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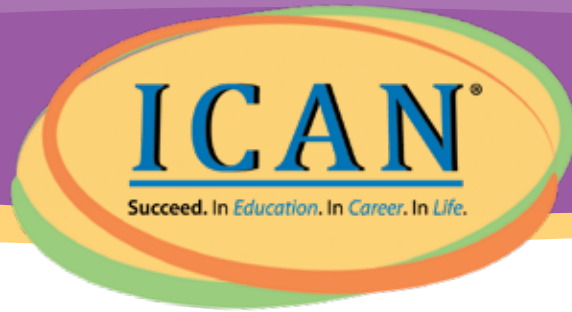
2025-2026

FRESHMAN TRANSITIONS

A Guide to Beginning High School



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Your Future Starts Now

High school is the start of your journey to the future you imagine. This is your time to discover who you are, explore your interests, and build the skills that will carry you to success in college, career and life. Every choice you make - big or small - can help shape what comes next. Use this guide to help you stay focused, build confidence, and take steps toward the future you want.

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About ICAN

ICAN is an education nonprofit with the mission to empower students to find success in career, college, and life. ICAN provides its services to students and families at no cost.

To fulfill its mission ICAN relies on donations. Generous financial support from people and companies ensures that the work to build Iowa's future workforce and empower young people to fulfill their dreams is carried out.

To make a gift, please visit [ICANSucceed.org/give](https://www.icansucceed.org/give) to make an online contribution, or you can contact the development team at (877) 272-4692, or by email development@icansucceed.org.

ICAN Student Success Centers

To provide personalized service and help more students succeed, ICAN offers virtual and in-person advising. To schedule an appointment, visit [ICANSucceed.org/apt](https://www.icansucceed.org/apt) or call (877) 272-4692.

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WELCOME TO HIGH SCHOOL



Welcome to High School



Explore Careers



Prepare Academically



Get Involved



Finance Your Future



Success Strategies

Building a Foundation

Beginning your high school career is an exciting time. For many reasons, your freshman year is one of the most important years you'll experience because it lays the foundation for everything to come. Setting a strong foundation allows for more opportunities in the coming years, so let's get started.

Your choices impact your future. Your grades as a freshman factor into lots of decisions down the road, including employability, college admission and potential scholarships. So while you are just getting your head wrapped around being in high school, the decisions you make this year and in the years to come will dictate what opportunities come to you later.

Freshman year is a fresh start. While elementary and middle school have prepared you for this next step, officially your transcript is like a blank piece of paper, and you can start fresh with your grades and activities.

Explore your options. Until now classes have probably been standard for you and your classmates. High school offers the opportunity to explore new subjects and begin investigating different interests and career pathways.

Plan Ahead & Set Goals

While you don't have to decide which career path you are going to take today, you should start figuring out the types of things you want to do. Your goals may be short-term, like making the honor roll or joining a club. Goals can also be long-term, such as going to college, becoming a nurse, or traveling the world. All goals take some preparation, whether that preparation is skill building, education, job experience, or money management.

Parent Tip

Your involvement and encouragement throughout your student's education is vital to their success. Learn more at ICANSucceed.org/parents.

Habits for Success

Starting high school strong means more than just showing up—it's about how you show up. Developing good habits early can help you stay on track and make the most of your high school experience.

- ▶ **Show up and participate.** Attendance and participation are key to doing well in class. Make it a priority to be present, ask questions, and stay engaged in lessons.
- ▶ **Listen and learn.** Practicing good listening skills helps you understand what's being taught and shows respect to your teachers and classmates.
- ▶ **Make a good impression.** First impressions count—be polite, stay organized, and take responsibility for your actions. These small things help build trust and respect.
- ▶ **Get to know your teachers and school counselor.** They're here to help you succeed—don't be afraid to ask questions or go to them for advice or support.
- ▶ **Take care of your physical and mental health.** Get enough sleep, eat well, stay active, and ask for help when you need it. Managing stress and staying healthy are just as important as getting good grades.

A Well Rounded Experience

No matter your path after high school, the classes you take, the grades you earn, and even the activities you participate in all affect your life after high school. There are four areas to focus on throughout high school that will help you prepare for whatever your future has in store.

- ▶ **Academics.** If you plan to pursue education and training after graduation, you need to take certain classes in high school and keep your grades up.
- ▶ **Extracurricular Activities.** School activities, sports, and community service are all additional opportunities to explore your interests and learn about new endeavors. They also look great on applications for scholarships and employment. Try a variety of activities over the course of your four years in high school; you may just find your niche.
- ▶ **Work.** For many students an extracurricular activity is having a job. Employment is an opportunity to develop a good work ethic, learn about different jobs, earn money, and begin your savings account for the future. It's also an opportunity to develop additional skills and experience with communications, interpersonal skills, and employer expectations.
- ▶ **Social Life.** Just as important, is your social life. All work and no play can be dull; it's best to have a positive social life and make responsible decisions. Mistakes, even as a freshman, can come back to haunt you later in life.

EXPLORE CAREERS

START

Welcome to High School



Explore Careers



Prepare Academically



Get Involved



Finance Your Future



Success Strategies

Career Exploration & Assessment

Making sure you find the right career that fits not just your monetary needs, but also your interests, values, and talents is important. When you find a career that fits your passions, you will find greater success and more opportunities. Imagine finding your dream job and building your education and social life around that goal. Career assessments are the first step.

What is an assessment? A career assessment, also known as an interest inventory, is a series of short questions that help determine what careers connects with your interests, skills, and values.

Assessments:

- ▶ Identify your strengths, skills, and areas of interest.
- ▶ Match your results to career pathways or industries.
- ▶ Link career pathways to specific careers and salary expectations.
- ▶ Link careers to education and training requirements.
- ▶ List education requirements that will lead to potential college majors or career training programs.
- ▶ Help narrow your list of potential education and training programs to those that fit your interest area and price range.

Why is it valuable? Understanding yourself on a deeper level and finding a career that truly fits your personality can save you both time and money. Many students go to college or take a job because it's the next step. Without planning, students spend thousands of dollars on classes that may or may not relate to their eventual career, or pursue a job that ends up not suiting them. Opportunities in high school can help you rule out careers and majors that don't fit long before you reach graduation, saving you time and money.

Assessment Options - Career Exploration Made Easy

MyACT is an easy tool featuring three short assessments. In 10-15 minutes MyACT creates a Career Map identifying career options that best fit your personality. Visit [MyACT.org](https://myact.org).

CareerOneStop offers a variety of free career assessments that help high school students explore interests, skills, and work values to identify potential career paths. These tools provide personalized career suggestions and connect students to relevant occupational and educational information. Visit careeronestop.org/explorecareers/assessments.

Holland Occupational Themes (RIASEC) is a theory of personality that focuses on career and vocational choice. It groups people on the basis of their suitability for six difference categories of occupations; Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC). Visit [ICANsucceed.org/RIASEC](https://icanucceed.org/RIASEC).

Princeton Review Career Quiz is a short, personality-based assessment that helps high school students identify careers and work environments that align with their interests and preferences. By analyzing how students respond to different scenarios, the quiz matches them with potential career paths and personality types. Visit princetonreview.com/quiz/career-quiz.

Course Selection Based on Career Clusters

The National Career Clusters Framework organizes careers into 14 career clusters. Assessments help identify career clusters that align with your interests so you can explore careers through coursework and field experiences.

Career Clusters include:

- ▶ Advanced Manufacturing
- ▶ Agriculture
- ▶ Arts, Entertainment & Design
- ▶ Construction
- ▶ Digital Technology
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Energy & Natural Resources
- ▶ Financial Services
- ▶ Health & Human Services
- ▶ Hospitality & Events
- ▶ Management & Entrepreneurship
- ▶ Marketing & Sales
- ▶ Public Service & Safety
- ▶ Supply Chain & Transportation

Learn more at [ICANsucceed.org/career-planning](https://icanucceed.org/career-planning).



Is Education and Training Beyond High School Worth It?

Yes - it's worth it. Experts in economics, education, and community development agree that training beyond high school has never been more valuable.

Average Annual Salaries*:

- ▶ High School Graduate: **\$45,040**
- ▶ Associate's Degree: **\$62,270**
- ▶ Registered Apprenticeship: **\$80,000****
- ▶ Bachelor's Degree: **\$85,800**

Beyond the Paycheck:

Education and training can also lead to***:

- ▶ Improved physical and mental health
- ▶ Greater life satisfaction and well-being
- ▶ More career options and chances for advancement
- ▶ Better job quality, stability, and flexibility
- ▶ Increased civic engagement and community involvement
- ▶ Stronger critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills

Make smart choices:

Individuals with a bachelor's degree earn \$32,000 more annually and about \$625,000 more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.**** Education and training beyond high school is an investment in your future.

Each career has its own job prospects, earning potential, and maximum suggested student loan debt. Use **Return on Investment Tools** to connect programs to career outcomes. Explore your options at studentloan.org/college-planning-tools to get started.

Education & Training After High School

72% of jobs in the US will require education and training beyond high school by 2031.*

To be competitive, students need to plan for the education or training required by their chosen career path. Every pathway has options ranging from a one-year certificate or diploma to a two-year associate's degree, a four-year bachelor's degree, and beyond. Students should explore the careers they're interested in and find the education or training that meets those career qualifications.

Apprenticeship

A paid job that provides hands-on training in a highly skilled career. Apprentices learn from experienced professionals (often called master craftsmen) who mentor and train them to become experts in their field.

Nine Month Certificate/One Year Diploma

Full-time programs that teach the core skills and knowledge needed for a specific career field or to enhance existing skills in a current profession.

Two-Year Degree (Associate's Degree)

Usually earned at a community college, associate degrees can either prepare students to transfer to a four-year college (liberal arts focus) or provide direct career training that leads to employment. Explore Iowa programs at ICANSucceed.org/2yroptions.

Four Year-Degree (Bachelor's Degree)

Combines general education (liberal arts) courses with focused study in a specific major. Often required for professional-level careers and graduate school admission.

Master or Doctorate Degree

Graduate-level degrees required for fields such as medicine, law, education, and specialized areas of business or research. These programs offer advanced knowledge and credentials for leadership and expert roles.

Military or Specialized Training

Opportunities exist in all six branches of the U.S. military. Most begin by taking the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), followed by basic training and occupational specialty training. Military academies, preparatory schools, and ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) programs combine academics with military leadership training. Some graduates enter service as officers. Learn more at ICANSucceed.org/militaryoptions.

* Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics Program, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2024.

** Apprenticeship.gov, 2024

*** <https://news.gallup.com/poll/510254/postsecondary-education-linked-volunteerism-better-health.aspx>

**** <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>

* Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/projections2031/#resources>

Education is Essential. A Four-Year Degree is Not.

A four-year college degree isn't the right path for everyone—and that's okay. Many high-demand careers in fields like advanced manufacturing, healthcare, transportation and utilities, agriculture and forestry, and the building and construction trades require education beyond high school, but not a bachelor's degree.

You can earn the skills you need through focused career and industry training—whether that's on-the-job learning, apprenticeships, or career-focused certificates and associate degrees at a community college or training center.

Earn While You Learn Apprenticeships

"Earn and Learn" programs combine paid, on-the-job training with structured classroom instruction, often at little to no cost to students. Apprentices work with experienced professionals at real job sites while also completing related coursework.

In Iowa, the Building and Construction Trades Registered Apprenticeship Programs are overseen by the Iowa Office of Apprenticeships as overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor. Apprentices earn a paycheck during both classroom and job-site training. On average, an apprentice earns about half of a journeyman's wage, with salary increases every six months. Many programs also include health benefits, a pension plan, and a guaranteed job upon completion. Learn more: ICANSucceed.org/careertraining.

Apprenticeship opportunities are also growing in healthcare, social assistance, manufacturing, and information technology. Explore more: earnandlearniowa.gov/apprentice.



Building & Construction Trades - There Are So Many Options

- ▶ Boilermakers
- ▶ Bricklayers
- ▶ Carpenters
- ▶ Electricians
- ▶ Elevator Constructors
- ▶ Glaziers
- ▶ Insulators
- ▶ Ironworkers
- ▶ Laborers
- ▶ Linemen
- ▶ Millwrights
- ▶ Operating Engineers
- ▶ Painters & Drywall Finishers
- ▶ Plasterers & Cement Masons
- ▶ Plumbers & Steamfitters
- ▶ Roofers & Waterproofers
- ▶ Sheet Metal Workers



For More Information

Learn more about career training and apprenticeship programs including:

- ~ Career Descriptions
- ~ Program Contacts
- ~ Certificate & Degree Program Options
- ~ Videos About Each Career

Visit ICANSucceed.org/careertraining.

PREPARE ACADEMICALLY

START

Welcome to High School



Explore Careers



Prepare Academically



Get Involved



Finance Your Future



Success Strategies

Develop a Four-Year Plan

A four-year plan helps you map out your classes for each year of high school. It ensures you meet graduation requirements while allowing room for career exploration and preparation. Start your plan in 8th grade and review it each year with your parents and school counselor. Update it based on your evolving interests, goals, and available courses.

Plan Your High School Courses with Purpose

As you begin high school, the courses you take can help you explore your interests and prepare for your future—whether that includes college, career training, or both. By being intentional about your course choices now, you can build a strong foundation for whatever path you choose.

Focus on Core Courses

Your core subjects—English, math, science, and social studies—build a strong academic foundation.

- ▶ **Follow career cluster suggestions.** Use your career interests to guide your core course selection. For example, if you're interested in engineering, focus on advanced math and science.
- ▶ **Consider world languages.** Even if your school doesn't require a language to graduate, many four-year colleges do. It's also a great way to build communication and global skills.
- ▶ **Go beyond graduation requirements.** Take the recommended number of years in each subject to challenge yourself and build readiness for college or career training.
- ▶ **Look for advanced opportunities.** If you're ready, take honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or dual enrollment courses to earn college credit while still in high school.

Optimum Preparation - Recommended High School Courses*

Subject Area	Optimum Years	Recommendation Reasoning	Sample Courses
English/Language Arts	4 years	Emphasis on communication skills of writing, reading and listening, and the analysis and interpretation of literature. In addition, courses in journalism and media literacy will be valuable.	Advanced Composition, Speech, Communication, Journalism
Math	4 years	One course each year of high school. While advanced courses like calculus and statistics are good, it's more important that you gain a complete understanding of algebra II and trigonometry.	Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus, Statistics
Natural Science	4 years	One course each year of high school. To be better prepared, take at least one year of biology, chemistry and physics.	Biology, Earth Science, Chemistry, Physics (with Lab)
Social Studies	3 – 4 years	Three years is essential but four is better. Take at least one year each of US and world history. Additional courses in anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology provide an important understanding of political, social and economic institutions.	Geography, U.S. History, Government, Economics
World Language	4 years	By taking world language during all four years of high school, you'll go beyond the basic skills and begin to use the language and reinforce your fluency.	Any one language
Electives	1 – 3 years	Courses in the fine and performing arts, computers, or technology will help round out your high school experience. Your future field may lie in one of those areas. Follow your interests, talents, and strengths, and remember to choose courses with high academic standards.	Fine Arts, Performing Arts, Computer Science, Technology

Be Prepared - A Lot Can Change in Four Years

This Optimum Preparation Chart shows the recommended courses that best prepare students for college-level academics. While your high school may only require three years of certain subjects, taking four years—especially in areas like math or science—can better prepare you for college or technical training.

Even if you're not sure of your path yet, choosing a rigorous course load keeps all doors open. Studies show that skipping a year in a core subject often leads to remedial classes later, making the transition harder.

* Source: Iowa Board of Regents: http://www.regents.iowa.gov/Admissions/Building_Your_Future.pdf

Choose Electives that Match Your Interests

Your elective courses give you a chance to explore areas you're curious about and develop skills that support your goals:

- ▶ **Explore career and technical education (CTE) options.** Classes like Intro to ACE, Health Science, Construction Tech, or Engineering Concepts offer hands-on experience in high-demand fields.
- ▶ **Participate in career academies or community college programs.** Many high schools partner with local colleges to provide early exposure to career training and certification programs.
- ▶ **Build essential workplace skills.** Courses like speech, computer applications, business, and technology can help you become better communicator and problem-solver.

Other Things to Keep in Mind

Your Grades Matter. Whether you're planning for college, training, or work, your transcript tells the story of your effort and growth.

Take Placement Exams. Even if ACT® or SAT® scores aren't required, many programs use placement tests to determine math and writing readiness.

Career Planning is a Journey. Your interests might change—and that's okay! Use your electives and experiences to explore and stay flexible.

Sample Four-Year Plan

Use a table like the one below to organize your required courses and add electives that match your career interests. Download the **Course Planner worksheet** at ICANSucceed.org/materials.

	Grade: 9th Fall Semester	Credits	Grade: 9th Spring Semester	Credits
English	<i>English I</i>	.5	<i>English I</i>	.5
Mathematics	<i>Algebra I</i>	.5	<i>Algebra I</i>	.5
History/Social Studies	<i>U.S. History I</i>	.5	<i>U.S. History I</i>	.5
Science	<i>Physical Science</i>	.5	<i>Physical Science</i>	.5
World Language	<i>Spanish I</i>	.5	<i>Spanish I</i>	.5
Visual/Performing Arts	<i>Band</i>	.5	<i>Band</i>	.5
Physical Education	<i>P.E.</i>	.5	<i>P.E.</i>	.5
Electives	<i>Creative Writing</i>	.5	<i>Personal Bookkeeping</i>	.5
Credits Earned		4		4
Accumulated Credits (including previous years)		4		8

Understand Your Grade Point Average

Your Grade Point Average (GPA) is a number that represents how well you're doing in your classes. It's important because colleges and future employers often look at your GPA when considering you for admission, scholarships, or jobs.

GPA is based on the grades you earn in each class. The better your grades, the higher your GPA. For example:

- ▶ An **A** usually equals **4 points**
- ▶ A **B** equals **3 points**
- ▶ A **C** equals **2 points**, and so on.

Some schools also use a **weighted GPA**, which gives extra points for harder classes like Honors or Advanced Placement (AP). That means getting an A in an AP class might count as more than 4 points.

What if your school uses Standards-Based Grading?

If your school uses standards-based grading, you may receive scores like 1–4 based on how well you meet learning goals. These scores are often converted into letter grades that factor into your GPA. Your school or district determines how this works, so be sure to ask your school counselor how your learning is evaluated and how it impacts your GPA.

No matter how your grades are reported, your GPA starts your freshman year—so the work you do now really matters. A strong GPA opens doors to opportunities later. You can keep your GPA up by:

- ▶ Studying regularly and asking for help when needed
- ▶ Attending class and staying on top of assignments
- ▶ Being prepared: Take notes, stay organized, and review often
- ▶ Challenging yourself when you're ready, like taking an AP or Honors class

Here is an example of how grades for one semester were converted into a GPA. This is an example only; talk to your school counselor about how your school calculates your GPA.

Class	Percent	Grade	Grade Points	Credits Attempted	Grade Points Earned
Art	81%	B-	2.67	0.5	$2.67 \times 0.5 = 1.335$
English	84%	B	3.0	0.5	$3.0 \times 0.5 = 1.5$
History	74%	C	2.0	0.5	$2.0 \times 0.5 = 1.0$
Math	93%	A	4.0	0.5	$4.0 \times 0.5 = 2.0$
Physical Education	79%	B+	3.33	0.5	$3.33 \times 0.5 = 1.665$
Science	80%	B-	2.67	0.5	$2.67 \times 0.5 = 1.335$
Totals				3.0 attempted (3.0 earned)	8.835
GPA					$8.835 \div 3.0 = 2.945$

Real World Experience

Sometimes the best way to learn is to leave the classroom and take a career for a test drive. Work with your school counselor to set up job shadows and internships in career areas you are interested in. You can also make connections with local businesses for additional opportunities.

Job Shadow: Spend a day with a professional in a career of interest and see how their day-to-day job duties fit with your vision. Spending a day in their shoes can open your eyes to how they spend their time and help you visualize yourself following the same path.

Internships: While a job shadow is typically a one day experience, an internship is a longer, more in-depth journey through which you can discover unknown aspects of careers and receive hands-on experience performing the tasks and duties of your potential future career.

Advanced Placement & College Credit Courses

Plan ahead and talk to your counselor about what options are available in your district and which classes would work best in your four-year plan. Remember these courses are the beginning of your college transcript. Only take courses if you are academically ready and prepared for a higher level of rigor and classroom expectations, as well as a greater time commitment.

- ▶ **Advanced Placement (AP)** courses are taught in high school at the college level. A test is given at the end of the course to potentially earn college credit.
- ▶ **Dual Enrollment** are college-level courses offered through local colleges that count towards both high school credit and college level credit.

Planning to Attend a Regent University?

Iowa's three Regent universities (Iowa State University, University of Iowa, and University of Northern Iowa) use a **Regent Admission Index (RAI)** score for automatic admission.

- ▶ You must complete required core courses and score at least **245** on the RAI.
- ▶ Scoring a **245 or higher** automatically admits you to these three institutions.
- ▶ No ACT/SAT score = no RAI. If you apply test-optional, you'll receive a holistic review instead—this may include essays, recommendations, extracurriculars, or an interview.
- ▶ You can calculate your score at regents.iowa.gov/RAI.

Private colleges do not use the RAI, but they consider similar factors. Community colleges do not require specific admission criteria, but RAI components may affect scholarship eligibility.

Element	Your Statistics	RAI Score Totals
ACT or SAT Composite Score	_____ x 3 =	_____
High School GPA	_____ x 30 =	_____
Number of RAI-approved courses Completed in High School	_____ x 5 =	_____
Add All Element Scores Together for RAI Score = _____		

Finding the Right Fit

As a student, finding the education or training option that is the right fit for you is incredibly important. It may seem overwhelming - how can you know which school or training program is right for you when there are so many options to consider?

- ▶ **Academic Fit.** How well will you fit in, academically, with the other students? Look beyond minimum admissions requirements. You want to be challenged, but you may feel out of place if your academic abilities are significantly above or below the other students.
- ▶ **Cultural Fit.** Does the training program or college setting feel like a place you can spend a significant period of your life? Some things to consider when gauging cultural fit: size, location, student body, amenities, and student services. Explore all of the options before you decide what is right for you, and visit as many programs as you can to learn what feels "right" to you.
- ▶ **Financial Fit.** Is this program a good investment that will be worth the money—and any debt you might take on? Don't be scared away by the published cost of a college, and don't assume you have to choose the cheapest option.

Sticker price is the total published cost of attending a college, including tuition, fees, and housing and food—before any financial aid is applied.

Net price is what you'll actually pay after subtracting scholarships, grants, and other aid.

Use net price—not sticker price—for a true cost comparison. You may discover that some of the most "expensive" colleges are actually affordable. Visit ICANSucceed.org/npc for a list of net price calculators by school. Visit for a list of institutional net price calculators.



GET INVOLVED

START

Welcome to High School



Explore Careers



Prepare Academically



Get Involved



Finance Your Future



Success Strategies

Be Active and Get Involved

High school is a great time to try new things, explore your interests, and start building the skills you'll need for your future. Getting involved in clubs, sports, volunteering, or even a part-time job helps you discover what you enjoy, grow in your confidence, and connect with others. Here's what being involved can do for you:

- ▶ **Build career-ready skills.** Learn leadership, teamwork, time management, and organization—skills that will help you in any job or college major.
- ▶ **Strengthen your people skills.** Working with others teaches you how to communicate, cooperate, and adapt—important tools for success in school, work, and life.
- ▶ **Explore your interests.** Whether it's joining student council, trying out for the play, or helping with a community project, you might discover something you're passionate about.
- ▶ **Make connections.** Activities are a great way to meet new people, build friendships, and feel more connected to your school.

Create an Activities Resume

As you get involved, keep track of everything you do—clubs, sports, volunteer work, jobs, awards, and achievements. This will make applying for scholarships, internships, college, and employment much easier later on. Use the template in the ICAN Resource Library to get started: - [visit ICANsucceed.org/activitiesresume](https://www.icansucceed.org/activitiesresume).

Mallory Morgan	
410 Main Street • Annapolis, Iowa 52543 • (562) 355-1234 • jsmith@gmail.com	
Education	
Iowa High School	
GPA: 3.77 • Class Rank: 84/380	
ACT Composite: 36	
Academic Awards: Academic Letter, National Honor Society and Honor Roll (3 yrs)	
School Activities	
Editor-in-Chief of The Spectator (school newspaper)	Grades 11-12
Student Council Vice-President	Grade 12
Class Treasurer	Grade 11
School Play - set designer	Grades 10-12
Soccer	Grades 9-12
Team Captain - Grade 12	
Community Involvement	
Assistant Little League Coach	Grades 11-12
Church Youth Group	Grades 9-12
Hospital Volunteer	Grade 11
Food Bank Volunteer	Grades 9-11
Humane Society Volunteer	Grade 10
Total Community Service Hours	222 Hours
Employment	
Waitress, The Restaurant	Grades 11-12
Provided menu, met special customer needs, took orders, brought food to tables, refilled glasses, and cleaned tables.	
Grocery Clerk, The Store	Grade 9
Provided customer service, including greeting customers, bagging groceries and answering their questions. Also assisted with stocking shelves and maintaining a clean and safe environment. Assisted with other duties as assigned.	
Honors & Awards	
AP Scholar	Grades 11-12
Service & Leadership Award	Grade 11
Soccer MVP	Grade 11

Get Hands-On Experience

One of the best ways to explore career options is to try things out and talk to people who've been there. Real-world experience gives you a clearer picture of what careers are really like—and it can boost your college and scholarship applications, too.

- ▶ Talk to adults about how they chose their careers and what their jobs are like.
- ▶ Participate in career days or mentoring programs at school.
- ▶ Research the education and training required for the careers you are interested in.
- ▶ Volunteer or intern with local organizations or businesses. Many scholarships look closely at volunteer experience.
- ▶ Job shadow professionals in fields you're curious about. Talk to your school counselor about options.
- ▶ Go on a career program site visit or visit an apprenticeship training center.

Manage Your Time

Balancing school, activities, and your personal life can be tough—but good time management makes everything easier. Learning how to plan ahead now will help reduce stress and set you up for success in high school, college, and your future career.

- ▶ **Use a planner** - paper or digital - and check it daily.
- ▶ **Block off time** for studying and bigger projects.
- ▶ **Color-code or prioritize your tasks.** Color-coding by subject or priority allows you to take in information at a glance. Label items **A.** Due Tomorrow; **B.** Items Due this Week; **C.** Items Due in 2-4 weeks; **D.** Items Due in a Month.
- ▶ **Plan backward** from big deadlines. Break projects into steps and assign each step to a specific day.
- ▶ **Double-check before you leave school** to make sure you have everything you need. Cross or check off each assignment when you finish it.
- ▶ **Make notes for home.** Write down reminders for new supplies or materials you need, as well as information for your parents.
- ▶ **Prioritize wisely.** Focus on what's due soonest, but don't leave long-term projects for the last minute.

Intercollegiate Athletics

Planning to play sports in college? If you want to compete at the college level, you'll need to meet specific academic and eligibility requirements set by the governing bodies of college athletics (like the NCAA or NAIA). This includes coursework, GPA, and standardized test benchmarks. Start preparing now so you stay on track—both on the field and in the classroom. Visit [ICANsucceed.org/collegethletes](https://www.icansucceed.org/collegethletes) to learn more.

FINANCE YOUR FUTURE

Finance Your Future

Planning how to pay for your education or training is a key part of your career journey. Start now by researching costs and talking with your parents or guardians about options. If there's a gap between what you have and what you'll need, consider ways to cover it, such as:

- ▶ Earning and saving money now
- ▶ Applying for scholarships and financial aid
- ▶ Working during college
- ▶ Choosing a more affordable program

If you already have a checking account, practice good money habits. Try using a budgeting app and aim to keep a minimum balance—like never letting your account go below \$100.

Talk About Money with Your Family

Discussing finances with your parents or guardians helps everyone stay on the same page. Topics to cover include:

- ▶ Your budget and how much your family can contribute
- ▶ How to cover remaining costs
- ▶ Your future career earnings and how much loan debt is manageable
- ▶ Whether you or your parents will borrow money—and who will repay it
- ▶ Talk about using credit or debit cards - when it makes sense, how they work, and what to watch out for (interest rates, fees, and minimum payments).

Save for College

It's never too early to start saving for college. Even small contributions to a savings account or college savings plan can make a big difference over time. Learn about ways to save at [ICANSucceed.org/savings](https://www.icansucceed.org/savings).

Prepare for Scholarships

Studying hard and getting involved in extracurricular activities can open the door to scholarships. These awards are usually based on:

- ▶ Academic achievement
- ▶ Leadership roles
- ▶ Community service
- ▶ Special talents (like music, theater, or sports)
- ▶ Financial need

Many scholarships are available in Iowa and beyond. visit [ICANSucceed.org/scholarships](https://www.icansucceed.org/scholarships).

Consider Part-Time Work or Volunteering

A part-time job during high school can help build skills and earn money for future expenses. If you take on a job:

- ▶ Look for an employer that understands school comes first
- ▶ Save a portion of your earnings for college or training
- ▶ Use your job to gain experience for your resume

Volunteering is another great way to grow your skills, give back to your community, and even meet requirements for clubs or scholarship applications.


Understand Financial Aid

Financial aid includes grants and scholarships (free money you don't repay), work-study (on-campus jobs), and student loans (money you borrow and repay after college). To qualify for most aid, you and your parents will need to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) during your senior year of high school. Until then, it's important to understand college costs.


Average Tuition Rates in Iowa	
Two-year public college	\$6,270 - \$8,010* (\$209 - \$267 per credit hour)
Four-year public college	\$10,201 - \$11,283 per academic year
Four-year private college	\$17,100 - \$72,346 per academic year


You'll also need to budget for housing, meals, books, and other supplies. Use ICAN's In-School Budget Calculator to estimate your future costs. Visit [ICANSucceed.org/calculators](https://www.icansucceed.org/calculators).

*30 credit hours per year.

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Welcome to High School
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Explore Careers
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Prepare Academically
- 

Get Involved
- 

Finance Your Future
- 

Success Strategies

SUCCESS STRATEGIES

START

Welcome to High School



Explore Careers



Prepare Academically



Get Involved



Finance Your Future



Success Strategies

Starting high school is a big step toward your future. While you'll be making more of your own decisions, building key life skills now can boost your confidence and help you feel more prepared—whether your path leads to college, a career, or independent living.

Time Management & Everyday Life

Before heading out on your own, make sure you're ready with these basic but important life skills:

- ▶ **Master the Basics.** Learn how to do laundry, cook a simple meal, and handle basic car care like checking the oil or changing a tire. These everyday tasks build confidence and independence.
- ▶ **Make Smart Choices.** Practice decision-making and knowing when to say “no.” Learning how to prioritize your time and energy helps you stay balanced and in control.
- ▶ **Time Management Matters.** Managing your time well is key to reducing stress and staying on track. For tips and strategies, check out the time management section on page 19.

Character & Professional Skills

Character and professional skills—like communication, teamwork, and responsibility—are just as important as academic knowledge when it comes to succeeding in school, work, and life.

- ▶ **Be Someone Others Want to Work With.** You might be great with tech, but soft skills like respect, teamwork, and independence matter just as much. Are you dependable on group projects? Can you follow through on tasks without constant reminders? These skills help in school—and on the job.
- ▶ **Handshake Confidence.** A strong (but not crushing) handshake can make a lasting impression. Practice a firm handshake and pair it with a friendly greeting when meeting someone new.

- ▶ **Posture and Eye Contact Matter.** People notice how you carry yourself. Good posture and direct eye contact show that you're confident and engaged. Try not to slouch, fidget, or look down when talking—it can distract from your message.
- ▶ **Speak Up.** You don't have to be a natural speaker to be effective. Start by reading aloud, presenting in class, or even talking to a mirror. Take opportunities to practice speaking clearly and with confidence. Consider joining a speech class or club—it's great prep for college and job interviews. **Pro Tip:** Those who communicate well often stand out. Being clear, professional, and confident can open doors!

Money Management Basics

Mastering basic money management will help you avoid costly mistakes later.

- ▶ **Open and Manage a Bank Account.** Know how to use a checking and savings account. Try using a check register or budgeting app to track your spending—it's good practice for adulthood.
- ▶ **Stick to a budget.** Start with small things like a phone or clothing allowance. Work on making smart choices with your money so you learn to manage it—not let it manage you.
- ▶ **Understand Credit.** Your credit score affects your future. Learn how to build good credit by using it responsibly. Not sure how? Ask your family, your bank, or check out [ICANSucceed.org/videos](https://www.icansucceed.org/videos) to get started.
- ▶ **Know How Loans & Interest Work.** If you take out loans for college, cars, or anything else, you'll need to understand how interest adds up. Learn how loan repayment works *before* you sign anything.

Keys to Personal Growth

Personal growth starts with knowing yourself and building the habits that lead to confidence, resilience, and success.

- ▶ **Ask for Help.** High school can feel overwhelming. Don't wait until you're struggling. Talk to teachers, counselors, or family when you need support.
- ▶ **Get Involved.** Join a club, sport, or activity that interests you. It's a great way to meet people, explore passions, and build your résumé.
- ▶ **Start Thinking Ahead.** It's never too early to think about what comes after high school. Use tools like career interest surveys, job shadowing, or online career planners to explore your options.
- ▶ **Be You.** High school is a time to grow into who you are. Stay true to your values, treat others kindly, and keep learning. The effort you put in now will pay off later.

Parent Reminder Service

Receive monthly emails that support and guide you as you help prepare your student for life after high school. Visit [SP3.org](https://www.sp3.org) to register for the Student Planning Pointers for Parents (SP3) program.

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