

9TH GRADE

BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- Select 9th grade courses with care, setting up for possibility of taking advanced courses later in high school, or across all 4 years
- Explore clubs and activities, try one or two new ones, or consider how to take current activities to the next level
- Start an informal list or journal to track all activities, and approximate time commitments, and any awards or special experiences
- Get to know your teachers, meet with them as needed
- Develop or strengthen study habits, calendar use and planning skills
- Set up a healthy sleep schedule on weeknights
- Meet with your counselor, just to get acquainted, share your plans and goals

- **PARENTS:** Run the Net Price Calculators on the websites of a few different colleges to get a sense of how much colleges will expect you to pay.

- **PARENTS:** If you haven't already done so, start saving for college. Even a small amount every month, compounded, will help.

MID-YEAR

- Start curriculum planning for 10th grade, look for opportunities for challenge
- Start planning for summer
- Meet with your counselor for help with curriculum planning, to continue to develop that relationship, and to ask for any suggestions for summer activities or anything else to strengthen your profile for college applications

- Consider setting up a student email account to be used for all college communication

SUMMER 9/10

- Some productive activity, such as a job, career or academic exploration activities, community service or volunteering, or family responsibilities

- Evaluate what can be strengthened for 10th grade—study skills, schedules, etc.
- Consider how to deepen extracurricular involvement for 10th grade
- Read! (Best possible preparation for standardized tests.)

10TH GRADE

BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- Focus on academics, get off to a strong start
- Develop relationships with teachers
- Deepen involvement with or explore new clubs and activities
- Maintain study habits, work and sleep schedules
- Meet with your counselor
- Take PSAT or PACT if offered at your school

MID-YEAR

- Start curriculum planning for 11th grade, look for opportunities for challenge and increased rigor

- Start planning summer, consider opportunities that include exploration of academic interests and career ideas
- Meet with your counselor
- Make a study plan for any AP exams that will take place in May, starting by meeting with teachers and getting their guidance

- **Parents:** Note that January 1st of your child's sophomore year is the beginning of the base year on which financial aid calculations for the first year of college will be based. The base year runs from January of the student's sophomore year to December of their junior year.

SPRING

- Focus on keeping grades up, finish as strongly as possible
- Study for any AP exams to earn the highest possible scores
- Take mock SAT and mock ACT to begin planning for standardized test prep based on mock test results
- **Parents:** Explore SAT/ACT test prep options and their costs

SUMMER 10/11

- Productive activity
- Possible start of test prep
- Consider what needs to be added or strengthened for the strong,

challenging, 11th grade year ahead. Consider:

- Early prep for a difficult class
- Strengthen time management and study habits
- Set up structures, boundaries, schedules, planning for the extra work of test prep and college planning during 11th grade
- Consider how to deepen involvement, take on leadership in extracurricular activities during 11th grade
- Consider taking YouScience or a similar career interest assessment, as it may impact course selection. Check with your counselor about whether any assessments are available for free through your high school.

11TH GRADE

BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- Academics! Get off to a strong start in classes.
- Think about 2 academic teachers who might write letters of recommendation, and nurture those relationships

- Take PSAT or PACT if offered
- Strong testers may take SAT/ACT in fall
- Continue to develop extracurricular involvement
- Perhaps visit a few nearby college campuses for big picture ideas of what different campus types offer

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

- Start or restart test prep
- Begin self-assessment work to prepare to research colleges (examples and links). Check with your counselor about whether they offer or prefer particular assessments.

- **Parents:** Since affordability is part of college fit, it needs to also be part of self-assessment. Begin the conversation with your teen about what you are willing/able to spend on college.

JAN—MARCH

- Meet with your counselor, share results of self-assessment, complete any required questionnaires, share ideas and goals for college
- Begin serious college research
- Learn to utilize any college planning software the high school uses
- Plan curriculum for senior year, planning for rigor
- Possible SAT/ACT
- Get in the habit of reading everything sent out by the college guidance office; attend all required meetings

- Make a study plan for any AP exams that will take place in May, starting by meeting with teachers and getting their guidance
- Plan summer, perhaps with greater focus on activities relating to academic interests and career ideas/curiosity
- Consider visiting college campuses during spring break (students must be on campus)

- **Parents:** Research costs and options for visiting college campus during spring break

- Attend available college fairs (virtual or IRL link to NACAC), local college events, admission reps visits to your high school
- Decide who to ask for letters of recommendation
- May begin to work on resume/list of activities

APRIL—JUNE

- Refocus on academics, finish strong: Grades, AP and IB exams, less focus on college work during this time
- Possible SAT/ACT
- Meet with counselor to share updates on college list

- Speak to teachers about letters of rec, ask if they are willing, what they need from you
- Shore up summer plans

■ **EARLY SUMMER 11/12**

- Start some productive activity
- Put finishing touches on college list (with additional research)
- Summer campus visits are not recommended except for campuses with significant summer enrollment of traditional college students.
- Start outreach (demonstrated interest activity) for your colleges
- Complete resume/activity list
- Possibly resume SAT/ACT prep

■ **JUNE/JULY 11/12**

- Complete basic sections on Common App, other applications that are open
- Write personal statement and/or other important essays (such as for in-state publics) with available prompts
- Research Early Decision/Early Action/rolling admission options

for your colleges, start considering application timing

- Plan fall campus visits
- Look for college interview opportunities, start scheduling them
- Consider those beyond teachers for possible letters of recommendation

■ **AUGUST 11/12**

- Create organizational structure for application work and timeline—spreadsheets, etc.
- Intensive application work, most applications and essay prompts are available by 8/1. Complete as many essays and application activity charts as possible.
- Note that some applications may be submitted as early as August.
- Develop family plans/agreements about how/when college work will be discussed and monitored.
- Continue scheduling interviews, if available

12TH GRADE

BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- Start strong in your classes, meet with teachers as necessary
- Meet with counselor to finalize list and review personal statement and other important essays; make sure they are aware of your earliest application deadlines
- Continue to read everything sent out by the college guidance office, attend all required meetings.
- Learn/understand how transcripts and letters will be submitted and whose responsibility it is
- Keep your counselor up to date through means they outline (software, emails, meetings, etc.)
- Continue application work
- Continue planning and doing interviews
- Possible campus visits
- Possible SAT/ACT
- Attend available college fairs, local college events, and admission rep visits or virtual meetings for your high school
- Follow up with teachers writing your letters, see if they need anything from you, make sure they are aware of your earliest application deadlines

• **Parents:** Prepare to complete financial aid applications (FAFSA, CSS), research submission deadlines for each college

OCTOBER TO JANUARY

- Complete and submit college applications. The majority of Early Decision and Early Action applications are due 11/1 or 11/15, and most Early Decision 2 and regular applications are due in early to mid-January, but this can all vary widely.
- **Parents:** Complete and submit financial aid applications. The forms become available on October 1st, and may be due as early as November 1st.
- Research if/how colleges require SAT/ACT scores delivered to them, send according to their instructions
- Follow up on transcript and teacher/counselor letter submissions if necessary

- Attend available college fairs, local college events, admission reps visits or virtual events for your high school
- If admitted Early Decision, withdraw applications from all other schools
- If deferred from Early Decision or Early Action, respond if appropriate
- Keep your grades up
- Research residential options and housing application deadlines for any colleges that do not guarantee housing

AFTER APPLICATIONS ARE SUBMITTED

- Create portal accounts for each college, if available, check for additional tasks, uploads or submissions, monitor application completion
- Continue demonstrated interest activities and communication with admissions reps until decisions are received
- Consider applying for independent scholarships
- Keep grades up
- Possible campus visits, including

special events for admitted students, to prepare to choose college by May 1st

AFTER CAMPUS IS CHOSEN

- For those needing learning disability or other support services, connect with appropriate campus offices.
- Take all possible AP and IB exams, send scores to college once received (July)
- Watch all communication from the college closely for admitted student events, housing and course registration, orientation events and opportunities
- Thank you notes/gifts for counselor and recommendation letter writers
- Parents: Submit FAFSA to the chosen college after you have paid the enrollment deposit if you did not apply for need-based aid, but want to apply for federal loans. (Let the financial aid office know why you are submitting at this time.)
- Meet with your counselor
- Make a study plan for any AP exams that will take place in May, starting by meeting with teachers and getting their guidance

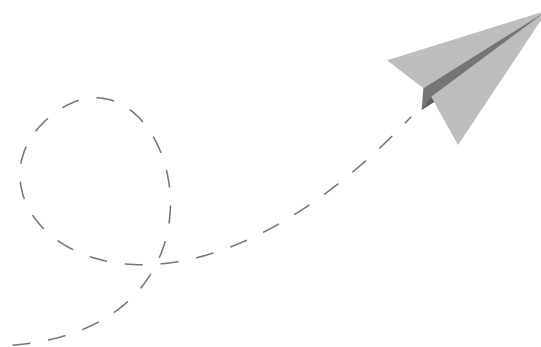
- **Parents:** Note that January 1st of your child's sophomore year is the beginning of the base year on which financial aid calculations for the first year of college will be based. The base year runs from January of the student's sophomore year to December of their junior year.

PRO-TIPS FOR PARENT

- 1. Ideally, the student should be in the driver's seat for as much of the college process as possible, but your help and support will be needed throughout.** In addition to the items on the timeline that are highlighted as parent responsibilities, here are a few ideas to help you identify where your help will be most beneficial.
- 2. You know your kid better than anyone.** Students are all different, both in their development and their engagement with the college process, so it is normal that some will require more parent involvement and some will need less, so the first recommendation is to adapt and adjust as needed based on your child.
- 3. Be involved in any part of the process that involves money.** Make it clear to your student which decisions will be driven by finances, and what the ground rules are for parts of the process with associated costs. This includes not only the cost of attending college and how that affects the college list, but also costs for tutoring, test prep and testing fees, application fees, visiting colleges, travel to and from campuses once enrolled, and others.
- 4. Be your child's prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is not fully developed in teens, but that is so crucial in making complex plans and decisions.** As you look through the items on the timeline, you will probably recognize which ones will require you to act as a sounding board or a manager. This could include anything from encouraging them to connect with teachers and counselors and to try new activities, to helping them think out loud about their priorities as they develop their college lists, to planning travel for campus visits, to setting up spreadsheets and schedules or other structures for completing applications over time rather than at the last minute. They are likely to need your support for any high-level reflection or any process that involves careful curation, whether of their own priorities or the college list itself
- 5. Nothing has to be perfect.** Not the college list, the essays and applications, the transcript, the grades, the test scores, the activity list--none of it! Colleges are

looking for real students who present themselves as authentically as possible, and no one was ever denied admission for a minor typo. Please resist the temptation to be too hands-on, especially with the essays. Admissions officers can spot a sentence written by someone over forty right away, and that will not help your student's chances. Remember that colleges need kids, so as long as the college list is well-balanced and fits the student, everything just has to be "good enough."

6. **It is still the student's journey.** Do what is truly necessary to support your child, but then stand back as much as you can. Students need to feel that the major decisions are theirs, and that what is being expressed in the applications is theirs. (In fact, they have to sign a statement attesting to the latter.) The more they are empowered in the process, the more likely they are to take ownership of the journey itself, and the more likely they are to be invested in their success, wherever they end up.
7. **Don't forget to enjoy the journey.** This does not have to be terribly stressful. At its best, college planning can be a joyful journey of self-discovery, and include some memorable parent-child moments you will cherish. It is more likely to play out this way if your teen starts the process early enough, and works on it a little bit almost every week starting in the middle of 11th grade. Anything you can do to support a calm, thoughtful, little-bit-at-a-time process will increase the chances that you and your teen can appreciate the growth it can facilitate, and savor the surprising moments of joy you may discover along the way.



Grown and Flown is the #1 site for parents with teens in high school and college.
Contact us at grownandflown@gmail.com | www.grownandflown.com

This timeline is a general guide and will not cover every student or circumstance. As circumstances change some information may become obsolete. By Stephanie Meade from [Collegiate Edge](#)

