

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

Countdown to College Checklist



Keep the following in mind when planning for college:

- Develop and maintain good study habits - every grade and every year counts!
- Learn how to plan effectively and manage your time efficiently.
- Remain involved in activities you enjoy.
- Ask questions when you need to of parents, teachers and your guidance counselor.

Grade 9:

- Get involved in extra-curricular activities that you enjoy and can add value to college applications. Extracurricular activities also help decide what your likes and dislikes are.
- Find out what high school courses may help you gain acceptance to certain colleges or career fields. Explore areas of interest through elective options.
- Discuss your high school courses, your likes and dislikes, and what you may like to study in the future with your guidance counselor.
- Find out about summer jobs and the skills necessary to get one.
- Look into volunteer activities that will expand your experience and skills.
- Keep a resume/record of all your extracurricular activities and work experiences.
- Challenge yourself to take the most rigorous coursework in high school that you can do well in.
- Consider serving in leadership positions whenever possible in your extracurricular activities.
- Freshman grades count! They will be calculated as 1/3 of your high school grade point average used for college admissions.
- Research eligibility criteria in your school for Honor Society admission. (i.e. National, Foreign Language, Math, Art, etc.).

Grade 10:

- Discuss high school course selections with your guidance counselor and parents to ensure they meet your college/career interests.
- Continue to talk with your parents about your college plans.
- Evaluate your past summer experiences and determine your plan for the upcoming summer.
- Discuss whether you are an appropriate candidate to take the PSAT in October with your guidance counselor.

- Complete a career assessment/inventory to assess where your interests lie.
- Consider taking the SAT Subject Tests in May or June in an area that you are strong in, particularly if you are in an AP or Honors course.
- Consider scholar programs offered at local colleges/universities.
- For student athletes, look into NCAA core course requirements to make sure you are meeting eligibility standards.
- Visit local colleges/universities and attend local college fairs. (www.nacac.com)
- Continue to build your college resume by remaining active in community service, summer employment and extracurricular activities.
- Continue to explore scholarship opportunities.
- Your grades count - continue to study!!!

Grade 11:

- Ensure that your coursework meets high school graduation, specific diploma type and college admissions requirements.
- In preparation for the SAT, take the PSAT. This also establishes your eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Competition, the National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students, and/or the National Hispanic Scholar Awards Program.
- Discuss your PSAT scores with your guidance counselor and parents.
- Use your PSAT results to focus on areas of weakness and consider taking an SAT preparation course (i.e. private tutoring, group instruction, practice manuals and online instruction).
- Utilize the free SAT preparation resources available on the College Board website, such as My College Quick Start, which contains a personalized study plan based on your PSAT scores. The access code for this service can be found on your PSAT score report.
- Continue to talk with your parents about your future plans.
- Decide what criteria you are looking for in a college or university. Consider factors such as location, cost, major, size of campus and setting of campus as well as the environment of the college. Develop a list of possible schools you are interested in attending. Your guidance office or school library may have books and websites to help you. Use a college search program to narrow down your options.
- Attend college and/or career fairs in your school, community or region.
- Attend sessions with college representatives who visit your high school.
- Research college majors or vocational areas that correspond with your abilities and interests.
- Begin researching sources of financial aid and scholarships you may be eligible for. Be sure to discuss how your family will finance your college education.
- If you are interested in a military academy or an ROTC scholarship, begin the application process early in junior year.
- Take the SAT and the ACT. Consider taking both two times in junior year to maximize your options. Take the ACT with the Writing section (it is optional). Consider taking the SAT Subject Tests if you will be applying to the more competitive colleges/universities.
- If the schools you are considering require the SAT Subject Tests, take them in May or June, while the course material is still fresh in your mind. Speak with your math teacher to determine which level of math is appropriate for you.

- Visit the schools that are high on your list when the school is in session so you can talk to students and professors as well as admissions counselors. Make an appointment to speak to a financial aid officer.
- Check with your guidance counselor, the school library, and the public library about possible scholarship sources.
- Search sites such as www.meritaid.com, www.fastweb.com, www.collegexpress.com & www.zinch.com.
- Develop a comprehensive resume; include all work and activity experiences. Highlight leadership skills.
- Consider which teachers you would like to ask to write a letter of recommendation for you in the fall of senior year. Major subject area teachers are preferable.
- If a portfolio(s), audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talent are required for admission or for scholarships, begin to put these items together.
- Apply for a summer job, college course or internship.
- Think about saving a portion of your summer earnings for college tuition, spending money or both.
- Save several graded papers/essays that you are proud of. Some colleges/universities will request this information as part of your admission packet or for the Honors Program application.
- While researching colleges, consider the retention rate (the percent of freshman that return to that college the following year), the commuter rate and the graduation rate. (www.collegenavigator.ed.gov.)
- Plan to take a strong senior year program.

Grade 11: Summer

- Request applications from schools you plan to apply to. Check online for the availability of the applications. Check www.commonapp.org to see if the schools you are interested in subscribe to the Common Application. Start to complete applications. Check if supplemental applications are required.
- Start to brainstorm essay topics – complete several drafts.
- If seeking an athletic scholarship, make contact with the coaches at schools of your interest; include a resume listing athletic profile & accomplishments.
- Consider attending a sport camp at a college/university. Check with your coach and athletic office.
- Write a letter requesting applications from any private scholarship sources you have identified.
- Visit the schools that interest you the most, if you have not done so already.
- Consider preparing over the summer to retake the SAT/ACT in early fall of senior year if necessary. Register early as testing sites fill quickly.
- Compile an activity resume that will be submitted with your application.

Grade 12: Fall

- Narrow down your college list to 8 – 10 schools – make sure that you have safety and match schools and only a few dream schools on this list.
- If you are applying to very competitive/popular schools or if you are looking for merit aid, you may need several schools on this list.
- Make sure you have “financial safeties” on this list as well.
- Plan to retake the SAT/ACT exams if needed and continue to prepare for these exams.
- Plan to apply early in senior year – preferably by November for the majority of schools, unless you have standardized testing to complete or would like senior year grades to be considered as part of your application. Watch deadlines for Early Action & Early Decision. Research the specific policies of Early Action programs – some contain restrictions.
- Meet with your guidance counselor & teachers to discuss your letter of recommendation and provide any forms/documentation they may require.
- Continue to research scholarship opportunities.
- Notify your guidance office if you are applying to the NCAA Clearinghouse.
- Continue to visit colleges. Upon acceptance, you may schedule an overnight visit at a college to learn if it is a good match for your needs.
- Plan to meet with college representatives who visit your high school.
- Complete all financial aid forms:

1) October – CSS Profile – required by select private colleges found at www.collegeboard.com

2) January – FAFSA – required by all colleges www.fafsa.ed.gov

3) Complete financial aid forms specific to colleges, if required.