

# EduGuideTIPS

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## Beginning Successfully

PARENT TIP #7

### Start the High School Year Strong

By Susan J. Demas

When I walked into high school for the first time, it felt like "The Wizard of Oz." And I knew I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

The buildings were enormous. Making it from first-period gym (yuck) in the field house all the way to English on the second floor in five minutes was impossible without speed-walking. My best friend was going to a neighboring high school. All the bathrooms smelled like cigarette smoke.

Luckily, my mother convinced me to take a summer school class there right after I graduated from eighth grade. I knocked out Earth Science, got the lay of the land at my new school and sat next to a girl who would become one of my closest friends over the next four years. So when I had to return in August, I could march bright in, knowing exactly where my locker was and all of my classes. And I'd even discovered which restroom stunk the least. Being prepared was my best defense and kept me on my game.

The second tool in my arsenal was organization. There were so many things going on at school, I had more homework than I imagined and I also loaded up on activities, like choir and the literary magazine. I needed to make sure I kept it all straight.

Start with buying your child an organizer that works for him. Check out any discount retailer, drug store or office supply store and you'll find hundreds to choose from of varying sizes and cuteness. Some schools provide students with organizers, but if the assignment section is too small or the cover too lame (no, Pokemon is definitely not in anymore), invest in something that he'll use. It's worth it. He can't rely on teachers to watch over him or cut him a break for forgetting a project. Chances are, they'll just give him an "F."

As Donna Goldberg and Jennifer Zwiebel write in "The Organized Student," you can lead your child to water, but you can't make him drink. He has to own the process and find out what works for him. It's important to establish a good foundation, since college is far less structured, but the stakes are even higher.

### Keeping Tabs for Parents

Kids aren't the only one transitioning to high school. So are you. And it can be tricky if your child immediately slams his bedroom door after he comes home. So what can you do to keep up with all the changes in your high schooler's life?

Check out these tips:

- **Talk to teachers.** Some things don't change. It's as important to check in about your child's progress in kindergarten as it is in ninth grade. E-mail can be a great way to stay in touch. Don't forget to check in with coaches and guidance counselors.
- **Volunteer to help with your child's activities.** Offer to organize the booster club potluck or usher the variety show. You're showing your child you're interested in what he's doing without being "in his face" all the time.
- **Talk with other parents** to get a feel for what their kids are going through. Volunteering at school is a great way to meet them!

And it helped that my mom was always there for me. Check in with your child every day, but don't nag. You need to stay plugged in to your child's schedule, but he's at the age when he does have to take on responsibility and make his own choices. You can't write his term paper on the roots of the Russian Revolution yourself. But it means a lot to kids to know their parents care and want to stay involved, even if you get the "Leave me alone!" look. So check how orchestra is going and how his Geometry quiz turned out.

The last part is taking the right classes. I flirted with the idea of taking jewelry as an elective, but I opted instead for child development, since I was interested in teaching. More importantly, I took all the honors classes I could. When I fell in love with world civilizations, I talked with my teacher about what classes I should be taking for my next three years, which included shifting my four-year plan around to make room for more Advanced Placement classes.

But when I entered college as a sophomore, I was sure glad that I'd taken the time to plan. Because when I stepped onto that sprawling Big Ten campus, believe me, I felt like Dorothy all over again.

*Susan J. Demas is a contributing editor to EduGuide from Lansing, Michigan.*

## It's a Fact

High school is on-the-ground training for the real world. You have to learn how to multitask, set priorities and plan long-term. The path you tread in high school will lead you to where you end up as an adult. So as you're picking classes, activities and friends, choose wisely.

## Are You Ready for High School?

See how your child scores.

1. I've toured the building and know where most of my classes are. **YES/NO**
2. I've met with my guidance counselor and picked a schedule with my parents' help. **YES/NO**
3. I have a four-year plan for the classes I need to take in high school and to be accepted into college. **YES/NO**
4. I know which extracurricular activities I want to join. **YES/NO**
5. I have a planner and have talked with my counselor and parents about staying organized. **YES/NO**

If you answered **NO** to any of these questions, get a move on so you're fully prepared. High school's starting soon!

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