

Optimism for transition

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Student engagement is a consistent topic of interest to all schools. The need to motivate students through their school years, creating inspired learners who are driven to achieve is a tall order. As students advance through their senior years the challenge, pressure and uncertainty often come to a head and create internal conflict, reduced self-esteem and a fear of uncertainty.

So how are schools to equip students with knowledge, tools and systems to

support them in their transition beyond school? How do we have students embrace a growth mindset to assist them with uncertainty they will face?

Focus on wellbeing in senior years

Senior years produce a mirage of academic demands and requirements, regulatory compliance and demands a level of maturity to maintain a high standard of commitment to a broad range of tasks through independent learning and inquiry. Where to start and which concern to

respond to first is a concern for most educators, parents and students. The sense of overwhelming expectations with the race to uncertainty is a problematic period. Evidence consistently supports that a focus on strengths and capability from schools' results in improved academic outcomes, student engagement and wellbeing. Knowing this, where do we start and how are we best to respond?

Many senior year advisers and schools, along with parents, are frustrated by students' lack of direction or



commitment to their pathway after school. Whilst the curriculum is clear cut and structured, the workplace is not so. More and more companies and tertiary providers are looking for individuals with initiative, positive character, aligned ethics and morals, in addition to developed interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills. Within the workplace these skills assist individuals in responding to departmental and business changes along with managing difficulties independently with optimism and a solution-focus.

How do you achieve this focus on positivity?

Plan forward – As much as possible, match students to teachers, for mentoring or home room if not class.

Value all students – Recognise the skills and talents students possess, even if they are currently misguided in use.

Encourage action – Be proactive in creating a planning discussion between students, their families and the school.

Make it personal – Individualise student planning to suit their style, it is unrealistic to expect that all students will have clarity by the end of Term 1 or even by the end of their time at school.

Keep current – Ensure your senior leaders, staff and year leads know of industry and workplace trends to provide accurate advice and guidance to students both formally and informally.

Step by step – Do not ask for a career plan, seek an initial transition step, asking students “What will you do next” to respect the agility of the workplace and potential opportunity for all.

Adapt to achieve the best – Recognise if your relationship is not conducive, if so create an alternate introduction to assist the student in continuing their investigation.

Don't forget middle school opportunities

Schools are currently faced with a lot more complexity and disconnect with an increase of Year 8 and 9 students disengaging from their learning, losing direction or dealing with irrational social and relationship dynamics. As such, our students need more understanding of opportunities that will assist them in remaining focused on their education whilst also building a resume for university, scholarship, cadetship and/or apprenticeship applications.

This development of competencies and capability can be achieved through student lead activities that create a portfolio of experiences they can reflect upon and learn from. This includes the chance to:

Investigate – Have students investigate any job or industry, invite parents to share their journey and role profile.

Reach out – As students gain more confidence in their high school routines,



Focus on positivity



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Reach out – As students gain more confidence in their high school routines, encourage them to be active in their community, work or school.



Call to action – Have students connect their interests and evidence of their capabilities with potential subject selections, work experience, charities or casual work.



Connection and purpose – When discussing electives, subject choices or changes, ensure students are assessing relevance and able to articulate the “why” as to their decision making.



Embrace critical thinking – Work with parents and staff to encourage analytical thinking in all students, ensure you allow for questioning and ensure answers are sort from students not simply provided to them.



Community partnership – Create formal and informal structures to develop relationships with families, carer’s and local industry to help students in reaching their potential and responding to personal challenges or difficulty in a positive manner.

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Obtain current data

Ensure you are utilising evidence not assumptions, gather data from your student base, staff and community to understand the scope and support your organisation has to maximise achievement. Look at offsetting a traditional academic focus with meaningful and purposeful tools that students can experience, discuss and learn from. Ensure they are appropriate to your student demographic and are for the purpose of student engagement and attainment.

Any profiling should encompass:

- 1 Conducting assessment
- 2 Reviewing results
- 3 Sharing individual and group trends with students, staff and community
- 4 Engaging on a personal level with students and their families to utilise insights immediately
- 5 Continue reflection and discussion with students in year groups, homeroom or pastoral groups for understanding and growth personally and as a cohort.

Ideally implement your profiling into Year 7 orientation and induction activities to proactively design class structure and homeroom groupings. Include explanation of this data in parent information sessions with suggestions as to how families can use this information to assist their child in commencing their high school life.

Whenever the assessment takes place,

have students associate the information and insights to all aspects of their life. Involve them in thinking and discussion around the application of this information to their:

- Social interactions
- Family dynamics
- Learning style
- Interests and hobbies
- Future opportunities

Get on the same page

Create a clear culture, ensure your values and mission statement rings true in the staffroom, homeroom and playground. To achieve this, you need to have a consensus amongst the executive team as to how their values look and can be executed across the school, in addition to methods of building awareness and responding to discrepancies.

With clarity, share with parents and families through various mediums. Utilise social media, newsletters and communication channels to allow parents to see the school culture in real settings. Invite them to be part, when appropriate, and inform them of their child’s role in this message.

Allow for interactions for staff, student and families to question their alignment to this culture through interactions, personal values and beliefs. If they do not align, support them in finding a better fit for their child, career or family. Be honest and respectful, allowing individuals to come to know what is important to them and how the disconnect may be affecting them, their child and/or wellbeing.

As we move through phases in education, professional stages and family milestones, it is important to recognise that transition is part of life, it continues well beyond Year 12 and is a healthy element to embrace. Transition allows us to reinvent, redesign, reassess and/or re-evaluate what will be most important to us for the phase ahead. We can learn from our successes and celebrate our achievements. Equally, we can grow from failures, develop from misjudgement and mature through unsuccessful moments. At all phases, we need to embrace moments of change and focus on the first step, initial goal or starting point to reach the next accomplishment.

References

- Gallup Australian Student Poll
Motivational Youth Maps