

A Parent's Guide to Preparing your High School Child
for College Admissions
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Freshman Year – Grade 9

- ❖ Plan to attend the orientation meeting for freshman parents at the high school.
- ❖ Please encourage your child to attend all freshman programs at the start of school either in late August or early September.
- ❖ Familiarize yourself with the school dates for class progress reports, exam dates, and date each quarter or semester ends for report cards.
- ❖ Have your child plan to take challenging courses in core academic subjects as most colleges require four years of English, three years of Social Studies (History, Civics, Geography, Economics), four years of mathematics, four years of science, and three years of a foreign language.
- ❖ Parents should plan to attend the annual school open house in the fall to become familiar with your child's teachers and especially with your appointed guidance counselor.
- ❖ Keep copies of all your child's progress reports and report cards during each quarter or semester for each year in high school.
- ❖ Research the courses available in 10th grade to help plan your student's schedule for sophomore year. You may want to touch base with your child's high school advisor to determine if Honors or Advance Placement (AP) courses are appropriate for your student and if they are offered to sophomores.

Sophomore Year – Grade 10

- ❖ Review your child's class schedule and determine with your high school counselor if the level of difficulty is appropriate for your child. Your child should be challenged but not overwhelmed.
- ❖ Please review with the guidance department regarding the college testing sequence and review if taking the PSAT's in the fall of the sophomore year is appropriate for your child.
- ❖ Check the school's website for college planning sessions for parents. These are typically scheduled for junior parents but are valuable if space is available. Sign up to receive e-mails from the high school guidance office for school-wide counseling.

- ❖ The high school may offer Naviance or a similar on-line comparison guide. Find out how to register (using a school issued password) and become familiar with tools offered for the college search process.
- ❖ If your child is taking Advance Placement (AP) courses, consult with their teachers in January or February on the date the AP exam is offered for that course (usually in May), and sign up for the tests which you will have to pay for.
- ❖ Your child can also take the SAT subject tests if your child is completing those courses sophomore year (ex. AP Biology).
- ❖ When you are traveling with your child, consider a drive through any convenient college or university. Take a few minutes to walk through the Student Union, library, or athletic facilities so that your child may get a flavor of college life. If possible, visit any schools of interest during the academic year to see how the campus feels with students on the campus. Criteria that should be measured when evaluating a school include:

Size of the student body
 Location (Urban, Suburban, Rural) of campus
 Specific majors and course of study
 Class sizes and faculty student ratios
 Tuition
 Campus activities

- ❖ Start a comparison worksheet to help in evaluating schools.
- ❖ If your child hasn't taken Advance Placement courses, review and determine what, if any, courses might be best for junior year. Attempt to find a balance between academics, extra curricular activities, sports and community service.
- ❖ Review the selection of courses that are available for junior year and determine if your child's graduation requirements are being met.
- ❖ If you haven't done so, determine if a SAT prep course outside of school would be of value. Check into SAT preparation courses (Kaplan, Sylvan, online options). If you decide to use these programs, there is often a complimentary PSAT prep course offered which your child can take in the summer between their sophomore and junior years.

Junior Year – Grade 11

- ❖ Schedule to take the preliminary SAT / National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in the fall for initial scores and to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Program.

- ❖ Register on line to take the ACT and SAT tests in the spring. You can take the SAT test again in the senior year if you want to improve your scores. Check to see if SAT subject tests are needed for specific colleges, and if your child intends to apply early decision, determine if they to complete all required tests by the end of their junior year.
- ❖ Sign up for AP tests in January or February which are given in May.
- ❖ The time between January 1st of junior year and December 31st of senior year may be the most stressful time in your child's life, so be prepared to share in the emotions.
- ❖ Schedule an appointment with your student's counselor to discuss college planning and start writing down a plan of action for both you and your child.
- ❖ Your child should prepare a one page academic resume outlining their academic record, community service and work experience for admissions interviews. Recommended formats may be available online through the high school's guidance department.
- ❖ Your child should establish a separate e-mail account solely for college admissions so as to send and receive information on colleges and to communicate with admissions officers as needed. Schools may e-mail you when an admissions person is in your town and sponsoring a local get together. Encourage your child to visit the websites of attractive colleges and register on their website. Please remind them to save all user ids and passwords.
- ❖ Attend college fairs, and college planning nights your school or community may sponsor for juniors. Generally, high school counseling offices start to work closely with high school juniors starting in January.
- ❖ Start to investigate the possibility of financial aid for your child based on merit, academic, or financial need. You will need to spend some time understanding what each university or college offers and what information they would need. Investigate federal student aid (www.studentaid.edu.gov) and the College Board website (www.collegeboard.com) to learn the process of applying and securing financial aid. Work with the expected family contribution (EFC) calculator to estimate how much your family might be expected to pay. This is a separate process from the college application, and will take some time. Most of the work will be done by a parent so the earlier you address the necessary paperwork and procedures, the better off you will be.
- ❖ Your child should start a college list with at least two reach, safety, and match schools. Plan to start visiting these schools in the spring of the junior year and the summer before senior year. If possible, schedule an admissions interview the same day you visit. If interviews are offered, it is highly recommended that you take advantage of the opportunity to meet with a representative of the school. This is one way Admissions gauges your interest when reviewing your application. Off campus interviews are often offered if the school is not close by. You would likely meet with an alumnus of the school who lives in your area. Spring vacation is very popular and crowded for college visits.

- ❖ Investigate and download the admissions requirements of all the schools on your student's list and determine if they use their own application or the Common Application, which is a shared application used by many schools. Start separate files for each school with check lists of specific requirements needed. Review each college's requirements for required high school courses.
- ❖ In the spring, have your child ask two teachers in different subject areas to write letters of recommendations due next year. In the fall, you will need to provide the faculty members with stamped addressed envelopes and directions on how to send or e-mail the recommendations and the dates they are due. The student should hand-write a thank you note to each teacher after the recommendations are sent.
- ❖ Review your student's course selection for senior year and make sure that all requirements for graduation are completed.
- ❖ Your child should start to prepare their college essays over the summer as the fall will be very busy. Often students confer with their English teacher about possible topics.

Senior Year – Grade 12

- ❖ Your child should narrow down their list of schools and determine if they want to apply early decision to the school of their dreams or apply early action to a number of schools which is not binding. Early decision applications and early action applications are generally due in November and early December, and general admissions are due in early January.
- ❖ Keep a college calendar of all admissions deadlines.
- ❖ Check with your high school counselor to determine how and when school transcripts should be sent to selected colleges. Arrange to have the first quarter grades sent to colleges receiving early decision or early action applications. SAT and ACT scores are sent directly from the testing companies. Check the websites for information, deadlines, and fees.
- ❖ Well written college essays are imperative for acceptance in the competitive college marketplace. If possible, have someone outside the family proofread and offer constructive criticism. The essay will be read several times during the school's admission process and is instrumental for acceptance.
- ❖ Watch for your high school's College Planning Night and schedule a fall appointment with your child's guidance counselor.
- ❖ Set both a soft date and a hard date when your child's applications should be completed. Life will become very hectic from Thanksgiving to the holidays and intensify once early admission decisions are received by friends of your child. Pay very close attention to deadlines and track submitted documents in individual college files. Make sure to include supplemental form, if required. This form may ask you to write additional essays specifically focused on the individual college and include it with your application.

- ❖ Plan to attend a financial aid workshop sponsored by your high school or community. Start to gather all the financial documents that you will need to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and sign up on the Federal website (www.pin.ed.gov) for a PIN number for you and your child.
- ❖ After January 1st, you can complete and submit your FAFSA application on line at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You will also need to fill out additional forms for each individual school that your child applies to. After you submit the FAFSA form, you should receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) within three to four weeks.
- ❖ You will also need to go to the College Board website (www.collegeboard.com) to fill out the private institution financial aid forms that many schools require.
- ❖ Most financial aid requirements are due by the end of February.
- ❖ Consider visiting schools which have accepted your child during accepted student weekends in April. Students look at schools differently after they have been accepted and many times change their decisions.
- ❖ Congratulations; your deposit check of money is due by May 1st in order to hold a seat for the incoming freshman class.

SOURCES

- ❖ Hall High School Junior Planning Book – Guidance Department
 - ❖ www.collegeboard.com
 - ❖ www.studentaid.ed.gov
 - ❖ www.fafsa.ed.gov
 - ❖ Nancy R. Coursey