



Starting High School

A Guide for Parents and Students



THE JOHN CARROLL SCHOOL

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Letter from Mr. Larry Hensley

Dean of Student Services



Starting high school is a big step. High schools are usually larger in size, the coursework is often more difficult, and the grades are more important. Students are also going from being the oldest kids in the school to being the youngest.

During this time of transition, it's important to keep the lines of communication open, and to provide your new high school student with lots of encouragement and support.

This guide will show you how you and your student can make a smooth, successful transition to high school.

Here's to a great school year!

Mr. Larry Hensley, *Dean of Student Services and Director of Counseling*



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Table of Contents

Common Student Concerns	4
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Students:

Everything Counts Now	5
Things You Need to Know	6
Getting Organized.	7-8
Time Management	9
Class Success.	10
Study Smart Tips	11
More Than Classes	12
Where to Go for Help	13

Parents:

Communication is Key	14
Learn About Your Child's School	15
A Blueprint for Success	16
The Social Scene	18



Common Student Concerns

A Guide for Parents & Students

Most students feel excited, and a little nervous, when they start high school. But, if you know what to expect, you are likely to feel more confident and relaxed.

Here are some things you can expect to find in high school – and some advice to help you feel more on top of things those first few weeks.

New teachers and lots of classmates

While this may seem overwhelming at first, remember, everyone in your grade is in the same boat. In a few short days, things won't seem so new, and you'll be on your way to knowing all of your teachers – and your new classmates.

A new schedule

Your schedule probably contains classes you've never taken before. Check your schedule carefully to make sure that it's correct. If you think there may be a mistake, or that you are in a wrong class, see your counselor right away.

More challenging classes with more homework

Your high school courses are likely to be more difficult, but you are smarter now. It is, however, important that you work hard – right from day one – to make sure that your classes get off to a good start.

More extra-curricular opportunities

Getting involved in school activities is a great way to meet new people and have fun. Some activities may have sign ups just days or weeks after school starts. Find out what activities your school offers, and learn how you can get involved!

Much more to juggle

High school students may have more activities, more homework, and more responsibilities than they have ever had before. To keep up with everything, you need to be organized and have good time management skills.

Discussing the topics covered in this guide will help alleviate any concerns, and show your child how to have a successful start to this very important year.

Parents: use this list to start a conversation with your child about any concerns he/she may have.

Everything Counts Now

STUDENTS

Here's a very important fact: once you get to high school, everything counts.

Your courses now earn credits

All of your courses earn credits that go towards fulfilling your high school's graduation requirements. Many schools also have specific requirements that students must meet in order to advance to the next grade. For example, freshmen who fail classes may not have enough credits to become sophomores.

Freshman grades are part of your high school GPA

Your freshman grades will be used to figure your high school grade point average (GPA). Your Grade Point Average is important because colleges and employers use it to help determine what kind of student or employee you will be.

Your permanent record starts now

Starting in ninth grade, the courses you take, the grades and credits you earn, and your test scores all become part of your permanent record. If and when you apply to college, a copy of your permanent record – called a transcript – is sent to the college, along with your application. This transcript will have all of your freshman courses and grades on it. You want to make sure your high school transcript is one that you can be proud of!

Things you need to know

Your high school has rules and regulations that they expect you to know and follow. These are explained in the school's [Student Handbook](#). If you have questions, go to the office or see your counselor.



Be informed and learn what you need to know.

STUDENT



I'm late. What do I do?

What happens if you are late or absent? Does a parent need to call if you're not going to be in school? Are there consequences for being absent or tardy a certain number of times?

We're not allowed to do that?

Most school rules are common sense (e.g. no bullying, weapons or alcohol); but some things are specific to your school, like the dress code. Go through your School Handbook, so that you know what's acceptable, and what's out of bounds.



I want to play a sport. Am I eligible?

High schools have eligibility requirements for students who want to play a sport - and often for students involved in other activities as well. If you have a concern or question about eligibility, see your coach, counselor or athletic director.



Answers to these questions and more can be found in the [Student Handbook](#).



Get Organized:

5 Great Tips

Being organized makes your day run smoother and it saves you time. It also helps you feel like you're in control and on top of things.

Get your year off to a great start by using these tips to get organized—and to stay organized.

1. Have the right tools

Just as a carpenter can't build a cabinet without a hammer and nails, you need the right tools to be a successful student. You need paper, pencils, pens, a calculator, and a backpack. You also need to have a notebook(s) for your notes, and a folder for each class.

2. Organize your papers

Unless your school has gone paperless, you will have lots of papers—homework, returned tests, class notes, handouts, etc. There is a saying: A place for everything and everything in its place. This should be true for every paper you have.

Josh, who is very organized, has the following:

- a 3-ring notebook for notes (with a tab for each class)
- a different colored pocket folder for each class
- a file at home for returned tests and the papers he wants to keep



STUDENTS



Get Organized:

5 Great Tips

STUDENT



3. Use a student planner

Many students have planners, but they don't use them like they should. Using a planner is a great way to keep yourself organized and on track! Here are a few tips.

Planner Tips:

- Write each assignment under the date it's assigned. Also write in the date it's due.
- Check off assignments when they are done.
- Write in all quiz and test dates.
- If you have a large assignment or project, give yourself smaller assignments and write these in your planner.
- Write in special events, practices, appointments, social activities, and anything else you want to remember.



4. Have routines

Have a morning routine that gets your day off to a good start, and a nighttime routine that gets you to bed on time.

- Your morning routine should include getting up early enough so that you can eat a good breakfast and not be rushed.
- Your nighttime routine should include getting everything organized and in your backpack for the next day. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, write yourself a note.



5. Keep it clean

When your locker and backpack are neat, clean, and organized, it's much easier to locate materials.



Manage Your Time

Here is some advice that will help ensure that you make the most of the time you have each day.

Use class time wisely

Use any extra time in class to look over your homework—and if you have a study hall, use it. Doing these things will reduce the amount of time you need to spend on homework at night.

Make to-do lists

Each day make a list of all the things you need to do, and then cross things off as they get done. At the end of each day, take the tasks that didn't get done and put them on the next day's list.

Limit time wasters

Social media, TV, and video games are fun—but they can very easily gobble up too much of your time. Schedule small chunks of time for these activities, and stick to your schedule.



STUDENTS



Start the year off by promising yourself that you will make the most of the time you spend in class. If you do, your classes will go faster, you'll have less to do on your own, and you'll get better grades.

Here's some advice to help make this happen.

Participate in class

Participating in class makes the class more interesting, and it helps keep your mind focused. Ask questions, volunteer answers, and participate in discussions. You'll learn more, and your teachers will be impressed.

Know your teachers

Think about what's important to your teachers. Are they strict about rules? Do they give points for participation?

Have a positive attitude

Go to your classes ready to learn and confident in your ability to succeed.

Come to class with your homework done

In many classes, homework is a significant portion of your final grade. (If you haven't read the short story that was assigned in English, you aren't going to get nearly as much out of the class discussion.)

Ask for help

Teachers are usually happy to help you, but you have to ask. If you're struggling in a class, get help early.



Top 10 Study Tips

Students who “study smart” often spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades. Here’s how you can study smart.

- 10** Have a place to study that’s quiet, well lit, and comfortable.
- 9** If you have a lot to do, prioritize your work. You want to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- 8** Do difficult assignments first, while you’re still fresh and alert.
- 7** If you have something to memorize, work on that first. Then go over it again at the end of your study session.
- 6** Alternate types of homework (read English, work on math, read history).
- 5** If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- 4** Before you begin, make a plan. Decide what you want to get done and the order you’re going to do it.
- 3** Always allow more time than you think you’ll need.
- 2** Set a time to start on your homework—and stick to it.
- 1** Turn off the TV and music, and silence your phone. Focus on the work you need to do.

STUDENTS



More Than Classes

Of course your classes and grades are important, but high school is so much more than classes. High school is a time for you to make new friends, develop new skills, and expand your horizons. Make the most of this opportunity to discover who you are and where your talents and strengths lie.

High school is like anything else—the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

Get involved

Students who are involved in school activities generally do better academically, and they enjoy school more. Find out what activities are available at your school and become involved in one or two. It's a great way to meet new people!

Make new friends

Go out of your way to talk to other students—the students in your classes, those you see at lunch, and the students who are involved in the same activities as you are. Smile, be friendly, and seek out students who have the same interests and values as you do.

If you're shy, start conversations by asking a question such as "Who do you have for English?" or by giving a compliment. "That's a really cool jacket." Remember, everyone in your grade is new to high school, and they are all learning how to navigate this new world, just as you are.



STUDENTS



Where to Go for Help

STUDENTS



At some point, you're probably going to have a question or problem that you need help with. You can usually get your questions answered and your problems taken care of just by going to the right office, or by talking to the right person. But you need to take the initiative. If you have a question or need help, be sure to let someone know.



If you look around your school, you'll find teachers, principals, counselors, tutors, coaches, and secretaries. All of these people are there to help you have the best high school experience possible!

If you have a problem and don't know who to talk to, [see your counselor](#). Your counselor can help you with any question or problem you may have.

Find out who your counselor is—and how you go about making an appointment to see him/her.



Communication is Key

Keeping the lines of communication open during the first few weeks of school is very important. Here are some tips to help you do this.

Ask open-ended questions

Instead of “How was school?” say “Tell me about your day.” Or ask “What are you studying in science?” “What’s that book about?” “What did you have for lunch?”

Be available to listen

Timing is important. Be available to listen when your child wants to talk, and look for times when he/she is most likely to be open to conversation (when you’re fixing dinner, driving in the car, before bed, etc.).

Recognize your child’s concerns

Something that may seem like a small thing to you could be a big thing to your teenager. If your child has a concern or problem, listen attentively, and help him/her figure out how to deal with it and move forward.

Pay attention to nonverbal communication

Teenagers aren’t always able to put into words the things they need you to know. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to your child’s body language, eating and sleeping patterns, moods, and school performance. These can be good indicators of how things are going at school and with friends.



PARENTS



Learn About Your Child's School

At the beginning of the year, students are concerned about what to wear, what their friends are doing, and getting used to a new schedule. They're not thinking about some of the more important, but less exciting, issues such as the school's attendance policy.

Learn about the following, and share the most important and pertinent information with your teenager. (All of the following topics are discussed in the [School Handbook](#) and website.)

School calendar

Every school has a calendar that shows when grading periods begin and end, when parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, and when school will be closed for holidays and vacations. Write these dates on your calendar at home.

School rules and policies

All schools have rules and policies regarding student conduct. Learn about your school's dress code, cell phone and attendance policies, rules regarding medications, etc.

Class schedule

Check your child's class schedule to make sure that he/she is in the correct courses. If you ever feel that a course is too difficult or "not right" for your student, talk to your child's counselor.

Extracurricular activities

Students who participate in school activities generally enjoy school more and get better grades. Find out what activities are available at your school.

School counselor

Counselors help students choose their courses, monitor student progress, and help students deal with difficult situations. Find out who your child's counselor is and make sure he/she knows how to go about making an appointment. Counselors are also great resources for parents.

Eligibility requirements

High schools have eligibility requirements that students must meet before they can play a sport. These requirements may also apply to students who participate in activities such as cheerleading and student government. For questions, talk to the athletic director, or check the Student Handbook.

Check information online

Many teachers post grades and homework assignments online, and email is often the preferred way of communicating with teachers. Take advantage of the School's online communication system, [Veracross](#), and check the website regularly for information and updates.

PARENTS



A Blueprint for Success

PARENTS

Here are some specific things you can do to help your student get the school year off to a great start.

Purchase school supplies

Make sure your child has the tools he/she needs before school starts. In addition to paper, pens, and pencils, students need folders, notebooks, a calculator, alarm clock, and an assignment notebook (if your school doesn't provide planners).

Provide a place to study

Your student needs a place to study that's quiet, well-lit, and comfortable. This area should have a surface for writing and be equipped with supplies.

Insist on good attendance

Your student needs to be in school on time every day unless he/she is ill. Attendance is the #1 school success factor!

Develop routines

Having a good morning and nighttime routine makes everyone's day run much smoother. Help your teenager establish routines that include getting to bed at a reasonable hour, and getting up early enough to eat a good breakfast.

Monitor technology use

Be aware of how, and for what purposes, your child is using his/her cell phone, laptop, tablet, and/or home computer. Set limits and guidelines. Limits might include turning off all cell phones during dinner, and/or docking all phones in a common place at 9 pm.

Set goals

At the beginning of the year, help your teenager set some academic goals. You might think about what grade he/she should realistically be able to earn in each course for that grading period, or you could focus more on study habits (e.g., have all homework completed by 9:00 each night).

Setting goals will help your child understand what your expectations are, and these goals will give your student something specific to work towards.

High school students are becoming more independent and self-sufficient, but they still need direction, guidance, and support from their parents.

A Blueprint for Success

PARENTS

Encourage a healthy lifestyle

With everything that's going on in their lives, it's important that high school students eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep. Have nutritious food at home, make sure that your teenager gets some exercise or does something physical on a regular basis, and insist on a reasonable bedtime.

Emphasize the importance of education

Nothing will affect your child's opportunities in life more than education. Make education a top priority in your home.

Monitor early grades

Make sure that your student is getting off to a good start in all of his/her classes. If you have a concern about your child's progress in one or more classes, contact the teacher(s).



Monitor progress:

It's important for students to be successful in their classes, and for them to feel competent and capable. If you see your child struggling in a class or spending an excessive amount of time on homework, contact the teacher and discuss your concerns.

Prioritizing work

If your student has a lot to do, help prioritize the work to make sure there's enough time for the things that are the most important.

1. Help break down large assignments

Large assignments can seem overwhelming, and sometimes students need help figuring out where to begin. Show your student how to break large assignments and projects down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

2. If your child has a question or problem...

Encourage your child to talk to the teacher either before or after class whenever he/she has a question or problem. Teachers are generally happy to help, but students need to let their teacher know they need it.

3. Be available to help—but don't do your child's work

All students need encouragement and support, and many need a little extra help from time to time. Be available to help if your child gets stuck, needs someone to listen to a speech, look over an essay, or help review for a test. However, don't give more help than is wanted, and don't do the work yourself.

*If something doesn't get done, don't come to the rescue.
If you do, your teenager won't feel the need to be responsible in the future.*

Friends are very important to high school students, and many students have some concerns or apprehensions regarding the high school social scene.

Here are some things you can do to help your child feel good about this very important aspect of high school.

Encourage after-school activities

Extracurricular activities are a great way for teenagers to meet other students with similar interests. Being part of a team, club, or group also gives students a sense of belonging.

Maintain family activities

While being with friends is very important to high school students, doing things with their parents and families provides them with a much needed sense of security.

Spend one-on-one time with your child, plan family outings, and eat dinner as a family as often as possible. During dinner, turn off the TV, silence all phones, and talk about your day.

Build self-esteem

Students with a positive self-image are less influenced by peer pressure, and less affected by social concerns. Foster your child's strengths through family activities, developing his/her interests and skills, church activities, volunteering, etc.

Expect friendship shifts

In high school, friendships often shift and change—a best friend in middle school may now have new interests and be making new friends. Encourage your child to keep his/her “old friends,” and to work on making new ones.



Discuss bullying

Bullying can sometimes be a problem in high school. If your child ever mentions anything about being bullied or harassed in school or online, find out exactly what has happened, and talk about how to best deal with the situation. You may also want to discuss what's happened with your child's counselor or principal.

Promote independence

If your teenager has a question or problem, try to help your child figure out how to take care of it on his/her own. Being able to get their questions answered and their problems resolved helps students gain confidence, and it gives them a sense of empowerment.



You want your child to become more independent and self-sufficient; however, it's important for your teen to know that you are always available if he/she ever needs your help.

Final Thoughts

High school students have a lot to deal with, and high school can be stressful at times. More than anything, your teenager needs encouragement, support, and lots of hugs.

