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## Part IV

### High School Year by Year

*This section will tell you what you need to do at each grade level to be prepared for college. If you have a question or concern, contact your counselor.*

## 8th Grade

### Getting Ready for High School

*Make college your goal, and work hard to achieve that goal!*

Sometimes when an eighth grade student takes an advanced course, such as Algebra I, credit is given and the grades are included in the student's GPA. As a general rule, however, the grades you receive in the eighth grade are not used in computing your GPA, nor do they appear on your high school transcript. The eighth grade, nevertheless, is an important year for these reasons.

- ▶ The grades earned are often used to determine ninth grade course placement. For example, a student may need an A or B in eighth grade math to be eligible to take Algebra I as a freshman.
- ▶ Students who develop good study skills in middle school are much better prepared for high school.
- ▶ Eighth grade students usually select their freshman courses in the spring. Spring is also a good time to develop a four-year high school plan. *It is very important that you start your high school career taking courses that will put you on the path to college.*
- ▶ Students involved in activities have greater academic success and enjoy school more. Also, colleges look for students who are active and involved. With these things in mind, try to identify some high school activities that you might enjoy.

# 9th Grade

## What You Need to Do as a Freshman

*When you become a freshman, everything starts to “count.” All of your freshman courses, grades, and credits will be on your transcript, and your freshman grades will be used in determining your GPA. Freshman activities, honors, and awards can also be listed on college and scholarship applications.*

### **Work hard to get good grades**

It’s important to get your high school career off to a good start. Set academic goals at the beginning of each grading period and work hard to achieve your goals. *Remember, your freshman grades will be on your transcript, and these grades will be figured into your GPA.*



### **Become involved in activities**

Most college and scholarship applications ask students to list their high school activities. Many applications also ask for evidence of leadership. Get involved in meaningful activities and take a leadership role whenever possible. Depth of involvement (being on the debate or soccer team for four years) is also important because it shows focus and commitment.

Participate in activities outside of school (scouting, athletics, church) and do some volunteer work. Community service, such as volunteering for Habitat for Humanity or the Red Cross, is very worthwhile, and it’s impressive on any application.

*Colleges today are looking for quality, not quantity.* Find a subject, activity, or hobby that you like and develop that interest.

*Tip: During your freshman year, start an “Activities Record.” Include all school and community activities, leadership positions, honors, awards, unique educational experiences, employment, and volunteer work. Update this record at least once a year. When you are a senior and need to list your activities and honors on college applications, this information will be very helpful.*

## Select appropriate 10th grade courses

In the spring, review your four-year high school plan with your counselor and your parents, and select the most appropriate courses for your sophomore year.

## Plan meaningful summer activities

Read, develop a hobby, take a course, join a team, and/or volunteer at an animal shelter, hospital, or nursing home. Many colleges also have excellent summer programs for high school students.

## Be careful with your Internet use

Do not post anything on MySpace or Facebook that you wouldn't want a college admissions officer to see. *Admissions officers do check these sites.*



## Start a college savings account

If you haven't started saving for college yet, begin now. Also, encourage your parents to look into 529 plans. For information on these plans, go to [www.savingforcollege.com](http://www.savingforcollege.com).

# 10th Grade

## What You Need to Do as a Sophomore

*Take college prep courses and work hard to get the best grades possible. Start thinking about your aptitudes, interests, and abilities, and look for opportunities to further develop your talents and skills.*

## Work hard to get the best grades possible

## Get involved in activities

Find meaningful activities to be involved in, both in and out of school.

## **Take the PLAN, if it's offered at your school**

The PLAN is a test that measures the same academic skills as the ACT (English, Math, Reading, and Science). Students receive an “estimated ACT score range” and an evaluation of their skills and interests.

## **Consider taking the PSAT/NMSQT**

This test is primarily for juniors, but many sophomores take it for practice. *For information, see page 7.*



## **Explore and discuss college options**

Gather information, go to college fairs, and make informal visits to colleges.

## **Select appropriate 11th grade courses**

In the spring, review your four-year high school plan with your parents and your counselor. Select the most appropriate courses for your junior year.

## **Consider dual-credit courses**

Many high schools now have programs that enable students to take courses for both high school and college credit. These courses give students the opportunity to take a wide variety of advanced courses. For information on dual-credit courses, talk to your counselor.

## **Plan summer activities**

Choose meaningful activities for the summer months. If possible, look for activities that relate to a career you might be interested in considering.

## **Update your “Activities Record”**

Make sure that all sophomore activities, awards, etc. are added to your “Activities Record.” Also start saving copies of anything you may want to include in a portfolio (artwork, writing samples, game tapes, newspaper clippings, etc.).

## **Add money to your college savings account**

# 11th Grade

## What You Need to Do as a Junior

*The junior year is when you should seriously begin examining your college options. This is also the year when you should take college tests, make college visits, and start searching for scholarships.*

### **Work hard to get the best grades possible**

You'll probably fill out college applications in the fall of your senior year. This means that your junior grades will be the last grades on your transcript. It is important that you do as well as possible your junior year. *Colleges like to see improvement, so if your grades haven't been as good as they should be, now is the time to bring them up.*

In the fall, go over your academic record with your counselor and find out what your GPA and class rank are.

### **Continue to be involved in activities**

Be involved in meaningful activities, and seek out leadership positions.

### **Register for the PSAT/NMSQT in September**

All college bound juniors should take the PSAT in October. See your counselor for information on how to register for this test.

### **Explore your college options**

Think about what you're looking for in a college, and learn as much as you can about the colleges you are considering. Talk to your parents and counselor about your college options.

### **Register for the ACT and/or SAT**

All college bound students should take the ACT and/or SAT in the spring of their junior year.

### **Make college visits**

The junior year is a great time to make college visits. *For tips on what to do on a college visit, go to page 13.*



## **Select senior year courses**

Make sure that your senior courses fulfill all high school graduation requirements, the requirements for the college(s) you're considering, and if necessary, the requirements for athletic eligibility. If you have any questions, see your counselor.

All colleges recommend that seniors continue to follow a strong academic program, and most college applications ask students to list their senior courses. Even though you may want to "take it easy" your senior year, you need to continue taking academic courses.

*Tip: College freshmen are often required to take a math placement test before they register for classes. To keep your math skills sharp, take a math course your senior year.*

## **Look for scholarships**

Students who are hoping to get a scholarship should start looking for scholarship possibilities as a junior.

## **Update your "Activities Record"**



## **In the spring, meet with your counselor**

Go over your academic record and discuss your college plans.

## **Choose meaningful activities for the summer**

Try to get a job or do some volunteer work in a field related to your intended major.

## **Narrow your list of college choices**

Research and visit colleges over the summer. Have your list narrowed down to four or five colleges by your senior year.

## **Establish an e-mail address**

Since colleges often communicate via e-mail, you need to have an appropriate, permanent e-mail address.

## **Continue to put money in your college savings account**

To get an idea of what kind of financial aid you may be eligible for, go to [www.FAFSA4caster.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA4caster.ed.gov).

# 12th Grade

## What You Need to Do as a Senior

*During your senior year, clarify your goals, set priorities, and stay focused. Remember that your parents and your counselor are available to help and support you.*

### **Continue to work hard to get good grades**

You may have heard that your senior grades are not important. This is not true. Colleges often ask to see first semester senior grades, and at the end of the year, your high school will forward your final transcript (with your senior grades) to the college you plan to attend.

### **Turn your “Activities Record” into a resume**

A one-page resume listing your educational goals, GPA, class rank, activities, achievements, unique experiences, etc. can be very helpful to anyone writing a recommendation. This resume can also be given to college admissions officers when making a college visit.

### **Set up a calendar for the year**

Use this calendar to record test dates, college visitation days, application deadlines, etc.



### **Sign up for the first ACT or SAT, if necessary**

Take a look at your previous test scores and determine whether or not you need to take the ACT and/or SAT in October. If you want to take the October ACT or SAT, you need to register early in September.

Colleges view test scores differently. Some colleges are looking for very high test scores. Other colleges use ACT and SAT scores more for course placement than admissions. If you're interested in a competitive college or program, or if you're trying to get a scholarship, having high test scores can be very important. For advice on whether you should retake the ACT and/or SAT, talk to your high school counselor or call the college admissions office.

## Complete college applications

You should know which colleges you want to apply to by the fall of your senior year. As a senior, you can then concentrate on completing college applications, retaking the ACT and/or SAT, doing well in your senior classes, and enjoying the experience of being a senior.

All colleges have admissions information and applications on their website, and high school guidance offices generally have applications for the colleges their students most often attend.

College applications usually require a high school transcript, and most have sections for your counselor to complete. *Make sure that you follow your school's procedures for submitting applications, requesting transcripts, and getting the required forms completed.*

High school counselors have many responsibilities and numerous applications to complete between October and February. Make sure that you give your counselor plenty of time to complete the required documents (e.g., forms, transcripts, recommendations).

*Tip: Apply to at least one "safety school." This is a college to which you are certain to be accepted and one you can afford.*

*Tip: Keep a copy of each completed application for your files. Be sure to note the date it was submitted.*

*Tip: Colleges usually contact students to let them know they've received their application. If you don't hear from a college, contact the admissions office to make sure they have everything they need.*

## Complete financial aid and scholarship forms

If you are applying for financial aid, have your parents complete the FAFSA and submit it as soon after January 1 as possible. *See page 25 for information on financial aid.*



## Make the decision

At some point in the spring, you must decide which college to attend. *Do not choose a college before making a college visit.* Once the decision is made, complete the necessary forms, and as a courtesy, notify the other colleges. If you are planning to live on campus, be sure to send in the required housing deposit before the deadline.