

SECTION 18C

C. COACHING 9TH GRADE STUDENTS/1ST YEAR OF COACHING

COACHING 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

Coaching should ideally begin in the summer before the 9th grade. This is a critical transition year for all young people, as it can be overwhelming both academically and socially. High school students have to adjust to a new school environment, are expected to perform more independently in their academic work, and also start feeling increased social pressures and influences.

For students in foster care, who often enter 9th grade academically behind or over-age, these academic expectations, combined with the social pressures, can lead them to repeat 9th grade. It doesn't feel good to fail. At this juncture, the desire to be accepted by their peers, the pull of the streets, and/or the allure of getting a job and earning money, can lead them to negative outcomes, such as dropping out and/or experiencing early parenthood.

Students who enter the 9th grade on/above grade level can also get deterred if they do not have the right supports or if they are in an under-performing school. Instead of getting on a 4-year graduation, college-bound or vocational track, they can also slip through the cracks.



Coaches can play a critical role in helping students transition successfully to high school so that the first year does not feel as challenging. Ideally, Coaches will begin building a trusting relationship with the student in the summer before the 9th grade. During this period, Coaches can help students mentally prepare for what they may expect in high school and let them know that they will be there for them.

Coaches should follow up with students the day before their first day of high school, the first day after to reflect on the experience, and check in on them every week thereafter. If a young person knows that there is a caring, supportive adult in their lives who believes in their potential, cares about their emotional well-being, and monitors and supports their academic performance, the young person will often strive to live up to that adult's expectations. They often will not do it for themselves until a later developmental stage.

DURING THE 9TH GRADE, COACHES SHOULD:

- ☐ Set up the first school visit (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 19](#) & [Appendix C5: Conducting Effective School Visits](#))
- ☐ Check in with the student's guidance counselor each semester, or more frequently if needed
- ☐ Continue to build a trusting relationship with the young person, so that the young person comes to them before a challenge becomes a major issue
- ☐ Provide emotional support to young people, including helping them navigate new social dynamics (friends, relationships, etc.)
- ☐ Ask about homework assignments and tests, and attempt to connect them to a tutor (as most students could benefit)
- ☐ Connect students to afterschool and summer activities in line with their interests to keep them engaged, and/or to a paid internship (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#)).
- ☐ Connect them to summer school, if needed
- ☐ Start engaging youth in post-secondary exposure, career exploration, and career development activities. Even if a young person is struggling academically, these activities can help them envision a pathway and/or build self-esteem, which can lead to increased engagement in school. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))

48%

**OF YOUNG PEOPLE
IN FOSTER CARE IN
NYC REPEATED
9TH GRADE**

IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-18

THE FIRST SCHOOL VISIT

For students in 9th grade, Coaches should set up a school visit as soon as possible, in September or October of their first term.

For those who come into the program in other grades or junctures, the Coach should visit the school/GED program (with the young person, whenever possible) ideally within the first 30 days, as discussed in the “Initial Engagement” section.

Coaches should visit the school at least once per semester for all students enrolled in high school; a best practice is monthly for struggling students.

To conduct an effective school visit, please [See Appendix C5. First School Visit.](#)

The content of this document is summarized below, but it is recommended to read the attachment as it contains many specific tips!

The meeting should take place with the young person, the student’s guidance counselor and any other school staff, as needed, and the parent (if they are able to attend).

The purpose of the visit is to:

- Show the young person that the Coach cares about them;
- Ensure that they are enrolled in a safe, productive environment ([See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#));
- Help create a plan for graduation and post-secondary exploration;
- Ensure that the student is receiving any needed supports from the school/program;
- Form a working relationship with key staff, so that the school knows to reach out to the Coach if any challenges, issues, or opportunities arise as it relates to that young person.

Before the first visit

The Coach should obtain required documentation:

- ☐ For youth in foster care, it’s possible that coaches will need to obtain a signed release from the youth’s parent, legal guardian, or the youth (if they are over 18, on final discharge, or adopted) to access school records.
- ☐ Review the student’s most recent report card, attendance, transcript (if they are in their second year of high school or later), IEP (if they have one), and the Office of Disciplinary Referrals & Parent-Teacher Correspondence. Coaches should be able to access most of this information on “Infinite Campus” through a data sharing agreement between Say YES and the Buffalo Public School District, if parents have consented.
- ☐ Explain the purpose of the visit to the young person. By this point, the Coach should already have begun to develop a solid rapport with the young person and ensured that they understand that the Coach is there to support them. Find out how they feel about their guidance counselor, teachers, and school in general so you can be sensitive to these dynamics. If the young person has NOT yet responded to the Coach, the Coach should still do the school visit - it shows that they care about the student, and it may even be the reason why the student ends up engaging!
- ☐ Reach out to the foster parent/parent, as appropriate, to see if they can attend.
- ☐ If they have a good relationship with the student, invite the youth’s Case Planner, Socio-Therapist, or other relevant agency staff to participate.

During the first visit

The Coach should set the stage for the meeting, and try to create a warm, engaging, and supportive environment. Sometimes these visits can be traumatic, as some young people associate “school” with another “system,” and guidance counselors do not always take a strength-based approach, particularly if a young person is struggling academically or has behavioral concerns. The Coach should model the appropriate tone, try to create a “circle of support” around the young person, and empower the young person to participate in the discussion.

If the student does not have strong performance, **it is the role of the Coach to focus on their potential**, and what steps can be taken. It may be helpful for the Coach to meet with the guidance counselor or other school staff alone before asking the student to join the meeting, to ensure everyone is on the same page. This can be useful if there are sensitive topics to discuss.

The Coach should also be sure to:

- ☐ Let the student talk!
- ☐ Inquire about any needs the student has, particularly if they have an IEP or 504 Plan, and whether the appropriate support services are in place. Ask specific questions (e.g., “Is the student meeting twice each week with the speech therapist, as outlined in the IEP?”).
- ☐ Review the student’s attendance thus far, including timeliness and attendance in individual classes. It is common for students to attend school regularly but arrive late, skip academic classes, or leave school early. The students should be given a chance to express their thoughts and concerns as well.
- ☐ Review progress towards graduation and any post-secondary plans - see blue box below.
- ☐ Discuss any supports the school has (e.g., afterschool programs, Regents prep, extracurricular activities, etc.), and the student’s interests in these activities.

IF THE STUDENT IS IN 10TH GRADE OR ABOVE (OR A SECOND-TIME 9TH GRADER), THE COACH SHOULD ALSO:

- ☐ Discuss the high school graduation goal: What type of degree is the student hoping to earn?
Options include: Advanced Regents, Regents, Local Degree
An alternative degree called a **Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential (SACC)** is also available for students with significant disabilities. *Note: a SACC degree is not a high school diploma and cannot be used to apply to college, the military, or trade schools, as the other degrees can. Students with IEPs should earn a diploma whenever possible and the SACC should be a last resort.* (See [Appendix F7 High School Graduation Options for Students with Disabilities](#))
With a **Local Degree**, the young person can pass their Regents exams with a 55 (instead of a 65)
This should only be discussed as an option if the student is really struggling to pass and getting discouraged.
- ☐ **Review the young person’s transcript and progress towards graduation with the Guidance Counselor.**
Note: Coaches do not need to discuss the high school graduation goal or type of degree for first-time 9th graders, as all young people should start off aiming for a Regents degree (unless they are already being tracked for an alternative high school degree).
See [Appendix F6 High School Graduation Checklist](#).

After the first visit:

The Coach should debrief with the student and talk through any feelings the meeting may have produced, particularly if the student’s performance is not optimal. This is an important relationship-building moment – it will reinforce that the Coach is there for them, no matter how they are doing in school, and that they believe in the young person. The Coach should also help the student set goals based on the meeting.

The Coach should also send a warm thank you note to the school and summarize the visit and any next steps.

The Coach should also update the parent if he/she was not able to attend and notify the case planner of any relevant information.

Urgent concerns would include:

- If the student is already cutting classes;
- If there are concerns about bullying;
- If the student’s IEP isn’t being followed;
- If there’s a medication form that needs to be completed, etc.

IF THE YOUNG PERSON COMPLETES THE SCHOOL YEAR AND IS PROMOTED:

The Coach should continue to provide coaching/persistence support going into 10th grade and beyond. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18E](#))

IF A YOUNG PERSON REPEATS THE 9TH GRADE:

The Coach should engage their Supervisor, the school guidance counselor, the case planning team, and the student's parent to gather additional information/input on the best course of action.

If the issue does not seem to be academic driven and related more to engagement, potential steps include:

- ☐ Help young person understand why school is important by connecting them to a peer group or credible messenger;
- ☐ Help young person understand why school is important by connecting them to an extracurricular program or experience in line with their interests to build self-esteem & help them envision pathway;
- ☐ Help young person have a "breakthrough moment" by taking them on a trip or engaging in a new experience that broadens their horizons;
- ☐ Work with young person to improve attendance; coach young person, text/call young person in the mornings.

If the student is engaged but struggling due to mostly academic reasons, common actions include:

- ☐ Refer the student to a tutor (and follow-up with tutor on performance);
- ☐ Help the student enroll in afterschool programming or Regents exam prep;
- ☐ Create a study plan;
- ☐ Advocate with the school/DOE to help the student obtain a particular service or accommodation;
- ☐ Request that the school submit an evaluation for an IEP or 504 Plan;
- ☐ Consider whether a school transfer may be appropriate ([See Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18D](#));

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