

COLLEGE PLANNING AND ACADEMICS CHECKLIST

When selecting a first-year class, colleges are not looking for well-rounded students; they are looking for well-rounded student bodies made up of specialists. While an applicant's academic record is critical in the college admissions process, many schools will also consider an applicant's personal record.

SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

Colleges and universities place a heavy emphasis on the applicant's "hard factors," which include the high school transcript (course work, grades, GPA, and class rank) and, if applicable, standardized test scores. However, colleges will also further evaluate applicants based on the student's personal record — or "soft factors" —which include letters of recommendation, essays, extra-curricular activities, demonstrated interest, and more.

Developing these "hard" and "soft" factors takes time! Colleges evaluate all four years of grades, courses, and activities, so students need to begin their college prep on day one of high school — or even before.

Whether you're an 11th grader gearing up for the application process this fall or an 8th grader wanting to map out the next four years of high school, there's a lot you can do now to get on track with your college prep.



8th Grade —————>

9th Grade —————>

10th Grade —————>

11th Grade —————>

12th Grade —————>

8TH GRADE

ACADEMICS

- Your middle school grades will not be assessed by colleges. However, this is the time to work on developing your executive functioning skills so that you are prepared to manage the more rigorous demands of high school. A WiseStart™ program can get you on track academically before you even start high school.
- Begin researching what courses are available at your future high school. When it's time to pick 9th grade courses, enroll in courses that will put you on track for the most rigorous courses in your areas of interest.
- Explore your interests through outside reading and develop a habit of reading for fun.

EXTRACURRICULARS & SUMMERS

- Explore extracurricular activities that interest you. Participate in clubs, competitions, and outside programs that will help you to define your interests even before you start high school.
- Research what activities are available at your future high school.
- Consider summer school and/or academic programs that will help you to accelerate your track in high school and/or allow you to define interests that you may want to pursue in high school.

9TH GRADE

ACADEMICS

- Universities take first-year grades into consideration, so it is important to take the most challenging (and realistic) academic course load you can and to perform well in those courses.
- Make a study plan that will help you to ace your academic courses.
- Identify and ask for help early if you are struggling with a course. IvyWise tutors can help you get back on track if you are having trouble with your coursework.
- Plan a challenging second-year course load.
- Continue to read as much as you can.

EXTRACURRICULARS & SUMMERS

- Explore extracurricular activities inside and outside school to find those that interest and excite you. Use 9th grade to explore all your options; then, you can narrow down some best-fit activities to get more involved with throughout high school.
- Don't fall victim to "summer brain drain." Spend the summer productively by participating in a summer program, or by taking additional academic courses to prepare for the academic demands of the upcoming year.

ACADEMICS

- Continue to maintain your GPA and perform well in your courses. Colleges want to see an upward grade trend, meaning you are continuing to perform well as you take increasingly rigorous courses.
- Save samples of your best papers and work in the arts (if applicable) for potential later use.
- If you are taking AP courses this year, create a study plan for AP exams at the end of the year.
- Plan a challenging third-year course load by taking rigorous classes, including AP or IB.
- If your high school does not offer challenging classes, consider supplementing your course load by enrolling in more advanced courses at a community college or taking some free online courses. You can also self-study for a specific AP exam and take it in May.
- Continue to read as much as you can and start thinking about what writing styles, themes, etc. resonate with you.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

- Take the PSAT and/or the PreACT, if offered by your school.
- Start your test planning and preparation by taking a full-length diagnostic of both exams to help you determine which test is the best fit for you.
- At IvyWise, we administer practice tests and use these diagnostic results to prepare an individualized Test Report with information analyzing your performance on each section of the SAT and ACT in order to determine which is the best-fit test for you.

EXTRACURRICULARS & SUMMERS

- Stay involved with the extracurricular activities that really interest you and cut activities that do not.
- Make an impact in your activities by seeking out leadership opportunities and consider volunteer activities that connect to your core interests.
- Discover new and innovative ways to explore your interests. Start on an independent project and further develop yourself as a specialist in an area of interest.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

- Begin researching possible colleges by looking at schools of interest online and on social media.
- Visit universities that are close to home to experience first-hand the range of options. If your family is traveling, try to see a few colleges in the destination city.
- Use your summer wisely. Consider participating in a study abroad program, a research project, an academic program at a university campus, or dive more deeply into one of your interests.
- Stick with your test prep throughout the summer to study for the SAT or ACT with a goal of sitting for a fall or spring test.



11TH GRADE

ACADEMICS

- Continue to perform well in class and maintain an upward grade trend. If you're struggling with your grades or coursework, consider academic tutoring support. Junior year grades are most critical.

- Plan a challenging final-year course load. Position yourself as a competitive college applicant by taking the most challenging classes available in your areas of interest, including AP and IB courses.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

- If you are enrolled in any AP or advanced courses, begin studying for end of course exams as soon as the school year begins.

- If you plan on taking the SAT or ACT, schedule your first sitting in the fall or spring of junior year. This allows you time to retake the exam, if needed. Plan to test 2-3 times at most.

- Registering for ACT or SAT testing accommodations? Apply for accommodation at least two months prior to the registration deadline of the exam as accommodations for both the ACT and SAT can take up to 6 to 7 weeks to process.

- If English is not your first language, prepare for the TOEFL or another English proficiency exam if required by the colleges on your list.

EXTRACURRICULARS & SUMMERS

- Continue involvement only in the extracurricular and volunteer activities aligned with your interests and seek leadership roles as appropriate.

- Secure an internship, job, research project, or other activity related to your core interests for the summer after 11th grade.

- Use this summer to get a head start on your college applications and essays. Essays benefit from the refining that comes from multiple drafts, so we advise working on these the summer before senior year.

- Avoid common mistakes like planning all your college visits this summer or spending your summer focusing solely on test preparation.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

- Schedule a meeting with your college counselor and your family to discuss college options.

- Continue to research colleges online and build your school list. We recommend a college list of 10-12 schools balanced with 3-4 reach schools, 4-5 target schools, and 2-3 likely schools.

- Visit prospective colleges during school breaks and weekends to help narrow down your college list. If you cannot visit in person, attend virtual visits/information sessions.

- Get a head start creating your Common Application account and even brainstorming/drafting your personal statement. If your applications will require a portfolio or audition tape, get started on it.

- If you are interested in being recruited for athletics, talk to your coaches and explore eligibility requirements. Start communicating with admissions officers/coaches at colleges on your school list.

12TH GRADE

ACADEMICS

- Maintain your grades and beware of senioritis.
- If your junior year grades and test scores are not strong enough for early round admissions, work to improve upon your grades and/or continue test prep to reach your goal ACT or SAT scores by the time Regular Decision applications are due.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

- If needed, continue your test prep into the fall of senior year, and retake the SAT or ACT. If you plan on applying in early rounds, you will need to complete all your standardized testing in accordance with those schools' deadlines, generally the October administrations for SAT or ACT.
- If you are taking AP or IB courses, continue to prepare for those exams in the spring.
- If you need to take the TOEFL or other language proficiency exam, take the exam in the fall.

EXTRACURRICULARS

- Continue involvement in your current extracurricular activities and seek out leadership positions. Senior year activities and leadership may strengthen your application, particularly for students deferred in early rounds.
- Create a final draft of your resume that includes your activities throughout high school, including summer activities.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

- Continue to visit (in person or virtually) the schools on your list to confirm your intent to apply and to demonstrate interest.
- Narrow down your college list – include a combination of reach, target, and likely schools. Plan which school(s) you can/will apply to in which round. Make note of all deadlines for each of the colleges on your list.
- If you haven't already started, begin working on your college essays and have them checked for content and grammar. Be thoughtful about your supplements.
- Prepare for interviews.
- Ask teachers for letters of recommendation at least one month before the first letter is due.
- Complete and submit the Common Application and/or any other applications before deadlines, double-checking that all parts and any school specific supplements are complete.
- If you are not applying test-optional, send test scores to the relevant colleges on your list.
- Confirm with your school counselor that they have sent the secondary school report and counselor letter of recommendation to all of your colleges.
- Check that colleges received all materials: applications, letters of recommendations, and test scores.
- Try to visit all colleges that have offered you a place, if you have not already done so.
- Listen to advice of parents and counselors but trust your own instincts on your college choice if it feels right for you.

