

Reducing Off-Track Rates Through Alignment and Consistency

Castlemont High School in Oakland Unified School District transformed its 9th grade experience by fostering a culture of trust among adults, establishing common routines, and ensuring vulnerable students feel seen and believed in.



Castlemont High School: Making Student-Centered Care Systematic

When Castlemont High School joined the Breakthrough Success Community, there were few common practices among 9th grade teachers and differing opinions on how to best support students. Their challenges were intensified by the realities of serving a historically disinvested yet resilient East Oakland community with large populations of Black and newcomer students.

● Opportunity

Castlemont High School had a deep culture of care for students, but they recognized a need to operationalize that care into defined structures and routines the team could use to systematically support the students that need it most.

● Insight

Operationalizing care required examining data and discussing the details of practice in new ways. Guided by the leadership of Assistant Principal Samantha Odom, the team built trust and a shared purpose around student success, enabling them to use grades, attendance, and survey data to identify strategic segments of students to intervene with using common approaches.

● Intervention

Among other changes, Castlemont implemented a protocol to structure teacher conversations about student needs; standardized a cadence of Gradebook Reviews and Make-Up Days each marking period; and built relationships specifically with students who reported no connections to adults at school.

● Impact

Castlemont has produced the most significant improvements of the five OUSD comprehensive high schools participating in the network. Approximately 200 9th graders enter Castlemont each year, and the school's focus on 9th grade success has changed hundreds of life trajectories... and counting!

21% more
students on-track compared to before the pandemic

50% decrease
in Ds and Fs in 9th grade at Castlemont since 2021

4 years
in a row of increasing on-track rates for Black students



“The support and coaching provided by BTSC have proven invaluable in strengthening my leadership and empowering our 9th grade team. Thanks to this partnership, our 9th grade team has become one of the most effective on campus—and we're proud to see our results improve year after year. The BTSC has been a strong fit for our community because everyone involved shares our belief in keeping students at the center of all we do.

Samantha Odom
Assistant Principal, Castlemont High School, Oakland USD