

Increasing 9th Grade Success through Collective Commitment & Action

Duncan Polytechnical High School has deepened existing work on instruction and paired it with new practices from the Breakthrough Success Community, with powerful results for kids.



Duncan Polytechnical High School: Getting Better at Getting Better

Despite a history of better than average 9th grade outcomes, Duncan Polytechnical High School in Fresno Unified never got complacent. They leveraged participation in the Breakthrough Success Community to deepen their use of data and enhance teacher collective action.

● Opportunity

Although staff were making strong efforts on instruction and student engagement in classrooms, the on-track team didn't always see the progress reflected in student grades. They knew there was more to address to take 9th grade success to the next level.

● Insight

Duncan's approach had always been data-rich, but they realized getting to breakthrough improvement would require them to be more disciplined in using data to establish collective action steps, with frequent cycles of circling back to assess impact as a team.

● Intervention

Duncan tested several high-leverage change ideas, including the KidTalk Protocol, Make-Up Days, and 2x10s. They learned to not go too big, too fast with these new ideas. Instead, they built to full scale through iterative cycles that involved more teachers over time.

● Impact

Duncan has not only seen large reductions in off-track and D/F rates since the pandemic, but they have also built and retained a strong on-track team. This stability has cultivated trust and deepened their work each year.

38% increase

in 9th graders on track since the pandemic

50% decrease

in D/F grades since 2021

4 years in a row

of a declining D/F rate for 9th graders



Focusing on the 9th grade experience and the instruction our students were receiving was definitely the right call. Being part of the network gave us the chance to try out new protocols and new change ideas. The team's steady participation and their drive to keep improving have lead to real gains for students, which in turn motivates both students and staff to keep getting better every day.

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