

The Freshman Academy Report: Successes in a Ninth Grade School-Within-A-School Model in an Urban/Suburban High School

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The Freshman Academy is a program set-up to reduce ninth grade retention rates and increase ninth grade attendance, as well as better address young adult needs within a school-within-a-school concept. The program is designed to accomplish these goals by: scheduling students with teams; providing students with a supportive environment, both academically and socially/emotionally; and, ensuring that students are safe and secure for their first year at the high school.

A significant factor in the Freshman Academy is that students are scheduled heterogeneously into classes; this provides a learning environment where students with different backgrounds, experiences and developmental levels have the opportunity to be part of the learning in a more diverse setting. A heterogeneously grouped class coupled with changes made in the core curricula over the past two years engage all students at all levels and creates the ideal classroom setting. The academy teachers are scheduled to have four meeting periods per week; three are team planning meetings where they discuss student issues (i.e. attendance, grades, behavior, etc) and one period per week is dedicated to content planning when teachers of the same content area (math, science, social studies, and English) plan common assessments and review data from previous assessments. Students have the opportunity to take honors level courses in mathematics, science, social studies and English in the ninth grade, outside of the academy, based on skills test, a B+ average or better, and 8th grade teacher recommendation; also students who have excelled in the regular core class can be elevated to the honors level in their ninth grade year.

Academy classrooms are clustered together in one wing of the building; to ensure student safety and security and create a strong community within the freshman core classes. Student movement is closely monitored by the teachers and can help deter class tardies and cuts. There are currently twenty-two teachers involved in The Freshman Academy; sixteen content area teachers, four special education teachers, one reading consultant and one school social worker. The Freshman Academy teachers work in a team system of collaboration and communication (with parents, school services and the administration) that has helped reduce the retention rates, increase overall student attendance and has promoted a positive school climate. Teachers monitor student progress and share it with other members of the team; they can then develop strategies to improve a student's performance academically and behaviorally, progress is then shared with

parents through telephone calls, parent/teacher meeting, team meetings, progress reports, and report cards.

Over the past year the Freshman Academy has continued to be a successful model of collaboration and student-centered learning at West Haven High School. Student discipline and retention rates continue to decline while attendance rates continue to increase through each school year. The success of the Freshman Academy is due to a tiered system of interventions to prevent student failure and drop-outs; it is a series of steps to prevent at-risk students falling through the cracks. The tiered system consists of initial parent communication, teachers adopting a student caseload, team meetings, interaction with the school social worker and administrator intervention. The tiered interventions were significant to individual student success and continue to be the model in the 2010/2011 school year. Specific data, compiled throughout the school year, is used to illustrate the benefits of the Freshman Academy model and how it can continue to be a tool instrumental to student achievement.

Freshman Failures

Ninth grade failures prior to the Freshman Academy model were considerably high, but since it’s adoption ninth grade failure rates have taken a dramatic dip both in the 2008/2009 school year and in the 2009/2010 school year in comparison to the previous two school years as depicted in the Following Table.

	2006/2007 SY Failures	2007/2008 SY Failures	2008/2009 SY Failures	2009/2010 SY Failures
Mathematics	31.2%	29.1%	19.6%	19.0%
Science	21.8%	22.6%	11.5%	8.5%
Social Studies	21.8%	22.2%	10.5%	11.1%
English	29.6%	27.5%	14.0%	14.1%
	Non Academy Year	Non Academy Year	Freshman Academy	Freshman Academy

In the 2006/2007 school year,

- 133 students or 31.2% of all ninth grade students failed mathematics;
- 93 students or 21.8% of all ninth grade students failed science;
- 73 students or 21.8% of all ninth grade students failed social studies; and,
- 126 students or 29.6% of all ninth grade students failed English.

In the 2007/2008 school year,

- 129 students or 29.1% of all ninth grade students failed mathematics;
- 100 students or 22.6% of all ninth grade students failed science;
- 98 students or 22.2% of all ninth grade students failed social studies; and,

- 138 students or 27.5% of all ninth grade students failed English.

The ninth grade student failure rate for the 2008/2009 school year was to be,

- 85 students or 19.6% of all ninth grade students failing mathematics;
- 50 students or 11.5% of all ninth grade students failing Biology;
- 45 students or 10.5% of all ninth grade students failing Global Studies; and,
- 67 students or 14.0% of all ninth grade students failing English.

In the 2009/2010 school year,

- 81 students or 19% of ninth grade students failed Algebra I;
- 29 students or 8.5% of ninth grade students failed Biology;
- 38 students or 11.1% of ninth grade students failed Global Studies.
- 48 students or 14.1% of ninth grade students failed English.

The following factors which are unique to the Freshman Academy may have contributed to the change in freshman failures.

- Student Support Teams. The teaming of the four academic subjects and a special education teacher allowed teachers the scheduling of common planning time for teachers; commonly referred to as Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Teachers are now able to discuss student needs, strengths and possible revision of curriculum to best address their learning styles.
- Increased Parent Communication. Freshman Academy teachers log close to 2,000 telephone calls each year to parents beginning with the 2008/2009 SY, and have had nearly 100 parent/team meetings. The increased communication with parents may have been an additional factor to lower failure rates and an increase in attendance. The teachers through telephone calls, parent/team meetings and e-mails inform parents of their child's performance and they also offer them strategies for improvement; academically and behaviorally.
- Consistency. The Freshman Academy teachers have universal class rules as well as a grading system. By having the same set of expectations students have consistency from one class to the next.
- Common Formative Assessments. The development of common assessments in the four academic subjects brought teachers together to discuss student-centered assessments and designing similar lesson plans and tests. Teachers were then able to discuss specific student interventions immediately rather than waiting for summative assessments (i.e. tests, mid-terms, finals) to indicate student needs. Through common formative assessments teachers were able to gauge student skills levels and provide immediate feedback and determine proper instructional interventions for each student.
- English Curriculum Development. The development of a new English curriculum designed to specifically address the needs of our freshman. The addition of core readers and supplemental readers in English provided texts which were different and more relevant literature for the ninth grade student. The new literature offers a more relevant selection to ninth grade students which they can relate to.

- Social Studies Curriculum Development. The development of a new social studies curriculum, Global Studies, created a single social studies course for ninth grade students, when in previous years the students chose 1 of 4 options. This allowed teachers to select materials and develop lessons and assessments together.
- Reading Consultant. The creation of a reading consultant position in the ninth grade allowed the teachers to have assistance in the classroom for reading and writing instruction and to have focused learning groups for students who are weak in basic reading and writing skills.

Freshman Grades

The letter grade breakdown demonstrates that a heterogeneous classroom setting with curricula centered on student skills with relevancy have a positive effect on student performance. There are fewer students overall failing their core classes and more students with passing grades higher than the 'D' range. The following table documents the grade breakdown of all ninth grade students classes from the 2006/2007 SY to the 2009/2010 SY. Students in classes from the 2006/2007 to the 2007/2008 SY were in classes that were leveled in three different groups; Academic, Basic and Developmental.

Letter Grade	06/07 results	06/07 percent	07/08 results	07/08 percent	08/09 results	08/09 percent	09/10 results	09/10 percent
A+	2	0.5%	16	3.6%	11	2.3%	1	0.3%
A	18	4.1%	11	2.5%	25	5.2%	13	4.2%
A-	15	3.4%	17	3.9%	24	5.0%	17	5.0%
B+	33	7.4%	30	6.8%	36	7.5%	20	6.4%
B	33	7.4%	39	8.9%	32	6.7%	39	12.0%
B-	34	7.6%	27	6.2%	33	6.9%	23	7.0%
C+	41	9.2%	40	9.1%	38	7.9%	20	6.1%
C	38	8.5%	32	7.1%	46	9.6%	42	12.5%
C-	35	7.9%	31	7.1%	41	8.5%	32	10.3%
D+	50	11.2%	37	8.4%	58	12.1%	42	12.7%
D	45	10.1%	39	8.9%	68	14.2%	32	10.3%
F	101	22.7%	120	27.3%	67	14.0%	48	14.5%

Mathematics

Letter Grade	06/07 results	06/07 percent	07/08 results	07/08 percent	08/09 results	08/09 percent	09/10 results	09/10 percent
A+	0	0	2	0.7%	4	1.0%	1	0.2%
A	6	1.3%	6	1.4%	6	1.4%	9	2.1%
A-	18	4.1%	6	1.4%	16	3.8%	12	2.8%

B+	23	5.3%	32	7.6%	16	3.8%	27	6.4%
B	28	6.5%	39	9.3%	22	5.2%	24	5.7%
B-	38	8.8%	30	7.2%	25	6.0%	24	5.7%
C+	44	10.1%	28	6.7%	39	9.3%	43	10.4%
C	43	9.9%	33	7.6%	35	8.4%	45	10.6%
C-	32	7.3%	42	10.0%	21	5.0%	44	10.5%
D+	36	8.2%	41	9.8%	35	8.3%	51	12.1%
D	33	7.6%	31	7.3%	32	9.5%	60	14.2%
F	133	31.2%	129	29.1%	85	19.6%	81	19.0%

Science

Letter Grade	06/07 results	06/07 percent	07/08 results	07/08 percent	08/09 results	08/09 percent	09/10 results	09/10 percent
A+	3	0.7%	3	0.4%	2	0.6%	1	0.3%
A	7	1.6%	6	1.4%	12	3.8%	14	3.7%
A-	15	3.4%	10	2.4%	20	6.4%	22	5.9%
B+	20	4.6%	37	8.9%	22	7.1%	21	5.6%
B	23	5.2%	48	11.5%	25	8.1%	30	8.1%
B-	19	4.4%	36	8.6%	26	8.4%	51	13.7%
C+	47	10.8%	43	10.3%	41	13.2%	51	13.7%
C	48	11.0%	29	7.0%	39	12.6%	42	11.2%
C-	79	18.1%	36	8.6%	31	10.0%	44	11.8%
D+	48	11.0%	35	8.4%	25	8.7	40	10.7%
D	33	7.5%	33	7.9%	16	5.2%	27	7.2%
F	93	21.8%	100	22.6%	50	11.5%	29	8.5%

Social Studies

Letter Grade	06/07 results	06/07 percent	07/08 results	07/08 percent	08/09 results	08/09 percent	09/10 results	09/10 percent
A+	5	0.1%	11	2.6%	7	2.3%	5	0.2%
A	20	4.0%	28	6.6%	14	4.6%	27	8.1%
A-	34	8.4%	34	8.0%	30	9.8%	23	6.9%
B+	39	9.7%	34	8.0%	25	8.2%	30	9.1%
B	48	12.0%	46	10.9%	31	10.2%	39	11.7%
B-	39	9.7%	43	10.2%	23	7.5%	30	9.1%
C+	45	11.1%	25	5.9%	30	9.8%	48	14.5%
C	31	7.7%	30	7.1%	43	14.1%	55	16.6%

C-	22	5.5%	28	6.6%	28	9.2%	31	9.4%
D+	29	7.2%	31	7.4%	31	10.2%	22	6.6%
D	18	4.4%	13	3.0%	24	7.9%	21	6.3%
F	73	21.8%	98	22.2%	45	10.5%	38	11.1%

Freshman Attendance

The ninth grade student attendance has steadily risen over the past 4 years, especially in years the Freshman Academy has been in place as depicted in the Following Table.

2006/2007 School Year	81.25%
2007/2008 School Year	85.42%
2008/2009 School Year	91.21%
2009/2010 School Year	92.06%

Ninth grade attendance by the end of the 2006/2007 school year was 81.25%; in the 2007/2008 school year attendance was 85.42%, for the 2008/2009 school year is 91.25%, and in the 2009/2010 school year attendance rose to 92.06%. The following factors may have contributed to an increase in student attendance:

- The school-within-a-school model used in Freshman Academy created a smaller learning environment making it so teachers can be more familiar with their students in a shorter time period. Scheduling the ninth grade in the B-wing played a large role in assisting teachers to track student movement in the halls and prevented class cuts.
- Smaller class sizes created a more personal learning environment for the students, and allowed teachers to be more knowledgeable of their students.
- Teachers have made their first period class their “caseload”; they are responsible for the initial call home and to review grades and attendance with their students on a bi-weekly basis.
- The Parent/Teacher/Student meetings acted as interventions for students who were not coming to school, failing classes, and/or misbehaving. These meetings served as a powerful tool to help students become more successful in school.
- The team planning time gave teachers an opportunity and the time to develop strategies to help at-risk students.
- The position of a school social worker to address student absences and truancy brought some students back into school that were not attending or had sporadic attendance. The social worker made home visits, contacted parents/guardians, worked with the school resource officers, DCF social workers, and independent agencies to help bring students back into school and counsel them to remain in school.
- The use of Parent Portal in PowerSchool allowed parents to view their child’s grades and attendance in real time. Team members encouraged parents to use Parent Portal to view

their child's grades and attendance and e-mail teachers with specific concerns and questions.

- Increased parental contact has played an important role in establishing a strong teacher/parent relationship. Throughout the school year over 1500 phone calls to parents were made by Academy teachers on matters of attendance, behavior and grades.

Freshman Discipline

The ninth grade suspension rates dropped from 2006/2007 school year to the 2009/2010 school year.

	2006/2007 SY	2007/2008 SY	2008/2009 SY	2009/2010SY
Verbal Reprimand	341	211	267	271
Central Detention	167	148	98	124
In-School Suspension	626	440	407	320
Out-of-School Suspension	285	199	164	125
Expulsions	20	12	3	8
Arrests	34	17	16	24
# of school days	144	147	151	181

The decrease in student discipline may be contributed to the following factors.

- A large number of the suspensions were due to students who were repeat offenders and some were for incidences that occurred off-campus that had an impact on the educational environment.
- Parent/Teacher/Student meetings addressed discipline issues with strategies to improve. Through team collaboration teachers have the ability to bring students into team meetings to discuss inappropriate behavior and consequences if behaviors continue.. In a majority of these meetings the behavior of the student improves. Additional meetings are required with the student, parent(s), school counselors, social workers, school psychologist and the administrator to further address student discipline issues when the behavior has not improved and the student has been suspended.
- The position of a school social worker for the Freshman Academy addresses behavioral issues by having interventions with students. The social worker addresses behavioral problems before they require an office referral and/or punishment. Teachers have referred inappropriate behavior to the social worker to discuss the behavior and how to improve for the future. Teachers have given names of students to the social worker, following team meetings with parents, to develop action plans for successful behaviors in the classroom as well as non-structured settings (passing time in the hallway and in the

cafeteria). The social worker has also been an important resource in communicating with outside agencies (Bridges, Juvenile Probation, Hill Heath Center, Yale, etc...) to develop action plans in school as well as in the home with the assistance of the guardians.

The Freshman Academy is a school-within-a-school model that has made the difficult transition from middle school to high school a more positive experience on students. The Freshman Academy model has been focused on educating the individual student; using collaboration, teachers are able to discover the reasons for failure and means to success by using common formative assessments in collaboration teachers can determine weaknesses in a student's skills and develop interventions to assist. The role of the school social worker has been the link between home and school and the community bringing students back into school that were truant, and counseling students on appropriate behavior in the classroom and society. The overall drive of the Freshman Academy has always been student success, by having consistency with student expectations and grades students have a greater opportunity of success at West Haven High School. As a result of the Freshman Academy students have had greater success than years without it.