

TRANSITION: Focusing on New Freshmen

By Shannon Mooney, High School Counselor

Jefferson High School and Jefferson Middle School continue to collaborate on the formalized 8th grade transition program started several years ago to help our 8th graders become successful high school students.

Highlights of the program include tours of the high school, small counseling groups focusing on social and academic issues, and a high school panel of staff and students for Q&A. Each year, we continue to add to our transition program and/or improve existing activities for both current eighth graders and new freshmen.

Grants continue to allow us to offer a variety of trainings for high school students to learn effective mentoring skills. These opportunities proved to be a successful addition to our transition program by providing 8th graders with a chance to learn from appropriate high school role modeling/tutoring.

Last year, the high school STAR organization innovatively initiated a relationship with Youth Frontiers, a non-profit organization specializing in high quality retreats for students. We became the first school in the local area to take our freshmen off campus for a day-long retreat on the importance of respect. This retreat was facilitated not only by professionals, but also by our own high school juniors and seniors. The collective impact to our school climate was amazing and we continue to see positive rewards with the use of weekly Youth Frontiers Character Challenges.

We continue to improve the Freshmen Only First Day of School. This year, our focus was on helping students navigate through the new Academic Wing, Commons Area, and Gym 1. Our new freshmen spent time learning about raised expectations, new protocols, and club/athletic involvements in addition to participating in a mock schedule of classes. With the addition of the Freshmen Academy initiated in the 2008-09 school year, we have been able to better serve the academic needs of freshmen. The Academy consists of freshmen teachers working collaboratively and meeting regularly in an effort to seamlessly address academic needs. Additionally, the Academy introduces a variety of innovative activities to help new freshmen develop healthy choices, both socially and academically. New freshmen have the opportunity to experience STAR's Challenge Day, whereby students are asked to interact with others outside of their comfort zone by sharing common experiences. The Freshmen Academy staff members, along with all new freshmen, participate in trust building and team building activities throughout the school year.