

Getting Ready for College: A Grade-By-Grade Guide

College admissions causes a lot of angst among parents and their teenagers. No surprise when the media narrative around college admissions tends to focus on how hard it is to get into college.

Your Teen Will Get Admitted to College

Let's start with the competitiveness of college admissions. There's no denying that there are a handful of colleges that are very difficult to get into, even for the most qualified students. These include the Ivy League and similarly-ranked institutions.

What you might now know, however, is that 80 percent of colleges ranked by U.S. News and World Report accept more than 50 percent of their applicants.

"A mistake that families make is having more anxiety than necessary about this process," says Cecilia Castellano, vice provost for strategic enrollment planning at Bowling Green State University.

A Good Fit is the Key

Indeed, there are many excellent colleges and universities at which your student can thrive. Experts stress that instead of focusing on name brand, shift your attention to finding schools that are a great fit for your student—academically, socially, and financially.

"Among college counselors, there is a famous saying: 'College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won,'" notes Terry McCue, a former high school college counselor and now a senior associate dean of admissions for Kenyon College. "This is not about a bumper sticker or whether your family and friends will recognize the name of the school. It's about finding a school that's a good match for your teenager. A place where she can thrive and reach her goals."

At the end of the day, says Castellano, families across the United States are successfully launching their students into college each and every year—and so can you. "Millions of people apply to college every year. As long as your list has a variety of schools, your student is going to go to college," she notes. "Just follow the directions, fill in the information, submit a good essay, meet the deadlines, and the process will happen."

9th Grade

Welcome to high school, where everything counts. Here's what to think about this year:

- **Transition to high school**

It can be hard for some students to make the transition to high school. If your student stumbles, don't worry too much. Colleges like to see students who show growth during these years.

- **Academics**

Understand how colleges will scrutinize your teenager's academic record (in other words, their transcript). Encourage your teenager to take courses that are challenging, but in which he can also do well. Keep reading!

- **Extracurriculars**

Let your teenager pick one or two extracurriculars they're passionate about. Packing a resume full of extracurriculars to impress an admissions office is not necessary, and not effective.



10th Grade

By sophomore year, colleges want to see that students have gained their footing in high school. Things to focus on this year:

- **Maintain a solid academic record (or get on track academically)**
Colleges like to see consistency. If you didn't have a great freshman year, the next best thing is to show academic improvement sophomore year.
- **Continue with one or two extracurricular activities (or find ones to start).**
Colleges like to see a few years of commitment to an activity.
- **Expect admissions testing to officially begin.**
Your student will take the PSAT or the Aspire or both.

11th Grade

Welcome to junior year, the heart of the admissions process. This is the most important—and stressful—year of your teenager's high school career. Here's what to expect:

- **Test scores on record**
While tests taken during sophomore year are for you and your teenager's eyes only, in junior year they count. Most juniors sit for the SAT or the ACT or both in the spring. Often, students will take their test a second time senior year.
- **Academics**
Junior year is in many ways the most important year on your teenager's transcript. Especially if your teenager applies to college early—deadlines are November of senior year—these grades will be a major focus of the admissions staff.
- **Start to build a college list**
This is the year to start to determine which colleges are going to be the right fit for your teenager. Carefully selecting schools that match your teenager's academic, social, and financial needs will be well worth the effort. Part of this process should include campus visits.
- **The essay**
At many high schools, students write their essays in English class. If that's the case at your teenager's school, lucky you. If not, your teen should wait no later than the summer before senior year to get started. Don't rush this part of the application.

12th Grade

Get ready. It's time to fill out applications! Help your teenager put their best foot forward (no spelling or grammatical errors, please), but do not do the application for them. Trust us when we say the admissions staff can tell. Encourage your teenager to submit all materials on time. Once your teenager clicks submit, it's time to kick back and wait.

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