

## **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO HASTINGS HIGH SCHOOL**

### **Created by the PTSA**

The transition to high school can be exciting and daunting for parents as well as students. Hastings High School often communicates with students directly, and, as a result, parents can feel slightly disconnected. Please know, though, that it is developmentally appropriate for high school students to begin handling more on their own, and HHS is quite purposeful when they decide to reach out to parents. We encourage you to let your child navigate more and more on their own; they will make mistakes, but they will learn and grow from them. This Parent's Guide provides parents with key information that will help families navigate academics, extracurricular activities, and other structures that define the high school.

The PTSA will update this guide each year to reflect any changes that are made in the high school. If anything in this guide is incorrect or if you think we have left out something important, please email [suemerm@gmail.com](mailto:suemerm@gmail.com). A copy of this guide can be found on the PTSA website at [ptsahastings.org](http://ptsahastings.org), where we will update it as needed.

And please remember that PTSA Parent Meetings take place at the high school every six weeks; dates of these meetings can be found on the PTSA calendar. These meetings provide parents with invaluable information about current goings-on in the high school. If you are not able to attend, minutes are sent out by email and posted on the district page of the website; click on "Community" and then on "Hastings PTSA."

#### **Student Orientation:**

An orientation for 9th graders (no parents please!) takes place the Thursday before school starts at 11 a.m. Each student will be assigned a locker and receive their final schedule and Chromebook. They will also receive a [Student Handbook](#), which has a lot of valuable information that they may need over the next four years. Peer Leaders will take students on tours throughout the school, show them their lockers, and answer students' questions. Students will also be introduced to guidance counselors and other staff and enjoy some ice cream afterwards.

Be on the lookout over the summer for a letter explaining the Chromebook program and asking if you'd like to purchase insurance.

#### **School Supplies:**

HHS does not provide lists for school supplies. Individual teachers will specify any particular needs during the first class. Overall, students can decide what they'd like to use for each class. Some like binders; some prefer composition notebooks and folders. Then they typically like to have a few pens, pencils, erasers, highlighters, post-its, and index cards. It's definitely an adjustment from having those supply lists in middle school, but most people find that it's much better to buy just what your kid needs.

#### **Peer Leadership:**

HHS's Peer Leadership (PL) is a great program where 9th graders are mentored by seniors and learn the ropes at the high school. At the beginning of the school year, 9th graders are assigned to a PL group led by two seniors. They meet with their Peer Leaders each Thursday during lunch from October through April. Full-day Peer Leadership retreats take place in September and again in April.

### **Academics:**

Course load: Each student must take at least 6.5 classes per year (except senior year). New York State requires the following number of credits in each subject for graduation with a Regents diploma: English (4), social studies (4), science (3), math (3), foreign language (1), art/music (1), phys ed (2), health (.5) and electives (3.5). (A few classes taken in middle school, such as Earth Science, Algebra, and World Language, count toward these credits.) In addition, students must take the following Regents exams: English, math (any one), global history, U.S. history, science (any one).

Many colleges have stricter admission requirements, so it's important to be aware of them lest your student find out when it's too late that they fall short. The requirements vary from college to college and are often listed on their websites. Here, for example, is what SUNY New Paltz expects: 4 units of English, 3-4 units of social sciences/history, 3-4 units of college prep mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II/Trigonometry), 3-4 units of laboratory science, 2-4 units of a language other than English.

Though you shouldn't focus on post-secondary education too soon, it is important to look ahead. If there is a dream college for your child and advanced math is an admission requirement, be sure that they are on track to study Calculus senior year. If extra standardized testing is required — such as SAT Subject Tests — plan the prerequisites so those AP courses can be taken in junior year and those tests can be seamlessly taken. There are many, many colleges — even very selective colleges — that do not require SAT Subject Tests.

**For additional information about courses, please see the Course of Study, found on the High School website, under Quick Links and the tab Parent/Guardian: [Program of Studies](#)**

**Bell schedule:** Students are typically given 3-4 minutes to pass from class to class, which is ample time for a building our size.

**Math track:** Students must take 3 mathematics courses to graduate, and they must pass one Regents exam. Ninth graders will either take Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry, or Geometry Honors, depending on what they took in 8th grade. Parents should know that if their child does not take Algebra in 8th grade, they will not be on track to take Calculus as seniors. If your child is in 9th grade Algebra and does want to take Calculus, talk with your guidance counselor right away. Students can take both Geometry and Algebra II in 10th grade. Be aware: Not all students are ready to take Algebra in 8th or even 9th grade! Talk with your child's teachers and counselors to determine the courses that suit them best.

Each year, students can choose whether to take the Honors option or not. For example, your child may decide to take regular Geometry in 9th grade but Honors Algebra II in 10th grade.

**Science Research:** Juniors and seniors can take a two-year Science Research class in which they work with professional mentors on original scientific research. Students complete an internship during the summer between their junior and senior years where they gather and analyze data. During senior year, they finalize their projects and participate in a few local science fairs.

**SUPA Classes:** Juniors and seniors have the opportunity to take advanced English and U.S. History classes through Syracuse University for college credit (depending on the college). HHS has now developed an application process to ensure that students are serious about taking these classes (i.e., students are required to read a book and write an essay over winter break). There is a fee associated with these classes, and the district offers financial assistance if needed.

**World language:** Even though New York State only requires one year of a language other than English to graduate (and if your child passes the 8th grade language proficiency exam, they start with one credit), many universities require three years of language. Be aware of this if your child is considering stopping their study of a language after 9th grade.

Students in upper-level language classes may have the opportunity to take trips during February break and/or spring break. For example, every other year juniors and seniors enrolled in the Latin program travel to Rome, and advanced Spanish students recently traveled to Peru and Guatemala. These trips typically cost a few thousand dollars.

**Learn about electives:** There are many electives in various subject areas that are exciting. Try to schedule the required introductory courses freshman or sophomore year if your child wants advanced courses later. If, for example, AP Photography is going to excite your kid, Photo 1 and Photo 2 are required prior.

**Art, Music or Theater:** If your child is not enrolled in either band, orchestra or chorus, you should know that New York State requires one credit of visual art, music and/or theater to graduate. The majority of students satisfy this requirement in 9th grade.

**Physical Education:** P.E. classes are made up of students from all grades. Let your 9th grader know that they may have juniors and seniors in their class. If your child has unexcused absences from P.E. classes, they are required to make them up on specific make-up days.

**Open enrollment:** Students and parents are able to choose whether they want to take Honors or college-level classes. Often a teacher will recommend or not recommend students for these classes; parents are allowed to overrule this decision and will receive a letter from the guidance office allowing them to do so. You can have a conversation with the teacher about which class is most appropriate.

**Withdrawing from a class or changing a course level:** Students are allowed to withdraw from classes until **October 11** for full-year and fall classes and **March 7** for spring half-year classes (or the next school day if either date falls on a weekend) without the class appearing on their transcripts. The same is true for course-level changes (such as honors to non-honors).

**Pass/Fail options:** Students are allowed to take one course per year on a pass/fail basis. Students have until the end of the 1st marking period for each course to switch to Pass/Fail. This option is not available for honors-level or college-level courses or physical education.

**Midterms, Finals and Regents:** New York State sets the schedule for Regents exams. HHS sends out a complete exam schedule, including Regents and non-Regents exams, a few weeks before midterm and final exams start. Students are only required to go to school when they have an exam, which can come as a surprise to parents!

**Study Halls:** Many students will be assigned a study hall period. This gives them time to do homework during the school day. Students sign into study halls and attendance is taken. Seniors can opt out and go to the student lounge, library, etc. Study halls can be a very useful way for busy students (especially juniors) to have a slight breather in their schedules.

#### **Hastings Alternative School Program (HASP):**

HASP, which was launched in 1985, is available to students in all grades in the high school. HASP seeks to provide an enriched education for students who are at risk of dropping out before graduation. Students are challenged to realize their highest potential in a family atmosphere that emphasizes learning and achieving success. Students can apply to the program in the 9th grade, or in subsequent years. It is estimated that over 500 students have been a part of HASP to date. More information can be found on the district website.

#### **Attendance:**

Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. Parents should call the attendance line (478-6254) to explain a student's absence or lateness. If your child needs to leave school for a doctor's appointment, have them bring a note to the main office or you can call the main office (478-6250). These appointments are logged into the computer system so that teachers are aware. You can wait outside for your child; there is no need to sign your child out. Students must bring in a note from the doctor if they would like to participate in afterschool activities.

#### **Tutoring:**

Free tutoring by National Honor Society students is available. During the 2018-19 school year it was offered Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 in the library classroom. Tutors can also be hired through the Youth Employment Service (see below).

Many families hire outside tutors (a recent parent survey done by the PTSA showed extensive use of private tutors, especially in math and science). Tutors in Westchester typically are not

cheap: Hourly fees can range from \$100 - \$200 per hour. Parents can also turn to organizations such as [Regents Review](#) to help their kids prepare for Regents and AP exams.

### **Youth Employment Service (YES):**

The Youth Employment Service is run by Jill Iturbe. If members of the community wish to hire a Hastings High School student, the YES Office will do the job posting and pre-screening of applicants. If your high school student would like a job, the YES Office assists with job searches, applications, interview skills and resumes. Jobs can be one-time or ongoing and may include: evening babysitting, after-school child care, tutoring, homework help, driving to activities, sports coaching, music lessons, party helpers, pet care, yard work, moving help, help with tag sales, tech help, photography and videography, office help, restaurant help, social media assistance, retail help and senior citizen assistance. In addition, summer job information is provided beginning in January and includes camp counselor jobs, lifeguard jobs and training information, and jobs at country clubs, golf courses and town parks. Students must fill out a YES application and meet with Mrs. Iturbe to discuss interests and experience. The YES Office is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays; students can stop by any time. If you would like to hire a student, call 914-478-6266 or email Mrs. Iturbe at [iturbeJ@HOHSchools.org](mailto:iturbeJ@HOHSchools.org).

### **Music:**

There may be adjustments to the music schedule with the hiring of a new HHS music teacher. Currently, there are early morning orchestra rehearsals on Tuesdays and Thursdays and early morning band rehearsals on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Students who cannot fit music classes into their schedules are allowed to take music as an "independent study," which may be taken on a Pass/Fail basis. Students who take music as an independent study must attend the morning (for band and orchestra) or evening (for chorus) rehearsals. Independent study chorus has been meeting on Monday nights from 7:30 - 9 p.m., and all students enrolled in orchestra and band as a class and as an independent study must attend the morning meetings, so the word "independent" is really a misnomer!

HHS band members are required to participate in the Pep Band, which means that they play at four home football games on Saturdays. Orchestra members, except for seniors, are required to play at the high school graduation ceremony.

Every HHS student participating in chorus, band, or orchestra is required to wear concert uniforms. These dresses and suits are typically ordered in early fall. Be on the lookout for an email!

Other ensembles currently include Sinfonia (a student-led chamber music group, the Pink PANthers (steel drums), Jazz Band, and Madrigals (the small chorus). There may be adjustments to these offerings with the arrival of the new music teacher.

Music teachers provide sectional lessons during lunchtime or other free periods such as study halls.

Every other year, students in the music program (band, orchestra, chorus, etc.) travel to destinations such as Boston and Philadelphia for a regional high school music festival in the spring. It's a busy few days where each ensemble performs and is adjudicated. The next trip will take place during the 2019-2020 school year. Kids fundraise for this trip to help offset the costs, but parents are typically required to pay \$300-\$400. Students can receive financial assistance if needed.

Be sure to join the HHS Music Parents Facebook page for up-to-date information on rehearsals and performances. You can also sign up to receive emails from the HHS Music Parents. A huge thank you to the HHS Music Parents for the timely information they provide! Their emails around uniform ordering and delivery are especially appreciated.

### **Theater:**

HHS typically presents a play in the fall and a musical in the spring. Auditions take place about 10 weeks ahead of time, and there will be a call for students to work on tech. The week before the performance is considered Tech Week, and all students involved in the show must attend. These Tech Week rehearsals typically go until 9:30, so be prepared for late nights and tired kids! Depending on the timing, there are occasional Saturday rehearsals and tech calls to prepare the set and make props.

### **Sports:**

Helpful information about the Athletic Department can be found on the high school website. An especially handy link on the webpage is the BOCES Game Schedules. Click on the relevant team and season, and you will see a list of all games for the season.

The following sports are offered:

Fall: football, cross country, field hockey, soccer, girls swimming, girls tennis, volleyball

Winter: basketball, indoor track, ice hockey, boys swimming and wrestling

Spring: baseball, golf, boys/girls lacrosse, softball, boys tennis, spring track

Junior Varsity (JV) teams are the bridge between modified sports (which are for grades 6-8) and Varsity. Junior Varsity teams are typically for 9th and 10 graders, and Varsity teams are typically for 11th and 12th graders. Some sports only have enough players to field one team, which plays at the Varsity level.

Registration for playing on a team as well as the medical clearance process is now online and is very simple through a platform called Family ID. A physical exam must be completed within 12 months prior to the start of any sports season. Remember to register for the sport before each season! The deadlines are firm, so if you forget, your kid will be out of luck.

Preseason for all fall HHS sports takes place two weeks before the start of school in September. This is mandatory. Athletes will not be allowed to play in any games until a required number of practices are attended. Coaches look negatively upon missing preseason, and some teams may hold tryouts during this time. This means that some families may need to plan family vacations

around the preseason. Practice times vary by sport, and sometimes students are required to be at practice/games/meets on Saturdays.

Be aware that some winter sports teams, such as basketball, may have practice and/or games during the holiday break in December as well as during winter break and spring break. Try to learn the sports schedule for your child before planning any vacations!

The Varsity baseball team takes a training trip during spring break every other year. The next trip will be during the 2020-2021 school year. Kids fundraise for this trip to help offset the costs, but parents typically pay \$550 for this trip; students can receive financial assistance if needed.

### **Parent/Teacher Conferences:**

Parent/Teacher Conferences take place in early November. Conferences at the high school are only 5 minutes long, but teachers are more than happy to schedule additional meetings if necessary. Just like at the middle school, parents sign up for conferences through an online system. You will receive an email in October alerting you to sign up.

### **Guidance Counselors:**

Each 9th grader is assigned a guidance counselor alphabetically according to the student's last name. Guidance counselors are charged with helping students navigate course selection throughout high school as well as the college application process. Ninth graders and their parents meet with their guidance counselors in the fall to start to get to know each other, to talk about how the transition to high school is going, and to discuss future courses of study. An e-mail will be sent out asking you to sign up for this meeting.

Note: A parent/student/counselor meeting is also held during the winter of junior year to discuss the college application process. At this meeting, the student's thoughts about where they might apply are discussed. During junior year, the guidance department will also offer student and family information sessions on the college application process and applying for financial aid.

Your child can make an appointment to see their counselor at any time, or they can even walk in without an appointment if need be. You, as the parent, can also request to meet with your child's counselor at any time.

It's important that you and your child develop a good relationship with your guidance counselor and that your child become comfortable seeking them out independently. The guidance counselor will help work out the schedule that is best for your child and will be writing a recommendation that is included with your child's college applications. Come senior year, parents will be asked to submit a "brag sheet" to counselors, which they use in writing the recommendation.

### **Other Student Support Services:**

**Social Worker:** Christina Repp is a licensed clinical social worker who works with students in individual and group counseling around issues involving stress, mental health, family problems, and alcohol, tobacco and other substances. She also networks with outside agencies to provide services to students and their families, consults with faculty and staff, and assists with individuals and families in crisis. Her office is in the Guidance Suite.

**School Psychologist:** Gloria Szeszko provides counseling to students who are experiencing academic, behavioral, social or emotional issues. Her responsibilities include evaluation of a student's learning, scholastic and social-emotional abilities and assisting students who receive specialized supports and services. Dr. Szeszko also works with students and families in crisis. Her office is in the Guidance Suite.

### **Student Portal and Parent Portal:**

Parents and students have access to the portal in order to see schedules, grades, and report cards. The portal cannot be accessed by students or parents during school hours. Students can talk with their teachers about missed assignments at any time, as teachers have unrestricted access to the portal. The hope is that shutting down the portal during the school day — so that students and parents are not constantly checking it — will reduce stress in our kids.

**IMPORTANT:** At the end of the school year, be sure to print out the final report card. A previous year's report card cannot be accessed in subsequent years, though guidance counselors can provide you a copy if need be.

### **Challenge Success:**

Having noticed escalating levels of stress and stress-related anxiety in our kids and some unhealthy behavior that has resulted, the HHS administration has partnered with Challenge Success, a non-profit organization affiliated with Stanford, in an effort to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for our kids. The program is funded through a grant from the Hastings Education Foundation.

All students, grades 9-12, answered a survey last fall that provided data on their daily activities, motivations, challenges and stressors. The Challenge Success committee, which includes HHS administrators, teachers, counselors, parents and students, are looking at best practices in areas such as curriculum, assessment, homework, school schedule and a healthy school climate.

Parents will be surveyed during the 2019-2020 school year to get their perspective on stressors affecting our children.

With research showing that adolescents need 8-10 hours of sleep daily, and our kids reporting, on average, less than 6 hours, the committee has been discussing implementation of a later start to the school day in both HHS and FMS.

For more information on Challenge Success: <http://www.challengesuccess.org/about/>.



## **Recess / Lunch:**

Students have 40 minutes for recess and lunch. They are not required to eat lunch in the cafeteria as long as they clean up after themselves. On Thursdays, 9th graders meet with their Peer Leaders during the lunch hour from October through the end of April. Students are allowed to use their phones during lunch, but they are encouraged to enjoy face-to-face conversations with their friends!

## **Social Dynamics:**

Parents often find that social groups shift when students enter high school. It can often take 9th graders a few months to feel settled. Because classes, athletic teams, music ensembles, and theater productions often consist of students from several grades, it's not uncommon for 9th graders to make close friends with upperclassmen.

We do suggest that parents of friend groups get together to talk about rules for when kids go out, where they're allowed to go, curfew, etc. We parents can learn a great deal from one another and have many good ideas to share. It can be very helpful to speak openly about our different rules and philosophies, so that we can respect one another's approaches.

Have an open dialogue about drug and alcohol use with your children. Many high school students gather on the weekends (only in good weather) in Hillside Woods at a location called Padj. Freshmen supposedly are not allowed at Padj until after Homecoming. Police are frequently aware of these gatherings and will often shut them down at about 11 p.m.

## **Vaping/Drugs/Alcohol:**

Vaping is not allowed on school premises. Administrators are constantly monitoring the high school bathrooms for vaping. For the first offense, the student gets an in-school suspension; for the second, an out-of-school suspension. Any vaping devices found will be confiscated and not returned. HHS has held several programs to educate kids about vaping risks.

When a student is caught vaping, the parents are called. The suspension cannot go into effect until the parent is notified, since parents have the option to appeal the suspension. Students who are suspended cannot participate in afterschool activities.

Use of alcohol or marijuana on school premises results in an out-of-school suspension. A chart outlining the HHS discipline code is in the [Student Handbook](#).

## **Junior Formal and Prom:**

The only dance currently on school property is the Junior Formal (known as JF). There is no longer a dance for Homecoming, but there is a weekend full of fun activities revolving around

many of the fall sports teams. Prom is held off site; after a PTSA-sponsored picture-taking event in the courtyard, kids are transported to the dance by bus.

### **Lockers:**

Each student is assigned a locker. Students rarely use them and lug their coats and heavy backpacks from class to class. Parents really can't understand why they do this...

### **Cell Phones:**

Students are required to put their phones away during class, but they are allowed to use them during lunch. Phones cannot be used in study hall or in the hallways between classes. If parents need to reach their student during the school day, they can call the main office (478-6250). Parents have been asked not to text or call their child during the school day.

### **Facebook:**

Be aware that many groups and teams use Facebook to communicate. Each grade typically has a Facebook page. If your child does not use Facebook, they may need to find other ways to stay up to date with these groups and teams.

### **Student Union:**

In the spring of 8th grade, students run for President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer of their freshman class and become members of Student Union. Student Union is made up of officers from all four grades and meets every Thursday morning. It works as a collective on school matters and events such as pep rallies and School Olympics, and class officers are also responsible for individual grade activities, including fundraising, Junior Formal, and Senior Prom.

### **National Honor Society:**

Students are inducted into the National Honor Society in the spring of their junior year. Students are initially invited to apply if their freshman and sophomore transcript shows an average of 88 or above. Middle School foreign language, Earth Science and Algebra (if taken) also count in this average. Once the required GPA is met, community service hours, demonstrated leadership, and recommendations are reviewed.

### **Other Clubs/Organizations:**

The Student Handbook has a list with descriptions of the numerous groups that are open to all to join. These include: Academic Challenge, Amnesty International, Art Club, Chess Club, Crossing Borders, Culinary Club, Environmental Club, Film Society, Gay/Straight Alliance, Habitat for Humanity, Hudsonettes, Jazz Band, Madrigals, Math Club, National Honor Society, National Art Honor Society, SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), the Buzzer (school

newspaper) and Oneirata (literary magazine), World Language Club, WESTMUNC (model United Nations club). Students are also welcome to propose and launch new clubs themselves, but they will need to find a faculty advisor.

### **Annual Thanksgiving Dinner for the Homeless:**

Many high school students volunteer for this annual event, sponsored by Project Share, in which hundreds of homeless people are brought to the Cochran gym to enjoy a full Thanksgiving meal prepared and served by volunteer students and adults. Parents can volunteer as well.

### **A final note:**

We hope that this handbook has been useful to all of you parents who will soon have or currently have children in the high school. Trust us: The years at HHS go by in a blink of an eye. So much happens, and our children grow and evolve in ways that are hard to anticipate. Rest assured that the high school administration, teachers, and staff work incredibly hard to make a rich and fulfilling experience for all of our children. It may feel overwhelming at first, but before you know it, your kids will be comfortable, self-assured, and content at HHS. We wish you all the best!