

NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE PLANNING PROCESS

These are some steps you can take to make sure you're on the right track for college.

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9TH GRADE

Create a four-year high school plan. Think about what you'd like to accomplish in the next four years.

- Make sure you know which high school courses are required by colleges, and that you're taking the right classes as early as the ninth grade. You can ask your counselor about what those "right" classes are.
- Get to know the levels of courses offered by your school.
- Start thinking about your life after school, including the types of jobs that might interest you. Of course, these will change — often — but it's good to start thinking about the possibilities.
- Identify your interests — likes and dislikes — not just in classes but also in every area. This will help you focus on your goals.
- Talk to other people, such as your school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc., about careers you might find interesting. Meet with your high school counselor. Your counselor knows how to help you get the most out of high school. Be sure to take some time during the school year to discuss post-high-school plans with him or her. Participate in extracurricular activities. Academics aren't everything.
- Explore your interest in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity. Remember that colleges would rather see real involvement in one activity instead of a loose connection to several.
- If you're interested in playing sports in college, research the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- Save for college. It's not too late to put money aside for college. Every little bit helps! Explore summer opportunities. Look for a job, internship, or volunteer position that will help you learn about a field of interest.

10TH GRADE:

Meet with your high school counselor — again. Be sure to meet with your school counselor to ensure that your course schedule is challenging enough to prepare you for college.

- Check into any prerequisites for advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses. Ask if

the PSAT/NMSQT® is offered to 10th-graders. Although this test is usually given in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th grade. That's because it provides valuable feedback through the Student Score Report. You can then work on any of your academic weaknesses while there is still plenty of time to make improvements!

- Are you interested in attending a U.S. military academy? If so, you should request a pre candidate questionnaire.
- Attend college and career fairs. The fairs often take place in the fall at your school or in your area.
- Participate in school activities or volunteer efforts. Extracurricular activities can help you develop time management skills and enrich your high school experience.
- Work with a counselor to resolve any admission or financial aid problems.
- Tour college campuses. If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel time to visit colleges and see what they're like. Even if you have no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help you learn what to look for in a college.

11TH GRADE:

Junior year marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to stay on track for college.

FALL:

- Start with you: Make lists of your abilities, social/ cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
- Learn about colleges. Look at their websites and find colleges at <http://connection.naviance.com/hwrhs> or bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search. Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the college features that interest you.
- Resource check: Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.
- At school, speak to your counselor about the PSAT/NMSQT®, which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure the College Board has approved your eligibility.
- Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data. If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.
- Along with your family, do some research about how to obtain financial aid. Many students use financial aid to cover college costs. Find out what financial aid is, where it comes from, and how you can apply for it. Read the U.S. Department of Education's Funding Your Education (about federal aid programs).
- Estimate your financial aid need. Financial aid can help you afford college. Use the College Board's Getting Financial Aid and the financial aid calculator at bigfuture.collegeboard.org to estimate how much aid you might receive.

WINTER:

- Sign up to take the college admission tests in the spring. You can register online. SAT® fee waivers are available for students with financial need in the guidance office. To prepare for college admission tests, like the SAT, download practice booklets from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice>. You can also take the SAT again next fall.
- Begin a search for financial aid sources. National sources include the College Board’s Scholarship Handbook and electronic sources. Don’t overlook local and state aid sources. (Ask a counselor for help or check your public library.)
- With your family, make an appointment with your counselor to discuss ways to improve your college preparation and selection processes.
- Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests in the spring. You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download Getting Ready for the SAT Subject Tests, which offers test-prep advice, from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests>.
- Explore AP. The Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) helps hundreds of thousands of high school students achieve their college dreams each year. Get the facts at apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap. If you’re in AP classes, register for the AP Exams given in May.

SPRING:

- Contact your counselor before leaving school for the summer if you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.
- Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that are of interest to you. You can find many colleges at which you’ll be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.
- Stay open to all the possibilities — don’t limit your search. To find the best college for you, you should apply to colleges of varying selectivity. Selective colleges admit a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are less selective. Make sure to apply to public, private, in-state, and out-of- state schools so that you have plenty of options from which to choose.

SUMMER:

- Register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center if you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college (<http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future/eligibility-center>).
- Find a full-time or part-time job, or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.
- Visit colleges. When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you’re there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors, and students.
- Take campus tours and, at colleges you’re serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admission counselors.
- Create a résumé — a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school.
- Download applications. Go to the website of each college’s admission office and either

complete the application online or request a paper application from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates — large universities may have early dates or rolling admission.

- Visit some local colleges — large, small, public, and private. A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is right for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Check out the campus checklist at bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/campus-visit-guide/campus-visit-checklist. Attend college fairs, too.
- Scan local newspapers to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

12TH GRADE:

Seniors, want to know if you're on track in the college application process? This checklist shows you what you should be doing, and when.

FALL:

Narrow your list of colleges to between five and 10. Meet with a counselor about your college choices and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.

- Create a master list or calendar that includes:
 - Tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines
 - College application due dates
 - Required financial aid application forms and their deadlines (aid applications may be due before college applications)
 - Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
 - Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Ask a counselor to help you request a fee waiver if you can't afford application or test fees.
- Be sure to have your college admission test scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying.
- Prepare early decision/early action or rolling admission applications as soon as possible. Nov. 1–15: Colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates for early decision admission.
- Ask a counselor or teacher for recommendations if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. Forms are available in the Guidance Office and via Naviance.
- Write first drafts and ask teachers and others to read them if you're submitting essays. If you're applying for early decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- Complete at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Ask counselors to send your transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before the colleges require them.

WINTER:

- Keep photocopies as you finish and send your applications and essays.

- Have your high school send your supporting documents — they are sent separately via eDocs (in most cases) to colleges if you apply online.
- Give the correct form to your counselor if the college wants to see second-semester grades.

SPRING:

- Keep active in school. If you are waitlisted, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and the time you learned of its decision.
- Visit your final college before accepting.
- You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. Notify your counselor of your choice. If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.
- Inform every college of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid by May 1. Colleges cannot require your deposit or your commitment to attend before May 1. Talk to your counselor or advisor if you have questions.
- Send your deposit to one college only.
- Waitlisted by a college? If you intend to enroll if you are accepted, tell the admission director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application.
- Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted.
- Work with a counselor to resolve any admission or financial aid problems.
- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college of choice.