

Providing Resources & Opportunities  
Designed to Inspire Gifted Youth

## **A Guide to College Preparation for Parents and Highly Capable Students**

Successful students cite parental support as the key factor in their achievement. The purpose of this guide is:

- To remove the mystery surrounding the process of college preparation by introducing you to basic information and resources.
- To provide you with a general timetable so you may encourage your child to take full advantage of the opportunities which are available.
- To assure you that this is a long process during which you and your child will ask questions, gather information, explore opportunities and create a plan, which works, for your own situation.

Get to know yourself...your interests, your strengths, your passions, to help you create a high school plan. To develop your own plan, use web tools, like Naviance (SPS), to narrow down what you are looking for in a college, or purchase a reference book, like "Profiles of American Colleges", Barron's Publisher. You will also visit college websites to find their expectations and recommendations to students as to college preparation, visit college testing websites to find test calendars and information, study your high school's comprehensive list of course offerings for grades 9-12, and find other resources and summer opportunities on the internet. With this information you can plot out a general plan which will serve as an individualized guide during the four years of high school. Review your plan periodically and make revisions when appropriate.

### **College Expectations versus High School Graduation Requirements**

High School graduation requirements represent the minimal class and credit requirements for graduation. These are not sufficient for admission to competitive colleges. This is why you must visit the websites of a variety of selective colleges from across the country in order to get an idea of the college prep coursework they recommend. This varies from school to school depending upon their mission. In general, all of these colleges want prospective students to take the most rigorous academic coursework their high school offers, such as Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Generally this means 4 years of English, 3 years of history/social studies, 4 years of mathematics, 3-4 years of lab sciences, and 3 - 4 years of a foreign language.

**Honors Program:** These are rigorously academic, achievement-based courses for students who have demonstrated mastery of prerequisite skills. Students generally take Honors classes in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, however some high schools allow students to start taking AP classes in ninth grade. Check with your high school for information on how to access these classes. This varies from school to school. Honors courses are not as highly accepted by colleges as AP courses for their rigor because the standards are set locally, not nationally.

**Advanced Placement Program:** This program is a cooperative effort between high schools and the colleges and universities. It provides students the opportunity to take college-level courses in high school. College credit may be earned depending upon the student's score and a particular college's AP policy. Each college sets its own policy. The coursework is academically rigorous. The AP exams are given in May. Check your high school for information on the AP classes. They may vary from school to school. See [www.apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com)

### **What else can students do to prepare for college work?**

- Read. This improves verbal skills and increases one's base of knowledge.
- Write. College students write continually.
- Problem-solve. Practice this skill whenever possible, especially in math and science classes.
- Develop computer skills.
- Expand your horizons. Go to libraries, museums, art galleries, science centers, performing arts events.
- Use summers to pursue your interests.
- Take online classes (starting summer of 7<sup>th</sup> grade) to give you more flexibility in your high school course selections and to enrich your academic experience.
- Seek a mentorship or internship opportunity in a field of interest.
- Participate in extra-curricular activities.

### **Tests for College-Bound Students**

**PSAT/NMSQT:** Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a program co-sponsored by the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). See [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and [www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org) .

It is administered every October and may be taken for practice in the 8<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grades, but it is taken in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade in order to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program. Take the PSAT as many times as you can to get the best score possible. Some colleges base their academic scholarships on the final PSAT score.

**SAT I:** The SAT I is a 3-hour reasoning test. The test is revised and updated every few years. Check the website for details. Colleges require that this test or the ACT (see below) be taken and the results sent to them as a part of the admissions process. Check the college website to see which test is preferred. It is administered by the College Board several times each year. See [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) .

**SAT II:** The SAT II tests are 1-hour subject tests. Many selective colleges and universities require particular subjects be tested through these exams. You must carefully check each individual college for which SAT II tests they require. A student may submit SAT II results to a college which does not require them as additional evidence of his /her competence in a particular subject. These tests are administered by the College Board several times each year. A student may take up to three subject exams per exam date.

Students should take a particular SAT II test as soon as possible after completing that subject or class. See [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) .

**ACT:** The American College Test is required by some colleges and universities. It tests aptitude in English, math, social studies and natural sciences. It is administered several times each year. Check colleges to see if they use this test instead of the SAT I and SAT II. See [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) .

**AP:** Advanced Placement Exams are administered each year in May and represent the culmination of college-level work in a given discipline which is taught in the high school setting. Many colleges give college credit to students for earning a score of 3, 4 or 5 out of a possible 5. Carefully review each particular school's policy pertaining to the acceptance of AP credits. See [www.apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com) .

**Note:** Some high achieving students, who know they want to take the **SAT I** twice and **SAT II** subject tests, might consider beginning the testing cycle earlier than 11<sup>th</sup> grade, to fit it all in before college application deadlines. Students who want to submit an early decision application (around November 1<sup>st</sup>), especially, should plan to have all testing completed by the college's early application deadline. Check with your high school college prep counselor about this.

## College-Prep Planning Calendar

### Grades 7 and 8:

- If possible, participate in a regional talent search such as the one administered by the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. Programs such as these offer resources and classes to highly capable students. [www.jhu.edu/~gifted](http://www.jhu.edu/~gifted) .
- Check out other resources for gifted and talented students. One particularly good list of resources comes from the Robinson Center for Young Scholars at the University of Washington. <https://robinsoncenter.uw.edu/> On the home page, click "other resources" and then click "Resource List".
- Take the PSAT in October of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year for practice.
- Take one or two online high school courses (Health and/or Introduction to Fitness) to get a head start on high school credits. Students in the Spokane area can enroll in SVL (Spokane Virtual Learning) [www2.spokaneschools.org/OnlineLearning/index.php](http://www2.spokaneschools.org/OnlineLearning/index.php) offered by Spokane Public Schools. You can also check with your district to see what options they have available for you to take courses outside of the classroom. Get good grades!

- Prior to registering for 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes, create a preliminary four-year plan. Then, sign up for Honors classes, a foreign language class, and possibly an AP Class, for high school requirements.
- Start writing letters of interest to the Admissions Departments of several colleges and universities indicating your age and interest in their school and why. Request that they send you materials and information about their college and the application requirements, etc.

### **Grade 9:**

- It is important to get one's high school career off to a strong start. Attendance is very important. Practice good study skills. Work on time management. Get involved in school and extra-curricular activities. Meet with your high school counselor and talk career planning. Get good grades!
- Before registering for 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes look at your college-prep plan and revise it if you wish. Sign up for Honors classes, a foreign language class, AP class, etc.
- Begin to visit colleges campuses either locally or when on vacation. Early informal visits can help students clarify what they want in a college.
- Participate in volunteer opportunities and community service projects. These kinds of experiences enhance a student's resume and applications for colleges.
- Look for summer courses to help meet requirements, or to enhance career field of interest.
- Research scholarships for Juniors (11<sup>th</sup> grade) only. Make note of application deadlines.

### **Grade 10:**

- Take the PSAT in October for practice.
- Attend a college fair where college representatives display information and talk to prospective applicants. Continue visiting colleges when possible.
- By now you might have a better idea about which colleges you are considering. Visit their websites for particular information which will help guide you in selecting which classes to take and when to take them.
- Check these college websites to find which tests you will need to take. Planning ahead will help you organize your very busy junior year.
- Before registering for 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes, evaluate your college-prep plan. Sign up for as many AP classes as you can handle.
- Start applying for "Juniors only" scholarships, making application deadlines in your junior year of high school.

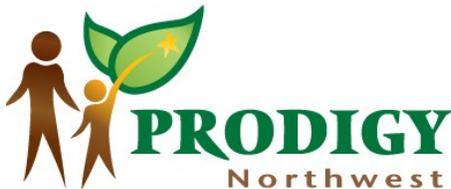
### **Grade 11:**

- Take the PSAT in October. It is good practice for the SAT I test which is generally taken in the second semester of the junior year.
- Obtain the testing booklets and practice material (SAT I & II or ACT) from your high school career center. Figure out when to take the tests. Take the practice tests.
- Parents should attend your high school's financial aid for college informational meeting.
- Meet with admissions representatives who visit your school. Attend a college fair.
- Visit as many colleges on your list as possible while they are in session. Arrange a campus tour, visit classes and stay overnight in a dorm. Use this opportunity to visit with an admissions officer to ask any questions you may have.
- Take the SAT I, and the ACT if it's required by any colleges on your list.
- Take the SAT II tests required by the colleges on your list.
- Take the AP tests. Decide whether to take the English Language and Composition Test in May of your junior year or whether to take it in May of your senior year when the English Literature test is taken. Ask your AP teacher and counselor for advice.
- Register for senior year classes. Continue with as many AP courses as you can handle. College acceptance is usually contingent upon doing well in the senior year.
- Make an appointment with the school's career counselor to talk about scholarship opportunities beyond those offered by colleges and universities. Start researching scholarships available in fields of interest offered by community organizations and national foundations. Start applying for scholarships as soon as possible.
- Over the summer, write to colleges for admissions and financial aid applications or download the forms from the school's websites. Read them carefully.

### **Grade 12:**

- Retake the SAT I if you believe your score will improve. Take any remaining SAT II tests required by your schools. Make sure colleges will get your scores in time.
- Parents should attend the financial aid meeting and begin to fill out all the forms.

- Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as soon as possible after January 1<sup>st</sup> of the senior year. [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) . Even if you don't think a student will qualify for need-based scholarships, many universities require a completed FAFSA to award academic/merit scholarships, too. You can complete the form with an estimate and revise it after you do your taxes, but be sure you meet the FAFSA deadline. Washington State hands out awards until funds are depleted. Early birds are rewarded here.
- Double-check your high school transcript for accuracy, and request that official transcripts (weighted transcripts) be sent from your high school to colleges by application deadlines.
- Meet the admissions application deadlines. Check with admissions offices to verify that your application and official transcripts have been received and your application file is complete.
- If you applied to a college but have not yet been able to visit the campus, do so as soon as possible and definitely before accepting an offer of admission. It is important to visit classes and stay overnight on campus because there is no other way to figure out if this is really the place you want to spend four years.
- Take the AP exams in May for this year's AP courses.
- Send final high school transcripts to selected colleges.
- Complete your 5<sup>th</sup> year plan with the career & college readiness coordinator.



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