

*The Center For*  
**FAIRFUTURES** ➤

**COLLEGE PLANNING  
& PREPARATION  
TIMELINE FOR HIGH  
SCHOOLERS**

## 9TH GRADE

The most important thing in 9th grade is to do as well as possible in all of your classes! What you do in 9th grade can set the tone for the rest of your high school experience, and so it's important to make sure that you're giving yourself the time and getting the support that you need to do well in school. 9th grade is also a time when you can start thinking about college, especially if your classes are going well.

### **STEPS TO START TAKING IN 9TH GRADE:**

#### **Get to know your high school.**

Review [NYC graduation requirements](#) using the [infohub.nyced.org](http://infohub.nyced.org) website.

Learn about the types of courses offered by your high school. Are there any AP or IB courses that you would like to take someday?

#### **Meet with your high school counselor.**

Your counselor knows how to help you get the most out of high school. Be sure to take some time during the school year just to get to know your counselor and to talk about your plans for after high school.

#### **Participate in extracurricular activities.**

They're a great way to be part of a community within your school and they can also help with college. Whether it's a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity, high school is full of opportunities - and if you want to explore beyond your high school, a list of free programs is [here](#).

#### **Explore tutoring options.**

Whether you're doing test prep or just trying to get your grades up, tutoring can be a big help with your college preparation. Ask your school, your agency, or your coach if there are any college guidance or tutoring resources available.

**At any point in high school**, your case planner, coach, or educational specialist can sign you up for long-term 1:1 tutoring offered for free through a tutoring service partnered with your agency.

#### **Explore summer opportunities.**

Look for a program, internship, or volunteer position that interests you. You can find a searchable list of summer opportunities (and other year-round activities!) [here](#) - just set the "schedule" drop-down to "Summer".

#### **Be the best student you can be.**

When they're considering you for admission, colleges are going to look at your grades across all four years of high school. Going to class every day, turning in your homework, setting aside time to study for tests, and seeking out help from teachers and tutors if you need it - all of these things will pay off in a big way when it comes time to apply for college.

## 10TH GRADE

10th grade is a good year to start familiarizing yourself with your college options and really understanding what you'd like to do after you graduate from high school. For a lot of students, college preparation starts in earnest in 11th and 12th grade, so anything that you accomplish in 10th grade is going to put you ahead of the game.

### HERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU DO IN 10TH GRADE:

#### Meet with your high school counselor — again.

Meet with your school counselor to ensure that your course schedule is challenging enough to prepare you for college and also includes the courses that you'll need to graduate from high school.

Talk to your counselor about your plans for life after high school. He or she can help you plan your schedule, search for colleges, and navigate the financial aid process. The more your counselor knows about you, the more he or she can help you along the way.

#### Keep participating in school activities or volunteer efforts. Learn more about your college options.

*Here are some questions you might want to talk to your coach or college counselor about:*

What's the difference between a 2-year and a 4-year college?

What's the difference between a CUNY school, a SUNY school, or a private school?

How would I pay for college?

What does it mean to have reach schools, match schools, and safe schools on my college application?

#### Attend college and career fairs. The fairs often take place in the fall at your school or in your area.

To view a college fair calendar and learn more about college fairs click [here](#).

#### Look into college tours. 10th grade is a great time to tour a college.

Some schools and programs offer tours of colleges both inside and outside NYC.

You can also visit a college with a coach, tutor, or family member. NYC schools like NYU, Hunter, Brooklyn College, Baruch, John Jay, Guttman, BMCC, and Columbia offer tours throughout the year you can sign up for.

#### Practice taking standardized tests.

The most important standardized tests in 9th and 10th grade are the **New York State Regents Exams**. Getting good scores on these tests early on in high school will set you up for success later.

*If you're already doing well with Regents exams practice tests, start taking some practice SAT problems.*

The best SAT practice problems are available online at [www.khanacademy.org/sat](http://www.khanacademy.org/sat).

#### Take the PSAT at SAT School Day.

The PSAT is offered through SAT school day to public school students in NYC, usually in the month of April. The PSAT can provide really good feedback on your strengths and areas to work on when you study for the SAT in 11th grade.

## 11TH GRADE

11th grade is a good time to start getting really serious about the college process. Most students take the SAT for the first time in 11th grade, and your grades this year will be especially important to colleges. By the end of the summer after 11th grade, if you can have a list of schools you want to apply to, take the SAT, and get a head start on your college essay (if you're applying to selective 4-year colleges) then you'll be in good position to enter your senior year ready for college applications.

### **DURING THE FALL OF 11TH GRADE:**

#### **Learn about colleges.**

- Purchase or borrow a copy of a college book like the *Fiske Guide to Colleges*.
- You can also learn about colleges online at [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search) or use the US Department of Education college database at [collegescorecard.ed.gov](https://collegescorecard.ed.gov).
- Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college.

*Questions you might want to ask yourself are:*

Do I want to go to school in New York City or outside the city?

Do I want to dorm?

Do I want to go to a big school with lots of resources or a smaller more tight-knit school?

What kinds of majors am I interested in?

How important is it to go to a school that has a lot of people with the same background as me?

#### **Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.**

If pursuing drama, music, art, sports, etc.; start to gather material for a portfolio for relevant applications.

#### **Make an appointment with your guidance counselor or college counselor to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.**

**Opt-in to the College Board Opportunity Scholarships.** Visit [cb.org/opportunity](https://cb.org/opportunity) to opt in.

You can earn scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 by completing individual college planning steps. Complete all six steps and you'll be eligible for the \$40,000 scholarship.

### **DURING THE SPRING OF 11TH GRADE:**

#### **Develop a college list.**

It doesn't have to be a final list, but by the end of the Spring it's a good idea to be able to list at least 5 schools that you might be interested in attending.

**You should also find out what those schools require you to submit along with your application.**

*Do they require an essay? Letters of recommendation? SAT subject tests?*

#### **Take the SAT.**

If you are attending an NYC public school, **take the SAT for free at SAT School Day in April**. In addition, the test is typically offered in March, May, and June.

Make sure you start preparing for the test several months in advance using the tools available online:

[www.khanacademy.org/sat](https://www.khanacademy.org/sat).

**If you need testing accommodations like extra time because of a disability, make sure to talk to your guidance counselor about requesting accommodations at least two months before the test date.**

### **DURING THE SPRING OF 11TH GRADE (CONTINUED)**

**Plan to take the SAT at least twice, or even three times, if you're planning to apply to schools that require SAT scores.**

Students tend to do better each time they take the test.

**The SAT on SAT school day is free, and you can take the SAT two more times for free by getting an SAT fee waiver from your guidance counselor.**

One reasonable plan would be to take the SAT at SAT school day in April, then again in June, and then once more in Fall of senior year if needed.

**Think about which teachers might be willing to write a recommendation for you.**

If you're applying to a school that requires letters of recommendation, you should think about which of your teachers could give you the best recommendation. It's not a bad idea to ask them before the end of your junior year, and then remind them once senior year comes.

### **DURING THE SUMMER AFTER 11TH GRADE:**

**Consider retaking the Regents Exams in English or Math in June or August.**

If you scored below a 70 on the Common Core Algebra or Geometry Regents exam, or below a 75 on the English Regents exam, you might want to retake these tests until you get a higher score.

*Scores above these thresholds are necessary to avoid having to take co-requisite courses at CUNY, or zero-credit remedial classes at some SUNY schools.*

**Sometimes very high Regents scores can impress admissions departments at both public and private 4-year schools as well.**

**Find a full-time or part-time job,** or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.

**Create a résumé.**

Create a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school.

**Visit some local colleges—large, small, public, and private.**

A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is right for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Check out the campus checklist at [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org). Attend college fairs, too.

**Start working on your college essays!**

If you are potentially applying to schools that require essays, the summer before 12th grade is a great time to get started. Show your essays to people you trust and get feedback - the more time you have to work on them, the better they can be!

## 12TH GRADE

### It's time to apply for colleges!

The secret to having a great college application experience is to get as much done as possible at the beginning of senior year. If you have all of your college applications, as well as the FAFSA, submitted by Halloween, you will be in the best possible position to get into schools while also being first in line for financial aid and opportunity programs.

The other important thing is to get in the habit of checking your email every single day. If an issue comes up at any point in the college process, the college is probably going to email you instead of calling. Forward any emails you're concerned about to your coach, counselor, and/or educational specialist and take action as needed - don't let them sit in your inbox!

### **DURING THE FALL OF 12TH GRADE:**

#### Finalize Your College List.

Meet with a counselor about your college choices and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms.

Make sure you have a balanced list of academic safety, fit, and reach schools. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as you can (though it is absolutely ok to apply to a school without having visited it!).

#### Create a list or calendar that includes:

- Tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines College application due dates
- Required financial aid application forms and their deadlines (financial aid applications may be due before college applications)
- Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
- Your high school's application processing deadlines

#### If you are planning to apply to four-year colleges:

- ☐ **Ask a counselor or teacher for recommendations if you need them.**  
Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. For each recommendation, provide a stamped, addressed envelope and any college forms required.
- ☐ **Finish your personal statement or other supplemental essays**, if needed  
Ask teachers and others to read them.  
If you're applying for early decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- ☐ **Retake the SAT if you need to:** Many seniors retake the SAT in the fall. Send your SAT scores to the colleges to which you are applying.

#### Apply to College: Submit your applications to the schools that you want to attend.

It's a good idea to try to finish your college applications by Halloween, especially if you are applying to SUNY or CUNY schools. This puts you in the best position for admission, financial aid, and spaces in support programs.

Make sure to indicate that you are interested in being considered for any Support Programs or Opportunity Programs offered by the school.

#### Ask a counselor to help you request fee waivers for your college applications.

If you are applying to CUNY you can request a fee waiver by filling out CUNY's [Application Fee Waiver Request Form](#).

#### Ask counselors to send your high school transcripts to colleges.

Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before the colleges require the documents. Note that if you attend an NYC public school, CUNY will receive your transcript automatically.

## **DURING THE FALL OF 12TH GRADE (CONTINUED)**

### **Complete the FAFSA\***

To apply for most financial aid, you'll need to complete the FAFSA. Oct. 1 is the first day you can file the FAFSA. Before you can fill out your FAFSA, you need a username and password (also known as an FSA ID).

- ☐ **Create an FSA ID:** [nslds.ed.gov/npas](https://nslds.ed.gov/npas)
- ☐ **Complete the FAFSA application online:** [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa)

### **Apply to ETV**

- ☐ If you are eligible, **fill out the initial ETV application** at [etv-nys.smapply.org](https://etv-nys.smapply.org) after completing the FAFSA.

### **Make sure you apply for TAP through FAFSA OR complete your TAP application**

- ☐ **Complete the TAP application:** [www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap](https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap)

### **Submit any needed verification documents to colleges**

Fill In many cases, you will need to verify your independent student status in order to receive financial aid. Check the to-do list on your student account and be ready to submit the following three documents to your college:

- ☐ **A letter stating that you are/were in foster care**
- ☐ **A non-filing letter from the IRS if you haven't filed taxes**
- ☐ **An independent student verification worksheet** (provided by the college and filled out by you)

### **If you are applying to schools other than CUNY or SUNY, complete the CSS Profile:**

The CSS Profile is an online application used by certain colleges programs to determine your eligibility for school-based aid and outside scholarships.

- ☐ **Complete the CSS Profile:** [cssprofile.collegeboard.org](https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org)

## **DURING THE SPRING OF 12TH GRADE**

### **Retake the Regents exams if you are planning to go to CUNY or SUNY and your Regents scores are below the threshold for exemption from remedials.**

This could save you a lot of time in remedial classes!

### **Stay on track in school.**

Your grades still matter in your second semester of high school, especially if you are waitlisted, planning to transfer colleges, or still need high school credits in order to graduate.

### **Accept a college admissions offer.**

You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. If you can, it's a really good idea to visit the college before accepting an admissions offer. Notify your counselor of your choice. If you have questions, talk to your counselor or call the college.

### **Apply for the College Choice Program**

If you are eligible, *i.e. if you are currently in foster care and planning to attend college full-time next year:*

- ☐ **Apply online at** [fosteringcollegesuccessinitiative.org](https://fosteringcollegesuccessinitiative.org)