

DOINGWHATWORKS



SAMPLE MATERIAL

Seventh- and Ninth-Grade Preparatory Academies

University Park Campus School, Massachusetts

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College

Practice: Foster College Aspirations

University Park Campus School (UPCS) emphasizes all students' social and academic preparation for college. This document briefly summarizes UPCS's two introductory academies designed to prepare students for high school success. Seventh graders are encouraged to attend the three-week August Academy, which acquaints them with the rigorous high school program and also serves students in upper elementary grades. The Ninth-Grade Academy, hosted by Clark University, explores the high school curriculum and the college campus and as well as an in-depth project that students complete.

UPCS August Academy

All incoming 7th graders to UPCS are strongly urged to attend a three-week academic orientation session called August Academy (typically 100% do). Students take English, math, and science classes with the faculty who will be their teachers during the year. Students begin to internalize the culture of the school and learn to meet the school's high expectations. Teachers begin to assess students and are able to tailor the curriculum for the upcoming year to the particular needs of the incoming students.

Although students all live in the same neighborhood they come from over a dozen feeder elementary schools. The August Academy gives students an opportunity to get to know each other.

- ***Engaging, Interdisciplinary project:*** In the August Academy, teachers jointly plan an interdisciplinary project based around the book the students read in English class. For example, one year students read Seedfolks by Paul Fleischmann, a story about neighbors who come together to form a community garden. In math, they studied area and perimeter to design their own community garden, and they studied plant biology and visited a local community garden in science.

The books selected for the August Academy typically have around a 5th grade reading level, but content that is still engaging for middle school students. Teachers are also deliberate in selecting a project the students will finish. For many students August Academy is the first time they have ever finished a book, offering them a confidence boost as they enter the school year.

- ***Effects of the August Academy: An Extra Month of School:*** August Academy has the net effect of extending school by one month seventh graders, who typically enter the school three to four grade levels behind in their English and math skills. Teachers and students have the opportunity to get to know each other in a relaxed environment before other students arrive at the school. During this time, skill gaps begin to close and the orientation process ensures that teachers and students “hit the ground running” on the first day of school.
- ***Afternoons on a College Campus:*** In the afternoons, students walk to the Clark campus where they participate in recreational and enrichment activities led by Clark students and staffed by UPCS upperclassmen. This enables the incoming class to become familiar and comfortable on the college campus and establishes a tiered system of mentorship between UPCS seventh graders and high school students and between Clark undergraduates and all UPCS students.
- ***Building a Pipeline: Programming for Future UPCS Students:*** The August Academy also serves 3rd through 6th graders from the neighborhood. They participate in recreational activities at Clark in the morning and attend courses at UPCS in the afternoon. The August Academy aims to make a broad educational impact in neighborhood around the school. Students in the program get the educational benefit of additional instruction minimizing the “summer slide.” By spending time on the Clark campus, these elementary school students develop identities as future college students, motivating them to achieve in school. High school age students from UPCS staff the program, serving as positive role models from the neighborhood for their younger peers.

UPCS 9th Grade Academy

After a review of 8th grade student data, faculty at University Park Campus School recognized that there was a need to explicitly transition students into the 9th grade. Although 9th graders do not change buildings when they become high schoolers at University Park, a clear transition does occur. In order to prepare students for the rigor and thinking of high school, the 9th Grade Academy was born.

This three week, twelve-day program runs Monday through Thursday from 8 am to 11 am. Staffed by the 9th grade teachers, the program is hosted at Clark University. This venue places the academy in the context of college readiness and differentiates it from the 7th grade academy in a substantive way. Each teacher (ELA, Math, Social Studies, and Science) takes part in teaching the interdisciplinary theme of the academy. For the last two years, the theme has been “A Sense of Place.” Students have participated in engaging and thought-provoking research about their surroundings. For the first two weeks, students participate in classes and take field trips to sites off of the Clark campus using each of the disciplines to see and appreciate the complex world around them. For the last week of the Academy, students choose, as a group, a question or problem that they must explore. On the last day of the academy, each group presents their findings to all of their classmates.

There are many rewards to the program. First, students are introduced to the genuine thinking, research, reading, and writing that is expected of them at the high school level since they will begin an all-honors, rigorous course of study in the fall. Second, teachers and students are introduced to one another before the beginning of the school year. Teachers get to see the strengths and challenges of each of their students making for a smoother transition when the year begins. Third, students are fully immersed in college-level thinking and start developing college-ready skills. These skills will continue to get honed throughout their time in the high school. Finally, the academy has become a great way, a right-of-passage, for students to get to know their classmates even better as they get ready to embark upon the journey of high school together.