

Why 9th Grade?

Research indicates that ninth grade is a “make or break” year of education. Ninth graders think much differently on many levels than most other high school students. The question is, what makes freshmen so different than other students?

The freshman year is one of the most emotionally difficult and academically challenging times in a student's life. Students explore independence while developing a sense of self. While developing this sense of self, ninth grade students need proper encouragement and reinforcement during their personal exploration to emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence. Some of the challenges and confrontations that can occur as these students explore their sense of self and independence can also cause these students to become more alienated and less trusting of adults.

Freshmen still need adults involved in their lives to mentor and coach them through the many pivotal decisions they will have to make; having a sense of belonging and experiencing supportive relationships are very important to assist these students during this time.

By ninth grade, these students need to be encouraged to develop decision making skills. Ninth grade students are unique because cognitively they start to understand the concept of independence, but developmentally they are just beginning to understand all the complexities, responsibilities, and stressors associated with learning how to become functional contributing members of society. Ninth grade is often the transitional year where students will talk a great deal about what they want to do after high school. Ninth grade students are at a critical point in their lives regarding developing and incorporating the needed motivation to be successful both in their personal lives and in their careers.

This is also a transitional time because these same students will be shifting their allegiance, seeking out the support and guidance of their peer group as they progress toward the completion of their high school education. Ninth grade students feel like they are too old to need adults, but realistically they are not yet ready to fully care for and support themselves. Appropriate support and encouragement at this critical stage often offers these students opportunities that they otherwise may have difficulty recognizing.