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Time to shift 'No Child Left Behind' to 'Every Child Self-Sufficient'

Tom Robinson

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The likelihood that students will leave high school with a diploma, and then follow through with postsecondary education or training often hinges on the attitudes they develop about themselves and their futures in the eighth and ninth grades. If trends persist, 75 percent of today's high school students will not complete the post-secondary education required to succeed in a globalized economy.

The Freshman Transition Initiative (FTI) at George Washington University lays out a curriculum guide for ninth grade classes and a set of standards for personal social growth, educational achievement and career and life skills. While aimed at high school administration and curriculum specialists, it also has implications for university education schools, enrollment services offices and career services departments.



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FTI is gaining traction at some big school districts. It may shift the emphasis from short-term standardized testing to 10-year career and life plans. It involves some tough questions for students and a variety of other stakeholders. According to Rebecca Dedmond, former director of Career Guidance for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the current director of FTI, the following should be asked:

- **Parents:** In 10 years, will your teenagers be thriving in a career that matches their passions and abilities? Or will they still be relying on you for support while they struggle to define what they want to do with their lives?
- **Legislators:** In 10 years, will the students of today have the skills to compete in globalized markets? Or will they be consigned to a life of just getting by due to a lack of education or training?
- **Educators:** In 10 years, will your efforts to keep students from dropping out (of either high school or college) be applauded? Or will your educational efforts be in yet another cycle of redesign?

Add employers, social services, police and others who would like to see an end to the spiraling dropout rate. FTI feels their pain, and its [website](#) proclaims:

Although the current push to increase academic rigor is a vital component of high school reform, thinking that increased rigor alone will meet the goal of preparing all students for the 21st century workforce is naive at best.

Unless the high drop out rates in high school and college are rectified too many students will be absent from the classrooms to benefit from these higher expectations and levels of instruction. As academic standards are amplified and exit exams become mandatory, failing students will drop out and apathetic young people will continue to flounder.

A one-semester FTI pilot involving 11,000 high school freshmen in Jacksonville, Florida has been upped to a full-year course. Stakeholders are being affected in the following ways.

College schools of education, which are so often driven by their state's licensing requirements, should infuse the 10-year plan's tenets into curricula for future K-12 teachers and guidance counselors.

College admissions counselors might incorporate the FTI's 10-year plan as another criterion for admission, since it indicates an applicant's intensified intent to pursue a particular path and to complete that requirement in the four years generally allocated to it.

Enrollment managers should, in time, be able to calculate and compare the retention and completion rates of students with and without 10-year plans.

Career services clearly can help engage students in their predetermined career paths with internships and co-ops, career advice and post-graduation services.

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