

Help Your Child Prepare: Twelfth Grade

Phew! Once your child reaches senior year, the college search kicks up a notch and will sometimes feel like a full-time job - with all of the toil, tedium, and triumphs that come with it. But this is the home stretch for both you and your future college graduate. It might be a lot of work, but it's a labor of love!

September

Take a moment with your child

Start the year off right by planning an evening out (perhaps dinner at a favorite restaurant) with your college-bound child. Go over your strategy for the school year. Discuss plans and goals and review your child's list of target schools. Also discuss plans to attend college fairs and meet with any college reps who may be coming to the school. (The school guidance office will have a schedule.) Go over which college sites have been visited and which ones haven't. Finalize plans for visits. If it all seems overwhelming, reassure your child (over dessert!) that you'll be there to support them every step of the way.

Start the application process

Does your student still need to take/retake the ACT or SAT? Find out the dates and get them registered!

October

Make a decision on early decision

Go over options for early decision and early action and determine if it's an option you and your child want to pursue. Help your child draw up a master schedule of application and financial aid due dates, and put them on the family calendar.

Move them in the "write" direction

Monitor the start of applications and encourage your child to mull over various essay topics to determine if any can be overlapped to reduce the workload. Your child should also start requesting teacher recommendations now; that way, they'll be done well in advance of any deadlines.

Hit the road

Start making college visits, and schedule any interviews that can be completed on campus or with college alumni. Attend college fairs, gather more information, and take a little time to laugh about the process by renting a good comedy and taking a night off!

Think dollars and cents

Certain colleges require a supplemental financial aid form, known as the CSS/PROFILE. This has an earlier deadline than the FAFSA. Check the schools to which your child is applying to find out if you'll need to complete this form in addition to the FAFSA. In addition, be searching for scholarships online and through the universities you are interested in.

November

Persistence

Try to use time over the Thanksgiving break to get in a campus visit. As your child continues working on (or completing) applications, offer to proofread and provide constructive criticism. Continue to search for and apply for scholarships.

December

Start coordinating paperwork

If your child plans to have another go at the SAT or ACT, make sure they register.

Keep an eye on the calendar

Be sure to have all transcripts and recommendations requested and mailed before Christmas break. The guidance office will not be open to send transcripts or recommendations over the holidays. Remember to give recommenders at least two weeks notice.

Apply for Florida Student Financial Aid (Bright Futures)

Students apply online at www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org

January

Remember "parent" deadlines

If you have everything you need, file your income taxes and begin filling out financial aid forms, such as the FAFSA. Finish and mail these forms as soon as possible - and never late! Keep in mind that many schools list earlier FAFSA filing dates than that which is listed on the form itself.

Finish up applications

Encourage your child to complete all of his or her applications, even those with later deadlines. Make copies of everything and save them! If SATs are being taken this month, find out if "rush" scores are required for any of your child's choice schools.

Congrats!

When the last application hits the mailbox, CELEBRATE!

February

Follow up

Unless confirmations have arrived, your child should consult colleges by phone or online to check the status of applications. They should keep track of who they speak with and find out if there are any materials that still need to be sent in.

March

Work through the waiting game

After nearly four years, the wait is almost over! There may be some decision letters arriving this month and, hopefully, they will bring great news.

April

Stay cool

Resist the urge to open letters addressed to your child. (Though holding them up to the light is an option.) Also, don't despair when thin envelopes show up - that doesn't always mean it's a rejection letter. Some schools send out enrollment forms later.

Remain supportive

If your child is accepted, cheer and applaud! If a rejection letter arrives, try to put things in perspective. There are thousands of colleges out there; one will be the right fit for them.

Take a second look

Compare financial aid offers and contact financial aid offices with any questions. If you feel you need to, appeal the awards. Plan crunch-time visits to campuses, as needed, to help with the big decision: which school to attend.

Follow up

Was your child placed on a waitlist? Make sure to return any waitlist cards and follow up with the admission offices regularly. Send updated records and other information, if available. Encourage your child to write an upbeat "Please take me, and this is why you should" letter. It may make a difference.

Take a deep breath

If you and your child have made a final decision about which school to attend, then congratulations! Now, make sure you send in any required deposit. Be sure not to dawdle and miss the May 1 deadline or your child may lose their spot to some other hopeful student. Last but not least, notify the schools that weren't chosen that your child won't be attending, particularly if an aid offer was made.

May

Polish off the details

Make sure your child takes any needed AP exams.

Remember P's and Q's

Encourage your child to write a thank you note to anyone who may have been especially helpful in the college-planning process. Guidance counselors are often unsung heroes, as are teachers who write recommendations, scholarship agencies, admission counselors, financial aid officers, secretaries, tours guides, or other students. Of course this isn't obligatory, but recipients are sure to be pleasantly surprised.

Buy some extra-long sheets

Stay on top of housing plans in case there are any forms that need to be returned. You and your child may also consider alternatives to the dorms, if there are any. Find out the dates for freshman orientation, as some schools have them in spring or summer. And of course, make sure your child knows when course registration is.

June

Play the waiting game

You and your child may both be a little jumpy around mail-delivery time each day. Keep your eye out for "the envelope," but also keep your cool.

Give your child (and yourself!) a pat on the back

Help your child organize a file to keep track of summer mailings from the college. Categories might include orientation, housing, course registration, and finances.

Attend to the details

Your child may want to consider summer courses to accelerate or place out of required courses, but make sure the college has confirmed that it will accept the credits. Also have your child confirm that the high school has forwarded a final transcript to the college.