

COLLEGE RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

(Some documents are duplicated in the student resources)



Resources are courtesy of College Board [<https://www.collegeboard.org/>]

Naviance is also a great resource for non-biased factual information about
Colleges / Universities

<https://student.naviance.com/tuscarorahi>

Working with Families

Counselors work with families at every point on the spectrum of awareness of college requirements. Some families need to be encouraged to view their children as college material and to support them in the course work they choose; others have high expectations for their children and may have goals that do not mesh with their children's own goals and talents.

COLLEGE: THE BIG PICTURE

- Many colleges have increased their admission requirements in recent years.
- There is more competition for space in selective and in-state public colleges.
- Most schools are more selective than they were 10 years ago.
- Colleges are receiving more applications.
- Students feel more pressure going through the application process.

EXPLAINING ADMISSION FACTORS

To help families develop a more realistic view of how their child matches up with other applicants at a college, you can explain some of the factors that selective colleges consider in making admission decisions:

- courses taken
- grade point average
- rank in class
- college entrance exam results
- activities outside the classroom
- intended major
- special talents and skills
- geographic residency
- alumnus relationship (if any)

TIP

"It's good to use historical data from the college to show the student what that college has decided with students of a similar background. Directories that show acceptance rates and mid-50 percent test scores are helpful. It's best to wait until the fall of senior year to discuss this, because things can change over the summer between junior and senior years."

**— Teri Tippitt,
The Kinkaid School, Texas**

Tips for Families on Finding a Great College

How can your child find colleges that match specific needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

SIZE OF STUDENT BODY

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps they are considering a small department within a large school. Your child should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

LOCATION

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps an urban environment is preferred, with access

to museums, ethnic restaurants, or major league ball games. Or maybe it's easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

If your child has decided on a field of study, they can research the reputation of academic departments by talking to people in their field of interest. If your child is undecided, as many students are, they may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those

students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus.

In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

CAMPUS LIFE

Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

COST

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. Because of financial aid, most students pay less than the “sticker price,” so don’t rule out a college that would be a good fit for your child before you find out how much financial

aid it will offer. Most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

DIVERSITY

Your child should explore what the advantages of a diverse student body would be. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the student body can help

students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

One of the best ways to measure a school’s quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who

go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

Finding the Perfect College

Most students want to find the “perfect” college. The truth is, there’s no such thing. You can find many colleges where you can be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.

BEFORE SEARCHING, CONSIDER THESE **8 FACTORS**

Size	Location
Available majors and classes	Available extracurricular activities
Distance from home	Makeup of the student body
Housing options	Campus atmosphere

Questions to consider:

- Which of these aspects are things you feel you must have to be comfortable at a college?
- On which factors are you flexible?
- What do you want to accomplish in college?
- Do you want to train for a specific job or get a wide-ranging education?
- If you have a major in mind, do the colleges you are considering specialize in that major?

Bigfuture.collegeboard.org is a great option to sort through the many options out there, based on your preferences.

Here are steps you can take to find colleges where you will thrive.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Although it's good to have some ideas in mind about what sorts of colleges will be good for you, stay open to all the possibilities at the beginning of your search.

TALK TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU

Tell family, teachers, relatives, friends, and your school counselor about your goals, and ask if they can suggest colleges that may be a good fit for you.

DON'T LIMIT YOUR SEARCH

At the start of this process, you may rule out colleges because you think that they are too expensive or too hard to get into, but this may not be the reality. Remember that financial aid can make college more affordable, and colleges look at more than just grades and test scores.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Once you have a list of schools, it's time to do some research. To learn more about the colleges you're considering, check out college guidebooks and websites.

Jot down your questions and get answers by:

- Talking to your school counselor or teachers
- Checking out colleges' student blogs, if available
- Contacting college admission officials
- Asking admission officials to recommend current students or recent graduates with whom you can have conversations
- Visiting college campuses or viewing virtual college tours, if possible

GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAMPUS VISIT IN 6 STEPS

1 DECIDE WHERE AND HOW

See if your school arranges group trips to colleges or if you could get a group of friends together and visit the campus. A family trip is another option and allows you to involve your family in the process.

2 PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Before you set out, get a map of the college campus and pick out places of interest. Call the college's admission office to schedule a guided tour of the campus.

3 TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR

Just wandering around the campus on your own or with friends can be the best way to get a feel for what a college is like.

4 EXPLORE THE FACILITIES

Finding the spots on campus where students gather or asking a student where the best place to eat is can give you a feel for the character of the college. Visit the library and check out the gym or theater. Ask an admission officer if you can tour a dorm and a classroom.

5 MAKE CONNECTIONS

Talk to current students. Ask the students at the next table or sitting nearby what they like best about the college.

6 TAKE NOTES

During your visit, write down some notes about your experience. What did you see that excited you? Are there aspects of the college that you don't like? If so, what are they?

Questions to Ask During Your Visit:

ASK TOUR GUIDES/STUDENTS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- What's it like to go from high school to college?
- What do you do in your free time? On the weekends?
- What do you love about this college?
- What do you wish you could change about this college?
- Why did you choose this college?
- What is it like to live here?
- What does the college do to promote student involvement in campus groups, extracurricular activities, or volunteerism?

ASK PROFESSORS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- Can a student be mentored by professors, graduate students, or upperclassmen?
- How are professors rated by the college? Does the college think mentoring and meetings for project guidance are important?
- How does the college help students have access to professors outside class? Do professors join students for lunch, help with community service groups, or guide student organizations?
- How many students do research or other kinds of projects for a semester or more?

ASK FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- How much has your total college cost for each student risen in the past year?
- How much do your students usually owe in loans when they graduate?
- What is the average income of graduates who had the same major that interests me?
- Will my costs go up when your tuition goes up, or can we use the same tuition rate I started with so I'll know the costs for four years? What should I expect in terms of increases in living expenses?
- How many students usually graduate in the major that interests me? How long do these students usually take to get their degrees? In what ways does the college help students graduate in four years?

Family Action Plan: 11th Grade

Junior year usually marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to support your child and give him or her the best options.

SUMMER

- **Get the facts about what college costs.** You may be surprised by how affordable higher education can be. Start by reading [Understanding College Costs](#).
- **Explore financial aid options.** These include grants and scholarships, loans, and work-study programs that can help pay for college costs. Find out more about how [financial aid can make college affordable](#).

FALL

- **Make sure your child meets with the school counselor.** This meeting is especially important this year as your 11th-grader starts to engage in the college application process. Learn more about the [counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Help your child stay organized.** Work with your 11th-grader to make weekly or monthly to-do lists to keep on top of the tasks required to get ready for applying to colleges. For more time management tips, see [8 Ways to Take Control of Your Time](#).
- **Help your junior get ready for the PSAT/NMSQT® in October.** This is a preliminary test that helps students practice for the SAT® and assess their academic skills. Juniors who score well on the test are also eligible for scholarship opportunities. Find out more about the [PSAT/NMSQT](#).
- **Encourage your child to set goals for the school year.** Working toward specific goals helps your high school student stay motivated and focused.
- **Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 11th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the [AP Program](#).

WINTER

- **Review PSAT/NMSQT results together** by logging in to the [student score reporting portal](#). Your child's score report shows what they should work on to get ready for college; lists Advanced Placement® courses that might be a good match for them; and connects them to [free, personalized SAT practice](#) on Khan Academy® based on their results.
- **Help your child prepare for the SAT.** Many juniors take the SAT in the spring so they can get a head start on planning for college. See [which other tests](#) your high school junior may need to take.
- **Discuss taking challenging courses next year.** Taking AP honors courses or college-level courses like Advanced Placement as a senior can help your child prepare for college work — and these are also the courses that college admission officers like to see. Learn more about [advanced classes](#).

SPRING

- **Search together for colleges that meet your child's needs.** Once you have an idea of the qualities your child is looking for in a college, help him or her enter these criteria into **College Search** to create a list of colleges to which he or she should consider applying.
- **Help your child research scholarships.** This form of financial aid provides money for college that doesn't need to be repaid. Learn more through the BigFuture's **Scholarship Search**.
- **Attend college fairs and financial aid events.** These events allow you to meet with college representatives and get answers to questions. Your child can ask the school counselor how to find events in your area. Check out the **College Fair Checklist** for more information.
- **Help your child make summer plans.** Summer is a great time to explore interests and learn new skills — and colleges look for students who pursue meaningful summer activities. Help your high school student look into **summer learning programs** or find a job or internship.
- **Visit colleges together.** Make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the **Campus Visit Checklist** to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- Remind your child, if they are a student-athlete, to ask the school counselor at the end of the year to send or upload their transcript to the NCAA Eligibility Center. If your child took classes at more than one high school or program, an official transcript must be submitted for each school.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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Family Action Plan: 12th Grade

Senior year is a whirlwind of activities. This is a big year for your child as he or she balances schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and the college application process. Use the suggestions below to help you and your child successfully navigate this important time.

SUMMER

- **Visit colleges together.** If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the **Campus Visit Checklist** to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- **Ask how you can help your senior finalize a college list.** You can help him or her choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets his or her needs, for example. Find out more about **how to finalize a college list**.
- **Find out a college's actual cost.** Once your 12th-grader has a list of a few colleges he or she is interested in, use the **Net Price Calculator** together to determine the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost — or net price — of each college.
- **Encourage your child to get started on applications.** He or she can get the easy stuff out of the way now by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible. Read about **how to get started on applications**.
- **Help your child decide about applying early.** If your senior is set on going to a certain college, he or she should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November. Read about the pros and cons of **applying early**.
- **Gather financial documents.** To apply for most financial aid, your child will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). You'll need your tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens Oct. 1.

FALL

- **Encourage your child to meet with the school counselor.** This year, he or she will work with the counselor to complete and submit college applications. Learn more about the **counselor's role in applying to college**.
- **Create a calendar with your child.** This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in **College Search**. If your child saves colleges to a list there, he or she can get a custom online calendar that shows those colleges' deadlines.
- **Help your child prepare for college admission tests.** Many seniors retake college admission tests, such as the SAT®, in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th-grader **prepare for admission tests**.
- **Help your child find and apply for scholarships.** He or she can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor. Your high school student will need to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about **scholarships**.
- **Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 12th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the **AP Program**.

FALL (CONTINUED)

- **Offer to look over your senior's college applications.** But remember that this is your child's work so remain in the role of adviser and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
- **Fill out the FAFSA to apply for aid beginning Oct. 1.** The government and many colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to award aid. Now it's easier than ever to fill out this form because you can automatically transfer your tax information online from the IRS to the FAFSA. Read **How to Complete the FAFSA** to learn more.
- **Complete the CSS Profile™, if required.** If your child needs to submit the PROFILE to a college or scholarship program, be sure to find out the priority deadline and submit it by that date. Visit cssprofile.collegeboard.org.
- **Encourage your child to set up college interviews.** An interview is a great way for your child to learn more about a college and for a college to learn more about your child. Get an overview of the **interview process**.

WINTER

- **Work together to apply for financial aid.** Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges in which he or she is interested to find out what forms students must submit to apply for aid. Make sure he or she applies for aid by or before any stated deadlines. Funds are limited, so the earlier you apply, the better.
- **Learn about college loan options together.** Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high school student gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the **parent's role in borrowing money**.

SPRING

- **Help your child process college responses.** Once your child starts hearing back from colleges about admission and financial aid, he or she will need your support to decide what to do. Read about **how to choose a college**.
- **Review financial aid offers together.** Your 12th-grader will need your help to read through financial aid award letters and figure out which package works best. Be sure your child pays attention to and meets any deadlines for acceptance. Get more information on **financial aid awards**.
- **Help your child complete the paperwork to accept a college's offer of admittance.** Once your child has decided which college to attend, he or she will need to review the offer, accept that college's offer, mail a tuition deposit, and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's **next steps**.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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College Resources for Students and Families

GENERAL WEBSITES

- **Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours.** Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps, and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. campustours.com
- **BigFuture.** A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT® and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. collegeboard.org
- **eCampusTours.com.** Virtual tours of colleges. Useful for its 360-degree views of dorm rooms and other buildings. ecampustours.com
- **NCAA Eligibility Center.** Official NCAA website that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the *Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete*. ncaapublications.com
- **Peterson's Education Portal.** An all-purpose site including a college search, as well as information about summer programs, summer camps, and jobs. The site asks you to register before using some of the search engines and other resources, but there is no registration fee. There is a charge for some of the services provided. petersons.com
- **U.S. Department of Education.** The federal government's website is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. ed.gov

FINANCIAL AID WEBSITES

- **College Board.** A website that includes a scholarship search, a loan calculator, and an online application form for the CSS Profile™, which is required by some colleges. collegeboard.org
- **FAFSA® on the Web.** The website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. fafsa.ed.gov
- **Fastweb.** Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. fastweb.com
- **FinAid!** Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. finaid.org

BOOKS

Comprehensive objective directories

- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.
- *Four-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.
- *Two-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Subjective guides

- Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.
- Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin. Paperback 2014.
- Yale Daily News staff. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

FAQ: College Entrance Exams

GENERAL

What are college entrance exams? These tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready you are for college-level work. The SAT® and ACT are both accepted by nearly all colleges and universities.

Do all colleges require a college entrance exam as part of the application process? Most four-year institutions accept a college entrance exam score. Those that do not require these scores will indicate that in their admission policies. Providing your

score gives you the opportunity to strengthen your application.

How many times should a college entrance exam be taken? Most students take a college entrance exam twice—once in the spring of the junior year and once at the beginning of the senior year.

SCORES

How do colleges use test scores? They are used to apply a common standard for all students no matter where they went to high school. Colleges look at your test scores, along with your high school grades and courses, to see how well prepared you are for college-level work. Some colleges use these scores for scholarship eligibility and course placement. Check with your colleges to find out how test scores are used.

Does a college receive all scores from every college entrance exam you've taken? Some colleges will allow you to select which scores you would like considered for admission and others might have specific instructions about which scores get reported. This information, along with how they require them to be sent, will be included in their application guidelines.

PREPARING

What is the best way to prepare for a college entrance exam? The best way to prepare is to work hard both inside and outside the classroom. Take challenging courses, study hard, and read and write as much as you can.

What are other ways to prepare for the tests?

- Know what to expect. Being familiar with the test's format is the single best way to prepare for that test. Go to the testing organization's website to get familiar with the various test sections and the instructions for each part.
- Take preliminary tests. These tests (such as the PSAT™ 8/9, PSAT™ 10, and PSAT/NMSQT®) have the same format and question types as the admission tests. You can use your score reports to help identify specific areas you need to focus on.
- Practice, practice, practice. Students can use Official SAT Practice to practice for the SAT for free with a world-class platform offering personalized and instructional content. Using free practice tests from the testing organizations' websites, you can discover your strengths and weaknesses and learn how to manage your time wisely during the test.

The Anatomy of a College Application

In order to get your college application together, you need to gather many different pieces to give the admission team a glimpse into who you are. Be sure to stay organized and find out from your school counselor or principal which of these items you have to send and which items your high school will send.

APPLICATION

Application Forms

This is the most common first step required to show your interest in a college. It might require information and forms from your family. Both online and paper application forms are available, as well as services (such as The Common Application and the Coalition for College application) that let you complete one application for multiple schools. It is recommended that you apply online if possible, to avoid delays.

Application Fees

Fees vary, but generally it costs from \$40 to \$90 to apply to each college. Fees are nonrefundable. Many colleges offer fee waivers to students who can't afford to pay. If you need application fee waivers, speak with your school counselor or principal. If you used an SAT® fee waiver, you are automatically eligible for application fee waivers to over 2,000 colleges.

SCORES AND REPORTS

College Entrance Exam Scores

Some colleges require that you send your scores from a college entrance exam (such as the SAT®). Many colleges will only accept scores that are sent directly from the testing organizations. Check with each college to verify whether they require test scores and their policy on receiving test scores.

High School Transcript

This is the record of the classes you have taken and your grades in each one. This is one of the most important parts of your application. Review your transcript for accuracy prior to completing your college application. Follow the procedure outlined by your high school for the submission of your transcript to your prospective colleges.

Secondary School Report

Some colleges require a Secondary School Report form to be completed by a high school official, usually a school counselor, with information about the school, the graduating class, and specific information about you. Your high school is responsible for sending this form to the college.

Midyear School Report

Much like the Secondary School Report, this form is submitted by your high school; it typically includes the fall semester grades of your senior year and updates to your spring semester schedule (if any apply). All colleges do not require this form.

LETTERS, ESSAYS, AND INTERVIEWS

Letters of Recommendation

Many colleges require letters of recommendation from teachers or other adults who know you well. Ask your references to write recommendations well in advance of the deadlines. It is helpful to give them a short written summary of your achievements and goals to help them write about you.

Essays

Many colleges require an essay or a personal statement as part of your application. Your essay is a chance for you to give admission officers a better idea of your character and strengths. Your essay should be drafted well in advance of the application deadline to ensure adequate time for review and revision.

Interviews, Auditions, and Portfolios

It is a good idea to ask for an interview, even if it is optional. It shows you're serious and gives you a chance to connect with someone in the admission office. Even if a college is far away, you may be able to interview with a local alumnus. If you're applying to music, art, or theater programs, a college may want to see samples of your work as part of your application. This means you may need to audition, send portfolios, or submit videos demonstrating your artistic ability.

The College Essay

The college essay is your chance to use your voice to add to your college application. Many colleges require the essay as a way to hear from the student directly and to get a sense of who you are in your own words. It's a great opportunity to personalize your application beyond the grades, scores, and other information you've provided and can make a difference at decision time.

8 KEY POINTS THAT ADMISSION OFFICERS LOOK FOR:

- A command of the basics of good writing
- A direct answer to the essay question
- A strong opening paragraph that captures the reader's interest
- A comprehensive argument or narrative—make your point and stick to it
- A style that is comfortable for you and that is appropriate for the subject matter
- Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Correct data—check your facts, dates, and names
- Succinctness—pay attention to the recommended length

WHAT THE ESSAY CAN DO FOR YOUR APPLICATION:

- Demonstrate your writing ability, a key component of success in college.
- Show that you have thought carefully about where you are applying and why you are a good match for the college, in your own words.
- Explain your commitment to learning and that you are willing and able to be a contributing member to the college community.
- Draw distinctions between you and other applicants, something that selective colleges especially rely on.

An essay will rarely take an applicant out of consideration at a college, but it certainly can elevate an applicant in an admission committee's eyes.

MAKE IT PERSONAL:

- Often you will be asked to write about a personal experience, an achievement, or a person who has been significant to you. Go beyond the what or the who and dig into the how and the why.
- If you write about a trip or event, describe how this experience affected you and is meaningful to you.
- If you are writing about a person in your life, be personal and specific, not just sentimental. Explain how or what this person did for you that is important to you.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Revise, revise, revise. Take the time to reread and revise. This process will help you develop a strong opening and a solid direction, and refine what you are trying to express.

Show, don't tell. Give readers such convincing evidence that they will come to the conclusion that you want. Provide detailed examples instead of providing a list of things.

Be authentic. Don't stress trying to write what you think they are looking for—just showcase who you are!

Just get started! Writing something meaningful can be a long process, so get started right away to allow for time to draft and revise. Be sure to write your essay long before the deadline.

For Families: Financial Aid Tips

College is usually more affordable than many families think, thanks to financial aid. The tips below can help you navigate the financial aid process and get the most money possible for college.

Create your Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID

(username and password). You can do this by the end of your child's junior year. This is an easy step and one of the few that you can complete early in the financial aid application process. For the most up-to-date information, visit the federal student aid website at studentaid.gov.

Attend a financial aid presentation at your local high school or college fair. Learning about the financial aid process as early as possible is very helpful.

Ask financial aid questions when you visit a college campus. Ask the school representative if it's possible to visit the institution's financial aid office (if necessary, call ahead to make an appointment).

Ask financial aid representatives about cost medians instead of only looking at a college's published cost.

Complete the college's supplemental financial aid forms or the CSS Profile® if the college to which your son or daughter is applying requires it. Visit cssprofile.collegeboard.org to complete your Profile. Also, remember that some institutions' financial aid and scholarship forms may have deadlines that are PRIOR to the college application form deadline.

Review forms and deadlines required by each college. Creating a chart or spreadsheet can be very helpful for keeping track of the different requirements and dates.

Fill out helpful worksheets prior to filing the FAFSA® at fafsa.gov.

When in doubt, ask a financial aid professional.

Call a financial aid office of any college in your area when you have a question, even if your son or daughter does not plan to attend that institution. Financial aid officers can answer many general questions and are happy to help.

Keep all tax records and documents up-to-date and handy when speaking with a financial aid officer. If your financial situation changes (health issues, loss of job, etc.), alert your financial aid officer immediately.

The FAFSA® application includes a feature called the Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) that allows you to transfer your tax return information to the FAFSA. Information is available on the FAFSA and IRS websites.

Look out for the Student Aid Report (SAR) that confirms you completed your FAFSA. It will provide your eligibility index for federal and state aid. If there are errors or incorrect information on the SAR, you can make corrections online.

Compare financial aid packages side by side. Using an award letter comparison tool will allow you to get a clearer picture of where your student's financial aid is coming from and will help you make a more informed decision. There is a "Compare Your Aid Awards" tool, along with other free tools, on the BigFuture® website, bigfuture.collegeboard.org.

Most important: When your child expresses an interest in a college, try to refrain from making your first question, "How much does it cost?" You can check on that later.

NCAA Eligibility Center

The NCAA Eligibility Center is responsible for certifying the academic and amateur status of all Division I and II incoming student-athletes. College-bound student-athletes can create an account with the Eligibility Center by visiting eligibilitycenter.org. We recommend that students register during their sophomore year of high school to ensure they have adequate time to confirm they are on track for meeting initial eligibility requirements.

Academic requirements for each college-bound student-athlete are based on the student's core-course grade point average and their coursework.

WHAT IS A CORE COURSE?

Core courses are those that are academic in nature, taught at or above your high school's regular academic level, receive credit toward high school graduation, and are four-year college preparatory courses. To be used in an academic certification, the courses need to be listed on the student's transcript with their grades and credits. Core courses must be in one of the following academic areas:

- English
- Math (Algebra 1 or higher)
- Natural/physical science
- Social science
- Foreign language
- Comparative religion or philosophy

DIVISION I ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Graduate from high school.
- Complete 16 core courses in the following areas:
 - ♦ English—four years
 - ♦ Math (Algebra 1 or higher)—three years
 - ♦ Natural/physical science (one year of lab if offered)—two years
 - ♦ Additional English, math, or natural/physical science—one year
 - ♦ Social science—two years
 - ♦ Additional courses (in any of the above subject areas or comparative religion or philosophy)—four years
- Complete 10 of the 16 core courses prior to the start of the seventh semester, including seven in English, math, or natural/physical science.
- Complete the 16 NCAA-approved core courses in eight academic semesters or four consecutive academic years from the beginning of ninth grade. If students graduate from high school early, they must still meet core-course requirements.

When Students Aren't Accepted

How to Help Students Handle Disappointments

Students who have not been accepted by a college rely on you for insight and direction on how to proceed with their college enrollment plans. Offer them the guidance they need to enroll successfully at a college that's a good fit.

ADVISING WAITLISTED STUDENTS

The seniors who discover that they've been waitlisted—neither accepted nor rejected—may present the biggest challenge. Do you give them hope and tell them to stay on the waitlist? Or do you advise them to move on?

The waitlist is the college's safety net: If a number of accepted students decide not to attend, the college can fill their spots. This way, the incoming class will still be at capacity. Most students who are accepted to a highly selective college will attend, so where does this leave the waitlisted student?

A student eager to attend a particular college may decide that it's worth the time, effort, and anxiety to stay on the list. Just make sure they know that fewer and fewer colleges are accepting applicants from their waitlists.

What you can do

Once your students have had a chance to come to terms with being waitlisted, take the following actions:

- Guide your students to focus on the real choices—the places that have sent acceptance letters.
- If your students **do** want to stay on the waitlist:
 - ♦ Explain that colleges usually don't admit from the waitlist until the May 1 decision deadline has passed.
 - ♦ Encourage the students to prepare to attend another college by completing the required forms and sending a deposit. (If a student is accepted from the waitlist and decides to attend the waitlist college, this deposit is forfeited.)

- ♦ Advise your students to write an email to the school with any additional information that will support their application. They should include that they plan to attend if accepted.
- ♦ You can submit a letter on behalf of your student, or they can ask a teacher to do so.

ADVISING REJECTED STUDENTS

In some ways, it's easier to help students who have been rejected outright. Although they have some decisions to make, they're not in a state of limbo. They know they have to seek an alternative to their first-choice college.

Understanding the decision

Admissions officers at selective colleges readily admit that as many as two-thirds of the students they reject are fully capable of succeeding academically at their institutions. Unfortunately, it's often a matter of too much demand for too few places. Understanding this reason for rejection can help students and their families better handle their disappointment.

What you can do

The following suggestions may help students handle a college rejection:

- Listen to them; let them vent and acknowledge their feelings of disappointment.
- Help them refocus by reminding them that it's not the college but the college experience that really matters.
- Point out that the experience they get at a different college that's a good fit may end up offering better opportunities.
- Explain that many factors other than what college a person attends lead to success in the real world.
- Lift their spirits by letting them know that you think the college that refused them is missing out on a great student.

- Explain that admissions trends are subject to variability and reflect institutional priorities; a rejection isn't a personal indictment.
- Be enthusiastic about the other colleges students have applied to, emphasizing that they, too, are good fits.
- Encourage students to consider offers they've received from other colleges and to select a college that excites them.
- Remind them that a focus on their academic work should continue into college.

Planning a transfer

Although you want your students to be excited about the college they end up choosing, remind them that they can try to transfer to the desired college after a year or two. Explain they can take steps now to make this easier. Advise them to:

- See if the desired college accepts transfer credits for courses taken at the college they'll attend.
- Be sure that the college they attend is a good fit academically.
- Enroll in courses in which they can excel.
- Take challenging courses.
- Work hard to get the best grades possible.
- Send updates of leadership opportunities and activities pursued.

The family's role

Let families know that it's OK for them to feel disappointment too, but they should keep their emotions in check. Help them to understand it's important to show their child support rather than their own feelings of anguish.

Resources

bigfuture.collegeboard.org

Students and families are provided a wealth of information regarding postsecondary education planning at this website. Topics range from the college search to the financial aid process. Videos from students and counseling professionals provide insightful advice.

sat.org

This website provides information regarding the SAT® Suite of Assessments. Included on the site are descriptions of the assessments, important dates, practice questions, and much more.

satpractice.org

Access free, world-class test practice for all students through Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®. Students can practice for the SAT using diagnostic quizzes, full-length practice tests, interactive problems, and personalized practice recommendations. Students will also receive instant feedback on their answers so they can see their progress and make the most of their study time.

studentaid.gov

This is the comprehensive U.S. government site that covers all information related to financial aid. It also has a "Prepare for College" section that details the financial benefits of attending college, explores career options, and provides academic and financial aid checklists.

collegeboard.org/counselors

In addition to providing registration links for our counselor workshops, this website also provides registration links for all webinars offered during the school year. The webinars are specifically designed for counselors and cover college advising topics such as the college application process, writing letters of recommendation, financial aid, advising special student populations, building your counseling program and leadership, and much more.

nacacnet.org

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is an organization of more than 14,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education. This site provides excellent resources for counseling professionals, students, and families.

schoolcounselor.org

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career, and social/emotional development so they can achieve success in school and be prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. ASCA provides professional development, publications, and other resources, research, and advocacy to professional school counselors around the globe.