

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS



With the right grades and right steps,
your child can make it to college.
You can make sure that happens.

It's easy to help your child make it to college. You just have to encourage him or her, and keep on top of things like academic requirements and financial aid deadlines. Here's a helpful checklist of how you can help your child during each year of high school:

FRESHMAN YEAR

- Make sure your freshman makes an appointment with the school counselor to create a graduation plan. The counselor can help students choose high school courses that lead to standard or advanced diplomas. Counselors can also offer suggestions about taking courses that will earn your child college credits.
- Express interest in your freshman's progress in class. Help him or her understand that grade point average (GPA) counts in ALL subjects, starting NOW.
- Help your freshman student create a personal résumé file where he or she can store copies of report cards, keep a list of school and community organizations he or she has joined, and maintain a list of volunteer and/or paid jobs.
- If you haven't done so already, explore the idea of saving for your child's education after high school. A 529 College Savings Plan is one way to put aside money for future higher education expenses. Visit www.virginia529.com or talk to your bank for additional information.
- Talk with your freshman about his or her interests and possible careers. Introduce your freshman to people you know in a variety of professions or have them visit www.vawizard.org to explore career options and the education that is needed for each.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Make sure your sophomore registers for the Preliminary SAT®/National Merit® Scholarship qualifying Test (PSAT/NMST®), a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT. Taking the PSAT as a sophomore helps students become familiar with the kinds of questions and the exact directions they will see on the SAT. If your family has trouble paying the registration fee, see your child's counselor about getting a fee waiver.
- Help your sophomore stay on track by requesting a meeting with his or her school counselor to review class grades and make sure graduation requirements are being met. Find out if the counselor has any suggestions for improving your child's coursework or college preparation. Encourage your sophomore to take these suggestions seriously and act on them.
- Remind your sophomore to work for the best grades possible in every class, and encourage him or her to join clubs, teams, or volunteer organizations in your community. A lot of colleges consider these activities when reviewing applications.

JUNIOR YEAR

- Remind your junior to register for the PSAT, even if he or she already took it last year. Scores from the Grade II PSAT will automatically be entered into a scholarship competition and will give your child a better idea about which colleges are a good fit.

Also, test-takers can request that colleges interested in students scoring in their range send pamphlets and brochures with more information about those schools. For more information about the PSAT, including test dates and scoring information, visit www.collegeboard.com.
- Help your junior begin researching colleges. Sit down with him or her and check out the websites of schools of interest. If your child is an athlete, visit the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website at www.ncaa.org and download a free copy of the NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete. If you don't have Internet access, go to a public library or ask your child's school counselor for other resources.

- Make sure your junior signs up for the SAT I and II and/or ACT®. Many colleges and universities require the SAT or ACT as a part of their admissions process.
- See if your child’s school has any resources for studying for these tests, or have your junior visit www.collegeboard.com or www.actstudent.org for free practice tests. Encourage your child to study over a period of time rather than “cram” the night before.

SENIOR YEAR

- Schedule and attend a meeting with your senior and his or her school counselor to review admissions requirements for colleges of interest. Find out how your child’s test scores and grades compare to college requirements. If your senior is not happy with his or her test scores, have your senior register to take the test again.
- Work with your senior and the counselor to make a list of target schools, including one “reach” school and one safety school. Help your senior learn more about these schools by calling the admissions offices to schedule a tour or by taking an online tour of the campus. Go to www.i-am-the-one.com for links to Virginia institutions that offer virtual campus tours on their websites.
- Encourage your senior to learn more about financial aid options, including scholarships and grants. Go with your senior to college fairs and financial aid information meetings, or check out the resources available at www.finaid.org, www.fastweb.com, and www.schev.edu.
- Make sure your senior is staying on top of college and scholarship applications. Have him or her start applying to schools well before the deadlines since most applications can take some time to complete. Some students use the holiday break as a good time to get those applications completed and in the mail, but make sure that your senior is meeting all necessary deadlines, which can vary depending on the institution.
- Learn more about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the form that MUST be completed by all students and parents who apply for federal student aid. Students should submit their FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st and no later than February 15th.
- Help your senior gather required documents and other information ahead of time. This includes Social Security Numbers for you and your child, Alien Registration Numbers if you are not a U.S. citizen, federal tax information or tax returns (such as W-2 information), and information on savings and investments.
- Most students fill out the application online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. If your family needs help completing the FAFSA, look for Super Saturday events in your area or ask your child’s counselor about organizations that can provide assistance. Please remember that this is a free application and you should not have to pay to fill it out. Be sure to keep a copy of the finished FAFSA application for your records.
- Once your senior has completed the FAFSA, he or she should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) that provides the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is the amount of money the family is expected to provide towards the cost of attending school. The EFC is used to determine whether a student is eligible for a Pell Grant or other federal aid. Review the SAR carefully and help your senior make any necessary changes. Keep a copy of the SAR for your records, and have your senior send it to his or her target schools.
- Help your senior make a final decision about the college he or she plans to attend, and have him or her notify the admissions office. When helping your senior decide which college to attend, consider the majors offered there and review the financial aid package to make sure it is affordable.

If your senior doesn’t have all the necessary financial aid to attend college, consider private loans. A couple of good sites to start with are www.finaid.org and www.petersons.com. For information on how to avoid scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/education/scholarships.shtm.

- Make sure your senior pays required deposit(s) for enrollment and room and board at the institution he or she has selected. Have your senior check with the college’s admissions and/or financial aid offices to make sure they have everything they need.
- If possible, attend a parent orientation session on your child’s new campus to learn more about what to expect now that your child is a college student!

