

PROGRAM:

LINK's Freshman Orientation: Student to Student

OBJECTIVES:

More and more studies show that if students have a positive experience in their first year of high school, the chance for success increases dramatically. Walla Walla High School's new LINK transition program provides the structure for freshmen to receive support and guidance from juniors and seniors. Junior and senior high school students know first-hand that the transition to high school can sometimes be overwhelming. Therefore, LINK provides leadership training to select juniors and seniors to be LINK Leaders, in order that the school can provide a student-to-student support network.

Walla Walla High School's (Wa-Hi) LINK Program includes a high-energy freshman orientation. The orientation is dedicated to help freshman students feel welcome and comfortable about their first year of high school. LINK Student Leaders are an integral part of the orientation because they are the positive role models, motivators, leaders and teachers who help freshmen discover what it takes to be successful when transitioning to high school - facilitating freshman success student-to-student.

Not only do the trained juniors and seniors provide support to freshmen, but Wa-Hi's LINK Program also benefits the LINK Student Leaders. This program helps LINK juniors and seniors gain leadership and life skills.

This program is also dedicated to aiding the high school in building a more inclusive school culture, which strengthens the whole student body and contributes to increased student success.

LOCATION:

4-Year High School

DESCRIPTION:

LINK began school year 2009 – 2010 with a high- powered Freshman Orientation that welcomed freshmen to their new school, helping freshmen gain confidence about going to high school. The orientation also introduced freshman students to resources and strategies that will contribute to their high school success.

LINK is dedicated to connecting freshman students with a variety of activities throughout the school year. These activities provide a continuous LINK to high school programs and activities, connecting freshman students with resources.

Walla Walla High School's first LINK Freshman Orientation was held the day prior to first day of school between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. The orientation began in the gymnasium and then small group breakouts were provided in classrooms. Event staff included: one facilitator, six LINK Crew Coordinators (support staff), 85 LINK Student Leaders, a high school counselor and teacher, along with six student volunteers.

10 to 11 a.m. was dedicated to event preparation and energizing LINK Student Leaders. The preparation hubbub was full of positive energy and music that helped maintain that energy. Once LINK Student Leaders completed their prep for the day, the facilitator then solicited volunteers for a variety of assignments to welcome freshmen and then get them to where they need to go. Group pictures were then taken and the facilitator provided one more pep talk, “Remember... LINK creates the ENERGY!!” The facilitator led *The Countdown*: “10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2...” (silent one with “pointer finger 1”) and repeated *The Countdown* three times. “Everybody ready?...MUSIC!!”

Once everyone was in place, a LINK Student Leader welcomed freshmen before one set of gymnasium doors was opened. 427 freshmen then steadily streamed through and were loudly welcomed by *The Cheering Tunnel of Greeters*. Some freshmen seemed quite surprised by the rambunctious welcome. Once they went through an approximate 20 foot long Tunnel of Greeters, freshman students were welcomed and directed to the nametag tables and to the bleachers. Once the bleachers started to fill-up, some LINK Student Leaders initiated *The Wave* with the bleacher crowd. Some LINK Student Leaders also started cheering “Freshman Power, Freshman Power...”

Once everyone was in the bleachers, the facilitator led a number of large group ice- breakers. Freshmen were then matched with their LINK Student Leaders, who led them to a classroom for a two-hour small group orientation. That session concluded with a campus tour. LINK Student Leaders provided costumes and/or props for their group tour. Some group themes included:

• Punch balloons	• Masks and capes (like Zorro)	• Aprons & oven mitts
• Dust masks	• Birthday hats and noise makers	• Pinwheels
• Caution tape	• Pirate hats & hooks	• Stars
• Headbands with feathers	• Crowns	• Fireman hats
• Polka dot bow ties	• Nerf swords	• Combat hats and “smears”
• Star sunglasses and blowing bubbles	• Surveyor ribbon belts and head bands	• Students were dressed-up as presents/gifts
• Variety of baseball caps	• Pirate eye patch	• Newspaper hats

The campus tour concluded with a group picture at the Spirit Rock. Everyone was then directed to return to the gymnasium, where event closure was provided.

As they were excused, freshmen picked up a high school t-shirt on the way out. LINK Student Leaders were asked to stay and help with clean up. Clean up was quick. The facilitator then asked the student leaders to sit in the bleachers, where their closure was provided. Closure included a big “Thank you!!”

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:

- Fall 2008, GEAR UP staff provided Link Crew (a program available through *the boomerang project*) information to the high school principal.
- The principal then reviewed the information and solicited staff input.
- Wa-Hi staff supported implementing this new freshman transition support program and the high school's ASB Advisor volunteered to become the school's LINK Facilitator.
- Winter 2009, Wa-Hi ASB Advisor attended a 3-day Link Crew training provided by *the boomerang project* (paid for by GEAR UP).
- After training, a staff team was formed, comprised of 6 LINK Crew Coordinators (Support Staff).
- By June 2009, the LINK Team recruited and screened 125 LINK student applicants. The LINK Team then coordinated a couple of summer fun sessions for LINK Student Leaders.
- On August 20 and 21, 2009, 85 LINK Student Leaders completed the training so that they could help lead the Freshman Orientation provided before the first day of school.
- Freshman Orientation was provided the day prior to the first day of school.

PREPARATION ACTIVITIES:

85 high school juniors and seniors successfully completed LINK's application, interview and screening process, along with a 2-day training that was held the week prior to Freshman Orientation.

Training was provided in the high school's auditorium and gymnasium. The LINK team included one LINK Facilitator and six LINK Coordinators (support staff). During the training, the facilitator kept everyone in constant movement, providing participants the opportunity to meet as many new faces as possible. The facilitator led numerous icebreakers and challenges that helped build leadership skills, communication skills and practice challenges – small group exercises designated specifically for the Freshman Orientation.

LINK Crew Coordinators served as role models in following instructions and assisted the facilitator with “extra hands” and behind-the-scene details.

Throughout the training, the facilitator let LINK Student Leaders know that:

1. “We appreciate you.”
2. “YOU will create the energy.”
3. “YOU have the cool factor.”
4. Reviewed the schedule for the Freshman Orientation often.
5. Referred to their LINK Leader Handbook constantly.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

LINK Student Leaders contact freshmen when important events are coming up. Two fall events included the school dance held the first Saturday of the school year and the Fall Club Fair. LINK Student Leaders also hosted a Tailgate Party at the Homecoming Football game for freshmen.

Walla Walla High School's LINK Facilitator and Coordinators schedule monthly sessions, many during lunch, providing regular opportunities for LINK Student Leaders and freshman students to connect. LINK staff members plan to provide stand-alone freshmen events, as opposed to tagging onto a school-wide event.

It has been determined that the LINK Facilitator should have some support. Therefore, more staff will receive Link Crew Training.

COSTS OR COST CONSIDERATIONS:

The major project cost considerations were the following:

Facilitator Training and follow-up training	\$2,500
Teacher stipends during the summer months (40 hrs. x 4 teachers)	4,000
Teacher stipend during the school year (\$1,500 x 4)	6,000
Facilitator Training for two more staff	4,000
Food	1,500
T-shirts	1,500
Supplies	250
Total	\$19,750

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LINK at Walla Walla High School is an adaptation of the Link Crew program created by *the boomerang project*. You can access more information on their website:

<http://www.boomerangproject.com/>