

STAND STRONGER: STAND-OUT PRACTICES FROM THE PANDEMIC

The year 2020 has tested the mettle of educators like no other experience in our lifetime. The Center for High School Success, a program of Stand for Children, works with 155 high schools in six states. Our partner schools range from those in rural single-high-school districts to ones in large urban districts serving thousands of students. Our unique vantage point has enabled us to witness firsthand the many triumphs and challenges schools have experienced as they've attempted to educate students during the global pandemic. **Below are the stand-out practices that have our full endorsement; we urge all school districts to adopt them for fall 2021. There is no time to waste.**

IMPLEMENT A 4X4 SCHEDULE

Ninth graders are three to five times [more likely to fail](#) a course than students at any other grade level, and students across all achievement levels experience a decline in GPA from eighth to ninth grade. [Research](#) attributes this decline in academic performance to students feeling less well known or supported by adults; students feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of transitions they must make daily; and students' inability, because of their underdeveloped executive functioning capacities, to effectively manage the increase in the number of courses they take.

An analysis of the performance of ninth graders in our partner schools this year surfaced a compelling, although not surprising, result: **Students with fewer courses each term stay on track at significantly higher rates.** Staying on track is defined as earning one quarter of the credits needed to graduate and earning no more than one F during the ninth grade year. A 4x4 schedule reduces the number of courses per day (to four) and extends the length of each class; by doing so, students and teachers have more manageable schedules, fewer transitions, more chances to build authentic relationships and the opportunity to cover course content in greater depth.

Among [76 schools across 6 states](#), students in schools who adopted 4x4 schedules scored 11 points higher on ninth grade on-track rates than their counterparts at schools who maintained traditional schedules (74% to 63%). This performance difference persisted across all racial groups. Significantly, the gaps were wider for students enrolled in English Language Learner (66% to 45%) and special education services (70% to 55%) and for those who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (75% to 55%).

START A NINTH GRADE SUCCESS PROGRAM

Research overwhelmingly points to ninth grade as the "make or break" year. Students who successfully pass all their ninth grade classes are four times more likely to graduate than those who don't. Further, for each course a student fails during their ninth grade year, the likelihood of graduation [reduces by 30%](#). In fact, the degree to which ninth graders stay on track is a stronger predictor of on-time graduation than the combination of eighth grade test scores, socioeconomic status, race, gender, and student mobility.

Establishing a ninth grade success program is a low-cost, research-supported strategy to support

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incoming ninth graders. In the fall of 2021, when many of these students will not have not been inside a schoolhouse since the middle of their seventh grade year, such support will be even more vital. The ninth grade year is an especially complex and consequential year for adolescents, and this year's ninth graders will be entering high school less prepared than ever, with unprecedented layers of academic and social-emotional complexities.

[Stand for Children's Center for High School Success can help!](#) By starting your own 9th Grade Success Program now, you can change the trajectory for this pandemic-plagued group of entering ninth graders.

PROVIDE SUMMER BRIDGE FOR ALL ENTERING NINTH GRADERS AND RISING TENTH GRADERS THIS SUMMER

Extending the research referenced in this document that daylight the [mismatch](#) between traditional school schedules and the developing adolescent brain, and coupling that with the our understanding of the complexities resulting from the pandemic, we can see that rising ninth graders are at an even greater risk than during a typical school year. Implementing a summer bridge program is a proven way to ease the transition from eighth to ninth grade. Strong empirical support for the academic and social-emotional [benefits of high-impact summer bridge programs](#) includes evidence that they increase ninth to tenth grade promotion rates, decrease disciplinary referrals and increase students' positive feelings of connection to school. Related studies show that students with skills taught in high-quality programs — such as time management, self-advocacy, and good study habits — experience far greater levels of success in high school.

Findings by the [UChicago Consortium on School Research](#) reveal that declines in student academic effort — measured by class participation, completing homework and seeking help when needed —

account for up to two-thirds of the decrease in academic performance from eighth to ninth grade. Schools can effectively mitigate ninth grade failure by designing high-quality summer bridge programs aimed at strengthening preparation for high school. While summer bridge programs vary in terms of their purpose, from remediating course failure to accelerating academic achievement, as well as in length, ranging from one-day orientations to six- to eight-week enrichment programs, an analysis of the research on effective summer bridge programs shows that they matter to kids! Kids need them now more than ever.

OFFER COMPETENCY-BASED CREDIT RECOVERY

Exceptional numbers of students will be ending the 2020-21 school year with historic numbers of failing grades and/or “incompletes.” CHSS has insights into how to establish an effective credit-recovery plan. In short, we caution against assigning students to retake courses online through outside providers disconnected from the students' schools, teachers and completed work. Students shouldn't have to repeat an entire course when they only failed half of it. It's better to identify what kids still need to learn or demonstrate mastery of, and give them the opportunity to do just that. Ideally, credit-recovery classes are built into the school day and allow students to earn additional elective credits. Strategies such as this not only aid in credit recovery, they elevate student agency as well.

PROVIDE LAPTOPS TO EVERY STUDENT AND ENSURE EVERY STUDENT HAS CONNECTIVITY FROM HOME

The pandemic exponentially accelerated 1-to-1 student computer rollout programs, giving many students at-home computer access for the first time. Closing the technology gap has been a long-

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held priority for which we have made tremendous gains! Educators should keep laptops as a central tool for students. Laptops at home have accelerated all students' ability to better track their work, access resources, communicate with teachers, monitor their progress and collaborate with classmates.

The increased use during the pandemic of learning management systems technology, such as Schoology, Canvas, and Google Classroom, has transformed how teachers, students and families communicate about assignments, grades and resources. Additionally, students can now access resources from home that allow them to plan for their future, search and prepare for jobs, prepare for postsecondary opportunities, participate in tutoring, engage with mental health services and expand their worlds by pursuing newfound interests.

Notably, however, laptops are not effective without internet connectivity. Districts should continue to provide hot spots and assistance with connectivity at home. Disconnected laptops do little to close technology gaps. Let's take this strong pandemic win and make it even stronger!

EXPAND SUPPORT FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING

The current Covid-19 pandemic has been extremely hard on students. Many reports have highlighted a rapid increase in mental health issues stemming from isolation, loneliness, changes in routines and, in some cases, lack of support. Earlier this year, the Washington Post reported that [students are struggling across the board](#). Students will need support as they reenter school full time. One low-cost way secondary schools can support student well-being is by connecting each student to one adult who is responsible for checking in with them and connecting with their family. A more

structured approach to this could involve an evidence-based program [like Check & Connect](#). Stand for Children continues to advocate for better student support in schools, including lower student-to-counselor ratios, more social workers and other student intervention staff.

PROVIDE HIGH-INTENSITY TUTORING TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

Under normal conditions, the average ninth grader enters high school [two to three grade levels behind in Math and ELA](#). Predictably, research shows higher failure rates and lower GPAs in ninth grade math and English than in other courses. Moreover, struggles with reading, writing and math have spillover effects on other content areas that require the ability to calculate, communicate effectively, comprehend written text and respond in writing. After nearly one and a half years of disrupted learning, we can expect most of next year's ninth graders to enter high school with significant learning gaps, especially in math and literacy. Addressing these skills gaps will require a higher-than-usual quantity of high-quality math and literacy learning supports.

[High dosage tutoring \(HDT\)](#), defined as tutoring that takes places in small groups of six or fewer students that meet at least three to four times per week, is a research-validated strategy that holds tremendous promise for undoing the Covid-related learning loss. Over 40 years of research supports the effectiveness of HDT in improving student achievement and closing racial and income achievement gaps across grade bands and grade levels. With an anticipated increase in ninth grade enrollment next year — due to higher proportions of ninth grade repeaters — districts will do well to provide HDT to targeted groups of students.

REGISTER TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO START A 9TH GRADE SUCCESS PROGRAM.