

How Parents Can Maximize the Freshman Academy Experience

Here are some tips for you to help make the most of your Freshman Academy experience as a parent/guardian of a ninth grade student. These are the secrets to maximizing your parent conferences, how to communicate most effectively with your child's teachers/counselor, and how to know if your child is spending enough time and effort on homework.

Progress Reports:

Grades are always current through our online grading program. You may set alerts to contact you for both attendance and grade issues, and we highly suggest that you do so. While progress reports are printed and sent home every six weeks, neither students nor parents should wait until the end of these grading periods to focus on good study habits and a monitoring of grades/performance.

'Those aren't my grades!'

Students may say that their grades as recorded in the computer program are inaccurate: that a teacher has not updated or has input inaccurate grades. Let us dispel these myths once and for all. Teachers update grades weekly; however, "trust but verify." If you have a question about a grade, contact the teacher. Email is the best way to do this.

Initiating Contact with Academy Staff

Parents will often remind teachers, "If you ever have any problems with my child, please don't hesitate to call or email me." That is a well-intentioned and sincere statement made by an involved parent, and it is always interpreted as such. However, due to large student numbers and a heavy teacher workload, we ask for your help in maintaining communication. Please use individual teacher blogs, the online grading program, counselor/parent e-groups, Remind 101, and the printed 6-, 12- and 18-week progress reports to stay informed. Beyond that, please reach out to the Freshman Academy coordinator or counselor with questions or concerns. Academy staff will always reply in a timely fashion to any parent who emails with a concern or question.

Academy/Parent Conferences

Parent-student-teacher conferences are scheduled through the school counseling office. The staff workday runs from 7:45 a.m.-3:45 p.m. Though most teachers always are working beyond those hours grading work and answering email, we only schedule conferences during our workday hours as a rule. Our Academy teachers tutor students after school, coach sports, advise clubs, and have personal obligations, and we thank you in advance for your understanding.

Due to other scheduled conferences and responsibilities, your conference must begin and end as scheduled. Please allow time for traffic, parking, and finding the

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meeting room as you plan your arrival time. Late arrivals could mean reduced meeting time or the need to reschedule the conference.

Homework: Matters of Quality AND Quantity

It has been long understood that one of the biggest problems we face as educators is helping students learn to invest their time, attention, and energies into homework and home test preparation. Inherently, high school freshmen struggle with making the connection between individual, nightly assignments and the rest of their lives. Freshmen often have almost no concept of the "domino effect" of failed/missing assignments and their cumulative average in a course.

You're On the Clock

It is appropriate for students to have homework assigned every day. Between smaller written assignments, upcoming major projects and essays, and preparing for summative assessments (unit tests), your child can and should routinely fill a block of 1 ½ to 2 hours of study in the evening. If you witness your child doing significantly less than that, or completing work in a distracting environment filled with music, TV, cell phone or recreational computer use, then we predict you are also receiving substandard grade reports. Please have your child spend an appropriate block of focused time on studies in a conducive space -- quiet, well lit, with a chair that makes slouching more difficult (a comfortable study area – but not *too* comfortable). Their detailed assignments should all be recorded in the **free planner** provided for them on Day 1. If students say they have nothing to do, we highly suggest that you encourage and model reading for pleasure. It is not too early for freshmen to prepare for tests like the SAT. High-interest titles as well as classics are available that allow students to learn SAT vocabulary in context: <http://www.sparknotes.com/satfiction/>

Log On

If your child claims to be finished after 20-30 minutes, parents should check individual teacher blogs on our website for notices of upcoming major tasks. Your child always has upcoming assessments that are posted on the blog and that require working ahead.

Worry Warts

We also have a handful of students each year who pour so much time into homework that they spend several hours per night on it. For some students, it can become an unhealthy pursuit of the unattainable: perfection. Students get bogged down in minutiae, rewriting an essay more times than necessary, editing incessantly. Please let the Academy school counselor know if you feel your child is having difficulty finding a healthy perspective and achieving balance. We want your child to have more in his/her life than school. Burn-out is a very real problem with

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hardworking, conscientious students. It is a harder problem to solve than apathy. How do you make a child work with less enthusiasm? How do you tell students not to care as much? As a team, we must support these types of students too.