

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS



With the right grades and right steps,
your child can make it to college.

You can help make sure that happens.

The time to start thinking about college is years before your child is ready to go. He or she will need to take a number of steps through their high school years to prepare for applying to college. Here's a checklist to help you make this happen:

FRESHMAN YEAR

- Make sure your freshman makes an appointment with the school counselor to create a graduation plan. This counselor helps students choose high school courses that lead to standard or advanced diplomas. Counselors can also offer information on courses that will earn your child college credits and can identify community organizations and events that may help your child prepare for college.
- Express interest in your freshman's progress in class. Help him or her understand that grades matter, starting NOW. Academic records (transcripts) are requested with most college and scholarship applications and will include grades earned each year of high school.
- 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/or offices he or she has held, and maintain a list of volunteer activities and 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 and to identify the Virginia schools that offer them.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Make sure your sophomore registers for the Preliminary SAT®/National Merit® Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®), a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT (this test score is required by many schools for admission). 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. Many colleges and scholarships 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 or community 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/students/Payforcollege.asp. Ask your employer, church, and other local organizations about scholarships that they may offer.
- 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 and many require letters of recommendation that may be difficult to get at the last minute. 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 to help pay for college. Students should submit their FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st.
- Help your senior gather required documents and other information ahead of time. The FAFSA has sections for the student and parent to complete. Requested information includes Social Security Numbers, 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 **Financial Aid** (usually in January or February) 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 and to remember your PIN to access records in the future.
- 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 toward the cost of attending school. The EFC is used to determine whether a student is eligible for a Pell Grant (do not have to pay back) 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 size, location, and majors offered there, and review the financial aid package to make sure it is affordable and the right fit.
- Consider private loans if your senior doesn’t have all the necessary financial aid to attend college. A number of good sites to start with are www.finaid.org and www.petersons.com. Beware of scholarship scams, which are unfortunately becoming more and more common. 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), by the deadlines, 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!

