

# Getting Ready

Helping your  
**middle school student**  
prepare for  
**college and career**

WASHINGTON  
**HIGHER  
EDUCATION**  
COORDINATING BOARD

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

GEAR UP is a national effort to encourage and prepare more students from low-income families to enter and succeed in post-secondary education.

Washington State GEAR UP is a partnership of the Office of the Governor, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the University of Washington and the College Success Foundation.

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**COLLEGE SPARK**  
WASHINGTON  
Pursuing Success by Promoting Education



A **GEAR UP**  
Publication



# CONGRATULATIONS

## You've got a student in **middle school!**

The next several years will be challenging but also exciting. You'll see your student grow from a child into a confident teen ready for high school and the world beyond.

But what can you do? How can you help your child do well in middle school and prepare for the future?

Here are **some tips** to make the most of middle school.



## 6<sup>th</sup> GRADE

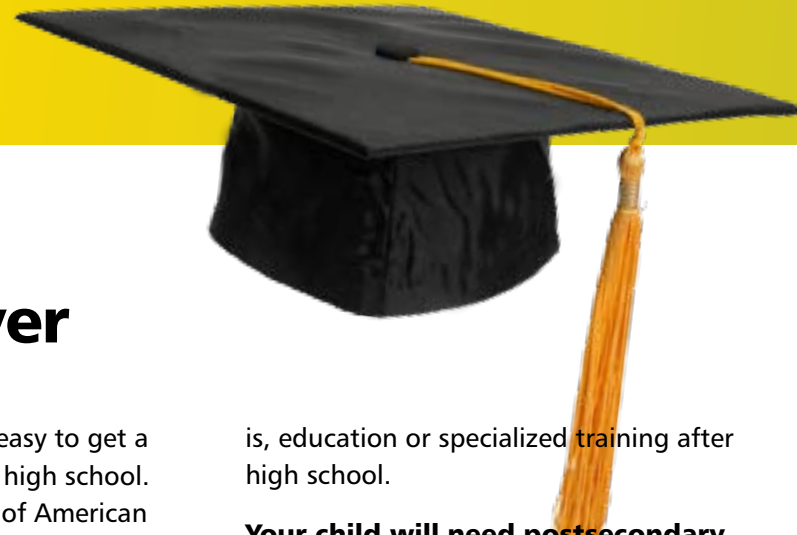
- ▶ Encourage your child to **join an extracurricular activity** at school. This could be sports or music, student government or the yearbook, or anything else. Getting involved is the best way to get to know teachers and other students.
- ▶ **Ask questions** about your child's classes and teachers. Ask about homework and assignments. Knowing that you care will help your child take school seriously.
- ▶ Encourage your child to **participate in class and turn in homework** on time. If your school has an on-line program to share grades, find out how you can log on.
- ▶ Find out if **you can volunteer** at the middle school. Volunteering will help you meet teachers and other parents, and it will show your child that you think school is important.
- ▶ Learn whether your child has an **advisor**. If so, schedule a time to meet the advisor and talk about how your child can explore his or her interests. Middle school is a good time to start thinking about the future.
- ▶ When it is time for 7th grade course registration, see if your child can sign up for honors classes. Taking **pre-algebra in 7th grade** is a good way to get ahead. Also see if your child can register for electives such as wood shop, art, computers, or a world language. **Challenging classes** help students prepare to succeed in high school.

## 7<sup>th</sup> GRADE

- ▶ Encourage your child to **stay active** in sports or other activities at school. Find out if there are volunteer projects your child can do, such as helping younger students with their homework.
- ▶ **Ask questions** about your child's classes, teachers and homework and encourage your child to turn in work on time. If your school has an on-line program to share grades, find out how you can log on.
- ▶ Keep **volunteering** at the middle school. Even as your child gets older, it's important that you stay involved.
- ▶ Learn what your school does to help students **explore their interests**. Many schools let students take **interest assessments** to learn about different careers.
- ▶ When it is time for 8th grade course registration, see if your child can sign up for honors classes. Taking **algebra in 8th grade** is a good way to get ahead. Also see if your child can register for electives such as wood shop, art, computers, or a world language.

## 8<sup>th</sup> GRADE

- ▶ Encourage your child to find **leadership opportunities** in student government or other school activities.
- ▶ **Ask questions** about your child's classes, teachers and homework. If your school has an on-line program to share grades, find out how you can log on.
- ▶ Make sure your child is **ready to graduate** from middle school and has the course credits, grades and behavior required by your school.
- ▶ Keep **volunteering** at school and learn about ways to volunteer at the high school.
- ▶ Learn what your school does to help students **explore career interests**. Many schools help students take electives in an interesting **career pathway**.
- ▶ Find out if there is a **high school orientation** for students and parents.
- ▶ When it is time for 9th grade course registration, see if your child can sign up for honors classes. Taking **geometry in 9th grade** is a good way to get ahead. Also see if your child can register for electives such as wood shop, art, computers, or a world language.



## College is more important than ever

Fifty years ago, it was easy to get a good job right out of high school. In 1950, **80 percent** of American jobs didn't require any higher education. You could get a job with just a year or two of high school, and you certainly didn't need to go to college.

But things are different now. Today, only **15 percent** of jobs are open to people without "postsecondary" education – that

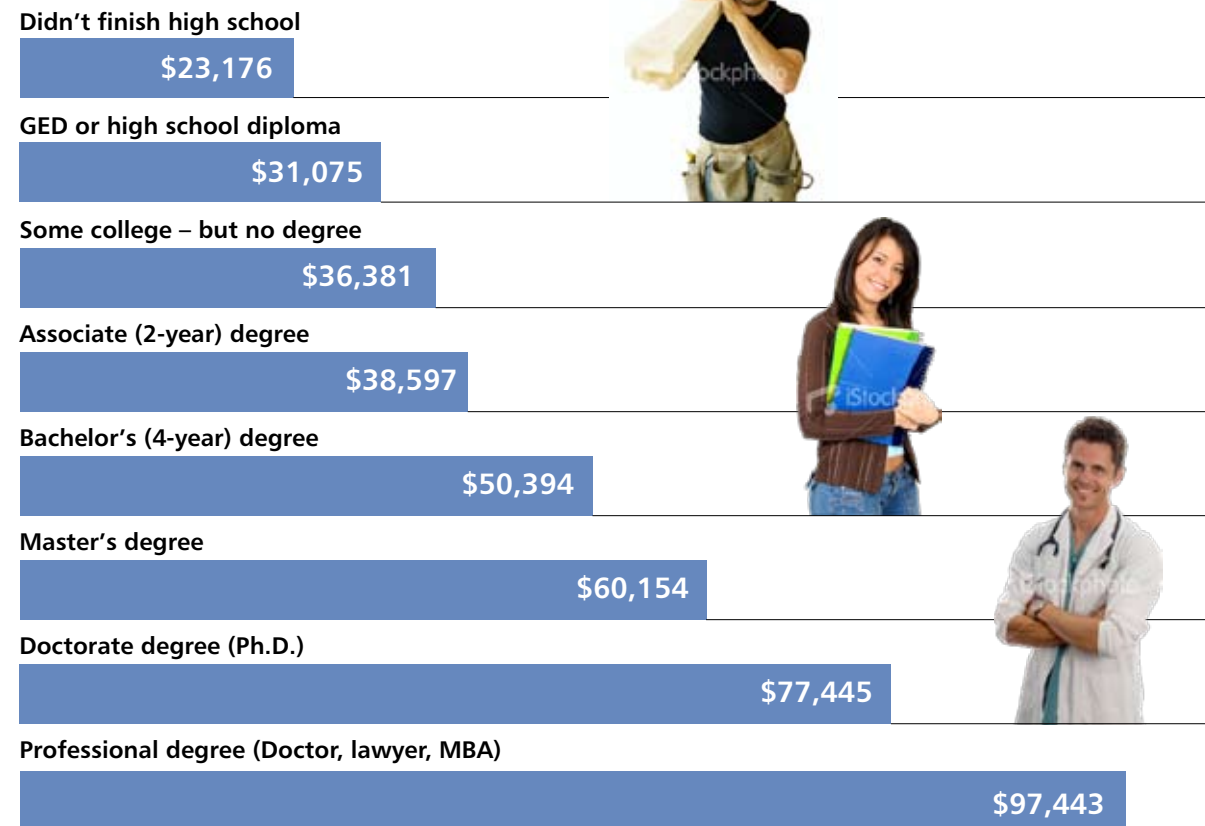
is, education or specialized training after high school.

**Your child will need postsecondary education to succeed.** That may be an apprenticeship or community college, a four-year college, or even a graduate degree. There are many different options for postsecondary education. Finding the right one depends on what your child wants to do for a career.

## Median Earnings for Workers Age 25 and Up

The skills and knowledge students need to be admitted to college are the same ones they need to succeed at a job. Being **college-ready** means your child is ready to do well in a four-year university, a community college, an apprenticeship or a good job.

On average, people who get college degrees will earn almost **twice as much** money in their lifetime as those with only a high school diploma.



Source: US Census Bureau, Earnings year-round full-time workers age 25 and over, [DATE] [www.pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005perinc/new03\\_010.htm](http://www.pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005perinc/new03_010.htm)

## Who am I?

### College might seem far away for a student in middle school, but it's important to start planning now.

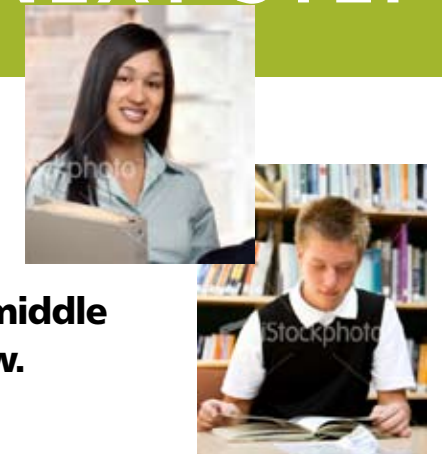
One good way to prepare during middle school is to help your child answer the question, "Who am I?" Talk with your child about the things he or she likes to do. Find out about jobs that sound interesting. Ask your child these questions:

DO YOU LIKE?	YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN CAREERS IN:
working outdoors or solving problems	Agriculture, Science & Natural Resources
expressing yourself creatively or performing	Arts, Media, Communications & Design
organizing things or persuading people	Business, Management & Finance
helping other people	Education, Social & Health Services
working on a team to solve problems	Engineering, Science & Technology

Then help your child learn more about careers in these areas and the education they require. Your child's middle school advisor may be able to help your child take interest assessments or aptitude tests to explore different careers. Or you can use the Internet or a library to learn more about different career ideas.

This chart shows the type of postsecondary education needed for different types of careers. Which of these sound interesting to your child?

Two Years of College (Associate Degree or Apprenticeship)	Four Years of College (Bachelor's Degree)	More Than Four Years of College (Graduate Degree)
Auto Mechanic	Accountant	Architect
Commercial Artist	Computer Systems Analyst	Biologist
Computer Technician	Dietitian	Chiropractor
Dental Hygienist	Editor	Dentist
Drafter	Engineer	Doctor
Graphic Designer	FBI Agent	Economist
Hotel/Restaurant Manager	Forensic Technician	Geologist
Medical Lab Technician	Investment Banker	Lawyer
Insurance Agent	Journalist	Librarian
Registered Nurse	Pharmacist	Priest or Rabbi
Surgical Technologist	Public Relations Specialist	Psychologist
Surveyor	Social Worker	Public Policy Analyst
	Teacher	Sociologist
	Writer	University Professor
		Veterinarian





# GET READY FOR HIGH SCHOOL

## Five tips to help your child make the most of middle school

### 1. Work hard in core classes.

Middle school students should take Math, Science, English and Social Studies every year. Grades in these courses will determine where your child gets placed in high school... so it's important to work hard, participate in class and turn in homework on time.

### 2. Take advanced classes if possible.

Find out if your child's school offers advanced or honors classes. Your child may be able to jump ahead by taking a more intense course load: for instance, taking pre-algebra in 7th grade and algebra in 8th grade can qualify a student for advanced math classes in high school.

### 3. Take electives in areas that interest you.

Is your child interested in music or art? In computers? In cooking? Encourage your child to explore electives in different areas. Middle school is a great time for students to learn about their interests.

### 4. Get involved in at least one activity at school.

Getting involved is the best way to be part of the school and meet other students and teachers. It will also make your child a better candidate for college and careers – colleges and employers both want "well-rounded" applicants who have taken the time to get involved in things they love.

### 5. Get to know at least one adult at school.

Your child might have an advisor who can help. Or maybe there's a school counselor or favorite teacher your child can turn to. But no matter who it is, it's important that your child identify at least one adult at school to talk to – someone who can give advice on what classes to take and how to prepare for high school.

Sometimes students think middle school isn't important. They're not in high school yet, and they're a long way from college. So they sometimes think they don't have to take their classes seriously or work hard. But middle school is important.

Middle school is important because it prepares students for high school. And high school is important because it prepares students for college and careers – to be successful as adults. Research shows that taking challenging classes in high school is the single most important thing a student can do to be successful after graduation. But students can't take challenging classes in high school if they haven't prepared by working hard during middle school.



## Make a High School

# PLAN

What will high school be like?

What will your child do in high school?

One good way to prepare is to help your child create a high school plan. Your child's middle school advisor may be able to help. Having a plan will help your child feel confident about moving on to a bigger school with higher expectations.

### Here's how to start.

**STEP 1. Choose a Career Pathway.** Career pathways are groups of jobs that are based on similar interests, skills, and abilities. Many high schools ask students to choose a career pathway during 9th grade. Ask your student to choose a pathway from the chart on this page.

**STEP 2. Choose two or three careers to explore.** Which careers in the career pathway sound the most interesting? What education will they require after high school?

**STEP 3. Learn what to do during high school.** Many high schools set students' course plans based on their career pathway. What does your high school recommend? Maybe your child will need to take extra math or science, or take specialized classes in music or computers.

CAREER PATHWAYS				
<b>Agriculture, Science &amp; Natural Resources</b> ↓ Farmer/Rancher Fisherman Forest Ranger Geologist Timber Harvester Veterinarian	<b>Art, Media, Communications, &amp; Design</b> ↓ Actor Director Graphic Designer Journalist Librarian Spokesperson	<b>Business, Management, &amp; Finance</b> ↓ Accountant Business Owner Office Manager Salesperson Stock Broker Store Manager	<b>Education, Social, &amp; Health Services</b> ↓ Cosmetologist Doctor Firefighter Police Officer Teacher Travel Agent	<b>Engineering, Science, &amp; Technology</b> ↓ Architect Computer Scientist Electrician Engineer HVAC Technician Mechanic

SAMPLE JOBS

## Do *More* than the Minimum!

**No matter what you do, it's important to do more than the minimum. That's true on the job – no matter what job you have. And it's definitely true in high school.**

The State of Washington has a minimum set of requirements for graduation from high school. Your child's high school will also have a minimum set of requirements. (These requirements may be the same as the State's or they may be higher.)

But these minimum requirements may **not be enough** to qualify your student for college or for the career he or she wants.

- ▶ The State of Washington requires **only two years of math** in high school. But most colleges require **three or four years of math**.
- ▶ The State of Washington **does not require** students to take a foreign language. But most colleges require **at least two years**.
- ▶ The State of Washington requires **only three years of English** in high school. But most colleges require **four years of English**.

How does your high school compare? What are the requirements there? It's important to find out. But it's even more important to find out what your child will need to do to qualify for a dream career. You don't want to miss out because your child didn't take the right courses.

	State of Washington MINIMUM requirements (Do more than this!)	ENTER Your high school's MINIMUM requirements	Typical College Requirements	Highly Selective College Requirements	University of Washington Requirements
English	3		4	4	4
Math	2		3	4	3
Lab Science	2		2	3	2
Social Science	2.5		2	3	3
Foreign Language	0		2	2	2
Arts	1		1	1	0.5
Elective	5.5		1	1	0.5
Health & Fitness	2				
Occupational Ed	1				

## 3 high school requirements.

In addition to taking the right classes, your child will need to do three additional things to graduate from high school in Washington State.

**1. High School & Beyond Plan.** Students must develop a plan for what they will do after high school. And they must show how they used their time in high school to prepare.

**2. WASL Exam.** Students must pass the 10th grade reading and writing sections of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) exam. Students in the class of 2013 and beyond must also pass the math and science WASL exams.

**3. Culminating Project.** The culminating project gives students the chance to apply their knowledge in a "real world" context. Most schools have students complete culminating projects during their senior year and set specific requirements for the projects.

## What happens after high school?

### What does your child dream about doing

No matter what it is, there is a way for your student to get the education and training to meet this dream. Here are some options for education after high school.

**Four-year colleges and universities** offer Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) and Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees and usually require four or five years to complete.

- ▶ Most four-year college students take classes full time and work at jobs no more than part time. Graduates from four-year colleges generally earn more money than non-graduates.
- ▶ Students don't need to know what they want to do before going to college. Many students discover their career interests in college. Students can study science or literature or engineering.

**Community and technical colleges** generally require two years of classes to earn an Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.) degree.

- ▶ Community and technical colleges are open to everyone, though a high school diploma or GED is sometimes required. These colleges are inexpensive and offer flexible class schedules, including nighttime courses.
- ▶ It's often possible to transfer to a four-year college and complete a bachelor's degree after earning an A.A. degree.
- ▶ Community and technical colleges offer training in Cosmetology, Drafting, Culinary Arts and many other fields.

**Vocational Schools** offer two or more years of training within a particular field or career.

- ▶ Popular vocational school programs include culinary training, music, nursing and computer science.
- ▶ These schools may award a certificate of mastery in a particular field or an A.A. or A.S. degree.

**Apprenticeship programs** combine coursework and on-the-job training.

- ▶ Apprenticeship programs train people interested in specialized trades, such as plumbing, carpentry, construction, electrical work and others.
- ▶ Apprenticeships usually take two to four years, and the apprentice earns a paycheck the entire time. There are currently more than 12,000 apprentices in Washington State.

**The U.S. military** provides career training as well as money for education.

- ▶ High school graduates can enlist immediately after graduation.
- ▶ Students going on to college can join the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs that are offered at many colleges and universities. In addition to regular coursework, ROTC cadets participate in military training while they are in college. ROTC graduates enter the military as officers after graduation.

## How do you know what kind of education your child needs?

There are a lot of choices for education after high school. How can you help your child decide which choice is best?

The type of education your child needs will be determined mainly by the career your child wants. Different careers require different amounts of education. In fact, even within the same "career ladder," different jobs often require different amounts of education: your child may be able to get an entry-level job with an Associate's degree, but may need a Bachelor's degree to move up.

Your school counselor or a high school career counselor will be able to help your child learn what education different careers require. You can also learn more on your own by visiting the College Board web site:

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)





# GETTING INTO COLLEGE

## TESTS

### High school means more tests!

High school students must take a number of tests, depending on what they want to do after graduation:

- ▶ All students must pass the reading and writing sections of the WASL in 10th grade.
- ▶ Students going to a 4-year college must take the PSAT and SAT exams.
- ▶ Students going to a 2-year college usually take the ASSET and COMPASS exams.
- ▶ Students joining the military must take the ASVAB exam.

## Learning about skills and interests

Over the next several years, your child will take a number of tests at school.

- ▶ Some of these tests will measure your child's skills - in math, for instance, or in reading.

The WASL is one of these tests. Students take the WASL (short for Washington Assessment of Student Learning) each year during middle school, usually during March or April. Depending on their grade level, students will take WASL tests in math, communication, writing, and/or science. The WASL is graded on a scale of 1 to 4; a score of 3 means the student is on standard for that grade level, and a score of 4 means the student is above standard.

Many schools also have students take other standardized tests to evaluate how students are doing in reading, writing or math.

- ▶ Other tests will help your child explore his or her interests and learn about careers that could be interesting.

The EXPLORE is one of these. Many students take the EXPLORE test in 8th grade. The test includes sections in English, math, reading, and science. Students' scores help them learn what they're good at and help them plan what types of courses they should take during high school to prepare for college and career.

### Help your child study smart!

Does your child have a big test coming up? Here's how you can help:

**Don't wait till the last minute** to study. Instead, help your child keep up with homework and do a little bit every day.



**Get a good night's rest.** Make sure your child gets a good sleep the night before the test.



**Eat a healthy breakfast.** Don't let your child take a test on "empty!" Make sure he or she takes the time to eat before school.



## Paying for College

College can be expensive. But don't let money stop your child from going to college. No matter what your child wants to do, there's probably financial aid available to help.

### Saving

Saving money ahead of time can help with college tuition. You can save a little or a lot, and middle school is a good time to start saving. The Washington State Guaranteed Education Tuition Program (GET) lets you pre-pay the tuition for any public college or university in Washington State. Learn more at [www.get.wa.gov](http://www.get.wa.gov)

### Need-based Financial Aid

Many colleges will help students pay for tuition, fees, and living expenses they can't afford. There are several kinds of need-based financial aid:

- ▶ **Need-based grants and scholarships:** Grants and scholarships don't have to be repaid. They're applied directly to a student's college costs.
- ▶ **Student loans:** Loans do need to be repaid – after the student graduates. Student loans usually have low interest rates.
- ▶ **Work-study:** Many colleges have part-time jobs available on campus for students who qualify.

Every college has different need-based financial aid. But most of them have one thing in common: they require the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to be completed. You can learn about the FAFSA at [www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov)

### Merit-based Grants And Scholarships

Not all grants and scholarships are based on financial need. Students can also get help with college tuition because of high test scores, athletics, being in the military or ROTC, or even because of their background, parent's employer, or career interests. You can learn more about scholarships at [www.hecb.wa.gov/Paying/index.asp](http://www.hecb.wa.gov/Paying/index.asp)

### Don't Worry – You Can Pay For College!

Yes, college is expensive. But it's well worth it. Research shows that a college graduate earns almost \$1 million more over the course of a lifetime than someone who didn't go to college.



## What do I want to do?

**M**iddle school is an important time. It's when your child starts thinking seriously about what the future will hold... and what he or she dreams about doing.

And that means you're more important than ever.

Your child needs you to learn how to navigate a larger, more demanding school. Your child needs you to help explore career and college ideas. And your child needs you to show how important school is – every day.

So, what can you do as the parent of a middle school student?

**Explore your child's interests.** During middle school, students learn who they are and what they are interested in doing. Help your child get involved in activities at school. Help your child register for courses – in music or computers or other subjects – that sound interesting.

**Help your child succeed at school.** Let your child know that school is important. Make sure your child attends class and turns in homework. And encourage your child to enroll in advanced and honors classes during middle school to be ready for high school.

**Learn about college and careers.** What careers sound interesting to your child? What education do these careers require? Work with your child's advisor or a counselor at the school to learn more about college and careers.

**Enjoy the middle school years!** Middle school is a time of enormous growth for children, both academically and physically. Your 8th grader will look nothing like the 6th grader you dropped off on the first day of school. Enjoy these years as you help your child prepare to grow even more during high school.



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