

The College Choice Timeline

12TH Grade

Do not lose focus on grades. Continue your good study habits. Make sure that you are taking the classes that are needed for college. Don't slack off and take an easy course load. Colleges will be looking at your senior schedule and they will be looking for challenging classes. Continue to take part in extra curricular activities.

September

- Talk to your high school guidance counselor to discuss your list of colleges and make sure that your expectations are realistic given your academic and personal record.
- Sign up for the November SAT I or the October ACT.
- You should have received the college applications that you have requested. If you have not, or if you have added new schools to your list, contact the school to obtain an application. Many schools have deadlines in November and December making it important that you start work on these applications as soon as possible.
- Continue to visit colleges

October

- You may wish to take the ACT
- Attend a college fair to gather information
- Start working on your college application
- Start looking for teachers to write you recommendations.
- Start sending in your college applications (check the due date for each school)
- Sign up for December/January SAT II Subject Tests and the December ACT

November

- You may wish to take the SAT I
- Make sure to have test scores sent to the schools where you are applying
- Obtain financial aid information from your high school guidance counselor.
- Continue to discuss options with your high school guidance counselor and your parents.

December

- You may wish to take the SAT I, SAT II, and ACT
- Expect Early Decisions this month

January

- You may wish to take the SAT II

- If you are applying for federal financial aid, prepare your application and send it in before the May first deadline.

February - April

- Keep track of all your applications, make sure schools have received all of the information that they have requested.
- Decide which school you wish to attend

May

- Prior to May first you must decide on which college you will attend.
- Send in your tuition deposit
- Notify other schools of your decision
- If you are applying for federal financial aid, your application must be submitted by May first - there are **NO EXCEPTIONS** to this deadline.
- You may wish to take the Advanced Placement Exams if you are eligible

June

- You may wish to take the SAT II Subject Tests. At this point you should have already taken these tests; however, on occasion, colleges and universities may provide you with a conditional acceptance until they receive all of your test scores. Check with individual schools you have applied to about test deadlines.
- You may wish to take the ACT. At this point you should have already taken this tests; however, on occasion, colleges and universities may provide you with a conditional acceptance until they receive all of your test scores. Check with individual schools you have applied to about test deadlines.

Summer

- Start packing!
- Find a place to live!

Help Your Child Prepare: Twelfth Grade

Phew! Once your child reaches senior year, the college search kicks up a notch and will sometimes feel like a full-time job - with all of the toil, tedium, and triumphs that come with it. But this is the home stretch for both you and your future college graduate. It might be a lot of work, but it's a labor of love!

September

Take a moment with your child

Start the year off right by planning an evening out (perhaps dinner at a favorite restaurant) with your college-bound child. Go over your strategy for the school year. Discuss plans and goals and review your child's list of target schools. Also discuss plans to attend college fairs and meet with any college reps who may be coming to the school. (The school guidance office will have a schedule.) Go over which college sites have been visited and which ones haven't. Finalize plans for visits. If it all seems overwhelming, reassure your child (over dessert!) that you'll be there to support them every step of the way.

Start the application process

Does your child still need to take the ACT or SAT? Find out the dates and get them registered!

October

Make a decision on early decision

Go over options for early decision and early action and determine if it's an option you and your child want to pursue. Help your child draw up a master schedule of application and financial aid due dates, and put them on the family calendar.

Move them in the "write" direction

Monitor the start of applications and encourage your child to mull over various essay topics to determine if any can be overlapped to reduce the workload. Your child should also start requesting teacher recommendations now; that way, they'll be done well in advance of any deadlines.

Hit the road

Start making college visits, and schedule any interviews that can be completed on campus or with college alumni. Attend college fairs, gather more information, and take a little time to laugh about the process by renting a good comedy and taking a night off!

Think dollars and cents

Certain colleges require a supplemental financial aid form, known as the CSS/PROFILE. This has an earlier deadline than the FAFSA. Check the schools to which your child is applying to find out if you'll need to complete this form in addition to the FAFSA.

November

Nag (but just a little)

You might have to start nagging your teen about early application deadlines, if applicable.

Narrow your college list to those schools to which applications will be sent. Try to use time over the Thanksgiving break to get in a campus visit. As your child starts working on (or completing) applications, offer to proofread and provide constructive criticism.

December

Start coordinating paperwork

If your child plans to have another go at the SAT or ACT, make sure they register. The January sitting (February for ACT) is their absolute last chance.

Keep an eye on the calendar

Get your federal financial aid forms (FAFSA) from the guidance office or the Web and attend workshops if there any available. Leave gentle reminders about any January or February application deadlines and have your child confirm that teachers and guidance staff are up-to-date with reference forms. Also make sure that transcripts are being sent to all short-list colleges.

Celebrate early

Usher in the New Year with a family toast to the future, whatever it may bring.

January

Remember "parent" deadlines

If you have everything you need, file your income taxes and begin filling out financial aid forms, such as the FAFSA. Finish and mail these forms as soon as possible - and never late! Keep in mind that many schools list earlier FAFSA filing dates than that which is listed on the form itself.

Finish up applications

Encourage your child to complete all of his or her applications, even those with later deadlines. Make copies of everything and save them! If SATs are being taken this month, find out if "rush" scores are required for any of your child's choice schools.

Congrats!

When the last application hits the mailbox, CELEBRATE!

February

Follow up

Unless confirmations have arrived, your child should consult colleges by phone or online to check the status of applications. They should keep track of who they speak with and find out if there are any materials that still need to be sent in.

March

Work through the waiting game

After nearly four years, the wait is nearly over! There may be some decision letters arriving this month and, hopefully, they will bring great news.

April

Stay cool

Resist the urge to open letters addressed to your child. (Though holding them up to the light is an option.) Also, don't despair when thin envelopes show up - that doesn't always mean it's a rejection letter. Some schools send out enrollment forms later.

Remain supportive

If your child is accepted, cheer and applaud! If a rejection letter arrives, try to put things in perspective with a comment like "It's an extremely competitive college and your math test scores must have hurt." (Don't say something like "The admission folks at that school seemed like a bunch of Bozos from the get-go." Even if that's what you think!)

Take a second look

Compare financial aid offers and contact financial aid offices with any questions. If you feel you need to, appeal the awards. Plan crunch-time visits to campuses, as needed, to help with the big decision: which school to attend.

Follow up

Was your child placed on a waitlist? Make sure to return any waitlist cards and follow up with the admission offices regularly. Send updated records and other information, if available. Encourage your child to write an upbeat "Please take me, and this is why you should" letter. It may make a difference.

Take a deep breath

If you and your child have made a final decision about which school to attend, then congratulations! Now, make sure you send in any required deposit. Be sure not to dawdle and miss the May 1 deadline or your child may lose their spot to some other hopeful student. Last but not least, notify the schools that weren't chosen that your child won't be attending, particularly if an aid offer was made.

May

Polish off the details

Make sure your child takes any needed AP exams.

Remember P's and Q's

Encourage your child to write a thank you note to anyone who may have been especially helpful in the college-planning process. Guidance counselors are often unsung heroes, as are teachers who write recommendations, scholarship agencies, admission counselors, financial aid officers, secretaries, tours guides, or other students. Of course this isn't obligatory, but recipients are sure to be pleasantly surprised.

Buy some extra-long sheets

Stay on top of housing plans in case there are any forms that need to be returned. You and your child may also consider alternatives to the dorms, if there are any. Find out the dates for freshman orientation, as some schools have them in spring or summer. And of course, make sure your child knows when course registration is.

Important Internet Sites Regarding Various Aspects of College Planning

<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/advsearch/match.asp> Use the Counselor-o-matic program here to help select a college that fits your needs and interests. Once you have registered at this site for free, you can request an application and many types of materials with one click!

<http://www.fastweb.com> This is the largest scholarship database on the web. Create a profile that will enable you to find scholarships that fit your own unique profile. It is a bit tedious to create this profile but well worth the effort. I recommend you file it with your parents nearby as many questions deal with activities and networks with which your parents might also be affiliated.

<http://www.act.org/> You can find the calendar for the ACT test dates as well as register online here.

<http://www.collegeboard.com/> You can find the calendar for the test dates for the SAT I and SAT II here as well as register online.

<http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/> This site allows you to get an early estimate of the results of your FAFSA filing.

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<http://www.number2.com> This site allows you to practice the ACT and/or SAT test at your leisure. I serve as a coach for my clients who choose to participate.

http://go.salliemae.com/plan/?dtd_cell=TAEIGP This site allows you to determine the cost of an education at over 5,500 institutions as well as create a plan to finance it. It is easy and allows you to quickly print out the plan and compare the cost of one school to another.

<http://www.college-scholarships.com/> Tips and articles on college preparation, college admission, scholarships, financial aid, campus life, internships, careers, summer jobs for students, graduate school admission, and much more.

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