

4-year High School Plan for College

The following is a four-year plan to keep students and parents on track for college admission. It is never too early to begin planning and setting the foundation for your post-secondary education.

FRESHMAN YEAR

Grades are important. Colleges look at your grades from all four years of high school. Take one or two classes that are higher difficulty. However, don't bite off more than you can chew. Your goal should be to maintain grades in the A-B range.

Transition into high school can be difficult for some students. Don't drop a challenging class at the first sign of difficulty. The work-load usually levels out after the first few weeks. Difficult classes during a students' freshman and sophomore year will help them greatly with college admission tests.

Create a working resume that you can update regularly during your four years in high school. Many awards are given out during a student's senior year and they can't remember half of the things they participated in. Take time each grading period to revise the document and be as specific as possible. Include all sports, volunteering, activities, and clubs in and out of school. You will use this information for your National Honors Society application as well. It is easier to remember now so don't put it off!

Participate in a community service project and extra-curricular activities. Community service is an important component to awards, scholarships, and ultimately college admission. Get your feet wet with a service project you enjoy. You don't have to dedicate all of your spare time. This transition year is the time to try a variety of new things. Participating in extra-curricular activities is important as well. Being in as many clubs, sports, and academic teams as possible will not help your cause. Focus on one or two activities and try something new in the process.

Be organized. Take a lot of notes. Study hard. Developing a positive routine now will carry you through high school and make it more manageable.

Schedule some of your electives for this year. Fine arts, PE, and Health are usually required and this is a good time to take them. Take a couple of them now so you can fit more advanced courses in your schedule later. Taking a summer PE is also an option to free up your schedule during the academic year.

Academic camps are good for honing skills during the summer and provide a get-a-way for students. They aren't all academic and students have a lot of fun as well. Colleges like to see this type of dedication over the summer.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

Build upon what you started your freshman year. Schedule challenging classes once again. Try to increase your GPA, but don't take easy classes to do it. Colleges like to see rigor and higher level classes and this will only help you score higher on the ACT and/or SAT.

Decide what electives you are going to be actively involved in before the year begins. Select things that compliment your interests.

Continue to volunteer and get community-service hours.

Update your high school resume.

Meet with your high school counselor to get your questions asked. They are a great resource.

If you haven't begun taking a foreign language, sign up for one.

Start a "college" notebook. You'll begin to attend college fairs, get on mailing lists, and schools will send you a ton of material in the mail. Keep it organized in pockets or sections of a binder. At the very least, dedicate a box for the materials.

Take the PSAT. Use it as practice for standardized tests and getting a feel for the PSAT during your junior year.

Begin visiting colleges during your sophomore year and during the summer after. Try visiting schools close to home at first, then branch out to other colleges of interest. Attend a sports event or fine-arts performance on campus if you can to get a social feel for campus life and offerings.

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JUNIOR YEAR

Junior year usually is the most crucial year for grades. Since you will begin applying for college admission in the fall of your senior year, your transcript may not include your GPA for the first semester of your senior year. Maintain a strong GPA and/or raise it to achievable standards. If you begin to notice any signs of struggling, get a tutor.

Your formal college search begins. Get well-acquainted with your high school counselor. Research colleges, go on campus tours, and ask people you know about their experiences at particular schools. By spring, narrow down your possible college choices to five or six. Do not put off your visits until the last minute. Make time for it!

In the fall, take the PSAT.

In the spring, take the SAT and/or the ACT. Then plan to take one or both again in September. Plan on taking the one you feel most comfortable with one last time in October. One or two points can translate to thousands of dollars in merit based aid.

Sign up for an AP class. Colleges look for rigor!

Get your extracurricular and community-service time in, but don't overload yourself. That's easy to do junior year, because you're climbing the ladder of leadership in clubs you've been involved in since sophomore or freshman year.

Meet with your high school counselor to get your questions asked and talk college/careers. They are an excellent resource.

Start reading about different majors and careers. Courses of study offered may play a big role in your college decision.

Start to think about financial aid for college. Don't be afraid to ask your parents how they plan to pay for college, or how much financial aid they think you'll need. The Web site www.collegeboard.com has a great financial-aid calculator. Talking about financial aid now will get both of you on the same page and make the college admission process easier.

Update your high school resume.

SENIOR YEAR

Take the SAT or ACT again in September and/or October.

Schedule an AP class.

Write your resume. Include current service activities, employment, and honors/awards you have earned throughout high school. Make a copy for your school counselor and select teachers for letters of recommendation.

Start applying to a maximum of 5/6 colleges. All of this can be done online. Get them filled out as early - but also as thoroughly - as possible. Devote a weekend early in the year strictly to filling out applications. Take some time to write your essays and utilize an English teacher for feedback. Do not put this off and miss deadlines. See your school counselor for help along the way.

Apply for scholarships. Check out the Guidance Office and the high school website as well. The colleges you apply for may have a separate application for scholarship opportunities. Contact the individual college admission offices or their websites.

Once you get accepted, start looking at your college's schedule. There will be separate deadlines for financial aid, enrollment and tuition payments. Keep track of these dates.

Take Math, Science, English and Social Studies classes this year. Colleges love to see core classes and not easy electives. Every college will ask for your senior schedule and current grades. Don't get senioritis!