

## **Parent Tips for a Smooth Transition from Middle to High School**

Making the move from middle school to high school can be a traumatic transition for some freshman. The changes involved in that move can be overwhelming at times, whether they are social, academic, or physical. Suddenly, students that were guided through the academic process by parents and teachers are expected to perform much more independently than ever before. At the same time, high school is often a period where friendships change, as students struggle to figure out where they belong. The good news is that there are plenty of ways parents can help their new high school student adjust to the transition.

### **Understand Potential Stressors**

According to well-known pediatrician *Dr. Paul*, there are many factors that can cause stress at this time of life, including:

- Changes to school structure, including more teachers, larger school building, and faster pace
- Changes to body image, as students begin attending with others who are basically young adults
- Changes in friends as students meet new people in new classes

With these changes come fear – fear of not fitting in, not keeping up, and not measuring up to parental expectations. While many students may not voice these fears to their parents, that doesn't mean the anxiety doesn't exist. Parents need to tune into potential stressors in their child's life during this time, so they can proactively help the child work through those anxieties and concerns.

### **Provide Reassurance**

Once parents understand the factors that contribute to the stress of the high school transition, they can provide reassurances to their child that will help him make it through the stressful changes. *Fox News* suggests that parents avoid brushing off a child's concerns by simply telling them "it will be alright." Instead, talk to your child to understand the specific anxiety he is dealing with so you can provide appropriate reassurance for that particular situation. For example, if your child is concerned about making new friends in high school, remind him/her of all the times he/she has successfully made friends in the past. Talk to him/her about activities he/she could get involved in to meet other students that share his/her interests. Bring his/her strengths to the forefront to help him/her understand why his/her current friends chose to spend time with him/her in the first place.

If academics are the primary worry for your child, help him/her create a schedule that includes ample time for homework, as well as time for activities and friends. Set up a homework station that includes all the supplies he/she will need to complete assignments. Purchase a planner and show him/her how to write down assignments to make it easier to keep track of tests and project due dates.

### **Use Transition Services**

North Murray High School offers a one-day orientation during the summer that brings middle school students into the high school setting. RSVP info will be given via Bagley in Spring 2020.

### **Tune into the System**

High school is also a new experience for parents, so it is important for parents to learn the ropes right along with their students. Attend Parent Nights, back to school nights, and open houses that allow you the opportunity to meet faculty and administration. *School Family* recommends that parents work with teachers to keep up with their child's academic work and adjustment. While this is a time to step back and let students explore their new environment on their own, they also need to know their parents are there working with them to help them succeed.

### **Encourage Activities**

When students get involved in extracurricular activities in high school, they cultivate a sense of belonging and meet new friends with similar interests to their own. *Bright Hub Education* also reminds parents and students that those activities are essential to building up a student's resume for college or the professional world. They might even lead to scholarships after graduation. Activities help students explore interests outside the classroom as well, whether their interests lie in sports, academic clubs, or the arts. While activities are an important part of the high school experience, too many activities at one time can create undue stress on a student trying to adjust to the academic rigors of high school. Parents need to ensure their students are discerning about their choices in extracurricular activities so that the students enjoy their additional clubs and competitions without wondering how they will find the time to complete homework assignments.

### **Use Summer to Bone Up**

If your child struggled with a particular subject throughout middle school, help him/her strengthen his/her skills over the summer before high school begins. There are plenty of activities you can do together to improve specific skills. If the problem goes beyond your own scope of expertise, consider hiring a tutor or utilizing online learning tools over the summer months to help her refine his skills before high school begins. By the same token, most students suffer from at least a degree of learning loss over summer break. Since the first few weeks of high school may be challenging enough without the need to regain skills, consider keeping up the learning over vacation. It doesn't have to be a full-time endeavor – a few minutes a day of math or reading a couple of books can help keep your student's head in the academic ring once the first bell rings at the start of the school year.

### **Cultivate Time Management Skills**

High school is the time when time itself is at a premium. As students learn to juggle a larger homework load, after-school activities, and a part-time job in some cases, the strain of managing those precious hours can become very stressful. Meet the problem head-on by instilling time management skills into your student prior to the start of high school. Show him/her how to organize his/her daily schedule to ensure he/she has time for everything he/she needs to do. Teach him/her how to maintain a personal calendar to help remember upcoming events. Help structure the room, particularly the study center, so supplies are easily found and precious time is not spent looking for evasive pencils, shoes, or homework. The right system initiated over the summer will mean less stress over time management throughout the school year.

Some kids have not yet developed good study habits by the time they hit high school, so teaching your child how to study may be a part of the time management lesson. While some students work best in a quiet space alone, others may focus better at the kitchen table with Mom or Dad close by.

If your child seems to be having difficulty with a particular class, talk to the teacher about the best way to study for that subject. Teachers usually have a wealth of constructive recommendations.

### **Start Talking College**

When students hit the high school track, those grades become much more important. Colleges look at transcripts from all four years in high school, but some students do not realize this relevance in the early months of their high school career. While you don't want to cause undue stress by talking up the grades during the initial adjustment phase, it is never too early to get students thinking about life beyond high school. *School Family* explains that high school students may get onto different tracks in high school, based on how they want to spend their high school years and what they want to do after graduation.

### **Build a Support Network**

Even students who are sufficiently prepared for high school may find themselves sinking instead of swimming from time to time. When the water starts rising, your student needs to know who she can turn to for help. Create a support network for your student during the early days of high school, so they have plenty of options when the load gets too heavy to shoulder alone.

This network will certainly include you as the parent, especially if you are open and accepting of your student and his/her decisions. Students are more likely to turn to parents for help if they know their parents are more interested in providing assistance than in judging their behavior or offering unwanted advice. Other individuals to include in the support network might be an older sibling, an extended family member, a member of the clergy, school counselor, teacher, or doctor. Make sure your child is comfortable talking to at least some of these individuals when the pressure begins to mount. Assure your child everyone needs extra assistance from time to time, and there is no shame in asking for help when it is needed.

### **Stay Involved**

While many parents believe high school is the time to step back and let the child take the reins, it does not mean parents should take themselves out of the picture completely. In fact, high school students may need the presence of their parents more than ever during these years, even if only to offer a steadfast presence during a constantly changing life phase. Parents can be involved without becoming a constant fixture in the child's activities – by keeping up on developments within the school, knowing the child's friends, and keeping track of the child's activities. Make your home a comfortable place for your student to hang out with his friends, so the gang will choose your house most often. Become a welcoming host to the high school crowd, keeping snacks in the pantry and movies near the TV. Keep an eye on what kids are doing without hovering over them during their social time. Remain available to lend a hand if needed, or volunteer to chauffeur for activities so you know where, when, and with whom your child is going.

### **Overall**

The high school transition will be one of the biggest for your child up to this point in his life. For some students, the move to high school is an exciting one filled with possibilities, while other students see the change as scary and overwhelming. No matter how your child approaches high school, you - as the parent - play a key role in the success of this transition. By keeping these tips in mind, you can help your child move into his high school years and beyond, smoothly and successfully.