

College planning: How to get started

Get started.

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, goals, passions, learning style, social skills. What is most important to you in the college-search process? What do you hope to gain from the process?

Make some basic decisions.

Where do you want to live? Will you go to college full-time? Part-time? Do you want to attend a single-sex school, a technical college, a public or private college, a large university, a small liberal arts college, a historically black or religiously affiliated college? How important to you is the cultural/ideological diversity of the student body?

Enlist help.

Who do you want to assist you in this process (parents, teachers, siblings, relatives, friends)?

Consult references.

Look at college directories (*College Board College Handbook*, Barron's, Peterson's) and use college searches (www.collegeboard.com).

Talk with your teachers and your school counselor about your dreams and goals.

Discuss your plans with your parents. Ask for their advice.

Meet with college representatives when they visit the school.

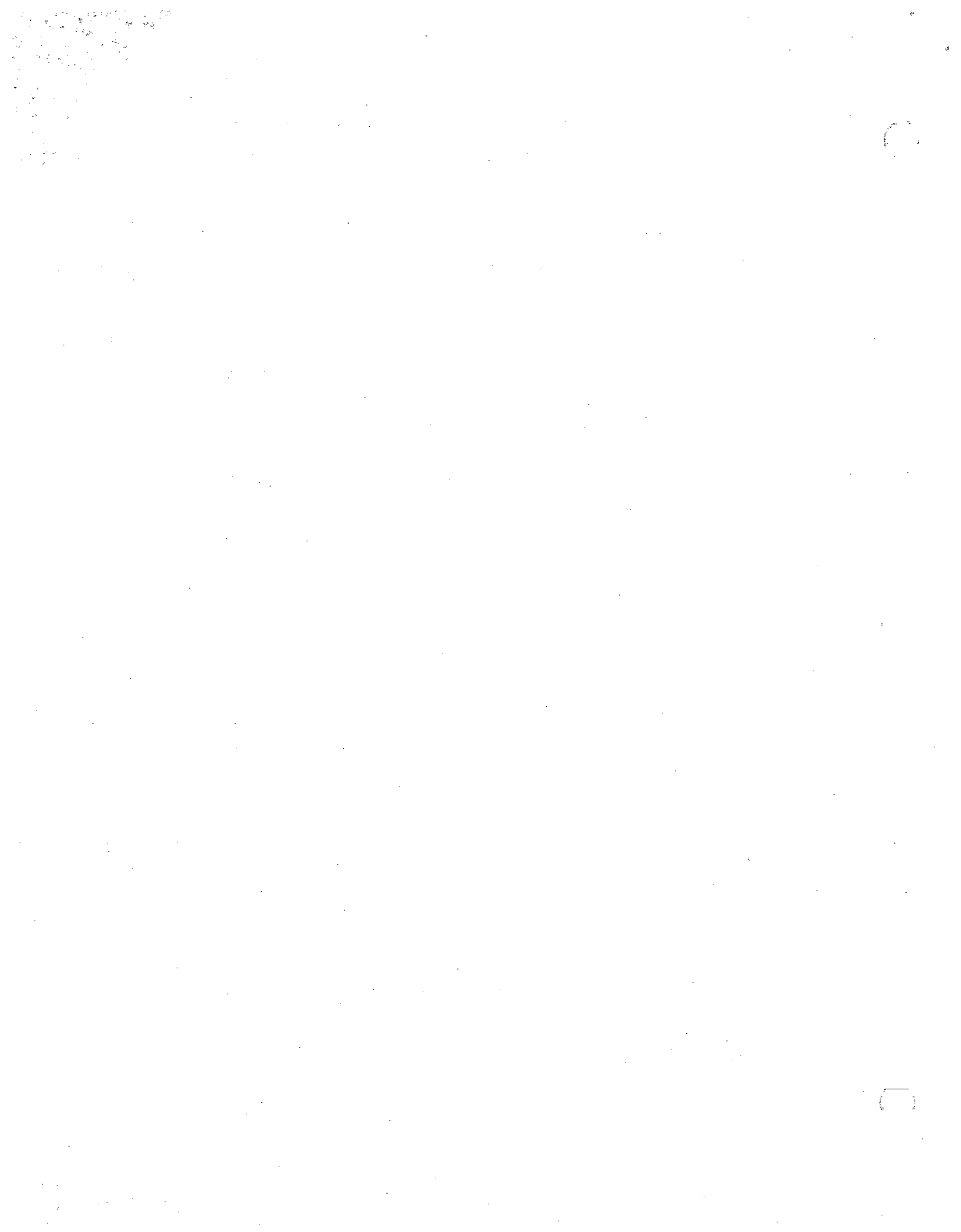
The guidance office will post information on upcoming visits. Have questions ready.

Visit campuses every chance you get.

Take a tour, meet with an admissions representative, ask students what they think of the college.

Source: *Amherst Regional High School, Amherst, Massachusetts*

Handout 3A



A planning list for parents of ninth- and tenth-graders

It may seem early to start thinking about getting your child ready for college, but it really isn't—important groundwork should take place in ninth and tenth grade. Here's a list to help you make sure your child is on the right track:

Grade 9

- 1. Create a four-year high school plan.** Once your child is settled into ninth grade, introduce the idea of preparing an overall plan for high school that relates to his or her goals.
 - Make sure you and your child know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that your child's ninth-grade courses are on the right track.
 - Map out when these courses should be taken.
 - Familiarize yourself with the various levels of courses offered by your child's school.
- 2. Start your child thinking about careers.** Encourage your child to develop a tentative career goal. Of course it will change—often—but it's the thought process that counts.
 - Help your child to identify interests—likes and dislikes—not just in academics but in all areas. This will help your child focus on goals.
 - Encourage your child to discuss career options with others, such as the school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
- 3. Suggest extracurricular activities.** Encourage your child to actively take part in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - Remember that colleges would rather see real involvement in one activity than a loose connection to several activities.
 - If your child may want to play sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- 4. Meet with the school counselor.** The school counselor knows how to help your child get the most out of high school. Make sure your child has an opportunity during the school year to discuss post-high school plans with the school counselor.
 - You should participate in this meeting, too.
- 5. Save for college.** It's still not too late to start a college savings plan, if you haven't already. Every little bit helps!
 - Investigate state financial aid programs and 529 plans.
- 6. Obtain a social security number for your child if you don't already have one.** This is often required for applications, testing, scholarships, and other opportunities.

A planning list for parents of ninth- and tenth-graders (page 2)

Grade 10

1. **Meet with the school counselor—again.** Make sure your child meets with his or her school counselor to ensure that he or she is enrolled in college-preparatory courses.
 - Check to see that your child is taking any prerequisites to advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
2. **Ask if the PSAT/NMSQT® is offered to tenth-graders.** While this test is usually taken in the eleventh grade, it is also often offered in the tenth. That's because it provides invaluable feedback on the Student Score Report; tenth-graders can then work on any disclosed academic weaknesses while there is still ample time to improve them.
3. **Is your child interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, he or she should request a precandidate questionnaire and complete it.
4. **Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall, at your school, or in your area.
5. **Support your child's participation in a school activity or volunteer effort.** Extracurricular activities help students develop time-management skills and enrich the school experience.
6. **Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel opportunities to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if there is no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help your child learn what to look for in a college.

Source: *The College Board*

College planning calendar for juniors

Fall

Start with you: Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.

Learn about colleges. Look at their Web sites (www.collegeboard.com has links). Talk to friends, family, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List college features that interest you.

Resource check: Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.

At school, sign up early to take the PSAT/NMSQT®, which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure your eligibility is approved by the College Board. Check with your school counselor.

Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.

If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.

With your family, start to learn about financial aid. Read the Department of Education's *Funding Your Education* (about federal aid programs). Use *Getting Financial Aid* published by the College Board and the financial aid calculator at www.collegeboard.com to estimate how much aid you might receive.

Winter

Make a family appointment with your counselor to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.

Sign up to take the SAT® and/or ACT at least once in the spring and again next fall. Register online or through your school. Fee waivers are available for students with financial need.

To prepare, download practice booklets from www.collegeboard.com (for the SAT) or from www.act.org (for ACT).

College planning calendar for juniors (page 2)

Begin a search for financial aid sources. National sources include the *College Board Scholarship Handbook* and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources (ask a counselor or check your public library).

Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests™ in the spring. You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download "Taking the SAT Subject Tests," which offers test-prep advice, from www.collegeboard.com.

If you're in Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) classes, register for AP Exams, given in May. You can earn college credit for courses not given in the AP Program by taking CLEP® tests at a college test center. See www.collegeboard.com to learn more.

Spring

Visit some local colleges—large, small, public, and private. Get a feel for what works for you. Attend college fairs, too.

Scan local newspapers to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that attract you. Request viewbooks and information about financial aid and academic programs that interest you. Visit some colleges over your spring break.

If you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships, contact your counselor before leaving school for the summer. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.

Summer

If you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college, register with the NCAA Clearinghouse (www.ncaaclearinghouse.net).

Find a full-time or part-time job, or participate in a camp or summer college program.

Visit colleges. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admissions counselors.

Create a résumé—a record of accomplishments, activities, and work experiences since you started high school.

Download applications (or request paper copies) from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates—large universities may have early dates or rolling admissions.

Source: *The College Board*

College planning calendar for seniors

September

- Narrow your list of colleges to 5 to 10. Meet with a counselor about them and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.
- Create a master list or calendar that includes:
 - tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines.
 - college application due dates.
 - financial aid application forms required and their deadlines. (Note: Aid applications may be due before college applications.)
 - other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.).
 - your high school's own application processing deadlines.
- If you can't afford application or test fees, a counselor can help you request a fee waiver.
- If you have not had your test scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the College Board or ACT to have your scores sent.

October

- Try to finalize your college choices.
- Prepare Early Decision, Early Action, or rolling admissions applications as soon as possible.
- Ask for counselor or teacher recommendations if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. For each recommendation, provide a stamped, addressed envelope, and any college forms required.
- If you're submitting essays, write first drafts and ask teachers and others to read them. If you're applying for Early Decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- If you have not had your test scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the College Board or ACT to have them sent.

November

- November 1–15: For Early Decision admissions, colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates.
- Complete at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Counselors send transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before colleges require them.

College planning calendar for seniors (page 2)

December

- As you finish and send your applications and essays, be sure to keep copies.
- If your college wants to see seventh-semester grades, be sure you give the form to your counselor.

January

- If you apply to colleges online, be sure to have your high school send a transcript—it goes to colleges separately, and by mail.

February

- No senioritis, please! Accepting colleges do look at second-semester senior grades.

March

- Keep active in school. If you are wait-listed, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and learned of its decision.

April

- You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. If you've not done so yet, visit your final college before accepting. As soon as you decide, notify your counselor of your choice.
- If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.

May

- May 1: Colleges cannot require a deposit or commitment to attend before May 1. By that postmarked date, you must inform every college of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid. (Questions? Talk to your counselor.)
- Send your deposit to one college only.
- Wait-listed by a college? If you will enroll if accepted, tell the admissions director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application. Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted.
- Work with a counselor to resolve any admissions or financial aid problems.

June

- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college.

Source: *The College Board*