

The College-Bound Student: A Preparation Timeline

Tips and resources for preparing for and applying to college from junior high through high school



“ School work and standardized tests are important, so students should do their best. Get help from a teacher or tutor if things get difficult. ”



Never stop reading

Reading is important because it increases learning and comprehension. Avid readers become better writers and develop higher-level language and critical thinking skills.



Doing homework proactively and independently

Developing a positive work ethic and earning good grades as a result of hard work in junior high stays with students throughout school.



Talking about college as a family

Discussing college plans as a family helps plant the seed of continuing education and reinforces the benefit of building on K-12 education. It can also help create the connection of owning a future of success and happiness.



Starting to save for college

Learning about the cost of college and different ways to save for tuition allows students and parents to plan ahead. Financial tools, like the FAFSA4caster, are a way to see how much financial aid might be awarded.



Preparing for high school

Discuss interests and skills as a way to help identify challenging and enjoyable classes to take during high school. Getting involved in school activities helps with learning new things.



Sharpening study skills

Successful students develop and refine effective study habits in junior high, high school and college. Study skills include note- and test-taking, active listening and reading, focusing, and concentrating. Setting goals, prioritizing tasks and staying organized help improve study skills.



“Taking summer classes is a great way to get ahead and explore interests. Ask the school counselor to see what’s available. Also try some casual or academic reading. Get book recommendations from an English teacher or librarian.”



Taking college prep courses

Consider challenging courses, like honors, Advanced Placement and dual enrollment classes. Focus on the core academics: English, math, science, history and foreign language. Rigorous courses that go beyond the minimum graduation requirements make a more prepared applicant and can be a way to earn college credit while in high school.



Taking career interest tests

There are many tests designed to help students find careers they would excel at and enjoy. High school counselors can answer questions about and administer career testing.



Meeting with a guidance counselor

Get to know the guidance counselor early on and meet with them regularly. Check in with them about classes, grades and campus opportunities for students. They can help navigate the high school journey and planning for college.



Actively start planning to go to college

Conversations about going to college and how to pay for it are important. Make sure everyone is comfortable with the plan and on the same page of the decision-making process.



Focusing on grades

High school transcripts are an important part of a college application. Good grades will distinguish applicants from each other and are a way to earn money for college.



Getting involved in extracurricular and leadership activities

Students can try several different extracurricular activities to find out which ones are most interesting.



Tracking accomplishments

It can be difficult to remember every accomplishment when filling out applications for colleges, financial aid and scholarships. Create and maintain a list of academic and athletic awards, extracurricular activities, volunteer work and community service.



Continuing to save for college

Even if only \$50 is saved each month, every little bit helps, and creating a college savings account makes the idea of going to college feel much more real.



“Two of the things admission officers look for when reviewing a transcript are course difficulty and performance consistency — not just good grades, but the ability to maintain steady grades.”



Learning about colleges

Start researching schools. Get familiar with college options, cost and available majors by searching online. Learn more about financial aid opportunities. Begin to put together a list of schools.



Staying involved in extracurricular activities

Consider student government, theatre, clubs, sports, the school newspaper or yearbook, or community service. Try new and different activities as a way to explore talents and interests.



Searching and earning scholarships

Begin learning about financial aid. Though most scholarships are available to juniors and seniors, there are some scholarships available to all high school students. Look into Niche, ACT, The College Board and RaiseMe.



Asking college students you know

Talk to a current college student who's home for the summer. Most colleges offer similar experiences, but it's helpful to get a genuine perspective, especially if they go to a school being considered. Ask questions that are hard to find real answers to anywhere else.



Taking practice tests

Begin preparing for the SAT and ACT. It's a good idea to take a full-length practice test of each and use the results to help decide which one is the best fit. There are tons of PSAT practice tests available online. PSAT and PreACT scores aren't used for college admission. Many students take their test of choice two or three times, with the final test in early fall of their senior year.



Looking for summer growth opportunities

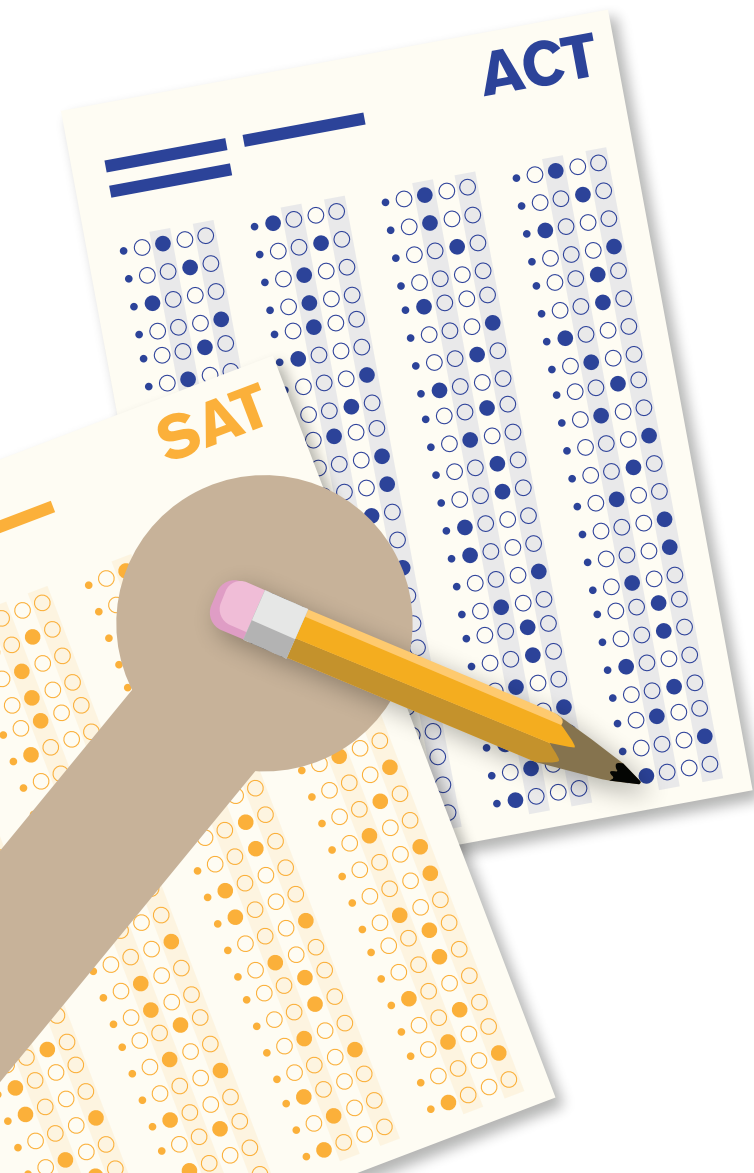
Summer is a great time to earn extra money for high school and college expenses. Volunteering and getting a job or internship are ways to explore different career fields, gain job experience and learn to work with others.



YOUR COLLEGE PREP CHECKLIST

High school
Junior Fall/Winter
September to February

Organize a spring testing schedule. Find out registration deadlines and the exact dates and times of the ACT, SAT and SAT subject tests.



Taking the PSAT

Take the PSAT in October to practice for the SAT and qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program. High school counselors have information about dates and registration. Test takers are put on college mailing lists and will begin receiving information from various universities.



Creating a resume

Outline academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities and work experiences since the start of high school.



Visiting local colleges

Even if these schools aren't on the top of the list, visiting local colleges will provide a sense of what college is like.



Refining list of colleges

Identify, prioritize and categorize 10 to 15 colleges. Consider a wide range of schools, both local and out of state. Include safety schools and target and reach options. Continue updating this list throughout junior year and at the beginning of senior year.



Participating in extracurricular activities

Colleges like well-rounded students, especially if they display consistent involvement or take a leadership role. Try the debate team, academic teams (math, robotics, decathlon), music or visual arts.



Making an official college list

Start reviewing schools. Attend college fairs, speak with college reps and request information from universities online to begin formulating an opinion of where to go. Continue this process throughout junior and senior year.



Taking SAT subject tests for courses ending in the fall

SAT subject tests, required for some colleges, are best taken immediately after completing the relevant class and while the material is still fresh.



Taking the SAT or ACT

Take the SAT or ACT for the first time. Plan to take the test again the spring of junior year or fall of senior year. If the cost of the test is a concern, guidance counselors can provide a fee waiver.



YOUR COLLEGE PREP CHECKLIST

High school
Junior Spring
March to May

“ Think about how summer work will look on a college application, and fill in any missing activities by seeking out those opportunities. ”



Taking SAT subject tests for courses ending in the spring

SAT subject tests, required for some colleges, are best taken immediately after completing the relevant class and while the material is still fresh.



Taking the SAT or ACT again

If there is room for improvement on the initial winter SAT or ACT results, take the test again. Most students do better their second time.



Searching for scholarships

Begin actively looking for scholarships. School counselors are a good resource, and search online. Continue searching throughout high school.



Taking AP exams

Earn college credit by taking Advanced Placement exams, offered each year in May. Practice tests are available online.



Identifying recommendation letter writers

Select potential teachers and counselors to provide recommendation letters for admission applications. Consider teachers from core classes (math, science, history, English or foreign language).



Creating a senior class schedule

Meet with a counselor and review possible honors and AP classes. Colleges pay attention to senior year courses and grades.



“Visiting colleges and universities gives access to the best insights — these will be helpful if there are multiple offers to consider and tough decisions to make.”



Determining application deadlines

Early decision and early action applications are generally due by November of senior year. Most regular admission applications are due between January 1 and March 1. Confirm the dates for each target school. The Common App, usually available at the beginning of August, will consolidate the deadlines.



Reaching out to recommendation writers

Recommendation letters are part of college application requirements, so beat the rush by contacting those writers early (teachers, coaches, mentors) so they'll have time to prepare and meet fall deadlines. Explain why they were chosen as recommenders and offer examples of why they should write a positive letter. Provide an academic record outline and extracurricular activities.



Applying for scholarships

Apply for about 30 scholarships. Don't shy away from smaller amounts or applications that require essays. Begin applying between junior and senior year and continue throughout the school year.



Beginning college application essays

Tailor each college application essay to the individual school. Review essay prompts as soon as possible and spend some time outlining responses before sitting down to write.



Prepping for a college interview

Identify colleges being considered that may offer optional interviews and practice with a teacher, counselor, mentor, parent or friend.



Visiting target colleges

Visit a few of the top-choice schools. Travel to the campuses to visit residence halls, classrooms and libraries. Check college websites for details on info sessions, tour dates and interview opportunities.



Outlining costs and a financial aid plan

Use tuition and financial aid calculators (also called net price calculators) on college websites to determine how much is usually needed to contribute to a college education. Create a list of tuition costs and all financial aid options to pursue. Add any deadlines for each.



Narrowing the list of colleges

Begin to finalize a top-10 list. Meet with a counselor about potential college choices and plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.



Stay organized by marking a calendar with important dates like financial aid workshops, early and regular decision application deadlines, test dates, and scholarship deadlines.



Meeting with a school counselor

Talk with a school counselor about class scheduling, application deadlines, and any transcripts or letters that should be sent to colleges. Provide a list that includes first and last name so that the counselor can remember specific requests easily. Also ask for help requesting fee waivers for application or test fees.



Making a final list of top colleges

Decide on five to 10 colleges to apply to. Include reach and safety schools. Look into the fees associated with each application, and consider using the Common App to apply to multiple schools.



Completing all college essays

The college essay is an important part of the application process. A teacher or parent can proofread essays for mistakes and provide feedback.



Preparing for early decision, early action or rolling admission deadlines

Some colleges offer early admission for students who submit test scores and applications between October 1 and November 30.



Finishing and submitting college applications

Submit applications online. The majority of decisions are made in March and April, although schools with rolling admission may send decisions sooner.



Taking the SAT or ACT

Many seniors retake the SAT or ACT in the fall. Coursework completed since the last test could help boost performance and score. Plus, students already know what to expect on test day. Have scores sent to the top-choice colleges.



Applying for financial aid

Fill out the FAFSA and submit it as soon as possible after October 1 to receive financial aid. Talk with a counselor about financial aid workshops to learn more about filing the FAFSA. Also find out if any schools of interest use the CSS PROFILE (to determine eligibility for university aid) and if so, file it online.



Continuing to make campus visits

Make plans to visit any colleges in the top five not yet visited. Take the campus tour, but also wander around alone. Sit in on a class of a subject that seems interesting. Speak with teachers, students, school admission counselors and financial aid staff. If visiting is not possible, look for virtual tours and online college forums.



Gathering letters of recommendation

Now's the time to approach teachers and counselors for recommendation letters or to follow up on previously requested letters.



Sending transcripts to colleges

Give counselors the proper forms for sending transcripts at least two weeks before colleges require them.



“Keep track of all applications and scholarship confirmations, and organize information as applications and essays are finished and sent.”



Checking application status

Confirm that test scores, official transcripts and recommendations were received. Check status online, or by calling or emailing the admission office.



Reviewing student aid report

Students receive their Student Aid Report, or SAR, three to five days after submitting a FAFSA online (one month if by mail). This document explains how much families are expected to pay toward education. Review the document for errors and discuss the contribution amount as a family.



Checking for admission decisions in the mail and online

Depending on when submitted, applicants should receive admission letters by mid-April, followed by financial aid award letters. Thoroughly read each decision document because they may require student action.



Following up on scholarship opportunities

Finish and submit any scholarship applications not yet submitted. Also, check with the schools being applied to and find out if they have any special scholarships that can be applied for.



Submitting midyear transcripts

Some colleges require first-semester senior year grades as part of the application process. A counselor can send these out to the schools that require them.



Evaluating early decision or early action responses

If accepted through early decision by a school, accept and withdraw applications from all other schools. If accepted through early action, decide to accept right away or wait to receive responses from other schools.



YOUR COLLEGE PREP CHECKLIST

High school
Senior Spring
March to May

“Waitlisted by a college? Be clear about intentions to enroll if accepted. Talk with the admission director and request application feedback. Ask whether funds will be available. Work with a counselor to resolve any admission or financial aid issues.”



WAIT LIST

Mario Sromedham	Bill Vada	Adam Zapple
Prava Crivilar	Hali E. Birdsey	Lewis N. Clark
Anna Sphaer	Mattew	Matt Sattlock
Paul Meece	Roby Scimone	Shirley
Anna Mull	Teri Mee	Chris P. Bacon
Gail Frenwood	Edis Cullon	Doug Lee Docking
Paige Turner	Gary Aho	Colin
Eric Haggerty	Kerry Cully	Sara Bellum
Walter Melon	Mary Christmas	Al Acet
Nickie B. Barber	Don Craft	Mary Ella
Burt Acque	Jim Neeson	Eric Stee
Burt Kestner	Angie O. Peady	Tony Bull
Gracie Lile	Ellie Nubar	Mark Stee
ina Morrill	Sal Nidge	Mark Stee
Shonda Lee	Hani Chok	Louis Vito
Brock Lee	Margo Ann	Ken Tracy
Maya Datta	Quay Poole	Fred Arthro
Rick O'Grine	Hugh Bess	Al Fredo
Pete Sauris	Lynn Davis	Randi Kistner
Morty Carlo	Cham Wyatt	Chip Zambata
Sig Monella	Mary Gray	Matt Gendhart
Sue Varner	Ash Wednesday	Mike Strosoppe
Chris Hanger	Clay Ya	Leo Sordick
Beck Dwyer	Gene Jackett	Fant Dwyer
Tony Aul	Tom Ance	Jay Cain
Corey Andor	Doug Out	Tom Ope
Robin Blanks	Blair Lee	Sam Owen
Tommy Ghazizadeh	Seij Proctor	Mark Aho
Yves Ghazizadeh	Warren Pease	Hofland Oata
Zack Lee	Bud Jell	Eddy Krs
Hai Appeno	Barney Cull	Al Sotacke
Chris Matic	Mal Proctor	Ellie Swardrop
Tom Francy	Ed Fong	Yi Tube
Al Dorris	Rick Shaw	Anna Lyrica
Philly Nash	Paul Hart	Shari Batum
Holly Graham	Ben Ellis	Phil Erp
Frank N. Dean	Kurti Cate	Mark Hara
Paul Agosta	Louis C. Ara	Mike Donadio
Tam Zuma	Alison Oate	Yo Tony
Brian Cate	Ty Battagone	Bobby Ph
Phil Altimonte	Arene Fitzgyn	Dan Halle
Marcel Gaudin	Bary Cash	Jan Sporandine
Phil Harmon	Judy Vitshawnd	
Angi Plick	Joe Thyme	
Will Power	Mara Goumond	
Diorena Nebault	Bill Dabole	
Juan Amato	Waz Zandrost	
Carl N. Cull		
Mia Emum		
Memo Mum		



Reviewing and comparing financial aid awards

Not all financial aid awards are the same, so it's important to choose the aid package that makes the most sense. Look into how to continue receiving financial aid from year to year, and how aid might change in future years. Thoroughly review each school's package. Also consider additional third-party scholarships and how to cover any remaining costs.



Making a final decision

After receiving responses from schools, sit down and consider the pros and cons of each. Some of the factors include prestige, academic programs, alumni success, location or cost. Be sure to weigh all of these when making a final decision.



Taking AP exams

Earn college credit for any AP classes taken during high school. Tests are offered in May.



Finishing enrollment steps

After accepting a school's offer, students receive a package with information on classes, orientation, housing and more. Complete any next steps by the deadlines.



Final college visit before accepting

Be prepared to make an educated final decision by experiencing what it's like on campus. Contact an admission counselor or call university housing with questions about living on campus.



Providing documents for financial aid verification

The federal government selects 30 percent of all FAFSA applications for verification, which means a college may require additional documents. These include signed copies of tax returns, parent or guardian tax returns, student W-2s, and parent or guardian W-2s. Send these in immediately.



Accepting or rejecting admission offers

Inform every college of acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and financial aid package by May 1. Colleges cannot require a deposit or commitment to attend before then. Talk to an admission counselor or advisor about any uncertainties. Confirm admission acceptance, accept the financial aid award package and pay the deposit.



Sending final high school transcripts

Many colleges require a final high school transcript. Contact the high school counselor to make sure the correct transcripts get sent.



“Taking summer college classes can help first-year students prepare for upcoming college-level courses, or provide a jump-start on required classes. Fall admission usually allows students to take classes the summer prior.”



Signing up for orientation

Attend an on-campus or online orientation to learn the first-year basics and register for classes.



Figuring out living arrangements

If not living at home, confirm on-campus housing assignment and make a connection with a new roommate or locate off-campus housing.



Making a list of what to bring to college

Put together a list of things to take to the college dorm room or apartment. Learn about any housing rules and furniture restrictions.



Making travel plans if school is far away

Decide on how to get to college and the best time to arrive.



Purchasing items needed during the first year

Prepare for academic and personal needs. Purchase big-ticket items and weather-conscious clothing.



Preparing to begin college

Share the good news. Be sure to let extended family, friends, employers and others know about college plans. That way they can prepare for the change as well.