

Postsecondary Planning Timeline

8th GRADE YEAR

- **Talk to friends and family** about careers and possible school choices. Counselors, teachers, parents, other family members, and friends are all good sources of information and support.
- **Explore career interests.** There are lots of different ways to achieve your career goals, including technical colleges, apprenticeships, cooperative education opportunities (“co-ops”), community colleges, military programs or schools, and traditional 2 or 4-year schools.
- Consult with your middle and high school counselors to find out which **courses** you should take that will qualify you to attend certain colleges and/or enter certain career fields.
- **Investigate** Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and honors coursework, as well as career and technical courses/programs and dual enrollment opportunities that are related to your career interests.
- **Discuss your financial situation** with your parents to see how they can assist you in paying for your education. Work together to establish a savings plan in which you can participate, such as a **PA 529 plan**.
- Don’t forget about **extra-curricular activities!** Whether you enjoy athletics, music, art, volunteerism, or employment, what you do outside the classroom is important, too!

FRESHMAN YEAR

- **Continue to explore your interests and talents.** You may change your mind about your career focus, and that's ok!
- **Organization is extremely important** in high school and beyond! Start using a dayplanner or electronic organizer (many smartphones and other electronic devices have calendar functions with reminders that can be a big help).
- **Build a flexible schedule** allowing for study time, extracurricular activities, and your other interests. Get involved only in extracurricular activities in which you have a genuine interest and those to which you are willing to make the necessary time commitment.
- Take your parents (or other trusted adult) with you to **talk to your school counselor** about your interests, post-secondary possibilities, and career information.
- Meet with your school counselor to develop a **tentative four-year schedule of classes** that increases your eligibility to attend the college of your choice. Bring your parents or other trusted adult along.
- Start developing a resume by **keeping a notebook of your accomplishments**. Include articles about yourself, awards that you have won, activities in which you have participated and any leadership positions you might have held.
- **Find out about AP and other honors-level courses** you can take in high school to **help you prepare for college or earn college credit**. Explore post-secondary credit opportunities including college, technical schools, special purpose schools, apprenticeships, and the military related to your selected career interest.
- **Take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test 9/10 (PSAT), if offered in your school, to evaluate your skills in English, math, reading and science reasoning.** It's good practice, and your scores won't count towards your college application.
- **Explore summer opportunities.** Sometimes colleges, businesses, or local organizations develop and fund summer programming with a particular career/interest in mind.
- **Get involved in something you enjoy!** Look into volunteer opportunities that will expand your experience and skills. Get a part-time job. Take karate lessons. Do something outside the classroom; engage in something other than schoolwork.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Visit your school counselor's office to **review your four-year plan** and make any necessary adjustments.
- **Start thinking about what factors are important to you in choosing a college:** size, location, your major/program of interest, and availability of extracurricular activities, for example.
- **Explore college search websites** and other college materials to begin narrowing your colleges and/or programs of interest.
- **Re-evaluate your high school course selection** to make sure it meets college requirements.
- **Keep those grades up!** You might have a lot going on this year, but it's important to stay focused on your schoolwork.
- **Take the PSAT 9/10 (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)** and/or the **PLAN (Preliminary ACT)** in October to prepare you for college entrance exams.
- See your counselor to **take interest inventories** or explore some interest/aptitude assessments on your own to discover which career(s) might be a match for you.
- If pursuing collegiate athletics, check out **NCAA requirements**.
- **Explore post-secondary credit opportunities** including college coursework through dual enrollment, career and technical centers/programs, special purpose schools, and apprenticeships related to your selected career interest. **Find out about AP and other honors-level courses, which can help you prepare for college *and* earn college credit.**
- **Continue extracurricular activities.** Remember, many admissions officers look for well-rounded students who participate in the world around them.
- Check into **work-based learning experiences** such as career-related field trips, job shadowing, entrepreneurial ventures, internships, co-operative education and youth apprenticeships. Sometimes, these programs occur in the summer. Look into participating in **academic enrichment programs, summer workshops and camps** with specialty focuses such as music, arts, business, and sciences.

SUMMER BETWEEN SOPHOMORE AND JUNIOR YEARS

- Now is the time to really **focus your post-secondary research**. Visit college search and “virtual tour” websites to narrow your list of potential colleges.
- **Explore college websites** to gain information about particular programs, schedule campus visitation days, and find information about admissions requirements and special programs (such as dual enrollment credit, honors programs, and co-ops).
- Begin to develop your own month-by-month postsecondary planning calendar for this year. Include any relevant test dates (such as PSAT, SAT, ACT, NOCTI, and AP), scheduled college visits, deadlines for summer program applications, and any other important postsecondary-related dates or deadlines.
- Keep your friends, family, and any other supportive adults in the loop! Tell them about your plans. Talk to them about the steps you’re taking. Ask them to come with you when you meet with your school counselor, speak with college admissions representatives, or attend college visitation days.

JUNIOR YEAR: FALL

- **Maintaining your grades during your junior year is important!** Colleges put a lot of weight on your marks for this year. **Make sure you're challenging yourself academically.** Colleges will consider how difficult your courses are.
- **Meet with your school counselor** (more than once, if necessary) to discuss the following:
 - Your **four-year plan**. Are your ideas about your potential career path changing? That's ok! Work with him/her to make any necessary adjustments to reflect your new ideas.
 - Potential **post-secondary credit opportunities** (earning college credit while in high school).
 - **Pre-College Assessments** such as the PSAT, SAT Reasoning and Subject tests, ACT, and AP exams. Gather test dates to add to your postsecondary planning calendar so you can begin to plan your chosen test date(s). Ask about fee waivers if you have concerns about costs for these exams.
 - **Upcoming college representative visits**. Ask about any schools of particular interest to you. Sometimes, college representatives visit high schools, and you should plan to attend these sessions.
 - **Upcoming college/career fairs** in your area.
 - **Upcoming financial aid workshops** in your area.
- Register for, prepare for, and take the **PSAT/NMSQT**. Remember that when you take the PSAT in your junior year, the scores will count towards the National Merit Scholarship Program (and it is good practice for the SAT Reasoning exam).
- If you are interested in one of the **military academies**, talk to your school counselor about starting the application process now. Applications for these types of schools are more rigorous and begin earlier than other types of schools.
- If you are considering an **ROTC program**, begin to meet with military representatives and/or speak with those offices at the colleges you're considering.
- Begin to **prepare for the SAT and/or ACT exams**. Preparing a little at a time will save you from attempting to cram right before the exam.

JUNIOR YEAR: WINTER

- Discuss your **PSAT** score with your school counselor. Your score report includes an access code for free, customized SAT prep through College Board's partnership with Khan Adcademy. It's a great way to prepare for your upcoming SAT!
- Register AND PREPARE for the **SAT I (also called the SAT Reasoning)** and/or the **ACT**. Typically, students take these exams more than once; beginning earlier gives you more time to determine any areas of need and work on those areas for the next time you take them.
- Are you looking at schools that require the **SAT II (Subject) Tests**? If so, register and prepare for them.
- **Continue to collect information** about your potential colleges, including application procedures and deadlines, entrance requirements (GPA, test scores, etc), tuition and fees, room and board costs, student activities, course offerings, faculty composition, accreditation, and financial considerations. You can find most of this information on each college's website.
- Have a discussion with your parents about the colleges in which you are interested. **Examine financial resources**, and begin to gather information about financial aid.
- Set up a **filing system** with individual folders for each college's correspondence and printed materials. You may also print off any emails and add them to these folders.
- If you desire, "friend" your potential colleges on **Facebook** or follow them on **Twitter, Instagram, or other social media**.

JUNIOR YEAR: SPRING

- Meet with your counselor to **review senior-year course selection and graduation requirements**. Look for classes and opportunities that will enhance your transcript and are relevant to your postsecondary plans.
- **Stay involved with your extracurricular activities**. Colleges look for consistency and depth in activities, so consider leadership positions within the activities you like most.
- Consider whom you will ask to write your **letters of recommendation**. Potential recommenders are adults with whom you have a good relationship; many students choose teachers, school counselors, or employers to write letters.
- **Visit campuses**, if possible. Research spring and summer visitation dates, and arrange to attend. Be sure to add these dates to your postsecondary planning calendar.
- **Athletes** who intend to play sports in college must start the certification process through the **NCAA**.
- **Prepare to make use of your summer!** Apply for jobs/internships, volunteer, and visit your school counselor to find out about summer programs that reflect your postsecondary plans.
- **Retake SAT I and/or ACT** as necessary. There are typically test dates in March, April (ACT only), May, and June. Continue to use prep resources to improve your scores.

SUMMER BETWEEN JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS

- **Update your personal file** with any awards, report cards, or other special recognition you may have received throughout the year.
- **Develop an activities list**, including the honors, awards, recognitions you have received, the activities in which you have participated (including employment, volunteerism, athletics, school clubs, or other community activities), and your postsecondary plans (schools or programs to which you will apply, intended major if you have one). This is useful for those who will be writing your **letters of recommendation** and can be used later to help develop a resume.
- **Visit the campuses of your top college choices.** If you like, you can call ahead to schedule one-on-one visits with admissions representatives on your visitation day. Be sure to send a thank-you note if you do have a personal meeting.
- Begin narrowing down your college choices; **develop your final list of 5-7 schools** to which you will apply.
- **Review the application procedures and requirements for your college choices.** For example, are letters of recommendation and/or essays required? Are there any supplemental financial aid forms to submit? What are the **early decision or early action deadlines** (if applicable)?
- Do any of your schools participate with the **Common Application, Universal Application, or the SendEDU** service? These services can make your application process much easier!
- **Mark application and financial aid deadlines on your postsecondary planning calendar--** and set reminders!
- Develop a **financial aid application plan**, including a list of the aid sources, requirements for each application, and a timetable for meeting the filing deadlines.

SENIOR YEAR: FALL

- **AVOID SENIORITIS! Keep studying!** Colleges and programs will look at your senior year grades, too!
- **Meet with your school counselor** to become familiar with your school's policies or procedures related to college applications and transcripts. Inform him/her of your plans and the schools/programs to which you will be applying; he/she can help you stay organized and answer any questions you may have. Ask about **upcoming financial aid workshops**, and put those dates on your calendar.
- **Review your application and financial aid deadlines.** Check that these dates are on your calendar and that you have **set reminders**. These dates are not flexible; it is vital to submit materials by the deadline—or better yet, far before it!
- **Apply** to your chosen colleges as soon as possible! Most schools prefer an online application, and many participate with programs like the **Common App and Universal App**.
- **Secure letters of recommendation** if needed. Politely (*and in person*) ask each recommender if they will write you a letter, and give each a copy of your activities list.
- **Polish up your admissions essays!** You should have no fewer than **three adults** read over your completed essays. Perfection is the standard!
- If you haven't already done so, be sure that your **official test scores** (SAT, ACT, etc) have been sent to the colleges of your choice.
- Some colleges require the **CSS PROFILE**, which is a supplemental financial aid form (different than the FAFSA). Find out if any of your schools need this; the deadline is much earlier than for the FAFSA!
- Attend any **financial aid workshops** in your area.
- **To male students:** when you turn 18, you must **register for selective service** to be eligible for federal and state financial aid.
- Meet with military/school representatives if you intend to pursue an ROTC program or scholarship.
- **Begin checking for scholarship applications.** You can meet with your school counselor, visit the financial aid site for your college or program, or check other free, online resources.
- **Retake the ACT Assessment, SAT I, or SAT II Subject Tests**, as necessary. Be sure to spend some time preparing so that your scores improve.
- Attend sessions if/when **college representatives** from your chosen schools visit your high school.
- Continue to participate in **extracurricular and/or volunteer** activities.

****AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT FINANCIAL AID****

- **Students will be able to file a 2017–18 FAFSA as early as Oct. 1, 2016**, rather than beginning on Jan. 1, 2017. The earlier submission date will be a permanent change, enabling students to complete and submit a FAFSA as early as October 1 every year. (There is NO CHANGE to the 2016–17 schedule. The FAFSA became available January 1 as in previous years.)
- **Students will use earlier income information.** Beginning with the 2017–18 FAFSA, students will be required to report income information from an earlier tax year. For example, on the 2017–18 FAFSA, students (and parents, as appropriate) will report their 2015 income information, rather than their 2016 income information.

SENIOR YEAR: WINTER

- Send **midyear grade reports** to colleges that require them.
- Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**) . These forms can be obtained at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> . The FAFSA can be submitted after January 1 for the following school year.
- Double-check each of your schools to be sure you **complete any additional financial aid information** they may need, if applicable.
- **Complete and submit any remaining applications** and supplemental materials *before winter break*.
- Follow up to **make sure that the colleges have received all application information**, including recommendations and test scores. Often, you can do this through the schools' websites.
- Continue to check in with your school counselor, colleges/programs, and websites for **scholarship information**. Complete all applications by their deadlines.
- Keep an eye out for **FAFSA completion sessions**. Some high schools and colleges offer this service; you and your parents can complete the FAFSA with financial aid representatives who can answer any questions you might have.
- **Contact your schools' financial aid offices** 2-3 weeks after you have completed the FAFSA to see that they have received your information.
- Begin to **think about how you will spend your summer**. See your school counselor about any internships or summer programs that are relevant to your postsecondary interests. Check with your potential colleges about any summer opportunities they may offer.

SENIOR YEAR: SPRING

- **Compare your acceptance letters and financial aid packages** from the colleges and universities that have accepted you.
- **Make your final choice**, and notify all schools of your intent by **May 1**. Once you have chosen to attend a particular school, you will likely be required to submit a nonrefundable deposit and complete housing information.
- **If you have been waitlisted** for a particular college and have decided to wait for an opening, contact an admissions representative at that school and let them know you are still interested in attending.
- Be sure that you have received a **FAFSA acknowledgment** (usually via email).
- Complete **follow-up paperwork** for the college of your choice (scheduling, orientation session, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms).
- Arrange to have your high school send your **final transcript** to the school you will be attending.
- Graduate! Enjoy, and best of luck!