

Action Plan: Your Freshman

Freshman year is an exciting time for your child (and you!)—new school, new friends, and challenging new classes. Though your child has a lot going on, it's important that together you start to plan for the future.

The phrase "college preparation" may bring to mind images of campus visits, college applications and the SAT®. But these days, college prep involves much more, and it starts earlier than junior year. Review your child's college options now. Learn what resources the high school has to offer and encourage your child to take advantage of them.

Fall

- Your child should meet with her [high school counselor](#) and be sure to:
 - Find out what courses the school offers, the graduation requirements, and how the grading system works.
 - Make sure he's enrolled in strong college preparatory classes.
 - Learn what extracurricular activities are available.
- Help your child create a four-year schedule of [recommended classes](#) that meet the basic requirements for high school graduation and college admission. Colleges prefer four years of English, history, math, science, and a foreign language.
- Your child should also select [meaningful electives](#), [Advanced Placement Program®](#) courses if appropriate, and other academics in which he shows an interest.
- Just like his academic schedule, help your child plan a four-year [extracurricular and athletic activity](#) schedule. Encourage him to stick with commitments.
- Honors-level students may consider taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test ([PSAT/NMSQT®](#)). Though most students take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall of their junior year, Valerie Trautman, a guidance counselor in Rockland County, New York, explains that students who are very academically focused and have excelled in honors programs may want to take the test as freshmen. She suggests that taking the test can help your child assess strengths and weaknesses, which will help when taking the test in the future.
- Encourage your child to read, read, and read some more. Reading develops interests, expands knowledge, and improves vocabulary and reading comprehension skills needed for college and for standardized tests. Get ideas from our online list: [101 Great Books Recommended for College-Bound Readers](#).

Winter

- Together with your child, review how he's doing in each of his key subject areas. Encourage him to keep up the good work, and help him set goals for improvement in weaker subjects. Learn how you can help your child develop good [homework skills](#).
- Motivate your child to keep up with [independent reading](#). Get your child a subscription to the *New York Times* or other newspaper.
- Your child should meet with school counselors and teachers about taking [SAT Subject Tests™](#) such as U.S. History, Biology E/M, and Literature in his strong subjects this spring.
- Get informed about [college costs](#). Explore your family's options for financing your child's college education and learn how [financial aid works](#).
- How much money will your family need to pay for college? Use the online [College Savings Calculator](#).

- Calculate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to get an estimate of how much your family can reasonably be expected to pay towards college. Use the online [EFC Calculator](#).

Spring

- Now is the time for your child to start looking for a [summer job](#), internship, or [volunteer opportunity](#). The summer is a good time to learn more about an area in which he's interested. For example, being a camp counselor can give a student who's interested in teaching a taste of what to expect.
- Your child can check with his school counselor and search online for [summer learning programs](#) offered to high school students at colleges and other institutions.

Summer

- Have your child finalize his summer plans.
- Encourage your child to read [great literature](#) this summer. Ask teachers or the school librarian for book suggestions.