9th Grade Campus Visit: What's Holding You Back?

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Time Frame 45–65 minutes

Essential Question(s)

- What keeps individuals from pursuing a postsecondary education?
- What are some resources to help overcome those challenges?

Summary

This 9th-grade campus visit activity will complement a student tour of a college campus to learn about postsecondary options. In this learning activity, students will identify obstacles that prevent individuals from pursuing postsecondary education and explore resources and strategies to overcome those obstacles.

Learning Goals

Standards

College and Career Preparation Standards 6–12 (6th -12th)

9.3.1: Students will identify at least two college and career aspirations (e.g., attending a four-year college, earning a technical certification) and list initial obstacles (e.g., finances, academic requirements), proposing one basic strategy to address each.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—What's Holding You Back.pptx
- High School Transcript—What's Holding You Back.docx
- High School Transcript—What's Holding You Back.pdf
- Overcoming Challenges—What's Holding You Back - Spanish.docx
- Overcoming Challenges—What's Holding You Back - Spanish.pdf
- Overcoming Challenges—What's Holding You Back.docx
- Overcoming Challenges—What's Holding You Back.pdf
- Station Posters—What's Holding You Back.docx
- Station Posters—What's Holding You Back.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Overcoming Challenges handout (attached; one per student; print two-sided)
- Station Posters (attached; one set; print one-sided on 11x17” paper)
- High School Transcript handout (attached; three copies; print one-sided)
- Copy paper (one per student, each one cut in half)
- Buckets or baskets (one per group)
- Sticky notes (six)
- Writing utensils

10 minutes

Introduction

Introduce the activity using the attached **Activity Slides**. Display **slide 3**, titled "Housekeeping: Norms," and review the list of expectations for the visit with students:

- Behave like a guest and represent your school well.
- Keep cell phones on silent and put away.
- Leave the campus as clean as it was when you arrived.
- Follow all instructions.
- Stay with your group.
- Stay engaged in all activities.
- Ask questions that are on topic.

Share the essential questions on **slide 4** and the learning objectives on **slide 5**.

Display **slide 6** and introduce the Commit and Toss strategy. Divide students into two or more groups of 6–8. Place an empty bucket in the center of each group. Give each student two half-sheets of copy paper. Ask groups to consider what might prevent students from going to college. Allow them time to think, then direct each student to write one reason per sheet.

Have students crumple each sheet of paper and gently toss both into their group's bucket. When all students have tossed their papers, have groups swap buckets with another group.

Display **slide 7**. Instruct each group to remove, uncrumple, and read the responses from the new bucket. Have groups discuss and sort the responses into categories. Encourage groups to have 3–5 categories of responses, each with a common theme.

Ask for a volunteer from one group to share the name of one of their categories. Then ask if any other group had that category. Repeat this with different groups until all categories have been identified.

Then show **slide 8** and facilitate a whole-group discussion, as needed, to guide the discussion toward *academic*, *financial*, and *support* (or synonyms of those terms).

Sample Student Responses:

- **Academic**: "My grades aren't good enough." "School doesn't teach me how to do a job."
- **Financial**: "I don't have enough money to pay for college." "You only get scholarships if you're smart."
- **Support:** "No one in my family has gone to college." "Everyone is too busy to help me."

30 minutes

Knowledge Building

Facilitator's Note: Activity Preparation

Before beginning this activity, hang the attached **Station Posters** around the room. There are three posters: Academic, Financial, and Support. Place three copies of the attached **High School Transcript** handout at the Academic Station for students to share.

Display **slide 9** and share with students that academic concerns, costs, and feeling unsupported are some of the most common challenges students face when pursuing postsecondary education. Give each student a copy of the attached **Overcoming Challenges** handout. Preview the activity by letting students know that they will visit three different stations (Academic, Financial, and Support) to learn about ways to overcome those obstacles. Let students know they have 8–10 minutes to complete the task at each station, taking notes on their handout. Divide the class evenly into three groups, and have each group begin at a different station. Tell students that they are to stay with their group as they visit all three stations.

- **Academic Station:** Students learn about a transcript and the story it tells. They should read the poster, analyze the High School Transcript handout, and answer the questions in the *Academics* section of their Overcoming Challenges handout.
- **Financial Station:** Students compare paying for college with paying for expensive sneakers. Using the vocabulary words and definitions from their Overcoming Challenges handout: *Pell Grant, Loan, Scholarship, Work-Study, Oklahoma's Promise,* and *FAFSA*. Students match each term with the sneaker payment option on the poster, then answer the question in the *Financial* section of their handout.
- **Support Station:** Students identify people who can support them as they begin their journey toward future goals. They record those individuals in the *Support* section of their Overcoming Challenges handout.

As students work, monitor the time and visit each station to answer any questions. Give students approximately 8 minutes at each station to complete their tasks. When students are done at the Financial Station, use the hidden **slide 11** to check their work, then reset the station by moving the sticky notes containing the vocabulary words back to their original location.

When students have completed one station, transition to **slide 10** and direct them to move to the next station: Academic → Financial → Support → academic. Return to **slide 9** and repeat this process until all groups have visited each station.

Facilitator's Note: Guiding the Activity

Different stations may need different amounts of support. As you circulate, take a moment to listen to their discussions and see if they are making connections.

- **Academic Station:** Students should notice that Jane, whose transcript they are analyzing, is not a 4.0 student but shows strengths in science and an interest in choir. They should also observe that her grades improve each year and that her transcript reflects her growth.
- **Financial Station:** Students use vocabulary words related to paying for college and connect them to ways to pay for something expensive they want. Encourage students to jot down questions about these terms in the margins of their handout to revisit later.
- **Support Station:** Students use a tree metaphor to visualize sources of support. For each part of the tree, they identify at least one person:
  - **Roots:** "Who keeps you rooted?"—friends, family, or others who remind them what matters most.
  - **Trunk:** "Who gives you strength?"—people who help them stay focused when challenges arise.
  - **Branches:** "Who lifts you up?"—mentors, coaches, or others who offer encouragement.
  - **Leaves:** "Who is growing like you?"—peers or relatives on a similar path.

After students have visited all three stations, bring the group together and show **slide 12**. Have students think about what they learned at the stations by asking the questions on the slide:

- Which challenge (academic, financial, or support) might be the hardest for you to overcome? Why?
- What is the name of a resource or person who might help you with that challenge?

Ask for volunteers to share their responses. Then move to **slide 13**. Have students reflect on their learning by asking the questions on the slide:

- What's one thing you learned today that makes college feel more possible for you?
- What is one step you could take next semester to prepare for life after high school?

Ask for volunteers to share.

5 minutes

Wrap-Up

Display **slide 14**. Ask students to follow along while you read the scenario aloud:

“James is a junior in high school with a 3.5 GPA. He’s passionate about computers and hopes to major in computer science at a four-year university.

He lives with his parents and younger sister. His mom is a cashier, and his dad works in construction. There’s very little savings, and most of their income is spent on rent, food, and bills. His parents are supportive, but they can't help financially with college.

What are some things James can do to help pay for college?”

Give students a few moments to recall what they learned today about financial aid. Ask them what options the example student, James, might have to help them pay for college.

Sample Student Responses:

- James could get a part-time job.
- He could apply for scholarships.

Show **slide 15**. Ask students to follow along while you read the scenario aloud:

“Elijah is a sophomore. He’s a quiet, low-key student who shows up, completes most assignments, and stays out of trouble. He makes mostly Bs and Cs, has a 2.8 GPA, and takes standard-level classes.

Elijah has started thinking about college now that his friends are talking about applications, scholarships, and letters of recommendation. He worries that he hasn’t done anything notable at school to add to a college application or that teachers could write about him in a letter of recommendation.

What can Elijah do in the last two years of high school to make him stand out to colleges?”

Give students a few moments to recall what they learned today about being academically prepared for a postsecondary education. Ask them to suggest actions the example student, Elijah, can take in the last two years of high school to make them stand out to colleges.

Sample Student Responses:

- He could turn in all of his assignments and raise his grades.
- Elijah could ask the counselor about more advanced classes.

Display **slide 16**. Ask students to follow along while you read the scenario aloud:

“Janelle is a senior at Eastview High School. She’s independent, hardworking, and focused on doing well in school. She has a 3.5 GPA and is on track to graduate. Janelle wants to go to college, but she’s having trouble taking the next steps.

Janelle hasn’t filled out the FAFSA, visited any colleges, or asked for recommendation letters. She feels overwhelmed by the process because her parents didn’t go to college and don't know how to help her.

Who can Janelle turn to for guidance?”

Give students a few moments to recall what they learned today about support systems. Ask them who the example student, Janelle, could turn to for guidance regarding financial aid, applications, and enrollment in a postsecondary institution.

Sample Student Responses:

- Janelle could reach out to her school counselor.
- She could ask her friends who are going to college for advice.

Show **slide 17** and ask the group, "Are there resources and scholarships that could help you go to college here?" Ask for students to keep this question in mind as they go on their campus tour.

Research Rationale

Acquiring knowledge about educational requirements for various careers helps students align their career aspirations with ideas about postsecondary education, which increases educational attainment (Perry et al., 2016). This is important because college can be a life-altering experience for students. For example, earning a bachelor's degree will allow students to earn, on average, $1 million more than high school graduates over the course of their careers (Starrett et al., 2022). College also offers students an opportunity to build relationships with mentors and peers that will benefit them throughout their careers (D'Agostino, 2022). College graduates tend to have more job satisfaction, jobs that offer a greater sense of accomplishment, more independence and opportunities for creativity, and more social interactions in their jobs than non-college graduates (Wolniak & Engberg, 2019). Additionally, college graduation increases the chances of employment. Over the last 20 years, the unemployment rate for college graduates has been approximately half that of high school graduates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Postsecondary education helps students develop skills that prepare them for careers in the tech-driven economy, including nonroutine, abstract skills that aid in problem-solving, multitasking, and creativity (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013).

The campus visit activity will help students and administrators set expectations for students to meet Oklahoma's Academic Standards of being college, career, and citizenship-ready (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2025), as well as The K20 Center's College and Career Preparation Standards for ninth grade (K20 Center, 2025, standard 9.3.1).

Resources

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- K20 Center. (2025). Student college and career preparation standards 6–12. https://k20center.ou.edu/collegeandcareerpreparation
- Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2025). *Oklahoma academic standards*. https://oklahoma.gov/education/services/standards-learning/oklahoma-academic-standards.html
- Oreopoulos, P., & Petronijevic, U. (2013). Making college worth it: A review of research on the returns to higher education (Working Paper No. 19053). *National Bureau of Economic Research.* https://doi.org/10.3386/w19053
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- Wolniak, G. C., & Engberg, M. E. (2019). Do "high-impact" college experiences affect early career outcomes? *The Review of Higher Education, 42(3),* 825–858. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0021