A Parent's Guide to College and Career Readiness:

A GUIDE TO HELP YOU SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S DREAMS

College Readiness Consortium

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

the YMCA
FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Produced by the University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium in partnership with the University YMCA

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, a college degree is becoming a requirement for career-track jobs that pay a living wage and provide opportunity for promotion. *College* isn't limited to four-year colleges, however. At community and technical colleges, a student can earn a two-year associate degree or obtain a certificate in a specialized field to prepare for a career.

Parents, grandparents, and other caring adults play a critical role in a child's education. This guide will help you support your child's preparation for college from preschool through high school. It is based on research used in the development of Ramp-Up to Readiness™, a school-wide guidance program of the University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium. The program is designed to increase the number and diversity of students who graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary for success in college. Ramp-Up to Readiness™ helps schools prepare students for college in five areas:

Academic Readiness: The ability to succeed in first-year classes that earn credits at a technical college, community college, or four-year college or university

Admissions Readiness: The ability to meet admissions requirements at a range of postsecondary institutions

Career Readiness: The ability to identify careers that match personal, financial, and other goals, along with an understanding of the skills, credentials, and experiences required to succeed in those careers

Financial Readiness: The ability to cover the cost of the first semester of study at a postsecondary institution through savings, loans, and/or financial aid

Personal and Social Readiness: The ability to set educational goals, make and monitor progress toward goals, and create relationships with peers and adults that support academic success

For more information on why college is important, visit:
www.rampuptoreadiness.org

‘College Prep’ From Infancy Through High School

Support reading: Reading helps develop vocabulary.

- ✔ Talk to your child, from the time he or she is an infant.
- ✔ Point out words on signs to preschoolers.
- ✔ Spend 20 minutes a day reading to your child, or having your child read to you.
  - Older students should read on their own daily, but often still enjoy listening to adults read.
  - For variety, visit a public library for books and magazines or buy a newspaper.

Remember intelligence is not fixed: Effort and persistence when facing challenges are important characteristics of a successful student.

- ✔ Tell your child, “smart is not what you are; smart is what you work to become.”
- ✔ Praise your child’s efforts, not just success; say things such as: “I like how you kept at that math assignment, even though it was hard.”

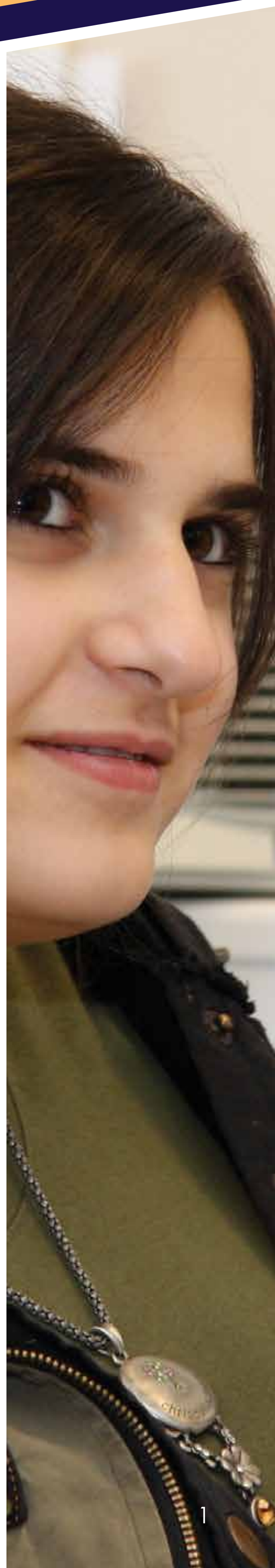
Help your child set goals: Setting goals is good practice, and achieving goals creates motivation.

- ✔ Help your student set and achieve SMART goals about behavior, time management, or school:

  Specific
  Measurable
  Attainable
  Relevant
  Timely

Establish a set time for homework every night:

- ✔ Turn off TVs and cell phones and eliminate other distractions.
- ✔ Help your child check his/her homework to be sure it is done correctly.



Stay connected with school:

- ✔ Attend parent-teacher conferences and use your school's information system to stay informed about your child's progress and grades.
- ✔ If you have questions, contact your student's teacher.
- ✔ Encourage your child to use a planner or binder and review it each night to know the upcoming assignments.
- ✔ Ask teachers or school counselors if your child is taking classes that will prepare him or her for college, and if your child's test scores indicate that he or she will be ready for college.

Encourage your child to seek help: Learning when and how to get assistance is an important skill for college and life. It is better to get help early before a problem gets worse.

- ✔ If you think your child needs extra help, ask a teacher or counselor about tutoring or other assistance available at the school.

Start saving for college: There are many ways to make college affordable. Even the smallest savings add up if set aside regularly over a long period of time.

- ✔ Explore setting up a Minnesota College Savings Plan and other savings ideas at www.mnsaves.org.
- ✔ Complete a sample FAFSA (financial aid) form to get an estimate of the financial aid your child might receive. You can find one at studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/estimate **or** www.getreadyforcollege.org/Estimator/firstQuestions.cfm.
- ✔ Social security numbers are not required to attend college, although they are required for all government financial aid.

‘College Prep’ For The Middle School Years
(Grades 6 through 8)

Encourage your child to take school seriously and choose challenging classes: Middle school subjects are important preparation for high school classes.

Explore a variety of career interests:

- ✔ Ask your child about activities that he or she enjoys, and explore related careers.
- ✔ Find a way to connect your child’s career dreams to attending college. For example, if a child wants to be a professional athlete or fashion designer, mention that the road to those careers includes college.
- ✔ Visit kids.usa.gov/teens-home/index.html or www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/5-8/index.html for fun websites to explore careers.
- ✔ This interactive tool, www.iseek.org/careers/realitytool.html, will help your child connect the cost of a desired lifestyle with college and career options.

Develop academic habits of success: Developing organizational skills, learning how to get help from school staff, and building positive relationships are all key college skills to start developing in middle school.

- ✔ Check your child’s binder or planner each night.
- ✔ Help your child build positive relationships with peers who make good choices and are developing good study habits.
- ✔ Have your child take a learning-style self-assessment (such as educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/learning-styles.shtml) to identify his or her best approaches to studying and learning.

Get involved in extracurricular activities: Colleges look for well-rounded students who volunteer or are involved in school and community activities. Activities are also a great way to get to know other students or adjust to a new school.

Explore financing college: Become familiar with information on college costs, grants, loans and scholarships.

- ✔ Check out the "Paying" section at www.getreadyforcollege.org.
- ✔ Get an early estimate of the financial aid your child might receive by using the planning tools at studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/estimate or www.getreadyforcollege.org/Estimator/firstQuestions.cfm.

Take the Explore test: The Explore test is good practice for the ACT college admissions exam that students will take in 11^{th} grade. It provides feedback on whether students are academically "college ready" in addition to giving information about careers that may be good matches for your child.

- ✔ Review test results with your child and your child's teacher or counselor.

Register for 9th grade: Often students register for high school classes while still in 8^{th} grade.

- ✔ Make sure your child registers for high-school classes that will keep him or her on track for college. Typical requirements for a four-year college are:
  - 3 years of math (four years recommended)
  - 4 years of English
  - 3 years of science (including biology and chemistry)
  - 2 years of foreign language
  - 4 years of social studies
  - 1 year of art (art includes music)

  Although these classes may not be required for a two-year community or technical college, they are good preparation for all college students.
- ✔ Encourage your child to take math, science, and technology classes, because many of the jobs of the future are in these fields.

'College Prep' During High School

Establish a set time for homework every night: Turn off TVs and cell phones and eliminate other distractions.

Remember grades count: Often students think grades in 9th-grade classes don't count for college admissions. Not only do they count, success in those classes is the foundation for more challenging coursework later in high school.

- ✔ If your school provides online access to grades, track your student's progress regularly.
- ✔ If your student is struggling, contact the teacher or counselor to find additional help. Don't wait until the end of the semester.

Get involved in extracurricular activities: Colleges look for well-rounded students who volunteer, are employed, and/or are involved in school activities.

- ✔ Help your child get involved in an activity at school or in the community.
- ✔ Keep homework a priority by helping your child develop time management skills.

Register for 10th-grade classes: Registration can happen as early as January.

- ✔ Stay involved in the registration process to make sure your student is taking the recommended classes to be prepared for college.

Complete a College Financial Aid Calculator: This will give you a realistic estimate of how much your family is expected to contribute to college costs.

- ✔ Check out the FAFSA4caster at studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/ to get an estimate of college expenses.
- ✔ Encourage your child to explore grant and scholarship options online and with their school counselor.

Take the PLAN and/or PSAT tests: Use them as practice for the ACT and SAT tests, and to see how your child is progressing in academic readiness for college.

Explore career interests: Continue discussion with your child about activities he or she enjoys and brainstorm careers related to those interests. Having a career goal can help students be more motivated and see the connection with school.

- ✔ Your child can find careers that fit his or her interests by taking an interest inventory. One website that can help is www.actstudent.org/career.
- ✔ School counselors can discuss the type of college degree needed for those careers.

Consider different types of postsecondary options: There's a wide range of postsecondary options, including two-year community colleges, four-year colleges, and technical college programs that often take fewer than two years to complete. Community and technical colleges are generally less expensive than four-year colleges; with good planning, the credits can transfer to a four-year college. For some majors, it may be best to start at a four-year college because of a required sequence of classes. For example, a student who transfers from a community college often will need three more years of study to complete an engineering degree.

- ✔ Discuss with your child which type of schooling might be the right fit for the careers or areas of study that interest them.
- ✔ Some other factors include: diversity and size of student body; city size/location, and average high school GPA for incoming freshman.

Register for 11th-grade classes: Consider trying a class that offers college credit, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College in the Schools, Project Lead the Way, or PSEO options.

- ✔ Learn more at readysetgo.state.mn.us/RSG/Parent/index.html.

Two websites with good information to help you explore and choose colleges are bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search and www.actstudent.org/college/choosing.html

Take the ACT or SAT: Most four-year colleges expect applicants to take the ACT or SAT exam in spring. Test dates in April and June are good because students have completed most or all of their junior year classes.

- ✔ Find out which test your child's preferred college requires.
- ✔ Register your child at least one month in advance. For dates and registration, see www.actstudent.org or sat.collegeboard.org/home.
- ✔ Have your student participate in ACT or SAT preparation classes offered through schools and community education programs.

Attend college fairs and visit campuses: Visiting colleges and talking to admissions staff are good ways to see if a campus is the right fit for your student.

- ✔ For information on factors to consider, review the 'Selecting' section of www.getreadyforcollege.org.
- ✔ Consider whether the college has majors (areas of study) that fit your child's interests, as well as college size, location, and cost.
- ✔ Make appointments with a college's office of admissions for information sessions and tours.

Continue planning for financing college: Completing a sample FAFSA (financial aid) form will help you get an estimate of the expected family contribution and the financial aid your child might receive.

- ✔ Explore the financial planning tools and sample FAFSA at studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/estimate or www.getreadyforcollege.org/Estimator/firstQuestions.cfm.
- ✔ Talk to a school counselor with your child and research scholarships online.

If your child plans to play a sport in college: Contact your high school coach to ask about programs and scholarships.

Register for 12th grade: English, social studies, math and/or science are important subjects to continue in 12^{th} grade. For example, two-year community and technical colleges have open admissions, but students take placement tests. If students are not ready in math or language arts, they may have to take developmental courses that *do not* earn college credit—but still charge tuition.

If he or she is eligible, enroll your student in at least one class that offers college credits such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College in the Schools, Project Lead the Way, or PSEO. For more information on these types of classes, see readysetgo.state.mn.us/RSG/Parent/index.html. Most four-year colleges prefer students who have taken at least one college-level course.

COLLEGE VISITS

College visits are very important to do before selecting a college. The summer after the junior year is a great time to visit. Listen for answers to or ask the following questions:

- Are there learning communities where students with similar interest live in the same hall and take classes together?
- What types of honors courses are offered?
- What kinds of academic support systems are available on campus?
- How much time do students spend on homework each week?
- How much writing is expected? How much reading is expected?
- Do students receive prompt feedback on academic performance?
- Do class discussions and assignments include diverse perspectives?
- Do students often work together on projects?
- What kinds of activities are students involved in outside of the classroom?
- When and how do students interact with other students who have differing social, political, or religious views, or are from differing racial and ethnic backgrounds?
- How many students study in other countries?
- What percentage of students do community service?
- How many students live on campus?
- Are faculty members accessible and supportive?
- Can students work on research projects with faculty?
- Do students and faculty members work together on committees or projects outside of course work?
- How does the college provide information to parents? Is there a parent communication program?

Avoid the 'senior slump': Colleges consider the senior-year course load when making admissions decisions. In addition, seniors who skip math courses can lose skills and increase the risk of needing to take non-credit developmental classes in college.

Last chance for ACT and SAT:

- ✔ If your student did not take the ACT or SAT as a junior, register for the October tests at least one month in advance.
- ✔ If your student took the test in 11^{th} grade but did not score as high as he/she expected, consider re-taking the test.

Determine application deadlines: Many four-year colleges have December deadlines. Others allow applications until January, February, or even June. Community colleges will accept students until the start of school, but sometimes fill up earlier.

Submit applications: Most applications are submitted online. Some colleges use the "Common Application," which can be submitted to multiple colleges at once. Some will require additional application materials.

- ✔ Apply to at least three colleges:
  - Match school: one where the average GPA and ACT/SAT scores for incoming first-year students are about the same as your child's
  - Stretch school: one where the GPA and test scores are a bit higher
  - Safety school: one where the scores are a little lower
- ✔ If the application requires recommendation letters, make sure your child asks people to write letters at least three weeks before the due date, and preferably early in fall. They can ask counselors, teachers, employers, coaches or leaders from volunteer activities.
- ✔ If a college your child applies to requires an essay, make sure your child has a teacher who can review it. If not, you should review it and provide comments. Make sure your child revises the essay before submitting it.
- ✔ Monitor applications to make sure all of the required documents are submitted.

Check it out—the summer before and fall of senior year are great times to visit a college campus.

Complete an official financial aid form (FAFSA):

- ✔ In January, complete an official financial aid form at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You'll want to have your most recent income tax forms and your child's savings information handy.
- ✔ Attend any financial aid workshops offered by your school. At events such as "College Goal Sunday," minnesotacollegegoal.org, you can get assistance in completing the FAFSA.

Decide where to go: By April, most colleges will have made admission decisions and provided information on financial aid.

- ✔ Compare schools based on the actual cost your student will have to pay after any grants or scholarships offered by the college are subtracted from the full tuition price.

Confirm enrollment: Follow the directions in the acceptance letter for the school your student chooses. Often, a tuition deposit must be sent to the school in spring.

- ✔ Your student should tell the school counselor the college he/she plans to attend, and request that final transcripts and all college-credit exam scores be sent there.
- ✔ Find out when tuition and room and board payments are due. Colleges usually allow installment payments, but you may have to ask for that option.
- ✔ Make sure your student is reading and responding to all information sent by the college.

If your child plans to play a sport in college:

- ✔ Contact your high school coach to ask about programs and scholarships.
- ✔ Register at the NCAA Eligibility Center, www.ncaa.org

Plan for college expenses:

- ✔ Help your child prepare a budget for college.
- ✔ Determine how much to spend on food, books and supplies, and entertainment.
- ✔ Most students will need debit cards. Make sure the bank you choose has an ATM machine close by campus.
- ✔ A checking account is convenient for the purchase of books and other expenses. Most colleges will charge books to a student's college account, which is then paid by check, charge card, or online payments from bank accounts.

Getting to college and moving in: You will be provided a specific move-in date, and possibly time of day.

- ✔ Air travel: Schedule flights in advance for the best prices.
- ✔ Train or bus: Find out how much you can take with you. You may be able to take a few boxes with you, which could save shipping costs.
- ✔ Car: Residence halls will have specific directions for unloading and moving in.

GLOSSARY

ACT: A standardized test used by many colleges as one factor considered in admissions. All Minnesota colleges will accept the ACT. A student usually takes this test in winter or spring of the junior year.

Advanced Placement (AP): AP classes are taught in high schools by high school teachers who are trained to use a specific college-level curriculum. Students take an exam at the end of the course and many colleges will give academic credits to students based on their exam scores.

Community Colleges: Public colleges that provide two-year associate degrees. Students who plan to continue their education at a four-year college should ask about the transfer curriculum.

College in the Schools (CIS): A program in which specially-trained high school teachers teach college courses in their own school. Students who successfully complete a CIS course receive academic credit from the college, and grades are recorded on college transcripts.

Explore: A standardized test offered in 8^{th} or 9^{th} grade that is aligned with the ACT. The results provide information about a student's knowledge, skills, and interests, and can help assess whether a student is on track for college readiness.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): This is the application required by all colleges for student loans and grants. The application requires information about both parent and student income and assets, and must be completed each year the student is in college. It calculates the expected family contribution.

Financial Aid: Colleges will calculate financial aid based on the difference between the expected family contribution and the cost of attending a particular college. Financial aid comes in many forms, including:

- Pell Grants: Federal money that does not need to be repaid, available to students with the highest need.
- State or college grants: Money that does not need to be repaid.
- Tuition waivers: A college may waive part or all of the tuition based on a student's talents or need.
- Work study: On-campus jobs provided through the school.
- Loans: Money that must be paid back, usually with interest.
- Colleges and private organizations offer scholarships based on a wide range of criteria that do not need to be repaid.

International Baccalaureate (IB): IB classes are taught in high schools, by high school teachers who are trained to use a specific college-level curriculum. Students take an exam at the end of the course and many colleges will give academic credit to students based on their scores on the exam. It is similar to AP.

PLAN: A standardized test offered in fall of the 11^{th} grade that is aligned with the ACT and can help a student prepare for the ACT. The results provide information about a student's knowledge, skills, and interests, and can help assess whether a student is on track for college readiness.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO): In Minnesota, high-school juniors and seniors (and, in some cases, sophomores) can take one or more courses at a public college without paying tuition and can earn college credit. Colleges have eligibility requirements based on class rank or test scores, so students should check with their school counselors to explore options.

Project Lead the Way (PLTW): Project Lead the Way classes provide hands-on, project-based, challenging engineering courses in high school, taught by high school teachers.

PSAT: A standardized test offered in 11^{th} grade that is aligned with the SAT and can help a student prepare for the SAT. The results provide information about a student's knowledge, skills, and interests, and can help assess whether a student is on track for college readiness.

ReadiStep: A standardized test offered in 8^{th} or 9^{th} grade that is aligned with the SAT. The results provide information about a student's knowledge, skills, and interests, and can help assess whether a student is on track for college readiness.

SAT: A standardized test used by many colleges, particularly colleges with highly competitive admissions, as one factor considered in admissions. A student usually takes this test in the winter or spring of their junior year.

Technical College: Public colleges that provide specific training that usually requires fewer than two years to achieve a diploma or certificate.

College Readiness Consortium

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

the YMCA
FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Produced by the University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium in partnership with the University YMCA Multicultural Achievers. The College Readiness Consortium works in partnership with PreK-12 educators and others to increase the number and diversity of Minnesota students who graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills and habits for success in higher education. The YMCA Multicultural Achievers is a high school and junior high school program that helps African American, Hispanic and Latino students set and obtain high educational and career goals.

Printed on recycled and recyclable paper with at least 10% postconsumer material. Produced 2013.