Getting Ready for the Grad Program

There are many skills that make the Graduation Program more manageable for our students. These are competencies that need to be built over time. Whether high school is just around the corner or a few years away, it is important to start building these skills now.

Key Skills

Independence

During the grad program years, teachers want your student(s) to be able to show their own learning. They want direct communication with the student(s) they are teaching, assessing and evaluating. Students are expected to be independently motivated to move through the grad program with goals for their adult life driving the building of their transcript.

- Are your students able to communicate what they have been learning with their teacher by doing their own weekly reporting? This can change gradually, but by grades 7-9, students should be doing their own reporting.
- Do your children pursue their interests and passions on their own?
- Can your children follow a schedule for school?
- Do they take responsibility for getting things done on time, and moving forward in their courses?

Ownership

Your student(s) will be expected to drive their own educational plan, and complete goals on time schedules during the grad program years.

- Are your children involved in planning their program? Do they let their preferences be known?
- When they are struggling to learn a concept do they seek help?
- Do they understand the how/why of what they are learning?
- When things are difficult do they keep trying?

Communication

During the grad program years, your students will have up to six teachers they will need to communicate regularly with. They will need to be able to manage communication with different personalities and with different styles.

- Do your students communicate regularly with their teachers?

- Is their communication in the proper form?
- Do they answer questions in depth, or do they just touch the surface?

Organization

Students are expected to complete the assigned work on schedule. That schedule may vary from course to course, semester to semester.

- Are your children able to manage their time? (What do I need to do? What is my step-by-step game plan for getting it done?)
- Do they plan their learning and follow their plan? (How am I going to get this done?)
- When they have outside activities (piano, soccer, etc.) do they have their supplies ready?
- Do they know strategies for help in this area (calendars, due dates, task lists, electronic reminders)

Prolonged Time

Individualized and online courses take time. They are created to take between 100-120 hours to complete, but for some students it takes even longer and some a quite a bit faster. Students are expected to spend a minimum of 4 to 5 hours on course related work five days-a-week in the Grad Program. This does not include things like outside lessons or activities.

- Are your children starting to spend more and more time “doing school”?

Academic Preparedness

As students progress through the grades learning and output expectations become more robust. During the grad program years even individualized courses have specific assignments from time to time that must be completed, mostly by writing. These are usually in-depth and require higher order thinking skills such as inference, synthesis and analysis as opposed to comprehension.

- Are your students digging deeply into topics or simply filling in blanks?
- Do your students understand how to express their opinions?
- Do your students understand the difference between input (reading a book, research, textbook reading, watching a video, doing a science experiment) and output, which a teacher can mark for evaluation and assessment purposes (essays, forum posts, slide shows, monologues, collages, political cartoons, science lab write-ups)
- Do your students write to show their learning in subjects like science, social studies, math and art?

Building These Skills

To help students develop these skills you can begin with some of the following activities:

1. Online Courses - Through online courses students learn to communicate with their teacher, take responsibility for their learning and learn time management.
2. Technology Skills – Move beyond social media and let your students use technology rather than having technology use them. Introduce them to Google Calendar, start a blog, learn

to compress files, make a pdf, and learn about reliable websites, learn to use G-Drive, manipulate pictures, send email with attachments, use a wide variety of software that dovetails with interest.

3. Group Activities – Educational group activities help students develop many of the above skills. Involve your children in Community Connections, Learning Camps, Youth Group, etc.
4. Writing Skills – Writing is an extremely important skill for students in the graduation program. They need to be able to write emails using proper voice, they need to express what they've learned through reports and oral presentations. Even in subjects such as music, students are expected to write to communicate their learning so they can receive credit.
5. Math Skills – Students need a robust math program to develop the skills for higher level math learning. Remember that not all programs cover all areas of learning. Often topics such as geometry, measurement, financial literacy and probability are missed. Build time into your middle school program to cover these topics.
6. Critical Thinking – Try to ensure that as your children progress through the grades they have opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. Simply filling in blanks in a workbook won't build the skills necessary for life. They need to engage in discussions, projects, have time for analysis, express opinions and delve into deeper learning.
7. Time Spent on School Pursuits—Train children to spend more time on school to the point where they are spending 5+ hours a day and feeling comfortable with that by the end of grade 9.

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