

**GET READY!**

MINNESOTA  
OFFICE OF  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION

*reach higher*

**Parent Guide**  
Exploring Higher Education with Your Child



# The Great College Mystery

This guide will let you know what your child is learning in school about preparing for high school graduation and further education. It will also support you as you help your child prepare for the future.



**It is important for you to work through this guide for several reasons:**

- It shows your child that you care.
- It tells your child, "I expect you to succeed in school and in life. I expect you to go on for more education. I know you can do it."
- Research shows that when parents pay attention to what goes on in school, their children do better in school and have a more positive attitude about it.
- Having high expectations for your children will help them make better choices during their teenage years. They are more likely to stay away from drugs and violence. They are more likely to get good grades.

**Some points to keep in mind:**

1. Your child is unique. There is no one else on this planet exactly like your child.
2. The best career for your child is the one that suits him best.
3. There are many different ways your child can reach his or her dreams.
4. If a plan is not working, don't give up.
5. Let your child know that you will be there to listen and help.
6. Believe in your child. Show your child you care. Work together.

**Important Terms**

**Campus:** where the majority of college classes, buildings, teachers and activities are located.

**College Entrance Exam:** a standardized test often required by colleges to help determine which students to admit. The most common tests are the ACT and the SAT.

**Credit:** a measure of how much a class is worth. Your child must have a certain number of credits to graduate from high school and college.

**Grade Point Average (GPA):** average of a student's grades, typically based on a 4-point scale where an 'A' equals four points, a 'B' equals three points, a 'C' equals two points, and a 'D' equals one point.

**Major:** an area of study that student's focus while in college. It is often area the student might like to work some day.

**Minor:** Another area of study that students select, but is not the major focus of study.

**Room and Board:** On- or off- campus housing costs (room) and what it costs to eat (board) during the school year.

**Tuition:** what it costs to take classes and use certain facilities at college.

**Undergraduate student:** any college student who has not earned a bachelor's degree.

# The Importance of a College Education



College can be very important to your child's future. It is a place to learn new skills, find out about yourself, meet interesting people and learn how to help others.

People who go to college tend to live longer, healthier lives. A college education will give your child a much better chance of finding a good job with health care and other benefits.

A college education will allow your child to earn more money than he would with just a high school diploma—probably about twice as much.

## Parent Activities

It may seem strange to think about college now when your child is so young. The parent activities for this section all involve imagining the future.

1. When you picture your child at age 20, what do you see? Is your child in college? What does he look like? What are your child's dreams? How did you help your child get where he is? How did school play a role?
2. What about at age 30? What is your child's career? Is your child healthy? Where is your child living? Does your child have a spouse and children? What did your child do in terms of school and job training that helped her get where she is today?
3. Picture your child at age 70, satisfied with a rewarding life. As your child looks back on his life, what does he see? If your child were talking to someone over a cup of coffee or giving an interview on his life, what might he say about what you did during elementary, middle and high school that helped him stay on track?

## Activities to Do with Your Child

1. Ask someone you know who has been to college to do a short interview with you and your child. The person could be a friend, neighbor, teacher, religious leader, coach or relative. Ask the person why he went to college, if he is glad he went, and if so, why he is glad. Have your child take notes during the interview. Then talk about what the person said.
2. Talk with your child about why a college education will help him in the future. Talk about the opportunities and benefits like more choices, more money and a sense of self-worth. Are there any negatives? Point out examples of people who went to college and people who did not go to college. How has their education affected their income and lifestyle?
3. Watch television with your child. See how many people the two of you can spot who are working, dressed for work or talking about their jobs. For each one, talk about what kind of education a person needs for that job. For example, on a medical show, you may see nurses; nurses have gone to college. Doctors have been to college and medical school. The x-ray technician went to college.

## Questions to Ask Your Child

- Would you like to go to college? Why or why not?
- Would you like to visit a college with me some day?
- Where do you want to live when you grow up? What kind of job will allow you to live in a place like that?
- What are some things you want to learn in life? What college courses do you think can teach you those things?

**Helping to get your child on track to go to college is one of the best things you can do for your child.**

**Move on to the next section for information about different types of colleges.**

# Types of Colleges



Different types of colleges prepare people for different careers. Here are examples of two types of colleges:

## 2-Year Colleges or Career Schools

Examples: St. Cloud Technical College (public), Normandale Community College (public), Dunwoody College of Technology (private)

- Prepare people for a variety of occupations including computer programmer, plumber, medical assistant, florist, web technician, welder, flight attendant, police officer, electrician, carpenter, nurse, legal assistant, accountant, and drafting technician.
- Completed in two years or less for career-oriented programs or lead to an associate degree which allows the student to transfer to a four-year college and university.

## 4-Year Colleges or Universities

Examples: University of Minnesota (public), Winona State University (public), St. John's University (private)

- Career examples include: teacher, social worker, scientist, journalist, doctor, engineer, actor, and businessperson.
- A student can take many different classes in languages, math, science, history, the arts, and other subjects.
- Bachelor's degrees typically are earned in four years.

## Parent Activities

1. Call or e-mail one two-year college and one four-year college to request copies of their brochures or course listings. You can get the phone numbers from the telephone directory or find the e-mail listings online. When the brochures arrive, look through them. Try to imagine what it would be like for your child to go to that college.
2. Do you think your child would like a career that involves working with his hands? Does he have the patience and interest to stay in college four or more years, or will he be more interested in getting into a career fast? What does he want to be when he grows up? Which type of college do you think might be right for your child?
3. Imagine that you are a teenager again. What kind of college would you attend and why?

## Activities to Do with Your Child

1. Ask your child to write down ten things that she likes. They can be activities (swimming, cooking), interests (volcanoes, politics) or dreams (going into space, helping cure diseases).
2. Look at the list together. Use your imagination to think about what careers might use these activities, interests or dreams. Together, think of five careers your child might like, based on what she wrote down. For example, a child who likes swimming, cooking, teaching, volcanoes, helping cure diseases and studying science might become a:
  - volcanologist (a scientist who travels around the world studying volcanoes)
  - teacher (maybe a science teacher who also coaches swimming)
  - chef (a professional cook in a restaurant or on TV)
  - nurse, doctor or scientist
3. Using your list of careers, decide what type of college your child would attend to prepare for each career. For example, someone wanting to be a chef would go to a technical college or a private career school.

## Questions to Ask Your Child

- Do you think you will want to go to college close to home or somewhere else? Where will you live? In the dormitory, an apartment or at home?
- When you are in high school, how will you choose a college?
- Do you know anyone who went to college after high school? What type of college did they go to?
- Should we call a college to ask for a brochure so we can see what you could study there?
- Would you like to visit a college with me this year?

**Congratulations on being ready to help your child succeed.**

**In the next section, you will learn how to get your child ready for college.**

# Preparing for College



To be ready for college, your child needs to take the right courses in high school:

- Right now, your child should know how to read and do well in all her subjects.
- In middle school, your child should take algebra and geometry, and continue to keep up in all subjects.
- In high school, your child should take four years of English, three to four years of math, three years of science, three years of social studies, two years of a world language and one year of art.

Some two-year colleges accept any student with a high school diploma, but your child may not be accepted at many four-year colleges and universities without taking the right courses in high school. Even colleges that only require a high school diploma may accept students for specific programs based on their academic preparation.

In addition to staying in school and taking the right courses, your child should:

- Get good grades—at least a B average, if possible, when in high school.
- Get involved in after-school activities like sports, volunteer work, clubs or work.
- Get to know teachers, coaches, or other people who will be able to write college recommendations.
- Pursue interests and talents—in music, sports, media, clubs or helping people.

## Parent Activities

1. Bring college and career into your conversations. Use expressions like, “When you go to college” or “Someday when you are an architect (or diver, accountant, teacher, beautician, etc.).”
2. Think about how much you know about your child. Do you know what his favorite subjects are? Do you know if he needs help in any subject? Make time to talk with him and his teacher.
3. Consider how much you know about your child outside of school. Does she have interests, hobbies or groups she takes part in? Does she mainly spend time watching television? Could you start doing an activity together once every week or even once a month?

## Activities to Do with Your Child

1. Adults use a resume to search for jobs or get into schools. A resume is a list of things a person has done or plans to do. Create a resume with your child. It can help your child feel proud, get jobs in the future and maybe someday get into college. Here are some things to list on your child’s resume: education (schools your child has attended), experiences (things your child helped with, did at home or school, or took part in), skills, clubs and teams, and dreams.
2. Find an older child who goes to high school. The person could be a brother or sister, other relative, babysitter or friend. Take an opportunity when your child is with you to ask the older student what classes he takes.
3. Look at your local newspaper. Find the featured high school students in the education section. Read about those students. These are examples of real people who will probably go to college.

## Questions to Ask Your Child

- How are you doing in school? What are your favorite classes?
- Do you need help with anything in school?
- Do you want to babysit, mow lawns or volunteer? Do you want to take a babysitting class or get a job?
- When you’re grown-up, what do you think you will do when you are not working? Will you play league baseball, spend time with friends, build things, sing in the church choir, or coach a sport?
- Is there any activity you want me to teach you or sign you up for?

**You’ve taken an important step in helping your child to be happy and successful.**

**Turn the page to learn more about the U.S. education system.**

# How the U.S. School System Works:

## What Comes Before College



### **Elementary School: Kindergarten through 6th Grade**

Elementary school is where students ages five to 12 learn to read and write, do math, understand basic science ideas, learn about history and health, become used to being in school, and have classes in art, music, and gym. Your child is probably in elementary school now.

### **Middle School/Junior High: 7th-8th grade**

Middle school is where students ages 12 to 14 continue to learn basic subjects, take harder classes, and prepare for high school. Many middle schools include sixth and ninth grade, too. Students may start moving to different classrooms to study different subjects. They may start studying a foreign language or playing on a school sports team.

### **High School: 9th-12th grade**

High school is where 14- to 18-year-old students study math, language arts, science, social studies and a foreign language. In high school, students have many course choices, and these choices will affect their opportunities in the future. Students can take electives such as woodshop, drivers' education, or ceramics. They often go to different rooms to take different classes with different teachers. Some students study three years of a foreign language.

Students are required by law to stay in school until they are 16. If they stay in high school until they successfully complete 12th grade—passing all their subjects and completing all their requirements—they receive a high-school diploma and are said to be high school graduates. At a minimum, students must graduate from high school or earn a General Education Diploma (GED) in order to continue on to college.

# About Us



## **Get Ready**

The Get Ready program provides students with college planning information, academic skills and first-hand career and college experiences. The program helps to prepare elementary, middle and high school students to complete school and pursue post-secondary education. The Get Ready program is primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Education through a federal grant program called GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and is administered in Minnesota by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education.

## **Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to post-secondary education. The agency serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on post-secondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant program, which is administered by the agency, is a need-based tuition assistance program for Minnesota students. The agency also oversees tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 college savings program, licensing and an early awareness outreach initiative for youth. Through collaboration with systems and institutions, the agency assists in the development of the state's education technology infrastructure and shared library resources.

This document can be made available in an alternative format to individuals with disabilities by calling (651) 642-0567.

**Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 350  
Saint Paul, MN 55108-5227

Tel: 651.642.0567 or 800.657.3866  
TTY Relay: 800.627.3529  
Fax: 651.642.0675

E-mail: [info@ohe.state.mn.us](mailto:info@ohe.state.mn.us)

[www.getreadyforcollege.org](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org)  
[www.ohe.state.mn.us](http://www.ohe.state.mn.us)

**GETREADY!**

MINNESOTA  
OFFICE OF  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION

*reach higher*