RHS Counseling Department

Freshman Year Priorities: What to Focus on in 9th Grade

Start 9th Grade Strong

- **Set up a place at home for schoolwork**.
  Having your own space to study and keep your supplies can help you to focus and work efficiently.
- **Create a routine for studying**.
  Find the best time of day to study when you're not distracted, hungry, or tired, and when you need to take a break.
- **Come up with study strategies.**
  Discover the ways you're able to learn and remember best: quizzing yourself, notetaking, listening, reading, creating mind maps or outlines, etc. Try different things until you find something that works for you. This could change over time, so keep adapting!

In the Fall

- **Meet your counselor.**
  In September, counselors visit freshmen classes to check-in and connect. You can also make an appointment to meet your counselor at any time.
- **Find your people.**
  Join a club or check out a sport, and connect with teachers you click with.
- **Assess how your transition to high school is going**.
  Talk with your parents/guardians. If something isn't going well, get help to work through it, which builds your perseverance and develops a growth mindset.
- **Get help when you need it**.
  If you're feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone. Seek help from your friends, parents/guardians, teachers, and your counselors any time. Seeking help is a vital life skill and now is the perfect time to learn it!
  Seek advice from your teachers for subjects you need help with, and meet with your counselor to help you develop a plan.
- **Create your EDP: Educational Development Plan.**
  During the school day with your counselor, you'll work on creating an Educational Development Plan (EDP) using Xello, a career exploration and readiness program. Xello will help you look into potential careers, discover your interests and strengths, and guide you with selecting courses to take throughout high school based on your potential future plans.

In the Winter

- **Schedule your classes for your sophomore year.**
  In January/February, counselors meet with all freshmen to discuss scheduling for classes to take in 10th grade. Information for families to review is provided. Alternative options include:
  - Testing out of a required course, called Credit by Exam, which allows you to create room in your class schedule for taking other courses of interest. To test out of a class, apply in Nov/Dec. to take the test in January. (January test-out dates are for testing out of one-semester classes. Apply in the spring to test out of a year-long class.)
    - To test out of taking a class, you study the subject and prepare for the test on your own. If interested, make an appointment with your counselor for questions or more details.
  - Consider taking a RCS Summer Learning class to obtain any credits you're still needing or to open up space in your schedule for other classes. Registration opens in the spring and courses are offered both in-person and online.

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In the Spring

- **Maintain good study habits and finish the year strong.**
  If you struggled somewhat with keeping your grades up, consider this: improvement in your grades is a sign of growth!
- **Plan ahead for next year's classes.**
  - Apply for Credit by Exam: testing out of a required year-long class, which can make room in your next year's schedule. May test-out dates apply only to testing out of year-long classes and not one-semester courses. Applications are available in mid-March, due to counseling in April, and testing is held in May.
  - Register for RCS Summer Learning to take a class during the summer if that's part of your plan.
- **Take the PSAT 9:** the standardized test for 9th graders.
  PSAT 9 is a preliminary SAT meant for providing a snapshot of where you are academically and what improvements to make. The PSAT 9 is given during the school day in April and student scores are available in early summer. As a practice SAT, these scores are not used for college admissions.

In the Summer

- **Take a tour of a local college** to familiarize yourself with the feel of college life.
- **Participate** in something that you enjoy!

What not to worry about this year:

- Taking the SAT in the spring of your Junior year. That test is based on curriculum typically acquired by the second semester of your Junior year. In addition, taking any test more than 2-3 times tends to lead to diminishing scores. Hold off on any formal test preparation courses; focusing on your in-school academics is the best preparation you can do now.