



A COLLEGE PLANNING GUIDE

Prepared by the Tri-County Guidance Department

2013 – 2014

HIGH SCHOOL TIMELINE

Use this timeline to help you make sure you're accomplishing everything you need to accomplish on time.

Ninth Grade

- As soon as you can, meet with your counselor to begin talking about colleges and careers.
- Make sure you are enrolled in the appropriate college-preparatory or tech-prep courses.
- Get off to a good start with your grades. The grades you earn in ninth grade will be included in your final high school GPA and class rank.
- College might seem a long way off now, but grades really do count toward college admission and scholarships.
- Explore your interests and possible careers.
- Get involved in extracurricular activities (both school and non-school-sponsored).
- Talk to your parents about planning for college expenses. Continue or begin a savings plan for college.
- Look at the college information available in your counselor's office, school and public libraries. Use the Internet to check out college Web sites.
- Tour a nearby college, if possible. Visit relatives or friends who live on or near a college campus. Check out the dorms, go to the library or student center, and get a feel for college life.
- Investigate summer enrichment programs.

Tenth Grade

Fall

- In October, take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) for practice. When you fill out your test sheet, check the box that releases your name to colleges so you can start receiving brochures from them.
- Become familiar with general college entrance requirements.
- Participate in your school's or state's career development activities.

Winter

- Discuss your PSAT score with your counselor.
- The people who read college applications aren't looking just for grades. Get involved in activities outside the classroom. Work toward leadership positions in the activities that you like best. Become involved in community service and other volunteer activities.
- Read, read, read. Read as many books as possible from a comprehensive reading list.

- Work on your writing skills – you’ll need them no matter what you do.
- Find a teacher or another adult who will advise and encourage you to write well.

Spring

- Keep your grades up so you can have the highest GPA and class rank possible.
- Continue to explore interests and careers that you think you might like.
- Begin zeroing in on the type of college you would prefer (two-year or four-year, small or large, rural or urban).
- If you are interested in attending a military academy, such as West Point or Annapolis, now is the time to start planning and getting information.
- Write to colleges and ask for their academic requirements for admission.
- Visit a few more college campuses. Read all of the mail you receive from colleges. You may see something you like.
- Attend college fairs.
- Keep putting money away for college. Get a summer job.
- Consider taking SAT II Subject Tests in the courses you took this year while the material is still fresh in your mind. These tests are offered in May and June.

Eleventh Grade

Fall

- Meet with your counselor to review the courses you’ve taken, and see what you still need to take.
- Check your class rank. Even if your grades haven’t been that good so far, it’s never too late to improve. Colleges like to see an upward trend.
- If you didn’t do so in tenth grade, sign up for and take the PSAT/NMSQT. In addition to National Merit Scholarships, this is the qualifying test for the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students and National Hispanic Scholar Recognition Program.
- Make sure that you have a social security number.
- Take a long, hard look at why you want to continue your education after high school so you will be able to choose the best college or university for your needs.
- Make a list of colleges that meet your most important criteria (size, location, distance from home, majors, academic rigor, housing, and cost). Weigh each of the factors according to their importance to you.
- Continue visiting college fairs. You may be able to narrow your choices or add a college to your list.
- Speak to college representatives who visit your high school.
- If you want to participate in Division I or Division II sports in college, start the certification process. Check with your counselor to make sure you are taking a core curriculum that meets NCAA requirements.
- If you are interested in one of the military academies, talk to your guidance counselor about starting the application process now.

Winter

- Collect information about college application procedures, entrance requirements, tuition and fees, room and board costs, student activities, course offerings, faculty composition, accreditation, and financial aid. The Internet is a good way to visit colleges and obtain this information. Begin comparing the schools by the factors that you consider to be most important.
- Discuss your PSAT score with your counselor.
- Begin narrowing down your college choices. Find out if the colleges you are interested in require the SAT I, ACT Assessment, or SAT II Subject Tests for admission.
- Register for the ACT Assessment, which is usually taken in April or June. You can take it again late in your junior year or in the fall of your senior year, if necessary.
- Begin preparing for the tests you've decided to take.
- Have a discussion with your parents about the colleges in which you are interested. Examine financial resources, and gather information about financial aid.
- Set up a filing system with individual folders for each college's correspondence and printed materials.

Spring

- Meet with your counselor to review senior-year course selection and graduation requirements.
- Discuss ACT Assessment/SAT I scores with your counselor. Register to take the ACT Assessment and/or SAT I again if you'd like to try to improve your score.
- Discuss the college essay with your guidance counselor or English teacher.
- Stay involved with your extracurricular activities. Colleges look for consistency and depth in activities.
- Consider whom you will ask to write your recommendations. Think about asking teachers who know you well and who will write positive letters about you. Letters from a coach, activity leader, or an adult who knows you well outside of school (e.g., volunteer work contact) are also valuable.
- Inquire about personal interviews at your favorite colleges. Call or write for early summer appointments. Make necessary travel arrangements.
- See your counselor to apply for on-campus summer programs for high school students. Apply for a summer job or internship. Be prepared to pay for college application, financial aid, and testing fees in fall.
- Request applications from schools you're interested in by mail or via the Internet.

Summer

- Visit the campuses of your top-five college choices.
- After each college interview, send a thank-you letter to the interviewer.
- Talk to people you know who have attended the colleges in which you are interested.
- Continue to read books, magazines, and newspapers.
- Practice filling out college applications, and then complete the final application forms or apply online through the Web sites of the colleges in which you're interested.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Compose rough drafts of your college essays. Have a teacher read and discuss them with you. Proofread them, and prepare final drafts. Proofread your final essays at least three times.
- Develop a financial aid application plan, including a list of the aid sources, requirements for each application, and a timetable for meeting the filing deadlines.

Twelfth Grade

Fall

- Continue to take a full course load of college-prep courses.
- Keep working on your grades. Make sure you have taken the courses necessary to graduate in the spring.
- Continue to participate in extracurricular and volunteer activities. Demonstrate initiative, creativity, commitment, and leadership in each.
- To male students: you must register for selective service on your eighteenth birthday to be eligible for federal and state financial aid.
- Talk to counselors, teachers, and parents about your final college choices.
- Make a calendar showing application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships.
- Check resource books, computer programs, and your guidance office for information on scholarships and grants. Ask colleges about scholarships for which you may qualify.
- Give recommendation forms to the teachers you have chosen, along with stamped, self-addressed envelopes so your teachers can send them directly to the colleges. Be sure to fill out your name, address, and school name on the top of the form. Talk to your recommendation writers about your goals and ambitions.
- Give School Report forms to your high school's guidance office. Fill in your name, address, and any other required information on top. Verify with your guidance counselor the schools to which transcripts, test scores, and letters are to be sent. Give your counselor any necessary forms at least two weeks before they are due or whenever your counselor's deadline is, whichever is earlier.
- Register for and take the ACT Assessment, SAT I, or SAT II Subject Tests, as necessary.

- Be sure you have requested (either by mail or online) that your test scores be sent to the colleges of your choice.
- Mail or send electronically any college applications for early-decision admission by November 1.
- If possible, visit colleges while classes are in session.
- If you plan to apply for an ROTC scholarship, remember that your application is due by December 1.
- Print extra copies or make photocopies of every application you send.

Winter

- Attend whatever college-preparatory nights are held at your school or by local organizations.
- Send midyear grade reports to colleges. Continue to focus on your schoolwork!
- Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and, if necessary, PROFILE®. These forms can be obtained from your guidance counselor or at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> to download the forms or to file electronically. These forms may not be processed before January 1, so don't send them before then.
- Mail or send electronically any remaining applications and financial aid forms before winter break. Make sure you apply to at least one college that you know you can afford and where you know you will be accepted.
- Follow up to make sure that the colleges have received all application information, including recommendations and test scores.
- Meet with your counselor to verify that all applicable forms are in order and have been sent out to colleges.

Spring

- Watch your mail between March 1 and April 1 for acceptance notifications from colleges.
- Watch your mail for notification of financial aid awards between April 1 and May 1.
- Compare the financial aid packages from the colleges and universities that have accepted you.
- Make your final choice, and notify all schools of your intent by May 1. If possible, do not decide without making at least one campus visit. Send your nonrefundable deposit to your chosen school by May 1 as well. Request that your guidance counselor send a final transcript to the college in June.
- Be sure that you have received a FAFSA acknowledgment.
- If you applied for a Pell Grant (on the FAFSA), you will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) statement. Review this Pell notice, and forward it to the college you plan to attend. Make a copy for your record.
- Complete follow-up paperwork for the college of your choice (scheduling, orientation session, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms).

Summer

- If applicable, apply for a Stafford Loan through a lender. Allow eight weeks for processing.
- Receive the orientation schedule from your college.
- Get residence hall assignment from your college.
- Obtain course scheduling and cost information from your college.
- Congratulations! You are about to begin the greatest adventure of your life. Good luck.

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PART I INFORMATION

Colleges will use some, if not all, of the information listed below when determining whether or not to accept an applicant. Individual colleges, however, differ in how they evaluate this information. For example, one college may place a great deal of importance on test scores, while another college may not.

1. Grade Point Average
2. Class Rank
3. Strength of subjects
4. SAT scores
5. Recommendations
6. Activities/Awards
7. Personal essays
8. Interviews



GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

GPA is simply the average of a student's semester (or end of term) grades, starting with the freshman year. Most high schools use a 4.0 scale where an A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1. Since college applications are generally completed during the fall of the senior year, the GPA at the end of the junior year is very important.

The GPA must be achieved based on all college preparatory courses completed at the time of application and should be weighted for accelerated (Honors or Advanced Placement) courses. Effective Fall 2002 the required minimum weighted high school GPA is 3.0 for the four-year public campuses.

<u>Effective Date</u>	<u>State College GPA</u>	<u>University GPA</u>
Fall 2002	3.00	3.00

If your grades are lower than required, you may be able to make up for them by earning high scores on the SAT (see sliding scale).

If you earn the required grades, you still need to take the SAT and have your scores sent to the college or colleges to which you are applying.

Students who do not meet these requirements still should apply, since the State Colleges may admit some students based on factors in addition to those outlined here.

CLASS RANK

Many high schools use class rank to show where a student stands academically. Class rank is often presented with the student's place in the class followed by the total number of students in the class (e.g., 35/295). Rank can be particularly important when applying for scholarships because many scholarships stipulate that a student must be in the top 10% (or 20%, 25%, etc.) of his/her class.

STUDENT TRANSCRIPT

A transcript is a document that details a student's academic achievement in high school. Transcripts generally contain the following information:

1. Courses, grades, and credits for each grade level completed, beginning with grade 9.
2. Anticipated graduation date.

All college, and most scholarship applications will request that a transcript be submitted with the application. For a transcript to be official, it must be mailed from the high school to the college. However, transcripts can also be sent electronically through ConnectEdu.

STATE COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS



Four-year colleges recommend students complete certain preparatory courses while in high school.

The following is the link to the complete Massachusetts State College Admission Standards:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/hsreform/masscore/studyprogram.html>

A summary of the Admission standards for Massachusetts State Colleges:

Required Courses

To be considered for acceptance to a Massachusetts State College or any of the four University campuses, you need to take the following 16 Carnegie units in high school. A 5 credit course or two 2.5 credit courses equals one year.



- English 4 courses
- Mathematics 4 courses (Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry or Trigonometry or comparable course work)
- Sciences 3 courses (including 2 with laboratory work)
These courses must be equivalent to T.C. 15 credits.
Honors chemistry and Honors physics must be taken.
- Social Sciences 3 courses (including one in U.S. History & World History)
- * Foreign Languages 2 courses (in the same language)
- Electives 2 courses (from the above subjects or from the Arts & Humanities or Computer Sciences)

*Vocational-technical high school graduates who do not complete the two required college preparatory foreign language courses must complete an additional elective

college preparatory course, for a total of three such courses, and satisfy one of the following options:

1. Complete at least one Carnegie unit of a foreign language;
2. Complete a fourth Carnegie unit of mathematics or science, which need not be a laboratory course; or
3. Complete one Carnegie unit of computer science.

Note: A Carnegie unit represents a full academic year of study or its equivalent in a specific subject.



PRIVATE FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS

Private four-year colleges maintain their own formula of grades, SAT's and extra-curricular criteria for admission.

TWO-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

A four-year college education is not for everyone. In fact, students can often best prepare for many of today's high growth career fields by attending a community college or technical school.

As a general rule, students who apply to a community college or technical school are not required to have followed a college prep curriculum in high school, nor are they required to take the SAT.

However, placement testing is required by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education for all students seeking a Degree or Certificate. It will be necessary for you to complete an assessment test called the ACCUPLACER (<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/accuplacer/index.html>) in Writing, Reading, and Mathematics if you plan to register for any English or Mathematics courses or apply to a Health Program. These tests are not a requirement for Admission, but are used for the purpose of advising and placement into the appropriate courses.

You can not "pass" or "fail" the placement tests, but it is very important that you do your very best on these tests so that you will have an accurate measure of your academic skills. Low scores on the ACCUPLACER may place you in developmental English and/or Mathematics classes. These classes do not count towards college credit.

Students may begin their education at a two-year college and then transfer to a four-year college to complete their bachelor's degree.

Community college graduates are guaranteed admission to state colleges and the University of Massachusetts when they complete an associate degree in an approved program with a GPA of 2.5 or better, and transfer to a comparable program at a participating college. You'll need to check with your community college to find which colleges accept your program of study. This program is called Mass Transfer.

Please go to www.mass.edu/masstransfer for more information and specific guidelines.

PART II

THE 11th GRADE

1. Consider College Options

There are over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. As you start looking at colleges, consider the following:

- Location
- Size
- Cost
- Facilities



- Available majors
- Reputation
- Competitiveness
- Community

The guidance office has websites to assist you in your search and there are excellent reference books available in libraries, guidance offices and bookstores. A wealth of information is also available on the internet.

2. Register for the SAT and/or ACT in Early Spring

Students may retake these tests as many times as they want; colleges will generally use their highest score. It is important for students to take the SAT and/or ACT tests in the spring of their junior year so they will have time to retake them if their scores are not as high as they need to be.

Students can pick up registration packets for the SAT in the guidance office or they may register online by visiting www.collegeboard.org. Students can register for the ACT by visiting www.actstudent.org. Both websites also provide practice questions.

Approximately two to three weeks before the test date, registered students receive “tickets” to enter the test along with instructions. Both the SAT and ACT are given on Saturday mornings and take approximately four hours. Students receive their scores in the mail four to eight weeks after the test date. Scores may be viewed earlier online.

The SAT is an aptitude test, testing reasoning and verbal abilities. The SAT I is comprised of three sections, Critical Reading, Math, and Writing (35 minute multiple choice section and 25 minute essay section) with scores ranging from 200 to 800 for each section. The highest possible combined score is 2400.

The ACT is an achievement test, measuring what a student has learned in school. The ACT has up to 5 components: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and an optional Writing Test. The highest possible score on the ACT is 36.

3. Make College Visits

The summer of the junior year is an excellent time to make college visits. If you make your college visits during the summer months, however, be sure to revisit the colleges you are seriously considering in order to get a feel for what the college is like when it is in “full swing”.

In order to plan a college visit, call the admissions office several weeks ahead of time.



4. Carefully Select Courses for the Senior Year

Be certain that senior courses meet all requirements for the college you may attend. Continue taking college prep courses instead of “taking it easy in the senior year”.

COLLEGE TESTING

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test)

A practice test for the SAT, it is given each October, primarily to juniors.

SAT I (Scholastic Assessment Test)

A college entrance examination, generally taken during the junior and/or senior year. Students receive a Reading, Writing, and Math score.

SAT II Subject Tests

One-hour tests which measure a student's knowledge of specific subjects, and his/her ability to apply that knowledge. These tests are required by some colleges.

WEBSITES

www.connectedu.net/tricountyvt - ConnectEdu's online tools allow school counselors to manage a large and diverse student population while providing each student with the individual guidance necessary to maximize his/her education potential. All 11th and 12th grade students and parents have received their login information.

www.bridges.com – Students can explore careers, research educational programs and colleges, look for scholarships, and even apply for different colleges nationwide online.

www.collegeboard.org - Students are encouraged to fill out the "My Organizer" section.

www.collegenet.com

www.anycollege.com

www.finaid.com

www.mefa.org – Provides financial aid advice.

www.fastweb.com - scholarship search

www.yourplanforthefuture.org - Students utilize each year with Guidance but should be used by students at home.

