities take place during the school day with minimum disruption to instructional time.
- Assign one teacher to each mentor group to provide guidance throughout the year.
- Consider additional activities that are thematic in nature (e.g., goal setting, team building, citizenship, problem-solving, conflict management, etc.).
- Pair seventh grade with fifth grade and 11th grade with eighth grade so they have a mentor when they transition to each school.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- All students should be included in this program.
- When pairing students from select student populations, consider adding a staff member from the special education department or other departments to the mentor group to provide additional support during planned events/activities.
- When pairing English learners, consider adding a translator to the mentor group to provide support during planned events/activities.
- This program should be considered for students who transfer into the school mid-year. Every effort should be made to include them in events scheduled for the remainder of the year.

Considerations for Counselors

- Assist the administrative team with student pairing and student training.
- Perform periodic check-ins with each student group and their families to receive informal feedback about the program.
- Use both formal and informal surveys to gain feedback on the effectiveness of the program.

Resources

- Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools
  https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/building-effective-peer-mentoring-programs-intro-guide.pdf
- School Checklist for Developing and Launching a Successful Mentor Program
  https://www.mentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Success-Mentors-School-Checklist.FINAL_.pdf

THE MINUTE MEETING
TRANSITION GROUP/FOCUS: E, M, H

Overview

The *minute meeting* is a quick and simple way for counselors to meet with every student in the building and/or a particular class. The goal is to meet with every student for approximately three (3) minutes and to build positive relationships and discuss any immediate academic, counseling, or social emotional needs they may have. These meetings should not replace required counseling sessions throughout the year.

Timeframe

Throughout the school year

Outcomes

- Develops a deeper understanding of the school culture for students
- Improves communication between the counseling department and all students
- Builds a positive relationship between the counseling department and each student
- Provides a personalized learning environment for each student
- Identifies which students need immediate assistance

Implementation

1. Develop a schedule for all Minute Meetings throughout the school year.
   a. This schedule should be developed in partnership with all staff, counselors, and administrators and allow time for each student to participate in one meeting every nine weeks, if possible.
   b. Non-instructional time (e.g., homeroom, zero hour, lunch, transition times, extracurricular activities, etc.) should be considered first when identifying when students will be pulled out for their meeting.
2. Using the school communication plan, provide all families and students with the description, purpose, confidentiality protocols, and schedule for these meetings.
3. During each meeting, counselors will provide an opportunity and safe space for students to discuss their day, their feelings, and any challenges they may be experiencing.
4. Using consistent protocols and conversation starters, each meeting can be conducted within three (3) minutes. More time could be allocated based on student need. Sample conversation starters include:
   a. "On a scale of 1 to 5, how is your day going? And why did you select that number?"
   b. "The last time we met, you mentioned that _____. How are things going now?"
   c. "How is this nine weeks going for you so far?"
   d. "Are you finding it easy or hard to make new friends here?"
   e. "Is there anything you are dealing with/experiencing that you would like my help with?"
   f. "I see that your grade in _____ has improved/declined some. What are some helpful tips you used to improve your performance? What can I do to help you in that class?"
   g. "I see that you joined (the) _____ (club/team). What are you the most excited about now that you are a member/on the team? And, why?"
   h. "Tell me what you like most about the school." What areas do you think we need to improve on, and why?"
   i. "What is your dream job and why?"
   j. "What is one thing you are really good at?"

5. Follow up with those students that need immediate resources and/or support in the areas of academic, counseling, or social emotional learning.

Considerations and Tips for Success

- Build in a short one- to two-minute break between meetings to prepare notes electronically or manually after each meeting. This will ensure you are being an active listener during the meeting and maximizing the time you have with each of them. Be sure to always keep all data and notes in a secure location.
- Develop a method for remembering the first name of each student that you meet with and use their name as you speak with them throughout the meeting. Consider creating a small binder using pictures from the school yearbook to help you put a name with a face.
- Using Mississippi's Social Emotional Learning Standards, create your own conversation starters by writing the strategies as a question.

Considerations for Students from Select Populations (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, transfer students, etc.)

- Provide all information in a format that accommodates all families and students represented at the school.

Considerations for Counselors

- Collaboration with teachers will be essential to ensure all students participate in their meeting.
- Use notes and collected data to create and locate additional resources that may be needed.
- Follow appropriate protocols for conferring with parents and administrators on issues that need immediate attention.

Resources

- The Dos and Don'ts of Minute Meetings
  https://simplyimperfectcounselor.com/the-dos-and-donts-of-minute-meetings/
- Mississippi's Social Emotional Learning Standards
  https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/Secondary%20Ed/sel_standards_final_1.21.21.pdf
- CASEL SEL Reflection Prompts for Students
  https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/SEL-Reflection-Prompts.pdf
- 50 SEL Prompts for Middle and High School Students
  https://s18670.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Allstate-50-SEL-Prompts.pdf
- ASCA Career Conversation Starters
  https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/de90a081-49d4-492f-ad75-c3f172114d5d/Career-Conversation-Starters.pdf

NOTES

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