

# Student Newsletter

Fall 2017

## Happy New (School) Year!

Welcome back! Whether you're a sixth grader or senior, a new school year is an exciting opportunity. It's a time to make resolutions or set goals for the upcoming school year. The beginning of the year can be overwhelming and busy, as you try to figure out your schedule, fit in homework and extracurricular activities, and tackle new subjects. You have a clean slate (or notebooks in this case), so resolve to hand in that homework completed and on-time, to join a club, or to volunteer more. Here are some resolutions to help you get off to a great start this school year.

1. Eat breakfast for a steady supply of energy.
2. Make a schedule.
3. Use your planner to record homework assignments, due dates, and special events.
4. Organize the night before—it's less stressful to grab your backpack and go.
5. Get a good night's sleep.
6. Keep your binders, folders, and locker tidy.
7. Clean up your online presence—college admission counselors and employers look at social media.
8. Check out college and career options.
9. Read more and explore new interests.
10. Stay positive!



Resolutions (goals) serve as motivation, guide decisions, and improve your confidence. Set realistic, achievable, short-term goals so that you can celebrate success. Don't be afraid to set a more challenging long-term goal to work towards and complete by the end of the school year. If you want to do better in math set a specific goal. For example, I would like to earn at least a B in math every nine weeks. Reward yourself and celebrate when you complete a goal. Good luck and have a great new school year!

## New Year, New You?

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. ~Aristotle

Welcome back and best of luck this year. Have you ever heard the expression, work smarter not harder? If we are going to improve on our past performance in any endeavor, we must start by acknowledging our past performance patterns. Having a firm grasp of individual tendencies and of where we invest our energy provides the direction necessary for formulating a plan to improve overall performance. Self-assessment or taking stock of one's skills is a valuable jumping-in point to fine tune a given skill, in this case academic performance.

Using a sheet of scrap paper complete the following self-assessment. Keep in mind, this assessment is for your eyes only. So be honest; there is no pressure, so keep it real. Rate your past patterns in each category (A through F) as they relate to your school performance. The assessment will only be as accurate as you are honest. Remember the exercise is designed to help you consider the energy you are investing in the various elements of the educational process. After all, "if you don't change something, nothing changes." One last piece of instructional advice for the exercise, as you are assigning yourself a letter grade in each category do not simply rely on your personal thoughts or gut reaction. Past grades, teacher feedback, attendance records and other evidence supporting your findings should be considered as a part of the final grade.

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(New Year, New You continued from p.1)

### Educational Self-Assessment (Grade yourself A-F in the following categories)

- \* Relationship with teachers
- \* Participation in class
- \* Organization of materials
- \* Procrastination
- \* Test preparation
- \* Notetaking
- \* Managing technology (distraction)
- \* Motivation to improve
- \* Managing social/work life
- \* Behavior in class
- \* Adherence to school rules/-disciplinary issues
- \* Use of additional teacher/after school support
- \* Evening/morning routine
- \* School attendance
- \* Amount of focused study time
- \* Investment in school and school activities
- \* Sleep patterns
- \* Making assignment deadlines

Your self-reflective assessment is now complete. Congratulations! Review your findings and in the areas where you identified a “C” or below, begin to formulate an action plan. Looking at those, select three that will (if changed) have the greatest impact on your school performance. Now, you are ready to develop an action plan specific to each category you identified. Ideally, the plan will be adjusting your patterns and improving your efficiency in problem areas. You are on your way to producing change in your academic patterns. Now, you simply have to implement your action plan.

## Starting School with Less Stress

The beginning of a new year brings an array of feelings, and for many students, stress is at the top of the list. According to MedlinePlus, “stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension, and is your body’s reaction to a challenge or demand.” In short bursts, stress can be positive, but if it lasts for a long time it can harm your health. There are ways to reduce stress and feel more relaxed, which will improve your overall health.

**Diaphragmatic Breathing** (also known as belly breathing) is the simplest of all relaxation exercises. The diaphragm is a strong, dome-shaped muscle between your abdomen and chest. When you breathe into your diaphragm, it pushes downward. This causes your abdominal muscles to relax and rise, allowing your lungs to fill with air. To practice diaphragmatic breathing:

1. Find a quiet place free of distractions. Lie on the floor or recline in a chair, loosen any tight clothing and remove glasses or contacts.
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your stomach. Inhale, taking a deep breath as you count to three. You should feel your stomach rise. The hand on your chest should not move.
3. After a short pause, slowly exhale while counting to three. Your stomach will fall down as you exhale.
4. Continue this pattern of rhythmic breathing for five to ten minutes.

Diaphragmatic breathing takes practice, so be patient. Practice this technique daily.

**Progressive muscle relaxation** is a technique where you slowly tense and relax each muscle group. In one method, you start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. You can also start with your head and neck and work down to your toes. Tense your muscles for about 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds, and repeat.

**Visualization** is a method of forming mental images to take a visual journey to a calming place or situation. Try to incorporate as many senses as you can, including smell, sight, sound and touch. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, think about the smell of salt water, the sound of waves and the warmth of the sun. You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot, and concentrate on your breathing. Focus on the present and think positive thoughts. Diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualization are just a few techniques used to relax and reduce stress. There are many options available via internet, DVD, CD, mp3, book, magazine, etc. Here’s to a happier, healthier school year!

### References

- <https://medlineplus.gov>; <http://www.stress-relief-tools.com>  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management>  
<http://www.webmd.com>

## Back to the Basics: The Fundamentals of Time

Everything in life is possible if you create **BALANCE** in your life. Think of balance as a \$100 bill. You could buy a new pair of sneakers for \$75, and go to a movie with your friends and grab dinner at a local restaurant. But when that \$100 is gone, what do you have? Were there other things that you wanted to purchase or save towards? Let's say you spent it as follows:

- \$35 sneakers on Amazon, deal of the day!
- \$35 in savings to save for a trip to Kennywood.
- \$15 for you and friends to hang out on Friday night, order pizza and watch a movie on Netflix.
- \$15 still in your pocket! Yes, it's true, you still have money left over and you met all of the same needs as the first scenario. In addition, you saved money!

Now let's apply this to going to school. If you spend your time wisely, you'll get more accomplished in the same time period. Here are some tips for spending your time wisely:

**TAKE ADVANTAGE** of study halls and extra time that you have in class to complete homework.

- Many students spend time socializing in study halls and the few extra minutes at the end of class. By using this time, you could potentially eliminate the need for making time at home to do your homework.
- If you get your homework done in school, you have more free time to spend with friends and family and taking care of other responsibilities/chores.

**SCHEDULE!** Set up a schedule every week of when to study, when to do chores/work and when to have free time. Sometimes we get overwhelmed with too much to do, but the truth is that most of us are more successful when we have more to do.

- Select an hour time slot every day to organize your schoolwork, to do homework, and to make sure you are prepared for your next day of school.

- Schedule time every day just for yourself! Hang out with friends, exercise, listen to music, whatever it is you like to do. This could be 30 minutes in the morning, 30 minutes after school and an hour before bedtime. It doesn't have to all be at once.
- Schedule in meal times, work times, hygiene times... Once you set up a schedule, you will realize that you have more time than you thought. The key is putting it in writing! Use an assignment book or print off a time management weekly chart. Try [www.studygs.net/schedule/weekly.htm](http://www.studygs.net/schedule/weekly.htm)

**ORGANIZE!** If you are allowed, carry a backpack to keep all of your school supplies in one place.

- Purchase a binder to keep assignments in. This will help you to know exactly where your homework is. (I am sure you all have done homework at least once and then couldn't find it....right?)
- Keep any pens/pencils and supplies in a special place.
- Use your cell phone! Put notes and passwords in your notes. Use the calendar/Google calendar to write in all of your assignments and send yourself reminders! We all need reminders.

**MIND YOUR BODY!** Remember that we are only as good as our bodies will let us be!

- Shoot for eight hours of sleep.
- Eat breakfast – it is the most important meal of the day and gives you the energy to get through your day.
- Exercise at least three times a week. Exercise is proven to reduce stress and to help you be more motivated
- Although we all love sugar (think candy bar), be careful not to overload. Sugar gives you quick energy, but shortly after you will find yourself feeling more tired than you were. Try eating almonds, nuts, fruit, trail mix, and healthy granola bars.

TRIO Educational Talent Search, 814-393-2071 and TRIO Upward Bound, 814-393-2342

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TRIO Educational Talent Search (\$400,800) and TRIO Upward Bound (\$423,522) are funded by the US Department of Education.

## Into the Woods

Deep in the farthest reach of the forest, a Grand Witch stands in a cave motioning over a deep and dark cauldron. Her minions enter the room and drop their nefarious items into the cauldron. As the contents begin to boil and toil, the Grand Witch continues her whispered incantation. As her voice begins to rise, her incantation begins to echo across the basement cavern. A greyish smoke begins to roll from the cauldron and the minions are trapping the smoke in deep purple bottles. She sends her minions out with their bottles to assign essays, extra homework, and presentations in the lives of her students.

Contrary to popular belief, your principal and teachers are not standing over a cauldron of doom, intent on making your academic life as stressful and painful as possible. Rather, they work daily to pass on their knowledge in the hope that you, “Generation Next,” will go out and seize all the opportunities you can. Every generation has been labeled and inherits various items from their predecessors. Some of you may even have some of the same teachers that your parents had. There have likely been stories passed down from family, seniors in your school, and others about the teachers that you see each day. Whether or not you choose to believe them, it is worth seeing what you can learn from each and every class you take.

My advice is to embrace the differences you see before you each day. Every year you are required to take classes that are meant to expand your knowledge base and prepare you for the next step. Knowing what the next step is happens in its own time, but recognizing that although you are not tested on it, knowledge has a unique way of working itself into our everyday lives. There will be days where you would love to crawl under the covers and skip out on life. There will be days where every assignment you turn in has red marks all over it. The challenge is in moving forward when you feel like you are just “not getting it.” There are numerous aspects in the world of academia that some “get” while others do not “get.” That is why we are all not in the same careers or professions. Diversity is the best part of our academic and social existence.

A few things to consider when you are leaning towards the “not getting it” end of the spectrum:



1. Evaluate the methods you have used. You may need to re-work your methods to supplement or fit the teacher’s style and coursework.
2. Ask yourself if you have been working as hard as you could. What can you eliminate or re-arrange to devote more time to the material?
3. Reach out to your teacher. Teachers are human; they are approachable. Nine times out of 10 they will be more than happy to help you trouble shoot.

You could reach for a giant bag of (insert your favorite candy here), but that only takes the edge off for a small amount time. A change in perspective brings about a long term tackle of your academic challenges.

## Change Your Perspective

- Ask yourself, **will it matter in five years.** Most of what we worry about, never even happens!
- **Help someone.** Move the focus from yourself onto another—guess who might get the blessing. :)
- **Write it down!** Grab a pencil or pen and a notebook or journal and write about it.
- **Call a friend.**
- **Be grateful!** Make a list of those things you are thankful and grateful for—confirm the positive and get rid of negative emotions and thoughts.
- **Get moving!** Go for a walk. It will help improve your mood dramatically.
- **Pray or meditate.**
- **Smile!**

### Seniors!

File your FAFSA as early as October 1 — Use your 2016 tax information to complete for 2018-19.

