

# Getting Ready for College Timeline

Help your child get ready for college by having him or her follow this timeline.

## Before and During High School

- Start saving for college as early as possible. Look into college savings plans available from your state. Visit [collegesavings.org](http://collegesavings.org) for more information.
- Build an academic portfolio. See Great Lakes' Guide to Academic Portfolios for more information.
- Do your best in school and establish good study skills. If you're getting stuck on a certain subject, ask for help from your teachers, coaches, counselors, and parents.
- Get involved in extracurricular activities. Although good grades are important, colleges look to see your involvement in other activities that fit your interests and goals.

## Ninth Grade

- Take challenging courses to meet DOE's regulation of a rigorous academic curriculum. Before graduating high school, plan to take:
  - 4 years of English
  - 3 years of Social Studies (History, Civics, Geography, Economics, etc)
  - 4 years of Math
  - 3–4 years of Science
  - To qualify for an Academic Competitiveness Grant, also take:
    - 3–4 years of a foreign language
    - One Advanced Placement, honors, or college-preparation course
- Stay involved in extracurricular activities
- Start thinking about how your talents and interests could lead to a career. Visit:
  - U.S. Dept. of Labor's Career InfoNet at [careerinfonet.org](http://careerinfonet.org).
  - Mapping Your Future's Careership at [mapping-your-future.org/features/careership](http://mapping-your-future.org/features/careership).
  - Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook at: [bls.gov/oco](http://bls.gov/oco).
- Keep your academic portfolio updated with report cards, awards, and examples of your best work. See Great Lakes' Guide to Academic Portfolios for assistance.

## Tenth Grade

- Continue to save money.
- Continue your rigorous curriculum.
- Continue extracurricular activities.
- Consider taking the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) or the PLAN exam, often called the "pre-ACT." See Great Lakes' Placement Test Preparer for more information.
- Update your academic portfolio. Be sure to include items such as:
  - Game tapes
  - Newspaper clippings
  - Awards
  - Artwork or photographs
  - School papers

## Eleventh Grade

### All Year

- Continue to save money.
- Continue your rigorous curriculum. Consider earning college credit by taking Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Postsecondary Enrollment Options, or College in Schools.
- Consider working or volunteering along with your extracurricular activities. Remember: leadership opportunities look great on college and scholarship applications!
- Add any new achievements to your academic portfolio.
- Attend college fairs and visits by college representatives to your high school.
- Attend financial aid nights.
- Research scholarships online or by talking to your counselor.
- Use Great Lakes' Personal Assessment Worksheet to prepare for completing essays for college and scholarship applications.
- Start researching colleges that offer degrees, specialties, and courses that might interest you. Try to narrow down the type of college you might want to attend: two-year, four-year, or technical; private or public; large or small; etc.
- Begin looking into financial aid opportunities. Start with the FAFSA4caster ([fafsa4caster.ed.gov](http://fafsa4caster.ed.gov)), which will provide you with an estimated Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and tell you if you're eligible for a Pell Grant.

### Fall

- Take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). Be sure to register in advance and give yourself time to prepare! There are many test preparation books and information available. Visit [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com) for more information, test dates, and practice materials.

### Spring

- Register for and take the ACT and SAT. Remember to prepare well before each test and register well in advance! For registration, test dates, and practice test materials, visit:
  - ACT: [actstudent.org](http://actstudent.org)
  - SAT: [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com)

### Summer

- Narrow down your list of colleges. If you can, visit the top schools on your list. Many colleges may offer virtual tours on their websites!
- Contact colleges to request information, admission applications, and deadlines for admission and financial aid. Inquire about their early-admission program and whether you might be interested in it.
- Start preparing for the application process. Draft your essays and select writing samples or other materials from your portfolio.
- Athletes should contact the college coaches for information about intercollegiate and intramural programs. Also, find out if there are any athletic scholarships available. Ask your coach to write a letter of recommendation.
- Apply for as many scholarships as you can! Every scholarship you receive is less money that you have to borrow and repay later with interest.

## Twelfth Grade

### All Year

- Continue taking challenging classes.
- Keep your grades up all year. Second-semester grades can affect scholarship applications.
- Update your academic portfolio with any new achievements.
- Stay involved in your extracurricular activities and leadership roles.
- Attend financial aid nights and college fairs.
- Meet with your school counselor. Make sure you're on track to graduate and fulfill college admission requirements.
- It's common to take the SAT, SAT II: Subject Test, or ACT twice. Register now to take them again.
- Ask your school counselor, teachers, and mentors to submit your transcript and letters of recommendation early. Complete Great Lakes' Letter of Recommendation Information Sheet to help them with completing letters for you.
- Apply to the colleges you've chosen. Most students apply to four to six colleges. Prepare your application carefully. Follow the instructions and make sure you meet the deadlines! Have someone read through your applications before you send them.
- Visit [pin.ed.gov](http://pin.ed.gov) to get your PIN to apply for federal student aid. Your parents must also apply for a PIN.

### Winter

- Encourage your parents to file their income tax returns early. Your parents can check for their eligibility for the Hope credit, lifetime learning credit, or other tax benefits.
- After January 1, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You can access the FAFSA online at [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov).
- When you receive your Student Aid Report (SAR)—usually about one to three weeks after you submit your FAFSA—make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor. Obtain a PIN ([pin.ed.gov](http://pin.ed.gov)) to make corrections and changes online.
- Continue applying for scholarships.

### Spring

- Visit colleges that have accepted you for enrollment.
- Compare financial aid packages of these schools carefully.
- Notify the school you've decided to attend and submit any financial deposits. The typical deadline is May 1. Notify in writing those colleges you will not be attending.

### Summer

- Continue applying for scholarships.
- Register for first semester classes.
- If you haven't done so yet, visit the school you will be attending.
- Sign your Master Promissory Note and attend entrance counseling when offered by your college if you have been awarded and plan to accept federal student loans.
- Attend orientation programs and other welcome activities.
- Talk to your roommate and plan your dorm room supplies!