

11th Grade: College Planning Timeline

This is a key year in the college planning process because you'll be taking standardized tests, narrowing down your college interest list, and learning more about financial aid, scholarships and staying involved in your high school courses and extra-curricular activities.

FALL

Stay on track with all your classes and grades

- Meet with your counselor (virtually or in person) to see what you still need to take. Check your class rank and GPA. Even if your grades haven't been great, it is NEVER too late to improve! Colleges like to see an upward trend.

Take the PSAT

- Taking the test qualifies you for the National Merit Scholarship Program, which means you could earn money for college. In addition, it is a good way to practice for the SAT.

Evaluate your education options

- Now is the time to follow a more specific path. Decide whether you want to pursue full-time employment, further education training (vocational-technical school, career college, 2-year or 4-year college), or a military service career. If you're interested in attending a military academy, talk with your counselor about starting the application process now.

Make a college list

- Your list of colleges should include schools that meet your most important criteria (e.g. size, location, cost, academic majors, or special programs). Weigh each of the factors according to their importance to you and develop a preliminary ranking of the schools on your list. You can also "favorite" schools in your Naviance account.

Continue gathering college information

- Got to college fairs, attend college visits (on campus or virtually), participate in college nights, and reach out to college representatives who visit school or host an on line event. Use an on line college finder/match program to help narrow your choices. (Naviance, CollegeVine).

Create a testing plan

- Figure out when you'll be taking important tests like SAT, SAT Subject Tests, ACT, and AP Exams. Mark these important dates on your calendar and manage your schedule to allow plenty of time to prepare.

Make sure you are meeting any special requirements

- If you plan to play Div I or Div II sports in college, start the certification process and check with your counselor to ensure you are taking the core curriculum classes that meet the NCAA requirements.

WINTER

Stay involved with extra-curricular activities

- Colleges look for consistency and depth in the non-academic activities you pursue. Taking on leadership roles and making a commitment to the same groups are more important than trying out tons of new activities each year

Organize your college information

- Set up a filing system or folders on your computer for each college's correspondence and materials. This will make it easier to locate the specific information when needed.

Begin narrowing down your college choices

- Make sure you have all the information you need about the colleges you are interested in (entrance requirements, tuition, room/board costs, course offering, student activities, financial aid). Then begin comparing the schools by the factors most important to you and rank your choices.

Prepare for standardized tests

- Find out if the colleges you are interested in require the SAT, ACT or SAT w Subject Tests. Register to take the tests you need; most juniors take them in the winter or spring. You can take them again in the Fall of your senior year if you are unhappy with your scores.

Talk with your family

- Have a discussion about the colleges you are interested in. Your family can learn about what you want to pursue and you can hear any concerns or suggestions they may have.

Learn more about financial aid

- Examine your family's financial resources and gather information about financial aid from the schools you're interested in. High-school sponsored financial aid nights and financial aid counselors (either virtual or in person) and advice articles are good sources of information and assistance.

SPRING

Prepare a challenging schedule for senior year

- Meet with your counselor to determine what classes you will take next year and make sure you are on track for graduation. Review your transcript and make sure it is accurate. When picking your classes, do not load up on too many easy electives. Colleges DO consider your senior year courses and grades, so stick with a schedule that challenges you, but also you can complete successfully.

Start a scholarship search

- There are a lot of scholarships out there; you just need to spend some time and effort in finding them. Check with the guidance office for scholarship opportunities from local organizations, and use on-line scholarship search tools to find a wider range of options (Naviance, Chap college/career webpage,) The sooner you start looking for scholarships, the easier it will be to select some to apply to during senior year.

Contact your recommendation writers

- Teachers and guidance counselors are often asked to write letters of recommendation for students. Consider whom you want to ask now and let them know so they'll have time to prepare before getting tons of requests in the Fall. Ask teacher who know you well and who will have positive things to say. Letters of recommendation from a coach, activity leader, or adult who knows you well outside of school are also valuable.

Apply for a summer job, internship, or volunteer opportunity

- Summer employment, internships, leadership opportunities, volunteering, study abroad are ways to gain experience and exposure in field you're interested in. This will look appealing on a college application or resume. The money you earn can also be used to help pay application and testing fees in the Fall.

Schedule appointments at your top college choices

- You'll often have to plan ahead when visiting college campuses. Call the admissions office to set up a personal interview (virtual or in person), arrange a tour, and try to meet with a professor or coach if possible.

Always speak with your guidance counselor prior to taking or re-taking any classes in summer school if needed

SUMMER

Visit colleges

- If colleges are permitting in person visits, try to see your top five college choices. Take a tour, speak with admissions and financial aid personnel. Ask if you are able to talk with current students or visit a class in session. If you have an interview, be sure to send a thank you note to the interviewer once you return home.

Get advice from other college students

- If you have friends or relatives in college, talk to them about what college life is like, especially if they attend a school of high interest to you. It is important to get different perspectives of life and academics on campus.

Organize our financial aid information

- Develop a plan that includes a list of aid sources, requirements for each application, and a timeline for meeting the filing deadlines. Getting organized will make the process much easier.

Start working on your application essays

- Compose rough drafts of the essays you'll need for your college applications. Look at resources and sites that offer essay writing advice/tips. Ask a teacher to read and discuss any improvements you might make. Don't forget to proofread, proofread, proofread.

Make "early decision" preparations

- If you plan to apply early decision to any school, take the time to visit the school again and make sure you are willing to commit. Early decision deadlines are sooner in the Fall, you should start working on your application as soon as possible.

Follow through on your internship, work, or other summer opportunities