

Extracurricular Tips

Selective colleges want to know what you do both inside and outside the classroom. Yes, your academics come first, but what you do with your free time reveals a lot, such as:

- Whether you are mature enough to stick to something over the long haul
- What your nonacademic interests are—what makes you tick
- How you've contributed to something beyond yourself
- Whether you can manage your time and priorities

So here are some tips for choosing extracurriculars.

Consider your interests and abilities first

It's easier to commit to something that fits the real you. If you like to write but don't enjoy running, it makes more sense to join the school newspaper than the track team. And while it's natural to want to be where your friends are, *don't join something for that reason alone*—it truly should be a shared interest.

Go for depth, not breadth

Colleges are more impressed by a real commitment to one activity over time, rather than a superficial involvement in multiple activities. So don't join a bunch of activities just to bulk up your application.

Keep your balance

Remember: Colleges are not interested in seeing you “do it all.” Don't overextend and risk burnout or bad grades. Colleges don't have a checklist of requirements when it comes to extracurriculars.

You don't have to be a star

Don't worry about being president of the club, or captain of the team. The key is whether you've contributed something significant—center stage or behind the scenes.

Working or volunteering counts too

A job—paid or unpaid, year-round or summer—shows that you can handle responsibilities and have “real-world” experience. If jobs are hard to find, ask your counselor how to arrange for an internship or a job-shadowing opportunity. The local chamber of commerce or organizations like Rotary or Kiwanis might also be able to help you. Volunteer work, such as tutoring elementary school kids or spending time at a local hospital, is another great way to gain the skills and *experience colleges like to see*.

Source: *Get It Together for College, 2nd ed (College Board, 2011)*

Handout 2E

Thinking about college: A checklist for parents of middle schoolers

- Help your child start planning for college now. By beginning academic and financial planning for college while your child is still in middle school, you help ensure your child's success after high school graduation.
- Help your child explore interests and possible careers. Understand that your child is likely to have a change of mind as you explore opportunities and options. By continuing to support your child in education and career decisions, you help your child gain confidence and achieve goals.
- Speak to your child's school counselor to learn about important courses and how your child can choose courses and qualify for advanced placement. Make sure your child meets the academic requirements for high school graduation and admission to college.
- Stay in touch with your child's teachers throughout middle school and high school, not only on parent conference dates but also on open school nights. Stay informed of your child's academic progress, and ensure that your child has tutoring or help with test preparation and other skills, if needed.
- Help your child explore colleges by visiting their websites or by scheduling visits with colleges of interest. Use *The College Board College Handbook* to gain information about different colleges and what they require.
- Begin to plan financially for college as early as possible. Save as much as you can. Learn about your state's 529 College Savings Plan.
- Remember to rely on your school counselor for information, and use www.collegeboard.org to learn more about how you can steer your child toward a successful future.
- It's important to note that your personal background will not affect your child's admission to college.

Source: CollegeEd®, 3rd Edition, *The College Board*

A planning list for parents of ninth- and 10th-graders

It may seem early to start thinking about getting your child ready for college, but it really isn't — important groundwork should take place in ninth and 10th grade. Here's a list to help you make sure your child is on the right path:

Grade 9

1. **Create a four-year high school plan.** Once your child is settled into ninth grade, introduce the idea of preparing an overall plan for high school that relates to his or her goals.
 - Make sure you and your child know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that your child's ninth-grade courses are on the right track.
 - Map out when these courses should be taken.
 - Familiarize yourself with the various levels of courses offered by your child's school.
2. **Start your child thinking about careers.** Encourage your child to develop a tentative career goal. Of course it will change — often — but it's the thought process that counts.
 - Help your child to identify interests — likes and dislikes — not just in academics but in all areas. This will help your child focus on goals.
 - Encourage your child to discuss career options with others, such as the school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
3. **Suggest extracurricular activities.** Encourage your child to actively take part in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - If your child may want to play sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
4. **Meet with the school counselor.** The school counselor knows how to help your child get the most out of high school. Make sure your child has an opportunity during the school year to discuss post-high-school plans with the school counselor and map out courses to take during the rest of high school.
 - You should participate in this meeting, too.
5. **Save for college.** It's still not too late to start a college savings plan, if you haven't already. Every little bit helps!
 - Investigate state financial aid programs and 529 plans.
6. **Obtain a social security number for your child if you don't already have one.** This is often required for applications, testing, scholarships and other opportunities.

A planning list for parents of ninth- and 10th-graders (page 2)

Grade 10

1. **Meet with the school counselor — again.** Make sure your child meets with his or her school counselor to ensure that he or she is enrolled in college-preparatory courses.
 - Check to see that your child is taking any prerequisites to advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
2. **Ask if the PSAT/NMSQT® is offered to 10th-graders.** While this test is usually taken in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th. That's because it provides invaluable feedback on the Student Score Report, 10th-graders can then work on any disclosed academic weaknesses while there is still ample time to improve them.
3. **Is your child interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, he or she should request a precandidate questionnaire and complete it. Your school counselor can help with this.
4. **Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall, at your school or in your area.
5. **Support your child's participation in a school activity or volunteer effort.**
Extracurricular activities help students develop time-management skills and enrich the school experience.
6. **Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel opportunities to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if there is no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help your child learn what to look for in a college.

Source: *The College Board*

What you need to know about college admission tests

- Your child will want to take a college admission test, such as the SAT® or other college entrance exams, when he or she is a junior or senior.
- Because every high school is different and has different standards and courses, colleges use admission tests to see how every student performs using the same material. The tests also help colleges know whether students are ready for college-level work.
- Many colleges also require or recommend SAT Subject Tests™ that measure achievement in English, mathematics, sciences, history and foreign languages. These tests can be used for admission, placement or advising.
- College admission tests are given several times during the year. Your child will have to register in advance and most registration deadlines are about a month before the test date.
- Students can register online at test websites (for example, go to www.SAT.collegeboard.org). There is a fee to register for each test. However, fee waivers are also available for those who qualify, which reduce the amount a student must pay for these tests.

How to Help Your Child Prepare

- It is important to remind your child that these tests are not the only thing colleges use to make their decisions.
- There are tools and resources to help your child get ready to take the tests. Many of these tools and resources are free or affordable. Go to www.SAT.collegeboard.org/practice to find out more.
- One of the best ways to prepare for the SAT is to take the PSAT/NMSQT®. Your child can take this test in the sophomore or junior year. The test is given every October. Ask your school counselor for details.
- Your child can take college admission tests more than once. Most students take a college admission test in the spring of their junior year and retake it in the fall of their senior year.
- Before taking an actual test, a student should take several practice tests to get a sense of how the test is set up, as well as the timing of the different sections
- Have your child review the results of every test in addition to learning the score. This will help indicate what skills he or she needs to work harder on.

What you need to know about college admission tests (page 2)

Conversation Topics

- What your child has heard about college admission tests
- Whether your child is stressed about these tests, and how that can be helped
- What your child thinks about tests in general
- Some good ways to get ready for admission tests
- Who to ask for advice about these tests

For more information

For information about the SAT and to register, visit www.SAT.collegeboard.org. Check your local library or consult with a librarian for resources related to college admission tests as well.

Frequently asked questions about the PSAT/NMSQT®

1. Why should students take the PSAT/NMSQT®?

The PSAT/NMSQT is great preparation for the SAT®, and juniors who take the test and meet other program entry requirements may enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation programs. Most importantly, the PSAT/NMSQT is a comprehensive educational tool that gives valuable feedback to the student and the school. Students will receive scores in critical reading, mathematics and writing skills and can compare their scores with those of sophomores or juniors across the country. A question-by-question review of answers enables students to see which answers they got right and wrong and to refer to the original test booklet for additional practice. Best of all, with their Score Report *Plus*, students receive personalized feedback on specific academic skills. Students who take the PSAT/NMSQT will also receive online access to My College QuickStart™, a free personalized college and career planning kit, with access until they graduate high school.

2. Who should take the PSAT/NMSQT?

Students take the PSAT/NMSQT in their junior year to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Corporation competitions. It is also beneficial for sophomores and younger students to take the test because it provides comprehensive information to help improve academic skills needed for success in college and life beyond college. Of the more than 3.5 million students that take the test each year, more than half of all testers were sophomores and younger.

3. What should students do to prepare for this test?

The *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT* contains plenty of useful information, including a full-length practice test. Students should review the guide and take the practice test to be sure they understand the directions and know the types of questions that will be asked. Classroom learning is the basis for test questions, so the best way students can prepare is to take a rigorous course of study.

4. If students don't do well on this test, will their chances of getting into college be diminished?

Absolutely not. If anything, taking the PSAT/NMSQT will improve their chances of going to college since the test provides information on the skills that need improvement in preparation for the SAT and college. PSAT/NMSQT scores are not sent to colleges.

Frequently asked questions about the PSAT/NMSQT (page 2)

5. How many times may a student take this test?

Only once a year, but there is no limit on how many years a student may participate. It is important for juniors to take the test in order to enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation competitions, as well as to prepare for the SAT. For younger students, the main benefit is to gain valuable feedback on improving their academic skills and start thinking about college at an earlier age.

6. When may schools expect to see results from the PSAT/NMSQT?

Schools will receive Student Score Reports in early December and will notify students regarding when, where and how to get their individual reports. Schools also receive an extra copy for the student's file.

7. What is the PSAT/NMSQT Score Report *Plus*?

The PSAT/NMSQT Score Report *Plus* gives students comprehensive, personalized feedback on their test performance, allowing them to see which questions they answered incorrectly and which academic skills they should work to improve. Students can log in to My College QuickStart and access suggestions for improving each of these skills and sample questions that give additional practice in each skill area. Score Report *Plus* also shows whether students meet entry requirements for National Merit Scholarship Corporation competitions.