



NIKOLA TESLA STEM
HIGH SCHOOL
... PYTHONS ...

TRANSITION TOOL KIT FOR INCOMING TESLA FAMILIES

Customized by: Tesla STEM PTSA in
conjunction with Tesla STEM staff

WHY A TRANSITION TOOL KIT?

Provide incoming 9th graders and their families some important information for a smooth transition to Tesla STEM!

Some of our parents, including our international parents, have particular challenges we may take for granted:

- Navigating middle and then high school to set yourself up for success is complex; parents also need to learn the academic landscape
- Families new to this country will be facing a completely new culture on many fronts, including in schools
- The US's idea of encouraging independence in schools, particularly when entering high school, may be a brand-new concept – a little explanation could go a long way

WHAT INCOMING TESLA PARENTS NEED TO KNOW:

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Glossary (some new terms that may be unfamiliar)

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GLOSSARY (SOME NEW TERMS)

ASB - The [Tesla STEM HS Associated Student Body \(ASB\)](#) is made up of both elected and appointed students who run the student government. Students in this group manage the student body finances and plan events such school spirit week, grade specific bonding events, Winter Ball (for all students) and Prom (mainly for 12th graders). ASB also refers to a student's school ID card.

ASB Card – The ASB card and the funds that it raises are used to pay for student activities (social, cultural and recreational) that benefit the entire school. The Tesla ASB fee is \$35 and is typically paid along with the other fees (lab, yearbook) paid at the beginning of the school year.

Sports Activities - Students who wish to participate in an after-school sports would do so through their “home” school. This link will direct you to the four “home” school athletic [websites](#).

Booster Clubs – These non-profit organizations are parent-run and support and raise money for sports, music, robotics and other clubs in schools. Help to support competitions and trips that PTSA, schools, and ASB are not allowed to fund. **Tesla STEM does not have booster clubs unlike the comprehensive high schools.**

Career and Technical Education Dual Credit Courses (CTE) - Through a partnership with community and technical colleges in the state, certain CTE courses provide students with the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit for the course, if they complete the course with a grade of “B” or better. If a course qualifies for CTE Dual Credit, it will be noted in the course description, and teachers will provide students with information about how to register for CTE Dual Credit. Here is the [link](#) to learn more about CTE .

PTSA – The parent–teacher–student association (PTSA) is a formal organization composed of parents, teachers and staff that supports students and teachers, provides information to parents, is a community resource etc. [Learn more about the PTSA.](#)

Running Start – Running Start is a program in which juniors and seniors who qualify may enroll in college level courses at Bellevue College, CWU Sammamish, Cascadia College, or Lake Washington Institute of Technology and earn high school and college credit concurrently. **This program is not offered at Tesla STEM**

WANIC – [Washington Network for Innovative Careers](#), a skill center program - Courses offered through WANIC often introduce students to specific career paths. Many skill centered classes have AP classes attached, students can also earn industry certifications. Some classes include culinary, nursing, emergency response services, computer science, etc. **This program is not offered at Tesla STEM**

1. WHAT IS DIFFERENT

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Curriculum: Different subjects with different teachers, students move between classes. Middle school helps students develop the skills and content knowledge to be successful in high school. Credits/grades for students taking Algebra, Geometry or a World Language are now automatically part of the high school transcript.

Communication: Students begin to take charge of their learning and communication with teachers.

Extra-curricular: Electives, clubs, sports, ASB (see Glossary) and other student leadership activities start to guide student interests.

HIGH SCHOOL

Curriculum: Grades, course selections and rigor start to really inform a student's post-graduation path, especially if college is the goal. Parents can help track student work, however students should become comfortable taking charge of their learning. Students select their courses online, and school provides families with information to assist their student.

Communication: It's helpful for student to form a connection with teachers (also important later for letters of recommendation). Good for student to know his or her school counselor.

Extra-curricular: Student involvement in clubs and/or sports are more targeted, and are highly recommended for any, but especially college paths. Students are expected to seek out activities and engage on their own. They can also start their own club!

2. PARENT TO SCHOOL COMMUNICATION – WHAT TO EXPECT

Curriculum Night – Tesla STEM will host an in-person Curriculum night on <TBD>. This event designed to have parents/guardians experience a short version of their student's academic day, meet with faculty, learn about their scholar's courses, and generally learn more about Tesla STEM.

(There are no formal Parent Teacher Conferences in high school)

Communication with teacher – Parents will not typically be receiving updates or e-mails, though this can vary. It is recommended for students to communicate openly with their teachers. Use of teacher office hours is highly recommended for student success. Parents can ask their student to show them the Teams channel for each class. Parents can also reach out to teachers via e-mail for questions or to request a meeting. Teachers may request that students attend any meetings scheduled with their parents. Note that teachers appreciate students advocating for themselves before the parent steps in.

Communication with Principal – Principal Amie Karkainen connects with parents/guardians through Parentsquare messages, during PTSA General meetings and “Coffee with the Principal” events. The Principal, Associate Principal, Counselors and staff members may also address the community at PTSA membership meetings.

General - Where can I as a parent/guardian get the most up to date information?

School info: <https://tesla.lwsd.org/> , PTSA <https://teslastemptsa.org/> and [sign up for PTSA newsletter!](#)

2. PARENT TO SCHOOL COMMUNICATION – KEY CONTACTS

School Connections

Principal:

Amie Karkainen - akarkainen@lwsd.org

Associate Principal:

Sumeyye Cardakli - scardakli@lwsd.org

Office staff:

Danielle O'Brien - dobrien@lwsd.org

Laura Ferguson - laferguson@lwsd.org

Activities Coordinator:

Lori Zebrack-Smith lzebrack-smith@lwsd.org

Counseling Office:

The [counseling office](#) is an important resource for your student.

You generally have to make an appointment. Role of counseling detailed in Section 5.

Late Arrival / Absence / Early dismissal:

Lauren Ferguson teslastemattend@lwsd.org 425-936-2770

School Bus route:

These differ based on your feeder high school. LWSD transportation department will send you information.

3. KEEPING TRACK OF STUDENT WORK, ASSIGNMENTS, GRADES & FEES

Students and Parents can view grades in [Skyward](#). Teachers update grades in Skyward at least eight times each year (halfway through each quarter, and at the end of each quarter).

Skyward Family Access – [Students/Families - Tesla STEM High \(lwsd.org\)](#) **Call** (425) 936-2770

Graduation requirements – student needs 24 credits in different subject areas to graduate. When in doubt, check with your student's counselor!

New Student Information - <https://tesla.lwsd.org/counseling/new-student-information>

High School and Beyond Plan (Xello) – students are required to complete; they explore their interests, discover potential future careers, and research post-secondary education options. They then link their plan for high school course taking with their future goals.

Choice of electives – What is offered? When and how to decide? Course and elective selections are not guaranteed – based on space, timing, other course offerings, needs of graduating students, etc. Here is the most current - [2026-2027 Course Catalog](#)

ASB - All students are issued a school ID card.

Fees– Lab fees for materials and supplies, yearbook, ASB card, graduation regalia. Student fees can be paid [online](#) or at the Tesla STEM office (checks accepted, no cash). Note- financial assistance may be available. Please inquire at the Tesla STEM office for more information.

Lunch accounts – <https://www.lwsd.org/students-families/breakfast-and-lunch-menus/online-payment-instructions>

4. ACADEMICS AND TESTS

Classes are explained by teachers on Curriculum Night. Students and parents should review classes in the student gradebook in [Skyward](#) to determine how homework, quizzes, and finals affect the final grade in each class. Skyward will show what percentage of HW, tests, projects, and finals make up the grade. Each course has a course syllabus, which includes important information about the course. Finals are scheduled for the last week in fall and spring semesters. Some classes (especially AP) have comprehensive finals with content from the entire year. Also, parents please note that finals days are not a typical schedule, and students generally only take 2 finals per day. As a matter of school policy, Tesla STEM does not give early final exams for any reason.

LWSD Graduation Requirements – The school works with the student to ensure they are taking the classes they need for graduation. Sitting down with a school counselor is helpful if a student or parent has questions. [High School and Beyond Plan](#).

Four-year class schedule – STEM students take 6 classes each year. Here is the [typical student schedule over 4 years](#) as well as the [2025-2026 course catalog](#).

AP Classes - Advanced Placement (AP) is a nationwide program that is designed to prepare students for higher education. AP classes provide rigorous, college-level curriculum in various subjects and the opportunity to earn college credits or advanced college standing. Information on signing up for AP tests can be found here - [Tesla AP signup and testing schedule information](#)

ELL or English Language Learning - empowers (English Learner) EL students to both participate in classroom curriculum and attain English proficiency.

World Language Credit - Students are required to graduate with two credits in a World Language. Counselors can provide more info.

4. ACADEMICS AND TESTS

ACT/SAT – ACT (American College Testing) and SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) are standardized tests used for college admissions in the United States. [Learn more about ACT/SAT.](#)

In mid-October (“called Super Wednesday”), Tesla STEM along with other LWSD high schools will have all 10th graders take a PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test) exam. 10th graders are automatically signed up to participate at no cost. 11th graders can choose to take the PSAT/NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) (paid by family) or stay home. 9th graders stay home on Super Wednesday.

The PTSA will offer opportunities for students to take practice SAT/ACT exams periodically. Check out the PTSA newsletter for upcoming times.

Credit Transfer Opportunities - students can also enroll in classes at other institutions to pursue specific skills and receive both high school and college credit in some cases; see Glossary for more details on these programs;

There are many different **post-graduation paths** available to students: the **College and Career Readiness Office** offers information and support to students wanting to attend college or visit college campuses, to do internships, etc. [Applying to College - Tesla STEM High School](#) is an invaluable resource to learn more about the process and how our school counselors support our students.

5. COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Tesla staff prefers that students go directly to the source to discuss issues or questions related to course grades/progress. They attempt to solve the problem at one level before moving to another. Please remember to follow Tesla STEM's communication protocols:

First Step - Email the appropriate instructor(s) to schedule a meeting; the student can meet, and parents/guardians can also be at the meeting. Most of the grade questions are resolved at this first step. Please remember that students earn their grades per their work standard, work completion rates, and assessment results. In addition, the school does not round grades; an 89.9% is a B+ and not an A; a 79.9% is a C+ and not a B-; and so on.

Second Step - If you do not have resolution after meeting with the instructor, then email your student's academic counselor.

Third Step - If you feel you do not have resolution after meeting with both the instructor and academic counselor, then email administration to schedule an appointment.

Faculty utilize office hours and/or email as communication tools. Teachers will make every effort to return emails within 48 hours (two school days).

6. COUNSELING OFFICE SERVICES

The [Counseling Office](#) offers a whole host of services, and your student will want to know who her/his counselor is (determined alphabetically). **Encourage your student to meet with their counselor.** Students can team up with their counselor to map out their High School and Beyond Plan. Among the services they provide are:

- **Course registration and scheduling**
- **Monitoring of student academic credits and on time graduation plans**
- **Academic, personal/social and career advising**
- **Coordination of referrals for community resources**
- **Comprehensive guidance programming delivered in classroom or other settings**
- **Guidance for post-secondary planning and application requirements**

[Tesla STEM School Counseling Team contacts](#)

New to the country? Here are some reasons you or your student might connect with a counselor: requesting special accommodations (physical or mental) for your student, questions about graduation requirements, emotional health support, etc.

For additional resources for youth mental health, go to: [Social/Emotional Resources - Tesla STEM High \(lwsd.org\)](#)

7. EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

CLUBS-

There are numerous clubs that students can and are encouraged to get involved in. Many are interest-based (as opposed to class-based) and founded by students. The student clubs are run by ASB and meet at different days and times of the week. Click [here](#) for current list of clubs, the advisor and when they meet.

LEADERSHIP –

Associated Student Body (ASB) is run by and for students. The funds raised by ASB are used for optional, extracurricular events that are cultural, athletic, recreational, or social. These funds are not available for graded student activities that are part of the school curriculum. Check the ASB Team (on TEAMS!) for announcements and information for upcoming events. [Meet the ASB officers](#).

8. SPORTS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES – SCHOOL/ASB/PTSA RUN

Tesla students can participate in the high school sports at their respective neighborhood high school. They will have to join the ASB of that high school to be able to do so. Booster clubs help support athletic and some additional programs through separate non-student fundraising (and follow specific guidelines).

Fall Sports – register in August (forms online, final clearance in-person during summer office hours); teams may practice all summer, try-outs prior to the start of school

Winter Sports – register in November (forms online, final clearance in-person during lunch and after school)

Spring Sports – register in February (forms online, final clearance in-person during lunch and after school)

School Dances – Homecoming (October) and Spring dance (March) – open to all students (others need a signed pass from their school); Senior Prom (June)

School musicals, plays and music concerts

Other Student Run Events (Leadership) - check ASB webpage

8. SPORTS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES – SCHOOL/ASB/PTSA RUN

Tesla STEM students can participate in High School Sports through their neighborhood High School

Tesla STEM PTSA hosts various Programs and Engagement Events for the Community to come together and connect.

FACE – Family and Community Engagement

- Fall Social – late Sept/Early Oct
- Parent Education talks - hosted based on demand

PROGRAMS –

- SAT /ACT Test prep Information sessions, workshops, and classes
- College Application related workshops
- Financial beginnings workshops

9. PARENT VOLUNTEERING

Parents have many opportunities to volunteer in schools. Be on the look-out in the PTA newsletter for information and on how to sign up. Or sign up with the Tesla STEM PTSA Volunteer Coordinator

Some examples are:

At school:

- * Registration Day (beginning of school)
- * Chaperoning ASB events
- * Research project review

Some classes, such as Engineering 3 and AP Psychology/Forensics offer opportunities to parents with specific interests or skill sets to participate.

There are also many roles and specific PTSA events that count on parent support all year long. Many of these roles do not require in person volunteering. Check out the ways you can support your student and our school with your time - [Volunteering opportunities](#)

- * Join the Board
- * Take a Committee chair position
- * Help with Staff appreciation, Senior Celebration etc.

All volunteers must be pre-approved by the district – access Volunteer application [here](#)

10. PTSA IS YOUR PARENT TOOL

Why is PTSA important at Tesla !!

A key source of information and news for parents is the PTSA newsletter that keeps you updated on school activities, key deadlines, resources and more. [Sign up](#) for PTSA newsletter!

Membership Meetings: 3 times a year - September, January and May

Come and hear about what PTSA activities and programming.

Participate and Vote on important decisions about the PTSA Budget and Programming.

Share your thoughts, ask your questions, get answers!

Key PTSA Programming that support your children (examples):

- ❖ Parent events focused on how to support your high school student,
- ❖ SAT/ACT practice, College Financial and Informational Seminar
- ❖ Reflections Art Program, teacher grants, staff appreciation,
- ❖ PTSA Scholarship Program and much more...

For questions about PTSA or how to get involved or manage a program, check our [website](#)

DISTRICT-WIDE INFORMATION RESOURCES

Welcome New Families PTSA Council/LWSD event this is a great way to meet district administrators, learn about the school system, network with other parents and community organizations and more;
www.lwptsa.net

Parent Education Events – planned by the PTSA Council in conjunction with the LWSD; professional guests speak on topics of parenting as well as screenings of documentaries such as Screenagers
www.lwptsa.net

Lake Washington School District (LWSD) – is another great source of information as headquarters to all the schools in the district; check out their website on back to school and much more at
www.lwsd.org .

WE WISH YOU A SPLENDID YEAR AT TESLA STEM!