

Planning for Ninth Grade - Amanda

Amanda will be going into the ninth grade this fall. She lives in a modest house in a large suburban community not far outside of the city. The community as a whole is diverse in a socioeconomic sense, though the middle school from which Amanda just graduated was more homogeneous, as it drew students from a more local area. Amanda's family moved to this community from an apartment in the city when she was in fourth grade. As Amanda's parents did not like the city schools, she spent first through third grade in a small religious private school, before they moved to their current house and Amanda began attending public school.

Amanda's parents are both well educated. In fact, they met in graduate school where Amanda's mom was spending her first year in the U.S. after moving from Eastern Europe. Her father is a freelance political journalist, and her mother is a web designer for small dot com company. Their combined incomes make for a comfortable, though not extravagant lifestyle. They each put in 50-60 hour workweeks, but the flexibility of both of their schedules has allowed them to be there for Amanda and her younger brother (now entering sixth grade) when they were needed.

Amanda has three friends from which she is inseparable. They spend most of their time in school together, and they don't socialize with many other kids. Amanda is the most academically successful of her friends, and this has been a source of contention between them. Her friends don't take school very seriously, and as she has been spending more time with them, her grades in school have been slipping. In seventh grade, Amanda was one of the top performers in her math and science classes, and was a semi-finalist in the Science Fair. In eighth grade, she had become a mediocre and uninspired student who sometimes did not turn in assignments in these classes, and did not participate in the Science Fair at all.

While Amanda is uninspired in her classes, she has been an inspired athlete on the field. She has been a key player on the girls' soccer and lacrosse teams, along with her three close friends. Her soccer coach told her that she has a good shot at being a starting player on the junior varsity team in the fall.

Neither the teachers nor administrators in Amanda's large school (400 students per grade in the middle school) have brought any attention to her declining performance. But Amanda's parents have definitely seen the changes in her behavior as well as her grades. They are concerned that her grades will continue to fall if she goes to the public high school. This year Amanda is scheduled to be in all of the same classes as her friends, and her parents feel that this will only lead to further decline. With nearly 3000 students in the high school, they feel it will be too easy for her to slip between the cracks and not capitalize on her academic skills.

So, Amanda's parents are investigating other options. The new science and technology charter school? The private school where she went to elementary school? Or perhaps homeschooling? What is your advice?