

What advice would you give an incoming 9th grader at your high school to help them maximize their high school experience?

Although I didn't know this would be the case when I was an apathetic fourteen-year-old, Cape Central High School has prepared me for my next stage of life more than any private education institution ever could have. For years now, adults have told me, "Have fun in high school! Your world will change when you get to college." I used to be somewhat fearful about postsecondary education based on these comments, but now I know that there's no reason to be. Something that each incoming freshman should know about high school is that it certainly is important to have fun while there. More important, however, is something I wish I was told when I began high school at CHS. High school is NOT the peak of the first half of your life; high school is simply a transitional period for the next level. Unless you begin 9th grade with two open ears and one open mind, you'll never acquire the skills needed for adulthood.

It's imperative to understand that high school is, above everything else, all about people. Here is where you'll befriend some fellow students who ultimately know more about you than your own parents, and here is where you'll learn how important they are in times of distress. You'll be under more collective stress from academics, athletics, clubs, and possibly relationships than you have ever been. The only people who can reach down the depths and pull you out are those friends who you'd do the same for. I implore you to not give up on a friendship after the first quarrel. Furthermore, learning how to synergistically coexist with other people is a key for having the skills to move on from high school. Several of your peers will share similar classes, interests, and clubs with you, but the overwhelming majority of them won't. This doesn't matter. By stepping out of your comfort zone to interact with people who are not like you, you're growing as a person. You are experiencing first-hand how (usually) easy it is to coexist with people who aren't exactly like you, which will eventually make you wonder why the entire world can't follow suit.

The single most important word of advice I can impart to you is "respect." Students forget that teachers don't take public education jobs with such long hours for the money; every teacher I've ever had, especially at Cape Central High School, has been personally invested in my success as a student and growth as a person. If you keep your ears open when they're trying to teach or talk with you, you'll soon realize that for yourself. A teacher's job is to educate you about the material in the curriculum, but they do so much more. Teachers will be preparing you for the rigor of college and workforce expectations by imposing difficult deadlines and assignment requirements. It's easy for you to be distracted by your classmates who may not be respecting your teacher as you should be. If you strictly narrow your focus to what is being taught, you'll get the most out of the experience. If a teacher reprimands you for acting in a way that is unbecoming of a student, apologize and be silent for the rest of the period unless you have a pressing question. He or she just wants you to understand that you simply cannot act that way later in your life. Respect them at all times, and appreciate them for everything they do beyond their job responsibilities.

In conclusion, the adults are right once again; you should have fun in high school. Central High School is a place to make friends and meet unique people, but remember it's much more as well. Don't forget that you're only here for a few years to learn as much as possible, including skills for personal growth, and many dedicated people are around to help you if you get stuck in a rut. You have no reason to worry, though. If you follow my advice, you'll be more than prepared for what comes next.