Always Move Forward.

Preparing a Student for College
A Parent’s Timeline for Success
Introduction

Your children are growing up. You know that college is on the horizon but do you have a plan to help get your students there? If not, don’t fret! The following guide is meant to be a roadmap to college. We start in freshman year, but don’t worry if your students are already beyond that. This process is all about looking forward. Talk to your students and let them know it is a team effort. Only your team can decide who is working on each task; the important thing is that all the tasks get accomplished.

We have hit as many key steps as possible in this guide. We did our best to lay out the process without overwhelming you. We hope you find this helpful. Best of Luck!

Sincerely,
Staff of the Test Preparation Program
University of San Diego
sandiego.edu/testprep
Welcome to Freshman Year

Start on the Right Path in 9th Grade

You might think that the freshman year of high school is too early to be thinking about college – it’s not! Grades earned for courses during the freshman year will appear on official transcripts that will be sent to colleges and universities to which your students will be applying.

This is a good time to take a moment to sit down with your incoming 9th grader and sketch out preliminary plans for classes to be taken during the high school years. It is also a good time to talk to them about extracurricular activities they might want to explore during the next few years.

Remember college is important, but so is high school. Don’t worry so much about college that you and your student can’t enjoy the high school years. Engaging in high school classes and activities is an important part of the college application.
“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” – Benjamin Franklin

• Get Involved – Keep an open dialogue about how classes are going with your students. If there are areas of struggle, now is the time to get a handle on it. If your student needs additional stimulation, you may want to talk to the school about advanced placement classes.

• Help Your Students Explore New Activities – Let students discover new and meaningful activities in and out of school. They’ll learn what they are comfortable with and how much time they can dedicate to activities without impacting their coursework.

• Take Note of Success – Help your students begin tracking their activities, accomplishments, awards, and leadership positions. These will all come into play as they complete their college and university applications later in their high school careers.

• Provide Support – Keep lines of communication open. Talk to your students about their progress and how they feel they are doing. Listen to their comments about what interests them and direct them toward activities that might better reflect those interests. Assist them with creating a good study environment.

• Be a motivator – If your student does struggle, remember that the best motivation is encouragement.

• Remain Open to Change – One thing all high school students do is explore their interests. If some activities aren’t working out, be open to helping them find new activities that might better reflect their strengths and interests.

• Think Summer – Together with your student begin to consider worthwhile summer plans such as a job, volunteer work, traveling, etc.
“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
– William Butler Yeats

• Look to the Future – With your student, look ahead to the sophomore year. Consider any changes/additions to their course schedules you might want to make. Discuss what activities they want to move forward with and those they might want to replace with something new.

• Hit the Books – Work with your student to develop a summer reading list to prepare for 10th grade and finalize any summer plans that were in development.
Welcome to Sophomore Year

Take the Next Step

This is the year to start getting organized and build the foundation for that most important Junior year. You may want to enroll your student in a Test Preparation course now so he/she can gain some familiarity with the test material. Both the ACT and SAT attempt to test for the knowledge gained in a typical high school education. However, every school and every student is different. Focusing on the test early can actually relieve the stress that some experience when they try to cram at the last minute. Consider a USD Test Prep course that offers free retakes so that your student only pays once but can prep as much as needed. Also, consider the benefits of carpooling and the buddy/group discount.

Keep in mind that the tests are important, but they are not everything. Keep encouraging those extracurricular activities. A student with a well-rounded high school experience will enjoy high school and improve those college applications!
Sophomore Year

Plan of Action–Fall/Winter

“The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.” – Aristotle

• Encourage Preliminary Testing – Speak with the guidance counselor at school about taking a practice exam for the SAT and ACT. Although the “real” PSAT is usually taken in the fall of the Junior year, a practice exam will allow students to become familiar with the exam. Also ask about the ASPIRE schedule for the ACT.

• Get a Head Start – Begin checking out college fairs (when and where they are scheduled) and possibly meeting with school representatives that might be visiting from out of state universities. Attend a college fair to see what it is like and what information is out there. Don’t push at this stage – keep things casual. Gather info!

• Keep Talking – Talk about progress and make sure that courses and activities continue to be a good fit. If your student is struggling with grades – review the course level or work on improving their study habits.

• Stay Active – Evaluate extracurricular activities to see if your student is over-involved to the point that activities are negatively affecting grades, study habits, and attitude.
Sophomore Year

Plan of Action–Spring/Summer

“The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one.” – Malcolm Forbes

• Break Out the Sunscreen – Summer is just around the corner. You and your students should be considering options. Earning money or enhancing their transcript with a summer camp or special program is great!

• Check the Schedule – Students interested in the Subject Tests for the SAT may want to practice. Register now for the June exams.

• Think Ahead – Revisit course plans for the Junior year with a thought toward selecting or continuing with a schedule of challenging courses. Encourage your student to participate in at least one community service activity. Finalize summer plans – including a reading list.

• Stay Productive – Summer study, jobs, and volunteer work rate high with admissions officials and look great on the application. If your student has a career goal in mind, see if he/she can “shadow” someone in the field for a day.

• Do Some Early Research – The internet is a great resource for college entrance information. Most institutions have online applications – take a look to see what information you’ll need to complete them. Start an interest list of schools that merit further consideration in the coming months. Bookmark the favorites!
Welcome to Junior Year

Make the Most of 11th Grade

This is the big year when it comes to the college application process. That does not mean it has to be stressful. Use this guide as a checklist and be deliberate. There is a lot to do, but it will get done. Go step by step, work with your student, and focus on the goal. It will all be worth it once those acceptance letters come through! If your student isn’t confident in his or her SAT/ACT test score then now is the time to consider a prep class.
Junior Year

Plan of Action—Fall

• Time to Get Serious – Make sure your student is registered to take the PSAT in October. This is the qualifying exam for the National Merit Scholarship program.

• College Fair Season – Check into college fairs and college representative visits to your student’s school. The Counseling Office at your school should have a schedule. Become familiar with the college resources available at the school.

• Important!! – If you haven’t already done so, get a Social Security number for your student.

• Stay Connected – Calendar the PSAT. Assist your student with practice questions and ensure both of you read the Student Bulletin on the College Board website. Don’t grill your student when the exam is over. Plan a stress-free, fun activity to decompress. The scores will be out soon enough!

• Take a Road Trip! – Schedule a day trip to visit nearby colleges. Don’t worry if these aren’t on your student’s “wish” list. The goal is to consider a variety of schools. Explore! Discuss which characteristics of the schools were attractive and which weren’t.

• Kick the Pace Up a Notch – Once you receive the PSAT scores, contact your student’s counselor if you have any questions/concerns. If needed, discuss strategies for improving weak areas for the actual SAT. Look into test preparation options for the SAT and ACT.

• Look to the Future – You and your student should begin to refine the list of colleges, keeping test results in mind. If you have friends/family with college students home for winter break, ask them questions about their experiences.

• Dollars and Cents – Take a first look at financial aid forms to see what you’ll be doing this time next year.
Junior Year

Plan of Action–Winter

• Communication – This can’t be stressed enough. Talk to each other, to counselors, to admissions advisors, etc. Evaluate progress in courses and make any needed changes. Talk to your student about successes and fears – celebrate the first and calm the second. Let him/her know that fears can be overcome – work together to make that happen.

• Anticipate Summer – Begin to make initial plans for summer. Plan something that interests your student and will look good on the college applications – work, volunteer, community service, summer program, studying, etc.

• Check the Schedule – Look ahead to SAT and/or ACT registration deadlines. There’s a March exam that most Juniors take, and the deadline to register is in February!

• Plan, Plan, and Plan Some More – Consider and plan a spring vacation to visit colleges preferably not out on break. That way you’ll be able to get a good feel for college life and speak to some students. See about taking campus tours when you can arrange them ahead of time.

• Get Organized – Make the “wish” list of colleges a reality. Keep track of information gained about each institution on the list. Have a file of printed/marketing materials received from each campus for reference. Visit websites and request information/publications.

• Testing, Testing – If you haven’t already done so, check on upcoming SAT and/or ACT registration deadlines and exam dates. Register early and don’t forget test preparation options.

• Plan Senior Year – Discuss 12th grade courses with your student. Try to include at least one math course or lab science. Colleges weigh senior classes and grades as heavily as the junior record.
Plan of Action–Spring/Summer

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

• Double-Check – Does your student still need to take a spring SAT and/or ACT? June exams are the last shot before fall. Also, don’t forget to discuss continuing activities with your student. Avoid overload!

• Double-Check...Again - Make sure to continue with test preparation for June exams and that no deadlines or test dates are overlooked. Make sure your student is registered for anything that still needs to be done. Track upcoming exam dates and keep preparing!

• Scholarship $$$ - Use the summer to search the internet for scholarships and financial aid with your student. There are many websites as well as library resources.

• Don’t Slack Off – Keep Moving – Your student should be used to setting summers aside for things that will impress on a college application. Work, volunteering, etc. all look great to admission officials. This is also a good time to schedule any additional campus visits.

• The List - Revise and update the “wish” list of colleges - adding in pros and cons as you receive information/publications from the schools.

• Lights, Camera, etc. – Students should be planning, if not executing, any supplemental submissions that will be required. Ex: audition tapes, art slides, portfolios, etc.
Welcome to Senior Year

Make the Most of 12th Grade

You are entering the home stretch! That does not necessarily mean the hard work is over but by now you should see the light at the end of the tunnel! If your student is still not happy with his or her SAT or ACT scores then consider the option to prep and retake the test in the fall. After that just keep an eye on all the deadlines, submit items on time and get ready to start checking the mailbox. The acceptance letters should be coming soon!
Senior Year

Plan of Action–Fall

- Calm Before the Storm – Start the final year of high school by spending some time with your student. Have a fun evening at a favorite restaurant, an end of summer cook out, or a bonfire at the beach. Go over your plans for the year. Discuss the “wish” list of schools – editing as needed.

- Go to the Fair – Plan to attend college fairs and meet with any college reps who may be coming to the school. Go over which college sites have been visited and which haven’t. Make final plans to visit any remaining campuses. Remind your students that they aren’t in this alone – you are with them all the way.

- Last Call for Exams – Does your student need to take the SAT or ACT one more time? Find out the dates and get registered!

- Make a Choice about Early Decision – Discuss whether to pursue options for early decision. Complete the college list by adding application and financial aid due dates.

- Guide them in the “Write” Direction – Monitor the start of applications and encourage your student to think over various application essay topics. Can any topics overlap with existing coursework? Remind your student to begin requesting teacher recommendations – well in advance of any deadlines.

- On the Road Again – Make any final, last-minute visits to the top schools on the list. Schedule any needed interviews that can be completed on campus. Attend more college fairs and gather more information.
• Think Dollars and Cents – Some schools require a supplemental financial aid form – the CSS/PROFILE. This has an earlier deadline than the FAFSA. Check the top rated schools on your list to see if they will require this form in addition to the FAFSA.

• Nag – Just a Bit – You may have to start nagging your student about application deadlines. Many schools have deadlines that hit before the Thanksgiving break, and others hit in early December.

• Keep an Eye on the Calendar – Get your federal financial aid forms (FAFSA) from the guidance office or the internet. Attend workshops – if available. Gently remind your student about any schools with application deadlines in January.

• Confirm Recommendations – Have your student confirm that teachers/counselors are up-to-date with reference forms. Also make sure that transcripts are being sent to all short-list colleges.

• Take Time to Relax – Spend time with family and friends enjoying the break. January is just around the corner.
Senior Year

Plan of Action–Winter

“Happiness does not come from doing easy work but from the afterglow of satisfaction that comes after the achievement of a difficult task that demanded our best.”
– Theodore Isaac Rubin

• Remember “Parent” Deadlines – If you have everything you need, file your income taxes and begin filling out financial aid forms (ex. FAFSA). Finish and mail as soon as possible – never be late with these!! Keep in mind that many schools list earlier FAFSA filing dates than what is listed on the forms themselves.

• Finish Applications – Make sure that late deadline applications are sent off to schools in plenty of time. Don’t forget to make copies of everything you send to schools. When you get the final application in the mail…CELEBRATE!!

• Follow Up – Unless confirmations have arrived, your student should contact schools by phone or online to check the status of applications. Keep track of the status and any materials that still need to be sent.

• The Waiting Game – The wait is almost over! There may be some decision letters arriving this month with good news.
Senior Year

Plan of Action–Spring

• Stay Cool – Resist the temptation to open any letters addressed to your student. Don’t despair when thin envelopes show up – that doesn’t always mean rejection. Some schools send out enrollment forms later.

• Remain Supportive – If your student is accepted – cheer! If a rejection letter arrives, try to put things in perspective – ex. It’s an extremely competitive school, it’s their loss!

• 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 student placed on a waitlist? Make sure to return any waitlist cards and follow up with the admissions office regularly. Send updated records and other information, if available.

Encourage your student 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 student have made a final decision about which school to attend – congratulations! Make sure you send in any required deposit. Do not procrastinate and miss the May 1 deadline or your student may lose his or her spot to some other hopeful student on a waitlist. Also, notify the schools that you did not choose that your student will not be attending, particularly if an aid offer was made.

• Finalize the Details – Make sure your student takes any final AP exams.
Senior Year

Plan of Action–Spring Continued

• Remember to say “Thanks!” – Encourage your student to write a thank you note to anyone who may have been helpful in the college-planning process. Guidance counselors, teachers, scholarship agencies, admission counselors, financial aid officers, secretaries, tour guides, or other students. This creates a positive attitude about your student that will serve him/her well down the road.

• Remember the Extra-Long Sheets – Stay on top of housing plans in case there are forms that need to be returned. You and your student may also consider any alternatives to dorms. Find out dates for freshman orientation, as some schools have it in spring or summer. Make sure you and your student know when course registration is scheduled to happen.

• The Waitlist Waiting Game – If you are waiting for late acceptance, you may be jumpy around mail-delivery time each day. Keep your eye out for the envelope, but also keep your cool!

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

• Details – Your student may want to consider summer courses to accelerate or place out of required courses – make sure the college has confirmed that it will accept the credits. Also confirm that the high school has sent the final transcript to the college.
Senior Year

Plan of Action—Spring Continued

• Ready, Set, Go – Take your student shopping for supplies and dorm décor. Don’t forget suitcases and boxes for packing!

• Take Well-Deserved Credit and Celebrate! – After all is done, take a moment to remember the past four years and how you and your student worked together to make all of this possible. Together you have created a masterpiece!
Why Choose Us?

8 Reasons to Choose Test Prep at USD

1. **Our Experience** – We have been helping San Diegans prepare for their standardized tests since 1980.

2. **Expert Instructors** – Our teachers have a passion for teaching and have demonstrated success on the exams.

3. **Best Materials** – We provide comprehensive materials that teach mastery of the content, test-specific strategies, and use technology to help our students succeed.

4. **Retake SAT/ACT Classes for free forever** – We want you to achieve your highest possible score. Prep as much as you want. Retakes are free.

5. **Buddy/Group Discount** – Studying with a friend or two can increase motivation, save car trips, and most importantly save money. The more friends you bring the more everyone saves.

6. **Military Discounts** – Thank you for your service! We offer a 10% discount to active or retired military and their dependents.

7. **USD Alumni Discount** - Come back home and study with USD or enroll the next generation of Toreros and get 10% off.

8. **Early Bird discount** – Sign up two weeks or more in advance and save.
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