

Countdown to College Checklist

Grades 8 – 12

Keep the following in mind when planning:

- Develop and maintain good study habits.
- Learn how to plan effectively.
- Get into the habit of saving money.
- Ask questions when you need to—of parents, teachers and guidance counselors.

Grade 8

_____ Confirm with your parents that you have a Social Security Number; if you do not, apply for one. To get an application, call 800-772-1213.

_____ Get involved in extracurricular activities which can add value to college applications.

_____ Extracurricular activities also help you figure out what you like and dislike.

_____ Think about jobs your parents and other adults you know have. Ask them what a typical work day is like. Does this sound interesting to you?

_____ Talk to your older brothers or sisters (or your friends' older brothers or sisters) who are attending college, vocational or technical school. Ask them what they like and don't like.

_____ Find out what high school courses may help you gain acceptance to certain colleges or career fields.

Grade 9

_____ Discuss your high school courses, your likes and dislikes, and what you may like to study in the future with your guidance counselor.

_____ Have your guidance counselor or trusted faculty member explain SAT preparation to you.

_____ Discuss college, and financing college, with your parents.

_____ Find out about summer jobs and what skills you need to get one.

_____ Look into volunteer activities that will expand your experience and skills.

Grade 10

_____ Begin to look at college catalogs and financial aid materials. Citizens Bank's Upward Bound Guide offers an overview of the financial aid process.

_____ Prepare for and take the PSAT in October, in preparation for the SAT.

_____ Discuss high school course selections with your guidance counselor and parents to ensure they meet your college/career interests.

_____ Continue to talk with your parents about your college plans.

_____ Evaluate your past summer experiences and determine your plan for the upcoming summer.

Grade 11: Fall/Winter

_____ Ensure your coursework meets high school graduation and college admissions requirements.

_____ In preparation for the SAT, take the PSAT. This also establishes your eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship competition, the National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students, and/or the National Hispanic Scholar Awards Program.

_____ Discuss your PSAT scores with your guidance counselor, trusted faculty and parents.

_____ Continue to talk with your parents about your future plans including financial aid.

_____ Decide what criteria you are looking for in a college or university. Develop a list of possible schools you are interested in attending. Your guidance office and/or school library may have books and computer materials to help you. Search College Scope, our national database of colleges and universities, offering links to several school websites.

_____ Attend college and/or career fairs in your school, community or region.

_____ Attend sessions with college representatives who visit your high school.

_____ Research college majors or vocational areas that correspond with your abilities and interests.

_____ Begin researching sources of financial aid and scholarships you may be eligible for.

Grade 11: Spring

_____ If you are interested in a military academy or an ROTC scholarship, begin the application process.

_____ Take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or the ACT (Achievement Test); check with your guidance counselor about the appropriate one.

_____ If the schools you are considering require achievement tests, take them in May or June, while the course material is still fresh in your mind.

_____ Visit the schools that are high on your list, when the school is in session so you can talk to students and professors as well as admissions. Make an appointment to speak to the financial aid office.

_____ Check with your guidance counselor, the school library, and the public library about possible scholarship sources.

_____ Develop a resume; include all work and activity experience.

_____ If portfolios, audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talent are required for admission or for scholarships, begin to put these items together.

_____ Apply for a summer job.

_____ Think about saving a portion of your summer earnings for college tuition, spending money or both.

Grade 11: Summer

_____ Request applications from schools you plan to apply to.

_____ If seeking an athletic scholarship, make contact with the coaches at schools of your interest; include a resume listing accomplishments.

_____ Write letters requesting applications from any private scholarship sources you have identified.

_____ Visit the schools that interest you the most, if you have not done so already.

Grade 12: Fall

_____ Make sure your coursework meets high school graduation and college admissions requirements and is appropriate for college/career interests.

_____ Talk to your guidance counselor about your plans for college; evaluate those plans in light of your SAT/ACT scores and high school grades.

_____ Discuss financial aid possibilities for in a conference with your guidance counselor and your parents.

_____ Request application materials for admissions and financial aid from schools of interest, if you have not done so already.

_____ If requesting Early Action or Early Decision college admission, be sure to submit application materials by the deadline.

_____ Visit the schools you are seriously considering to confirm your top choices. Make arrangements in advance for a personal interview with an admissions counselor, a financial aid administrator, and a professor in the academic department representing your intended major. Stay overnight, if possible.

_____ Depending on your SAT or ACT scores, discuss re-taking with your guidance counselor

_____ Be aware of admission and financial aid application deadlines and meet them. **Don't procrastinate.** Keep accurate record of all applications and supporting materials you submit.

_____ Be aware of application deadlines for private scholarships and keep records of your applications and letters.

_____ Devote time, energy, and thought to writing and re-writing any required essays.

_____ Give recommendation forms to teachers, counselors, and other persons from whom you are seeking a reference at least a month before they are due to be returned; include a stamped, addressed envelope. Follow-up with your references to make sure they have remembered to send them.

_____ If seeking appointment to a military academy, make sure your file is current and in the possession of the persons or organizations from whom you are seeking a nomination.

_____ If seeking an athletic scholarship, send a copy of your game schedule to the appropriate coaches; ask your high school coaches about contacts they may have.

_____ If portfolios, audition tapes, writing samples, or other evidence of talent are required for admission or for scholarships, finalize them.

Grade 12: Winter

_____ Submit your family's financial information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on or as soon after January 1 as possible. Your guidance counselor can tell you if the schools you are applying to require additional financial aid forms.

_____ Apply for state financial aid; your guidance counselor can tell you whether your state requires information in addition to the FAFSA.

_____ If the financial aid processor requests additional financial information in order to process your application, submit it promptly.

_____ Confirm that all school admissions application materials, including recommendations, have been sent on schedule.

_____ Request that your high school send a copy of your transcript, including first semester senior grades to schools you've applied to.

_____ Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) for accuracy. If necessary, correct inaccurate items on the SAR and return it to the FAFSA processor. If you had a college transmit your FAFSA data directly to the CPS, you must notify the school of any changes or corrections. When a corrected SAR is returned to you, review it once more and then if correct, place all parts of the SAR in your financial aid file.

_____ If the school requests your SAR, submit it promptly. Do this even if the SAR says you are *not* eligible to receive a Federal Pell Grant, as the school may be able to offer you other aid based on the information in that report.

_____ If the schools you are applying to require additional application forms for financial aid or request copies of your family's income tax returns for verification, submit them immediately.

_____ Continue to seek and apply for private scholarships.

Grade 12: Spring

_____ Make your final decision about which college you will attend. Notify the college of your choice in writing by the appropriate deadline. Decline, in writing, other offers of admission (other students may be waiting for that place in the freshman class).

_____ Review your financial aid award letter with your parents; be sure that you understand the terms and conditions that apply to each type of aid offered.

_____ Sign your financial aid award letter and any other items requiring your signature and return them. Schedule an appointment with the school's financial aid administrator if you have questions or wish to discuss the contents of your award letter. If a personal visit is not possible, call the financial aid office and ask for an extension of time so that you can make up your mind.

_____ Notify the financial aid office if you receive any outside scholarships, grants, or other kinds of student aid.

_____ If you have received financial aid award letters from schools whose offers of enrollment or aid you have decided to decline, notify the aid office in writing (other students who wish to attend that school will need the aid).

_____ Complete separate application forms for any loan funds that require such application; understand all of your rights and responsibilities *before* you and/or your parents sign a promissory note.

_____ Arrange with the school for housing and a meal plan, if necessary.

_____ Understand when tuition, fees and room and board are actually due. Be sure you understand how your financial aid will be disbursed and whether you can defer bill payment until the funds are available.

_____ Be aware of any summer orientation sessions that you must attend at the chosen school and make plans accordingly.

_____ Apply for a summer job.

Graduate From High School!

_____ Continue to talk with your family about college expenses that financial aid will not cover. Investigate tuition payment plans that the school may offer or accept.

_____ Make a plan for saving a portion of your summer earnings.

_____ Prepare a proposed budget for your freshman year in college—see our Student Financial Success Guide which includes an interactive budget worksheet.

_____ If a Federal Work Study opportunity is part of your aid package, remember that it may be your responsibility to find an appropriate job. You will need to follow up with the financial aid office as soon as you arrive on campus.

_____ Return any additional materials your school requires on time.