PARENT’S COLLEGE PREP CHECKLIST BY GRADE



Middle School

- [ ] Help your child set goals for the year. Working toward specific goals will help your child stay motivated and focused.
- [ ] Review the school calendar together. Note important dates and put them in a shared online calendar or in an easy-to-view place, such as a bulletin board in your kitchen.
- [ ] Make a plan to check in regularly about schoolwork. If you keep up with your child’s tests, papers and homework assignments, you can celebrate successes and head off problems as a team.
- [ ] Talk about extracurricular activities. Getting involved in clubs and other groups is a great way for your child to identify interests and feel more engaged in school.
- [ ] Discuss ways to take on challenges. Encourage your child to take the most-challenging courses that he or she can handle. Tackling tough courses can give your child confidence and prepare him or her for higher-level high school classes.
- [ ] Come up with fun reading ideas. Look for magazines or newspapers your child may like and talk about the books you loved reading when you were your child’s age. If your family makes reading enjoyable, it can become a daily habit.
- [ ] Visit a nearby college together. If you live near a college, look for upcoming events on campus that are open to the community or see if the college offers classes to local children and families. Just being on a campus may get your child interested in college.
- [ ] Get the big picture on paying for college. It’s not too early to learn the basics of financial aid.

Ninth Grade

Summer Before High School

- [ ] Visit a college campus together. It's a great way to get your child excited about college.
- [ ] Get the facts about what college costs. You may be surprised at how affordable higher education can be.
- [ ] Show your child how to explore career ideas. He or she can make a list of interests, talents and favorite activities and start matching them with occupations.
- [ ] Come up with fun reading ideas. Look for magazines or newspapers your child may like and talk about the books you loved reading when you were your child's age. If your family makes reading enjoyable, it can become a daily habit

Fall

- [ ] Make sure your child meets with the school counselor. Your child should schedule a meeting to talk about college and career options and to choose the most-appropriate classes.
- [ ] Help your child set goals for the school year. Working toward specific goals helps your child stay motivated and focused.
- [ ] Make a plan to check in regularly about schoolwork. If you keep up with your child's tests, papers and homework assignments, you can celebrate successes and head off problems as a team.
- [ ] Talk about extracurricular activities. Getting involved in clubs and other groups is a great way for your child to identify interests and feel more engaged in school.

Winter

- [ ] Start thinking about financial aid. It's not too early to look into types of aid that could help you cover college costs.
- [ ] Discuss next year's classes. Make sure your child is challenging him- or herself — and taking the courses college admission officers expect to see. Learn more about the high school classes that colleges look for.

Spring

- [ ] Help your child start a college list for visits.
- [ ] See how much you need to save for college. Use the Cost of College Calculators to get an idea of where you are compared with your savings goal.
- [ ] 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.

Tenth Grade

Summer

- [ ] Visit a college campus together. It's a great way to get your 10th-grader excited about college.
- [ ] Get the facts about what college costs. You may be surprised by how affordable higher education can be.
- [ ] Help your sophomore explore career ideas. He or she can make a list of interests, talents and favorite activities and start matching them with occupations.

- [ ] Come up with fun reading ideas. Look for magazines or newspapers your child may like and talk about the books you loved reading when you were in high school. If your family makes reading enjoyable, it can become a daily habit.

Fall

- [ ] Make sure your child meets with the school counselor. Your sophomore should schedule a meeting to talk about college and career options and to make sure he or she is taking the most-appropriate classes
- [ ] Encourage your child to set goals for the school year. Working toward specific goals helps your high schooler stay motivated and focused.
- [ ] Make a plan to check in regularly about schoolwork. If you keep up with your child's tests, papers and homework assignments, you can celebrate successes and head off problems as a team.
- [ ] Talk about extracurricular activities. Getting involved in clubs and other groups is a great way for your child to identify interests and feel more engaged in school.
- [ ] Help your 10th-grader get ready to take preliminary exams. Taking the PSAT/NMSQT or the PLAN this fall can help your child prepare for college admission tests. Sophomores can also use their score reports to figure out which academic areas they need to work on.

Winter

- [ ] Review PSAT/NMSQT or PLAN results together. Your child's score report indicates his or her academic strengths and weaknesses. Review the report together and talk about ways to improve in areas that need attention.
- [ ] Start thinking about ways to pay for college. Most families get help paying for college costs.
- [ ] Encourage your sophomore to consider taking SAT Subject Tests. Many colleges require or recommend taking these tests to get a sense of your child's skills in a certain academic area. In general, it's best to take a Subject Test right after taking the relevant course.
- [ ] Discuss next year's classes. Make sure your child will be challenging him- or herself and taking the courses college admission officers expect to see.

Spring

- [ ] Make a college wish list together. Talk with your 10th-grader about qualities he or she may want in a college in terms of location, size, majors offered and so on.
- [ ] See how much you need to save for college.
- [ ] 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.

Eleventh Grade

Summer

- [ ] Get the facts about what college costs. You may be surprised by how affordable higher education can be.

- [ ] Explore financial aid options. These include grants and scholarships, loans, and work-study programs that can help pay for college costs.

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.
- [ ] Encourage your child to set goals for the school year. Working toward specific goals helps your high schooler stay motivated and focused.
- [ ] 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.
- [ ] 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.

Winter

- [ ] Review PSAT/NMSQT results together. Your child's score report comes with a free SAT study plan. This online, customized plan is based on your child's test scores and can help him or her work on areas that need improvement.
- [ ] Help your child prepare for college admission tests. Many juniors take college admission tests, such as the SAT and the ACT, in the spring so they can get a head start on planning for college.
- [ ] Discuss taking challenging courses next year. Taking college-level or honors courses as a senior can help your child prepare for college work — and these are also the courses that college admission officers like to see.
- [ ] Encourage your junior to consider taking SAT Subject Tests. Many colleges require or recommend taking these tests to get a sense of your child's skills in a certain academic area. In general, it's best to take a Subject Test right after taking the relevant course.
- [ ] 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.

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 to create a list of colleges to consider applying to.
- [ ] Help your child research scholarships. This form of financial aid provides money for college that doesn't need to be repaid.
- [ ] 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.
- [ ] 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 schooler look into summer learning programs or find a job or internship.
- [ ] Visit colleges together. Make plans to check out the campuses of colleges your child is interested in. Use the campus visit checklist to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.

Twelfth Grade

Summer

- [ ] Visit colleges together. If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges your child is interested in. 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 a college's actual cost. Once your 12th-grader has a list of a few colleges he or she is interested in, use the Cost of College Calculator together to find out 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.
- [ ] 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.

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.
- [ ] Create a calendar with your child. This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in College Profiles. 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 and the ACT, in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th-grader prepare for admission tests.
- [ ] Offer to look over your senior's college applications. But remember that this is your child's work so remain in the role of advisor and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
- [ ] Help your child find and apply for scholarships. He or she can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor. Your high schooler will need to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about Scholarships.
- [ ] 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.

Winter

- [ ] Work together to apply for financial aid. Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges he or she is interested in 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.
- [ ] 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.

- [ ] Learn about college loan options together. Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high schooler gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the parent's role in borrowing money.
- [ ] Encourage your senior to take SAT Subject Tests. These tests can showcase your child's interests and achievements — and many colleges require or recommend that applicants take one or more Subject Tests. Read more about SAT Subject Tests or ACT Subject Test.
- [ ] 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.

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 accept a college's offer, mail a tuition deposit and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's next steps in Applying for College

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