

**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER FOR FAMILIES OF 12THGRADE STUDENTS**

**STUDENTS**

**NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE**

High School & Beyond Planning — News & Information

**Senior Year- Get Organized!**

Insert School Logo

There are six key milestones that your child will accomplish this year. **In 12th grade, your child will:**

1. Take postsecondary entrance and placement exams.
2. Develop a list of postsecondary choices.
3. Apply to postsecondary programs or institutions.
4. Prepare a financial plan and apply for financial aid.
5. Complete all high school graduation requirements.
6. Graduate.

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It is important to stay organized. Create a calendar with your child. This should include application deadlines and other important dates. This fall, help your teen prepare for college and financial aid. Students should:

* **Meet with the guidance counselor** to talk about postsecondary plans.
* **Review transcript** to make sure they are on track to graduate on time. Get help if needed.
* **Learn the application process** for each college or program. Get started on the applications now. Start writing application essays.
* **Update résumés with senior year activities**. Their résumé will help them with their applications. Plus, students will want to share it with people who are writing recommendations for them.
* **Ask teachers, counselors, coaches, or employers for letters of recommendation**. Give them plenty of time. Students should give them a copy of their résumé plus the recommendation form and a stamped envelope (if needed).
* **Be sure to write a thank you note** to each person who writes a letter of recommendation!
* **Take any needed required entrance exams** and make sure scores are sent to college.

**Did You Know?**

Your teen should apply to at least three colleges, one from within each of these three categories:

* **Reach** - You might not get in, but it's worth applying because you really want to go.
* **Solid** - You're a competitive applicant and will likely be accepted.
* **Safety** - You'll definitely get accepted, and it's a backup in case the others don't work out.

**STEP 1: College Applications**

***College*** includes many options such as apprenticeships, on-the-job training programs, community college certificates, two-year degrees, and four-year degrees.

Every college sets its own admission requirements, so it’s a good idea for your child to check with the college’s website to see what criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.) applicants must meet in order to be a good candidate.

Early applications are usually due in the fall, sometimes even as early as October. For regular admissions, applications are usually due in December or January. Encourage your child to start working on them now.

**Here are the most common parts of an application:**

* **The Application:** Most colleges use their own custom application form, but many schools use a shared application called the Common Application.
* **Personal Statement/Essay:** Most colleges will require at least one written essay. **Your child’s main goal should be to share personal information in a clear, engaging way.** This is perhaps the most critical element of an application. The personal statement is a way for admissions officers to get to know who applicants are and why they want to attend their college.
* **Transcript**: Most colleges will require a high school transcript, which is a record of your child’s classes and grades. Students, who have earned college credit, will also need to submit those college transcripts. NOTE: Colleges only accept "official" transcripts that are signed and sealed by the high school, usually the school counselor.
* **Test Scores:** The required test could be one of the following: SAT and/or ACT, SAT Subject Tests (select subjects), ASSET/ACCUPLACER (for community college) or ASVAB (for military).
* **Short Answer Response:** These are extra questions beyond a personal statement.
* **Activities Log/Resume:** This listing of extracurricular activities is a way for admissions to get to know your child.
* **Letters of Recommendation**: Sometimes a college will require one or more letters of recommendation, from someone other than a family member.

Students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents can apply to and attend a college or university. They may even be eligible for in-state tuition rates and state financial aid. **Learn more at:** <https://wsac.wa.gov/student-residency>

**Did You Know?**

If your teen has been in foster care at any time after turning 13, your child’s classes will likely be paid for at most Washington State colleges.

Learn about the College Bound Scholarship, the Passport to Careers Program, and/or the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program to help pay for school.

Find details at:

<https://gearup.wa.gov/students-families> and <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-youth>

These are supportive adults who can help guide your teen through the financial aid process: Designated Support Staff (DSS), program staff, financial aid staff, Independent Living (IL) providers, SETuP staff.

**Upcoming Events & Announcements**

* **Family Orientation:**
* **Student Orientation:**
* **Family Event:**
* **National GEAR UP Week:**
* **College Application Campaign:**
* **College Goal WA:**
* Click here to enter text.

**Did You Know?**

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**MYTH:** Just applying to college costs a lot of money (application fees, test fees, etc.).

**REALITY**: While it's true that there are a lot of fees and costs associated with college applications, students can often get fee waivers if they meet certain criteria.

A high school counselor can help students get a fee waiver for the SAT or ACT, and students should talk to each college individually about waiving your application fee.

Often, if students can show that they were given an ACT fee waiver, the college will automatically waive the application fee.

Additionally, every income-eligible senior who takes the SAT or SAT Subject Test using a fee waiver will receive **four** college application fee waivers from the College Board.

**Step 2: Apply for Financial Aid**

You and your child should complete and submit either the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)](https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa) or the [Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA)](https://wsac.wa.gov/wasfa). Both applications open **October 1.** You should complete this step as soon as possible.

**REMINDER:** File the **FAFSA** (<https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>) if your child **is** a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Students who do not meet these eligibility requirements should file the **WASFA** (<https://wsac.wa.gov/wasfa>).

Students will be required to report income and tax information from an earlier tax year or ***prior-prior year.*** For example, on the 2023-24 FAFSA/WASFA, students—and their parent(s), as appropriate—will report their 2021 income and tax information. Because you will have already done your taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, you may be able to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) to automatically import your tax information into your FAFSA. See more information at: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/resources/parents>

Filing early is holding your child’s place in line for financial aid. The sooner you get in line, the likelier it is that you’ll be awarded aid. Filing early – before your taxes are complete – helps ensure that your child has access to as much financial aid funds as is possible.

Students need to file for financial aid every year they are in college. ***The 12th Year Campaign*** is a state-administered program that holds free, regional events to help students and families complete financial aid applications. The workshops begin in October and November at numerous locations across Washington State. Students receive step-by-step instructions for successfully completing and submitting their FAFSA or WASFA.

**Confused? Get help.** <https://wsac.wa.gov/12th-year-campaign>

**Myth Buster**

**MYTH:** Because of the cost of higher education, students should only apply to inexpensive schools.

**REALITY**: Students do not really know how much college will cost out of pocket until they apply, are accepted, and receive a financial aid package. This means that they should apply to colleges seem like a good fit, regardless of cost.

For example, private schools often have a higher sticker price than public schools but they also tend to offer more financial aid. Larger financial aid packages may lower the total cost for students to less than that of a public school.

With the availability of financial aid, students have many options for schools. It’s important to consider costs as one part of the criteria for choosing which college best fits them. But it should not be the determining factor.

**Checklist for Parents**

Although a student’s FAFSA or WASFA is the student’s responsibility, parents take a large role in the process when a student is determined to be [dependent](https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/dependency). Here are the steps you should take to prepare to help your child apply for financial aid.

**Before the *FAFSA:***

* **Learn the basics of the federal student aid programs** (grants, work-study, and loans) at <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types>. Federal aid is intended to help cover the student’s cost of attendance (tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and other education expenses.)
* **Encourage your child to maximize any available free money to help pay for college.** There’s information and a free scholarship search at <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/scholarships> and at [thewashboard.org](http://thewashboard.org).
* **Understand whether your child needs to provide parent information on the FAFSA.** <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/dependency> will help you determine if your child is dependent or independent.
* **Understand who counts as a parent for purposes of filling out the FAFSA**. <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/parent-info> includes the definition of “legal parent” and discusses which parent’s information should be reported on the FAFSA when the legal parents are divorced or separated and not living together.
* **YOU and YOUR CHILD should get** [**FSA IDs**](https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch). An ***FSA ID*** is a username and password that you’ll be using to sign the FAFSA. You and your child each need your own FSA ID—and you each need to create your own for privacy purposes, and because the information is easier to remember if you create your own. (Note: Only one of a student’s parents needs to sign the student’s FAFSA, so only one parent needs an FSA ID.) PARENTS: Before you can sign your child’s FAFSA online, you need to get your own username and password.

**FAFSA Facts:**

* Completing the FAFSA takes about 30 minutes and it is available in Spanish.
* Free assistance is available via email, by phone, and on the web: <https://studentaid.gov/help-center/contact>
* You do NOT have to pay to file the FAFSA. Beware of fraudulent websites that want you to pay them to file your FAFSA. It is always free!
* You must file the FAFSA for every year you attend school. For example, if you are currently a college freshman, you should complete the 2023-24 FAFSA to receive aid for your sophomore year.

**FAFSA Facts**

**Student Checklist**

* Meet with your guidance counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate.
* Contact the admission and the financial aid offices at the colleges you are interested in attending. What are the admissions requirements? When are the deadlines? Are there fees? What forms do the financial aid offices require?
* Register for the October/November SAT, ACT, and SAT Subject Tests™ required by the schools you choose.
* Prepare and submit your applications on time if you want to apply for early action or early admission.
* Ask your teachers/mentors to begin writing recommendation letters. Also, keep copies of all forms you mail.
* Take your SAT or ACT tests as early as possible so you can re-take them if you need to. Ask your counselor if you qualify for a test fee waiver.
* Have your scores sent to the schools on your final list.
* If you applied for early action or early decision, contact the admissions office to make sure all your paperwork and forms have been received. Check with the financial aid office, too.
* Work with your school counselor to get your official transcript to each college.
* Get an FSA ID if filing the FAFSA. An FSA ID is a username and password that you’ll be using to sign the FAFSA.
* Submit your FAFSA or WASFA as soon as possible after October 1.

**Family Checklist**

Visit <https://gearup.wa.gov/students-families> to learn more and access resources to help your child make a plan.

* Help your child get organized. Create a calendar with your child. This should include application deadlines and other important dates.
* Help your child decide about applying early. If your senior is set on going to a certain college, he or she should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November.
* Encourage your child to take your SAT or ACT tests as early as possible and to send the scores to the schools that he or she wants to apply to. Remember: Test fee waivers may be available. Ask the school counselor about this.
* If your child applied for early action or early decision, encourage him or her to contact the admissions office to make sure all the paperwork and forms have been received. Check with the financial aid office, too.
* Find out if your child’s school or a community organization is offering any assistance to help students complete college applications.
* Offer to look over your senior’s college applications. Remember that this is your child’s work so try to remain in the role of advisor and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
* Help your child to complete and submit all required parts of each college application online.
* Work together to apply for financial aid. The earlier you apply, the better.
* Learn about college loan options together. Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high schooler gets a low-interest federal loan. Be cautious; learn about loan options and a [parent's role in borrowing money](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/loans/borrowing-the-parents-role-college-financial-aid).
* If filing the FAFSA, get an FSA ID. An FSA ID is a username and password that you’ll be using to sign the FAFSA.