

## **A Parent's Guide -- Middle School**

### ***Why should parents and students start thinking about college in Middle School?***

During the middle school years, parents and students should begin thinking about the future. Students need to hear a consistent (and often repeated) message from parents: "High school is just one step toward achievement of life long goals." Education after high school allows students to earn more career options throughout their lifetime!

Preparation for college starts early! Parents can show interest in their child's future by encouraging respect for teachers and for learning, expecting children to set high academic goals, and by staying informed about school activities. School involvement helps parents know exactly what is going on at their child's school and can help them form a network of support with school personnel and other parents.

### ***When should parents begin thinking about financial aid for college?***

Good question! It's never too early to start saving for your child's education. Rising costs of higher education often scare parents into thinking, "How can we ever afford college for our children?"

In Texas, there are many ways to afford college! You'll be surprised at the number of financial options available, including loans, work study, grants and scholarships. However, the vast majority of students end up applying for low-interest loans that can be paid back over a long period of time. If this is the case, just remember, the investment in your child's future is well worth the effort!

It's a good idea to educate yourself about various financial aid options. Cost factors vary greatly between community college and universities. Knowing early about your child's interests and abilities can help you plan ahead. Counselors can help you locate resources for researching "after high school" options.

### ***What should parents know about college entrance requirements?***

Almost everyone can go to college, but not everyone will qualify for a "free ride" in college. If you and your child are interested in scholarships, then you should know that scholarships go to well-rounded students. Students need to maintain good grades (3.2 + GPA) and at the same time participate in other productive activities. Colleges are also looking at the types of courses students have taken. When students are planning middle school schedules, they should be encouraged to take more challenging courses in areas of interest. This shows college admissions officers that they are willing to work hard and make the most of their education. Grades and test scores are important, but involvement in extracurricular activities also says a lot about students. Beginning in middle school, students should be exploring a variety of activities from sports to theatre, volunteering in service groups, and participating in academic honor societies. These types of activities not only help middle school students develop leadership skills, but also encourage them to investigate career possibilities. Think of it as a way to contribute, to learn, and to think about their future all at the same time!

### ***Is college the only option for post-secondary education?***

No, there are several roads to a successful career. After high school, students can choose several different paths to continue their education. One path is to earn a certificate, degree, or diploma from a career college or technical school that will educate them for a specific career, trade, or profession. Those

schools provide many possibilities in a variety of technical positions and fields. Financial aid is also available for these “beyond high school” options. Technical schools enable students to bypass the classic college education, earn a license and practice a skilled career sooner than a traditional college-bound student. It all depends on a student’s interests, skills and commitment.

***What about all of those tests students need to take?***

Middle school parents should know that the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) Test is very important. It is an indicator of how well your child is progressing with the state-approved curriculum. Students will take some form of the TAKS every year, grades 3-11. Each year the knowledge and skills tested become more advanced.

In their junior year, students are required to pass the TAKS Exit Exam in order to graduate. It just makes sense that they will have fewer problems later if they apply themselves and don’t fall behind in earlier grades. Be sure that you are aware of your child’s progress on these tests and encourage him/her to take advantage of every available option offered by the school for tutorials, study groups, and extra help in passing these exams. Students whose TAKS scores at grade 11 are not in the college-readiness range (2200+) may have to take the THEA Test (Texas Higher Education Assessment).

Your child should sign up to take the PSAT for practice. Students may take the test for practice in their sophomore year and again as a junior. National Merit Scholarships are based on scores earned as juniors. Often schools will offer PSAT practice-testing software on campus. Ask about this option.

The SAT is taken in the junior and/or senior year. A high score will place a student among the most sought after students in the country. Opportunities for scholarships increase dramatically with high SAT scores.

***How can I help my child find a career that interests him/her?***

Help your child explore as many career avenues as possible. A student’s mind should be filled with every option available. Parents need to foster learning and encourage a student’s chosen career path. If parents feel their student is going down the wrong career path, the career should be discussed. Parents should provide concrete examples of why a student’s chosen career path might not be suitable. A student should listen carefully to parents. Remember, parents have the greatest teacher of all- experience. Also, a student can research virtually any job or job description on the Web. Help your child research, then discuss what you find.