

High School Parent Guidebook

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*“There are two great things that you can give your children:
one is roots, the other is wings.” Hodding Carter*

The Transition to High School

Students need the support and guidance of their parents during this important transition period.

High school presents students with a variety of new opportunities and challenges. High schools are usually larger in size and students often find that the coursework is more difficult. Students also find that they're expected to be more independent, more focused, and more responsible.

For the first time, students are taking courses that earn credits towards graduation. The grades they earn in their high school courses are also more important. High school grades help determine the kinds of jobs students can get and the colleges they'll be able to get into.

Most students feel excited and a little apprehensive as they start high school. Students wonder if they'll fit in, whether or not they'll like their teachers, and if they'll be able to succeed in the courses they're taking. During this transition period, it's important to keep the lines of communication open. Talk to your children, and listen to what they say. Let them know that you're there to help them make the transition to high school as smooth as possible.

Of course, this is not only a transition period for students. It's also a time of transition for parents. With each passing year, you see your children becoming more self-sufficient and independent. You also see your role as a parent changing.

During these high school years, it's very important that you continue to be involved in your children's lives. You need to make sure that your children are doing well in school and that they're making good choices and decisions. You also need to make sure that your children understand that with increased independence comes increased responsibility.

"It's important for students to get their year off to a good start. During the first few weeks of school, parents need to make sure that their children's classes are going well and that they're getting involved in school activities." Thomas Cole, Principal



High School Basics

Most high schools have a handbook that provides information on their policies, procedures, code of conduct, rules, and regulations. Read through your school's handbook and keep it for reference. If you have any questions, call the school office.

School calendar

Every school has a calendar that shows when each grading period begins and ends and when their school will be closed for holidays and vacations. Many school calendars also include dates for testing, parent meetings, conferences, and exams. Write all of these dates on your calendar at home.



Attendance policies

Schools have attendance policies that encourage regular attendance, while allowing students to be absent if they're ill. If your child is going to be absent for more than a couple of days, see if your school has a procedure for getting assignments, and try to get some work that can be done at home.

If your child has an extended illness or chronic health problem, get documentation from your child's physician and give it to the principal.

Graduation requirements

All high schools have academic requirements that students must meet in order to graduate. As a rule, students must pass a certain number of required courses and earn a minimum number of credits. In some states, students must also pass a state required test before they can graduate.

To ensure that students are making satisfactory academic progress, most high schools also have specific requirements that students must meet in order to advance to the next grade level.

School counselors

Most high school students have a school counselor. Counselors monitor academic progress, help students choose courses, and talk to students about their career goals and educational options. Counselors are also available to answer questions, to listen, and to help students figure out how to deal with difficult situations. *Make sure that your child knows how to go about seeing his/her counselor.*

If you have a question, need information, or if your child needs help, contact your child's counselor by phone or e-mail. Counselors are excellent resources for both students and parents.



Programs and courses

High school students have a number of required courses they have to take in order to graduate (math, history, English, etc.). While freshman schedules are mostly filled with required courses, each year students have more time for courses they “elect” or choose to take. Electives give students the opportunity to gain knowledge and develop skills in their areas of interest.

Four-year colleges want students to be prepared for college-level work. College bound students, therefore, need to choose college prep courses (foreign language, advanced math, etc.) for many of their electives.

Most high schools offer a variety of programs in order to meet the needs of their students. These often include career and technology programs, special education programs, and programs that make it possible for students to take college courses while they're still in high school (dual-enrollment courses).

Students who are in the right courses and programs are happier and more successful. If your child doesn't enjoy school or is struggling academically, ask your child's counselor if there might be a more appropriate program or set of courses for your child.

Scheduling

Most schools ask students to choose their courses for the following year in the early spring. Students need to take the scheduling process very seriously. Before choosing their courses, they need to investigate and carefully consider all of their course options.

Go through all of the scheduling information, read the course descriptions, and help your child choose his/her courses for the following year. Make sure that your child signs up for the courses that are required for graduation and that he/she chooses the most appropriate electives.

If you have any questions, call your child's counselor. Do not just assume that you can change a class later. Once a student's schedule is set, it may be very difficult to change a class.

"Too often we focus on the negative - the low grade or the area that needs work. We need to spend more time identifying and developing our students' strengths." Andrea Royer, School Counselor

School rules / Code of conduct

In order to provide students with a safe environment that encourages learning, schools need to have rules regarding student conduct and behavior. Most students understand that rules are necessary and they follow them. For the students who don't follow the rules, there are consequences.

Consequences can range anywhere from detention to expulsion. The severity of the consequence generally depends on the seriousness of the offense and the past history of the student(s) involved. While rules vary from school to school, no school will allow weapons, drugs, smoking, alcohol, or harassment.

Bullying can be a problem in high school. If your child complains that a student is bullying or harassing him/her in any way, notify the principal or counselor. If you ever hear of a situation that could put your child or another individual at risk, contact the principal immediately.

Extracurricular activities



Studies show that students who are involved in extracurricular activities enjoy school more, and they do better academically. Fortunately, most high schools have a variety of clubs, teams, and organizations that students can join.

All high schools offer some, if not all, of the following: speech and drama programs, athletic teams, clubs, service organizations, and music programs. In many schools, students can also work as an office aide or teacher's assistant. Encourage your child to get involved in at least two or three school-related activities.

“We want students to be involved; however, sometimes we see students who are overcommitted. These students are trying to do too much and they're stressed out. Students need to realize that quality is more important than quantity.” Kathi Miller, Counselor

Eligibility requirements



In addition to state eligibility requirements, many high schools have their own requirements that students must meet before they can play a sport. For example, athletes may be required to maintain a minimum grade point average in a certain number of classes.

At many high schools, eligibility requirements also apply to students who participate in activities like cheerleading and student government. If you have questions on eligibility, check your school's handbook, talk to the athletic director, or see the school counselor.

Summer school

Many high schools offer a limited number of courses during the summer. Students who are short on credits or who have failed a required course should go to summer school if they can. This will help keep them on track for graduation.

If you think summer school may be appropriate for your child, get information on the dates, cost, and courses offered. For information and advice, talk to your child's counselor.



Information Parents Need to Have

- ▶ **School calendar**
- ▶ **Attendance policies**
- ▶ **Graduation requirements**
- ▶ **State testing information**
- ▶ **Academic requirements for each grade level**
- ▶ **Required and elective courses by grade level**
- ▶ **Information on the scheduling process**
- ▶ **School rules / Code of conduct**
- ▶ **Information on extracurricular activities**
- ▶ **Eligibility requirements**
- ▶ **Summer school options**
- ▶ **How to contact your child's counselor**

If you need information or have questions on any of the above, call the high school office or contact your child's counselor.



The Academic Record

Parents need to know and understand the information that's included in their child's academic record. Parents also need to understand terms such as GPA, class rank, four-year plan, and transcript.

Grade point average (GPA)

A student's grade point average, or GPA, is an indicator of how well that student is performing in school. A student's GPA is simply the average of the student's semester (or end of term) grades, starting with the freshman year. Because colleges use GPAs to help them decide whether or not to accept a student, having a high GPA can be very important for college bound students.

Although there are variations, most high schools use a 4.0 scale in which an A=4, B=3, C=2, and D=1. Students with all As have a 4.0 grade point average. Students who have Bs in half their courses and Cs in the other half have a 2.5 GPA.

Many schools have "weighted grades" for honors, AP (Advanced Placement), and/or IB (International Baccalaureate) courses. If a school has weighted grades, then a grade in a weighted course is worth more than it is in a non-weighted course. For example, an A in an honors course might be worth five points instead of the usual four points. *Regardless of the method used, the higher the grades, the higher the GPA.*

In order to understand how your school figures GPAs, you need to know if your school uses quarter, semester, or end-of-year grades. If your school has weighted grades, you also need to know how these grades are used in determining a student's GPA.

"I'm trying to bring my grade point average up this year so that I can get into college. But when you're a senior, it's really hard to bring your GPA up. I wish I would have paid more attention to my grades earlier." Jeremy Montgomery, Senior

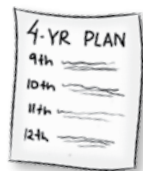
Class rank

Many high schools use class rank to show where a student stands academically in relation to the other members of his/her graduating class. The student with the highest GPA is number one, the student with the second highest GPA is number two, etc.

Class rank is usually written as two numbers. The first number represents the student's place in the class. The second number represents the total number of students in the class (e.g., 35/295). Because GPAs are used to determine class rank, a student must have a high GPA in order to have an impressive class rank. Like GPA, class rank is one of several factors that colleges use in the admissions process.

Four-year high school plan

A four-year high school plan is a listing of the courses a student plans to take during his/her freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. Students should have a four-year high school plan by the time they begin their freshman year.



When making a four-year high school plan, you and your child need to consider graduation requirements, college recommended courses, career plans, and, if your child wants to play a sport in college, athletic eligibility requirements.

Review and revise your child's four-year plan each year, making adjustments for academic performance, personal interests, revised career plans, and changes in curriculum offerings. The best time to review and revise your child's four-year plan is when you're choosing courses for the following school year.

If you ever have a question, or if you want to make sure that your child is taking the right courses, schedule an appointment with your child's counselor.

“The 4-year plan my parents and I made when I started high school has helped a lot. I’ve taken all of the courses I need for college, and I’ve still been able to take chorus and art.” Chris Adams, Senior