

KEEPING ACADEMICS FIRST BOOKLET

This informational booklet is designed to assist students, parents, teachers, coaches, advisors, counselors, and administrators help ensure the academic success of all students.

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Iowa High School Athletic Association



Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union



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FOREWORD

The purpose of high school athletic and activity programs is the education of the young people involved so they will become more productive citizens in society. Interscholastic athletic and activity programs must be part of a school's total educational program. **The Iowa High Athletic Association and Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union place academics as a priority for all Iowa high school students.** In order to help ensure the academic success of Iowa high school students, the Athletic Association and Girls' Union have developed the **"Keeping Academics First"** program. **The "Keeping Academics First" program includes this booklet, a videotape that each high school in Iowa has received, and pamphlets provided for students through their schools.** The videotape provides information on the importance of academics and emphasizes three strategies schools can use to assist students in need of academic assistance. Those strategies are mentoring/tutoring programs, progress reports and study tables.

Research has shown, that as a group, students involved in high school athletics and activities have higher GPA's than those not involved, and those involved in more than one sport, or activity, have still higher GPA's. However, balancing academics as well as athletics and activities can certainly present challenges for students. We believe students involved in athletics and/or activities need to be equally committed to academic success and success in athletics, and/or, activities.

This booklet, which is part of the overall **"Keeping Academics First"** program, provides students, parents and educators with the tools to help all students be successful in academics.

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE STRATEGY #1

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORTS

- ▶ Monitor the academic progress of students
- ▶ Monitor the citizenship of students
- ▶ Monitor the classroom effort of students
- ▶ Can be used in conjunction with tutoring/mentoring and study tables

Possible methods of implementation: Progress reports require the cooperation of the school faculty in providing periodic information about student academic performance, citizenship and effort. The United States Educational Code allows “school officials, including teachers within the educational institution, who have been determined by the school to have legitimate educational interests . . .” to receive this information without the otherwise required written consent of the parents.

A few suggestions for implementing the academic assistance strategy of progress reports are:

(1) The school establishes a period of time for which academic eligibility will be reviewed and determined.

(2) Progress reporting sheets will be provided to the teachers by the athletic/activity administrator. The sheets are returned to the athletic/activity administrator and coaches/advisors know if students are having any problems in the areas of citizenship, effort and grades.

(3) Progress report sheets will be given to the coach/advisor, and it is their responsibility to review the report with their students.

(4) After the review, the student may be referred to whatever system is in place in the school to assist the student in improving their academic performance, or their personal conduct.

(5) A school may wish to consider some form of academic probation for students who are eligible under state requirements, but not eligible under local standards.

(6) If a student receives an unfavorable progress report that would render them ineligible under local standards, the student-athlete could apply for “academic probation.” To be considered for academic probation, a student would complete and return an academic probation contract to the athletic/activity administrator. The contract will state the student’s intent and agreement to abide by the conditions of academic probation. Failure to agree to academic probation would cause the student to become ineligible immediately upon not meeting the local standard.

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE STRATEGY #2

STUDY TABLES

- ▶ Provide academic assistance for students in a variety of academic areas
- ▶ Staffed by coaches, teachers, retired educators, college students, or high school honor students
- ▶ Can be used in conjunction with tutorial assistance programs and progress reports

Possible methods of implementation: Study tables can be implemented at a very low cost, or no cost, to school districts. A few suggestions for implementing the academic assistance strategy of study tables are:

(1) Have study tables available before, and after, school 3-4 days a week.

(2) Assistance for study tables can be provided by staff members, retired educators, student volunteers from a local college or high school students. Adults should always supervise study table sessions.

(3) If students do not achieve a certain GPA (2.0, as an example) they are required to attend study table sessions at least twice a week.

(4) When a student's GPA reaches the minimum that is required, they are no longer required to attend the study table sessions, even though they may be encouraged to attend.

(5) If a student does not attend a required study table session he, or she, is suspended from their activity for a specified amount of time (one week, as an example) and his/her parents are notified. If the suspension lasts more than a given number of weeks (3, as an example) they are dropped from the activity for that season/grading period.

(6) Coaches, or advisors, could use a certain amount of practice time each week and require all members of their team/group to attend the study table session held at that time.

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE STRATEGY #3

TUTORIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

- ▶ Provide academic assistance and/or counseling for students in specific academic needs (i.e., study skills, test taking skills, preparation for ACT, SAT, etc.)
- ▶ Staffed by teachers, coaches, counselors, retired educators
- ▶ Can incorporate the use of student or adult mentors
- ▶ Can be used in conjunction with progress reports & study tables

Possible Methods of Implementation: A tutorial assistance program can be implemented in a variety of ways at little, if any cost, to a school. A few suggestions for implementing the academic assistance strategy of tutorial assistance programs are:

(1) Locate a room off the library, guidance center, student center, etc. where students can go, or be assigned, (by a teacher, counselor, or coach) during a free period.

(2) The staff supervisor might be connected with the other academic assistance programs in the school, or it may be a teacher desiring to use a "free period" to help students, or one who would prefer working with students rather than taking a study hall assignment.

(3) Some schools may wish to utilize volunteers such as retired teachers, administrators or other professionals in the community.

(4) Classroom teachers could staff their own "departmental tutorial assistance program," where students could go, or be assigned, for help in specific areas such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, English, etc. These programs could function before the start of school or for a set amount of time after school, as well as during the regular school day. Counselors could work with students in the areas of study habits, note-taking, test-taking skills, and preparation for standardized tests.

(5) Older students or peers who excel in a particular discipline could be utilized as peer tutors and possibly earn a community/school service credit for their involvement.

SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is important to achieve success in any area of life, including academics. Parents, teachers, and educators discipline students when they do not discipline themselves, but self-discipline is preferred by everyone. Self-discipline is absolutely necessary if one is to achieve academic success.

Setting goals is one example of self-discipline. For students involved in athletics and activities, these goals fit into three categories: personal goals, academic goals, and athletic/activity goals. The following are examples of goals students may choose to set.

Personal Goals:

- Get at least 8 hours of sleep a night
- Allow ? evenings per week for leisure time
- Participate in ? clubs at school this semester
- Watch TV no more than ? hours per week
- Read ? books a month for pleasure
- Work no more than ? hours per week at my job

Academic Goals:

- Have a semester GPA of ?
- Have an overall GPA at graduation of ?
- Graduate ranked ? in my class
- Study ? hours a night or week
- Get a grade of ? in Chemistry
- Improve my grade by one letter grade in Math
- Keep a daily planner

Athletic/Activity Goals:

- Improve my personal best from last year
- Improve my performance from the beginning of the season/year to the end of the season/year
- Be an All-Conference or All-District performer
- Run a ?-minute mile
- Score an average of ? points per game
- Get ? pins for the season
- Receive the highest rating at competition

STUDY STRATEGIES

It's not unusual for some students to get better grades than others while spending less time studying. This might be partially due to intellect, but it might also have to do with the student who spends less time studying having more effective study habits. Certain study strategies can make a big difference in the amount of time spent studying and the results a student gets from that study time.

Study Strategy #1: Getting Motivated

Some students spend a great deal of time complaining about the need to study or finding ways (excuses) to get out of studying. Others develop positive study habits and spend their time studying, rather than complaining. Whichever habit you develop will stay with you for a lifetime!

Study Strategy #2: Taking Responsibility

Even though parents and teachers often remind students it is the student's responsibility to take notes, do homework, study for tests, etc. everyone involved is happier when the student assumes that responsibility for themselves. Taking responsibility might involve keeping a daily planner, visiting with teachers, or a tutor, on a regular basis, attending study tables, or finding better ways to manage your time. Taking responsibility now, will pay great dividends throughout life.

Study Strategy #3: Setting Goals

Setting goals helps one stay focused on the things that are important. Some students don't seem to "get it" until their senior year and it's often too late to do well academically by that time. Appropriate goal setting involves setting long-term & short-term goals that are specific, measurable, attainable & timely. Goal setting is a lifetime skill that is best learned in school.

Study Strategy #4: Taking an Interest and Getting Involved in the Subject

Students often say they are doing poorly in a class because they are not interested in the subject and it does not pertain to their life. Developing a positive attitude, and becoming actively involved in a class, will make it more interesting and improve your performance in the class. Being prepared for class, sitting up straight, listening, and asking questions are all ways to get involved. Getting involved & acting interested often lead to a genuine interest in the subject or task that needs to be accomplished. Finding ways to become interested in the class will help improve your opportunity for success now & in the future.

Study Strategy #5: Don't Give Up

When people get discouraged, it's easy to give up on the task at hand. Often that

failure is an excuse not to try a similar task again. If a concept isn't understood the first time, don't give up. Instead, seek help from someone who does understand and who can help you do better in the future.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STUDY HABITS

- Studying is a combination of making time to study and maximizing your study time.
- When studying, **be prepared** with the materials you will need, and find a place where you will not be distracted.
- **Schedule regular study time every day** and allow adequate time to study each subject. Studying at a similar time every day prepares your mind & body to focus on studying.
- **Libraries and study rooms are great places to study** as they minimize distractions. If you have a minimal amount of studying to do, use the extra time to review difficult subjects, read a good book, or evaluate the goals you have set.
- **Keep a daily planner** or make notes on when assignments, papers and projects are due, and when exams are scheduled. Don't put off assignments that aren't due immediately. By beginning an assignment soon after it has been assigned, it will seem more manageable & you will probably worry less about it.
- **Become actively involved in studying.** Highlight important points, jot down notes, check definitions, and put question marks by things you don't understand or which need clarification.
- Don't fall into the trap of only studying for the classes you find the easiest or most interesting. **Alternate between studying for classes you find most interesting and those you find least interesting.**
- **It's easier to concentrate when it is quiet.** The easier it is to concentrate the more you will accomplish in a shorter period of time and the more you will retain. Avoid distractions like T.V., radio, telephones, and friends (unless you are studying with them) while studying.
- If you have multiple subjects to study, **make a list of specifically what needs to be done.** That way you won't forget something and you can mark each item off your list when it is completed, signifying what you have accomplished.

- **Do difficult tasks first while you are still fresh.** If you tend to procrastinate, study the most interesting subject first.
- **Set specific goals at the beginning of long study periods.** Make a list of exactly what you need to accomplish in each class.
- **Studying during daylight hours is more productive** than studying when it is dark outside.
- **Have specific places to study.** This will help condition your body to be prepared to study. Take into consideration proper lighting, a comfortable room temperature, and availability of study materials.
- **Avoid procrastination.** Start with a positive attitude. Organize what needs to be done into manageable parts. List what needs to be done, in order of priority. Clear your desk so there are fewer distractions. No matter how trivial the task might be, start doing something rather than just sitting and doing nothing. **AT ALL COSTS, AVOID STUDYING IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION!**
- **Studying information that needs to be memorized works best just before going to bed** because while you sleep, your subconscious will help you retain the information.
- **Don't study in bed.** Your body is conditioned to become sleepy in bed, not to study.
- **Don't waste valuable study time you may have during school.** If you are given time to study at the end of class, use it. If you complete your homework in one class get permission from the teacher to work on other homework you may have.
- **Avoid being extremely tired, hungry, or stressed out** when studying.

TIME MANAGEMENT

- **Use a daily, weekly and/or monthly planner** to indicate class schedules, meetings, practices, study time, assignment due dates and scheduled tests.
- **Make a “to do” list** and follow it every day.
- **Write down your class assignments** and keep all assignments in one place. Keep track of due dates for assignments and projects.
- **Keep handouts organized** for all classes.
- **Don’t waste valuable study time** you may have during the school day.
- **Say “No”** to the things that don’t fit into your schedule or are not a priority.
- **Find the right time to do things.** Are you a morning person, or a night person? Determine what tasks you do well at certain times of day and do those tasks when you can do them most efficiently.
- **Get a good night sleep** as often as possible.

DOING YOUR BEST IN THE CLASSROOM

- **Give the teacher a good first impression** by sitting in the front of the classroom beginning on the first day of class. Don't sit with friends who are poor students and tend to get in trouble. This severely limits your ability to pay attention. Take notes and stay focused on the class.
- **Be actively involved** in every class. It makes the class more fun and more educational.
- **Arrive at every class prepared** with texts, pencils, paper, etc.
- **Set short-term and long-term goals in every class.** Some may be daily or weekly goals and some may be quarterly or semester goals.
- **Become involved** in classroom discussions, even if it means admitting you don't understand.
- **Keep an open mind and try your best** to understand what is being said in class and what you read.
- **Be an active listener.** Sit near the front & center of the room, sit up straight, look at the speaker, keep an open mind, stay focused on the discussion, and be prepared to take notes. Being on time for class, and having all materials ready, helps one prepare to be an active listener. Most students who do well academically don't just sit in the back of class and absorb everything that is said. They demonstrate behavior that allows them to do their best.
- **Let the teacher know you are paying attention** by taking notes, asking questions and participating in class discussions. When a student has a borderline grade, teachers will often decide the final grade based on attentiveness in class and class participation.
- **Help others understand your point of view**, rather than becoming frustrated because they don't understand.
- **Try to phrase difficult concepts in a way you understand.** Ask yourself, "What does that mean and how can I relate to it." By truly understanding a difficult concept you will remember it long after the original words are forgotten.

- If you are having trouble with a class, **get help as soon as possible**. This will show you have an interest and want to do your best. Waiting until the day before a test is scheduled, or an assignment is due, may not leave enough time for you to be prepared. If you did poorly on a test, or assignment, visit with the teacher as soon as possible about how you can do better next time and about the possibility of extra credit. Once you ask for help, be prepared to follow up on suggestions the teacher may have, especially offers of help before or after school.

NOTE TAKING

- **The key to taking good notes is listening and paying attention.** Avoid daydreaming and distractions while taking notes.
- **An effective way to take notes is the outline method.** In this method you write down a main idea and include other thoughts under that heading.
- **Keep separate notebooks for each subject.** Start each day on a separate page or draw line under the notes from one day before you start taking notes the next day.
- Don't write down every word the teacher says! **Write down, and highlight, key/major points.**
- **Write neatly and don't crowd your words.** Notes are for future reference and it shouldn't take longer to decipher your notes than it does to review the concepts you've written down!
- **Pay special attention to key points** made by, and key words or phrases used by, the teacher. He or she may underline something on the board, make a certain comment about how important a concept is, tell the class to remember a certain point, etc.
- **Use abbreviations whenever possible,** but be sure you know what the abbreviations mean. Consider keeping track of abbreviations and what they stand for in the margin of your notes.
- **Don't worry about spelling or writing mistakes.** Write down the main concepts and worry about grammar skills later.
- Your notes should **include any comments the teacher makes about assignments or tests.** Putting these in the margin of your notebook may draw your attention to them more easily. A schedule of tests and assignments should also be included in your daily planner.
- If the subject is extremely difficult for you, **preview the reading(s) before class to prepare yourself** for what the teacher may say.

BECOMING A BETTER READER

- Understand that reading text books is different from reading for enjoyment. **Reading texts requires one to read with a purpose** and to become an active reader.
- Before you begin reading, **tell yourself you will do your best to remember the material.**
- Concentrating on what is being read saves many hours of rereading and helps one understand the material being read. **If your concentration is slipping, change tasks or take a break.**
- **Preview a chapter before actually reading it.** Look for headings, titles, charts, graphs, summaries, words that appear in bold or italicized print, and other hints to what the key points will be.
- If you are reading to find answers to specific questions, **preview the questions before you begin reading** as this will help you become more involved in your reading.
- **Be sure you understand** one paragraph, or section, before going to the next.
- For extremely difficult material, **recite out loud** the key points and what you have learned.
- **Read hard to understand material out loud** for better retention.
- **Think about potential test questions** as you read the chapter.
- When you have finished reading the chapter, **review the headings, titles, charts, graphs, summaries, etc.** to be sure you understand the material covered.

WRITING PAPERS

- Before you begin writing a paper, think about how it will be graded? **What is the teacher looking for in the paper?**
 - Does the paper cover the assigned topic?
 - Did you put thought and effort into the paper or was it thrown together at the last minute?
 - Are the major points supported by the material assigned?
 - Are the sentences clear and concise?
 - Are the thoughts presented in an organized manner or do you have to read sentences several times before they make sense?
 - Has the paper been proofread for mistakes and typographical errors?
- **A good paper includes three parts:** an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. A simple way of understanding these three parts is this: (1) tell people what your going to tell them (introduction); (2) tell them what you want them to know (body); (3) tell them what you've just told them (conclusion).
- There is no shortcut to writing a good paper. **Allow enough time** to gather your thoughts and review any necessary material.
- **Be sure you clearly understand what the expectations before beginning the paper.** Topic selection, length, sources, and format are important to the quality of the paper.
 - **Topic selection.** Select a topic that is of interest to you. If the topic has been assigned, try to find details within that topic that interest you. Keep your topic broad enough so you can find enough information, yet narrow enough to keep it manageable.
 - **Gathering and organizing information.** As a general rule, it should take as much time to gather and organize the information as it does to write the paper. The more time spent gathering and organizing information, the easier it will be to write the paper.
 - **References.** Encyclopedias, almanacs and atlases are traditional

references when writing papers. Newspaper & magazine articles, museums, educational television programs, the internet and interviews are also excellent references.

- **Taking notes.** As you gather the information, be sure to take notes on key points. Notes don't need to be extensive, but they need to contain enough information so you can write the paper from them. Be sure the notes indicate the source of the information.
- **Making an outline.** After you have gathered enough information, make an outline of the major points you will present in your paper. Making an outline helps put your thoughts into a logical sequence so you can write the rough draft.
- **Writing the rough draft.** The rough draft does not need to be neat, but it does need to be legible. Follow your outline and expand on the headings. Refer back to your notes for additional information. Read the rough draft aloud to yourself, or someone else, to be sure it makes sense and that your thoughts are organized.
- **Writing the final draft.** Following the teacher's exact instructions is very important when writing the final draft. Items such as length, spacing and margins are simple, but important. Properly reference each source you have used.

STUDYING FOR TESTS

- **Write down any information the teacher tells the class about the test.** What kinds of questions will be on it, what sections it will cover, etc. If unsure, ask the teacher what material will be covered on the test (notes, specific chapters, topics, projects, labs, etc.) and what types of questions will appear.
- **Study the test material more than once.** Cramming for a test may work, but usually only if the material has already been studied more than once.
- **Avoid cramming for tests.** While everyone does last minute studying don't let that be the only time you study. Study a little each day for several days before the test and review difficult information shortly before taking the test.
- **Study the information you have the hardest time understanding first,** while you are still fresh and while you have more energy. Then review more familiar information and return the difficult information for a review.
- Pay special attention to information in the text that is **bold**, underlined, *italicized*, ***etc.*** Also review charts, tables & graphs.
- **Read all chapter summaries**, review vocabulary words, key point sections.
- **Make a list of study questions** or review those provided.
- **Work any problems in the book.**
- **Ask questions, or rephrase material, out loud** as it may make the information easier to understand.
- **Try to anticipate questions** that may be asked, especially essay questions.
- **Make flash cards** of important concepts, theories, principles, formulas, etc.
- **Think of practical ways to remember the information** or of practical applications for the ideas presented.
- When using notes to study **don't hesitate to underline or highlight key points.** Ask yourself potential test questions as you review.

- **Students have better recall when studying from their original notes.** Something that was erased or crossed out may trigger a memory that would be missed if using rewritten, or someone else's, notes.
- **Take a ten-minute break every hour while studying.** Taking regular breaks helps keep you more alert which improves concentration.
- **Avoid being extremely tired, hungry, or stressed out** when studying.
- **Get a good night sleep** before a test!

TAKING TESTS

- **Look the entire test over quickly before you begin answering questions.** This allows you to preview the types of questions that are being asked and the amount of time each section may take. If you have questions about the instructions, ask the teacher to clarify immediately.
- **Plan your time**, allowing the most time for questions worth the most points.
- **Read the instructions** for each section of the test before answering any questions in that section.
- **Begin by answering any questions whose answers you might forget.**
- **Answer the questions worth the most points first.**
- If you read a question twice and don't know the answer, go to the next question. Something you read later in the test may trigger your memory about the question. **Don't forget to go back and answer any questions you skipped!**
- **Pace yourself** to make sure you have time to answer all the questions.
- **Review the test one last time before turning it in** to make sure you didn't forget to answer a question, or questions.

TAKING TESTS

True-False Questions

- **Answer the easy questions first**, then return to the more difficult ones.
- **Carefully read statements containing dates, places, or other specific details** that may make a statement false.
- **Words such as** all, none, only, never, always and best/worst, highest/lowest, are clues that the statement may be false.
- **Words such as** usually, most, and some are clues the statement may be true.
- **Be careful of statements containing “and,”** as both parts of the statement must be true in order for the answer to be true.
- **Your first answer is most likely to be the correct answer.** Never change an answer unless other information in the test causes you to be sure your first choice was wrong.

TAKING TESTS

Multiple choice questions

- **Answer the questions you know the answers to first** and place an “X” next to those you don’t know. Go back and answer those with an “X” after you’ve answered the easier questions.
- If you are unsure of the correct answer, **eliminate obviously incorrect answers to narrow down your choices**. If you must guess, guess among those answers that are not obviously incorrect.
- **Read carefully** and eliminate implausible answers.
- When several answers seem correct, **reread the question and choose the answer that agrees grammatically with the question**. (If the question is in plural form, the answer should be also.)
- **Don’t read too much into the answer or question**.
- **Your first answer is most likely to be the correct answer**. Never change an answer unless other information in the test causes you to be sure your first choice was wrong.

TAKING TESTS

Essay questions

- **Scan the questions to determine which ones are worth the most points.** Answer those questions first.
- **Read each question carefully** to be sure you understand what is being asked and answer the question as directly as possible.
- **Jot down a quick outline** before you start answering the question.
- **Underline key words, or phrases**, in your answer.
- **Get to the point** and stick to the topic. Don't make the teacher grading the test read more than they need to!
- **Be sure you understand and answer the question being asked.**
- **Write legibly** and present well-organized thoughts.
- **Review your answer** to be sure it covers what you know about the question.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

A partnership between the school and parents is necessary to give students every opportunity to be successful in the classroom, and beyond. Parents are the most important educators of their children and with their help students can have a successful school career.

Here are a few ideas to help students become the best students possible.

- **Talk about school every day.** Ask questions such as - “What is the hardest thing you did today?” “What was the funniest thing that happened in school?” “What is the thing you are the most proud of today?”
- **Make reading special.** Give books as a gift and role model reading.
- **Show your child that learning is a lifelong activity.** Learn a new skill or sport with them. Learn the answers to difficult homework questions together.
- **Know your child’s weaknesses and strengths.** Challenge their strengths and support their weaknesses.
- **Find time each week to have a one-on-one conversation with your child.** During this time talk about things your child likes and discuss what they think.
- **Be aware of your expectations as a parent.** If our expectations are too low, we are limiting our children’s accomplishments. If our expectations are too high, we may be setting our children up for failure.
- **Make homework a priority.** Provide a quiet, pleasant place for your child to study every day. If your child has no homework, encourage them to use time to read. Limit distractions and noise during this time.
- **Get to know your child’s teachers.** Attend parent-teacher conferences and get involved with school whenever possible.
- **Discuss values with your children.** Let them know what you think is right and wrong - and why.

- **Talk to other parents** about how much freedom their children have. You may find that “everybody else’s parents aren’t letting their kids go!”

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