



Welcome Parents of the Class of 2013!

While your children are now very busy with their sophomore classes at the Academy, it is not too early to begin thinking about college! There are just two short years between now and the time your children become seniors working on their college applications. Those years will pass by rapidly. I welcome your emails and phone calls at any time, but would like to make sure I communicate with you each term with specific information about college preparation.

#### SETTING YOUR SIGHTS ON COLLEGE PREPARATION AT THE ACADEMY

The curriculum at the Academy has been designed specifically to prepare your students for college level work. Meeting the Academy's minimum graduation requirements qualifies students for most colleges and universities. And while many other high schools are cutting arts and physical fitness from their program of study, the American Hebrew Academy has expanded those offerings thereby ensuring that our students graduate with a well-rounded and informed knowledge of the arts, and a commitment to developing a healthy life style. Students will be given opportunities to go beyond the minimum requirements however, and colleges will review this favorably. Please review the HaMadrach (Student/Parent Handbook) for graduation requirements. As you contemplate the type of college or university you believe may be best for your child, it would be beneficial to start considering what coursework he or she might want to take in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

For 10<sup>th</sup> graders, there are several goals to achieve in terms of college preparation. Providing a basic understanding of what colleges will be looking for when the student is applying to colleges in the senior year is an important first step. For 10<sup>th</sup> graders new to the Academy this year, some of this goal will be achieved through the Success 101 course that your son or daughter is currently enrolled in fall term. I will go over some of the main items colleges look at when reviewing a college application (grades, rigor of class schedule, standardized test scores, extra curricular activities, essays and recommendations). Whether your child is new this year or returning after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, there are several things you can do to help your student begin to create a strong portfolio for college:

- 1) **Grades** - The first thing a college will look at in any admission application is high school grades. Most colleges look at the cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA). This is computed by averaging ALL grades earned from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (actually the first grades a college will see are the ones from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 11<sup>th</sup> grade), so getting a strong start is important. Study skills and time management are critical. Please encourage your child to seek assistance from teachers, advisors, house parents and tutors if they appear to be struggling in any subject. While there is much to do here at the Academy to detract them from studies, academics are central. If your son or daughter had a great first year, encourage them to maintain that momentum. Don't encourage your child to just seek the easy path. Colleges look favorably on students who have encountered challenges, and who successfully conquer those challenges. If your sophomore experienced academic challenges last year, don't be discouraged! Many fine Academy graduates hit a

“learning curve” the first year here because of the rigor of the dual curriculum. Seek help and improve on last year’s performance. Colleges will appreciate students who overcome adversity, stick to it and improve their GPA each year.

- 2) **Rigor of Curriculum** – As I mentioned, colleges like students who challenge themselves academically. During the sophomore year, your child may want to consider a couple of things.

Some colleges require SAT IIs which are subject tests. While many students take these at the end of their junior year or the beginning of senior year, if your son or daughter is taking Algebra II this year (and has already taken Geometry) she or he may want to consider signing up for the Math I Subject Test in June of 2011, while all the material is still fresh. You can consult the College Board’s Official Study Guide for all SAT Subject Tests to review the material and see if it is an appropriate course of action for your child. Likewise, at the end of their junior year, they may want to explore taking the U.S. History SAT II.

Most Academy students take the majority of their AP courses during their senior year. However, students may opt to take the European History elective class (sophomore year) or the U.S. History Elective Class (junior year) to help prepare for taking the AP exams in those subjects in May. If your student loves history, opting for these electives and attempting the AP exam in May is an option.

- 3) **Test Scores and Preparation** – As your child progresses through the Academy, we will offer a number of resources to ready your child for the standardized tests that are part of most college applications. Academy teachers integrate the WordSmart program in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English curriculum. It’s a great vocabulary boosting program that our students participate in, just by being here. Academy students take the PSAT (Preliminary SAT) in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, and your child will be taking it here at the school on the morning of October 13<sup>th</sup>. As one criterion in our accreditation, the state of North Carolina requires some form of standardized testing for grades 9 and 11. We believe using the PSAT will help students become more comfortable with standardized tests used for college admissions. By taking the PSAT both in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, students are much more comfortable with it when they take it their junior year (in Israel) when the test determines entry into the National Merit competition.

Results of the PSATs are received in December, and for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, will help students and families identify academic strengths and weaknesses, and give you a better understanding of what areas your child may need help with. Your results will also give you information about signing up for MY COLLEGE QUICKSTART which will give you individualized advice (based on PSAT results) on how to improve on the test. Taking the PSAT in and of itself is good preparation for the SAT which juniors take in the spring of their junior year. The Academy will provide several resources and options for test preparation including an SAT elective class for juniors, an optional Princeton Review SAT class, and a PSAT workshop prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSATs. The College Counseling office also maintains lists of local SAT tutors, other SAT preparation classes in the area, and other free test-prep options for students.

Parents wanting more information about the PSAT and about other things they can be doing to get their children ready for college may want to sign up for the Parent Newsletter offered on the College Board’s web site:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/>

These newsletters are focused on what students can be doing at each grade level (9-12) to get ready for college. I will be writing more about the PSAT results and next steps with test preparation, when I send my second posting at the beginning of winter term (early December).

## Encouraging Your Child to Read

While there are many types of test preparation that your child may choose to do, ultimately the best preparation for doing well on the Critical Reading and Writing sections of the SAT exams is to read – a lot. I would like to ask parents of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to do one thing in this regard. Please sign your child up for a subscription to a magazine that she or he might like to read. This could be something like Sports Illustrated, Smithsonian or Art and News, etc. – whatever your child is interested in. Besides, it's fun to get mail! Here is a web site that has a list of magazines by various topics if you need a suggestion:

<http://www.allyoucanread.com/top-10-teen-magazines/>

- 3) **Extra-Curricular Activities** – The Academy will provide a wealth of activities for your child to become involved in. Your son or daughter may already have focused on something they really love to do. Please encourage your students to pursue their interests with passion, both during the school year and in the summer between grades. Colleges will be looking for students who, rather than simply having a “laundry list” of activities they have participated in, pursue their interests and passions, and engage others in doing them as well. Let me paraphrase for you, something from the admission’s web site of a prestigious university in the east, that references what highly selective colleges are looking for:

*What they're looking for beyond the numbers is intellectual potential, strength of character, and love of learning. They want to know about your ability, achievements, motivation, leadership, diligence, and integrity; your sense of fairness and compassion. All of this and more can be revealed in your essays and recommendations, and is reflected in your extracurricular activities, hobbies, after school and summer jobs, and volunteer work.*

The College Counseling Office will keep a list of many different summer enrichment programs available to students. This list will be found in NAVIANCE, the College Counseling software used at the Academy. ALL students (beginning with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade) will have access to their Naviance accounts. This will be part of their Success 101 curriculum. Parents can also have access to their child’s Naviance account. It is a useful tool for keeping track of test scores, GPAs, researching colleges and lots of other college information. If you would like to activate your Naviance account, please email me at: starbox@aha-net.org.

- 4) **Honors, Awards, Community Service, Internships, and Activities** – A critical piece of your student’s application to colleges will be listing all the honors, activities, etc. that she or he has been involved or received during the high school years. Many seniors have difficulty remembering these things when it comes time to completing their applications. Parents, it would be very helpful if you could start a file on these and update it term by term or at the end of the academic year. When your child is ready to begin college applications, you can sit down and review the entire file with your son or daughter, and organize it into a coherent list of items that best represent your child’s interests, unique characteristics and passions.
- 5) **Relationships with Teachers** – Now is the time to have your student thinking about maintaining good relationships with all the teachers here at the Academy. They are here to help. By working closely with the teachers, a student will build strong and supportive relationships over the years, and teachers will get to know the student well. This helps teachers write personal and heartfelt letters of recommendation for the college applications in fall of the senior year.

The College Counseling Office is committed to providing support and guidance to students and families as they navigate the high school experience and the college admissions process. Parents are central to the success of this endeavor. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to working with you and your child over the next three years.

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