

College & Career



9th Grade

Use these checklists to help guide decision-making and ensure students do not miss key points and considerations.

✓ **Course Selection**

Select courses that interest you and challenge you. As you are deciding on courses, think about how the courses you are selecting this year will affect courses for the following year.

✓ **Study Skills & Time Management**

Develop good study habits and time management early in the year. Your grades freshman year impact your overall GPA. Reach out to teachers if you are having trouble or take advantage of school resources for tutoring or support.

✓ **Begin Building a Resume**

Even though senior year feels far away, the activities and accomplishments during freshman year will be included in the materials you use when applying to colleges or training programs. And it's hard to remember details of activities years later. Begin keeping a list of accomplishments and include what skills you developed or lessons you learned.

✓ **Career Exploration**

Use school resources to begin exploring careers you might be interested in or that fit your strengths. As you make decisions about courses and activities, consider whether they match the careers or college programs that interest you.

✓ **Extracurricular Activities**

Get involved in activities or clubs that excite you and help you develop a passion or new skill. Don't just join ALL activities or clubs. Consider ones that interest you or will help you build skills, a support network, or that align with things you are interested in doing in the future.

✓ **Volunteer Service Hours**

Check graduation requirements for service hours in your school or district. When looking for a volunteer opportunity, consider options that are related to passions or career you're interested in. Keep names and contact information of any supervisors in case you need a letter of recommendation in the future.

10th Grade

✓ **Attend College and Career Fairs**

Sophomore year is the right time to start considering different college and career options and considering which might be a good fit. As you attend these events, make note of which colleges and/or careers interest you and follow up by doing research on the different programs and options.

✓ **Begin Researching Scholarships & Grants**

Sophomore year is a good time to start familiarizing yourself with the different kinds of scholarships and grants available. You might be surprised by how many different kinds of scholarships there are for different interests, passions, or those planning on certain career choices. Many scholarships have specific requirements to be eligible. Pay attention to the ones you are particularly interested in and make a plan to make sure you are eligible.

✓ **Consider Your Plan for Rigorous Courses**

During this year, begin to make a plan for taking AP, IB, or AICE courses (depending upon what is offered at

your school) if you are interested in doing so. Many colleges like to see that students take rigorous coursework, but be sure not to overburden yourself with an unmanageable course load. Consider reaching out to older students or counselors for guidance on these decisions.

✓ **Take on Leadership Roles**

Toward the end of sophomore year, begin to look for opportunities within high school clubs, student government, extracurricular activities, or within the community where you can make a positive impact during the next school year. Find ways to lead, coordinate, and organize efforts that align with your skills, interests, and passions.

✓ **Be Thoughtful About Summer Plans**

Summer can be a good time for a work based learning opportunity, internship, or other work that might help you to learn more about a career path. Starting in the spring, consider how you might use your summer to gain experience in a field that interests you.

11th Grade

✓ **Build a Resume**

Spend time turning your list of accomplishments and experiences into an organized resume or portfolio. This information is needed when applying for colleges, jobs, internships, and scholarships. Include work experience (formal or informal), volunteer experience, community service, leadership roles, extracurricular involvement, awards, and any special skills or industry certifications.

✓ **Letters of Recommendation**

Request early! Think about someone who knows you well and has seen you grow, excel, or work through a challenge, such as a teacher, coach, mentor, or counselor. You may need to share a resume or other information to help guide the details they include.

✓ **College Exploration**

Begin to narrow your college search. Create a list of schools or programs that are good matches and ones that might be a reach, but you are hoping to apply to. Remember that there are many good fits and options for each person. Try not to get overly attached to a single school or program.

✓ **Connect with Alumni**

Talking with alumni of a college you are interested in can give you an opportunity to ask questions to someone with first-hand experience. These conversations can help you to

determine better if a school is a good fit for you.

✓ **Make a Plan for Admissions Tests**

Take time to research which tests you will need to take, and consider how you will prepare. You might want to familiarize yourself with the format, schedule time to study, take a preparatory course, or do a practice exam. If you take tests early in the year, you will have more time to get support before retaking an exam, if needed.

✓ **Begin Thinking About College Essays**

Look at essay prompts for the Common Application or specific colleges you plan to apply to. Begin forming ideas about how you might respond, and consider starting a document to draft ideas or responses. This will give you a starting point to alleviate some pressure when you need to write to meet a deadline.

✓ **Consider WBL Opportunities**

Work-based learning (WBL) opportunities can help you to develop useful skills and gain insights into the type of job you are considering. Learning that you love a field or discovering that you dislike many aspects of a job can be equally informative to future planning. Learn what WBL opportunities are available to you, and consider how they might fit into your schedule.

12th Grade

✓ **Graduation Requirements**

Make sure you are on track to complete graduation requirements for your high school as well as any colleges or programs you are applying to.

✓ **Research the Different Timelines & Categories for College Admission**

Different schools have different application options and timelines. It is important to familiarize yourself with the deadlines, the timeframe for hearing decisions, and what it means to apply under early decision vs. early action vs. regular decision.

✓ **Make a Calendar of Deadlines**

Add important deadlines and dates to your calendar for college applications, FAFSA, scholarship applications, standardized tests, and any other important dates. If helpful, consider adding a reminder ahead of the date with ample time to complete the necessary steps.

✓ **College Essays**

Begin early! Reach out to your teachers or counselor's office for resources to brainstorm and review essays. Keep copies of all essays and responses to writing prompts that might be helpful in future applications for scholarships or other types of recognition.

✓ **College Visits**

Selecting a college is choosing an environment and community you will be part of for several years. If possible, try to go and visit colleges you are very interested in or strongly considering. Walk around the campus, talk to students, and try to imagine living and studying there. If you are unable to actually visit, try to take a virtual tour online and reach out to the admissions office to be connected to a current student.

✓ **Make a Plan if You Hope to Retake Tests**

Some students want to retake the SATs or ACTs in the fall of senior year to improve scores before applications are due. Be sure to note the testing dates early in the year and sign up before deadlines.

✓ **Submit Scholarship Applications**

Scholarships can be essential for helping to pay for college, and they are available for students with a wide diversity of skills, talents, and future plans. Take time researching which scholarships are available, and apply to those that align with your qualifications.

✓ **Submit Applications on Time**

Unlike internal deadlines within a high school that can sometimes be extended for extenuating

circumstances, application deadlines are rather strict. Be sure to request all necessary transcripts, letters of recommendation, and other materials that you need and begin working on essays and application questions with plenty of time left for reviewing and submitting your application.

☒ **Financial Aid & FAFSA**

Work with your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to learn about FAFSA and ensure they have all the information they need to complete. Without the FAFSA, you cannot qualify for federal financial aid. Connect with a counselor at school if you need any support.

☒ **Review Financial Aid Offers**

Take time to look over all of the financial aid packages you have

received. Offers can vary greatly between schools. Note the total of financial aid awarded, and be sure to pay attention to what is being offered that will not need to be paid back (i.e., scholarships and grants) and what will need to be paid back (i.e., loans). Ask questions to ensure that you fully understand the offers.

☒ **Find the Best Overall Fit for YOU**

Think about your goals for the future, your preferences for postsecondary learning, the various financial aid offerings, and what excites you about your next steps. Try not to be heavily influenced by the decisions of peers. Make sure that your decision is true to who you are and where you will be happy and able to flourish.