

Highway to High School
Wednesday, September 17, 2025
Presented by the PTA, at Gorzycki Middle School

Panelists: Corinne Oh (GMS/Bowie parent/GMS counselor), Lori Sonnier (GMS/Bowie parent), Susanna Gallun (GMS/Bowie and LASA parent), Michelle McMillan (GMS/Bowie parent), Nicole Hepburn (Bowie parent/Bowie Counselor).

Moderated by Stephanie Kotara

MS = Middle School, HS = High School, GPA = Grade Point Average.

Blue text is additional advice from last year's panel.

Panel Questions:

What most prepared your MS child for Bowie?

- Extracurricular activities help with connections going into HS. Also builds confidence.
- Getting involved.
- Keeping track of assignments, executive functioning skills.
- Back to school brunch (mother-daughter example, but can be for anyone) to get to know your child's friends.
- From the students: Spanish, math, summer math program.
- Summer sports, to get to know other kids before going into HS.
- The math program is great at GMS. The math track begins in 6th grade. Make sure your kid is in the right math track for their level.
- There's an AISD math bridge program, 3 weeks in the summer, if your child wants to 'level up' to the next math class at GMS.
- GMS Band prepared Corinne's shy child for Bowie.
- Activities give the kids a sense of belonging, plus leadership and interpersonal skills.

What classes were most helpful for your student?

- Starting a foreign language in MS.
- STEM classes.
- Classes that suited interests: music (example: classical guitar), computer classes, orchestra.
- Advanced classes.
- Study Skills: helps with organization and executive functioning.
- Keyboarding (typing). There is no keyboarding/typing requirement anymore to graduate HS. Keyboarding is part of the CTE wheel (6th grade only). Camps and online classes are

helpful for keyboarding. My (Stephanie) child went to the Regents School keyboarding camp in the summer and it was very good.

- MS is a good time to explore new interests. Kids can realize what they're good at, what they're not good at.

What advice would you give MS parents going to Bowie?

- Ask questions!
- Let kids manage themselves.
- Let kids explore. Let them figure things out on their own.
- Just because a student took advanced classes in MS, doesn't mean they need to in HS. I.e. Bowie Algebra 2 is really hard. Look at getting a tutor.
- Talk to other parents.
- Get involved as a parent. Raise funds for groups.
- Check in with them.
- Engage with the family. I.e. trivia night.
- 'Back off' as a parent and don't hand everything to your child. Let them fail (no one is saying that's easy!). That will prepare them for more responsibility as they get older, and teach them to be 'scrappy'!
- Sign up for the most rigorous classes your child can handle.

Please explain endorsements, 'tracks' and certifications.

- Endorsements stress parents out. It's not a big deal. Students on the panel had barely heard of them.
- Endorsements' – a little like a college major, good for a resume, but shouldn't stress anyone out. Most Bowie students leave HS with multiple endorsements anyway.
- You can change tracks/pathways.
- 'Certifications are a great option for pursuing careers. Students can apply to different schools for this, even if they attend Bowie: culinary, auto tech, cosmetology, etc. Transportation is often not provided, so students need to secure that.

What's the difference between Advanced, AP, ACC Dual Credit and UT OnRamps Classes?

- The classes at Bowie are Academic ('regular' class), Advanced (more challenging) and AP (Advanced Placement. Need to take an exam. See handout on this). There is a Gifted and Talented program.
- Bowie has struggled to keep ACC classes. Kids don't really take them.
- Students can go off campus to take ACC classes, but have to complete their Bowie classes and that's a lot.
- Each college/university decides which classes they take, i.e. if they'll accept AP.
- Universities change their rules.

- Students can decide if their OnRamps class gets college credit at UT (if their grade is good enough).
- Taking an OnRamps class does not enhance a student's chances of getting into UT.
- Universities want to see if a student challenged themselves. Take the hardest classes you can manage.
- AP exams (credit) are taken by individual universities, not necessarily all of them.

What was the transition to HS like, socially and academically?

- It depends on the child. It's important to find your place at a big school like Bowie. The size can be a good thing, as kids can reinvent themselves, try new things and make new friends.
- Bowie is big! Find your place. There are over 100 clubs. Check out the Club Fair at the beginning of the year.
- 'Meet at the Tree' event offers a chance for students to meet new friends.
- Choose an activity but have a back-up because some activities/athletics are very competitive. Color Guard, Cross Country, Jazz and Steel band, La Crosse, Wrestling have little or no requirements.

What is my child is average?

- There are so many options and pathways at Bowie! There's a place for everyone.

Other tips:

- Hiring an essay coach helped with college applications.
- Rank GPA consists of 4 classes, 2 languages (4 semesters). If the student takes more than 4 semesters of a foreign language, the higher grades will knock out the lower ones.
- Health is a requirement to graduate HS. Kids can take health at Garza HS (there may be other options too), and gain an elective in HS with that out of the way.
- Foreign languages: there's a 2 year/4 semester (credit) requirement for HS students to graduate. You are setting up your child well if you start them in a foreign language in 7th grade. These MS foreign languages count as HS credit, so keep that in mind with prioritizing their grades in these classes. Their future self will thank them!
- Universities look at grades, test scores, activities, character, work.
- HS cumulative GPA consists of all the classes, starting in 7th grade (if kids are taking HS credit classes).
- Stay connected to what's going on in HS/at Bowie: the newsletter, school paper, Facebook pages.
- You can often join the school Facebook pages now, as a MS parent, to see what's going on at the school.

- Pay attention to how the kids are doing, academically, socially. Are they in the right class, or activity, have good friends/influences?
- Recognize their physical development might impede learning (remember as babies, that when their bodies were developing, they were not advancing as fast mentally, and vice versa). Puberty has the same affect. Be patient as they struggle through this.
- 'Boy mom' Susanna especially noted the changes in 9th grade boys. Be considerate and supportive of all they're going through physically and emotionally.

Post-panel note: "A study by the Hudson Institute states that there will be a shortage of tradesmen by 2050 in the U.S." A college degree is not necessary for a fulfilling, well-paying career. <https://nationaltoday.com/national-tradesmen-day/>