



**12th Grade**

**Student Guidebook**



Dear Seniors,

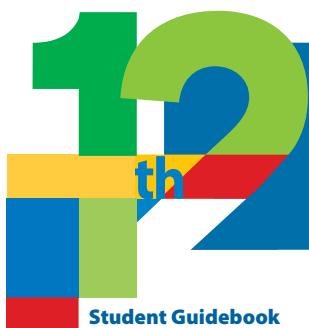
Congratulations! This is your last year of high school and you have a lot to be proud of. Think of all the tests you've studied for, the homework you've worked hard on, and the friends you've made.

You've done a lot, but there's still more to do. In addition to taking stock of your accomplishments, senior year is about finishing high school strong—and building a solid foundation for your future, whatever that might be. So, keep working.

Regardless of how you feel about this being your final year (nervous, excited, worried, eager, or a little of all these), know that you have what it takes to succeed, this year and in the years to come.

Seth Rockman





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# run (don't crawl) to the finish line

There's a word for the feeling high school seniors have when they believe they've done everything they need to do—so now they can just coast through their senior year.

it's called  
"senioritis"

Actually, if you've worked hard your first three years maintaining a high GPA and participating in extracurriculars, you might be in a position to have a slightly lighter schedule this year. But senioritis is more than taking an easy elective in place of a more difficult class—it's neglecting your responsibilities and your schoolwork.

Senioritis can be dangerous. If you stop working too soon, or if you start acting as if the rules no longer apply to you, it can cause all sorts of problems for you.



**Your best strategy is to “run to the finish line.”**

Don't stop too soon. Get to graduation. Keep being the same hard-working, motivated, goal-oriented person that got you this far.

**Is it okay to enjoy yourself? Absolutely. Go to the games.  
Go to prom. Have fun with your friends.**

But is it okay to enjoy yourself so much that you start developing bad habits and neglecting your responsibilities? **Definitely not.**

# keep on top of it all



**Think about how busy you were these past three years. Well, get ready, because this year's going to be a lot busier.**

In addition to dealing with homework, activities, jobs, friends, and family, this year you also have to think about graduation requirements, college and/or job applications, and your impending adulthood. Not stressful at all, right?

**Being organized is the only way to keep on top of it all.**

## **Here's your senior organization checklist.**

- ▶ **Use a planner every day** to make sure that you don't forget anything—homework assignments, appointments and practices, work schedules, application deadlines, etc.
- ▶ **Make a To-Do list** each day and prioritize your tasks.
- ▶ **Schedule an appointment** with your counselor to make sure that you're on track to graduate, and to also talk about what you need to do this year to prepare for your career and/or college (e.g., take the ACT or SAT, complete applications, apply for financial aid).

**If you have questions about your high school record, or about what you should be doing this year, see your counselor. Your counselor can help you with any questions or concerns you may have.**

# plan for your future



## As graduation approaches, people will be asking, “What are you going to do after you graduate?”

Maybe you already know what you’re going to do after high school. If you do, that’s great. Just be sure to discuss your plans with your parents and counselor to make sure there isn’t something important you haven’t considered.

**If you aren’t sure what you’re going to do after high school,** now is the time to seriously consider your career and education options. Talk to your teachers, parents, and counselor. Also, do some online research. For career information, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is a good place to start ([www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh)). For up-to-date college information, check out [bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org).

**Career exploration is a journey** that evolves and branches off in different directions—sometimes in directions you’d never expect. Just remember that no career path is permanent or irreversible. *Make your career and education choices based on who you are today, but know that you can always choose a different path in the future.*

**Most careers today require education and/or training beyond high school. Which of these options will best help you prepare for your career: 4-year college, 2-year college, career/trade school, the military, an apprenticeship?**

# choose your own path

**You certainly want to listen to the advice of those you love and respect. However, this is your life and your future.**

Don't base your future plans on what others are doing. For instance, don't forgo your dream college because it's too far away from your boyfriend or girlfriend.

Similarly, understand that your dreams and your parents' dreams for you might be different. For example, they may want you to attend the college they went to, or perhaps they have some pretty strong opinions about what career you should choose.

If you and your parents have different visions for your future, do your research, share your thoughts and goals, and explain why you think the path you'd like to pursue is the right one for you. Be sure to also seriously consider your parents' thoughts and opinions, and know that they have your best interests at heart.

***In many ways, the trajectory of your life depends on the decisions you make now. Carefully consider your career and education options, and think about how you want to create your future.***



# your college to-do list

If you plan to go to college after high school, you've made a wise decision. But to make your college dreams a reality, there are a number of things you need to do this year.

Go through this To-Do list and think about each of the questions asked.

## 1. Get organized.

Do you have a master calendar to record test dates, college visits, and application deadlines? Do you have a college file for notes and copies of applications and essays?

## 2. Take college admission tests.

Do you need to take (or retake) the ACT or SAT? If so, when will you take it?

## 3. Decide where to apply.

If you haven't decided which colleges you want to apply to, do you have a list of colleges you're considering? Have you discussed your college options with your parents and school counselor?

## 4. Complete applications.

What are the deadlines for the colleges you're applying to? Are you interested in applying Early Action or Early Decision?

## 5. Make college visits.

Have you visited the college(s) you're considering? If so, do you need to revisit any of them? If not, when will you make your visits?





# paying for college

**Most students pay for college in a combination of ways (grants, loans, scholarships, savings, help from parents).**

If you haven't done so already, have a discussion with your parents about how your education will be paid for. If you determine that you need help paying for college, you can apply for financial aid.

**There's a great deal of financial aid available for students who qualify.** But to receive this aid, you and your parents must complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).

**Completing the FAFSA is very important!**

If you qualify for aid, the colleges you apply to will put together a financial aid package for you.

You can complete the FAFSA as early as October of your senior year. Since financial aid is often awarded on a first come, first served basis, the earlier the better. **For information and to complete the FAFSA online, go to [fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov).**

*This might all sound complicated, and it can be. But remember, your school counselor can guide you through the financial aid process and answer any questions you may have.*

## Three Ways to Cut College Costs

You can save a lot of money by doing the following:

1. Attend a public college in your home state
2. Live at home and commute
3. Start at a community college, and later transfer to a 4-year college

# up your skills

## basic life skills

Many students graduate from high school without some basic life skills—which can make things harder than they need to be. Whether you're going to be living in a dorm next year, in an apartment with friends, or staying right where you are, you need to know how to take care of yourself.

### During this year, learn how to do the following:

- ▶ cook some simple dishes. (You can't live on pizza and Pop Tarts forever.)
- ▶ maintain a checking account; pay bills; and use debit cards, ATMs, and credit cards wisely.
- ▶ set up a budget—so you'll be able to afford the necessities (food, rent, clothes, and utilities) and still have money for fun.
- ▶ do your own laundry, iron your own clothes, and do basic sewing.
- ▶ take care of a car (i.e., schedule regular maintenance, check tire pressure)
- ▶ deal with insurance. Make sure you understand what your car and health insurance do and don't cover.
- ▶ maintain a calendar of important dates, events, appointments, and deadlines—so you aren't depending on others to make sure you do what you need to do.



*But perhaps the most important thing for you to be able to do is to ask for help. If you aren't sure how to do something, asking for help is often the most "adult" thing you can do.*



# social skills

In addition to developing the skills you need to take care of yourself, use this year to also polish up your social skills. Soon you will be interacting with co-workers, bosses, and/or professors, and you want to be able to present yourself well.

## Work on the following now so that when you graduate, you will be ready to meet any challenge.

- ▶ Expand your social circle and practice being fully present whenever you're with others. Get comfortable meeting and talking to lots of different kinds of people.
- ▶ Work on being a good communicator. Try to clearly articulate your thoughts, feelings, and opinions—and look people in the eye when you speak to them.
- ▶ Improve your body language. Stand tall, sit up straight, and have body posture that shows confidence.
- ▶ Practice being a good listener. Put your phone away, and listen—really listen—to what others are saying.
- ▶ Have good manners, and show respect to everyone, regardless of age, gender, or race.

*According to recent surveys, employers are looking for people with soft skills. The skills they value most are leadership, communication, collaboration, and time management.*



# be healthy and stay safe!

When it comes to being told to stay safe, be healthy, and say no to alcohol and drugs, you've undoubtedly heard it all before. But this message bears repeating, because it is very important!

**If you heed just one piece of advice this year, let it be this. Keep yourself safe and healthy.**



**Avoid alcohol.** Alcohol is dangerous. Whether it's drunk driving or binge drinking, alcohol is bad for your health and your relationships. And remember, if you've had any amount of alcohol to drink, you cannot drive. **Period.**

**Avoid drugs.** Like alcohol, all drugs (including tobacco and vaping) are bad for your health and your relationships. Drug use can also get in the way of getting into the college or career field of your choice. It just isn't worth it.

**Think for yourself.** If anyone pressures you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable or that's unsafe, don't do it. You always have a choice.

**Take care of your mind and body.** Make sure you get enough sleep (8-9 hours a night), eat healthy, and exercise regularly.

**At your age, it's normal to feel invincible. But you're not. Your health and well-being (and your future) depend on you making good choices today.**

# manage stress

Whether you're feeling unsure about your plans after high school, pressure to finish high school strong, or anxious about leaving home, you're likely to have some stress this year—and you need to have a healthy way to deal with it.



## When you're feeling stressed...

- 1.** Talk to your friends and family. Talking helps you sort things out, and others may be able to offer suggestions, give you a new perspective, or just be someone to listen.
- 2.** Do whatever has helped you feel calm and relaxed in the past—take a hot bath, read a book, play with a pet, listen to music.
- 3.** Make a list of the things that stress you out. Then figure out which ones are changeable, and change them—either by dropping them completely or by changing the way you approach them.
- 4.** Practice deep breathing. Find a comfortable place to sit, close your eyes, relax your body, and breathe in deeply, counting to four. On four, release your breath. Repeat.

**There's no shame in feeling stressed out as the "next phase" of your life approaches. Figuring out how to effectively handle stress now is a skill that will help you for the rest of your life.**

*If stress, anxiety, or depression are ever interfering with your sleep, schoolwork, or relationships, talk to your parents or counselor. They can help.*

# expand your comfort zone

**Once you got used to high school life, there probably weren't too many surprises. You learned the ropes, developed routines, and knew what to expect.**

But high school is almost over, which means you will soon be entering a whole new world that will challenge you in brand new ways. There will be times when you're in totally new surroundings, and times when you're completely out of your comfort zone.

Whether this excites or scares you (or a little of both), know that you have what it takes to survive and thrive in unfamiliar situations and surroundings. And as you grow and have more experiences, you will find that you feel more confident in new situations.

**This is why, during your last year of high school, you should...**

**push yourself to have  
new experiences**

**Visit new places. Meet new people. Have different kinds of conversations. Do things on your own.**

**As you experience new things, it can sometimes feel like you're in over your head. Just know that this is normal. Also know that being able to adapt to new situations will give you the confidence to tackle new challenges in the future.**

# be someone you can be proud of

**Think about the people you respect.**

What are the qualities they possess?

Are they: **Trustworthy?** **Kind?**  
**Reliable?** **Hardworking?** **Organized?**

Now think about some of the people you don't respect as much, and think about the qualities they possess.

Are they: **Rude?** **Ungrateful?**  
**Impatient?** **Lazy?** **Unreliable?**

**Now think to yourself: What kind of person am I?**

The truth is, there are a lot of things that will happen in your life that you can't control. But the one thing you do have complete control over is the kind of adult you become.

Every day this year, practice displaying the qualities that you respect in others. Be the kind of person you would respect if you met at a job or in college.

**If you consistently demonstrate the qualities you respect and admire in others, you are much more likely to fulfill your potential, realize your dreams, and have the kind of life you want to have.**



# 12

**12th** Grade

**Student Guidebook**

**This booklet is filled with helpful tips and expert advice on how you can have a great senior year!**



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