



COLLEGE ACCESS:

How can I help my scholar be, and stay, on the path to college?

INTRO. There is a lot that goes into preparing for and applying to college. You can be a great source of motivation as scholars explore their goals, consider college options, and meet requirements to enroll in a four-year college. You can also help provide guidance as they navigate colleges, applications, and requirements.

“Getting out and visiting colleges with my mentor opened my eyes to several college choices. I was confident that I had made the right choice when enrolling at my new school.” - PSP Alum

I. PREPARE: HOW CAN I HELP MY SCHOLARS PREPARE FOR COLLEGE?

CONSIDER. Do you remember the first time you heard about college? How and when did you first learn about college?

TIMELINE. When do you do what?! The infographic on p. 2 summarizes this information. More details will follow, but you can see detailed descriptions of each stage at [College Planning](#)¹ and [Your Journey](#)².

TIP: You can also encourage your scholar to create a [Road Map](#)³ themselves. They can create an online account to save articles and information, or use a resource like [ACT](#)⁴ with actions steps for 9-12th grade. [Student Aid.gov](#)⁵ also has checklists to track steps and progress.



PATH TO COLLEGE

7 TH GRADE

- Get involved at school (sports, band, drama, debate, art, etc)
- Explore interests
- Talk College

8TH GRADE

- Explore interests
- Investigate careers
- Meet with counselor about HS course expectations
- Talk about financial plan w/ parents
- A-G Classes

9 TH GRADE

- Explore colleges more broadly
- Get involved in extracurriculars
- Design 4-yr class schedule
- Look into summer jobs
- Look into volunteer opportunities
- Keep track of your activities and accomplishments for resume
- Meet with counselor to ensure courses are on track for college

10TH GRADE

- Spend time with HS counselor
- Explore college websites, campus
- Learn about Financial Aid
- Career exploration
- Investigate best school for you
- Take PSAT this year
- Review HS courses

11 TH GRADE

FALL: Take PSAT in October if haven't yet, or re-take it

- Attend college fairs
- Create a college interest list
- research private scholarships
- Request financial aid info from schools of interest
- SAT/ACT prep class

SPRING: Take SAT/ACT (1st time)

- Go on college campus visits
- Continue scholarship search
- Begin personal essays or writing sample drafts (if possible)

12TH GRADE

FALL: Register for AP tests

- SAT/ACT retakes
- Collect recommendations, writing samples, any other requirements,
- Complete resume
- Submit applications & scholarships

SPRING: Submit FAFSA, SAR

- Request transcripts sent to schools
- Review Financial Aid rewards w/ parents; choose a school & **ACCEPT!**

Figure 1: College Access Action Steps

DO! ESTABLISH GOALS. Encourage or support your high school scholar in creating a ‘Yearly Goal Sheet’ for college action steps. As they check it off they will feel accomplished! They can use the timelines in this guide, one of the resources provided above, or they could use something like this handy reference [calendar](#)⁶.

Don’t forget! Your scholars should:

- ✓ Enroll in one residential summer camp, class, or workshop on a college campus
- ✓ Visit at least 5 college campuses of private and/or out-of-state schools
- ✓ Visit at least 5 other college campuses

DO! CHECK OUT GREAT ONLINE RESOURCES that help organize research, planning, and decision-making around college acceptance and enrollment. [ACT’s college planning resource](#)⁷, might be a good fit for your scholar, especially high school scholars. There are also two versions for parents, one which is in Spanish.

A. What does my scholar need to do to ensure they are on the path to college?

DO! TALK COLLEGE. Expose scholars to college early and often. You can have conversations and college-related exploration and experiences around:

First, the WHY. **What is the purpose of college?** Star this conversation with you middle school scholar. Always keep the why a part of the conversation at all grade levels. Remember, it isn’t just about society’s “why” for college, but the scholar’s “why”. Some ways to get started:

1. Introduce and continue conversations about college. Use [conversation](#)⁸ starters if needed. For example:

- Talk about your college experience.
- Ask, “What kinds of things do you hope to do when you get older?”

2. Motivate and inspire. Be a ‘[College Positive Mentor](#)’! “The role of a college positive mentor is to offer encouragement and support to promote the college-going mindset, expose your scholar to the resources and options that make college possible, and equip them with the tools and knowledge to explore and pursue higher education”.⁹

- a. **Share information** about the impact earning a Bachelor’s Degree can have on their life like that below. When children born into the bottom fifth of the income distribution get a college degree, their chances of making it to the top nearly quadruple, and their chances of making it out of the bottom increase by more than 50 percent.¹⁰ The impact of a college degree:

70% more likely to be employed.

Earn **66%** more.
\$1 million more in a lifetime.

70% receive health benefits from employers compared to less than 50% without degrees.

Ability to **communicate** clearly, concisely, and persuasively increases.

College graduates are **less** likely to end up in prison. Only **11.4%** of state prisoners have some postsecondary education.

By **2020, 2/3^{rds}** of job openings will require postsecondary education.

Source: Ed.gov¹¹ and Library Index¹². Read MORE.¹³

LEARN MORE: You can read¹⁴ more about the impact of college and increasing opportunities for low-income students.

BEYOND THE STATS. It is important to discuss more than just the stats. Talk about how college opens doors. College broadens your horizons, provides opportunities on campus and after graduation to see and experience new things. Also, think about how the purpose aligns with your scholar's interests and goals.

- b. Talk about role models.** Check out someone that is relatable – who shares something in common with your scholar (background, race, socio-economic status, family dynamics as a child, etc.). Questions you might research and think about include:
 - **What is the person's occupation? What training did that require?**
 - **What makes them successful to your scholar? What characteristics made them successful?**
- c. Activities.** Here are some other ways to encourage a college-going mindset for your middle¹⁵ or high school¹⁶ scholar.

Next, the WHAT: What is college like? Start this conversation with your 7 and 8th graders. Begin exploring interests, careers, and majors early. Their interests may change, but its good to be reflecting on long-term goals and to build that college knowledge.

3. Explore what college is like:

- a. Visit local colleges in middle school and take online virtual tours of distant campuses. Visit in and out-of-state colleges in high school. You can still take virtual tours then too!
- b. Attend a college event like sporting events, plays, or other opportunities open to the public.
- c. Create a collage, diagram, journal, etc. of the various things you can do in college.

4. Explore career interests. What do they want to do/be?

- a. **Read up on interests and aspirations.** If they don't know yet that is ok. Think about what subjects they like, what they enjoy doing, and areas of strength.
- b. **Reflect with your scholar at all ages.** Help them learn about themselves and match interests, values, and skills with education and career options using tools like [Kudor](#)¹⁷.

TIP: State websites like [Pure Michigan](#)¹⁸ are great resources for looking at jobs. You can also explore careers with resources like [Big Future](#)¹⁹.

DO! EXPLORE OPTIONS. Be compassionate and patient in your delivery of information regarding college. Remember, your scholars are the first in their family to go. Help them to understand and explore options. Below are some action steps you can take to do that.

***First*, the WHERE: What are the options?**

- **Share your college experience.** Where did you go? Why did you choose that school? What did you like and what did you wish had been different?
- **Share that there are a variety of options**²⁰. This includes in-state and out-of-state²¹, private and public schools. Encourage the feeling that any option is possible.
- **Talk about possible opportunities and challenges related to going to a school in a different city or state.** See more in the next section about applying: 'What School is best for your scholar?'
- **Go to a college fair.** Check out these [College fair tips](#)²² to help make them successful.

What the above conversations look like will change a bit based on your scholar's interests, age, and where they are in the college access process. But, you can tailor the 'Whys' and 'Whats' as you go.

Next, the HOW: How are we going to get there?

To the right are some of the main questions scholars need to answer. You can help scholars to:

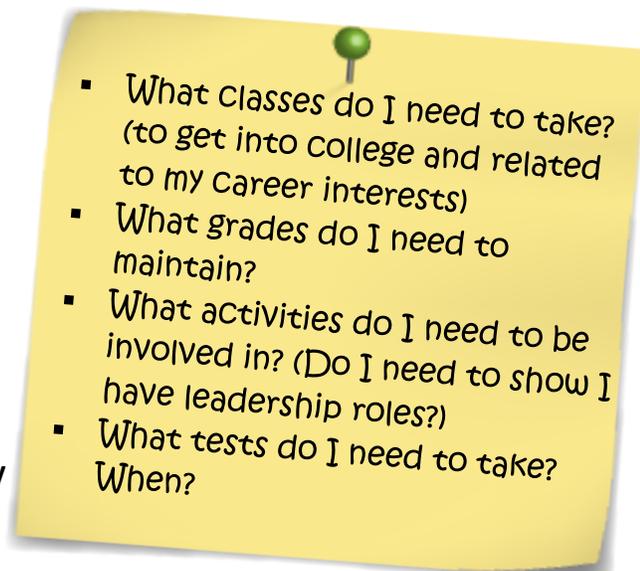
FIRST, choose the right classes²³ and get the right grades.

- 1. Encourage them to speak with their HS counselor early** and continue that conversation each year. They can use the post-it questions as a guide, as well as the interest and career exploration they have done previously.
- 2. Help scholars set up a time to visit with a college counselor.** Some things they might ask:
 - What opportunities are there at this college that align with my interests?
 - What are the course and GPA requirements to be accepted here?
 - What do I need to be doing now to be accepted and to enroll?
- 3. Lend an ear.** If your scholar needs someone to listen to their thoughts, be there. If they are interested in nutrition help them think through what subjects now might benefit them later.

TIPS: [Questbridge](#)²⁴ helps scholars think through class choices. Both GPA and classes matter. Here are some things scholars should be considering: AP courses and areas of study aligned with college/career interests. There might be programs like [AVID](#)²⁵ or [MESA](#)²⁶ at your school also.

SECOND, find and engage in extra-curricular or leadership activities²⁷.

- 1. Scholars can look at options that align with their interests.** They can use the answers they have received above, combined with activities that would interest them. It helps if those roles set them apart for college entrance and/or include civic engagement, which helps with scholarships.
- 2. Participate in summer enrichment²⁸ options!** For example:
 - Residency programs and Youth Leadership at [UCLA](#)
 - Check out [these](#) 'Science and Engineering Opportunities with Colleges'
 - A 'Programs and Internship' list found at [ECCLA](#)
 - [Questbridge](#) program scholarships
 - Ask PSP for recommendations!



THIRD, know and prepare for required tests. Some basic information to know:

	PSAT	SAT	ACT
What	Prepares scholars for entrance exam. No influence on admission.	General reasoning and problem solving.	Curriculum-based. There is an optional writing test.
Why	Get feedback on strengths and weaknesses, qualify for some scholarships.	Colleges use SAT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships.	Colleges use ACT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships.
When	Fall: Sophomore, Juniors	Spring: Juniors	Spring: Juniors

DO! PLAN AHEAD. Help your scholar create a simple plan of action for meeting test requirements using suggested actions [here](#).²⁹ Help them:

- 1. Schedule the PSAT.** It would be great for scholars to take the PSAT their sophomore years, but we require they at least take it in their junior years.
- 2. Choose a college entrance test.** Most colleges allow either the SAT or ACT but some have preferences. Double check test requirements with your admissions office or on the website. Check out the link to learn more about the [SAT vs ACT](#).³⁰
- 3. Practice tests.** [ACT](#), [SAT](#), [PSAT](#). Help your scholar calendar a few practice tests. A relaxing activity afterwards would be beneficial too!! Google “free SAT/ACT test prep” for more!
- 4. Prepare for the tests.** Online options that students can do at home or at the library include: [PrepScholar](#), [Kaplan](#), [College Board](#), [March 2 Success](#), and [KHAN Academy](#). You can look at [The Princeton Review](#) to see if there are free in-person strategy sessions, events, as well as college admissions classes. ***PSP will pay for students to enroll in a SAT/ACT prep class of their choice!***
- 5. Plan ahead.** Know testing dates: [ACT](#), [SAT](#). Register at least a month in advance and find test centers. Take it early so they can retest if necessary or desired.
- 6. Get fees waived,** if eligible: [ACT](#), [SAT](#).³¹ For the PSAT, they can ask the counselor. PSP will help with fees too!



LEARN MORE: This is a **great**³² resource for understanding test preparation. There are also programs out there that support students in preparing for college. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your mentor is connect them to the right tools and resources. Check out programs like GEAR UP, [College Forward](#), and others for additional resources and support.

Figure 2: Video College Planning Guide³³

II. APPLY: HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY SCHOLAR IN APPLYING FOR COLLEGE?

A. What does the college application process look like?

DO! KNOW WHAT IS REQUIRED. There are several elements to a college application. It helps for scholars to be prepared when it comes time to completing applications. You can help! Below is information about what they need, where they find it, and when they need it:

WHAT	WHY	WHERE	WHEN
Register and take SAT and/or ACT	Meet testing requirements	<u>SAT</u> test dates and location; <u>ACT</u> test dates and location	Spring 11 th grade, Oct 12 th grade if re-taking; test scores sent to colleges mid-Oct
Complete Personal Statements/Essays	Application requirement	Get requirements via college applications; <u>helpful tips</u> ³⁴	Brainstorm essay topics and practice writing in 11 th grade; 12 th grade Sept drafts
Create online accounts and retrieve applications	Submit Applications	Online at universities' admission pages or hard copies sent via mail	12 th grade: Requests Sept/early Oct; applications submitted Nov (early action); Dec decision notifications
Submit scholarship applications	Receive merit-awards	Applied colleges Community orgs And more! (see funding college 101)	11 th grade fall, spring, summer 12 th grade fall, spring, summer
Ask for and receive <u>recommendations</u> ³⁵	Strong Applications	Teacher or counselors, employees, coaches, <u>you</u> ³⁶ !	12 th grade (approx. Oct – a least 1 month prior to submitting applications)
Complete resume Transcript requests	Application requirements	High School sends transcripts to college	12 th grade: mid-Oct.; transcripts again at end of year
Send in acceptance!	Confirm College Choice	College	By school's required deadline
Get a FSA ID	To file FAFSA	<u>Federal Student Aid</u>	Fall 12 th grade
Collect FAFSA documents (read more in 'Funding College 101' guide)	To file FAFSA	Online or printout at <u>FederalAid.gov</u>	12 th grade, early Jan (2016 available starting in Oct. though!)
Get fees waived	Applications and Test Fees	Learn more <u>here</u> ³⁷ ; PSP can help too!	Register or submit applications

TIPS: Dates in the table above are considered ‘early action’. See ‘regular decision’ timelines and see more specifics and associated timelines at [Questbridge](#).³⁸ Read more about ‘[Application Tips](#)’.³⁹ Also, the [Common App](#) is a standardized application accepted by more than 500 colleges.

B. What college is best for your scholar?

CONSIDER. What were some of the factors you took into consideration when you were deciding where to go to college? Why? What do you wish you had considered that you didn’t?

TIP: Ask your scholar to envision college. What do they envision the college experience will be like? What do they want to get out of school besides a diploma? Help them connect with PSP alumni, college students or administrators on campuses they think they might be interested in.

DO! THINK THROUGH COLLEGE OPTIONS. There are several things to consider when deciding what colleges to apply to, and ultimately attend! It is important for scholars to figure out what option(s) are right for them. You can help guide your scholar through some questions to consider, be a listening ear, or do some research together. Here is a ‘[College Comparison](#)’ Sheet⁴⁰ your scholar could use to keep track of information they gather.

1. Some factors your scholars should consider are below. Some of the main ones include:

- ✓ Majors and Academics
- ✓ Support Services and Faculty
- ✓ Campus Life
- ✓ Tuition and Room and Board Costs
- ✓ Size and Location

You and your scholar can read more about these considerations [here](#).⁴¹ [Student Aid.gov](#) includes a few others and describes what to look for.⁴²

- ✓ Admission Requirements
- ✓ Work Flexibility
- ✓ Accreditation (program and overall)
- ✓ Complaints and Reputation

2. Questions to support research and weighing options might include:

- What are my career interests? Check out this interactive [World-of-Work Map](#)!⁴³
- What are the best colleges for the field(s) I am interested in? (In-state and out-of-state)
- What student services and career services are available?
- How much does school cost? (See more below!)
- What kinds of activities do I want to engage in on and/or off campus?
- Will I need to work? What types of places might I look for work?

3. **Browse schools.** Use resources like the [Princeton Review](#), [College Greenlight](#), and [College Atlas](#). You can look by state, major, etc. Check out info like the following as you browse:

- Student Reviews
- Mission Statements
- Scholarships Available
- Tuition and Room and Board estimates
- On and Off Campus Life

[Big Future](#)⁴⁴ offers several different starting points for looking at colleges. Scholars can choose from ‘I know what I want’ to ‘I am not sure where to start’, or from whether location or majors matter.

4. **Find Majors of interest.**⁴⁵ See what colleges have these majors, tuition, and enrollment.

5. **Consider the cost.** Your scholar could look at cost estimates of colleges. Look at the cost calculator on the college websites that you are interested in. All colleges that participate in federal student aid programs have net price calculators on their websites your scholar can use. There is a free financial need estimator calculator at [ACT](#) too.

6. **Reflect on opportunities and challenges.** For example: What are the [opportunities](#)⁴⁶ and challenges associated with attending college [out-of-state](#)⁴⁷?

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
Meeting new people, new cultural experiences	Missing friends and family, far away from home
Build Independence	Usually higher tuition, though this isn’t always the case
Explore a new city/state and areas nearby	Relocation and travel expenses
Specialized program or possibly increasing degree program options	Adapting and initial feelings of isolation

7. **Share your experiences too** – what you learned or wish you would have considered! An example of a mentor’s reflection:

“I was from a small town and wanted to experience a college campus but a tighter knit community. I ended up going to a big University and had wished for more one-on-one and small group opportunities in class. I could have more carefully considered my smaller school options that aligned with my interests and goals too.”

Q: How will they pay for college? Check out the brief, ‘Funding College 101’ for an overview of financial assistance options and resources.

DO! VISIT SEVERAL COLLEGES. PSP requires at least ten college visits. Things to consider:

1. When determining colleges to visit, and while visiting, have your scholars consider what they are looking for in relation to some of the following: location, geography, diversity, and other unique characteristics that matter to the scholar. Check out this [Campus Visit Guide](#).⁴⁸
2. Use the questions in #2 above as a guide, and help them come up with their own questions for college visits. This can help scholars get answers that will better inform them as to whether the colleges align or do not align with their goals and interests.
3. Scholars should engage in a camp, class, or workshop on a college campus that they might be interested in attending for college. This will help them get a better feel for the college.

TIP: Ask them to carefully consider what schools they will apply to, and offer to answer their questions as they research colleges. You can explore together or just support and motivate them, depending on your scholar. Just being a friend and support can help relieve some of the stress of applying to schools! Scholars can also see more about the best schools, read education blogs, and save, compare and take notes on schools at [US News Education](#).⁴⁹

III. ACCEPTANCE: WHAT IS NEXT AFTER CHOOSING A COLLEGE?

What do scholars do once they are accepted and have made their choice?!? After acceptance, there should be a celebration! The journey is not over, but it is a new beginning. Now it is time to change gears and focus in on requirements like those below.

1. **Make smooth transitions as scholars end their senior years.** Scholars will need to:
 - Respond to all correspondence from selected college.
 - Be aware of due dates for tuition, room and board, and other expenses.
 - Check in on financial aid and how aid will be disbursed, and ask to defer payments until funds are available if necessary.
 - Get ready for summer orientation!
2. **Prepare for campus life.** If you have a senior scholar, you might want to help prepare them for campus life. [Here](#)⁵⁰ are some resources for you to help!
3. **Start a personal budget.** It is a good time to get in the habit of managing [finances](#).⁵¹
 - Ask your scholar if they want help creating a future college budget.
 - Help them get excited about the things they can do while in school;
 - But, also think about what getting a job might look like and how it can help financially;
 - And, why and how to be responsible with financial aid.

TIP: After high school graduation, students can start looking at internships. Share resources like [‘How to Find an Internship You’ll Value’](#)⁵² with your scholars.

TIP: There are some great resources at [Big Future](#)⁵³ for supporting undocumented students in applying to college. Readings and videos include: “what do undocumented students need to know”, how to get financial aid, and student experiences and perspectives. You can read an overview of [The Dream Act](#), eligibility, and states that offer in-state tuition undocumented students.⁵⁴



*Figure 3: Big Future Video Gallery*⁵⁵

HIGHLIGHTS and ‘AHA’ MOMENTS. How can you apply two of the things you learned?

1. Prepare ahead of time and understand crucial timelines.
2. Visit several colleges and ask good questions.
3. Discuss college options and reasons for going.
4. Be aware of testing requirements.
5. Know the ins and outs of college applications.

END NOTES.

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