

Preparing for College: It's Never Too Soon

Freshman year: Plan for the future and explore passions

- Introduce yourself to your guidance counselor.
- Register for courses in academic areas (English, math, science, social studies and foreign language) required for college entrance.
- Do well academically! Remember, ninth grade sets the stage for your academic performance in high school and is the first set of grades college admissions officers will see on your transcript.
- Explore your extracurricular opportunities and begin to get involved in activities that are meaningful to you. Join clubs, participate in school activities and volunteer for service organizations that match your interests.

Sophomore year: Begin to deepen your experiences

- Become involved and committed to a community service organization or project.
- Deepen your involvement in several extracurricular activities to broaden your experience and help you build relationships with other students and with faculty.
- Meet with your guidance counselor and make sure you're on target with the right courses.
- Register for the PLAN test, which will help identify academic and career interests. Take a practice SAT - Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT).

Junior year: Test, inquire and lead

- Take on leadership roles in extracurricular and community service activities, or take the initiative to create your own organization or project. (Start to look for ways you can impact your organizations through your skills and leadership.)
- Enter the PSAT/NMSQT competition. Top scorers often qualify for college scholarships.
- Create a tentative list of colleges for consideration and contact them to request information or get on their mailing lists to receive information about the schools.
- Attend college fairs and workshops and review college catalogs and guides.
- Take the ACT and SAT. Remember that you can take these exams more than once and many students improve their scores the second and even third time around.
- Take the SAT II tests if required by colleges on your list.
- Remember to request that your scores be sent to schools and scholarship providers that you are interested in.
- Visit college campuses and take campus tours during summer break (or sooner).
- Carefully consider various summer job and volunteer work opportunities.
- Search for and prepare to apply for scholarships (summer prior to senior year).

Senior year: Apply/visit/confirm – Grow/sustain

- Continue involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities and community service.
- Think about ways to leave a legacy in these organizations and ensure that impact is sustainable after you leave.
- Take/retake ACT/SAT or SAT II tests if you would like to improve your scores.
- Narrow college choices to three-to-four colleges, including a "back-up" school in case top choices do not work out. (Attending college fairs/workshops can be helpful in this process.)
- Request admissions applications or download the necessary forms online, apply for admission and establish relationships with admissions counselors at the schools to which you apply. During the application process:
 - Prepare a personal essay.
 - Contact teachers/counselors about writing letters of recommendation.
 - Fill out a FAFSA form (January).
 - Apply for scholarships (each has its own deadline).
 - Consider admission offers, and confirm your intent to enroll.
 - Take Advanced Placement Tests.
 - Request that a final transcript be sent to your college of choice and ensure that your college receives it.

Resources for Financial Aid Information

Free Application for Financial Aid (FAFSA)

All colleges and universities require their students to fill out the FAFSA to be considered for financial aid. You can complete an application at your own pace on the internet and can easily check the status of it later.

- Before completing the FAFSA online, you must obtain a FSA ID at fsaid.ed.gov.
- With your FSA ID, go to fafsa.gov. The FAFSA website also has useful information about other financial aid programs offered by the government.
- Financial aid is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Fill out the application as soon as possible. The federal deadline for submitting your FAFSA is June 30. You can change the information later if necessary.
- If you would prefer to receive a paper FAFSA form, call 1.800.4.FED.AID. You can also request other federal publications, such as "Funding Education Beyond High School" and receive help with questions and concerns.

Free Scholarship Searches and Internet Resources

While numerous companies offer scholarship search services for a fee, you can find all of the same information yourself with a little bit of work. Some good places to start searching are:

Scholarship Experts: scholarshipexperts.com

Princeton Review: princetonreview.com

Scholarships.com: scholarships.com

College Answer: collegeanswer.com

Fastweb: fastweb.com

Mach25: collegenet.com/mach25

Some other useful sites are:

- finaid.org: You can estimate your EFC (Estimated Family Contribution) now to plan ahead financially. Includes links to the scholarship searches listed above, links to colleges' financial aid pages, student loan information and much more.
- scholarsnapp.org: Solution that allows students to apply for scholarships online and then automatically re-use that information for other scholarship applications without retyping their data again and again.
- nasfaa.org: The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators web site gives general information on aid. Look under the tab "Parents & Students". The site also includes links to other information pages, including NCAA regulations.
- studentaid.ed.gov: The U.S. Department of Education site supplies information on Federal Student Aid programs, including maximum awards and eligibility.
- collegeboard.org: The College Board provides good general information, online registration and test dates for the SAT.
- actstudent.org: This site has information on the ACT exam, including dates, practice tests and financial aid.
- salliemae.com: Sallie Mae presents good general information, a general, step-by-step financial aid application process explanation and good information on student loans.
- collegeincolorado.org: Here you will find information on student services for the colleges and universities in Colorado, test preparation, career options, higher education opportunities, college planning tools and more.
- college-assist.com: College Assist offers invaluable guidance about financing an education in Colorado.
- bigfuture.collegeboard.org: Designed with the input of students and educators, this site's step-by-step approach will make the college planning process easier to navigate.

Books

There are more than 500 books about college scholarships. Here are some to get you started:

- *All the Wisdom and None of the Junk: Secrets of Applying for College Admission and Scholarships* compiles recommendations from Boettcher Foundation staff experts. Your guidance counseling office has a copy available, and you can learn more at boettcherfoundation.org/scholarship-book
- Colorado Council on High School/College Relations, Colorado Collegiate Handbook – best for in-state information. Cost is about \$15. To order, see your counselor or visit coloradocouncil.org.
- The College Board Scholarship Handbook
- Peterson's College Money Handbook