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## Freshman Transition Retreat

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## Freshman Transition Retreat

### Abstract

The purpose of a freshman retreat would be to help middle school students make the transition to high school a successful one. A successful transition program has many components such as; important information in regards to classes and school requirements, parent meetings, and days for new freshman to get acquainted to their new surroundings. These components along with a weekend retreat away from school grounds would prove to be an effective way to help transitioning students. Through the use of adventure-based activities and techniques students will gain self confidence, develop new friendships and take part in risk taking.

FRESHMAN TRANSITION RETREAT

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

And Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Amy E. Swisher

May 2008


This Research Project by: Amy E. Swisher

Entitled: Freshman Transition Retreat

has been approved as meeting the research project requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Education


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5/7/08  
Date Approved

  
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May 8, 2008  
Date Received

  
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Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

### Abstract:

The purpose of a freshman retreat would be to help middle school students make the transition to high school a successful one. A successful transition program has many components such as; important information in regards to classes and school requirements, parent meetings, and days for new freshman to get acquainted to their new surroundings. These components along with a weekend retreat away from school grounds would prove to be an effective way to help transitioning students. Through the use of adventure-based activities and techniques students will gain self confidence, develop new friendships and take part in risk taking.

## Freshman Transition Retreat

### Rationale

Transitioning from one school to another can be an exciting yet stressful time in a student's life. The transition from middle school to high school is one that is critical in the successful development of students. Some research suggests that today's adolescents have a tough time transitioning into high school (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis & Trickett, 1991; George, 1999; Hertzog, Morgan, Diamond, & Walker, 1996 as cited in Mizelle & Irvin 2000). Many factors can influence the impact of the transition from middle school to high school. Many adolescence experience a decline in grades and attendance during the transition to high school (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991). A need exists for a program to help students make the transition from middle school to high school, has become evident in the literature.

According to Mac Iver (1990), school administrators valued programs that assisted in the middle level transition that used a variety of articulation activities. These programs included activities that (a) provided students and parents information about the new school, (b) provided students social support during the transition, and (c) brought middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements.

### Description of Project

The purpose of a freshman transition retreat would be to assist middle school student's transition to the high school. Ideally, the setting would be at a retreat house or facility that had a large meeting room. Also having other activities provided such

as a ropes course, outdoor activities, and other various activities would be ideal. The retreat would incorporate adventure-based activities and experiential learning. Using experiential counseling techniques would provide activities that foster cooperation and increase adolescents' interpersonal skills and self-esteem through structured group activities (Moote & Wodarski, 1997).

### *Retreat Design*

Many of the ideas and design for the freshman retreat are taken from the Outward Bound program. "The mission of Outward Bound is to inspire character development and self-discovery in people of all ages and walks of life through challenge and adventure, and to impel them to achieve more than they ever thought possible, to show compassion for others and to actively engage in creating a better world" ([www.outwardbound.org](http://www.outwardbound.org)). Outward Bound uses adventure based techniques and activities in developing the whole person. The core values of Outward Bound are: (1) adventure and challenge (2) inclusion and diversity (3) social and environmental responsibility (4) learning through experience (5) character development and (6) compassion and service ([www.outwardbound.org](http://www.outwardbound.org)).

The core values emphasized throughout the retreat would be character development, the Outward Bound program lists these key areas of character development as: self-knowledge, craftsmanship, tenacity, physical fitness, teamwork, leadership, self-reliance, ability to go beyond self-imposed limitations and acceptance of responsibilities. These are critical areas that would be a main focus throughout the retreat in preparing freshman students for high school and the rest of their lives.

The goal or intent for the retreat would be the use of various adventure-based activities with students. These activities would be designed to build confidence in the student's abilities, aid them in developing new relationships with their peers, and assist with the development of important life skills. Students will be split into smaller advisory groups for the weekend as well. These groups will remain the same throughout the school year. Teachers, administrators, school counselors and upper classman leaders, are other key components of this retreat.

Students will have the opportunity to interact with school personal throughout the weekend. Each advisory group will be lead by two upper class leaders, one male and one female, along with a teacher from the high school. Teachers play a critical role in the transition phase for students. According to Akos & Gallassi (2004) who conducted a survey of 320 ninth grade students, the top three concerns in transitioning to high school were: amount of homework, the academic rigor of classes and getting lost. Therefore the importance of teacher involvement is crucial in elevating potential stress on these issues. Throughout the retreat students will interact and get to know their new teachers, which will help students see their teachers outside of the classroom setting and build a solid foundation for the student and teacher relationship.

Similarly, higher grade students, such as juniors and seniors are seen as role models and possible even a social support for transitioning students. The junior and senior class leaders would be an instrumental part of the retreat. A brief training of these leaders would be essential. The student leaders would be very visible to the



freshman; the junior and senior participants will be in charge of leading large group activities, breakout groups, and even contributing with the breakout sessions.

In using adventure-based activities, along with important orientation information, and large group activities students will gain the appropriate skills and knowledge to make the transition from middle school to high school successful.

Thus, it is vital for high school transition programs to include activities that Provide incoming students social support: activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Cognato, 1999; Hertzog et al., 1996; Mac Iver, 1990 as cited in Mizelle & Irvin 2000, p1).

The retreat's design aligns with what research is suggesting. The retreat would provide transitioning students with social interaction with both older students from the high school, along with teachers, administrators and school counselors.

### *Expectations*

The design of the retreat is such that students would learn about the important components of high school in an exciting experiential format. The mission statement of the retreat is to effectively help ninth grade students make the transition from middle school to high school, and the goal is a positive experience for all students transitioning. It is important to have objectives for the retreat as well. Objectives for the retreat would include:

- Student's gain confidence in his or her abilities
- Build new friendships
- Take risks

- Develop a deeper understanding of self.

Many of the objectives are similar to the core values of Outward Bound.

### *Funding Ideas*

A great deal of planning and cooperation is needed to implement a freshman retreat. It is important to get all stakeholders involved and excited about transition programs. The drawbacks to a weekend retreat may include, cost, scheduling, and convincing parents and administrators of the importance of such a program. Today's schools are hard pressed to find extra money to offer weekend retreats. Therefore, it is important to get all stakeholders involved. This is a great opportunity to empower the student's to take charge in brainstorming various fundraising ideas. The fundraising can be done towards the end of their eight grade year and continue on throughout the summer. Stakeholders would include anyone who would be affected by the retreat, such as, parents, teachers, students, administrators, and other school faculty.

Stakeholders that would be a good resource include the school board, PTA, student organizations, community organizations as well as parents and teachers. The first few years of implementing a freshman retreat would prove to be the most challenging, the hope would be that after a few years, the funding for the retreat would not be as difficult, once stake holder's saw the significance of such a retreat. It would also be important to put together a freshman planning team, which would consist of teachers, administrators and the school counselors.

### Conclusion

Finally, the goal of providing a freshman transition retreat over the duration of a weekend is one component for making the transition from middle school to high

school a successful and positive experience for students. Possible other events to compliment the program would be, a parent meeting, freshman only day in school, and further orientation meetings could prove beneficial in aiding in the transition program. Overall, the goal is to empower students and give them the confidence needed to successfully transition from middle school to high school. While it may be difficult to see the immediate benefits of a freshman retreat, the results in the long run such as lower drop out rate, better grades, less fights would be one of the rewards of a successful transition program.

## References:

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# ::FTR::

Freshman Transition Retreat: August 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>

## **Day #1: Friday Night**

- 3:30 Load Buses/Head to Retreat House
- 6:00 Stop for Dinner
- 8:00 Arrive to BugBee Resort/unload stuff/room assignments
- 9:00 Large Group Activity\*-Lead by Student Leaders
- 10:30 Free Time
- 11:45 Bed Time/Lights out

## **Day #2: Saturday:**

- 8:00 Leader Meeting
- 8:30 Breakfast in Main Building
- 9:00 Myths about high school-Counselor/junior and senior panel
- 10:00 Large Group Activity-Lead by Counselor & Teachers
- 10:45 Break Out Groups
- 11:30 Sessions
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Afternoon Activities
- 3:30 Sessions
- 6:00 Dinner
- 7:00 Talent Show
- 9:30 Ice Cream Social/Free Time
- 10:00 Bonfire
- 11:45 Bedtime/Lights Out

### **Day #3: Sunday**

8:00 Clean up Cabin/Load Buses

9:00 Breakfast

10:15 Break Out Groups

11:30 Load buses and head home

1:00 Stop for lunch

4:30 Arrive home

\*\*\*Important Dates To Remember\*\*\*\*\*

September 5<sup>th</sup>: Parent Meeting

September 7<sup>th</sup>: Tour of the high school:

September 10<sup>th</sup>: First Day of School

S T U D E N T  
L E A D E R ' S P A C K E T

Freshman Transition Retreat



**"Your position never gives you the right to command. It only imposes on you the duty of so living your life that others can receive your orders without being humiliated"**

**-Dag Hammarskjold-**

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Name:

# Important Information for Student Leaders

You have been selected to be a student leader for the Freshman Transition Retreat. This is a big honor and responsibility. As a leader you are responsible for helping run the retreat. Student leaders will be teamed up with a staff member and lead both large group activities and small group activities. Below you will find the weekend schedule along with each session broken down with process questions. You have already had a student leader training day, this packet is to help you in leading activities and small group discussions. Just remember you were chosen for a reason!!

## Important Rules and Guidelines for Student Leaders:

- Be on time to all activities and meetings
- All of the rules of the retreat apply to you as well
- Be responsible
- Get out of your comfort zone, you are on the retreat to help the under class men, not socialize with each other
- You are a leader, act like one.
- If you are unsure about something, ask one of the retreat leaders
- Have Fun!!

## Mission Statement:

*Effectively help ninth grade students make the transition from middle school to high school, and the goal is a positive experience for all students.*

## Objectives for retreat:

- *Help student's gain confidence in his or her abilities*
- *Build new friendships*
- *Take risks*
- *Develop a deeper understanding of self*



## Core Values of Outward Bound:

### Adventure and Challenge

Challenge is an action that requires special effort. Adventure is an exciting and remarkable experience that involves uncertain outcomes and acceptable risks.

### Inclusion and Diversity

Welcoming and respecting differences strengthens the richness of ideas and perspectives brought to bear on challenge and learning. The transformational experience of Outward Bound is more powerful when it takes place in the company of others as diverse as the society in which we live.

### Social and Environmental Responsibility

Social and environmental responsibility instills in students a sense of integrity, which results in choices and actions that have a positive effect on society and the environment.

### Learning Through Experience

Learning through experience is a lifelong process based on action and reflection. Experiences are intentionally designed, presented and reflected upon to instill values and promote skill mastery for people at all stages in their lifespan.

### Character Development

Character development means developing capacities of mind, body, and spirit to better understand one's responsibilities to self, others, and the community. Key areas of development are:

- self-knowledge
- craftsmanship
- tenacity
- physical fitness
- teamwork
- leadership
- the ability to go beyond self-imposed limitations
- acceptance of responsibilities
- and self-reliance

### Compassion and Service

Compassion is a heartfelt, caring connection to each other and the world around us. Service is an active expression of valuing our common humanity and the natural world.

*"It is not fair to ask of others what you are unwilling to do yourself" Anna Eleanor Roosevelt*

## **Large Group Game #1: Ah-So-Co**

**\*\*Lead by student leaders\*\***

Ah=Either hand across stomach. So=Either hand over head. Co=Point to another person in the circle.

Whoever is pointed at each time must do next chronological action. If done wrong, fudge it, or take too long, then a Yahm Zing is performed by the group putting their thumbs in and saying "Yahm Zing". Person leaves circle and game continues. When people are "Yahm Zinged", their role then is to annoy participants in any way (without touching them) to get them to mess up and be "Yahm Zinged" out. Last two participants are the winners.

## **Large Group Game #2: All My Neighbors**

Arrange chairs in a circle-enough for each of the participants minus one. One person stands in the middle of the circle, everyone else sits in the chairs. The middle person calls out "I want to meet all my neighbors who are wearing black shoes." Everyone, including the person in the middle who is wearing black shoes must find a new seat as quickly as possible-yet safely. The one person left without a chair then becomes the caller in the middle of the circle. Several ideas for calls are: those with blue eyes, those wearing glasses, those who use Crest toothpaste, those who have been to Europe, etc. BE CREATIVE!

### **Other Activities:**

#### **Values Continuum:**

The facilitator introduces an issue or fear of going to high school. He/she should point to two corners of a room which are assigned polar viewpoints on the particular issue. Each participant must take a stand on the imaginary continuum line between the polar corners which best describes their feelings. Process Point: What did you learn about your fears about high school? What surprised you the most in the line up

# ::BREAKOUT GROUPS::

## Small Group Session #1:

### Activity: Group Juggle

The group gets in a circle. The group sets a pattern for throwing the bean bags and follows that same pattern throughout the activity. The rules are (a) the person throwing the ball must call out the persons name he or she is throwing to, and (b) the toss must be made underhand. After awhile start adding more balls, the group must keep the same pattern. The activity should get more difficult with the addition of more balls.

Emphasis: Ice breaker / Stress Management / Coping Skills

### Process Questions:

1. When was this activity the most stressful for you?
2. How can this activity relate to school?
3. What did you learn about yourself from this activity?
4. What is one thing you can take away from this experience?

## Break Out Groups #2:

### Activity: Compass Challenge

Emphasis: Teamwork / Navigation skills

The participants arrive and discover an envelope with a list of directions and a note telling them to go find their leaders. The group must figure out how to use the directions and then walk in the right direction until the leaders are located. Make sure the challenge is designated for success, even if it also results in a little frustration.

### Process Questions:

1. What was the first thing that went through your mind after receiving the envelope?
2. Describe how you found your leaders? Was it easy, hard frustrating?
3. Did you ever feel like giving up?
4. How can you relate this to going to a new school and finding your way around?
5. What is one thing you can take away from this experience?

**Remember it is all about the PROCESS, try and ask open ended questions and get your group to have open discussions.!!!**

# More Group Conversation Starters:

**If you won \$2 million tomorrow, what are the first three things that you think you would do or buy as soon as you had the money in your hand?**

**If you could live in any state other than the one in which you currently reside, what state would you choose?**

**Aside from any family, friends, or pets what would be the most difficult thing for you to give up in your life?**

**What is one piece of advice that you wish you could pass along to everyone else?**

**What is something you always used to love to do that, during the last year or two, you feel like you've outgrown or lost interest in doing?**

**In what situations do you lack confidence in yourself?**

**Are you more of a night person or a day person? Why?**

**What is one of your favorite places to search on the Internet? Why?**

**Who has it easier today-girls or boys? Why?**

**Do you feel today's youth are getting a decent amount of respect from adults? Why, or why not?**

**Would you raise your children differently than the way you are being raised? If so, how?**

**What quality is most important to you in choosing a friend?**

# Sessions:

## SESSION #1:

### **ARE YOU SMARTER THAN YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR..**

You have seen the popular tv game show, "Are you smarter than a 5th grader" But you have never seen the game played like this. In this session you will learn about your new teachers, school and maybe even learn some new things about being a freshman.

## SESSION #2:

### **SAVE THE DRAMA FOR YOUR MAMA**

High School can be a confusing time in a person's life, especially when it comes to friendships and relationships. In this session you will learn about effective social skills, life skills, how to solve conflict on your own, and some useful tips from the upper class leaders about relationships.

## SESSION #3:

### **FIRST DOOR ON YOUR LEFT.....**

Finding your way around a new school can be scary. In this session you will learn a hands on approach to navigating those scary halls of high school.

## SESSION #4:

### **YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT**

High school can be a stressful time. In this session you will learn about how to be a healthy high schooler. You will learn about how to cook healthy meals for yourself, stress management, and how to take care of yourself. You will have the opportunity to learn yoga, tai chi, and other ways to relieve stress.

- Sleeping Bag
- Pillow
- Money
- Swimsuit
- Towel
- Sunscreen
- Enough Clothes for 3 days
- Snacks
- Good Attitude
- A instrument if you have one

## Leave at Home:

- Your dog or Cat
- Cell Phone
- Weapons
- Alcohol or Drugs
- Bad Attitude
- DVD player
- Video Games

## -----IMPORTANT TIMES/DATES-----

### **AUGUST 28TH:**

3:00PM MEET AT HIGH SCHOOL

**\*\*DO NOT BE LATE\*\***

### **AUGUST 31ST:**

4:30 PM ARRIVE BACK AT SCHOOL

AUGUST 28TH-31ST



## **CONFUSED ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL?**

**You are not alone.**

If you are going to be a freshman in the Fall of 2008, you are NOT going to want to miss this year's freshman retreat.

**This retreat is a requirement of all students.**

"This weekend was awesome, I learned so much about myself and my classmates, that I was not expecting"

~Anne, Sophomore~



It's normal to feel the

# FRESHMAN RETREAT

2008

# It's normal to feel the way you do

If you are worried about getting lost trying to find your class, or worried about how much harder classes are, or maybe getting shoved in your locker by Juniors and Seniors.

YOU ARE NORMAL!!





## **Mission Statement for the Retreat:**

Effectively help ninth grade students make the transition from middle school to high school, and the goal is a positive experience for all students.

## **Objectives:**

- Student's gain confidence in his or her abilities
- Build new friendships
- Take risks
- Develop a deeper understanding of self



# What is the Freshman Retreat?

The Freshman retreat is a weekend long event that takes place in Minnesota at Bugsbee Resort. During the retreat you will participate in a variety of group activities, small group activities and short sessions which will help prepare you as you move on to high school.



# ::The Resort::

This year we will be staying at the Bugbee Resort which is located in Paynesville, MN. About an hour north of the cities. Students will stay 4 to a room in a nice cabin. The resort also has other activities such as:

- Volleyball/Badminton
- Basketball
- Fishing
- Lake
- Camp Store

- Ropes Course
- Shuffleboard
- Indoor Pool
- Campfire
- Hiking trails





# !!!Important!!!

- This retreat is REQUIRED of all freshman.
- If for some reason you have an emergency please contact Sue immediately, she is the school secretary
- A packing list will provided for you after the meeting tonight.

# More Important Information

- The cost of the retreat is \$75. The dates are August 28th-31st.
- We will meet at the school at **3pm** on August 28th. **DO NOT BE LATE!**
- We will return August 31st at **4:30pm**

\*There are scholarships available, talk to

Ms. Swisher at the counselor table for information and a form\*



# What to Expect

- Meet lots of new People
- Have fun!
- Learn about yourself
- Learn about some of the Myths of high school
- Have fun!
- Meet Junior and Seniors
- Meet some of your teachers
- Have fun!

# PARENTS.....

## ::FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS::

### **Why is my son or daughter required to go?**

Research has shown that students do best when they go through a variety of transition programs, and when the parents are involved in the process.

We have learned that a weekend retreat is a great way to get students outside of the school environment and for them to learn about themselves and meet other students and learn about high school.

# More Questions??

## How can I get all the information I need?

This year we have created a blog which will have all the information about the retreat and everything else you will need to know. You can also ask questions to the school counselor on it, and they will respond back. All the forms and registration information is on the blog as well. Here is the address.....

**[www.freshman.blogspot.com](http://www.freshman.blogspot.com)**

## **Why a retreat? Why not an orientation day?**

There is something about taking adolescence out of their “normal” environment and taking them to a more secluded place. This is one event that students talk about even after they graduate, and we have discovered it works!

This is just one component of the transition process, but an important one.



# Questions?