

## Parent Action Plan: Your COLLEGE BOUND Senior

Where did the years go? In the blink of an eye, it seems, your freshman turned into a senior, and is now knee-deep in the college application process. Perhaps the most important advice you can give your child when entering senior year is that it really does count! Contrary to popular belief, senior grades do matter even after you've gotten into the college of your choice. So, don't let your high schooler catch senioritis. Especially important this year is staying organized and meeting application deadlines.

### Summer before senior year

- [Visit college campuses](#) with your high schooler. Call ahead for tour and open house schedules.
- If your child is planning to take the SAT in the fall, he should [register online](#) now.
- Discuss different [college majors](#) with your child that relate to his interests and career goals.
- To help your child start thinking about life after high school, access MyRoad™. Your child will take MyRoad's questionnaire to get a detailed report on his personality type. Then MyRoad will connect him to in-depth information on careers and majors that are right for him. [Learn about MyRoad](#).
- By the end of summer, your child should narrow his [college list](#) to five to eight schools. The list should include "safety" schools as well as "reach" and "match" schools.
- Help your child prepare drafts of [application essays](#) for his target schools.
- If your child plans on competing in Division I or Division II college sports and wants to be eligible to be recruited by colleges, he/she must register with the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse.
- Together with your child, mark a calendar with important application and financial aid dates and deadlines for senior year. Start planning for dates and deadlines with the [College Application Calendar](#) and the [Financial Aid Calendar](#).

### September

- Your child may opt to take the SAT® again to aim for higher scores. Help her [register online](#) for fall tests.
- Your child should request applications, brochures, and financial aid information from the admissions offices of the colleges to which she's applying.
- Make [campus visits](#) to as many of the colleges on your child's list as possible this fall. To get a feel for the campus, encourage your child to talk to students, take a tour, sit in on a class and try to stay overnight in a dorm. Be sure to schedule an [admissions interview](#) and meet with a financial aid officer. [Review admissions requirements for each college](#).
- Help your child review admissions requirements for each college to which she's applying. You can do this online with [College Search](#). She should check in with her counselor to review her transcript and confirm that she's meeting all the required academic and testing requirements. If necessary, she should adjust her course schedule. She should also talk to her counselor about financial aid options and local scholarships.
- Have your child request application materials for targeted scholarships and grants, and confirm that she meets the eligibility requirements for each program.

### October

- [My College List](#) can help your child manage her list of schools online, compare them side-by-side at a glance, and track requirements and her application for each college.

- It's time for your child to ask teachers, counselors, coaches, and other mentors to write [recommendation letters](#).
- Is your child applying [early decision or early action](#)? If so, be careful to meet all application deadlines. Most fall in October or November.
- Your child should work on [college application essays](#).
- Some colleges and scholarship programs require the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE® application. Visit [PROFILE Online](#) to learn more and to submit your application online. Get help [tackling the PROFILE](#).
- Encourage your child to use our [Scholarship Search](#) and to ask counselors about local scholarships.

## November

- Encourage your child to practice [college interviews](#) with trusted family members or friends.
- Review your child's completed school and scholarship applications and essays to make sure they're error-free and clear. You may want to have another person review them, too. Note that many scholarship application deadlines are in December.

## December

- Your child should complete and send in [college applications](#) and scholarship applications this month.
- Get a copy of the Free Application of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or, after January 1, complete the FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Get help [tackling the FAFSA](#).
- Male students who will be 18 at the time they complete the FAFSA must register with Selective Service.
- Have your child [send SAT scores](#) online to the colleges on her list. **Advise your child to avoid senioritis and stay focused.**

## January

- Submit the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. Complete the FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).
- Colleges like to see strong second semester grades, so advise your child to [avoid senioritis](#).

## February

- Most priority financial aid deadlines fall in February. Complete the necessary aid forms, including FAFSA and [CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE](#). Keep copies of everything that you send.
- About four weeks after mailing in your child's FAFSA, you'll receive the Student Aid Report (SAR). Review it for accuracy.
- Attend a Financial Aid Night with your child at a school in your area.

## March

- Encourage your child to start looking for a summer opportunity—either a [job](#), [internship](#), or [volunteer opportunity](#). Real-world experience can give your child a preview of careers in which she's interested. This may help her to focus her studies in college and when she's selecting a major.

## April

- Most admission decisions and financial aid award letters arrive this month. You and your child should read each carefully, and note all reply deadlines.
- Review financial aid packages. Use the [Compare Your Aid Awards](#) tool to do a side-by-side comparison.
- Send the enrollment form and deposit check to the college your child will attend.
- Your child should notify the other colleges to which she was accepted of her decision.
- [If waitlisted](#) by a college, encourage your child to contact the admission director to reiterate her interest in the school. Use [College Search to find colleges whose deadlines haven't passed](#).
- [If not admitted](#) to any of the colleges to which she applied, your child should see her counselor immediately. Use [College Search](#) to find colleges whose application deadlines haven't passed.
- Your child should concentrate on studying for May AP<sup>®</sup>Exams. She can earn credit or advanced placement at many colleges with a qualifying grade. Visit the [AP Prep Center](#).

## May

- AP Exams are administered the first two weeks in May. Your child should have her scores sent to her final-choice college.
- If it will be difficult for your family to pay the Expected Family Contribution for the semester, it's time to start pursuing alternatives such as parent loans or private loans to close the financial aid gap.
- Taking [SAT Subject Tests™](#) may enable your child to place out of freshman academic requirements or help placement in advanced classes.
- Have your child send thank-you notes to teachers and other mentors who wrote recommendations.

## Summer

- A final transcript should be sent to your child's college.
- Encourage your child to finalize summer plans.
- Have your child send thank-you notes to scholarship programs that have given her aid.
- Notify the financial aid office of your child's college about any scholarships she's been offered.
- Give your child a chance to relax and enjoy herself this summer. She's earned it!
- Help your child [start packing](#).

## FOR PARENTS...

### Ten Questions to Ask Before Choosing a College

Melissa Bearns

"If there's one mistake my students make [when choosing a college], it's not listening to their parents," says Bruce Hammond, director of college counseling at Sandia Preparatory School in Albuquerque, N.M., contributing editor to the *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* and author of *Discounts and Deals at the Nation's 360 Best Colleges*.

Parents can often balance the excitement students feel about leaving home with the knowledge that building a life in a new environment is difficult. They see the personal and extracurricular connections a student will need to be happy and successful in their college environment.

When considering a college for their student, parents should take into consideration these questions that are frequently overlooked in the decision-making process.

**#1: Are they your student's kind of people? Will your student find a place he or she fits in?**

That was a key question for Catherine, a third-year student at the University of Dallas. "I wanted a tight community," she says. "I wanted somewhere I could build a strong foundation for myself."

Does your child require a close-knit student community, or are they most excited by the possibilities of a very large student body? Are they looking to connect with peers from a similar background, or do they desire a diverse group of students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds? You know your child best; assess their needs, personality and comfort level.

**#2: Is the office of residential life accessible to the students? Can students switch if they get a terrible roommate, and how long does that process take?**

Students eat, hang out and study in their rooms, and it needs to be a place where they feel comfortable. If the student faces tension or arguments in their rooms, it may cause their grades and social development to suffer.

**#3: What is the ratio of residential/live-in counselors to students? How many hours a day are they required to be available to the students? How are they chosen and by what criteria are they evaluated?**

Residential advisers (RAs) are the first line of defense in ensuring your child's physical and emotional health. They should be trained to spot signs of trouble such as depression, tension among students and eating disorders, and they should know basic first aid. They should also be people that students feel comfortable with.

**#4: What are the hours at the student health clinic? What about 24-hour emergency care? What does the college's health insurance cover, and are pre-existing conditions included in the coverage?**

Get the answers before taking your son or daughter off your own insurance.

**#5: What kind of psychological counseling or support groups are available? What resources are available for students dealing with stress or emotionally difficult situations?**

During the college years, students often have some big issues to deal with. Find out who will be there when you're far away.

**#6: What is the crime rate on campus?**

The Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 requires all colleges and universities to produce an annual report of their safety and security procedures, as well as statistics relating to criminal offenses reported to the police. Request a copy and read it.

**#7: Does the school provide student escorts to accompany students walking home late at night?**

Students sometimes have evening classes or study sessions. Make sure that the college or university offers some way for students to get home safely after a long night at the library. If they don't, it could be a sign that the school doesn't take the necessary measures to ensure students' safety and welfare.

**#8: What is the average increase in tuition and when are tuition increases next expected? Does the school have provisions to help students and parents cover the increases?**

By asking these questions, you can plan your finances appropriately and not be hit with unpleasant surprises.

**#9: Can you pick your academic advisor? How do current students feel about the advising system?**

Students often change majors several times. A good advisor can help a student plan their classes, make career-planning decisions and graduate on time.

"I didn't expect to have my hand held," says Kristan Lunardini, 21, a senior at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "But I never realized I'd be totally on my own. Like, there's this timetable and requirements, they're always changing, and there's no one to help you figure it out."

**#10: How competitive is the school and is it an environment your son or daughter can handle?**

Too much stress can cause illness and depression, lead to poor performance and even cause students to drop out. Talk to current students at the school. Ask them how many all-nighters they pulled last semester. Ask them to rate the level of competitiveness on a scale of 1 to 10. Do they have time for themselves? Do they spend their weekends in the library?

A competitive school isn't necessarily bad and can often inspire students to further achievement. The important thing is to ask whether it's the kind of environment in which your child thrives.

Choosing the right college can be one of the most important decisions a student makes, and can set the foundation for their post-graduate success. Help your student make an informed decision that will lead to an enriching and enjoyable college experience.