

Blueprint is brought to you by Jack Berckemeyer, Kim Campbell, Debbie Silver and Dedra Stafford and is written by Judith Baenen.

NINTH GRADE ACADEMY

Did you know that students are 3 to 5 times more likely to fail a class in the ninth grade than students in any other grade (Smith 2010)? This is generally not the result of a weak education in the middle grades, but rather a lack of preparedness for and understanding of the requirements of high school.

Ninth grade teams can help students succeed by spending significant time working with them on management and organizational skills. Sit with individual students to examine their notebooks, binders, folders and planners. Although each student's organizational approach will differ, share with students a variety of ideas on how to keep their work organized, then follow up in two weeks to see if one of the plans succeeded. If not, try something else. If your school does not have teaming for the ninth grade, this help with organization becomes each teacher's responsibility.

Time management is another bailiwick for ninth graders. Many are involved in sports, clubs and other outside activities that are new to them and possibly more demanding than their middle grades experiences. Some ninth graders have serious responsibilities at home as well. Add this to increased homework that is part of ninth grade, and many young people get overwhelmed. Teams/teachers of ninth graders must take time to give students information on ways of scheduling themselves and focusing so that they can keep up. Do not make the mistake of thinking that young adolescents know more than they do.

What I Learned From Watching the Olympics

The Olympics are behind us, but perhaps you heard some of the athletes talking about what motivates them. Here are some things we heard:

- A clearly defined goal – it's easy to evaluate one's performance in each event.
- A challenge – it's never easy, but worth working for.
- Ability to set one's own personal standards – get better every time.
- Rules that apply to everyone.
- Immediate feedback.
- Chance to socialize.
- Positive recognition.
- The knowledge that lessons and practice will bring improvement.
- A pleasant environment.
- It's fun!

Now think about your classroom. If there are one or two areas where you could improve, focus on those for the next few weeks. We all want to medal in motivating our students to succeed.

Are You Ready to Grow?

It's early in the school year, so there is still time to set goals for yourself as a professional. No need to think of anything "ginormous" – becoming just a 10 percent better teacher is a worthy aim. How can you be a better team member? What one thing can you change so that students in your class have an improved chance of success? Take a look at where you encountered problems last year – anything you can change so that the same events don't occur?

We encourage our students to set goals for themselves in order to be better learners, and it is imperative that we do the same. Perhaps you and a colleague can work together on a goal or at least talk with each other about possibilities. Commit to two or three doable, observable objectives that rely on you alone to achieve. (One cannot count on other people to change or to cooperate in our goals,) Set up periodic reviews for yourself (and mark them in your planner). Reward yourself when there is progress.



JACK SAYS: "CHOOSE OPTIMISM"

Research shows that if you make an **out loud, verbal commitment** toward any goal (such as diet, more exercise, less time online, etc.) you are **70 percent more likely** to continue to work on achieving that goal. You and your team might think about verbal commitments as a professional development strategy for the year.

Jack Berckemeyer is the head of the Berckemeyer Consulting Group and Owner and Director of Nuts & Bolts Symposiums.
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