

# College Timeline

There are specific things high school students need to do to plan and prepare for college. *The following information will tell you what you need to do each year to stay on the path to college.*



## 9th Grade

- ▶ Work hard in your classes. All of your freshman grades will become part of your permanent high school record. This record (called a transcript) will be sent to any college you apply to. Your freshman grades will also be used to calculate your high school grade point average (GPA).
- ▶ Develop a four-year high school plan. This plan should list all of the courses you intend to take each year. Make sure your four-year plan includes the recommended college prep courses.
- ▶ Talk to your family, Talent Search advisor, and school counselor about your plans to attend college, and ask for their support.

## 10th Grade

- ▶ Continue to work hard in your classes and develop your skills and interests.
- ▶ Make informal visits to colleges to get a feel for what different campuses are like.
- ▶ Start thinking about what you are looking for in a college, such as location and cost.

For tips on how to build an impressive high school record, watch this short video.



VIDEO

# Your High School Record

Your high school record shows colleges what kind of a student you are and what makes you unique.



*Here are some tips for building a high school record that will put you on the path to college.*

## Take the right classes

Choose your high school courses carefully. Take courses that will help you prepare for college, and courses that will help you develop your skills in your areas of interest.

Most four-year colleges recommend that students take the following high school courses:

- ▶ 4 years of English
- ▶ 3–4 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- ▶ 3–4 years of science
- ▶ 2–3 years of one foreign language
- ▶ 3 years of social studies
- ▶ 1 year of fine or performing arts

Competitive colleges consider the above to be the minimum requirements. They recommend that students take advanced and honors classes whenever possible. Students who haven't taken several of the above classes may want to start at a two-year college or at a branch campus.

*If you have any questions, talk to your school counselor or Talent Search advisor.*

For information on making a four-year high school plan, watch this short video.



VIDEO

# Why Go to College?

As a Talent Search student, you know that while going to college is important, it takes a lot of hard work to get there. From time to time, you may find yourself wondering, "Is it really worth it?" The short answer is...yes!



*Here are some reasons why going to college is a goal that is definitely worth working toward.*

## More career opportunities

A college education can open doors and prepare you for a career that is personally satisfying, financially rewarding, and a perfect match for your interests and values. *With a college degree, the sky is the limit!*

## More money

Statistics show that four-year college graduates earn almost twice as much as high school graduates. That comes out to \$1,000,000 or more over a lifetime.

Having a higher income provides financial stability and more money for the things that are important to you, like hobbies, travel, and entertainment.

## New people and experiences

Going to college will give you the opportunity to study a variety of subjects, try new things, expand your skills, and meet new people. Most importantly, college gives you the opportunity to become the person you aspire to be.

# High School vs. College

While success in high school and college both require strong academic, organization, and time-management skills, there are a number of differences.



Here are some of the differences you can expect.

## High School

## College

High school is mandatory.

Attending college is your choice.

Public high schools are free.

College is not free, and it can be expensive.

You have classes one right after the other for 6–7 hours a day, Monday–Friday.

You may have big gaps between classes. On some days, you may not have any classes.

Your days are scheduled and organized by others.

You organize your days and manage your own time.

Your classes usually have less than 30 students in them.

Your classes may be very small or have 100 students or more.

Your course selection is limited and your schedule is arranged for you.

You have many courses to choose from and you make your own schedule.

# Two-Year Colleges

Two-year colleges are an increasingly popular college choice. They provide affordable, career-oriented one- and two-year programs. Students can also start at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college.



## What is a two-year college like?

### Career-focused education

Two-year colleges offer programs in high-growth career fields such as healthcare, computer science, and business.

### Affordable tuition

Attending a two-year public college for a year costs about half as much as attending a four-year in-state public college for a year.

### A good place to start

Many students who don't feel ready to attend a four-year college, or who want to save money, find that starting at a two-year college is a great way to begin their college education.

### Small classes

Two-year colleges keep their classes small and hire instructors who have worked in a related career field.

### Available services for TRIO students

Many colleges have a TRIO program called Student Support Services. This program helps students like you succeed in college and earn their degree.

# Four-Year Colleges

A four-year college education, or bachelor's degree, can open doors and provide students with more career opportunities, greater earning potential, and the pride that comes with earning a college degree. Here are the answers to common questions about four-year colleges.



## What kinds of courses do you take?

Students at a four-year college choose one subject to study in depth—this is their major. About half of a student's classes are in their major. The rest of their classes are in required general education courses (such as English, science, and math) and electives (courses they choose to take). A student's major should be a subject they enjoy, and one that will help them achieve their career goals.

Lots of students don't know what they want to major in when they start college. These students spend their first year taking their general education courses, learning about the majors offered at their school, and exploring their options.

## What do students do in their free time?

Colleges offer a variety of student clubs and organizations, community service opportunities, and intramural and club sports. Getting involved in campus activities gives students an opportunity to meet others with similar interests—and to also have some fun.

For more about four-year colleges, watch this quick video.



VIDEO

# Choosing a College

Choosing a college is about finding a college that's a good fit for you. The following questions and information will help you determine what's important to you in a college so that you can make the best choice.



## Type of college

Four-year colleges offer a wide variety of majors and programs. Two-year colleges offer affordable one- and two-year programs that prepare students for a specific career. Students can also start at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college to earn their bachelor's degree.

What type of college are you interested in?

- four-year college     two-year college

## Campus size

Larger colleges offer lots of majors, programs, and activities; smaller colleges usually have smaller classes and a more personal feel.

What size college do you want to attend?

- small     medium     large

## Location

Where do you want to attend college?

- close to home     out of state  
 in my home state     close to nature  
 near a big city    other \_\_\_\_\_

# College Visits

Making a college visit is the best way to find out if a college is going to be a good fit for you.



*The following tips will help you get the most out of your college visits.*

## Plan your visit

Check the college's website or call the admissions office to see when they have student visitation days and/or open houses scheduled. These programs are designed specifically for prospective students. If you want to visit on another day, contact the admissions office to set up a visit. The admissions office can schedule appointments and arrange for you to take a tour.

## Learn all you can

Prepare for your visit ahead of time by learning as much as you can about the college. Explore the website and take a virtual tour. Make a list of everything you want to see and do, and come up with a list of questions you want to ask. You might also ask your Talent Search advisor and counselor about their thoughts on the college.

## Talk to people

Schedule appointments with people who can answer your questions, such as admissions counselors, department chairs, and financial aid counselors. Also talk to students. Ask them what they like and don't like about the college, and what they do on the weekends.

# Understanding College Admissions

The college application and admissions process generally begins early in your senior year. The information below will give you a general idea of how it works, and the steps you should follow.



## The College Admissions Process

### STEP 1 – Submission

All colleges have admissions information and applications on their website. You may also be able to apply using the Common App. Be sure to submit everything that's required before the deadline.

### STEP 2 – Review

The college admissions office will put all of the information regarding your application into a file. When all of the required documents have been received, your application will be evaluated by an admissions committee.

### STEP 3 – Notification

Once your application has been evaluated, the college will let you know whether you have been accepted, rejected, waitlisted, or deferred.

### STEP 4 – Your decision

After comparing all of your college and financial aid offers, you decide which college you want to attend.

For tips on how to complete an impressive college application, watch this short video.



VIDEO

# ACT and SAT

The ACT and SAT are tests that many colleges require as part of the application process. Here's what you need to know about these important tests.



## About the ACT and SAT

**What do the tests cover?** The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, Reading, Math, and Science. The SAT has two sections: Reading and Writing, and Math.

**When are the tests given?** The ACT is given in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July. The SAT is given in August, October, November, December, March, May, and June.

**When should you take these tests?** It's best to take one of these tests in the spring of your junior year. If you want to improve your scores, you can then retake the test in the fall of your senior year.

**How are the tests scored?** On the ACT, students receive a composite score (1–36) and a score on each of the four sections. On the SAT, students receive a total score (400–1600) and two section scores.

**Should you take the ACT, SAT, or both?** Many experts recommend that you take a full-length practice test for each, determine which one you're likely to do better on, and then devote all of your time and energy to preparing for that test.

*Many colleges now have test-optional policies. However, unless you're certain you will not need to submit test scores, plan to take the ACT and/or SAT.*

# Applying to College

College applications are a group of documents highlighting your academic achievements, skills, unique characteristics, and goals. Your college application is a representation of you, and it's important that you present yourself in the best possible light. *Here's what you need to know about applying to college.*



## College Applications

Colleges generally require that applicants submit some or all of the following as part of the application process:

- ▶ the college's application form
- ▶ your high school transcript—which will include all of your high school courses and grades, and your GPA
- ▶ your ACT and/or SAT test scores
- ▶ a list of the school and community activities you've participated in
- ▶ recommendation letters from teachers, counselors, or other adults who know you well

If you're applying to more than one college that accepts the Common App, completing this online application can save you a lot of time. The Common App is accepted by 900+ colleges.

For more information on the Common App, watch this video or visit [commonapp.org](http://commonapp.org).



VIDEO

# Your Support System

Planning and preparing for college takes a lot of time and hard work; however, it's much easier when you have people to help, support, and advise you.



When it comes to succeeding in school and getting to college, know that there are people who can help you every step of the way.

*Consider all of the people in your life who care about you and want to help you succeed. Think of these people as members of your support system.*

## Ways the people in your support system can help you

- ▶ **Goal-setting.** Your network of supporters can help you set academic and personal goals—and also hold you accountable for achieving them.
- ▶ **Advice and guidance.** The people in your support system can offer advice on choosing a college and a major, and help you find the answers to any questions you may have
- ▶ **Emotional support.** Planning and preparing for college can be stressful, and it's important to have people you can share your concerns and problems with.
- ▶ **Networking.** Who you know can often be just as important as what you know. Having people in your corner expands your potential opportunities.

# Being a First-Generation College Student

A first-generation college student is someone whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree. Being a first-generation college student is something you should be proud of, but it can come with its own set of challenges.



## It's ok to have mixed emotions

It's not unusual for first-generation students to have conflicting feelings about going to college. These mixed emotions often include excitement, fear, pride, pressure, and even guilt. If you have any of these emotions, know that they are normal, and that there are many students who share your feelings, fears, and doubts. Just remember that going to college is the best thing you can do for your future—and know that there are people who can help you every step of the way.

## Reach out to others

You're not the only student in your school who will be a first-generation college student, and you won't be the only one on campus. As you plan and prepare for college, reach out to others in your situation, and find comfort and kinship in your similar experiences.

Also reach out to your Talent Search advisor, school counselor, family members, and favorite teacher(s). Ask for their help and support. *They all want to see you succeed!*

# Choosing a Major

It's never too early to start thinking about what you might like to study in college, and what you would like to major in. *The answers to the following questions will tell you what you need to know about choosing a major.*



## What is a major?

A major is the subject that students attending a four-year college study in depth. Almost half of the courses a student takes at a four-year college will be in their major—so it's very important that students choose a subject area they like.

## Do two-year college students choose a major?

Instead of choosing a major, two-year college students choose the program they want their degree to be in, such as engineering technology, dental hygiene, or fire science.

Students who want to transfer to a four-year college sign up for a transfer program. They then take courses they know the four-year college they plan to attend will accept.

## What if I don't know what to major in?

Many students start college without having decided on a major. These students use their first year of college to take their required general education courses such as English, science, and math. They can also use this time to talk to their advisor, learn about the majors offered at their college, and explore their options.

# Paying for College

College can be expensive, but there are things you can do to make college affordable. If you need help paying for college, learn about financial aid, fill out a FAFSA, and explore ways to cut college costs.



## College costs

When thinking about the cost of attendance (COA) for a particular college, be sure to include tuition, fees, books, room and board, transportation, and personal expenses. Here are the average COA "sticker prices" for 2023–2024.

4-year in-state public college—\$28,825

4-year private college—\$60,425

2-year public college—\$19,875

Most college students receive some form of financial aid (grants, scholarships, work-study, loans) and pay less than the above amounts.

## Apply for financial aid

*To get money to help you pay for college, do the following your senior year.*

1. **Complete college applications.** Complete admission applications in the fall of your senior year.
2. **Complete the FAFSA.** For information and instructions, go to [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov).
3. **Apply for scholarships.** Search for scholarships online at [fastweb.com](https://fastweb.com) and [scholarships.com](https://scholarships.com).

*To learn more about financial aid, watch this short video.*



# Understanding Financial Aid

Financial aid is money that is given, earned, or lent to help students pay for college. Financial aid makes it possible for millions of students to attend college.



## There are the four types of financial aid.

**Grants** are funds given, usually because of financial need. Grants do not have to be paid back. The Pell Grant, for example, provides billions of dollars each year to income-eligible families. *When students and parents submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), they automatically apply for a Pell Grant.*

**Scholarships** are generally awarded for academic achievement or an outstanding talent or skill. Scholarships do not need to be repaid.

**Loans** are funds borrowed from a lender (such as a bank, college, or the federal government). Loans must be paid back. *Over half of all financial aid awarded is in the form of a loan.*

**Work-study programs** provide college students who have financial need with part-time jobs to help fund their education.

Any family who needs help paying for college needs to complete a FAFSA. *This is very important! Many students who could have gotten free money for college didn't receive it because they didn't complete a FAFSA. Don't be one of those students!*

# The FAFSA

If you need help paying for college, it's important that you fill out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).



*If you have questions about the FAFSA, talk to your Talent Search advisor or counselor. For more information, visit [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov).*

## What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA is the application you need to fill out in order to receive any financial aid for college from the federal government.

## Why is the FAFSA important?

Because most financial aid is given to students with financial need, it's necessary to have a way to determine which students actually need money for college. The information from the FAFSA helps the government and colleges determine who is eligible for financial aid.

## How will completing a FAFSA help me?

Students who have financial need and complete a FAFSA become eligible to receive federal grants (free money), low interest loans, and more. Colleges and states also use information from the FAFSA to determine eligibility for their aid.

## When do I fill it out?

College bound students should complete a FAFSA in the fall/winter of their senior year.

Many students who could have gotten free money for college didn't receive it because they didn't complete a FAFSA. *Don't be one of those students!*

# Grants, Loans, & Scholarships

College is expensive, and most students need financial aid to help pay for college. Financial aid packages generally include grants, scholarships, and/or loans.



*Grants and scholarships are "free money" for college. Smart students get as much grant and scholarship money as they can!*

## Grants

Grants are money given to students who have a financial need. Grants do not need to be repaid and are available from several sources.

- ▶ **The federal government** awards Pell Grants, TEACH Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), and more.

The Pell Grant is the largest federal college grant program and it provides billions of dollars each year to students who need help paying for college. A Pell Grant is often part of a student's financial aid package.

*When parents and students submit a FAFSA, they automatically apply for a Pell Grant.*

- ▶ **State governments** offer grants to students who live and attend college in their home state. While application procedures vary, in most states, the FAFSA serves as the application.
- ▶ **Colleges, organizations, and corporations** often award funds to deserving students.