

Starting Out

Bigger building; new faces; upperclassmen; sign-ups for clubs; and a pile of homework – every night. How do you carve out your own, successful place in this new environment? Here are some tips to get you started on the right track.

Be open to the new world around you. Be open to new ideas, activities and styles. Find a balance between expressing yourself and trying new things.

Make smart choices about the company you keep. The people you choose to spend time with will shape your school experience. Motivated peers can help you keep up your own personal drive. Also, being friendly and respectful to classmates and teachers can open many doors for you.

Strike a balance with old friends. If you only hang out with people you already know, you'll miss out on one of the greatest things about high school -- the chance to grow, reinvent yourself and make new friends.

Make a lunch plan. Ask someone you meet in a morning class if they want to head to lunch together. (Don't forget, they're new, too, and just as eager to make friends.)

Get involved. Join a club or sports team, or volunteer for a cause. You'll get to meet people with similar interests and build a social life!

What you need to do:

Try out some of these conversation starters:

"Hi, I'm _____. What's your name?"

Talk about a possible common interest, *"Did you catch the game last night?"*

Share a compliment, *"Hey, great shoes! Where'd you get them?"*

Ask how they get to school. Interesting commutes make for good stories.

Getting To and From School

School starts early— for some as early as 7:20 AM. In high school, some students take school buses, but most students need to figure out their own transportation and this often includes using the MBTA's buses or trains.

If you do not live within walking distance of your high school, you will most likely get an MBTA pass to take public transportation to school. You will receive this on the first day of school. Use the tips to the right to figure out the fastest and safest way to school.

Juggling Classes, Homework and a Social Life

Another great thing about high school is the variety of classes that you will take. However, with four to seven class periods each day, you will also have several different teachers, study many topics, and trek to a lot of classrooms on a daily basis.

The first day of school

You will get a schedule that outlines your classes. In some schools, your schedule will be the same every day. In others, your classes may rotate, making Monday's schedule different from Tuesday's, and so forth. Teachers will explain how the schedule works and they will also be in the hall to help students find their next classes.

Getting organized

It's important to organize your materials for each class so they don't get mixed up. Some students like to have a notebook for each subject while others prefer to have one big binder with different notebooks for each class. Your teachers will outline the specific things required for their classes. Get your supplies early and then spend the first few days creating a system that works for you.

Scheduling your free time

While you need to make time for homework, you may also have clubs, sports or family obligations to juggle. You'll also want to spend time with your friends. See the tips to the right to make sure there's time to do all the things you want and need to do.

What you need to do:

Make a weekly schedule for your out-of-school time. Include time for homework, chores, athletics, clubs, and so forth. Don't forget to schedule some time on the weekends for homework because most teachers assign weekend work or long term projects that will require some weekend hours.

It's important that you get to school on time because it is difficult to do well in your classes if you aren't there. If you are finding it hard to get to school on time, revisit your travel options and talk to a teacher or administrator at the school immediately — do not wait until report cards come out, when your grades have already suffered!

"Getting to school on time was probably my biggest worry, but once I tried out the route a couple times, I knew I could handle it."

- Ninth grader, Brighton High School

College Ready? The Journey Starts Now.

Though college may seem far away, one of the best things that you can do now to get ready is to take courses that challenge you. You can take college-level or Advanced Placement (AP) classes in 11th and/or 12th grade. Not only do they look good on your college application, AP classes can actually help you earn college credit and enable you to skip courses in college. The classes you take in 9th and 10th grade can prepare you for these types of courses.

GPA (Grade Point Average)

In high school, you are given letter grades on your report card (A, B, C, etc.) which are then converted into number grades. These number grades are averaged to calculate your GPA. The GPA is important because it tells a story about the kind of student you have been in high school.

To calculate your GPA, you can convert the letter grade into the numerical value. For example, an A = 4 points, a B = 3 points, a C = 2 points, a D = 1 point, and an F = 0 points. Those numbers are then averaged. The more A's you receive, the higher the GPA. Colleges like to see students with high GPAs. Although students are certainly accepted to colleges with lower GPAs, choices are more limited and it's harder to get scholarships.

MCAS

Your tenth grade MCAS scores are a big deal because you need to pass them in order to graduate from high school. The tests cover material in English, Math, and Science from grades 9 and 10 – so what you learn now will determine how well you do on these.

What you need to do:

Starting in your freshman year, map out your course load so you don't find yourself short of a required class to graduate on time. These requirements vary from high school to high school. Be sure to ask your teachers and counselors what you need to stay on track.

To make sure you have a strong GPA, do all of your class work and your homework. Make time to study for tests and quizzes. If you are having difficulty in a class, talk with the teacher or your counselor. Do not be embarrassed to ask for help—teachers appreciate it when students seek extra support.

What you need to do:

1. Ask someone to help you figure out a route that works for you. Also, ask whether your school offers a bus from any of the MBTA stations.
2. Visit www.mbta.com or a trip planning site such as www.hopstop.com. On these sites you can enter your home and school addresses, and then see all the routes available to you.