

A guide for Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities, who are entering High School

ONLY YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD. They are entering a new school where no one knows them. It is up to you to **INFORM** and **EDUCATE** the school about your child. With input from past teachers, counselors and specialists, inform teachers and **SHARE** information regarding what has worked in helping to educate your child in the past. IEP papers do not always accurately translate what your child is all about. You may want to put together a comprised list of recommended tips and accommodations that work well for your child. (See attached wish list of tips and accommodations, p. 9)

PARENTAL GOALS

- Your child's success depends on you...it all starts at home. Lots of love, patience, discipline and support are needed to help your child succeed.
- Never put emphasis on what your child can't do.... always praise and support their strengths and put emphasis on what they CAN DO.
- Be your child's advocate, **stay on top of every issue and always follow up** with questions or concerns.
- You must also know when to gradually "let go" and let your child become a more independent young adult. They must learn to be their own advocate, i.e., seek out a teacher if they need help, go to a tutoring center, go in early for study sessions, participate in class discussions, etc. **They will gain self confidence by doing things on their own. If you do everything for them, they will NOT succeed.**
- Know your Child's strengths and weaknesses plus their limitations. Be aware that teachers are not "miracle workers". I have found that most teachers do want your child to succeed.
- **IT IS YOUR CHILDS HOMEWORK, NOT YOURS.**
- **Limit your child's extracurricular activities.** Especially if they are struggling academically and are involved in sports, art, music, clubs, etc. Have them focus on academics only. This may mean they need to drop out of a favorite activity, but it will improve their grades. Too many activities may cause unnecessary stress for them.
- If you have not already done so, **SET UP HOUSE RULES**, especially where homework is concerned. Find the one thing that motivates your child and restrict it from them until they have completed their homework (i.e., no wii or other computer games until all homework is completed). Children need discipline and rules, no matter how old they are. Always be consistent and follow-through with your house rules.

- T.V.'s and computers should be set up in an area of the house that is in plain sight of parents. T.V.'s or computers should NOT be in the child's room. You want to be able to monitor your child on the computer and know that they are doing their homework and using their time wisely. Limit their time spent on emails to friends and/or don't allow them to email unless their homework is completed. Set up HOUSE RULES for the computer too!
- **A Healthy diet** makes a big difference in their academic performance. When they come home from school, have some fruit cut up for them. Carrots, celery, cucumbers, veggies are good too. A light snack is best after school (and it won't spoil their appetite for dinner). Pack, or have them pack a healthy lunch the night before.
- **Make sure your child gets enough sleep.** It's OK if they want to be in bed by 8:30-9:00. Their brains are working very hard all day and they need their down time.

WHILE YOUR CHILD IS IN 8TH GRADE

- Get a copy of and read through the OPRF Academic Catalog. This catalog lists all the courses offered at OPRF along with a brief description of that course. It outlines the "levels" that courses are divided into. Review these levels with your child and 8th grade teachers, to see what may be the best fit for him/her.
- Have your child Shadow with a student at OPRF for a day or two. If your child does not know anyone, check with the Academic Strategies teachers or their case manager, to see if they know of any students who would make good mentors for your child to shadow.
- **Parents...Sit in on classes @ OPRF during Parent day** (at the various levels): Honors, regular Education, R.E.I.'s (Regular Education Initiative) and Special Ed classes. Determine which class environment works best for your child (even if it means over-riding recommendations). You may also want your child to go with you to get his/her opinion. It may take 2 – 3 days of sitting in on classes before you make your class determinations.
- Calculate each class size, determine ratio of student to teacher(s). Ask yourself: does teacher have control of the classroom, will this class environment/level work for my child? Will my child learn well in this class environment?
- Talk to the teachers in these classes and give them information about your child, ask their opinion. Many teachers were helpful in helping me decide on which class may be best suited for my child.
- For English classes, ask the specific question: "What is the reading level of this class?" Do the same for each core curriculum course: Science, Math, History, Languages, etc. Keep in mind that many Math and Science courses go hand-in-

hand, Science placement may be determined by their Math placement scores and vice versa.

- **Be sure to take notes while you are sitting in on these classes**, mark them as appropriate, inappropriate or not-sure for your child. When you return home, make sure to review your notes, they will help you determine the final course selections for your child.

COURSE SELECTION

- OPRF offers a Special Education Curriculum in three areas: Learning Development (LD), Emotional Development (ED) and Transitional Education with Access to Mainstream (TEAM) which includes MI, Autistic, Other Health Impaired and MH Program Course Options. It is very possible that your child will not have an exact fit for any of the above curriculums. This is where “knowing your child and their limitations” will become critical in their course selection. You may need to develop a custom curriculum for your child by “mixing and matching” the various course levels offered.
- You may want to place your child in an Academic Strategies course (same as Resource at Roosevelt). **Academic Strategies teachers are Special Ed teachers and the best contact person to coordinate any concerns you may have with any teacher.** Other key Contacts are their Case Manager and Dean. Each contact person has their specific roles. Know what these roles are.
- Place child in mainstream, regular Education or Honor courses where they excel (**only if you know they can do it**). **Be careful, the student cannot switch classes until the quarter is over.** Subjects where the child struggles, look into R.E.I classes and/or LD classes (based on their reading/Math/Science/Writing level from Middle School).
- Balance your child’s schedule with “fun classes” and/or intersperse courses with heavy auditory language with hands on/visual learning classes (See Review Schedule below).

REVIEW SCHEDULE

- Review schedule with your child, walk the halls to each class period many times before school starts until they feel comfortable in knowing where they are going.
- Carefully review their schedule and note how the courses are dispersed. **An ideal schedule would have the courses that are the most challenging for your child earlier in the day (first thing in the morning), plus allow for listening breaks.** Intersperse courses with heavy auditory language with hands on/visual learning classes. If they have an Academic Strategies class (Resource/Study period) it should fall mid day OR at the end of the day. If they have any questions regarding assignments they will receive assistance in Academic Strategies, or be directed to the appropriate tutor during school hours. The below is an example of what an “Ideal” schedule could be. **(Again, this would be based on where your child’s strengths and weaknesses lie.)**
- 1st period – Math
- 2nd period – Art
- 3rd period - History
- 4th period - Lunch
- 5th period - Science
- 6th period - English
- 7th period - PE
- 8th period - Academic strategies
- 9th period - Homeroom

REVIEW LOCKER LOCATION WITH CHILD

- Select a locker location for your child that is centrally located in proximity to the majority of their classes. You may change locker locations each year, based on their schedules or, they can keep the same locker location for all 4 years. to their 1st period

KEEPING THEM ORGANIZED

- Make a color-coded Map (copy map out of Academic Catalog) for your child. Circle where their classrooms are located and label them 1st period, 2nd period, and so on. Place the map into a plastic sleeve at the front of their binder, along with their schedule.
- Make sure your student has all the necessary supplies...pre-order their supplies when you receive the flyer from the Bookstore...it will save you a lot of running around.

- Help your child put together a 6- 8 subject BINDER, color code each subject. An organized student will do much better!
- Have Child do homework as soon as they get home (allow for a short snack break if needed). Don't allow them to play until their homework is finished first. It's OK for them to listen to music while doing homework...for some kids, it actually helps!
- The State provides all students with an IEP a second set of books to keep at home. Please do this, as the text books are very heavy and, if your child tends to be forgetful, they will always have their textbook at home.

STUDENTS GOALS/Tips from my high-schoolers

- Remember, it is YOUR homework, not your parents.
- Keep an organized Binder.
- Keep your locker clean.
- Get to class on time, do NOT be tardy.
- Keep up with the teacher's schedule.
- Seek out help when needed from teachers. Teachers are available before, during and after school. They are always happy to help out. There are also tutor centers in the library.
- Do as much homework on your own as possible.
- Don't procrastinate. Start those big assignments early. Do a little each day, especially when research is involved.
- For finals, plan a study schedule and start studying a week ahead of time. Ask teachers for study guides as early as possible. DO NOT CRAM FOR A FINAL!!!!
- Eat a healthy breakfast and/or lunch before finals ...do not take them on an empty stomach.
- For January Finals, get study guides before December break and study over your break. Even if it is only 15-30 minutes a day, it will help when finals roll around.
- Do as much homework as you can in Study Hall/Resource (there are teachers there that can help you with any questions).
- Finish homework right when you get home, do not wait (allow a short break for a snack, if necessary).
- When you have a Field Trip planned, make sure to get homework/assignments from your other teachers in advance.
- Start or join a study buddy group
- Don't be afraid to ask questions
- Participate in class discussions
- Join a club
- Make friends
- Have Fun
- Take required courses early and/or test out of them if you can. Then you can take fun courses your senior year.

- For test, Lab or PE make-ups go in early or after school, do not forget to do make-ups.
- Use note cards to study terms for any subject.
- Check your textbook for websites...they provide helpful study guides too!
- Do as much EXTRA CREDIT as possible (it all adds up!).
- Call a friend if you forgot or are unclear about a homework assignment and if the teacher cannot be reached.
- Get enough sleep...school is a lot of work and you need your rest.
- Limit your extracurricular activities. One per season.
- Use your computer time wisely – for homework/research. Play games and do emails after your homework is done.
- When trying to memorize difficult things, make up your own “jingle” to help yourself remember. Like when you were in grade school, “Never Eat Soggy Waffles” for North, East, South and West.

A Student’s guide to test taking:

- Answer the questions you know first. Skip the questions you don’t know, you can always go back to them. You may find the answers to the ones you do not know in other questions.
- Eliminate answers you know are wrong
- If you are running out of time, it is better to guess than to leave it blank.
- Double check your answers before turning it in.
- Use index cards to help study for vocabulary and other terms on a test. The more you write it down, the more you will remember it.
- Read each question carefully
- Pay attention to key words, i.e., NOT, ALWAYS,
- Take a Test Prep course
- Look at the websites in your textbook and the OPRFHS site, to find helpful study guides/tips.

PUT TOGETHER A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS (BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS OR ON THEIR FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL).

- **KEEP AN OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS. THIS IS WHERE YOU WANT TO INFORM AND EDUCATE THEM ABOUT YOUR CHILD...**
- When emailing concerns, copy all parties involved including teacher, Academic Strategies teacher, Case Manager, Dean, Special Ed Director.
- OPRF is a big school, each department is compartmentalized, so assume the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing...in other words, **KEEP ALL PARTIES INFORMED OF YOUR CONCERNS AND ALWAYS TOUCH BASE IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE A RESPONSE BACK.**
- Put together a “letter of introduction” regarding your child. (See example below). Email this letter to ALL of your child’s teachers. Give them background

information on your child (which middle school they went to, which program they were in, and a brief family history), list their strengths & weaknesses:

Hello to all of _____'s teachers,
My name is _____, _____'s Mom/Dad/Caregiver. I just wanted to give you some background information regarding _____. _____ **has an IEP.**
_____ went to _____ Middle School in Oak Park/River Forest and was in the _____ Program. _____ lives at home with his/her Mom/Dad/Mom & Dad/Caregiver/Grandparents/Stepparents/Other. _____ has _____ brothers and _____ sisters, ages _____ and _____. We have a family pet named _____. (Give just a brief family history and/or list anything you may feel is important regarding your child, family ,beliefs, etc.). He/She has many strengths and weaknesses as follows:

Strengths

- *Very hardworking and conscientious*
- *he/she is very honest*
- *has a great memory*
- *when asked to do something, he/she will give it his/her all*
- *he/she is organized*
- *he/she is very rule based*
- *he/she is very quiet and non-disruptive*

Weaknesses

- *His/Her ability to conceptualize. _____ sees only in "black or white", "right or wrong", that gray area is hard for him/her.*
- *He/She processes information at a slower rate than we do*
- *He/She cannot hold eye contact with others. Even though he/she is not looking at you, he/she does know what you are saying and more importantly is listening.*
- *His/Her fine motor skills are poor*
- ***HE/SHE DOES NOT TEST WELL...**especially if long written responses are required. He/She does well with True/False, multiple choice, word banks, fill in the blank, short answers, etc.*
- *Physically, he/she is very small, so I worry about the weight of his/her backpack.*
- *He/She is a "different" kid, who lacks the ability to understand nonverbal language (body language). His/Her social skills need to be coached. Because of this, he/she has few friends and/or difficulty maintaining friendships, and/or is very shy and keeps to himself/herself. My biggest concern is other kids making fun of him/her. Please keep an eye out for him/her in this regard. If you know of any students he/she might be compatible with, please pair him/her with them if there are team class projects.*

- *Sometimes, when he/she gets excited, he/she tends to rock back and forth in his/her seat. I don't know if this was an issue in school, his/her past teachers have stated it was not an issue.*

If you have any questions you'd like to ask former teachers, they were as follows: (List past teachers here:)

<i>Science</i>	<i>Mr. A</i>	<i>555-1234</i>
<i>English</i>	<i>Mrs. B</i>	
<i>Math</i>	<i>Ms. C</i>	
<i>Academic Strategies/Resource</i>	<i>Mr. D</i>	
<i>History</i>	<i>Mrs. E</i>	
<i>Foreign Language</i>	<i>Ms. F</i>	
<i>Music</i>	<i>Mr. G</i>	
<i>Art</i>	<i>Mrs. H</i>	
<i>P.E.</i>	<i>Ms. J</i>	

As for any Medical Diagnosis, His/her condition has been described as ADD and NLD (non-verbal learning disorder). He/she has recently been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome, a form of "high-functioning" Autism.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via email, home, work or cell phone numbers as listed below. Keep me updated weekly/monthly/daily regarding my son/daughter _____. I look forward to working with _____'s teachers at OPRF, we are all a team working together in helping educate and make our child's academic experience the best it can be.

Sincerely,

Your name

___ - ___ work phone

___ - ___ home phone

___ - ___ cell phone

This is just an example. **Your child will have different strengths and weaknesses.** Put together your own version of your child's "introduction letter" and make sure to submit it to all their teachers **PLUS their Dean, Case Manager and the Special Education Director. I have found that all the teachers found this information most helpful and it quickly opened the door of communication between parent, teacher and student.** Also, a positive and teamwork approach is the best way to define and/or resolve any issues you may have.

WISH LIST OF TIPS AND RECOMMENDED ACCOMMODATIONS

REMIND ALL teachers before each **test that your child has an IEP** and list the accommodations that go along with it, i.e., extended time in a less disruptive environment.

List examples of what the teacher can do to make the students learning experience better, ie...

- No pop quizzes
- Prime seating close to teacher
- Accommodations for tests: No timed testing or shorter version of test during the class period or tests taken in less disruptive class environment or test taken/broken down over a two day period. Multiple choice or other closed set type tests rather than open ended or essay answers.
- Provide a Study guide for tests
- Always distribute a class syllabus
- Visual aids use for homework and project assignments – write assignment clearly on the board and make sure student has written it down correctly.
- Allow student to use index cards/notes for tests
- For Standardized testing, **make sure your student receives the accommodations they are eligible for.** Especially the ACT, there are different levels of Special Testing: One for **extended time** and one for **special testing**. Extended time is just that, allowing more time for your child to take the test. Special testing includes extended time over multiple days, note taking and tape cassette (reader). ACT is also compartmentalized...**DO NOT apply online for your student to take the ACT if they are eligible for special accommodations. The online application process is for the STANDARD TEST ONLY and your child would NOT receive any accommodations.**

The above are accounts of what has worked for us and our child. Each child is unique...what works for one may not necessarily work for another. The key is knowing your child, their strengths, weaknesses and limitations. Know what they are capable of, but more importantly what they are not capable of. **SHARE** your information with school personnel and **EDUCATE** them about your child. “Brainstorm” with educators to find the best approach for making your child’s academic experience successful. Remember, a positive teamwork approach is the best way to define and/or resolve any issues you may have. You are all working toward the same goal: helping your child succeed.