

GET READY!



A Parent's Guide to Preparing Your Student for College

MINNESOTA
OFFICE OF
HIGHER
EDUCATION

reach higher

Welcome parents!



The purpose of this guide is to answer some of the questions you have about your student's future education.

Why should my student go to college?

- A college degree offers your student a wider variety of job options.
- Of all the job openings between now and 2016 that pay more than \$15 per hour, about 70 percent will require some college.
- Over a lifetime, a college graduate will earn on average \$1 million more than a high school graduate.
- College graduates typically have better access to health care than those with only a high school diploma.
- A person who graduates from college is more likely to own a home than someone with a high school diploma.

Once you believe that college will offer your student countless opportunities in life, there are some simple things you can do to help your student prepare.

Start early. No matter how young your student is, it is never too early to begin planning for college and talking with your student about it.

Be clear. Communicate your expectations to your student about his or her behavior and performance in school.

Talk. Have frequent conversations with your student about schoolwork, goals and the importance of education.

Encourage. Motivate your student to try new activities, volunteer in the community and succeed in school. Studies have shown that students involved in school activities enjoy school more and do better academically. Extra activities at school help students make new friends, gain confidence and new skills and have fun!

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What are the benefits of higher education?

Knowledge. A college education teaches your student to think critically and abstractly, to express thoughts and opinions, and to weigh options and make informed decisions.

Potential. College brings your student a world of information as he or she explores interests, and helps your student understand the issues that connect communities, the nation and the world.

Opportunity. Critical thinking and new technology skills are vital for success and advancement in today's workforce and provide your student with more career and job options.

Income. A college graduate typically has a higher income and is less likely to be unemployed than someone with less education.



Be Informed and Involved

- Parent events are planned by the school to provide important information to help your student succeed. Attending these events shows your student that his or her education is important to you. If you are unable to attend, see if another responsible adult can go in your place to bring you the information, or get the information from another parent that did attend the event.
- At the beginning of each term, sit down with your student and set some academic goals. Setting academic goals will give your student something specific to work toward in school. Examples of academic goals:
 - Read at least one book each week.
 - Get at least a B on every math quiz.
 - Hand in all English homework on time.
 - Spend at least 30 minutes every week studying for the spelling test.
- Have a school calendar at home. All schools have a calendar that shows when the school will be closed for holidays and vacations. Many school calendars also include dates for parent conferences and when each term begins and ends.
- Know your student's school counselor and teacher(s) and how to contact them. Introduce yourself at a student event. You don't have to wait for them to contact you. Teachers and counselors are responsible for the success of hundreds of students. You must be your student's advocate.
- School counselors are responsible for monitoring student academic success and answering questions about school or other difficult situations. Counselors also know which classes are offered at their school.
- In middle and high school, be sure your student takes classes that prepare him or her to be a successful college student.
- Review all report cards. Contact your school to find out when these are sent out.
- Talk with your student and his or her teacher(s) to learn how your student is supposed to keep track of assignments. Many schools use planners. Tell your student that you will regularly review his or her planner to check on assignments.
- Have your student clean out and organize his or her backpack once a week. This will help your student turn in assignments on time.
- Insist that your child attend school every single day, unless he or she is ill. If your student will be absent from school for more than a day, contact his or her teacher(s) to see if work can be picked up for your student to work on while at home.
- In high school, make sure that school work is your student's top priority, above sports or working.

Attend as many parent-teacher conferences as you are able.

Here are some questions you can ask to get the most out of these meetings:

- Q. Is my student's homework completed accurately and turned in on time?
- Q. Is my student working to his or her potential?
- Q. Is my student respectful of other students and adults in class?
- Q. Does my student participate and pay attention in class?
- Q. Does my student come to class prepared?
- Q. What are my student's strengths and weaknesses? How can I help him or her improve?
- Q. Is my student taking the classes that will prepare him or her for high school and college-level work? If not, why not?



Become a Homework Helper



You may not always have a lot of time or know exactly what your student is learning, but there are ways you can help.

- Check your student's planner to see which assignments have been assigned. Students should use the planners every day to keep track of their assignments. If needed, have teachers add comments, sign the planner each week and include your student's grade.
- When your student is working on homework or gets stuck, here are some questions you can ask:
 - o What are you working on?
 - o Let's look at this together.
 - o What do the directions tell you to do?
 - o What words or directions don't you understand?
 - o Tell me what you've done so far.
 - o Let's look in your book or notebook for some notes and information that might help us.
 - o What did the teacher say when he or she gave you this assignment?
 - o Who can you call to get help?
 - o Can you go before or after school to get help from your teacher?

Sometimes students need help, but don't know how to ask for it.

Helpful Homework Web Sites

- Ask for Kids: www.ajkids.com
- BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper: www.bjpinchbeck.com
- Homework Spot: www.homeworkspot.com
- World of Math: www.math.com
- Live Homework Help (St. Paul students only): www.sppl.org/homework

Enroll your student in a summer enrichment camp.

The Benefits of Summer Camp

- It can improve your student's achievement in school.
- It can increase your student's awareness of careers and education options.
- It helps your student explore areas of interest.
- It allows your student to meet other students with similar interests.
- It keeps your student busy during the summer.

Types of Summer Programs

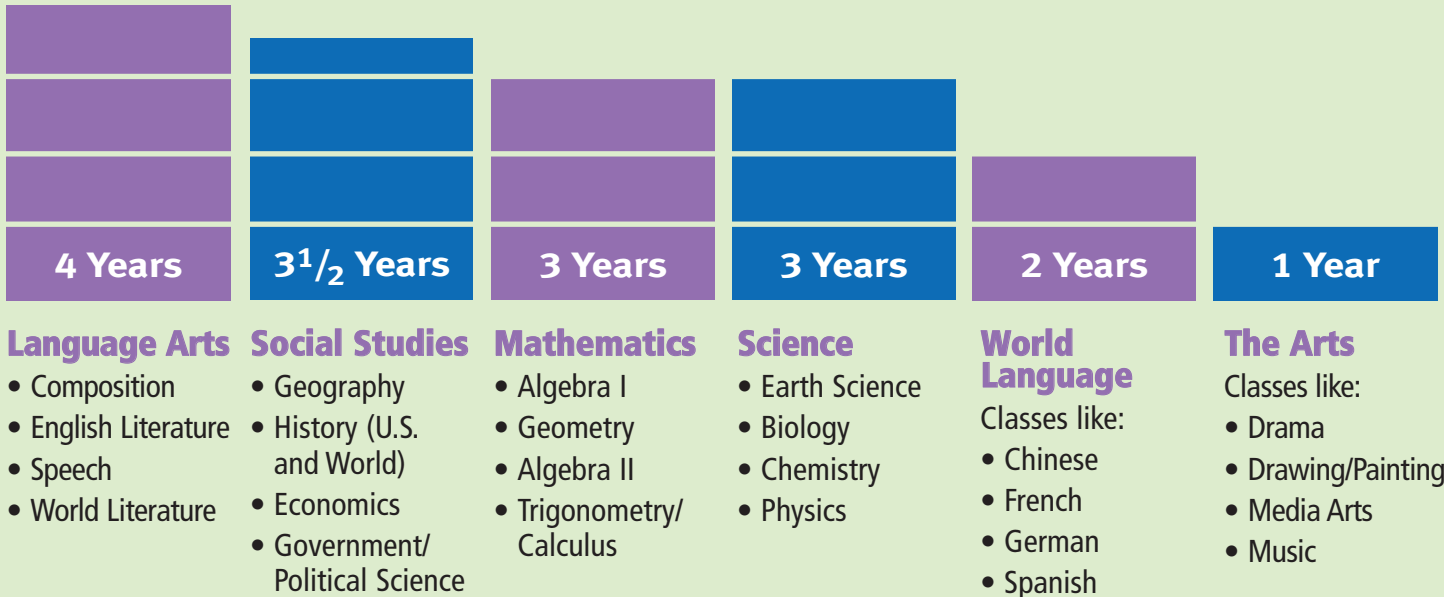
- College preparation
- Career preparation
- General enrichment
- Recreational/environment
- Subject areas include: art, business, communications, computer skills, language, math, music, science and writing



Essential High School Classes

Completing courses like these will help your student meet the basic admission requirements at most colleges. Your high school's graduation requirements may differ.

It is important your student takes all of these classes and also challenges him or herself. Colleges look for students who have taken challenging classes, and grades are weighed against class difficulty.



Language Arts

- Composition
- English Literature
- Speech
- World Literature

Social Studies

- Geography
- History (U.S. and World)
- Economics
- Government/Political Science

Mathematics

- Algebra I
- Geometry
- Algebra II
- Trigonometry/Calculus

Science

- Earth Science
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics

World Language

- Classes like:
- Chinese
 - French
 - German
 - Spanish

The Arts

- Classes like:
- Drama
 - Drawing/Painting
 - Media Arts
 - Music

Note: Beginning with the class of 2015, students must complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade.

Earn College Credit in High School

If your student has the ability to challenge him or herself and to work hard, talk with the school counselor about these options.

What are Advanced Placement (AP) classes?

AP classes are higher level courses students can take in high school. Your student can earn college credit for these classes if he or she scores high enough on the final exam for the course.

What is Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)?

PSEO allows students to take college courses at a local college while they are high school students. They attend class and complete the same assignments as college students, but without paying the fee.

What is College in the Schools (CIS)?

CIS offers college-level courses in high school through partnerships between high schools and colleges and universities.

What is International Baccalaureate (IB)?

IB is a two-year pre-college diploma program offered at some high schools that helps prepare students for college.



Language Arts

Communication is vital in college and in any job. People who can read and write are people who succeed. Your student should take as many courses in reading, writing and speaking as possible.

Mathematics

Everyone uses numbers in the real world to solve problems. Two years of algebra and one year of geometry are recommended, but it's best for students to take even more than that.

Science

Learning how things work and understanding the world around you is exciting. It also helps your student understand how science affects your community and the world.

Social Studies

Classes in geography, civics, history and economics will help your student understand what is happening in the world and his or her place in it.

World Languages

Studying a different language is a great way for your student to learn about another culture. Make sure your student takes at least two years of the same language.

The Arts

Art helps your student explore and appreciate his or her creative side.

Electives

High school allows your student to explore his or her interests through optional courses called electives. Check with your high school counselor to learn what is offered at your high school. Your school may offer courses like:

Agriculture	Keyboarding
Automotive Technology	Marketing
Accounting	Media/Film Studies
Computer Programming	Photography
Creative Writing	Physical Education
Electronics	Public Speaking
Family/Consumer Science	Web Design
Graphic Design	Welding
Journalism	Woodshop

Make sure your student also takes at least one computer class. It may not be required for graduation, but computer skills are extremely important for success in college and in life.



High School Class Plan

Many high schools require students to take a certain sequence of classes each year of high school. Below is a common sequence, but your local high school may have different requirements.

9th Grade

- English/Composition 9
- Algebra I or Geometry
- Earth Sciences
- Geography
- World Language

10th Grade

- English/Composition 10
- Geometry or Algebra II
- Biology or Chemistry
- U.S. History
- World Language

11th Grade

- English/Composition 11
- Geometry, Algebra II or Trigonometry
- Chemistry
- Economics
- World Language

12th Grade

- English/Composition 12
- Trigonometry or Calculus
- Physics I or Physics II
- Political Science or World History
- World Language

Tests and Test Anxiety

Tests are a normal part of school. There are ways you can help your student be a successful test taker:

- Talk about tests in a very positive way, even if you had negative experiences yourself in school. Your student will pick up on your attitude about test taking.
- Remind your student that tests are meant to measure how well he or she understands a particular subject.
- Help your student prepare for his or her tests far in advance. Here are some ways to do that:
 - At the beginning of each week, ask which tests or quizzes are coming up. Help your student plan to study each day for each test.
 - Review any reading or notes your student has on the subject.
 - Make sure your student gets plenty of sleep the day before and eats breakfast the morning of the test.
 - Have your student read aloud or write down key points. Writing or saying these will help him or her remember them during the test.
 - Have your student explain his or her notes to you in his or her own words. If your student can do this, he or she probably understands the concept.
 - Remind your student the day of the test to be confident of what he or she knows and to take a few deep breaths before starting the test.



What are Minnesota's academic standards?

- The Minnesota Department of Education has created academic standards for each grade in each subject. These are benchmarks that every student in that grade should be able to achieve.



- The standards were created to ensure that students are learning specific concepts at each grade level.
- The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments students take in the spring assess how well students measure up against the state standards.
- MCA scores often help determine where your student needs help and which courses he or she is advised to take the following year.

Tests Your Student May Encounter in High School

College Preparation Tests

PLAN: Measures academic development in preparation for the ACT and explores career options.

PSAT: Measures academic development in preparation for the SAT and may qualify students for the National Merit Scholarship Program.

College Admissions Tests

Most four-year colleges and universities require admissions tests scores from applicants and accept the ACT or SAT. You must register and pay for these tests in advance. Some tests have the option to waive the registration fee. Your student takes the test outside of the regular school day, usually on a Saturday.

ACT: Tests English, reading, writing, math and science reasoning skills. (www.actstudent.org)

SAT: Tests verbal and math reasoning abilities and writing skills. (www.collegeboard.com/sat)

If English is not your student's first language, he or she may be required to take the TOEFL (www.toefl.org), which tests the ability of nonnative speakers of English to understand and use North American English.



How can I help my student explore careers?

Your student will probably change his or her mind many times about what career to pursue as an adult. That's normal.

- Share with your student what you like and dislike about your career and why you chose it.
- Talk with your student about careers he or she may not have considered.

For example: Many students want to be professional athletes, singers, dancers or actors. The reality is that very few people make it in those industries, but there are many other related professions. If your student really wants to become a singer, remind him or her about all the people that write the songs, edit the music, write the singer's contracts and design the album artwork.

- Ask your student about his or her dreams and see if those desires can be achieved with the career(s) that interests him or her. Let your student dream big without being critical.
- Talk with your student about things they like to do and things they are good at. Combining these two can often lead to possible careers.

What your student likes to do	+	What your student is good at	=	Possible Career
Help animals	+	Science	=	Veterinarian
Organizing	+	Playing football	=	Team manager
Work on computer	+	Drawing	=	Graphic designer
Do experiments	+	Investigating	=	Forensic scientist

Once your student has a career in mind, it is easier to figure out which type of college education he or she will need.



What is grade point average (GPA)?

GPA is one of the criteria reviewed by colleges. Some place more importance on it than others. It is the numerical average of all your student's grades. Each grade has a different value:

Grade	Points
A+, A	= 4.0
A-	= 3.7
B+	= 3.3
B	= 3.0
B-	= 2.7
C+	= 2.3
C	= 2.0
C-	= 1.7
D+	= 1.3
D	= 1.0
D-	= .7
F	= 0

These values are totalled and then divided by the number of classes.

Example: Your student receives an A-, B+, B and C.

A-	=	3.7
B+	=	3.3
B	=	3.0
C	=	2.0
Total	=	12

Divide the total points (12) by the number of classes (4): $12 \div 4 = 3$. This means your student has a 3.0 GPA, otherwise known as a B average.



Help Make Your Student's College Dreams a Reality

In 9th & 10th Grade

- Have your student meet with a school counselor to talk about careers that interest him or her as well as which courses best prepare for college.
- Talk with your student about ways to pay for college.
- Check if your school district has tenth grade students take the PLAN test to prepare for the ACT.
- Find out how your student may be able to sign up for classes that will earn him or her college credit in high school.

In 11th Grade

- Attend college fairs and financial aid events with your student.
- Make sure your student takes the PSAT in the fall to prepare for the SAT.
- Help your student investigate which type of education is needed for the careers that interest him or her.
- Encourage your student to request materials from colleges that interest him or her.
- Arrange campus visits to those schools that interest your student.
- Help your student sign up for classes that will earn him or her college credit in high school.
- Make sure your student takes the ACT and/or SAT in the spring.
- Help your student research scholarship options.

In 12th Grade

- Arrange campus visits to those schools that interest your student.
- Make sure your student takes (or retakes) the ACT and/or SAT in the fall.
- Help your student select and apply to colleges that interest him or her.
- Attend a financial aid event with your student.
- Make sure your student asks for recommendations (if required) from teachers, counselors and others.
- Help your student search and apply for scholarships in the fall.
- Help your student complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible after January 1.
- Make sure your student has his or her high school transcript sent to those colleges to which he or she applied.
- Help your student choose a college.



What does it mean to have a college major?

Four-year colleges require students to major in a specific subject.

- A **major** is an area of study that your student focuses on while in college and is usually an area that your student might want to work in someday.
- A **minor** is an additional area of study that requires less course work than a major, but one that may also help your student in his or her career.

Students usually choose (or “declare”) a major in their second or third year at the college, but most students change their major at least once. Students can also major in more than one subject.

When deciding on a major or minor, it's helpful for your student to ask:

- What interests me?
- What do I like to do?
- What do I value?
- What is the job market like for careers in majors that interest me?



Types of Colleges

Remember that different types of colleges prepare students for different careers, provide varied learning environments, cost different amounts and offer different degrees or certificates. This chart is a comparison of three types of colleges. You and your student will need to work together to choose the type of college that best fits him or her.

College Type	What You Can Earn	Career Examples	Characteristics	Average Tuition & Fees*
Technical or Career College	Certificate Diploma Associate degree	Computer Programmer Cosmetologist Dental Assistant Mechanic Medical Assistant Plumber	Smaller class sizes Evening and weekend classes offered Focus on skills necessary for a specific career	\$4,515 (public) \$12,233 (private)
Community College	Certificate Diploma Associate degree The ability to transfer to a 4-year college or university	Accountant Air Plane Mechanic Dental Hygienist Legal Assistant Paramedic Restaurant Manager	Smaller class sizes Evening and weekend classes offered Can often transfer to a 4-year college or university Often smaller schools found in local communities	\$4,492 (public)
4-year College or University	Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate degree Professional degrees	Engineer Graphic Designer Pharmacist Pilot Social Worker Teacher	Most people attend full-time Can take many different classes Usually have dorms on campus	\$6,373 (state university) \$10,756 (University of Minnesota) \$27,829 (private)

*Does not include room and board, books and supplies, or personal or transportation expenses.

What is this degree thing?

Associate degrees are offered by technical, community and some private career colleges. It typically requires at least two years of study beyond high school.

Bachelor's degrees are required for most professional occupations. It usually requires four years of study beyond high school.



Research College Options



When your student begins to explore his or her college options, there are a lot of things to consider:

- Which schools have programs in the major or field that interests your student?
- Where is the college located?
- What are the students at the college like? The campus?
- What special services does the college have that interest your student?
- What are the teachers like?
- Will your student feel comfortable there?
- What does the college cost?

Another way to identify or narrow down school options is to ask your student the following questions:

- Why do you want to go to college?
- What do you want to get out of college?
- How will college help you work toward your goals?
- Which college will best/least help you work toward your goals?
- Does it matter how many students are enrolled with you?
- Do you want the other students to have diverse ideas and backgrounds?
- In which type of campus setting are you most/least comfortable?

Free College Searches

www.collegeanswer.com
www.collegeboard.com
nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

www.collegenet.com
www.collegeview.com
www.iseek.org

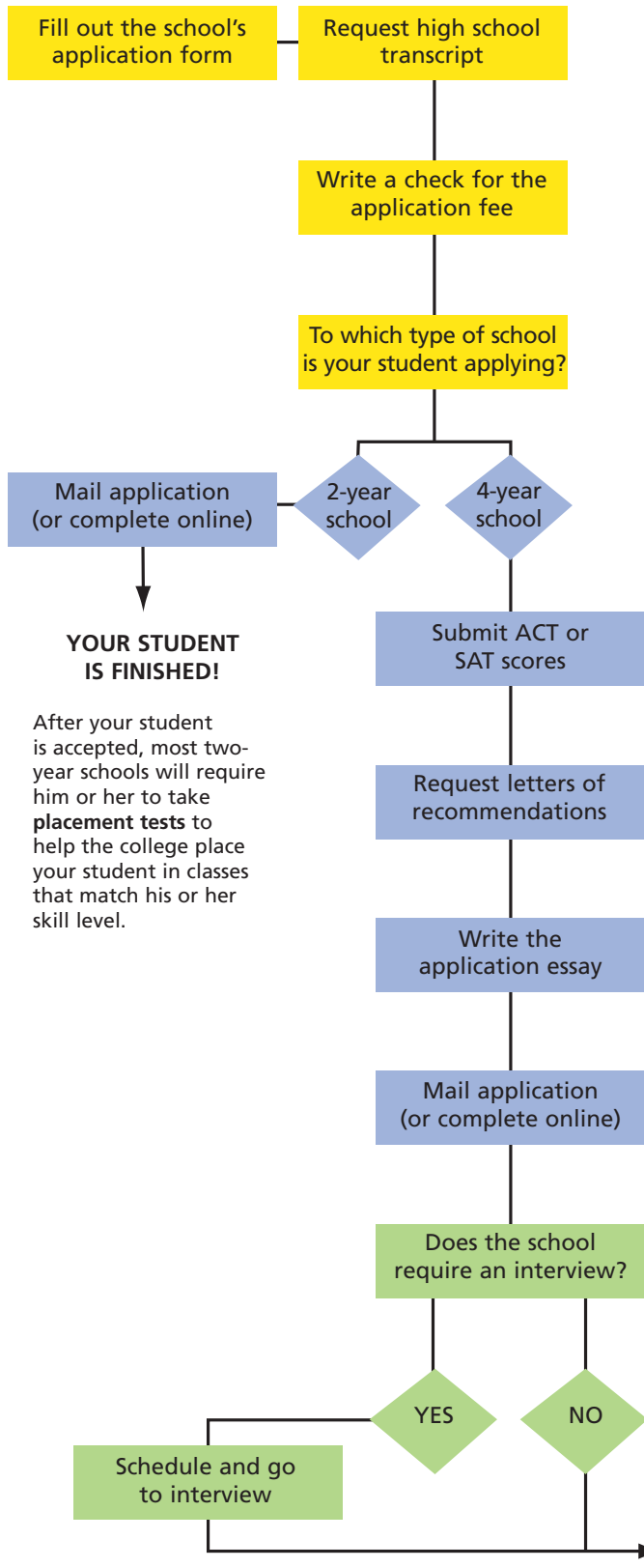
Identify Your Top 10 College Characteristics

Use the checklist below to identify the college characteristics that matter most to both you and your student. Then search for schools that match your key criteria and fit your student academically, socially and culturally.

- athletic offerings
- campus safety
- campus setting (urban, suburban, small town or rural)
- diversity of student population
- extracurricular organizations and events
- faculty experience and expertise
- financial aid availability and deadlines
- geographic location
- housing availability and cost
- length, time and location of classes
- number of students enrolled
- percentage of graduates employed within one year
- percentage of students who return the following year
- programs of study (majors and minors)
- school facilities and equipment
- school or program reputation
- student-to-faculty ratio (class size)
- support services (meals, counseling, job placement)
- transportation availability and cost
- tuition and fees

Applying for College

There are a lot of pieces to pull together when your student applies for college.



After your student is accepted, most two-year schools will require him or her to take **placement tests** to help the college place your student in classes that match his or her skill level.

High School Transcript: Your student will need to send a copy of his or her high school transcript to each school. Transcripts can be requested through your high school counselor.

Application Fee: You may have to pay an application fee (often \$25). If you can't afford it, talk with the admissions counselor at the college to which your student is applying. They may be able to waive the fee.

College Admissions Tests: Your student will probably need to take the ACT or SAT and have the scores sent to each school. Talk with your school counselor to learn about test dates and how to sign up for the test.

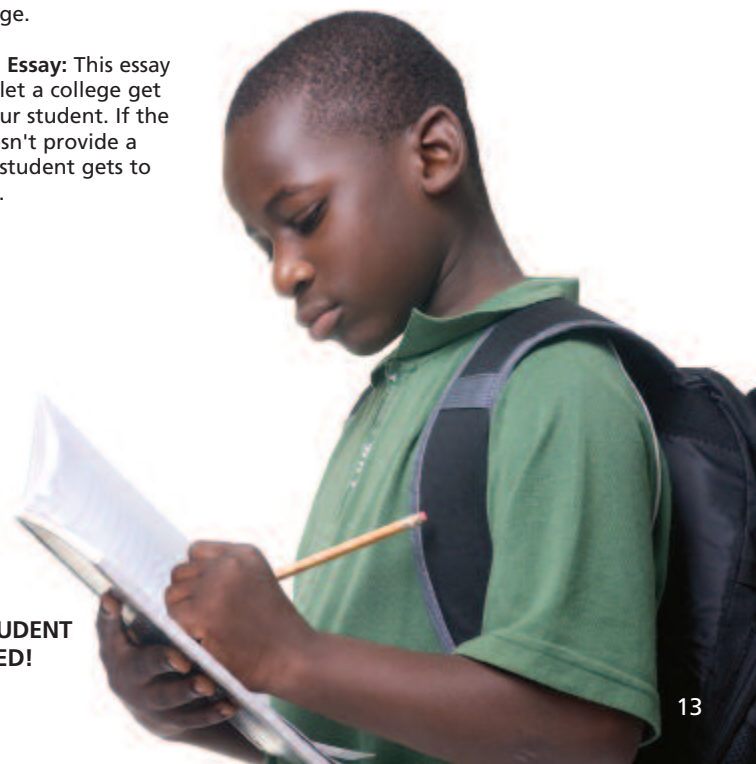
Letters of Recommendation: These letters help show what your student has accomplished, what kind of potential he or she has, and why the person writing the letter believes your student should be admitted to the college.

Application Essay: This essay is a way to let a college get to know your student. If the college doesn't provide a topic, your student gets to choose one.

Know the College Admission Requirements

There are certain requirements students need to meet in order to be accepted into college. These requirements vary by school, but here is a list of what colleges may consider when deciding whether or not to accept a student:

- Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Classes the student has taken
- Class rank
- Recommendations from adults
- Special talents
- Activities and awards
- Written essays
- Interviews with the student
- Scores on national college admissions tests (ACT/SAT)



Quick and Meaningful Activities

- Start using “goal language” at home: short-term goals, long-term goals, planning, determination and barriers.
- Plan to reach a goal with your student and then celebrate. For example, plan to read 20 minutes each day for an entire week.
- Have your student interview a college graduate, asking:
 - Why did you go to college?
 - Are you glad you went? Why?
 - How did you decide which college to attend?
 - How did you decide what to study?
- Sit down with your child, each with a piece of paper and a pen. Have both of you write down three rules that would be good for a person to follow their whole life. Read and discuss each other’s lists. Some examples of these rules may be to be honest with oneself, work hard and take responsibility for your actions.
- Think of three compliments you can give your child each day.
- Visit one of the almost 200 colleges in Minnesota to help your student discover what a college campus is like.

Career activities:

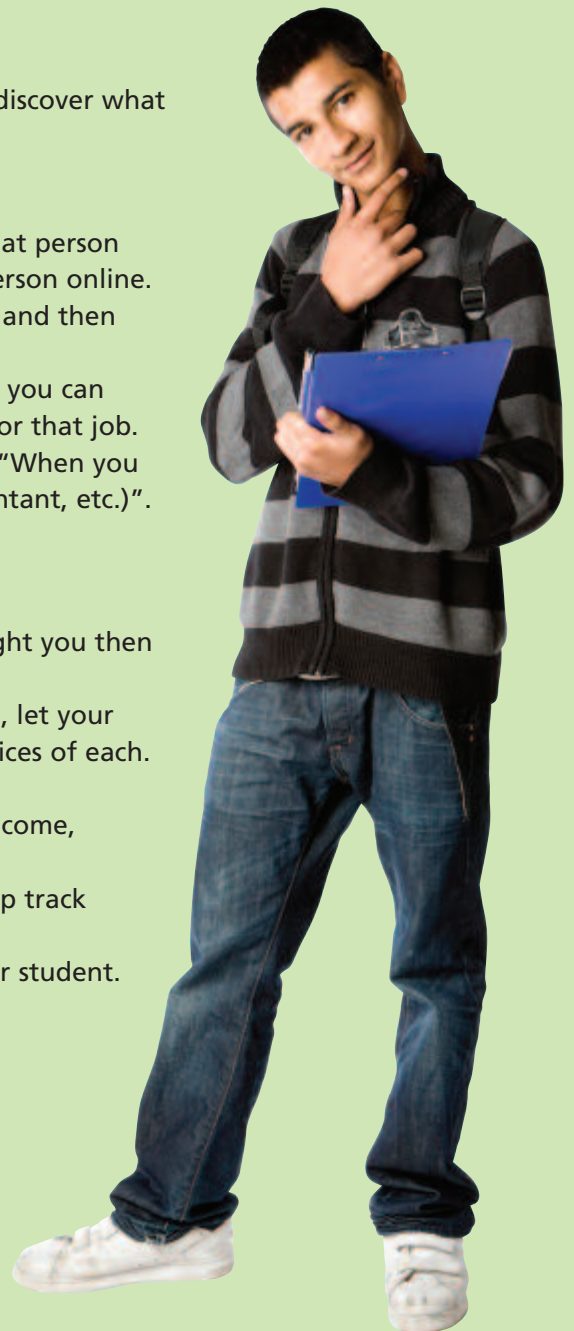
- When your student admires someone famous, ask your student what that person may have had to do to achieve their career. Consider researching the person online.
- Help your child imagine life with different careers by choosing a career and then discussing what a typical day might be like.
- Watch television with your student and see how many different careers you can spot. For each one, talk about what type of education a person needs for that job.
- Bring college and careers into your conversations. Use expressions like, “When you go to college” or “someday when you are an architect (or nurse, accountant, etc.)”.

Money activities for parents:

- Talk about needs versus wants at home.
- Think back to your teenage years. What do you wish someone had taught you then about money that you can teach your child now?
- Make your spending choices clear. For example, when grocery shopping, let your student know why you buy a certain brand and how to compare the prices of each.
- Have your student help you create a budget.
- Use “money language” at home: budget, credit card, debt, expenses, income, interest and savings.
- If you have a checkbook, show your child how to write a check and keep track of the money in the account.
- The next time you get a credit card offer in the mail, review it with your student. Explain how the card and interest works.

Conversation starters:

- What are you proud of about yourself?
- What is something you have accomplished and feel good about?
- Would you like to go to college? Why or why not?
- What do you think was the best decision you made this week?
- What is the best thing that happened to you today?



Words to Know

The following are terms you and your student may encounter in high school and on the road to college.

Academic Standards: Benchmarks that every student needs to be able to achieve in each grade.

Admission Requirements: A set of guidelines established by colleges that must be met in order for a student to attend that college.

Advanced Placement (AP): College-level classes your student can take in high school to earn high school and possibly college credit.

Bachelor's Degree: A degree earned after about four years of study at college.

Budget: A plan outlining how to spend and save money.

Campus: Where college classes, buildings, teachers and activities are located.

Campus Visit: A trip to a college or university to learn more about the school.

Career: The occupation for which you or your student is trained.

Class Rank: A student's standing based on his or her GPA compared to other students in their class.

College: Any education after high school that earns your student a degree. Universities are often referred to as "college".

College Entrance Exam: A test often required by four-year colleges to help determine which students to admit to their school. The most common tests are the ACT and SAT.

College Fair: An event where college admissions representatives talk with students and parents.

Community College: Colleges that provide the first two years of a four-year college education or prepare students for certain jobs.

Credit: A measure of how much a class is worth. Your student needs a certain number of credits to graduate from high school and college.

Degree: What your student earns when he or she graduates from college, like an associate or bachelor's degree.

Dormitory: An on-campus building where students live during the school year. Also called a "dorm" or "residence hall".

Electives: Extra classes students can take in high school to learn more about topics they are interested in.

Expenses: Money that is spent.

Financial Aid: Money to help pay for college.

Financial Need: The difference between the price of attending a postsecondary institution and the family's ability to pay for those costs.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): A form used to apply for financial aid.

Grade Point Average (GPA): The average of a student's grades, typically based on a four-point scale.

Grant: Money for college from the government that does not have to be repaid.

Guidance Counselor: A person at school who helps students prepare for college and careers.

Higher Education: Any education after high school, also referred to as "postsecondary" or "college".

Internship: Real-world experience related to your student's major that can provide college credit, mentors, references and might lead to a job.

Loans: Money college students or their parents borrow to help pay for college. It must be repaid with interest, even if the student doesn't graduate.

Major: An area of study that your student focuses on while in college. Students usually major in an area they might like to work in some day.

Mentor: An older person who gives support and guidance to a younger person.

Minor: An area of study that your student pursues, but it is not his or her major focus of study.

Postsecondary: Any education after high school. This is often called "higher education" or "college".

Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO): Taking classes at a college for free while in high school.

Resume: A summary of a person's skills and work experience often used when applying for a job.

Room and Board: Housing costs (room) and what it costs to eat (board) during the school year.

Salary: The amount of money a person makes per year.

Saving: The act of putting money aside for future use.

Scholarships: Money given to college students because of a special achievement, ability or background. It does not have to be repaid.

STEM Careers: High-demand jobs in science, technology, engineering and math.

Technical College: Colleges that offer employment courses and programs which teach specific knowledge and skills leading to certain jobs.

Transcript: A record of your student's academic progress.

Tuition: What it costs to take classes and use certain facilities at college. Tuition does not include room and board, books and other fees.

Tutor: A person who helps students with their school work.

Undergraduate Student: Any college student without a bachelor's degree.

University: A type of school that offers a degree and a wide variety of majors. Universities are often referred to as a "college".

Work Study: Jobs offered through a college and funded by the government to help students pay for college.

GET READY!

The Get Ready program helps prepare students from low-income families and those from groups traditionally under-represented in college with college planning information, academic tutoring and information on career and higher education options. The program is administered by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education and is funded in part by the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP).

About GEAR UP

GEAR UP is a federal grant program of the U.S. Department of Education created to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.



About the 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 postsecondary education.



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OFFICE OF
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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

www.getreadyforcollege.org

www.ohe.state.mn.us

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