

Dear Ninth Graders,

Below is advice from current high school and college students about the start of high school. We hope it is helpful to you as you embark on this next stage of your educational career and life!

Also be sure to [watch this video](#) from PALS graduate, Denise, with her amazing words of wisdom!

Best wishes for an incredible year!

Sincerely,
PALS Program

What advice do you have for rising 9th graders?

Participate in high school clubs! Besides electives, this is usually the only other school related activity that you can choose for yourself in 9th grade. Clubs can help you develop your interests and become an active member of your community.

Don't be afraid to ask for help regarding where classes are or what a certain class is. I had to ask for help to find math on the first day and that's how I met one of my best friends.

Develop time management skills! This is super important, as assignments in high school can really pile up, and you don't want to spend the late nights/early mornings last minute finishing work. Work on this as early on as possible, and it will really help you with the rest of your high school career and life.

Don't be scared to speak up! Whether it be socially and making new friends, talk to new people and put yourself out there. Academically, it is CRITICAL that you speak up to teachers whenever you have a question, because classes move fast and paying attention and being attentive in class is important.

Put yourself out there, meet as many people as you can, enjoy exploring your passions and finding yourself, and cherish the time and the age that you are.

I know everyone says this, but I am a true believer that you should always try new things and not be afraid of what others will think. I think I spent a lot of my time in high school thinking about what I would do and where I wanted to go in the upcoming years and worrying about what others thought of me. Instead, I wish I had slowed down and allowed myself to enjoy each and every moment in high school, being the most "me" I could be, working hard in school, having fun with the incredible peers that I was surrounded by.

DO YOUR WORK! Contrary to popular belief, 9th grade matters! It's so important that you complete your assignments and do your homework, no matter the class. Work hard, because colleges look at your entire high school career. It's important to drill this into your head to encourage yourself to work hard, because everything you do matters!

Don't stop being yourself for anyone and try new things. The two pieces of advice go hand in hand.

First, do not stop being yourself when you get to high school. Everything will change. You'll meet new people, grow physically and mentally, and develop interests that you did not even anticipate you would have otherwise had. But know that what matters most at the end of the day is how you treat people, and what you add to the community by being yourself.

Try new things because you could develop new interests, and they can help you with your personal development. I began doing theater during the spring of my freshman year and it helped me to put myself out there and learn to present myself in front of others. Doing theater became something that I contributed to the community and it made me feel complete.

What do you wish you had known before you started high school?

I wish I had known how much my time in high school would mean to me after I left. I miss the moments laughing in the cafeteria, or cheering on my high school basketball team in the stands, or simply waving hi to my friends in the hall. There is no other time in your life where you will be able to learn and socialize in such a close and supportive community like your high school.

I wish I knew to start thinking about my interests earlier on, because I would just take classes for the sake of taking them. High school is the gateway to college, and it's a time to start discovering your interests. In 9th grade, start thinking about what classes would help you work towards your future goal.

I wish before high school I had understood that the 4 years goes by faster than you think it does. I have very close connections with people from my middle school, but most of us had also gone to the same elementary school and known each other for a full 9 years. Some students don't start at your high school in 9th grade but end up in your grade, or you may go to school with them for just a year or less. Make all of the connections that you can but also understand that if you get discouraged or stressed, that it is not that long overall. You'll look back and wish that you had more time.

I wish I knew how important 9th grade grades were, because everyone had been saying that they didn't "count towards anything." If I had known that they were as important, I would have tried a bit harder to reach my full potential and get the better grades I could have gotten.

Other thoughts for 9th graders to keep in mind?

Try to talk to as many people as you can. You never know what you might have in common with some people.

You are about to begin one of the most formative and fun times of your life, and I am so excited for you. As a rising college junior looking back on my high school experience, I can't help but feel nostalgic. Although many have said that college is the best four years of your life, I would argue that high school is just as, if not more, enjoyable. I wish you all the best in high school, and I hope more than anything that you look back at your high school years with the same love and warmth that I do. I am almost jealous — I would do it all again if I had the chance. Enjoy!

Enjoy every second of your school year! Even though the workload might get tough sometimes, never be afraid to ask for help from your teacher, a friend, or the many other academic resources on campus.

Overall, just be yourself and work smarter, not harder! This will help you so much in the long run, and will make high school so much enjoyable for you. Practice time management, get enough sleep, and do what interests you. Good luck and have fun!

Maximize your resources. If I had one thing that I could've done better to get sure, guaranteed results it would be to maximize my resources. What does that mean? If you have an advisor of any sort, meet with them often. Be proactive about what you need from teachers so that they can best assist you. If there is any academic support set up in your school system or office hours, take advantage of that. In my high school we had office hours every day, and though they were not that long and only a few minutes, it made a difference in the relationships with my teachers.

Keep a planner of some sort, whether it be physical or online. Consider it an investment in the long-term because it really will be. You can find that balance between being mature and still enjoying the last remnants of adolescence.

Embrace the challenge, get a snack and figure it out. High school teaches you how to be a problem solver before anything else.