

 VIDEO  
4:48 min

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## Paying Attention to Students

Jefferson Davis High School, Texas  
April 2011

**Topic** DROPOUT PREVENTION

**Practice** ADULT ADVOCATES

### Highlights

- » The ninth-grade mentoring program is designed to create caring relationships between ninth graders and adults who will guide and support them throughout the year.
- » Seventy-five percent percent of incoming freshmen participate, and 90% of faculty serve as mentors.
- » The mentoring program focuses on ninth graders because it is a critical year for success throughout the rest of high school.
- » Mentors serve as volunteers and work to create a trusting relationship with their students.

**About the Site** Jefferson Davis High School  
Houston, TX

### Demographics:

- » 89% Hispanic
- » 10% Black
- » 1% White
- » 92% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 15% Special Education


(Houston Independent School District, District and School Profiles, 2009-10)


Jefferson Davis High School implements multiple strategies to ensure all students graduate fully prepared to pursue their postsecondary goals:


- » Staff use middle school student achievement and nonacademic outcome data to monitor students' progress toward graduation and postsecondary readiness, providing interventions for struggling students and those at risk
- » A ninth-grade mentoring program provides students with supportive adult relationships
- » Students can enroll in programs that provide tutoring, family support, college workshops, counseling, and dropout recovery success
- » To foster a sense of community among students, the school sets high expectations, holding students accountable, and celebrates their successes


## Full Transcript




 **00:04** I am Louisa Meacham. I teach ninth-grade English at Jefferson Davis Senior High School in Houston, Texas.


 **00:10** My name is Paloma Garner. I am a biology and robotics teacher at Davis High School in Houston, Texas.


**Meacham**  **00:16** The ninth-grade mentor program at Davis High School is an effort on the part of the teachers and administrators to create connections between our new ninth graders and adults on campus. The goal is to make sure that every single ninth grader on this campus has a connection to an adult—an advocate who is looking out for that person. We feel strongly that kids who are anonymous, kids who are disconnected are the kids that will fall through the cracks.


**Garner**  **00:50** At the beginning of every year, the administration sends out a list of all the ninth-grade students, and then teachers, all faculty,


are encouraged to identify a student, maybe that they know or possibly not, to establish a relationship with throughout the year.


 **01:11** Seventy-five percent of our incoming first-time freshmen are participating in the mentee program, and 90% of our faculty are serving as mentors, with any mentors having one mentee to up to 40 mentees depending on the teacher, their time allowance, and also what grade level they teach.

**Meacham**  **01:31** We choose to focus our mentoring program on ninth graders because we know that the transition from middle school to high school is absolutely critical.

**Garner**  **01:43** There is a lot of research to show that failing ninth grade is—if not the greatest risk factor—one of the most significant risk factors in students graduating from high school. If we can get students through the first year, that's a huge step, but it's not the end of the road. And so the power of establishing such a strong relationship in that first year is that those kids are now, there is cord, there is a connection to someone in the school. So no matter what happens through the next three years, it's kind of like a safety net to be able to go back to that mentor and say here's what's going on, here is what's up, I need this, or can we talk about this. And so if we can establish that root, if we can have kids build those roots in the ninth grade, make it to the tenth grade, then we know that the chances of them going, not only graduating, but beyond are so much greater.

 **02:43** Building trust is probably the most important thing we can do between a mentor and a mentee, particularly because there is such a sentiment of distrust amongst students entering ninth grade frequently. There are so many different ways to build trust, but the most important way, and different mentors and mentees have many variations of doing this, is to demonstrate clearly that there is care and that there is a genuine interest, that this is not something we are doing because we have to; this is something we want to do because we really care about you as a student and, more importantly, as a person.

**Meacham**  **03:29** Part of the power of this program, I think, lies in its informality—that there isn't a set schedule. It hasn't become another thing that teachers have to write reports on and have endless oceans of paperwork on. It's human interaction, and that, to me, is the magic of this and the power of it and the way that you get 90% of the faculty to participate.

 **04:04** We know the ninth-grade mentoring program works. When I taught at Davis in the mid-90s, we had a significant dropout rate between the ninth- and tenth-grade year, and that dropout rate has significantly decreased. And I believe that that is in part due to programs like the mentoring outreach, where students feel connected to an adult who is looking out for them, nudging them, bugging them, praising them, paying attention to them.