

Success in the last year of middle school

Part Two

High school is just around the corner!
Are you and your eighth grader ready to make the jump?

Important things to know about— Making the transition into high school

- Planning which high school classes to take.
- Questions kids ask about high school.
- Making the most of a \$30,000 investment.
- Parent involvement.

Getting ready for high school classes

When your teen is still in middle school, you should start looking at what's ahead in high school. Ask for a catalog or curriculum guide, and read it carefully. It's the blueprint for your child's success. If there is a high-school planning event at the middle school, go and ask questions about anything that's not clear.

Then, sit down with your 8th grader, talk about the possibilities, and try to sketch out the whole three- or four-year high school journey. Depending on your child's abilities and interests, there may be quite a few choices to talk about. Of course you and your child can make changes to your plan as time goes on, but it's very helpful to have a big-picture plan instead of making decisions one year at a time.

There will be some requirements for math, science, English, social studies, health, foreign languages, fine arts, technology, and so on. It's important to encourage your child to take more than the school or state minimum in math and English.

As we've said before, make sure that your child takes as many classes as possible in math, science, and technology—especially math, which is the foundation for the others. High schools usually offer algebra, geometry, trigonometry, pre-calculus, and calculus, and students take them in that order.

What will high school be like?

All these questions about academic issues are important, but there are other questions too. Your 8th grader may also have questions or anxieties about:

- *How will I get to school?* There may be new school bus routes or whole new transportation systems to learn.
- *Where and when do I eat lunch?* The high school may offer several options at lunchtime.
- *How will I adjust to being the bottom of the social heap again?* Your child will go from being in the oldest grade of middle school to being in the youngest grade in high school. That can be a big jolt. If you and your child talk about it and prepare yourselves *for it, the transition won't be so harsh.*
- *Will I know anybody there? Will I make new friends?* Now is a good time to talk about what it means to make a friend and to **be** a friend. Remember that learning to build strong relationships is one of a young teenager's most important jobs.
- *Will the classes be a lot harder?* High-school work is usually more challenging than middle-school work, and teachers may have stricter standards about grades, turning in homework, and all that. Talk with your child about the school's expectations—and especially about **your** expectations—for making the best effort and doing the best work. That's an important part of becoming a responsible adult.

Of course, being a teenager, your 8th grader may not actually ask these questions out loud, in words. Bring the topics up in conversation yourself, when you can. Remember, teenagers love to talk about themselves, and they crave attention from the adults they care about.

Understanding the value of high school

People tell each other—and any kids who’ll listen—that you can’t get anywhere with **just** a high school diploma. Such statements are meant to encourage students to plan for more education after high school, and we make them with the best intentions. However, it may be that our best intentions are backfiring. “Selling” high school as a college prep program may be discouraging students. Students who don’t plan to go to a four-year college may think they don’t need to do well in high school. Even worse, they may think the skills they could be learning in high school aren’t really important to their lives.

We may also be giving an unintended message to the college-bound: it doesn’t matter what you learn or how you get the grades, just as long as you get them. The truth is that students can’t get **anywhere without** a solid high school education. It’s tragic that we aren’t helping **all** students take advantage of the huge investment their community has made in them.

Finally, telling students that they won’t find good jobs if they don’t go to college is simply not true.

Students need to know that there are good jobs available for those who bring good skills to work. Jobs such as carpentry, auto and RV repair, construction, and all the skilled trades (plumbing, electrical, heating & air-conditioning, etc.) don’t require college degrees but do require education beyond high school. **But no one succeeds in any kind of training after high school without having solid high-school skills to start with.**

Parents! If a college told you that it had a \$30,000 scholarship waiting for your child, wouldn’t you jump at it? Wouldn’t you make sure your child didn’t waste it? **That support**, that “scholarship opportunity” **does exist. It’s called high school.** The average high school in Washington State spends about \$7500 per high school student per year. Over four years, that **is** a “\$30,000 scholarship”—for skills that can take our kids anywhere, into any career path they choose, after high school.

Which kids succeed in high school? Which kids use their “scholarship opportunity” wisely? The kids whose parents stay involved in their education.

Staying involved as your child goes to high school

Parents have their own transition to make when their children start high school, and staying involved is a big part of the challenge. An absolutely **crucial** part. Research from the U.S. Department of Education shows that students whose parents who stay highly involved with their high school education are much more likely to earn a high-school diploma and go on to get technical training or a college degree.

Being involved doesn’t just mean going to meetings at the school. It means knowing what makes your children tick and taking a true interest in their activities and accomplishments. Learn their favorite subjects and favorite teachers. Discover what they like best about the school and the community. Encourage and praise their efforts. Support their inborn gifts, talents, and abilities.

Sound overwhelming? Let these simple “do” and “don’t” guidelines help you stay involved during your child’s high-school years.

DO—	DON’T—
1. Express high but realistic expectations.	1. Don’t underestimate your teen. Don’t let your teen do sloppy or incomplete work, either at home or at school.
2. Make sure your teen attends school regularly.	2. Don’t let your teen skip school—or duck any other obligations.
3. Encourage your teen to take challenging classes.	3. Don’t think that grades are more important than skills.
4. Make sure your teen does all homework before going on to other activities.	4. Don’t let anything come before your teen’s education.
5. Help your teen with choosing classes.	5. Don’t let your teen plan his or her class schedule at the last minute.
6. Encourage a well-rounded education including academic and professional/technical classes.	6. Don’t let your teen’s education be lopsided—balance is important.
7. Keep an eye on out-of-school activities, especially teen jobs.	7. Don’t let your teen work in a paid job more than 15 hours a week.
8. Encourage volunteering, job shadowing, and internships during high school.	8. Don’t let your teen be isolated from the community.
9. Get an accurate evaluation of your teen’s skills through an ASSET test given at your local community or technical college.	9. Don’t assume that A and B grades prove your teen has mastered skills.