

Course Standards for Freshman Transition Classes

A Classroom-Based, Comprehensive Guidance and Career Exploration Course
for 8th or 9th Grade Students

Course Goals

Reduce dropout rates for both high school and post-secondary education and training because students learn the value of education and what a diploma means to their future life and career satisfaction.

Increase matriculation rates for college and post-secondary programs because students understand the quantitative life differences (e.g., financial, personal satisfaction, career options) various kinds of post-secondary training and education provide.

Help students acquire the skills necessary to successfully navigate their life/work transitions:

- Middle school to high school
- High school to college or post-secondary training
- Education to a quality workforce
- Adolescence to adulthood
- Dependency to self-sufficiency

The freshman year of high school has been documented as a pivotal time for students. It is during the freshman year that:

- The highest dropout rates are recorded
- Students are asked to make academic choices that either launch them along a trajectory toward college or some other form of post-secondary education, or potentially condemn them to a life of limited career choices
- Students start making lifestyle choices that can either lead to a life of self-sufficiency or one of dependency (e.g., teen parenting, substance abuse, unemployment or under-employment, gang involvement)

To combat these realities, districts and schools across the country have grappled with a variety of solutions and courses in an effort to circumvent the downside possibilities and enhance the opportunities. The results have been mixed. Without a clear vision of what a freshman transition class or freshman academy should address, many schools struggle to reach their ultimate goal of student retention and higher academic achievement. For some, a freshman course is viewed by the school staff as a form of purgatory and, therefore, the newest or least experienced teachers are assigned to teach it—when in reality its imperatives cry out for the most seasoned among us.

The following standards were developed to raise both student and educator expectations and to provide a roadmap and vision of what it takes to make a significant difference at this critical point in the lives of our students. The intent is to outline a rigorous, research-based course from which ALL 8th or 9th grade students will benefit—whether they are entering the workforce following high school graduation or have their sights set on college, a graduate degree, or some other form of post-secondary education.

Course Overview

To meet the requirements of these emerging adults, a freshman transition course must address a combination of personal/social, educational, and career and life skills.

In short, the coursework must:

PERSONAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ Help students **envision a future that is productive, achievable, and stimulating.**
- ✓ Provide the framework for helping **students learn to project into the future and understand the consequences of today's choices and actions.**
- ✓ **Expose students to potential stumbling blocks** that could impede their success and help them develop the necessary coping skills and attitudes required for a productive transition into adulthood.
- ✓ Help **students become identity-achieved**, a necessary developmental process for all adolescents, but particularly necessary for youth at risk of becoming teen parents, substance abusers, or dropouts.
- ✓ Provide practice in the **communication and interpersonal skills** required for career and personal success.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

- ✓ Facilitate students' **recognition of the value of education** and the importance of becoming internally motivated to succeed in school.
- ✓ Motivate learners and workers who **challenge themselves and strive for higher achievement.**
- ✓ Help students understand **how education, training, and career choice impact their personal lifestyle.**
- ✓ **Motivate students to apply themselves**, because once they understand how core subjects (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, computing) impact their future success, **academic achievement will increase.**

CAREER AND LIFE SKILLS

- ✓ **Teach a life and career planning "process,"** so students can continually adjust their plans throughout their education and adult life.
- ✓ Help **students become "career focused,"** so every student is prepared to enter the workforce upon completion of their education.
- ✓ Facilitate the development of a **personalized ten-year plan** that matches each student's career aspirations and commitment to education.
- ✓ **Teach students the skills, aptitudes, and attitudes** needed to successfully transition into high school, post-secondary education and/or training, the workforce, and adulthood.

Freshman Transition Standards

Knowledge and Skills
01. The student learns to project into the future and to understand the consequences of their actions and the choices made today. The student is expected to:
A. Visualize and describe the adult life they envision.
B. Identify the choices and actions that could impede a successful transition to adulthood.
C. Describe the challenges faced by individuals whose lives were sidetracked due to drug addiction, teen parenting, and/or dropping out (high school or college).
D. Analyze the impact of education on life satisfaction, by determining what they think the average lifestyle is for individuals who have been out of school at least 15 years for each of the following situations: high school dropout; high school graduate who enters the workplace with no further training or education; community college/industry certification; college graduate; graduate or professional school certification/degree.
E. Develop and analyze a budget for a single parent raising two children whose annual income is below the average in their community.
F. Set goals for wellness practices to maximize present and future health, appearance, and peak performance.
02. The student completes formal assessments and surveys to help them establish and consolidate their identity, becoming “identity-achieved.” The student is expected to:
A. Reflect on and write a personal definition(s) of success. (To be re-evaluated and re-written throughout the course.)
B. Contemplate and list their unique traits (e.g., passions, values and priorities, personality, strengths and weaknesses).
C. Identify any limiting factors that might impede their progression to a successful life and create plans to circumvent limitations.
D. Develop a plan for overcoming the anxieties and fears that might keep them from succeeding.
03. The student analyzes the effect of personal interest and aptitudes upon educational and career planning. The student is expected to:
A. Complete a formal career interest and aptitude assessment.
B. Match interests and aptitudes to career opportunities.
C. Begin a personal career portfolio by conducting an in-depth study of the varied aspects of occupations related to their interest areas.
04. The student recognizes the impact of career choice on personal lifestyle. The student is expected to:
A. Prepare a personal budget reflecting future lifestyle desires.
B. Prepare a subsistence budget (e.g., supported by minimum wage, unemployment insurance, or welfare) and articulate how their ideal lifestyle (described in 04.A) would change at this income level.

Knowledge and Skills

- C. Use print or online information to determine salaries of at least three career choices in their interest area with varying education requirements (e.g., no high school diploma, high school diploma, and post-secondary education/training).
- D. Develop a chart that graphically demonstrates the difference between the total lifetime wages for each of the career choices found in 04.C, outlining the time commitment for education and training for each.
- E. Prepare a list of the possible rewards and sacrifices (psychological, as well as financial) for each of the career choices researched in 04.C.
- F. Select the career most closely matching both their personal lifestyle budget and their commitment to education and training.

05. The student recognizes the impact their commitment to education has on their future lifestyle and life satisfaction. The student is expected to:

- A. Develop a chart classifying employment opportunities based on the education and training requirements of careers in their interest area.
- B. Prepare a proportional life-long timeline (until age 78) that graphically shows the amount of time the student plans to commit to education and training and the amount of time they expect to be active in the workforce. Factor the ratio between time spent preparing for their chosen career and time spent working.

06. The student demonstrates the skills to locate, analyze, and apply career information. The student is expected to:

- A. Access career information using print and online resources to complete an education and/or training plan for a career pathway.
- B. Access career information using interviews with business and industry representatives to create a career resource file.
- C. Complete career critiques gained through a variety of experiences (e.g., shadowing, career study tours, guest speakers, career fairs, videos, CD-ROM, Internet, and simulated work activities).
- D. Use career information to apply entrepreneurial skills by developing a small business plan.
- E. Identify the key disadvantages of careers/jobs traditionally held by women.

07. The student knows the process for career planning and educational preparation. The student is expected to:

- A. Identify high school courses related to specific career choices in their interest area.
- B. Select appropriate high school courses and experiences, and develop a graduation plan that leads to a specific career choice in their interest area.
- C. List and explain education and/or training alternatives after high school for a career choice within their interest area.
- D. Prepare an education and career plan for an occupation within their interest area that begins with entry into high school and continues through a post-secondary education and/or training program. Place this information in the personal career portfolio.
- E. Complete a 10-year plan outlining yearly quantitative goals and objectives for education, work, finances, and lifestyle choices.

Knowledge and Skills

08. The student can apply the skill sets required to succeed (both in the classroom and the workforce). The student is expected to:

- A. List and explain the steps in the decision-making process.
- B. Write quantitative goals and objectives for three personal or classroom projects.
- C. Apply problem-solving strategies to resolve a personal dilemma or that of a friend.
- D. Diagram the steps required to achieve identified short- and long-term goals.
- E. Describe at least five situations common to teens in which delaying gratification would lead to long-term rewards.
- F. Prioritize and manage personal and academic activities using time management strategies.
- G. Generate personal strategies for managing stress and tolerating anxiety.
- H. Give and receive constructive criticism.
- I. Make a persuasive oral presentation about a contemporary teenage problem (e.g., convince an imaginary friend who is contemplating dropping out to stay in school).
- J. Explain and demonstrate effective communication in family, community, and career settings.
- K. Apply reading, writing, listening, speaking, and mathematic skills in family and workplace settings.

09. The student demonstrates the importance of productive work habits and attitudes. The student is expected to:

- A. Conduct interviews with a minimum of two employers to determine the importance of work ethics, such as dependability, promptness, getting along with others, and honesty.
- B. List the characteristics of an effective team member.
- C. Work on a team to accomplish an assigned task and complete an "effective team member" profile to be placed in the personal career portfolio.
- D. Write job scenarios demonstrating positive and negative employee/customer relations.
- E. List and explain in the context of a school assignment the traits of those who strive for excellence.
- F. Create systems and strategies for managing personal activities and resources, such as schedules, assignments, school materials, and projects.
- G. Demonstrate respect for multiple diversities with sensitivity to anti-bias and equity in gender, age, race, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and exceptionalities.

Knowledge and Skills
10. The student knows that many skills are common to a variety of careers and that these skills can be transferred from one career opportunity to another. The student is expected to:
A. Compile a list of transferable skills, along with a corresponding list of possible career options that match their interests and aptitudes. Place the list in the personal career portfolio.
B. Create a presentation portraying transferable skills within their interest area.
11. The student knows the process used to locate and secure entry-level employment. The student is expected to:
A. Complete a job application form for an employment opportunity in their interest area.
B. Develop a resume for an employment opportunity in their interest area.
C. Role-play appropriate interviewing techniques for an employment opportunity in their interest area.
12. The student knows the effect change has on society and career opportunities. The student is expected to:
A. Cite examples of change in our society.
B. Compose a report explaining positive and negative aspects of one example of societal change.
C. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the changing nature of work and educational requirements.
D. Develop a timeline that covers the last ten years and depicts the changes in a selected career choice.
E. Use labor market information and knowledge of technology and societal and/or economic trends to forecast a job profile for a career in their interest area ten years from now. Add this profile to the personal career portfolio.

The above standards were developed using state standards from Texas, Tennessee, Indiana, and Maine, along with research findings and input from various experts and authors, including but not limited to:

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"I endorse the idea of freshman transition classes and the course standards involved as a part of an overall school district comprehensive guidance and counseling program."

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