



## **College Search Timeline 9th-12th Grade**

Finding the right college is a process. It takes time, commitment and a lot of soul searching. Give yourself the time in high school to discover your strengths and needs.

The college search process doesn't have to be stressful! Planning ahead, keeping track of deadlines and application requirements, and asking for help from a trusted adult (your guidance counselor/college advisor, a teacher, parent, older sibling, neighbor or friend) can help alleviate or minimize the stress.

Getting into the right college is about being true to yourself. Don't join clubs or sports to impress a college. Do things you love. Try new things. Commit to a sport or activity that gets you excited every time you do it! Your authenticity is what is most valued in the application process.

### **Some Advice**

Over the years, the best piece of advice I would have for students and parents is to ENJOY THE ROAD TRIP. Spending time with each other in this phase of life is not common. Days of carpools and dropping kids off at activities and school is obsolete. So spending time together in a car, train or plane while visiting campuses is priceless. Some of the best stories I hear from families include the fun they had talking in the car while finding their way to visitor parking at the admission office, sharing a meal at the diner next to campus, or watching movies at the hotel after a long day of tours and information sessions. You never know when you might spend this much time together again so savor it!

All colleges will start to sound similar. All tour guides walk backwards so they can talk to you. All campuses have blue lights for safety. Dining halls now serve vegan options. Many places have therapy dogs for finals. Most schools offer free shuttles to the airport for winter break. All schools tout their benefits. They all start to sound the same after 10 tours and information sessions. DETERMINE WHAT FEELS "RIGHT" TO YOU. And soon enough the list of pros at five of the ten schools you saw means your list is coming together.

### **Helpful Hints**

While there are many things to consider as you think about college, here are three helpful hints.

1. Person-Centered: find a place that “fits”. It’s like finding the perfect pair of jeans! Try on lots of them and find the school that feels right.
2. Prepare: take the classes that interest you, not the ones that you think colleges want to see. Find your path to success, starting at the end of 8th grade as you select your first high school classes.
3. Plan: Don’t wait until fall of your senior year to start thinking about college. Each year of high school you will ramp up to the application process as a senior.

## **The Timeline**

### **9th Grade**

- **Course planning.** Determine what courses you will take throughout high school. Are STEM courses of most interest? Then you may want to plan to be in AP biology or chemistry and AP Calculus by your senior year. Think ahead.
- Work hard. Starting high school by establishing strong study habits and developing time management skills can set you up for success throughout the next four years and beyond. Now is the time to set the tone for your success. Will you juggle your academic work and sports/music/drama/service/work well? What do you need to do to be confident in your efforts and do your best?
- Start to think about how you want to leave your mark in your school and community. You don’t need to have a resume yet but what types of things will you be recognized for when you graduate? Are you an athlete or a singer? Do you want to coach little league baseball and make the ensemble in your school’s musical? These types of activities will tell your story to a college.
- Students take a class, Changing Lives, “The Future Now: Assessing Interests, Strengths and Learning Styles”. This class is focused on helping students understand their personal interests and strengths and how to best approach class choices for the remainder of high school. Students interview professionals about their jobs, take personality and learning style assessments and understand what’s to come later in high school with regards to the college search.

### **10th Grade**

- This is the first time you will take the PSATs. Taking standardized tests is not exactly fun, but they establish a baseline for you to be compared with students across the country. Understanding how the test works and the types of questions that are included is a great way to be prepared for taking the SAT and ACT later. You can practice online too at [SAT Test Prep-Khan Academy](#) or [ACT Test Prep](#)
- Get to know YOU better. How do you learn best? What are your strengths as a student and person? Most schools use Naviance/Family Connection to help you find the right college. This software also has surveys and tools to help you identify your strengths and potential career interests. Knowing who you are will guide you on the path to the right college that “fits” you!

- You can Google anything and everything, including every college in the country! But don't get too carried away with the overwhelming amount of information that is out there. Start small. Take a virtual tour of a campus. Read about possible majors at state versus private schools. Just start looking at what is available out there. If you really want to be ahead of the game, look at schools in the Fiske Guide to Colleges. You can check it out at the library or your guidance/college advising office. Learning about the different types of colleges is a great way to dip your toe in the water before diving in! There are literally thousands of college search websites. Here is just one to get you started. <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>
- There are almost 4,000 universities in the U.S. which means you will find just the right place for you! Steer clear of rankings and think beyond "big names". There are plenty of hidden gems out there. Here is just a sampling of those options. <https://ctcl.org/>
- Talk to friends, cousins, neighbors, teachers and even...your parents! Many people you know have gone to college. Everyone loves to reminisce and share stories about their college days! Ask them what they liked. Going to football games and painting their faces the colors of their school? Studying abroad for a year in Spain? Meeting lifelong friends? Doing an internship in a big city one summer? Maybe their stories spark an interest in that school.

### 11th Grade

- Things will get busy this year in the college search process. This is where it really all happens! Get to know your guidance counselor/college advisor if you haven't! This person can be your guide in this journey. And he/she will write your letter of recommendation for college next year.
- Start using the college search features of Naviance Student. This is one stop shopping for career assessments, tracking college interests and communicating with your college advisor about your needs and criteria for college. It's also how all application materials from the school are sent to colleges. Transcripts, teacher recommendation letters, college advisor letter and the School Profile are all sent electronically (magically) through Naviance Student to colleges.
- You will take the PSAT one last time. Practice is great preparation for the SAT and ACT. You should take each of these tests one time between winter of your junior year and summer into your senior year. Ask your guidance counselor the right time for you. It's not the same for every student.
- Attend a college fair. It's a rite of passage! They are busy and full of smiling, suited up college admission counselors. Ask questions, don't just pick up colorful brochures. Every school looks nice in October with colorful leaves. Ask them for advice about the college process. They all have nuggets of information to share. And they are people people! Talk to them! Broadneck HS has a fair in the fall and AACC has a fair in the spring. There are also national fairs in DC and Baltimore each year.
- Determine your college criteria. Small or big? Close to home or across the country? Liberal arts or research 1? Do you need financial aid or scholarships? Do you need

support services? Want small or large classes?

<http://www.collegequest.com/things-to-consider-when-choosing-a-college.aspx>

- Develop a list of colleges to visit, consider and eventually apply to! Seek the advice of your guidance/college advisor or, based on your criteria and an online search engine, craft a list of schools. Ideally you would start with 15-20 schools this year to read about, explore and maybe visit some.
- Spend spring break or some weekends visiting colleges. Seeing a campus firsthand gives you the best perspective. Take a tour, attend an information session, walk around campus and explore the area. Talk to students, pick up a campus newspaper. You will feel right away whether or not it's a good option for you, just like those jeans!
- Take AP exams in May if you were enrolled in these classes. Are you planning to take more as a senior?
- Draft your resume. What else will it include during your senior year? Keep it to one page and a summary of all of your accomplishments.
- Enjoy this process! You should be learning so much about YOU!

## 12th Grade

- By now you should have a list of schools that you planning to apply to. Ideally, 7-9 colleges gives you space to apply to some "reach" schools, "realistic/likely" and "safety" schools.
- Attend college visits when admission counselors come to your high school. You have an opportunity to talk to them about your specific interests.
- Ask two teachers and your guidance counselor/college advisor to write your letters of recommendation. Select two teachers you have had junior and/or senior year. And two that know you well enough to speak to your accomplishments as well as your potential.
- Visit any campuses you haven't seen that are on your list. Need to talk to a coach? Want to interview? Need to see a lab or campus farm? This is your last chance to see schools before you get decisions back.
- Write your college essays. Edit. Edit. And edit again! Answer the question. Share your story. Don't try to "wow" the reader. Just be you.
- Complete your college applications. The Common Application <http://www.commonapp.org/plan-ahead> is used by 100s of schools. The Coalition Application is new and now is the UMD application venue. Determine if you are applying early decision, early action, regular or rolling.
- Take the SAT, SAT II, and/or ACT if needed, one more time. Do not over test! Taking each test once and then just one a second time is usually enough. Schools superscore so they combine the best score from all of your testing dates.
- Decisions. Once decisions come back from a college, the ball is back in your court! You get to decide what school is best for you! Talk with your parents and trusted people in your life. Where will you get the best education? May 1 is the national deposit day. You must decide by then what college is yours!

- Celebrate! Once you have YOUR college sweatshirt and bumper sticker, take a deep breath. You did it! You are headed to a place to be challenged, learn, grow and succeed.

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**The Key School**

## SHORT VERSION OF TIMELINE

### The Timeline

#### 9th Grade

- Course planning. Determine what courses you will take throughout high school.
- Changing Lives course for all 9th graders includes a unit on career options, personality styles and learning preferences. This course plants the seeds of what is to come in the college search.
- Work hard. Starting high school by establishing strong study habits and developing time management skills can set you up for success throughout the next four years and beyond. Now is the time to set the tone for your success.
- Start to think about how you want to leave your mark in your school and community.

#### 10th Grade

- This is the first time you will take the PSATs.
- Get to know YOU better. How do you learn best? What are your strengths as a student and person?
- Talk to friends, cousins, neighbors, teachers and even...your parents! Many people you know have gone to college. Everyone loves to reminisce and share stories about their college days! Ask them what they liked. Maybe their stories spark an interest in that school.
- Attend an evening program with the college advisor to understand the timeline of the college search that begins in junior year.

#### 11th Grade

- Things will get busy this year in the college search process. This is where it really all happens!
- You will take the PSAT one last time. Practice is great preparation for the SAT and ACT. You should take each of these tests one time between winter of your junior year and summer into your senior year. The college advisor will help you determine when to take these exams.
- Attend a college fair. Ask college admission counselors for advice about the college process.
- Determine your college criteria. Small or big? Close to home or across the country? Liberal arts or research 1? Do you need financial aid or scholarships? Do you need support services? Want small or large classes?
- Your college advisor will develop a list of colleges to visit, consider and eventually apply to! This will be done after a series of meetings to understand your criteria and academic record.
- Spend winter, spring break or some weekends visiting colleges. Seeing a campus firsthand gives you the best perspective.
- Take AP exams in May if you were enrolled in these classes .
- Draft your resume. What else will it include during your senior year? Keep it to one page and a summary of all of your accomplishments.

- Enjoy this process! You should be learning so much about YOU!
- Attend a summer application workshop at Key to start working on your applications.

### **12th Grade**

- By now you should have a list of schools that you planning to apply to. Ideally, 7-9 colleges gives you space to apply to some “reach” schools, “realistic/likely” and “safety” schools.
- Attend college visits when admission counselors come to Key. You have an opportunity to talk to them about your specific interests.
- Ask two teachers to write your letters of recommendation. Select two teachers you have had junior and/or senior year. And two that know you well enough to speak to your accomplishments as well as your potential.
- Visit any campuses you haven’t seen that are on your list.
- Write your college essays. Edit. Edit. And edit again! Answer the question. Share your story. Don’t try to “wow” the reader. Just be you.
- Complete your college applications. Determine if you are applying early decision, early action, regular or rolling.
- Take the SAT, SAT II, and/or ACT if needed, one more time. Do not over test! Taking each test once and then just one a second time is usually enough. Schools superscore so they combine the best score from all of your testing dates.
- Decisions. Once decisions come back from a college, the ball is back in your court! You get to decide what school is best for you!
- Celebrate! Once you have YOUR college sweatshirt and bumper sticker, take a deep breath. You did it! You are headed to a place to be challenged, learn, grow and succeed.

\*A series of evening meetings for students and parents will take place throughout junior and senior year. These meetings provide important information about the college search and application process.