



College Prep TIMELINE

Your student is going to be a high school senior. College preparation, applications, and questions tend to dominate the next few months. Use this monthly guide to develop a plan, organize your tasks, and carve out time to enjoy the journey.

9-10 MONTHS *Focus: College Visits*

Nothing is more beneficial to your student's college search than visiting their top college choices in person. Not only does it give you a first-hand look at the campus and community, but it helps your child narrow their focus and fine-tune their "list." For example, it might become apparent that a smaller college is more desirable when they are overwhelmed by walking through a large university.

Consider combining a college tour with a family vacation or take two mini-trips with a fun stop in between. No matter when or how you choose to tour, make sure to involve your student in the planning, and use the guide below to record notes from your visits.

College	
Location	
Tuition	
Student Enrollment	
Reasons for Consideration	
Visit Dates	
Overall Impression	
Positive Aspects	
Negative Aspects	

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Focus: College Application Timeline & Curriculum Review

Before school starts, talk with your student about their college choices and plans. Review the list of prospective schools and the notes you made during your visits. The goal is to develop a final college application list. Once finalize the list, allow your student to complete the information below for each college.

As the school year ramps up, it is easy to overlook requirements or miss deadlines. This exercise helps them assimilate critical information into one document and grasp the scope of the work ahead. It is also a good time for them to review their academic schedule.

Make sure that all requirements will be met for graduation and schedule any prerequisite courses. (Suggestion: Add the important dates and deadlines to your calendar at this time.)

College	
Location	
Application Deadline	
Application Fee	
Essay	Y N
Interview	Y N
ACT	Y N
SAT	Y N
Recommendation Letters	Y N How many?
Additional Requirements / Notes	

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Application Deadline	
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The application opens on October 1, so it is critical that you apply on that date or as soon as you can. Not only does it put you at the head of the pack for the limited funds available, but it also means that you have crossed one more thing off the list!

(Note: Merit-based scholarships can have separate applications/processes, so be sure to research and record those details if it applies to your student.)

6-8 MONTHS *Focus: College Application*

Hopefully, your student has finalized their college list and recorded all the deadlines. Now it's time to begin the application process—and it's not near as fun as the tours.

Some of the applications likely have deadlines in November or December. Although that may seem far away, it will be here before you know it and your student's calendar will be even more crowded.

Encourage your student to begin working now. If they seem overwhelmed, help them break down the tasks. Schedule a few hours on consecutive Sunday afternoons to work on their essay. Order their favorite takeout, spread out on the kitchen table, and tackle some of your paperwork while they work on their applications.

Your job is not to complete the applications or nag your student to do it a certain way. Instead, you should provide encouragement, support, and help (as needed) for scheduling and organizing the tasks. Don't forget that your student needs to ask teachers, administrators, coaches, or church leaders to write letters of recommendation (if required). By asking now, you will give them plenty of time to meet any deadlines.

Focus: Financial Aid

Your student has spent a lot of time over the last few months planning for and applying for college. Now it's time to think about how to pay for it!

Your first step in this process should be completing your FAFSA application. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (because this is probably the only application you will complete that doesn't require a fee!). Not so long ago, this program was only used to secure government-funded grants or loans.

However, many colleges now use this system and its subsequent report as the guideline for awarding their school's financial aid. The beauty of this system is that you may not be required to complete multiple applications for each school. Plus, you can electronically link your FAFSA application to your IRS account which completes most of the fields for you!

Focus: Finalize Applications

Hopefully, your student has been diligently working on their essays, gathering their recommendation letters, and completing their applications. November 1 is a good time to do a status check and make any adjustments to their task list/schedule to ensure they submit everything on time.

Remind your student to consult with their guidance or college counselor and speak with at least one representative from the colleges to which they are applying. Senior year is in full swing and the holidays are approaching, so it's easy for things to get lost in the busyness.

If possible, try to complete everything by the end of the month or mid-December at the latest. It will make your Christmas holiday and break much more enjoyable to know everything has been prepared and submitted.

4-5 MONTHS

Focus: Celebrate and Rest

No matter your age, family size, traditions, or career, this is a busy season! The ability to put the college application process on pause allows you and your senior to enjoy some family time and celebration.

No matter your student's plans, the holidays will probably look very different in the coming years. Take advantage of the opportunity to savor the moments, reflect on previous holidays, and make time for your favorite traditions. The sprint to the end will begin in just a few weeks, so carve out some time for rest.

Focus: Evaluate and Assess

As you begin to plan and assess the new year, take time to review the final application list with your student, along with any remaining tasks, questions, or concerns. Your student may have changed their mind about a college or a course of study.

Make sure to notify those institutions if your student will not be applying or attending. Also, it's probably not too late to add one to the list. Remember that this process is a journey—and you are traveling with a young, excited, (and perhaps “Senioritis”) student. Your goal is to guide, encourage, and help everyone survive!

2-3 MONTHS

Focus: The Waiting Game

Each family and university is different. Some students receive early acceptance letters for months due to rolling admissions or early college decisions. Others wait a month or two for their first branded envelope to arrive in the mail.

Hopefully, most of them lead with the opening words, “Congratulations! We want to invite you to” Realistically, some of them may say, “Thank you for applying. Unfortunately, you”

No matter the response, a parent's job is to affirm your student's identity, celebrate the effort and accomplishments. Frame the disappointments as opportunities for growth, and help your student navigate the choices provided to them.

Focus: Compare Offers

This month you should receive any outstanding decision letters, as well as the financial aid packages and offers. Every school calculates and lists the offers differently, so help your student review, analyze, and compare the packages.

If needed, contact the school's financial aid or admissions office and ask for clarification. When reviewing offers, don't overlook the cost of getting to and from school, room and board, books, and extra fees.

Also, make sure you understand the difference between merit-based awards, grants, scholarships, and loans. Are the awards or grants renewable each year? What are the requirements for renewal? If necessary, schedule a final trip to look at the school(s) your student is considering. Making a confident choice now could save you a lot of time and heartache later.

I MONTH *Focus: Final Decisions*

April is the month for final decisions as most schools have a May 1 deadline for acceptance or awards/admission. You are approaching the finish line, but the demands of senior year are growing as well.

Prom proposals, final exams, final awards, senior trips, and graduation are all in the mix. Plus, have you noticed that everywhere you go, people ask your student, "Where are you going to college?"

The pressure and stress are real—both at school and at home. It's also likely that the "Senior-itis" and anxiety will bubble to the surface on one or multiple occasions. Continue to support and encourage your student. Show patience and grace. Guide, help and suggest.

GRADUATION MONTH *Focus: Celebrate Decisions & Sprint to the Finish Line*

It's finally here! All the hard work, late nights, study sessions, club activities, applications, and competitions are coming to an end. Hopefully, your student has made their college decision, and they are beginning to submit deposits and housing requests.

You are also finalizing graduation celebration plans. This month will be incredibly busy. Consider limiting all other unnecessary responsibilities and to-do lists and enjoy the moment. Attend that last game or recital. Don't miss the awards presentation.

Order some college gear from their new school and celebrate their decision with a family dinner. Plan your graduation festivities and take part in others with friends. Savor the moments and make some memories.

DISCLAIMER: This strategy list is provided from the perspective of a previous senior parent and is designed to give encouragement and general advice. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide for the entire college application process. Please consult your high school guidance counselor or a college admissions counselor for specific information and instructions based on your student's state, college choices, and academic standing.