

Family Action Plan: 12th Grade

Senior year is a whirlwind of activities. This is a big year for your child as he or she balances schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and the college application process. Use the suggestions below to help you and your child successfully navigate this important time.

SUMMER

- **Visit colleges together.** If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the [Campus Visit Checklist](#) to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- **Ask how you can help your senior finalize a college list.** You can help him or her choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets his or her needs, for example. Find out more about [how to finalize a college list](#).
- **Find out a college's actual cost.** Once your 12th-grader has a list of a few colleges he or she is interested in, use the [Net Price Calculator](#) together to determine the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost — or net price — of each college.
- **Encourage your child to get started on applications.** He or she can get the easy stuff out of the way now by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible. Read about [how to get started on applications](#).
- **Help your child decide about applying early.** If your senior is set on going to a certain college, he or she should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November. Read about the pros and cons of [applying early](#).
- **Gather financial documents.** To apply for most financial aid, your child will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You'll need your most recent tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens Oct. 1.

FALL

- **Encourage your child to meet with the school counselor.** This year, he or she will work with the counselor to complete and submit college applications. Learn more about [the counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Create a calendar with your child.** This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in [College Search](#). If your child saves colleges to a list there, he or she can get a custom online calendar that shows those colleges' deadlines.
- **Help your child prepare for college admission tests.** Many seniors retake college admission tests, such as the SAT®, in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th-grader [prepare for admission tests](#).
- **Help your child find and apply for scholarships.** He or she can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor. Your high school student will need to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about [scholarships](#).

FALL (CONTINUED)

- **Offer to look over your senior's college applications.** But remember that this is your child's work so remain in the role of adviser and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
- **Fill out the FAFSA to apply for aid beginning Oct. 1.** The government and many colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to award aid. Now it's easier than ever to fill out this form because you can automatically transfer your tax information online from the IRS to the FAFSA. Read [How to Complete the FAFSA](#) to learn more.
- **Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE[®], if required.** If your child needs to submit the PROFILE to a college or scholarship program, be sure to find out the priority deadline and submit it by that date. Read [How to Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE](#).
- **Encourage your child to set up college interviews.** An interview is a great way for your child to learn more about a college and for a college to learn more about your child. Get an overview of the [interview process](#).

WINTER

- **Work together to apply for financial aid.** Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges in which he or she is interested to find out what forms students must submit to apply for aid. Make sure he or she applies for aid by or before any stated deadlines. Funds are limited, so the earlier you apply, the better.
- **Learn about college loan options together.** Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high school student gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the [parent's role in borrowing money](#).
- **Encourage your senior to take SAT Subject Tests[™].** These tests can showcase your child's interests and achievements — and many colleges require or recommend that applicants take one or more Subject Tests. Read more about [SAT Subject Tests](#).
- **Encourage your child to take AP[®] Exams.** If your 12th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the [AP Program](#).

SPRING

- **Help your child process college responses.** Once your child starts hearing back from colleges about admission and financial aid, he or she will need your support to decide what to do. Read about [how to choose a college](#).
- **Review financial aid offers together.** Your 12th-grader will need your help to read through financial aid award letters and figure out which package works best. Be sure your child pays attention to and meets any deadlines for acceptance. Get more information on [financial aid awards](#).
- **Help your child complete the paperwork to accept a college's offer of admittance.** Once your child has decided which college to attend, he or she will need to review the offer, accept that college's offer, mail a tuition deposit, and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's [next steps](#).

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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Senior Year Calendar for Students Applying for Financial Aid

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

- ❑ **Research scholarship opportunities for which you might be eligible.** An early start will give you time to meet deadlines and to prepare a competitive application.
- ❑ Create the FSA ID and password for yourself and at least one parent at studentaid.gov/fsaid.

SEPTEMBER

- ❑ **Ask your school counselor about local scholarships** offered by community groups, civic associations, and businesses in your area.
- ❑ Start gathering what you need to complete the FAFSA. Visit FAFSA online at fafsa.gov for a list of required documents.
- ❑ If you're going to apply **Early Decision** to a college, and financial aid is an important part of your decision to attend, review application deadlines and requirements carefully.
- ❑ Use the online **financial aid calculator** on collegeboard.org to estimate your family's expected family contribution (EFC).
- ❑ Complete the Net Price Calculator on the college website. The Net Price Calculator is a tool that students can use to get an early indication of how much and what types of financial aid they might receive.

OCTOBER

- ❑ Find out if there's a **family financial aid night** at your high school or in your area.
- ❑ If you need to fill out the **CSS /Financial Aid PROFILE**, you can register on student.collegeboard.org/profile starting Oct. 1.
- ❑ If any **scholarship applications need recommendations**, request them now, or at least four weeks before the deadline.
- ❑ If a college you're applying to has an early **financial aid priority date**, submit your FAFSA as soon as you can. Be sure you have completed any supplemental applications required by the college.
- ❑ **File the FAFSA and other aid forms now.** Remember: Some funds may be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Apply early to ensure you meet deadlines and maximize your aid award.

NOVEMBER

- ❑ **Check each college's financial aid section of their website** for deadlines and the required forms.

DECEMBER

- ❑ Check the status of your admission and financial aid applications. If any outstanding items are required by your college, ensure you respond by required deadlines. Many colleges provide online resources where you may check the status of your application.

JANUARY

- ❑ If needed, correct or update your **Student Aid Report (SAR)** that follows the FAFSA. Contact the college financial aid office for additional guidance.
- ❑ If you submitted the **CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE**, check **your acknowledgment** and send any corrections, if necessary, directly to the colleges that require it.

MARCH

- ❑ Submit any final, outstanding information or documentation that may be required to process your aid award.

APRIL

- ❑ Most admission decisions and financial aid award letters arrive this month. **Carefully compare financial aid award letters** from the colleges that accept you.
- ❑ Contact the colleges if you have any **questions about the financial aid packages** they've offered you. Make sure you understand all terms and conditions.
- ❑ If you didn't get enough aid to be able to attend a particular college, explore other alternatives to cover the cost. Additional options, might include federal loans, such as the Parent Loan to Undergraduate Students (PLUS), which may not have been included in your initial award. If your family's financial circumstances have changed or you have special circumstances that may impact your eligibility, contact your financial aid office to discuss your options.
- ❑ Make a final decision, **accept the aid package, and mail a deposit check** to the college you select before May 1 (the acceptance deadline for most schools).
- ❑ On the **waiting list** at your first-choice college? Don't let being wait-listed jeopardize your aid at another college that has accepted you. Accept that award in case you don't make it off the waiting list.

MAY

- ❑ **Thank everyone** who wrote you recommendations or otherwise helped with your scholarship applications.

JUNE

- ❑ Think about your summer job options. The more money you make, the easier it will be to finance college — and have some fun during the school year.

What You Should Know About FAFSA:

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid

WHAT IS FEDERAL STUDENT AID?

Federal student aid comes from the federal government — specifically, the U.S. Department of Education. It's money that helps a student pay for higher education expenses (i.e., college, career school, or graduate school expenses). Federal student aid covers expenses such as tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation. There are three main categories of federal student aid: grants, work-study, and loans.

WHO GETS FEDERAL STUDENT AID?

Every student who meets certain eligibility requirements can get some type of federal student aid, regardless of age or family income. Some of the most basic eligibility requirements are that you must:

- demonstrate financial need (for most programs — to learn more, visit studentaid.gov/how-calculated);
- be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen;
- have a valid Social Security number;
- register (if you haven't already) with Selective Service if you're a male between the ages of 18 and 25;
- maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school; and
- show you're qualified to obtain a college or career school education by
 - having a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a state-recognized equivalent; or
 - completing a high school education in a homeschool setting approved under state law; or
 - enrolling in an eligible career pathways program.

Find more details about eligibility requirements at studentaid.gov/eligibility.

STEP 1

Create an FSA ID. Students, parents, and borrowers are required to use an FSA ID, made up of a username and password, to access U.S. Department of Education

websites. Your FSA ID is used to confirm your identity and electronically sign your federal student aid documents. To create an FSA ID, visit studentaid.gov/fsaid.

STEP 2

Collect the documents needed to apply, including income tax returns and W-2 forms (and other records of income) A full list of what you need is at fafsa.gov.

STEP 3

Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at fafsa.gov. Beginning with the 2017-18 award year, the FAFSA is available from Oct. 1, 2016, to June 30, 2018. But you need to apply as soon as you can! Schools and states often use FAFSA information to award

nonfederal aid, and their deadlines are usually earlier in the year. You can find state deadlines at fafsa.gov. Also check with the schools you're interested in for their deadlines.

STEP 4

If you are eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT), we strongly urge you to use the tool. It's the easiest way to provide your tax data and the best way of being sure that your FAFSA has accurate tax information. The IRS

DRT lets students and parents get the IRS tax return information they need to complete the FAFSA, and to transfer the data directly into their FAFSA from the IRS website.

STEP 5

Review your Student Aid Report. After you apply, you'll receive a Student Aid Report, or SAR. Your SAR has the information reported on your FAFSA and usually includes your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The

EFC is a number (not a dollar amount) used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. Review your SAR information to make sure it's correct. The school(s) you list on your FAFSA will get your SAR data electronically.

STEP 6

If you are selected for verification, your school's financial aid office will ask you to submit tax transcripts and other documents, as appropriate. Be sure to meet the school's deadline, or you will not be able to receive federal

student aid. Whether you're selected for verification or not, make sure the financial aid office at the school has all the information they need to determine your eligibility.

STEP 7

Contact the financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered. Review award packages from schools to compare amounts and types of aid being offered. Decide which school to attend based on a combination of (a) how well the school suits your needs and (b) its affordability after all aid is taken into account.

Note:

You also might be able to get financial aid from your state government, your school, or a private scholarship. Research nonfederal aid early (ideally, start in the spring of your junior year of high school). Be sure to meet all application deadlines!

IRS Data Retrieval Tool (FAQs)

The implementation of an earlier Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application opening Oct. 1, and using tax information that is two years old, brings with it many benefits for students and parents. Because most families have filed their taxes by the time the FAFSA application opens, more families can use the valuable IRS Data Retrieval Tool. The IRS Data Retrieval Tool lets students and parents transfer their IRS tax return information from the IRS website directly into their FAFSA.

Although it is not required, if you are eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool, we strongly urge you to use the tool for several reasons:

- It's the easiest way to provide your tax return information.
- It's the best way to make sure your FAFSA has accurate tax return information.
- It may mean you don't have to send more documents to your college.

AM I ELIGIBLE TO USE THE IRS DATA RETRIEVAL TOOL?

Most students and parents are eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool if they have already filed their taxes. However, students and parents are ineligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool in the following cases:

- The student/parent is married, and either the student/parent or his/her spouse filed as Married Filing Separately.
- The student/parent is married, and either the student/parent or his/her spouse filed as Head of Household.
- The parents' marital status is "Unmarried and both parents living together."
- The student/parent filed a Form 1040X amended tax return. Remember, the Form 1040X is used to correct your original tax return.
- The student/parent filed a Puerto Rican or foreign tax return.

Any students or parents who meet these criteria will need to enter their tax return information manually.

HOW DOES THE IRS DATA RETRIEVAL TOOL WORK?

To use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool within the application on the student or parent finances pages:

1. If you indicated that you filed your taxes or have already used the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to transfer your tax return information into your application, click the "View option to link to the IRS" hyperlink. (Note: If you are eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool and have not previously used it to transfer your tax return information into your application, then the "View option to link to the IRS" hyperlink does not display; skip ahead to step 2.)
2. Enter your FSA ID and click Link To IRS. (Note: Students will not be asked to enter their FSA ID if they entered an FSA ID to begin their FAFSA.)
3. Your FAFSA will be saved, and you will be transferred to the IRS website.
4. On the IRS website, enter the requested information exactly as it appears on your tax return.
5. After the IRS has validated your identification, your IRS tax information will display. You can either transfer your information from the IRS, or choose to return to *FAFSA on the Web*.

If you transfer your IRS tax information, questions that are populated with that tax information will be marked with "Transferred from the IRS."

Note: The person whose tax information is being transferred should enter his or her FSA ID.

Source: Department of Education