

College Preparation Checklist (page 1 of 3)

Pre-High School

- Visit www.studentaid.ed.gov/early to find out why you should consider college now and how to pay for it.
- Start discussing your college plans today with your family and with people at school.
- Use *FAFSA4caster* at www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov to find out how much federal student aid you might receive. This information will help you and your parents plan ahead.
- Start saving for college if you haven't already. Look into college savings plans that your state may offer.
- Take challenging and interesting classes to prepare for high school.
- Develop strong study habits.
- Do your best in school. If you are having difficulty, don't give up—get help from a teacher, tutor or mentor.
- Become involved in school- or community-based extracurricular activities that enable you to explore your interests, meet new people, and learn new things.
- Go to career information events. As employers what kind of education they expect their employees to have.

High School:

Every Year

- Update your information in *FAFSA4caster*, and continue to save for college.
- Take challenging classes in core academic subjects: most colleges require 4 years of English, at least 3 years of social studies (history, civics, geography, economics, etc.), 3 years of mathematics, and 3 years of science; and many require 2 years of a foreign language. Round out your course load with classes in computer science and the arts. To increase your chances of receiving an Academic Competitiveness Grant in college, follow a “rigorous high school program.” For more information, visit www.studentaid.ed.gov/funding.
- Stay involved in school- or community-based extracurricular activities that interest you or enable you to explore career interests. Consider working or volunteering. Remember—it's quality (not quantity) that counts.
- Talk to your school counselor and other mentors about education after high school. Your counselor can answer questions about what classes to take in high school, how to sign up for standardized tests, and where to get money for college.

9th Grade

- Follow a rigorous program of study. (See above, under “Every Year.”)
- Start planning for college and thinking about your career interests. At www.studentaid.ed.gov you can register with MyFSA and research your career and college options.

10th Grade

- Continue to follow a rigorous program of study. (See above, under “Every Year.”)
- Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their requirements.
- Consider taking a practice Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) or the PLAN exam, also known as the “Pre-Act.”*

*REMEMBER: Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.

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11th Grade

All Year

- Continue to follow a rigorous program of study. (See page 1, under “Every Year.”)
- Research colleges that interest you. Think about things such as location, size, special programs, and college costs. The MyFSA college search at www.studentaid.ed.gov can help you.
- Go to college fairs and presentations by college representatives.
- Investigate financial aid, including scholarships. Understand the different types and sources of aid.
- For more information about scholarships and federal student aid opportunities, visit www.studentaid.ed.gov.

Fall

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT.* You must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Program.

Spring

- Register for and take exams for college admission.* Many colleges accept the SAT Reasoning Test and/or SAT Subject Tests, while others accept the ACT. Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.

Summer Before 12th Grade

- Narrow down the list of colleges you are interested in attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.
- Contact colleges to request information and applications for admission. Ask about financial aid, admission requirements, and deadlines.
- Decide whether you are going to apply under a particular college’s early decision or early action program. Be sure to learn about the program deadlines and requirements.
- Update your information in *FAFSA4caster* one last time, and compare the results to the actual costs at colleges to which you will apply. To supplement any aid *FAFSA4caster* estimates you might receive, be sure to apply for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow.

*REMEMBER: Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.

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12th Grade

All Year

- Continue to follow a rigorous program of study. (See page 1, under “Every Year.”)
- Work hard all year; second-semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.
- Stay involved and seek leadership roles in your activities.

Fall

- Meet with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate and fulfill college admission requirements.
- If you haven’t done so already, register for and take exams such as the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT for college admission.* Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.
- Apply to the colleges you have chosen. Prepare your applications carefully. Follow the instructions, and **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!**
- Well before your application deadlines, ask your counselor and teachers to submit required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you’re applying.
- To prepare to apply for federal student aid, be sure to get a PIN at **www.pin.ed.gov** so that you can complete your application and access your information online. One of your parents must also get a PIN.

Winter

- Encourage your parent(s) to complete income tax forms early. If your parent(s) have not completed their tax forms, you can provide estimated information on your federal student aid application, but remember to make any necessary changes later.
- As soon after Jan. 1 as possible, complete and submit your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA), along with any other financial aid applications your school(s) of choice may require. You can complete the FAFSA online at **www.fafsa.ed.gov** or on paper, but completing the application online is faster and easier. You should submit your FAFSA by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, usually by early February.
- If you have questions about the federal student aid programs or need assistance with the application process, call **1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)** or the TTY for the hearing impaired, 1-800-730-8913.
- After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your *Student Aid Report* (SAR) within three days to three weeks. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor.
- Complete scholarship applications.

Spring

- Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.
- Review your college acceptances and compare financial aid packages.
- Contact a school’s financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, other aid for which you can apply, and important paperwork you might need to submit.
- When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.

***REMEMBER:** Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.