

Discover 10 Ways to Jump-Start College Planning Help Your Child Take the Right Steps, Now

Decisions your child makes as early as 8th grade can have a huge effect on his college career. They might affect how soon your child will go to college, what type of college he attends, and even whether he will go to college at all.

As a result, there can be a lot of pressure on students to do the necessary work to get into the college of their choice. As a parent, your support will be crucial through this time to help your child to make decisions that will lead to the college and career path that's most suitable for him. Below are some things that your child will need to do to get ready for his college planning—and some ways for you to help.

1. Get Involved

Getting ready for college isn't all work. Your child should find something he really likes doing, then dive into it. He will develop skills and be more appealing to colleges. Colleges like to have a diverse and motivated student body. Involvement in activities indicates your child has shown a commitment and taken on responsibility.

2. Do the Work

If your child expects to go to college later, he should expect to study and work hard now, and throughout his four years of high school.

3. Take Challenging Courses

Colleges look at your child's grades, but also at how difficult his courses are. They want to see that he has challenged himself. Plus, if your child pursues advanced courses, such as AP[®], he may be able to get college credit.

4. Get Help

Is your child having trouble in a class? Many schools have peer tutors, students in upper grades who'll help him for free. Your child should talk to his teachers or counselors and let them know he wants extra help.

5. Read

Your child should read at least 30 minutes every day, beyond study and homework. It's best for him to read what interests him—magazines and novels. Your child's strength in reading will be essential when he takes the PSAT/NMSQT[®] and SAT[®] tests.

6. Don't Delay

Students take the PSAT/NMSQT in the junior year (or even in the sophomore year). So your child should take the most challenging schedule he can before high school. He should talk to his counselor to make sure he is taking the solid math and other courses that will get him ready.

7. Get the College-Bound Facts

How will your child know all the right moves to get into college? He should ask someone who's done it. Your child should get to know his counselors. He may also want to ask a career planner at a local college, or a trusted teacher. Doing Web research can also be helpful.

8. Family Support

If you haven't been to college yourself, you may think you can't help your child. That's not true. You can talk to his counselors and help him stay on the right path. Your support will be important as he begins to make important decisions about his future.

9. Mentors

Even though you are supportive of your child's ambitions, the encouragement of other adults who can lend their enthusiasm will help make sure your child succeeds. He might look to a counselor, a teacher, or someone else he trusts to help him develop his interests in a particular area.

10. Confront Personal Roadblocks

High school can be a stressful time for students. If your child has a problem that's really getting in the way of schoolwork, try to sort it out together. Keep an open mind and a listening ear at the ready. Your child's counselor may also be able to help with advice, or simply to point your child to resources at school or in the community that can help.