

Getting Started

How to help your student make the most of New Trier and beyond
Sophomore Parent Newsletter from New Trier's Post-High School Counseling Office

Welcome to the Winnetka Campus and to the first sophomore newsletter from the post-high school counseling department. These newsletters are designed to communicate information pertinent to your student's opportunities in high school in preparation for success beyond New Trier. The vast majority of our students are bound for a four-year, residential college and this typically requires the largest amount of pre-planning, so these newsletters presume your student is preparing for college enrollment. The purpose of the newsletters, however, is to provide general guidance information. During the second semester of your student's junior year when individualized post-high school planning begins, your student's counselor will work specifically to meet the expectations your student has. If you or a friend misses one of these newsletters, they will be posted on the New Trier post-high school counseling website under "Document Links" and then "Soph Planning."

Academically, it's important that students are appropriately placed in challenging but attainable curricula. Teachers recommend placements based on students' abilities, demonstrated work ethic, and depth of interest; family input is important as it relates to the overall obligations of the individual student. Balancing classroom responsibilities with co-curricular demands requires review every year, and the goal is to enable students to manage their academic challenges in conjunction with the time required for any outside activities. We don't want to overwhelm students and we also want to make sure that an emphasis is placed on academics.

The vast majority of New Trier graduates are admitted to college without regard to special talents or connections; therefore, achievement in the classroom is a vital facet of creating their opportunities. Every year, post-high school counselors are asked whether earning "A's" in a lower-level class or "B's" in a higher-level class is more beneficial in college admissions; college admission officers will respond that earning "A's" in the higher level is more desirable. In reality, the response is, "It depends." Achievement typically depends upon a combination of the individual's abilities in each academic discipline, work ethic, commitment, resilience, and his or her time available to devote to learning.

Parents, teachers, and advisers can have an impact on some of these factors. New Trier seeks to provide a classroom setting in each discipline that is educationally appropriate for every individual student. Teachers are available for individualized student consultation during their free periods, before and after school. Additional resources for mathematics, reading and writing also exist: math teachers staff the math resource room (room 273) and top-performing juniors and seniors tutor in the Reading and Writing Center in the library every period of the day on a drop-in basis. For more thorough individualized assistance, tutors are registered with each department; most departments put their lists of tutors on the departmental web page.

Parents can help their students become organized, stay focused, and take the risks necessary to stretch their intellectual thinking, thereby increasing the tools in their educational toolbox. Learning organizational tactics provides a tremendous advantage in intellectual pursuits, and here are some tips to help your student get and stay organized, and create disciplined study habits:

- Buy an assignment notebook and help your student make the most of it. It may be easier to designate how demanding the days will be if your student records exams in red ink, projects in blue, and daily assignments in black, for instance. Or, go over the items in highlighters.
- Make a list of the tasks necessary for projects and create a schedule for completing them in the assignment notebook.
- Ask your student each night about assignments due, and if necessary, check the assignment notebook each evening.
- Create a plan for homework completion. Sticking with the plan for a week or two gets students into a routine....one they will typically follow on their own eventually.
- If your student has issues staying focused on homework, create a study center on the main floor of your home and do not allow studying alone in a bedroom where the temptations of the phone and Internet exist. Plan to supervise this study area or even complete your own work there as well.

- Modeling study behaviors reinforces your efforts. Turn off cell phones, televisions and unnecessary Internet notifications to decrease interruptions.

Attitude also counts; encouragement, rather than nagging, inspires the development of good habits. Studies show that students who know their parents trust and believe in them are more satisfied with their efforts, even when they run into obstacles.

And speaking of obstacles, when your students encounter difficulties, help them work through it instead of fixing it for them. Turn it into a learning experience to help them develop problem-solving skills and resilience.

High school is the place for students to take risks and to develop independence, to solidify their study skills, to develop socially, and to discover their passions intellectually, athletically, in the arts and in activities. Parents can help students try new things, find their boundaries, and encourage their interests, no matter how varied. When the focus remains on what is in the student's best interests, curricular and extra-curricular growth results.

How does this relate to post-high school planning? First and foremost, New Trier students will have developed the study skills and habits necessary for success in the college classroom. They will know when and how to advocate for themselves, and they will understand that there are additional resources available to assist them in their intellectual pursuits. Collaborative group projects completed in the high school classroom will also promote teamwork, flexibility, creativity and resourcefulness. Each of these qualities gives our students an advantage in a collegiate environment. The basis for strong performance in college is to have a superb background in the classroom disciplines as well as excellent study habits.