



COLLEGE GUIDE





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INTRODUCTION

Have you thought about life after high school? Are you considering attending college or trade or technical school? There's a lot to think about to get ready: where to go, what to study, how to apply, how to pay for it, and more.

It's never too early—or too late—to explore your options. In this guide, we will provide you with key information for preparing for college or a career school, and resources that can help you along the way.



How can this guide help me if I don't plan to go to college?

Knowledge really is power. The more you know, the more options you have. When we talk about “college,” what we really mean is education or training after high school, which includes college, trade school, vocational education, and more.

And, while you may not plan to attend college after high school now, you might change your mind. Learning more about education options, including college, empowers you to make important decisions about your life—even if you don't think more schooling is in your immediate future. So whatever path you choose, the information and resources in this guide can help you.

What are the advantages of acquiring more education after high school?

It's simple, really: attending college or attaining some other education beyond high school equals more job options, more money, and more freedom. Take a look at the chart below. With additional education, you'll have more job opportunities and have higher earnings. Education is a long-term investment that—with self-awareness, practical information, and thoughtful planning—can put you on the path to success.

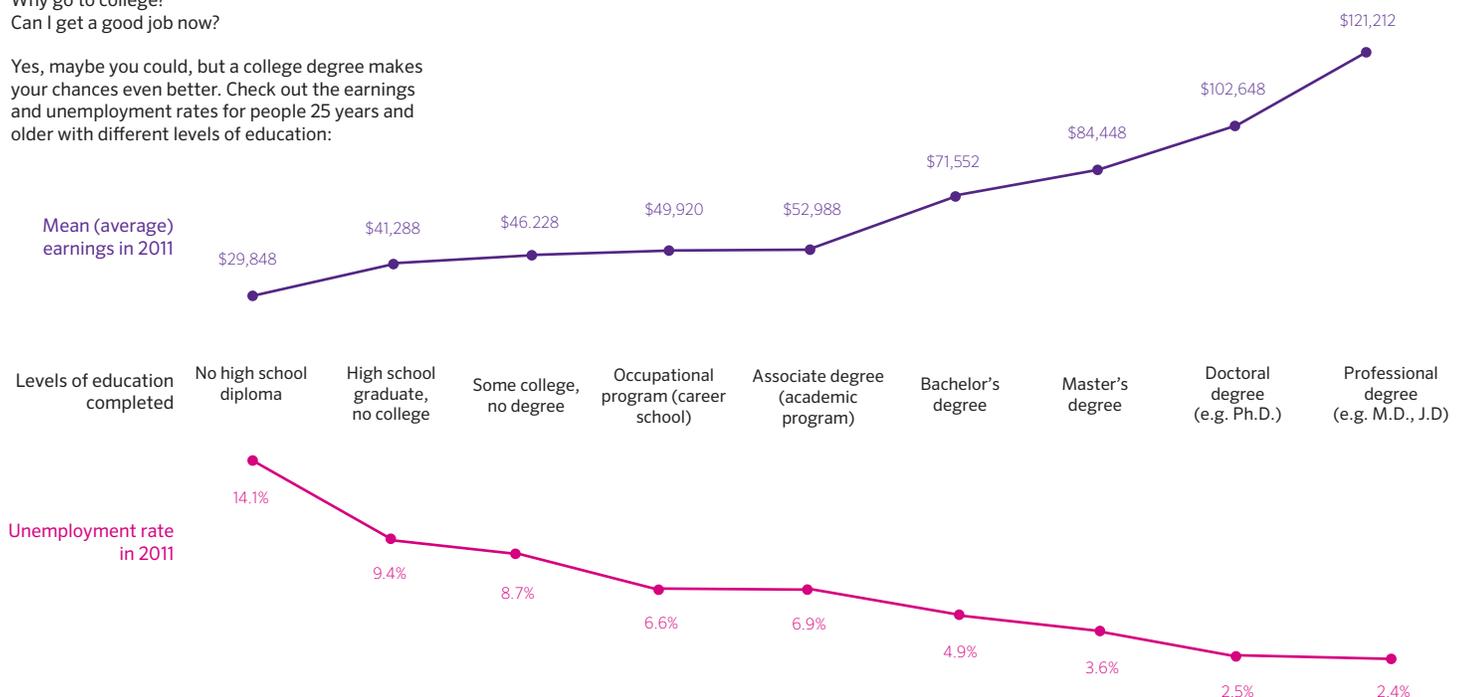
What institutions provide education beyond high school?

- Colleges or universities: institutions authorized to grant academic degrees for a range of majors that prepare individuals for diverse careers; approximately 2,500 accredited, four-year institutions exist in the U.S.
- Community or junior colleges: two-year public and private institutions that specialize in college transfer programs, vocational programs, or both; approximately 1,200 community colleges exist in the U.S.
- Trade, technical, or business schools: privately-owned schools specializing in training for trades or vocations; thousands of these schools exist in the U.S.

EDUCATION PAYS

Why go to college?
Can I get a good job now?

Yes, maybe you could, but a college degree makes your chances even better. Check out the earnings and unemployment rates for people 25 years and older with different levels of education:



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, unpublished tables, 2012



GETTING STARTED

How can I know which school or career I'm best suited for?

The first step in preparing for college or a career is to identify your interests, skills, values, and goals for the future. What kind of life do you want to have? What are you passionate about?

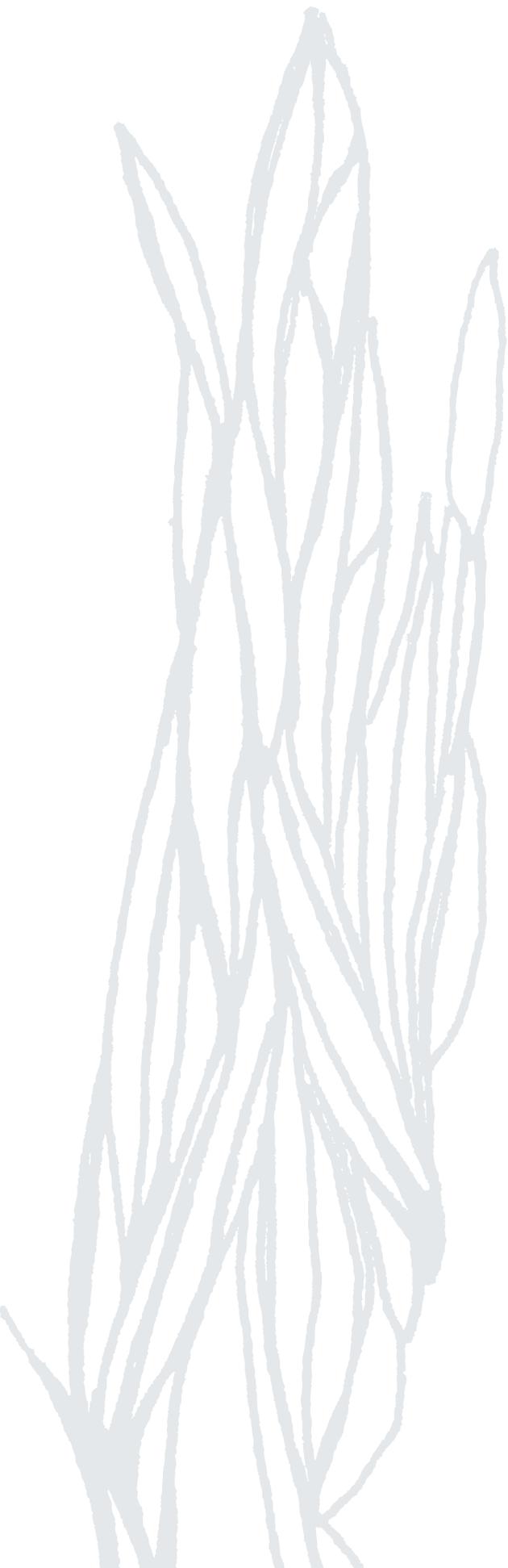
A good way to uncover your interests is to take a career self-assessment. Do you already know what you like and want? You can still take an assessment to gain more insight into the most important person in this process: you.

Once you complete an assessment, begin to explore careers that match your interests.

To get started, the following resources offer a wide variety of information and tools to help you explore your interests and connect them to a career:

- K¹²'s Pathfinder: see page 18
- Big Future, the College Board's college planning site: bigfuture.collegeboard.org
- My Next Move, the U.S. Department of Labor's career exploration tool: mynextmove.org





What should I consider when looking at colleges?

After determining your interests and possible careers, identify the education necessary for success in those fields. Find out which majors are most common. Clarify what type of degree you'll need. Is a bachelor's degree from a four-year college required, or is an associate's degree from a two-year community college sufficient? Is trade school an option?

The following list contains items to bear in mind as you begin looking at colleges:

- 2- or 4-year college or university
- Public or private
- Religious or other affiliation
- Majors or fields of study
- Location
- Size
- Campus life
- Number of students
- Admissions requirements
- Cost of attending
- Financial aid
- Opportunities for internships
- Career services and job placement
- Study abroad programs

What resources are available for researching colleges?

K¹²'S
PATHFINDER
(SEE PAGE 18)

COLLEGE
WEBSITES

COLLEGE
FAIRS

CAMPUS
VISITS

GUIDE BOOKS
FROM THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

COLLEGE
NAVIGATOR:
NCES.ED.GOV/
COLLEGENAVIGATOR

COLLEGE
BOARD:
COLLEGEBOARD.COM

PRINCETON
REVIEW:
REVIEW.COM

PETERSON'S
REVIEW:
PETERSONS.COM

MYTONOMY:
MYTONOMY.COM

What kinds of colleges should I apply to?

As you do research, develop a broad list of colleges. Your initial list may start with 10 to 12 colleges that you then pare down to 3 to 5 schools. The important thing is to allow yourself to consider numerous schools with a range of competitive admissions requirements. Select schools that will challenge you, requiring you to reach and grow a bit more academically. Choose schools that match your interests and academic abilities. And select schools with requirements that you safely exceed.

REACH

Schools where your academic record falls below the average college freshman applicant but is still within the overall range

MATCH

Schools where your academic record falls well within or exceeds the average college freshman applicant

SAFETY

Schools where your academic record clearly exceeds the average college freshman applicant



APPLYING TO COLLEGE

What do colleges consider in the application process?

Admissions officers for four-year colleges look at a variety of factors when considering applicants. The following information lists the factors by level of importance:

- Academic record (includes strength of a school's curriculum, rigor of completed courses, and grades earned)
- Test scores
- Recommendation(s)
- Essay(s)
- Activities/work experience

What information is requested on a college application?

- Personal and education data
- Honors and awards
- Extracurricular, personal, and volunteer activities
- Employment, internships, and summer activities
- Short-answer and longer form personal essays
- Disciplinary information
- Application fee
- Signatures

How should I begin the application process?

1 **Create a resume** of your activities, employment, awards, etc., and update it as necessary. Having this information easily at hand will make filling out applications more efficient.

2 Next, long before application deadlines arrive, **create a personal file**. Begin collecting the documents you'll need to submit with your application because some may take time to finalize. You'll need to gather the following items:

- **High school transcripts:** the official record of your high school grades
- **Official standardized test score(s)** from the College Board (if you take the SAT) or ACT, Inc. (if you take the ACT), SAT II subject test scores, and/or AP exam scores
- **Application and application fee:** a completed application form with all requested supplements, plus the application fee
- **Essay(s):** one or more as required by the school. It's never too early to start thinking about this part of your application. The best times to begin are the spring of your junior year of high school or the summer before your senior year.
- **Letters of recommendation:** the number will be specified by the school. Typically these letters are written by a school counselor and teacher(s). Sometimes colleges will allow special letters of recommendation from other people who know you well, such as coaches or classmates.
- **Live or recorded auditions or portfolio presentation** (for performing or fine arts students)
- **Confirmation of eligibility to compete** (for athletes)

How can I stay organized as I apply to colleges?

- Maintain your college information in separate folders with notes
- Read all the information you receive from the colleges, both e-mails and letters
- Keep copies of every admissions and financial aid application
- Use a master calendar and checklist for important dates and appointments

What information should I include in a master calendar and checklist?

- Your high school's deadlines for requests, such as for transcripts
- Test dates, fees, and deadlines
- College admission application deadlines
- Financial aid application deadlines
- Dates and times for interviews with admissions officers





PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Considering how to pay for college can feel overwhelming at first. Worries about cost keep many students from applying to college. While cost is a very important consideration, it does not have to be a barrier to applying to and attending college. Financial aid can make going to college possible. Every college has a financial aid office, which exists to assist students. And the costs to attend college vary widely, from affordable community colleges to private schools that offer significant financial aid.

What is financial aid?

Financial aid is any assistance given to students and families to help them pay for college. While paying for college is the responsibility of families, it is also a partnership between families, students, the government, and colleges to expand educational access to qualified students.

What if I can't afford college?

You can! More than 65% of all college students receive some kind of financial aid in the form of scholarships, grants, subsidized loans, and work study programs. Billions of dollars are available from the federal government alone for the purpose of helping students receive more education after high school.

What is federal student aid?

The federal government—specifically, the U.S. Department of Education—issues student aid to help pay for education expenses at colleges, career schools, and graduate schools. Student aid covers expenses such as tuition, fees, room and board, books, supplies, and transportation. It can also assist with paying for a computer and dependent care.

Note that receiving federal student aid comes with responsibility. Students have to sign a statement that they are not in default on a federal student loan or owe money on a federal student grant, and that they will use federal student aid only for educational purposes.

What kinds of federal student aid are available?

- Grants: U.S. Department of Education grants are based on a student's financial need, and most do not have to be repaid.
- Work-study: Through work-study programs, students earn money from a job on or near campus while attending school. The money they earn does not have to be repaid.
- Loans: Loans must be repaid with interest.

Who is eligible for federal student aid?

Students eligible for federal student aid must show proof that they:

- Have financial need (to qualify for most programs)
- Are U.S. citizens or eligible non-citizens
- Have a valid social security number
- Are registered with Selective Service, if applicable
- Are enrolled or accepted for enrollment in an eligible degree or certificate program
- Are enrolled at least half-time to be eligible for Direct Loan Program funds
- Are maintaining satisfactory academic progress in college
- Have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate

How much federal student aid do I qualify for?

- For an early estimate of how much federal student aid you may qualify for, use the FAFSA4caster at: fafsa4caster.ed.gov
- For more details about eligibility criteria, visit studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility
- To learn more about federal student aid programs, including maximum annual amounts and loan interest rates, visit StudentAid.gov/types

What other forms of student aid are available?

- Federal agencies: StudentAid.gov/types#federal-aid
- State governments: ed.gov/sgt
- Colleges: visit school websites and contact their financial aid offices

What are scholarships?

Scholarships are financial assistance programs sponsored by organizations based on a variety of criteria, such as academics, musical ability, community service, affiliation, etc. Scholarships do not have to be repaid. Each scholarship provider has a unique application with different deadlines and timelines. Some are renewable, whereas others are one-time scholarships.

Note: As you begin searching for scholarships, beware of scams. You do not need to pay someone or join a society that says it will help you get scholarships.

What types of scholarships are available?

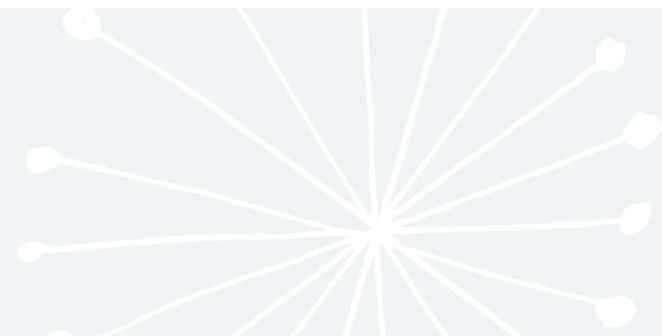
Many different kinds of scholarships are available to qualifying students. As you research scholarships, think broadly and creatively about what you may qualify for. Let the following list of types and examples encourage ideas for your search:

- Academic
- Athletic
- Community organization: Boys and Girls Club, Boy Scouts of America, etc.
- Community service: a local hospital for volunteer service, etc.
- Ethnic: local Scottish Heritage Society, etc.
- Gender: local women's club, etc.
- Military: Veterans of Foreign Wars "Voice of Democracy" program, etc.
- Political: local Democratic or Republican Club scholarships, etc.
- Professional: Dow Jones News Fund journalism scholarships, etc.
- Race: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, etc.
- Religious
- Employer-sponsored

What resources are available for researching scholarships?

- K¹²'s Pathfinder (see page 18)
- U.S. Department of Labor: careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch
- Scholarships.com: scholarships.com
- Fastweb: fastweb.com
- College Board: bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search
- Sallie Mae Fund: thesalliemaefund.org/smfnew/index.html





COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

Colleges use standardized tests to compare students from high schools across the U.S. and around the world. These tests are required or recommended by most colleges. Students may register for one or both primary college entrance examinations: Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT). Both exams assess general college readiness.

What are the differences between the SAT and ACT?

SAT

- Tests aptitude, measuring reasoning, and verbal abilities
- Includes only three components: Critical Reasoning, Mathematics, and a required Writing Test
- Bases scores on correct answers and takes off points for wrong answers

ACT

- Tests achievement, measuring what a student has learned in school
- Includes up to five components: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and an optional Writing Test
- Bases scores on the number of correct answers with no penalty for wrong answers

When can I take the PSAT, SAT, and ACT exams?

- Plan to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) in October of your sophomore or junior year of high school. The PSAT is a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT. Many students now take the PSAT as early as freshman year. This test is considered a strong indicator of how a student will perform on the SAT. The PSAT also functions as the qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship Program.
- Plan to take the SAT and ACT exams during your junior and/or senior years of high school. You can take these tests more than once. Additional study between tests can improve your score.

Where can I take the SAT and ACT tests?

Check the exam websites for information about testing locations. In addition, ask your academic counselor if your school proctors the SAT or ACT. If yes, ask the counselor about registration and test location.

Do I have to register for the tests in advance?

Yes. Online registration makes the process fast and easy to manage on your own. Dates fill up quickly, so be sure to register early.

Note: Before you register for the tests, ask your school counselor for your high school's College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) code. This code is a unique number that identifies the school you attend. The CEEB code is used to register for ACT and SAT tests and for reporting official scores to a student's high school.

To register online, complete the following steps:

- Go to the exam website for the test you want to take
- Review the test dates
- Search for a testing site
- Register online; have your school's CEEB code ready
- Provide payment

What about testing for students with disabilities?

If you currently receive accommodations in school due to a professionally diagnosed and documented disability, review each test's documentation requirements and submission process. You will need to work with your school counselor or teacher to obtain the necessary documentation. And be sure to plan ahead. Begin working on obtaining the documentation at least two months before the registration deadline for your preferred test date.

What is a fee waiver?

You may be eligible for a fee waiver if you cannot afford the registration fee for the SAT or ACT. A fee waiver covers part of the registration fee. Some states also have special programs. Ask your school counselor for more information. And be sure to plan ahead. Begin researching if you qualify for a fee waiver at least two months before the registration deadline for your preferred test date.

SAT

sat.collegeboard.org/register

- Cost: \$50
- Dates: January, March (or April), May, June, October, November, and December

ACT

actstudent.org/regist

- cost: \$35-\$50
- Dates: February, April, June, October, and December

How can I prepare for the exams?

Many students enroll in review courses, either online or in person, to prepare for the exams. Review books and guides are available in any major bookstore, and many schools and communities offer free or inexpensive review sessions. For-profit companies—most notably Kaplan and The Princeton Review—offer fee-based test preparation programs online and at their franchise centers.

The best ways to prepare for the exams are to work hard in challenging courses and to read and write in class and during personal free time. Studies suggest that cramming and short-term test preparation cannot substitute for hard work in school. In addition, taking practice tests and the PSAT will help you better understand each exam and choose the one that's best for you.

The day before your test, review the specific requirements and restrictions for the exam:

- ID requirements
- Security and fairness
- Cell phone, calculator, and electronic devices policies

Gather everything you will need, including the following items:

- Site address and directions
- Official ACT or SAT admission ticket
- Student ID or driver's license
- #2 pencils (not pens)
- Calculator
- Watch
- A good snack
- A sweater in case the exam room is chilly

Plan to arrive 30 minutes before the test begins. You may not be admitted if you arrive late. Then relax and avoid cramming. Do something you enjoy to get your mind off of the exam. At this point, getting a good night's rest is the most important thing you can do.

Do I really have to take a test?

Some colleges do not require standardized testing for admission. Be sure to review each school's admissions requirements. But even if you don't plan to apply to college right away, it's a good idea to try taking the test.

Do colleges require any other tests for admission?

Some colleges may require or recommend SAT Subject Tests, especially if a student is applying to a specific major or program of study. As early as freshman year, students may take a subject test to demonstrate knowledge in a particular area such as biology, chemistry, or United States history.

What about AP exams?

Results from Advanced Placement® (AP) exams may be used to award credit and advanced standing by some colleges. Colleges also consider AP test scores as evidence of college readiness. An AP exam usually follows the completion of an AP course.

What resources are available to learn more about standardized tests?

- PSAT:
collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html
- SAT:
sat.collegeboard.org/home
- ACT:
actstudent.org
- SAT Subject Tests:
sat.collegeboard.org/practice/sat-subject-test-preparation





K¹²'S PATHFINDER

QUICK GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

What is K¹²'s Pathfinder?

K¹²'s Pathfinder is the K¹² College and Career Counseling System. It provides students, parents, and staff a collaborative space with tools to explore and plan for life after high school. This guide will help you understand how the various tools in K¹²'s Pathfinder function and how they will benefit you in planning your post-secondary education and career. You can also watch this brief video to learn more: tinyurl.com/k12pathfinder

How do I log in to K¹²'s Pathfinder?

Students, parents, and staff can access their individual Pathfinder account directly from the Online School or My Info. No additional login is required.

What can I do in K¹²'s Pathfinder?

There are six tabs to help you identify your interests, explore careers, and plan for college. We recommend you investigate each of them. If you don't know where to begin, try taking a career interest inventory, such as "Get to Know Yourself" on the Careers tab.

ONLINE SCHOOL

You can access K¹²'s Pathfinder two ways: Community tab and My Info tab.

COMMUNITY



MY INFO



Visit and watch Pathfinder Video: tinyurl.com/k12pathfinder

K¹²'S PATHFINDER ACTIVITIES BY TAB

HOME

- My Profile
- Messages
- Calendar
- Counseling Office

MY PORTFOLIO

- Career Plan
- Post Secondary Goal
- Career Interests
- Goals & Strategies
- Employment
- Activities & Interests
- Honors & Awards and more!

CAREERS

- Finding a Job
- Get To Know Yourself
- Resources
- Explore Careers
- Occupation Characteristics
- Preparation
- Career Development
- Career Outlook

COLLEGES

- College Search
- College List
- College Compare
- Admissions
- Application

MONEY MATTERS

- Paying for College
- Banking
- FAFSA EFC Estimator
- College Cost Estimator
- Loan Cost Estimator
- Search for Scholarships
- Resources

PLANNING

- Course Planner
- Course Catalog
- Test Prep & Learning
- Resources



K¹² COLLEGE & CAREER WORKSHOPS



What are K¹² College and Career Workshops?

This fun and informative weekly workshop series helps students identify their interests so they can make informed decisions about life after high school, including college, careers, and beyond. The workshops are hosted live by experts on college and career preparation and guest speakers from a range of exciting job industries.

What are some sample workshops?

Included in the series are the following workshops, and more:

- Crafting a Standout Application
- How to Write Your Best Personal Statement
- Paying for College
- Why High School Matters
- Apprenticeships and Trade Careers
- Business and Entrepreneurship Careers
- Health and Human Services Careers

Why should I attend the workshops?

Attending the workshops will help you connect your interests and dreams to your future.

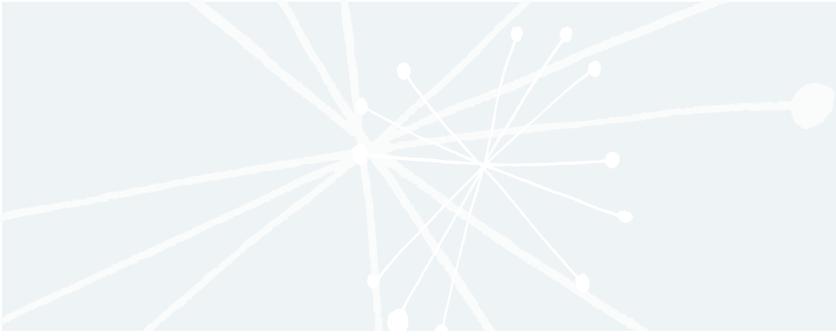
When are they offered?

Workshops are offered Wednesdays at 2 PM (ET).

How do I access them?

Visit K12start.com/high-school/college-and-career for recordings of previous workshops and to see this school year's workshop schedule.





COLLEGEWEEK LIVE

What is CollegeWeek Live?

CollegeWeek Live is a free, online college fair that connects students and parents with admissions experts and representatives from more than 300 colleges and universities. CollegeWeek Live hosts events every week, all year long. To learn more, visit collegeweeklive.com/en_CA/Guest/StudentPage.

How do I register for it?

To register, visit collegeweeklive.com/en_CA/guest/app-registration.

What can I do there?

- Text chat with college admissions representatives. You can ask questions about application requirements and deadlines, applying for financial aid, and academic programs.
- Engage in live, interactive, video presentations led by current college students to find out what campus life is really like.
- Hear college application and admissions experts share their insights on everything students need to know about college admissions including test preparation, selecting a college that fits, and applying for financial aid.
- Win prizes for attending!



COLLEGE PREPARATION TIMELINE

If you have been reading through this guide, you know by now that preparing for college or another kind of education after high school is a process. It takes time and some work, but the effort is certainly worthwhile when it can mean having a bright and successful future.

The following information is a general timeline to help you stay on track as you juggle your present responsibilities at school while staying aware of how to prepare for life beyond high school:

FRESHMAN YEAR AND BEYOND

Know and monitor your:

- High school graduation requirements
- Credits earned and needed to graduate
- Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Attendance, assignments, and course activity
- College admissions requirements

Now is a great time to:

- Take challenging courses
- Communicate and develop relationships with faculty and counselors
- Self-advocate: get help if you need it, when you need it
- Create and build your school resume: volunteer, take extra classes, etc.
- Explore careers and colleges
- Take the PSAT

Begin your search for colleges by:

- Making lists of your abilities, preferences, personal qualities, and what you may want to study in college
- Jumpstarting your college planning by reading about majors and careers
- Using K¹²'s Pathfinder and other online tools to find colleges with the right characteristics

JUNIOR TO SENIOR YEAR

Now it's time to:

- Make a master calendar and checklist (see page 10)
- Create a personal application file (see page 9)
- Register for the SAT and/or ACT, if needed
- Narrow your list of colleges (between 5 and 10) and review it with your counselor
- Get application and financial aid information from the colleges you're interested in
- Visit as many colleges as possible
- Ask the appropriate people for recommendations, providing them with your resume, a stamped and addressed envelope, and any required forms
- Write application essays and ask your teachers, counselor, and parents for feedback



LET'S
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