



9th Grade Postsecondary Event–Recruiter Toolkit:

*Using the ABCs as an Opportunity for
Recruiters to Build Relationships with and
Foster College and Career Readiness in
9th Grade Students*

Philadelphia
Education ★
Fund

The Big Why: Context

- Only 69% of Philadelphia's public school students will graduate from high school.*
- Of those graduates, just 54% will continue to and only 24% will graduate from a postsecondary institution.
- By necessity, most college and career advising programs focus on the 11th and 12th grades, at which point it is often too late for students to consider *what choices they might make throughout high school to improve the college and career opportunities available to them.*
- Research has shown that some of the most important choices students can make towards high school graduation and postsecondary success fall under the areas of *attendance, behavior, and course performance (the ABCs).*

The Big Why: Opportunity

Imagine you are a 12th grader who attends a college fair only to learn that your GPA puts your dream school out of reach. Now imagine instead that you are a 9th grader *inspired by* a college fair to use the next four years to obtain the GPA required by your dream school.

- College and career fairs introduce students to the opportunities available after high school. However, like postsecondary advising programs, these fairs are more likely to be attended by and designed for 11th and 12th graders with a focus on the specifics of the application and admissions process.
- We believe that, when designed specifically for the 9th grade, these fairs have the potential not only to expose students to their postsecondary options, but to emphasize the steps they need to take **now** in order for those options to be available to them by the time they are high school seniors.

Why recruiters?

Students will likely hear about attendance, behavior, and course performance from their teachers, counselors, and parents. So why do we believe that this message will resonate deeply and uniquely when coming from recruiters?



Recruiter Benefits:

Being messengers of the ABCs provides an advantage to recruiters as well.

Integrating the ABCs lends itself to a more authentic and engaging conversation between 9th graders and a recruiter than would topics better directed towards upperclassmen like the fine details of financial aid or course requirements.

Speaking to 9th graders about what's relevant to them now creates a relationship between students and recruiter (and by extension the college or organization they represent).

Opening the door in 9th grade allows recruiters to facilitate a strong, sustained relationship with the student and the college or organization. Students who are invested in and identify with a particular institution are more likely to persist there, increasing retention.

Recruiter Benefits Continued

Arming students with the why and how of the ABCs is proven to lead to greater postsecondary retention by creating students prepared for the expectations they will encounter after high school.

Connecting with students at the under-resourced high schools that the Philadelphia Education Fund supports could bring underrepresented populations and first generation students to your campus or workplace, creating a richer environment through its diversity of background and perspective.

Why the ABCs?

- A move towards a data-driven focus on the three factors of **attendance, behavior, and course performance** originated from the 2011 Everyone Graduates Center's research around "the high school dropout crisis and the need to graduate high school students who are ready for college and career success."
- Their research identified the ABCs as **indicators more predictive of high school graduation than even demographics or test scores**, and showed that most students at risk of dropping out of high school could graduate if they were provided **early and often with advising and intervention anchored in the ABCs**.
- These supports proved most important "in the transition years of the **6th and 9th grades**."

Why the 9th Grade?



As participants in studies led by the Everyone Graduates Center, the Philadelphia Education Fund found that “a significant percentage of 9th graders who had not shown risk factors [for dropping out of school] in the middle grades slid off track in the 9th grade,” highlighting the rationale behind this toolkit’s focus on the 9th grade as a year highly determinant of a student’s long-term success.

**Research out of Chicago showed that students who are ABC
on-track by the end of 9th grade are
FOUR TIMES
more likely to graduate from high school.**

References:

https://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/on_track_for_success.pdf
<https://ncs.uchicago.edu/page/track-graduation-and-college-readiness>

The ABCs: Definitions and Strategies

Attendance

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of school, which is equivalent to approximately 18–20 days a year or **just 2 days a month.**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		✗	✗	

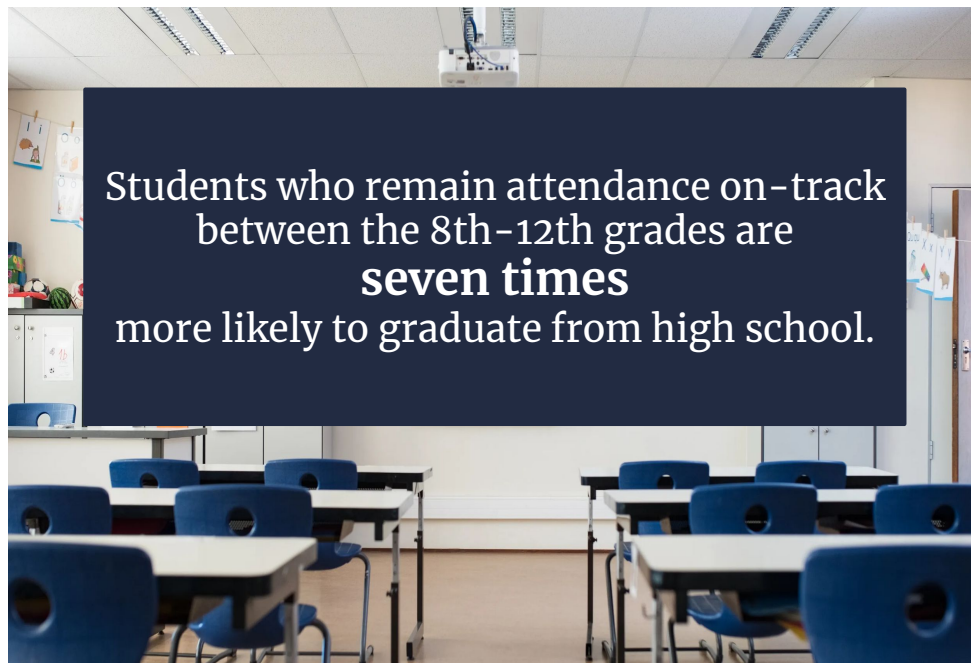
Strategies for Recruiter as Messenger

- Discuss the average attendance of students who succeed in your school or discuss the attendance policy at your workplace.
- Connect attendance to discipline, maturity, routine, and time management skills.
- Encourage students to seek assistance from a professor, adviser, mentor, or boss if they are facing attendance barriers such as transportation or competing responsibilities (working a part-time job while attending school, for example).
- Share tips with students for being on time (like laying out your clothes the night before or selecting times best suited to your schedule and routines).

Attendance Continued

Students may be surprised to learn that college professors will not be chasing them down the hallway or calling their parents if they are missing from class.

Students who form disciplined and consistent attendance habits **in high school** will be better prepared to maintain strong attendance in college or career when they are met with this increased independence.



Behavior

Students are in danger of dropping out of high school when they have **two or more mild or serious behavior infractions**.



Strategies for Recruiter as Messenger

- Instead of focusing on the consequences of disruptive behavior, you may wish to speak with students about the long-term personal and professional rewards of positive behavioral qualities like ambition, self-advocacy, resilience, resourcefulness, and an ability to accept feedback and work cooperatively with colleagues or peers.
- Explain to students *why* your college or workplace seeks those who demonstrate these qualities. What sort of environment do students or employees with these positive behavioral qualities work together to create?
- Provide concrete examples of how your students or employees demonstrate these behavioral qualities.

Course Performance

9th graders are considered on-track if they:

- earn five full-year course credits
- receive no more than one semester grade of an F (including no failing grades in English or Math)
- maintain a GPA of 2.0 or above



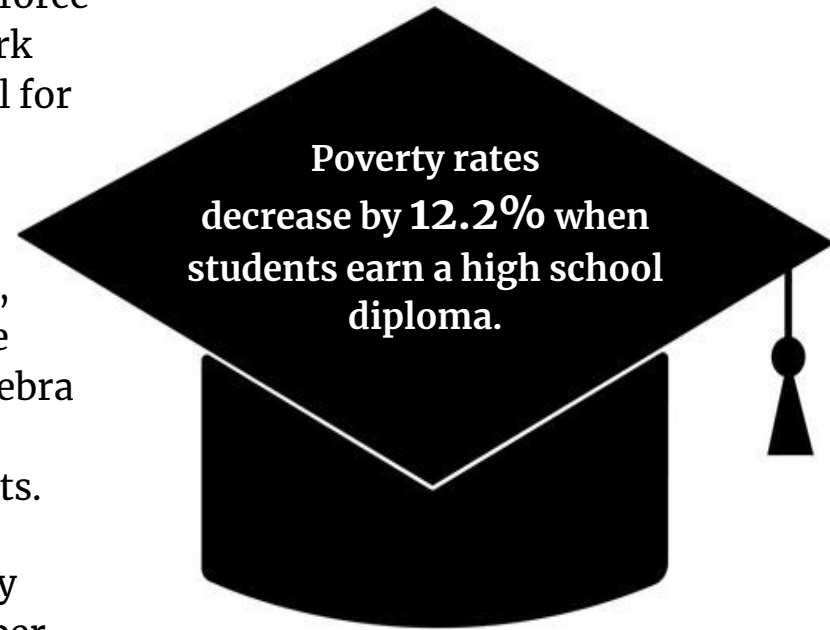
Strategies for Recruiter as Messenger

- 9th graders are often unfamiliar with terms like GPA, transcript, or course credits. Talk to students about what these terms mean and why they matter.
- Share with students the average GPA of students admitted to your campus.
- Emphasize for students the cumulative nature of GPA (so students understand that it is more difficult to raise your GPA the longer you wait into your high school career to do so).
- Explain to students the importance of regularly monitoring their grades through their school's online gradebook.

Course Performance Continued

It is not uncommon for students planning to enter the workforce directly after high school to assume that GPA and coursework are not relevant for their future plans. Therefore, it's critical for students to hear that:

- to enter and advance in the skilled trades requires knowledge and skills related to math, science, reading, and critical thinking. A pipefitter, for example, will use both chemistry and physics while a welder will use algebra and geometry, an electrician will read engineering specifications, and a contractor will interpret blueprints.
- high school graduates who enter the workforce directly after high school will earn an average of **\$9,412** more per year than those without a high school diploma.



Beyond the ABCs:

The Importance of Helping 9th Graders
Envision Their Future Through College and
Career Fairs

Envisioning the Future

We have learned from student surveys that 9th graders feel motivated and informed by being exposed to the why and how of the ABCs. For students to commit to sustained action around this message, though, it is important that they connect the ABCs to a future they can envision for themselves.

We've found through goal-setting activities used to close 9th grade fairs that students with an interest in a specific college or career write more precise and ambitious goals for themselves than do their peers who are less certain about what their future holds.

We're not suggesting that every 9th grader needs to decide on a set postsecondary pathway, but rather that every student needs to be able to imagine with some specificity and enthusiasm the possible futures available to choose from.

Envisioning the Future

With that in mind, we encourage you to share with 9th graders examples of what they can look forward to.

This will help students see what they are working towards by committing to the ABCs. This is especially important with 9th graders as they may feel that college or career is a lifetime away.

What student activities on your campus might 9th graders find exciting? Are there memorable campus traditions that students take part in each year? What perks will students have as a student on your campus? Will students have an opportunity to study abroad?

Are there college or career success stories you can share with our 9th graders (especially from students or employees with backgrounds they can relate to)?

*What do you find most interesting or fulfilling about your job?
What does a day in your field look like?*



Sample Outcomes: Student Feedback

- We worked with leaders at one of our partner schools to hold an ABC-infused Trades, Military, and Workforce Forum for their 9th graders in March 2022 (we will be putting on a College Forum at the same school in May 2022). 84% of attending students agreed or strongly agreed that the event helped them prepare to take next steps towards college or career. Students reported takeaways like learning about the importance of GPA and of ways to start exploring career options.
- We worked with leaders at another partner school to hold an ABC-infused event in March 2022 consisting of a college fair, college rep panel, and college 101 workshops. 83.5% of attending 9th graders agreed or strongly agreed that the experience increased their understanding of available postsecondary opportunities. Student takeaways stressed the importance of acting now to be ready for life after high school (i.e. by researching colleges early or pursuing college credits in high school).
- Leaders at both schools would like to expand ABC-infused postsecondary exposure opportunities to their 10th graders.

Sample Outcomes: Recruiter Feedback

- 100% of recruiters participating in a 2020–2021 school year 9th grade postsecondary experience agreed or strongly agreed that the ABC toolkit slides made clear the value of holding college and career events designed specifically for a 9th grade audience.
- 100% of recruiters participating in a 2020–2021 school year 9th grade postsecondary experience agreed or strongly agreed that ABC toolkit slides made clear the connection between the ABCs and their role as a college, career, or military recruiter.
- One recruiter commented that they “saw genuine value in the purpose and function of the program.” We also consider a success that our ABC-trained college and career recruiters chose to return for participation in 2021–2022 9th grade events.

“Everyone deserves options.”

-Roxborough HS 9th grader sharing her feedback on the importance of postsecondary workshops



Roxborough High School Commencement Ceremony

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