



Freshmen Parent Boot Camp

Tips to Help You Survive High School



"When we adults think of children, there is a simple truth we ignore: childhood is not preparation for life, childhood is life. A child isn't getting ready to live- a child is living. The child is constantly confronted with the nagging question, 'What are you going to be?' Courageous would be the youngster who, looking the adult squarely in the face, would say, 'I'm not going to be anything; I already am.'" - Professor T. Ripaldi

High School is not just preparation for college. This will be a very active time for your child's growth and development- academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. You will be amazed at the changes in your child over the next four years! The best thing you can do as a parent is be involved, informed, and aware of what is going on in all areas. We hope that these tips shared by other parents will make the process a little easier.

Start shifting your role - There is a lot going on in high school and the emphasis clearly switches from you to the child being in charge of collecting and communicating information, advocating for themselves, and making decisions about classes/sports/clubs, etc. Your role is to help support them through the transition and allow them to become more independent each year, so by graduation you will feel more comfortable about them being able to handle themselves at college.

Four Year Plan - Make a long term plan with your student to start thinking about where he/she wants to be at the end of four years. The time goes by very quickly and it is better if you have an academic plan, a sports/activities plan, and a testing plan. It can always change, but it is good to go in with knowledge of how things should progress each year.

Communication - Parents need to be very proactive in pulling together various sources of school information. It is imperative that you remain engaged and informed and the best way is to read everything that comes your way. Familiarize yourself with the website, read the District E-news that comes out each Sunday, sign up for and read the PTSA E-news that comes out each Monday, read the Principal's quarterly newsletters, read Guidance department's quarterly newsletter, and always read emails from the school or district. They are very judicious on what they send out, so assume it is important and read it! If the Principal sends a letter or an email it usually has pertinent information enclosed - READ IT - same rule should apply if your Guidance Counselor sends an email to you - they reach out to you when you need to be involved in a discussion.

Use Available Resources - The PTSA has put together detailed FAQs that may answer many of your basic questions. They are available on the PTSA website located at <https://www.mhs-ptsa.com>. PTSA Board members are also happy to answer your questions, or direct you to someone who can. Our information is located on our website.

Honors/Regular Classes – How Much is Too Much? When a counselor, parent, or current student tells you to really look at the complete picture when choosing classes, *they really mean this*. Honor classes generally move faster and go more in depth than regular classes. It is best to review your particular student's workload with a counselor if you have any questions about honors versus regular classes. How much can your student handle with homework and after school activities...and still have fun being in high school?

Know the rules - Take a few minutes to look at the information section in your child's on-line Student Handbook. It is a great resource/reference for school and MTSD rules and regulations.

504 or IEP Plans - If you are a parent of a child with a 504 or an IEP don't assume that all teachers that your student will come in contact with will know about any modifications or support that your student may need. Don't forget about Gym/Health teachers, Coaches, Advisors, etc... who are often not kept in the Special Services loop. Send a friendly email to any teachers your child may be working with to: 1) remind them of any classroom practices or protocols that should be in place, 2) introduce them to your child and you (gentle way to convey concerns

without having to set up an appointment, etc...), 3) open up a line of communication should you find your student needs more support down the line.

Communication Protocol - When communicating with staff with regard to an issue your child might have, it is a good idea to keep copies of all emails. It is also a good idea to keep a paper trail if you are having difficulties communicating with a staff member. It is always best to start with the teacher, then move on to the supervisor, and finally to the principal if you can't get satisfactory answers. It also can't hurt to keep your guidance counselor in the loop with any issues that might be affecting your child's educational or emotional needs.

Allow Disappointments - We love our kids and want to believe in them, but sometimes they see and/or react to situations, problems, stories as the "Teenagers" they are and not the "Young Adults" we hope they are becoming. Listen to both sides of an issue/complaint/story before reaching a conclusion or reacting. It often helps to take a step back and review issues from an adult perspective. Our kids may be unhappy with outcomes from time to time, but this is where they often learn the most -- working through a challenge, understanding that their way is not always the right way, and learning to cope with a disappointment are all important life skills.

Volunteer - Ignore your child when they tell you NOT to volunteer or become involved! Get involved with PTSA volunteer efforts or with the activities that your student participates in. There are parent and booster clubs for most teams, activities, and clubs here at MHS. This is a big school with many options. It is highly unlikely that you and your child will be working or participating together - but this is your gateway into their lives, an opportunity to observe their new friends, learn about their growing interests and passions, and a great way to see and hear what is going on at MHS.

Join the PTSA/Attend a meeting - Being a member of the PTSA allows you to be a part of the many positive things we do to support the school. You can also sign-up for our weekly E-news to get the latest on all school events and volunteer activities. Attending a meeting is a great way to learn more about what is going on in the building and with the PTSA. It also gives you a chance to hear from the principal and ask questions.

Cell phones and Internet Use - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Texting, Group chats, WhatsApp, Internet use, etc... These activities can consume a lot of your teen's time if not monitored. It can be difficult to study or sleep when the phone is nearby, so limits are suggested during homework and bedtime. The internet/social media are great information and communication tools, but unchecked they can be unhealthy and even dangerous. Be aware that *sexting* is something that is increasing among high school kids. Make sure you have a discussion with your kids about this and other personal safety issues.

Friends - Pay attention to who your child's friends are. This is important at every age but especially high school when students frequently switch friend groups. Make sure they are making friends who reflect who you want them to be. Friends frequently have more influence at this age, so choose (and monitor) wisely. Get to know their parents too.

Sleep - Make sure your kids get enough sleep. As challenging as it is, turn off technology at a reasonable hour and have your children read a book or magazine. Turning off stimulating sources like the TV, phone, or computer will enable them to fall asleep and stay asleep more easily.

Communication with Teens - Keep the lines of communication open with your teen (even if they say they don't want it). Find ways to connect and not always be talking to them about grades, friends, choices, etc. Stay involved with your children even though they become more into themselves and their friends. Be the parent to drive to the movies, drive to parties, take them to the mall. Have the sleep overs at your house...Listen to their conversations, but try not to interject your opinions. Eat family meals together and support whatever school events they are in. Finding ways to share about your experiences in High School are also fun ways to connect. Have fun together - in a few short years they will be off to college!! Enjoy the time you have but always remember you are their parent not their "friend".

MHS Parking Lot - If you are driving your child to school, you probably know that traffic builds after 7:20-7:25 am and traffic backups occur. Earlier is better when it comes to driving in the morning! Be sure to follow the drop off procedures and only drop off students at the front entrance by the curb. Do not drive down parking lanes and let students out there. The parking lot is a very busy and potentially dangerous place at peak times and students crossing unexpected traffic flow are an accident waiting to happen. If a student is a Senior, they may apply for a parking permit in the spring/summer. Students must have a paid parking permit to park in the high school lot- no exceptions!

Academic Support - All teachers have after school help time. Be sure to write down what days your child's teacher is available after school. If they aren't available on a day that your child needs help, be sure they know that they can go to any teacher in that subject for help. All subject teachers work together, so they should be able to help with any questions.

Use the Counselors - Your student's guidance counselor is more than just a college counselor. Your student should get to know him/her before senior year so they have a good relationship before the college process begins. The counselors can help with many issues and the student or parent should not be afraid to contact them. Remember as a parent you are your student's best and only true advocate. Speak up if you have a concern or questions!

Fall Sports/Activities - It is very beneficial for students to be involved in a fall sport or activity. This gives students a chance to meet other students and get the full high school experience right in the beginning of the school year. Even if your student plays a spring sport, have them try something in the fall to enjoy the full benefit of being in high school. Many fall activities like sports, marching band, cheerleading, or dance team start in late summer giving many opportunities to get to know other kids before you get to school in the fall.

Senior Trip - Seniors have the opportunity to go to Disney World in spring of Senior year. Did you know that students can earn points (which become money) toward the cost of their Senior Trip? When a student participates in class activities (they are labeled as activities for Class of 2028, etc...) they can earn points by volunteering or participating in fundraisers. Many students and parents are not aware of this and it is a great way to defray costs.

Unit Lunch - All students at MHS share the same lunch period. Tables are set up in several areas outside the cafeteria to accommodate all of the students. This can be intimidating to some as it can be a challenge to find a table at first. Students should try to buddy up with someone on the first day so they can search for a table together. It is also helpful to bring lunch for the first few days until the process becomes easier. Normally once a table is chosen, the students stay there most of the year.

Student Tips for Parents:

- Encourage your student to email their teachers/peers instead of the parent emailing them (unless it's an emergency of course). It will leave a good impression on the teacher if the student is responsible and attentive.
- Check in to make sure your student is not staying up way past midnight to get homework done. More than a few late nights will only leave the student unprepared and exhausted for the next week or so.
- Encourage students to not only work hard but also to have fun! Go to sporting events, fundraisers, volunteer activities, etc. Breaking up the studying by attending some fun events really helps.
- Use National Honor Society tutors! MHS offers a wonderful opportunity for free peer tutoring that all students should take advantage of if they are struggling. It is entirely safe as well with sessions conducted in public locations (either high school or Mary Jacobs Library) and surveys are sent out every two weeks to make sure the tutees are comfortable with their tutors and vice versa.
- Just be there to talk to your son/daughter. Starting out the high school adventure, they might still think you're uncool (as a parent) and may avoid talking to you. However, towards the end of those four years, they usually need you as a support, and they also need someone to talk to in order to alleviate their stress. Always be open to listening!

For Students:

Realize the freshman year matters. When colleges evaluate a potential student's transcript, they typically will only see the grades from junior year, sophomore year, AND freshman year considering that the application process for college admissions usually takes place in the fall of the student's senior year, well before the 1st semester of senior grades are available. It's not that the colleges don't care about the senior grades and classes taken; it's simply the fact that access to this information is not available until later on after applications have been submitted; hence the reason why the initial decision for admission consideration is based on the first three years of high school, including freshman year.

The freshman year offers a "fresh start". Kids who have not taken their schooling seriously at the middle school level have an opportunity to "begin again" starting with the freshman year. The GPA, class rank, etc.. all begin anew as a freshman. What the student did during middle school does not carry over to high school.

Different academic expectations - There is usually a difference in the level of difficulty and expectations of the 8th grade course curriculum and the 9th grade Honors course curriculum. Typically, 9th grade Honors courses are much more challenging than are the 8th grade courses. They usually move faster and cover more material. This can be a bit of a shock for incoming freshmen.

Honors Classes - Taking two Honors classes in the areas/subjects that you are strong in is a much preferred option to taking four Honors classes and then not doing as well in them. Challenge yourself, but be realistic about what you can handle. Each student is different, but just make sure you can keep up with the class work load and balance the extra-curricular activities that you are involved in.

Preparing for final exams - This is not something that can be done in a cram session the night before. Students should begin getting ready for final exams well before finals week occurs.

Homework - Homework is essential and a big part of the high school experience. Don't neglect it, or think that it doesn't matter. It can make a big difference with grades. While there is no magic number, 90 minutes a night is a reasonable amount to study.

Become one's own advocate - Teachers at MHS care greatly about their students, but they are not mind readers. Students who are successful usually are asking questions and getting help when they don't understand something. Once in high school, the shift to the student seeking out the assistance and the help from the teachers becomes more the norm rather than the teacher making the initial effort to make sure the student is comprehending material. It is best for students to advocate for themselves with teachers and/or counselors.

Activities for students - There are plenty of activities for all students (choir, band, orchestra, cheerleading, dance team, sports, robotics, theater, drama, clubs, etc.) Encourage your student to try an after school club or sport. Studies show that students that are involved in at least one extra-curricular will have higher grades and have more school spirit. Also, many colleges and universities look at what types of involvement you have in your school, not just your grades and SAT/ACT scores. There is a complete list on the MHS website. Be sure to find a balance between academic responsibilities and after school activities. Everyone has a finite amount of time! Many colleges and universities now are "test scores optional" so involvement in extracurricular activities is even more important to add to your students college resume.

Peer Leaders - Students will have the opportunity to meet with their peer leaders (a selected, trained group of upperclassmen) throughout the year. Small groups of students meet with their leader and talk about issues that are important to teenagers. There is a set curriculum that is monitored by teachers, but actual lessons are done in a more informal way. It is easier and less threatening to talk about some of these issues with students closer to their own age.

Clubs - Students should try out several different clubs freshman year and then stick with the ones that they really like. They get to explore new interests while they meet and socialize with other groups of students. As they stick with the club, they have the opportunity to become an officer and further develop leadership and organizational skills. Most seniors wish they had tried more options as a freshman.

Community Service - If your child isn't already participating in a community service activity or organization; this is a great time to start. Not only is this an important and meaningful activity for their personal development, but it is also good for college applications. Many colleges and scholarship committees look for this type of sustained activity over the course of high school, so if your child is interested it is great to start early. This is a win/win for everyone!

Student to Student Tips:

- Use block scheduling to your advantage- be proactive with your homework and don't misuse the flexibility by procrastinating.
- Don't allow yourself to settle for lower grades because high school is harder- it's ok to go to help sessions and work hard because it will get you good results.
- Use study hall to your advantage- 84 minutes of homework done at school is 84 more minutes of sleep you can get at home!
- Don't freak out if classes feel hard at the beginning of the year. There is a period of time where the student has to get used to the teacher and the class and eventually there likely will be an upward curve in your grades.
- Don't be intimidated to get involved because you are a freshman and everyone else is older. You can make a difference at any age!

Sports:

Tryouts - If your child is interested in trying out for sports, check the Athletics tab on the MHS website for information about meetings and practices. Information is often given out during the course of the day, but your child has to be aware of announcements and be able to hear them. This is considered a student responsibility and they don't always hear or remember!

Schedules - If you are interested in going to a sporting event or knowing your child's sports schedule, check the Athletics Tab of the high school website where you can find schedules for all sports teams. You can download the schedule you are interested in, and even sign up to get automatic notifications if a game/meet/match is postponed or changed.

Communication - Most sports teams have a website or some other method of communicating. These are usually run by a parent volunteer through the Booster Clubs. Be sure you know what the method is so you can get the information you need. The Athletics tab has a section called "Schedules (All Sorts)" that will give you the addresses of any team websites. Students will often communicate through Facebook groups, group chats, or Twitter; so it is easy for the adults to miss information.

Booster Clubs - Most sports have booster clubs that help support the team and provide for needs above and beyond what the school budget will cover. Many of these charge booster club or membership fees. These fees go a long way in providing a quality experience for your child. Please talk to your booster club officers if you have questions about the fee or don't understand where the money is going to. All booster clubs are required to follow very specific guidelines for the collection and usage of fees and work with the coaches to determine the best use of the funds raised.

Playing in College - Students who are interested in playing sports in college need to let their coach and guidance counselor know as soon as possible. There are many special rules and restrictions that can apply depending on what level your child is likely to participate in. Guidance counselor Keith Glock is the one who advises on NCAA requirements for athletes. It is never too early to understand the process!

Looking Ahead to College:

Organization, Organization, Organization - Become familiar with Genesis, this helps keep students on track. . Try to get your student to do the regular checking, not you. Let your student have increasing amounts of responsibility regarding studying, following assignments, etc., over these next 4 years. If you handle everything for them (talking to the teacher, checking for missing or missed assignments, studying for tests, etc...), they will have a much harder time in college.

Assignment Books/Calendars - Develop a system to record assignments in. Homework, activities, and deadlines get more complicated each year so it really helps to have a system in place that your child is comfortable with.

Attend Guidance Department Presentations - The College Series presentations are very helpful and will keep you on track through the process. There are also other informative presentations for various issues facing students today. If you can't make it, there is almost always a PowerPoint presentation posted on the Guidance website within a few days of the presentation.

Naviance - This is the online tool that MHS uses for learning styles, career inventories, and college planning. Your student will get a login and password Freshman year. Each year there are activities that the students need to do culminating in college planning/application assistance Senior Year. You will need to be familiar with this system by Spring of Junior year (if not before). Be sure to get your child's sign on so you can have access.

Start College visits early - Start locally, possibly even the summer between sophomore and junior year. It is good to look at different types of schools so your child can get a sense of what feels comfortable. Spread out after that. You often don't know what you're even looking at until you've seen several. Take the tours and listen to the presentations whenever possible, but even casual visits can be helpful.

PSAT/ACT/SAT - College related testing starts sophomore year with the optional PSAT in the fall. By Junior year, the PSAT is highly recommended as prep to the "real" test and also as a means to get National Merit recognition or scholarships. Plan to take the ACT/SAT several times, beginning at least in junior year, if not sooner. There are prep classes, too. The kids who score really high usually have taken it several times as well as done practice classes, practice tests, etc... so nothing is really a surprise. The PSAT is available for 10th and 11th graders. It is not recommended for 9th graders due to the material covered.

Prep Classes - MHS offers free test prep classes afterschool on Tuesdays and Thursdays! Many people are not aware that this is an option. You can also get information about tutors and other prep classes through Guidance although other parents may give you a better idea of what worked for them. Although prep classes are not mandatory, some type of preparation is definitely recommended prior to taking tests. It helps the student become more comfortable with the format and type of questioning and helps highlight any areas that need extra work.

Variety is Good - Encourage your child to try a wide variety of classes so he/she is exposed to many different areas of study. It's a really cheap way to help get a direction for a major.

AP Classes - If your child is planning on trying to get into a highly selective college or major, start taking AP classes by sophomore year, which is usually the earliest you can take them. It's a totally new way to study and learn, but very much like college. Some colleges will require or "desire" a certain number of courses. Colleges like to see that a student has taken challenging courses, so even one AP class makes a difference. In general, colleges like to see that a student is challenging him/herself in ways that are appropriate to their major.

Summer camps and programs - Think about summer camps by Junior year—this is a great way to test drive colleges cheaply, get your child used to being away for a week or so at a time, and try on different areas of study. Many colleges and universities offer a wide array of educational sleep away programs in the summer months.

Employment - If time allows, it is always a good experience for a student to have some kind of part time job. It helps them learn how to work with different kinds of people and gives them some early experience dealing with money. Also, colleges like to see if a student can manage their time. Teens who can handle a job on top of school often show that they have the time management skills to handle college.

Essays - Save outstanding writing samples, especially if they have any personal stories/references in them. They come in very handy at college essay writing time. This is even helpful when applying for special programs/trips. You can also keep a file where you list all activities the student has engaged in – start at 8th grade because by 12th, all of the younger years might be a blur.

Be prepared for some stress - It's a pretty stressful time (for us and them), especially junior year and first semester senior year. It's all very intimidating--your child will be fine and will end up where they are supposed to be if you support them and trust their leanings. There's a fine balance between support and direction, versus pressure. They are under an incredible amount of pressure as they go through the application, acceptance, and decision process. Help them through it with extra love and support.

Quick Tips

Students can carry their backpacks during school. This is recommended as getting to your locker between classes isn't always possible and many students never use their lockers. If a student has a problem with their locker, they should go see the MHS Main Office Staff.

To take your child out of school they need a note to take in the morning to the main office attendance desk and they will receive a pass to leave class. You are also able to use Genesis to mark your student absent.

When students are absent or late for school, a parent always needs to log in to Genesis or call before 10 am to verify their absence or the student will be considered “truant”. A note must be sent the next day to make sure the school is aware of the reason for the absence. There are very specific policies regarding excused and unexcused absences-make sure you understand the difference.

Students need to use their student email address for all school related communications. This is the address that teachers and counselors will use to communicate with them. Students need to make it a habit to check this email!

Make sure you are talking to your child's friends' parents. There's a whole new set of friends for children in high school and the parent network is your best bet for knowing what is going on!

Additional Resources:

“Academic and Extracurricular Suggestions for 9th and 10th Graders”

<http://www.road2college.com/parent-of-12th-grader/>

Cougar Connect- Student run club that organizes spirit activities for the students and offers sports info. You can like them on Facebook or follow them on Twitter for the latest Cougar news.

Follow your administrators on Instagram:

@mhs_cougar_den @vpmacdaddy @vpvitale_mhs @vp_cucc