
College Advising Essentials

VOLUME 2



Handouts



Resources



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Visits from College Representatives

College representatives will visit your school in the fall to meet with interested students. The representatives meet with students in small-group sessions and discuss academic programs, campus life, financial aid, and admission procedures. As more and more students apply to college early in their senior year, it is a good idea to allow juniors and even sophomores to meet with college representatives so they can sail into their senior year having made a personal connection to some colleges.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- If your students are interested in a college that does not traditionally have a representative visit your school, call the admission office and ask if a visit can be scheduled. Colleges are eager to meet prospective applicants.
- A counselor should be available, whenever possible, to greet the college rep. College representatives say not only do they value the visit, but a chief goal is to meet the counselors, and to create or perpetuate a relationship with them.
- Encourage students to meet with a number of college representatives. Quite often, the rep will be a reader of their application, and putting a face to a name is always helpful.
- Students might decide a college is not right for them after the representative's visit — this helps them define the type of school they are looking for.
- If possible, sit in on the representative's presentation. Often, students are shy, and the counselor can ease the tension by asking a few questions to get the discussion going. In addition, attending presentations is an excellent way to know what a college is really like.
- Be sure to get copies of recent materials from the rep to update your files.

HAVE ON HAND

- Your school profile
- Your business card
- A college statistics list (colleges that students from your school have attended in recent years)
- Directions to other local high schools

GO THAT EXTRA MILE

- Make sure the representative feels welcome and appreciated.
- If you cannot greet the representative, ask a family member or student volunteer to be there. (A student volunteer who plans to apply to the school is a nice benefit for both the presenter and the student.)
- If possible, provide a quiet location in which they can meet with students (not the cafeteria during lunch).
- A convenient parking spot should be arranged.
- A lunch or a snack is good to provide if the visit is to be at midday.

All of this can go a long way toward leaving reps with a positive impression of the school and its students.

TIP

“I encourage students to email the college representatives who visit our school. It’s nice to have that personal touch, and it gives students experience with communicating in the adult world.”

**— Lisa Sohmer, Garden School,
New York**

Organizing a College Fair

A college fair features a variety of college representatives who have traveled to a school or another location to meet with students and their families. A school may conduct its own college fairs, collaborate with other local schools, or inform their students and families of college fairs being hosted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), which presents college fairs throughout the nation (for a current list, go to nacacnet.org).

HELPFUL PLANNING HINTS

- Choose the date early. Counselors who hold their own college fairs suggest a lead time of nine months.
- Work with your state counseling association and register your fair with NACAC to avoid conflicts.
- Before inviting colleges, determine how much space you have available. Remember that the more popular colleges might need a larger space (you might position them at the end of a row). Some may even request a separate room.
- Send invitations to colleges four months before the fair (end of May for the mid-September fair). College representatives begin to finalize their schedules in early summer. If you wait until the last minute to invite reps, you won't get the college participation you would like.
- Note that some colleges will send alumni rather than college staff. It is helpful to provide suggestions if you know that alumni are coming and to give them an idea of how many students they may see, so they will have enough materials to hand out.
- Coordinate scheduling with all other events and activities at your school.
- Make sure there will be no athletic events, night classes, or other extracurricular events during your fair. Careful planning ensures that you'll have adequate parking and enough room in the building.
- Review your budget and plan for things such as table rental, if needed.
- Many schools provide food and bottled water for the college reps. If your budget is tight, look for help from the community (e.g., from restaurants or caterers).

THE FAIR

- Ask representatives to come an hour early, so they can get a good parking spot and unload their materials.
- Have student volunteers on hand to help set up the tables and to assist reps with their materials.
- If you are collaborating with several schools, you might use community resources (newsletters, marquee at the local arena, local newspaper) to get the word out.
- Provide signage for colleges that don't have proper identifying banners.
- Have snacks or light dinner food and beverages available, depending on the time of the day of the fair.

THE FAIR (CONTINUED)

- Have a guidebook/directory for families when they arrive. List each school and its location at the fair. Be sure to point out if a particular school is in its own room.
- If possible, give a detailed description of each school, including size, location, religious affiliation (if any), most popular majors, and mid-50 percent admission test.
- Provide a list of suggested questions for the students and families to ask of the reps.
- Distribute an evaluation form so that college reps, students, and families can give you feedback to use in planning the next fair.
- Write follow-up thank-you notes to representatives, helpful community groups, etc.

TIP

Send postcards. “One important postcard I send has the dates and locations of all local college fairs. We mail that out early in the fall.”

— *Pat Rambo, Springfield High School, Pennsylvania*

Organizing “Major Mania”

Some programs are created by counselors to help students and families get a better understanding of college majors. The programs, held annually, begin with a general presentation covering the basics of selecting a major. After that there are two breakout sessions that give students and families the opportunity to attend presentations on two majors. Department heads from several universities are invited to give presentations about the major.

WHAT THE PRESENTATIONS COVER

- Academic strengths needed for success in the area of study.
- A list of courses required in the first two years of a typical program — such as general education courses and prerequisites for the major.
- The kinds of jobs the major frequently leads to, and with which types of companies or other employers (including government agencies) it is associated.
- Employment forecast for graduates in the area of study.
- The variety of career paths that graduates in the major can pursue.
- Personal experiences of the presenter that would be helpful to a student considering this major. Students might decide a college is not right for them after the rep visit — this helps them determine the type of school they are looking for.

PLANNING STEPS

- If possible, survey students to find out the majors in which they are the most interested.
- Review colleges in your area to determine which ones have programs for the majors you would like to include.
- Include community colleges.
- Contact department heads at least six months before the program. Provide them with the type of information (listed above) to include in the presentation. Let them know how often they will be giving their presentations during the evening.

PLANNING STEPS (CONTINUED)

- Determine the audiovisual requirements well in advance.
- If possible, open the program to the families of ninth- and 10th-graders as well. This will give them a head start on picking their major and help them choose high school courses wisely.
- Prepare students by giving them a list of appropriate questions to ask the presenters.
- Have students sign in at each session they attend to determine which majors attract the most interest.
- At the end of the event, survey students, families, and presenters for their feedback.

TIP

“I remind students that they don’t have to know their major when they’re applying to colleges. For many students it’s too much pressure to make that decision while still in high school. I encourage those students to go to college with an open mind — take a variety of classes, explore their interests.”

— Missie Heady, West Jessamine High School, Kentucky

Source: Pat Clipp, Plano West Senior High School. Contributor to College Counseling Sourcebook.

Finding a Great College for Each Student

Counselors have many conversations with students about the importance of finding a college that is great *for them*. Although there are probably many colleges that a student would find acceptable, applicants who think first about who they are and what they want from college academically, socially, and financially are more likely to choose a school that is great for them.

THE DISCUSSION

- Encourage students to compose a potential list that includes colleges beyond the ones that their family or friends attended or ones that the publishers of college directories deem the best.
- Instead of starting the discussion with colleges, help students focus on what is important to them — major, activities, location, etc.
- Ask an open-ended question about their parents' education in order to get a sense of the family's expectations.
- Convey to students that they need to reflect on who they are and what their goals are.

ABOUT RANKINGS

Help your students understand that those who rank colleges use certain criteria — endowment, student-faculty ratio, admit rate, and other measurable factors. But these factors may have little or no significance to an individual student. Students should realize that no ranked list of colleges can indicate which college is best for them.

TIP

“I strongly recommend that students and parents read *Rugg’s Recommendations on the Colleges* by Frederick Rugg. This isn’t the usual, basic way of college search. Rugg emphasizes individualistic, personal criteria of interest. Rugg then lists the schools in alphabetical order — not according to rankings.”

— Lynn Ann Lescenski, Veterans Tribute Career and Technical Academy, Nevada

Working with Families

Counselors work with families at every point on the spectrum of awareness of college requirements. Some families need to be encouraged to view their children as college material and to support them in the course work they choose; others have high expectations for their children and may have goals that do not mesh with their children's own goals and talents.

COLLEGE: THE BIG PICTURE

- Many colleges have increased their admission requirements in recent years.
- There is more competition for space in selective and in-state public colleges.
- Most schools are more selective than they were 10 years ago.
- Colleges are receiving more applications.
- Students feel more pressure going through the application process.

EXPLAINING ADMISSION FACTORS

To help families develop a more realistic view of how their child matches up with other applicants at a college, you can explain some of the factors that selective colleges consider in making admission decisions:

- courses taken
- grade point average
- rank in class
- college entrance exam results
- activities outside the classroom
- intended major
- special talents and skills
- geographic residency
- alumnus relationship (if any)

TIP

“It’s good to use historical data from the college to show the student what that college has decided with students of a similar background. Directories that show acceptance rates and mid-50 percent test scores are helpful. It’s best to wait until the fall of senior year to discuss this, because things can change over the summer between junior and senior years.”

**— Teri Tippitt,
The Kinkaid School, Texas**

College Planning: How to Get Started

STEP 1: GET STARTED

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, goals, passions, learning style, and social skills. What is most important to you in the college-search process? What do you hope to learn from the process?

STEP 2: MAKE SOME BASIC DECISIONS

- Where do you want to live?
a small liberal arts college, or a historically black or religiously affiliated college?
- Will you go to college full time? Part time?
- Do you want to attend a single-sex school, a technical college, a public or private college, a large university,
 - How important is the cultural/ideological diversity of the student body?

STEP 3: ENLIST HELP

Who do you want to assist you in this process (family, teachers, siblings, relatives, friends)?

STEP 4: CONSULT REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

Look at college directories and use college searches (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>). Visit the websites of the colleges that interest you.

STEP 5: TALK

Discuss your goals and plans with your family, teachers, and school counselor. They can provide helpful advice.

STEP 6: MEET WITH COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES

Visit with college representatives when they come to your high school. Make a list of your important questions to ask the representatives. Also meet college personnel at area college fairs.

STEP 7: VISIT CAMPUSES

Try to go to the college campus and take a tour, meet with admission and financial aid representatives, and ask students what they think about the college. Can't make the trip? Many colleges provide virtual tours on their websites.

Source: Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts.

20 Questions to Ask College Representatives

Whether you meet them at a college fair or on a campus visit, college representatives genuinely enjoy talking to high school students and answering questions about their college. The following questions will help start a good dialogue.

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1. What makes your college unique?
 2. For what academic programs is your college known?
 3. How would you describe the students at your college? Where are most of them from?
 4. Where do students hang out on campus?
 5. What happens on weekends — are there things to do on campus or in town, or do most students go home?
 6. Are fraternities and sororities a big part of campus life?
 7. What are the housing options for freshmen?
 8. Do many students live off campus?
 9. Is there a sports complex or fitness center?
 10. What are the most popular clubs and activities?
 11. What's the security like on campus?
 12. What's the surrounding area like? Is it easy to get around?
 13. What are the most popular majors?
 14. How would you describe the academic pressure and workload?
 15. What support services (academic advisers, tutors, etc.) are available?
 16. Do I need to bring my own computer?
 17. What's the faculty like? Are they accessible outside of class?
 18. Are there opportunities for internships?
 19. Is there job placement help for graduates?
 20. Are there any big changes in the works that I should know about?

How to Get the Most Out of a College Fair

GOING TO A COLLEGE FAIR

- Take a pen and a small notebook.
- Take a bag to carry the brochures you pick up.
- Print out some address labels with your name, address, phone number, email address, high school, and year of graduation. Spend your time at the college tables asking questions, not filling out contact cards!
- When you arrive, check out the floor plan and find out where the tables for your top choice colleges are located so you can go directly to them.
- Write down your most important questions in advance so you don't forget them.
- Check on whether any information sessions, such as financial aid, are being offered. Interested? Budget your time accordingly.
- Jot down notes about a college while your memory is fresh, such as right after visiting the table.
- Pick up the business cards of any representatives you talk to, so you can contact them if you have any more questions.

AFTER YOU GET HOME

- Make a point of going through the materials and your notes within one week after the fair. You'll probably remember more about your conversations with college representatives while the memories from the fair are still fresh.
- Follow up with any college that interests you by contacting the admission office to ask further questions and, if possible, plan a visit to the campus.

Source: Associated Colleges of the Midwest (acm.edu).

How to Make the Most of a College Interview

While not all schools offer interviews, the opportunity to interview offers you a chance to learn about the college and allows the interviewer to learn about you. Use it as a tool to assist your college selection. The interview can have a positive effect on your admission — rarely a negative one. Relax and be yourself!

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- Your interview will usually be with an admission staff member, but it may be with a student, an alumnus, or a professional interviewer. Keep this person's perspective in mind.
 - The interviewer is eager to get to know you and will try to put you at ease. The interviewer will answer your questions but will be more interested if you have helpful questions that show you have already done some research on the college.
 - Be prepared. Know your rank, your test scores, and your present areas of interest. If you are undecided about your career, feel free to say so (half of college students change their intended major). Think through some areas you would like to explore, competencies you would like to develop, and projects or situations that intrigue you.
 - Do your homework about the school to get the obvious questions answered. You don't want to be silent when asked, "What would you like to know about our college?"
- Questions or comments like, "What kinds of internships are offered, and how often do students take them?" show more maturity in your thinking than asking about the number of books in the college library.
- Interviewers may ask questions about your interests, extracurricular activities/jobs, books you've read, meaningful experiences, reasons for applying to this college, life at school, and similar topics. Be ready to talk about these subjects.
 - Be honest. Everyone has strong and weak points.
 - Plan to have your interview alone. Most admission officers prefer to speak with your family after talking with you, rather than during the interview.
 - Choose appropriate clothes to wear for the interview.
 - When you return home, send a thank-you note to the interviewer. Thank the person for his or her time and refer to something specific you discussed.

Source: Adapted from material prepared by Gloria Mueller, Glenbrook High School, Illinois.

Assessing Your List of Colleges

As you develop a list of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

THE BASICS

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

WHERE WOULD YOU FIT IN?

- What are the admission test scores at the colleges of interest to you? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

VISIT THEIR WEBSITES AND READ COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates, and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs (study abroad, internships, etc.) of interest to you?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?
- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?
- What does the U.S. Department of Education's **College Scorecard** tell you about the school?

ADMISSION PROCESS

- When are applications due?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

NOW ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina.

Tips for Families on Finding a Great College

How can your child find colleges that match specific needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

SIZE OF STUDENT BODY

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps they are considering a small department within a large school. Your child should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

LOCATION

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps an urban environment is preferred, with access

to museums, ethnic restaurants, or major league ball games. Or maybe it's easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

If your child has decided on a field of study, they can research the reputation of academic departments by talking to people in their field of interest. If your child is undecided, as many students are, they may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those

students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus.

In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

CAMPUS LIFE

Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

COST

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. Because of financial aid, most students pay less than the “sticker price,” so don’t rule out a college that would be a good fit for your child before you find out how much financial

aid it will offer. Most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

DIVERSITY

Your child should explore what the advantages of a diverse student body would be. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the student body can help

students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

One of the best ways to measure a school’s quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who

go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

A Planning List for Families of Ninth- and 10th-Graders

It may seem early to start thinking about getting your child ready for college, but it really isn't — important groundwork should take place in ninth and 10th grades. Here's a list to help you make sure your child is on a good path.

GRADE 9

- 1. Create a four-year high school plan.** Once your child is settled into ninth grade, introduce the idea of preparing an overall plan for high school that relates to their goals.
 - Make sure you and your child know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that their ninth-grade courses are on track.
 - Map out when these courses should be taken.
 - Familiarize yourself with the various levels of courses offered by your child's school.
- 2. Tell your child to start thinking about careers.** Encourage your child to develop a tentative career goal. Of course it will change — often — but it's the thought process that counts.
 - Help your child to identify interests — likes and dislikes — not just in academics but in all areas. This will help your child focus on goals.
 - Encourage your child to discuss career options with others, such as the school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
- 3. Suggest extracurricular activities.** Encourage your child to actively take part in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - If your child may want to play sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at eligibilitycenter.org.
- 4. Meet with the school counselor.** The school counselor knows how to help your child get the most out of high school. Make sure your child has an opportunity during the school year to discuss post-high-school plans with the school counselor and map out courses to take during the rest of high school.
 - You should participate in this meeting, too.
- 5. Ask if the PSAT™ 8/9 is offered to ninth-graders.** The PSAT 8/9 will help you and your child's teachers figure out what your child needs to work on the most so that they're ready for college when they graduate from high school. It tests the same skills and knowledge as the SAT®, PSAT/NMSQT®, and PSAT™ 10 — in a way that makes sense for their grade level.
- 6. Save for college.** It's still not too late to start a college savings plan, if you haven't already. Every little bit helps!
 - Investigate state financial aid programs and 529 plans.
- 7. Obtain a Social Security number for your child if you don't already have one.** This is often required for applications, testing, scholarships, and other opportunities.

GRADE 10

- 1. Meet with the school counselor — again.** Make sure your child meets with their school counselor to ensure that she or he is enrolled in college-preparatory courses.
 - Check to see that your child is taking any prerequisites to advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
- 2. Ask if the PSAT 10 or PSAT/NMSQT is offered to 10th-graders.** While the PSAT/NMSQT is usually taken in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th. That's because it provides valuable feedback on the student score report; 10th-graders can then work on any disclosed academic weaknesses while there is still ample time to improve them.
- 3. Is your child interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, they should request a precandidate questionnaire and complete it. Your school counselor can help with this.
- 4. Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall at your school or in your area.
- 5. Support your child's participation in a school activity or volunteer effort.** Extracurricular activities help students develop time-management skills and enrich the school experience.
- 6. Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel opportunities to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if there is no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help your child learn what to look for in a college.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information.

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Family Action Plan: 11th Grade

Junior year usually 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 support your child and give him or her the best options.

SUMMER

- **Get the facts about what college costs.** You may be surprised by how affordable higher education can be. Start by reading [Understanding College Costs](#).
- **Explore financial aid options.** These include grants and scholarships, loans, and work-study programs that can help pay for college costs. Find out more about how [financial aid can make college affordable](#).

FALL

- **Make sure your child meets with the school counselor.** This meeting is especially important this year as your 11th-grader starts to engage in the college application process. Learn more about the [counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Help your child stay organized.** Work with your 11th-grader to make weekly or monthly to-do lists to keep on top of the tasks required to get ready for applying to colleges. For more time management tips, see [8 Ways to Take Control of Your Time](#).
- **Help your junior get ready for the PSAT/NMSQT® in October.** This is a preliminary test that helps students practice for the SAT® and assess their academic skills. Juniors who score well on the test are also eligible for scholarship opportunities. Find out more about the [PSAT/NMSQT](#).
- **Encourage your child to set goals for the school year.** Working toward specific goals helps your high school student stay motivated and focused.
- **Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 11th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the [AP Program](#).

WINTER

- **Review PSAT/NMSQT results together** by logging in to the [student score reporting portal](#). Your child's score report shows what they should work on to get ready for college; lists Advanced Placement® courses that might be a good match for them; and connects them to [free, personalized SAT practice](#) on Khan Academy® based on their results.
- **Help your child prepare for the SAT.** Many juniors take the SAT in the spring so they can get a head start on planning for college. See [which other tests](#) your high school junior may need to take.
- **Discuss taking challenging courses next year.** Taking AP honors courses or college-level courses like Advanced Placement as a senior can help your child prepare for college work — and these are also the courses that college admission officers like to see. Learn more about [advanced classes](#).

SPRING

- **Search together for colleges that meet your child's needs.** Once you have an idea of the qualities your child is looking for in a college, help him or her enter these criteria into [College Search](#) to create a list of colleges to which he or she should consider applying.
- **Help your child research scholarships.** This form of financial aid provides money for college that doesn't need to be repaid. Learn more through the BigFuture's [Scholarship Search](#).
- **Attend college fairs and financial aid events.** These events allow you to meet with college representatives and get answers to questions. Your child can ask the school counselor how to find events in your area. Check out the [College Fair Checklist](#) for more information.
- **Help your child make summer plans.** Summer is a great time to explore interests and learn new skills — and colleges look for students who pursue meaningful summer activities. Help your high school student look into [summer learning programs](#) or find a job or internship.
- **Visit colleges together.** Make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the [Campus Visit Checklist](#) to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- Remind your child, if they are a student-athlete, to ask the school counselor at the end of the year to send or upload their transcript to the NCAA Eligibility Center. If your child took classes at more than one high school or program, an official transcript must be submitted for each school.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

[f/MyBigFuture](#) [@MyBigFuture](#) [@collegeboard](#)

Family Action Plan: 12th Grade

Senior year is a whirlwind of activities. This is a big year for your child as he or she balances schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and the college application process. Use the suggestions below to help you and your child successfully navigate this important time.

SUMMER

- **Visit colleges together.** If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the [Campus Visit Checklist](#) to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- **Ask how you can help your senior finalize a college list.** You can help him or her choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets his or her needs, for example. Find out more about [how to finalize a college list](#).
- **Find out a college's actual cost.** Once your 12th-grader has a list of a few colleges he or she is interested in, use the [Net Price Calculator](#) together to determine the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost — or net price — of each college.
- **Encourage your child to get started on applications.** He or she can get the easy stuff out of the way now by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible. Read about [how to get started on applications](#).
- **Help your child decide about applying early.** If your senior is set on going to a certain college, he or she should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November. Read about the pros and cons of [applying early](#).
- **Gather financial documents.** To apply for most financial aid, your child will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). You'll need your tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens Oct. 1.

FALL

- **Encourage your child to meet with the school counselor.** This year, he or she will work with the counselor to complete and submit college applications. Learn more about [the counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Create a calendar with your child.** This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in [College Search](#). If your child saves colleges to a list there, he or she can get a custom online calendar that shows those colleges' deadlines.
- **Help your child prepare for college admission tests.** Many seniors retake college admission tests, such as the SAT®, in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th-grader [prepare for admission tests](#).
- **Help your child find and apply for scholarships.** He or she can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor. Your high school student will need to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about [scholarships](#).
- **Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 12th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the [AP Program](#).

FALL (CONTINUED)

- **Offer to look over your senior's college applications.** But remember that this is your child's work so remain in the role of adviser and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
- **Fill out the FAFSA to apply for aid.** The government and many colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to award aid. Now it's easier than ever to fill out this form because you can automatically transfer your tax information online from the IRS to the FAFSA. Read [How to Complete the FAFSA](#) to learn more.
- **Complete the CSS Profile™, if required.** If your child needs to submit the PROFILE to a college or scholarship program, be sure to find out the priority deadline and submit it by that date. Visit cssprofile.collegeboard.org.
- **Encourage your child to set up college interviews.** An interview is a great way for your child to learn more about a college and for a college to learn more about your child. Get an overview of the [interview process](#).

WINTER

- **Work together to apply for financial aid.** Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges in which he or she is interested to find out what forms students must submit to apply for aid. Make sure he or she applies for aid by or before any stated deadlines. Funds are limited, so the earlier you apply, the better.
- **Learn about college loan options together.** Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high school student gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the [parent's role in borrowing money](#).

SPRING

- **Help your child process college responses.** Once your child starts hearing back from colleges about admission and financial aid, he or she will need your support to decide what to do. Read about [how to choose a college](#).
- **Review financial aid offers together.** Your 12th-grader will need your help to read through financial aid award letters and figure out which package works best. Be sure your child pays attention to and meets any deadlines for acceptance. Get more information on [financial aid awards](#).
- **Help your child complete the paperwork to accept a college's offer of admittance.** Once your child has decided which college to attend, he or she will need to review the offer, accept that college's offer, mail a tuition deposit, and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's [next steps](#).

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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College Resources for Students and Families

GENERAL WEBSITES

- **Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours.** Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps, and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. campustours.com
- **BigFuture.** A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT® and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. collegeboard.org
- **NCAA Eligibility Center.** Official NCAA website that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete. ncaapublications.com
- **U.S. Department of Education.** The federal government's website is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. ed.gov

FINANCIAL AID WEBSITES

- **College Board.** A website that includes a scholarship search, a loan calculator, and an online application form for the CSS Profile™, which is required by some colleges. collegeboard.org
- **FAFSA® on the Web.** The website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. fafsa.ed.gov
- **Fastweb.** Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. fastweb.com
- **FinAid!** Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. finaid.org

BOOKS

Comprehensive objective directories

- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.
- *Four-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.
- *Two-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Subjective guides

- Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.
- Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin. Paperback 2014.
- Yale Daily News staff. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

Source: Department of Education.

Resources

bigfuture.collegeboard.org

Students and families are provided a wealth of information regarding postsecondary education planning at this website. Topics range from the college search to the financial aid process. Videos from students and counseling professionals provide insightful advice.

sat.org

This website provides information regarding the SAT® Suite of Assessments. Included on the site are descriptions of the assessments, important dates, practice questions, and much more.

satpractice.org

Access free, world-class test practice for all students through Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®. Students can practice for the SAT using diagnostic quizzes, full-length practice tests, interactive problems, and personalized practice recommendations. Students will also receive instant feedback on their answers so they can see their progress and make the most of their study time.

studentaid.gov

This is the comprehensive U.S. government site that covers all information related to financial aid. It also has a “Prepare for College” section that details the financial benefits of attending college, explores career options, and provides academic and financial aid checklists.

collegeboard.org/counselors

In addition to providing registration links for our counselor workshops, this website also provides registration links for all webinars offered during the school year. The webinars are specifically designed for counselors and cover college advising topics such as the college application process, writing letters of recommendation, financial aid, advising special student populations, building your counseling program and leadership, and much more.

nacacnet.org

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is an organization of more than 14,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education. This site provides excellent resources for counseling professionals, students, and families.

schoolcounselor.org

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supports school counselors’ efforts to help students focus on academic, career, and social/emotional development so they can achieve success in school and be prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. ASCA provides professional development, publications, and other resources, research, and advocacy to professional school counselors around the globe.