



**TEXAS
GEAR
UP**

**BEING AN ADVOCATE
FOR YOUR TEEN**

PARENT
SPOT



➤ BEING AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUR TEEN

As the parent of a high school student, it's so important to empower yourself with knowledge about the college preparation and admission process so that you can be a true source of support for your teen. By seeking out resources at your child's school, within your community, and online, you can help your student succeed—both now and in the future.

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START

College may seem like a long time away. This is particularly true when your child is young, still in elementary school or making their way through the tween years in middle school. But starting the college conversation as early as elementary school directly affects their high school years. By establishing successful habits early, your child will carry those forward as a firm foundation for greater future options. (And if your child is already in high school, don't worry—it's also never too late to become a powerful advocate for your student.)

There are steps you can take at every phase of your child's education. Become involved

in their school by building relationships with teachers. Attending school events and engaging in community activities make strong connections that may help with early access to resources such as scholarships and references for college applications.

Meet with your child's school guidance counselor or GEAR UP advisor on a regular basis. At least twice a year, schedule time to discuss high school graduation and college requirements. The purpose of this is to ask if your child is on track for meeting these requirements. The earlier you make that determination, the easier it'll be to make a shift in the right direction.

ENCOURAGE GOOD HABITS

When we repeat thoughts and actions over and over, they become hardwired into our brains. These pathways are challenging to change once the connections are made. For this reason, you'll increase your child's lifelong options by helping them build essential, productive skills. Demonstrate and encourage them to be better listeners and critical thinkers. Both are fundamental prerequisites for academic and career success.

- **There are many different study methods.** Each learner will gravitate towards a method that works best for them. Experiment early on and consider the environment they need for effective studying techniques. Do they need complete quiet when they study? Do they prefer interactive studying with a group, peers, or a tutor?
- **Organization skills are also a huge success factor.** There are electronic and traditional choices for helping your child meet target dates for assignments and learn how to manage their projects. If you need some assistance deciding whether a daily planner or an online calendar would work best, check with your child's teacher or counselor.
- **It's entirely true that reading is fundamental.** Reading requires a considerable number of thought processes to happen simultaneously. Because of this, avid readers demonstrate better critical thinking and writing, as well as improved memory and concentration. Lowered stress levels are an additional benefit. Start reading with your child as early as possible. It helps if you too are a reader and regularly model taking the time to read.
- **Goal setting is a superb way to transform your child's vision of their future into reality.** To be a well-rounded individual, make sure they include academic goals, community involvement, and personal growth in their planning. Periodically revisiting their targets and associated timelines encourages long-term thinking and planning.
- **It's best to balance between protecting your student and allowing them the freedom to explore options and experiences.** Many parents want to rush in and save their child from failure. But, experiencing failure is a part of the growth process. Indeed, teaching your child how to manage failure and then continue on their path in spite of setbacks is the foundation for resilience and autonomy.

DEVELOP OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

There's a difference between communicating expectations and taking control of your child's choices. Stating precise requirements for school, work, and home life early on in their development will help you to avoid communication pitfalls as they grow older.

- **Be clear about your expectations and allow your child room to be honest about theirs.** This is a shared experience.
- **Most schools provide online grade reporting.** View these together with your child. This is a great conversation starter and time to review goals and expectations.

MOTIVATE INVOLVEMENT

Human beings are naturally social creatures. Making connections in the community not only looks great on college applications but also reinforces what's called self-efficacy, which refers to your child's belief that they can successfully meet goals. It's important for your student to start practicing community outreach in high school. This helps support their self-efficacy through community involvement.

- **Encourage your teen to connect with their school or community through activities like sports, music, art, clubs, volunteer work, or employment.**
- **Students who are involved in school not only get exposure to potential career fields,** but are also more likely to become leaders, earn higher grades, and gain additional confidence. Major bonus: In terms of college applications, this definitely helps make them stronger applicants.

USE LOCAL RESOURCES

You can find a bunch of incredibly helpful college-prep tools right in your own backyard. Searching for resources in your community and at your child's school are prime opportunities to learn more about the college process. And the best part? The resources are free to all local families.

- **Take advantage of teacher-parent conferences, school, and citywide college fairs, and essay writing workshops.**

- **Reach out to your child’s teachers, counselors, and community leaders/members.**
- **Review a list of the classes your teen’s high school offers to help your student plan out their coursework for 9th-12th grades.** The Texas High School Foundation Program plan requires completion of a specified number of courses—and it includes a set of five endorsement tracks from which your student can choose: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math), Business and Industry, Public Services, Arts and Humanities, and Multidisciplinary Studies. (These endorsements are designed much like college majors.) You’ll find the list of required courses under the [state graduation requirements section](#) of the Texas Education Agency website.

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THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

The more you and your child both know about how the college application process works, the stronger the submitted applications will be. Each part of the college application will provide vital information to the college admissions officers. Everything from your child's personal essay to their standardized test scores will be analyzed. That being said, each college is unique, which means there'll be slightly different requirements for the application process for each school. Of course, there are general prerequisites you and your child will need to be ready to complete for any college.

- **Application:** All schools will ask for basic biographical data and educational background information. Many schools will also have a section asking about your student's extracurricular activities, honors, and awards. While there's no single number of activities required for consideration, selective colleges prefer to see a three- to four-year commitment to the same activity. The typical activities colleges look for include arts, athletics, community service or employment.
- **Transcripts:** This is the official documentation from the high school that lists all past and future courses, credits, and grades earned during the high school years. Also possibly included on the transcript are standardized testing results, class rankings, and early college credits your student may have earned during their high school years.
 - A majority of colleges require four years of English, math, science, foreign language, and social studies. However, additional credits (like a yearlong fine arts course) may also be required.
 - Check the admission requirements carefully for each college your family is considering to ensure your child has enough time to complete the college prerequisites before graduating.
- **Standardized Testing:** A majority of colleges and universities require a standardized test for entrance. Some do have a test-optional policy, but the highly selective colleges are more likely to need for your child to take the SAT and ACT.

- The SAT and ACT are tests teens must register for online in advance. Your student will generally take the exams in the spring of their 11th-grade year. The earlier your child plans the test, the better. Taking the SAT or ACT at the earliest possible time in their high school career provides a cushion if they need to retake it for some reason. And there may be waivers available for the testing fee—contact your child’s school counselor or GEAR UP advisor for additional information.
- For individual degree programs and highly selective colleges, your child may need to take an SAT Subject Test. These tests are shorter and topic specific. Math, biology or American history are just a few examples of the SAT subject focus. Your student can take the SAT Subject Test as early as 10th grade if it aligns with their high school curriculum. Check with each college to determine which admissions test they either prefer or require.
- Essays: Most colleges will require at least one essay, and they’ll often give your student a particular topic to write about. (Other schools may allow your child to choose their own topic.)
- There are several purposes for the essay. The college wants to see your student’s writing ability and powers of expression. Additionally, since the formal application process tends to be pretty dry and impersonal, the essay allows for your child’s individual experiences to be revealed—which is why the essay takes on a more personal tone.
- Depending on the college, some will also ask applicants to answer shorter questions about topics such as extracurricular activities, academic passions, or why they’re interested in attending that school.
- **Recommendation Letters:** These are letters written by your student’s teachers, employers, or other community leaders that help the admissions office better understand how they conduct their professional, academic, and community relationships. Each college will specify who (teacher, employer, etc.) they’d like to write the recommendation letters submitted with applications.
- **Guidance Counselor Report/Letter of Recommendation:** Many universities will ask for a report or letter (or both) from your student’s guidance counselor.
 - The report includes information that helps explain your child’s academic performance from the perspective of the high school. This will further reveal the rigor of your student’s academic program.



- Additionally, the guidance counselor letter will detail extracurricular achievements and give further insight into your child’s academically applicable personal traits. Feedback from teachers may also be included in the guidance counselor’s report.

COLLEGE APPLICATION TIMELINE

The college application process should start well before senior year kicks off. Below, you’ll see a recommended college-prep schedule covering all of high school.

	9 TH GRADE	10 TH GRADE	11 TH GRADE	12 TH GRADE		
JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a summer reading list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on outside reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer ACT/SAT Prep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize your college application list 		
AUGUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hone math skills • Choose possible endorsement path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer school to catch up or get ahead • Summer activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer school to catch up or get ahead • Summer activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a system for keeping your applications organized • Start working on essays 		
SEPTEMBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start strong: Maintain a high GPA and develop good relationships with teachers • Explore different passions and interests through activities • Set goals for the next three years—consider whether or not you’ll want to take honors and AP classes in the future, and determine the requirements for those classes at your high school • Assess endorsement path and talk to a counselor if you need to switch (because this is the last year you can change your graduation plan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up for school year activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start researching colleges, using broad categories like public vs. private, urban vs. suburban or rural 	SAT/ACT Testing		
OCTOBER		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the PSAT (offered at the high school) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last chance for SAT/ACT testing • Applications, essays • Scholarship applications 	
NOVEMBER						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for need-based financial aid using the FAFSA or TASFA and, depending on your list of schools, the CSS PROFILE
DECEMBER						
JANUARY			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan your testing timeline now that you have your PSAT scores—will you want prep? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start recommendation letters 	
FEBRUARY			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start researching colleges and visiting if possible 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue researching colleges and visiting if possible 	
MARCH						
APRIL						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 1=National Reply Deadline (submit your enrollment forms!)
MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a plan to remain engaged over the summer—job, activities or summer school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP Exams, SAT Subject Tests (if required or recommended at schools of interest) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP Exams, SAT Subject Tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP Exams 		
JUNE						

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SELECTING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

Choosing the right college is crucial to your child's overall academic and personal success. There's so much to think about when it comes time to help your child select the college that's the best fit for them. That's why being organized and thoughtful will help your family take the correct steps and make the process easier.

Start by making a list of the ideal qualities your student wants in a college. Also, consider the general type of environment where your child has experienced the most success:

- **Where's the school located?**
- **What's the college setting (urban, suburban, small town, rural)?**
- **What size is the college (schools range in size from 800 to 40,000-plus students)?**
- **What's the college type (two-year, four-year, public, private)?**
- **What's the student body composition (coed, single-sex, religious affiliation, the amount of diversity, etc.)?**
- **What are the academic offerings? Students don't need to know their major immediately, and it's not required to choose a college. However, knowing or at least having an idea as to your child's future major helps focus the college list.**
- **Are there recreational activities that your teen enjoys (sports, clubs, sororities/fraternities, etc.)?**

School websites, social media, the [Fiske Guide](#), the [Princeton Review](#), and the [College Board's Big Future](#) website are excellent resources to use during your family's college research.

DEVELOPING A COLLEGE LIST

To develop a college list, you'll want your student to narrow the choices down to between seven and 10 colleges. Within those selections, at least two of the schools should be listed as your child's "No Problem" schools, meaning they have a high probability of admission. Three other schools on the list, the "Just Right" schools, are those your student targets as "likely entry" and meet all of their wish list criteria.

To determine admission probability, navigate to the "Freshman Class Profile" at each school on your child's list. This will give you information about the average test scores and GPA of recently admitted students. Choose the school's whose freshman profiles most closely match your student's data.

VISITING COLLEGES

With so many colleges spread across the country, you probably won't make it to every single campus on the list. That's totally normal! All that means is your child will do most of the research online. In many instances, colleges actually offer virtual tours on their website—which means you can see all around the campus from right in front of a computer screen. Check the colleges' websites to see if they have virtual tours, or contact your GEAR UP coordinator or counselor for more help.

Of course, if you can visit a college campus, it's highly recommended that your family do so. A campus visit is especially valuable if your child has already been admitted to the school. Many colleges offers official campus tours and information sessions. Check with the admissions office by either giving them a call or visiting their website. To get a better idea of the campus atmosphere, plan to have a snack or dine on campus. Allow time for your family to explore the campus and investigate areas of specific interest (athletic facilities, classrooms, science center, campus TV studio, etc.).

STAYING ORGANIZED

Warning: There'll be a mountain of paperwork when you wade through college, scholarship, and financial aid applications. Getting a handle on this paper beast before it gets out of hand is a must for a polished transition from high school to college. That's why it's important to develop an organization method early and stay on track through the application process.

If you want to use a system beyond folders and printed calendars, spreadsheets can be a super helpful method for monitoring all of the information flowing through your home at this time. All you need is a simple chart with:

- **College name**
- **Information about each school's application process**
- **Type of application accepted**
- **Application deadline**
- **Essay prompts**
- **Standardized testing requirements**
- **Recommendation letter requirements**
- **Transcript requirements**

Once these headings are put into a spreadsheet, all your child needs to do is check off the

requirements as each one is done. It'd be a great idea to post the spreadsheet or organizational chart in a public place (like on the refrigerator) so everyone can keep track of the process together.

Given federal laws such as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), once your student reaches 18 years of age, the college will communicate directly with them. You'll no longer be in the loop unless you actively discuss what's going on with your college-bound student. This includes money matters (such as the tuition bills) that you won't see anymore because of the privacy laws. So be sure to keep the lines of communication open with your child!

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CHECKLIST: THE SUMMER BEFORE COLLEGE

Your family is heading towards high school graduation and into the summer before your teen officially goes off to college. But it's not the time for anyone in the family to relax quite yet. Once your student has decided where they're going to enroll, there are still a few things you need to think about before they first step foot on campus.

PAPERWORK "TO DO" LIST

✓ **Submit all required forms.**

You're going to have a flurry of forms arriving either by postal service or email. Some of those emails may end up in your child's spam folder (or yours if they're coming to you). Make sure you check there frequently and add those email addresses to your contact list so they don't end up in the land of the lost emails.

A majority of colleges have an online student portal that gives you a visual check-off list and additional requirements. It's up to you to talk with your child about your access to this information. Sharing login info may or may not be a touchy subject, but it's worth the try to make sure everything is getting turned in time, and the school is receiving the paperwork.

✓ **Make sure your child's high school transcripts are sent to the college(s).**

Some colleges will not admit your student until the transcripts are received and analyzed by the admissions office. Contact your teen's school counselor or the guidance office before school's out for the summer, and check to make sure the transcripts have been sent to the correct colleges.

✓ **Send all placement tests and college transfer credits (if applicable).**

- ✓ **Find out dates for advisor assignment, class registration, and the add/drop deadlines for classes. Place these on a calendar (physical or digital).**
- ✓ **Check your orientation options.**

There may be separate orientations for parents and students. Some of the orientations may be before or during the summer months. Definitely, attend a parent orientation session if one is offered. This'll be your time to get additional information about paperwork, resources for parent support, and further tips on how to help your student be successful in college.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION "TO DO" LIST

They're all grown up now and soon to be off on their own. Communication from a distance can be challenging, but it's an issue that can be solved using the tips below:

- **DO** set expectations about the who, what, when, where, why, and how of communication before they leave for school.
- **DO** keep in touch, but allow your child to lead the way in establishing the balance between needing a parents' advice and the right amount of space for independence.
- **DO** respect each other's schedules. If they're in class until 7 pm on Wednesdays, it's probably not a good time to call or send them a message. Also, if you're sound asleep at 2 am, you'd best make it known that unless there's an emergency, they should wait to call at a more appropriate hour.
- **DO** listen more than talk. Your child needs your presence and space at the same time. Listening provides this.
- **DO** let them make mistakes. They need to learn to manage making the wrong decisions and figure out how to problem-solve real-world issues. This furthers their growth as independent adults.
- **DON'T** forget that even though "snail mail" care packages, cards, notes, and handwritten letters may seem to be "old school," these gestures also give them an actual, physical reminder that you love them, and you're thinking about them.
- **DO** step in if you notice significant changes in their behavior or they suddenly stop communicating.

RESEARCH CAMPUS RESOURCES

College campuses offer many different types of student resources. Being aware of these resources provides you with essential tools to help your student take full advantage of them. And keep in mind that because many college campuses slow down during the summer months (since advisors and other important campus contacts may take vacation), it's best for your family to research campus resources before then.

- **DO** find out which college offices are your go-to contacts for specific questions or concerns. The admissions office is no longer a one-stop shop for answering parent or student questions. Colleges now run different departments for various purposes. Save yourself time and frustration and know who to contact for what reason or goal.
- **DON'T** contact these offices for your child. Make it clear that your student is to reach out to the college on their own to help them find a solution or answer their questions.
- **DO** make sure your child knows what the different college resource departments offer and how to get ahold of them. Each college tends to have a different department title, but it's typical for all colleges to offer the following resources:

REGISTRAR

- ✓ **Keeps track of class schedules, grades, and degree completion.**
- ✓ **Evaluates transfer credits.**
- ✓ **Signs off on insurance information to prove your child is a full-time student.**
- ✓ **Keeps track of the academic calendar.**

BURSAR, CASHIER, AND STUDENT ACCOUNTS

- ✓ **Handles payment plans.**
- ✓ **They will charge late fees! If your student is charged a late fee, this can stop future class registration, degree awards, and restrict any number of other important college processes.**
- ✓ **You can add money to your child's student account, which is usually attached to a "swipe card."**

FINANCIAL AID OFFICE OR FINANCIAL SERVICES OFFICE

- ✓ **Processes loans, grants, and work-study.**
- ✓ **You can file requests for financial aid appeals in the event of job loss or other drastic situation.**

DEAN OF STUDENTS

The Dean of Students oversees a large portion of the college campus resources. There are also several sub-departments are associated with this office.

- ✓ **Student housing or “residential life.”**
- ✓ **Health Center**
- ✓ **Class deans and student advisors**

CAREER SERVICES

- ✓ **Help with resumes and writing a curriculum vitae, interview and job searching.**
- ✓ **Finding internships or work co-ops.**
- ✓ **Facilitate on-campus recruitment from outside companies.**

ACADEMIC AND OTHER SERVICES

DO remember that your student has much support if they’re struggling. It’s natural to experience feelings of being overwhelmed and more than an average amount of stress. Encourage your student to take advantage of the following resources if they’re having a hard time.

Academic Resources:

- **Professors – Taking advantage of professors’ office hours (the times they’re available for student appointments and drop-in visits to answer questions) is an excellent way to make a personal connection with faculty**
- **Tutoring, writing center**
- **Study groups, theme housing**
- **Seminars on time management, organization, essay writing, class participation, staying balanced, etc.**

Emotional Resources:

- Resident advisor
- First-year advisor
- Campus counseling

Specialized Services

- **Office of Disability services (usually covers physical disabilities, learning disabilities, psychological/psychiatric illnesses, medical conditions, ADHD/ADD, etc.)**
 - Students will need to advocate for themselves—this is different than high school, where the school will advocate for the student. In college, students must reach out for the services they want or need!
 - The best situation is to be in contact with disability services before arrival so everything is all set by the time you show up.

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COLLEGE-TERMS GLOSSARY

Use this handy glossary as a quick-reference tool when working with your child on all things relating to applying to college.

Aspire: The practice version of the ACT—prepares students for the ACT while assessing Common Core competencies. High schools usually offer it to their students in the 10th grade.

Coalition Application: A newer online college application distinguished by the fact that students can begin adding information about themselves, their activities, and their academics as early as 9th grade, and can even upload writing samples and videos throughout their high school career. Currently, there are fewer than 100 member institutions within the Coalition.

Common Application: Students can apply to nearly 700 American and foreign colleges and universities by filling out the core components of this online application, as well as supplemental questions specific to each institution.

Deferred: Applicants who apply Early Action or Early Decision to a school may find themselves deferred to the Regular Decision process. Some

Regular Decision applicants may be admitted to a school, but offered deferred entry for a later semester or later year.

Early Action (EA): Students can apply to multiple colleges via Early Action in the fall of senior year, allowing them to receive admission decisions more quickly than they would for Regular Decision. EA admission is non-binding.

Early Decision (ED): Students can submit an Early Decision application to only one university, and in so doing, commit themselves to attending that college if admitted. Applying ED is binding, meaning students must immediately withdraw all other college applications if accepted via ED. Because ED is binding, students should apply ED only to their clear first-choice school. Students typically apply ED in early November of senior year and are notified by mid-December.

Four-year vs. Two-year Schools: A four-year school caters to those undergraduates who want

a bachelor's degree, which is comprised of a major course of study as well as foundational general educational courses. A two-year school, like a community college or junior college, caters to those undergraduates who want either an associate's degree or a technical or trade certificate. For some students, a two-year college is an affordable way to improve their academic profile and earn credits before applying to transfer to a four-year college.

Institutional Application: This type of application is specific and exclusive to one college, university, or university system. Many public schools, as well as some private colleges, make use of these.

Numeric vs. Holistic Review: Numeric review is an admission process that focuses solely on factors like GPA, test scores, and academic rigor. Holistic review is a more flexible, individualized approach to admission, taking all numeric factors into account but incorporating additional factors like involvement, personal attributes, life experiences, fit for major or institution, and special talents.

PSAT: The Preliminary SAT is offered in fall of 11th grade (though many high schools will allow 10th graders to participate) and prepares students for the SAT. Juniors scoring in the top 99th percentile in their state may be eligible for the National Merit Scholarship.

Public vs. Private Universities: Public universities receive most of their funding from state governments, while private colleges are primarily endowed by tuition and private contributions. Because of this, public schools tend to have a lower sticker price than private schools. In general, public schools have larger populations and offer a wider range of majors, while private schools typically offer smaller class sizes and lower teacher/student ratios.

Regular Decision (RD): The most traditional form of admission, RD deadlines require students to apply by a published deadline (usually in winter of senior year). All decisions are mailed by April 1.

Rolling Admission: Under rolling admission, students can submit their application anytime within a large time window, usually from the early fall to mid-spring. Applications are reviewed as they arrive, with decisions typically made within two months or less and mailed out on a rolling basis. Applicants are considered on a "first come, first served" basis.

SAT and ACT: These are the two standardized tests most likely to be required for admission to a four-year college. There is usually no preference which one a student submits, and both tests cover topics like reading, writing, and math. The ACT also includes a section on science reasoning. Both exams have an optional writing test.

SAT Subject Tests: Shorter than the SAT, these mini-tests focus on a single subject area. Subject Tests are sometimes required by highly selective colleges, but are optional at most other institutions.

Waitlist: Applicants who haven't been accepted to a university may instead be put on a school's waitlist. If your student is placed on a waitlist, there's still a chance they may be accepted later in the spring or summer. But one should never assume they'll be accepted from the waitlist, so it's always best to commit to another school prior to any enrollment deadline.

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HELPFUL LINKS & RESOURCES

Use the resources and FAQs listed below to help educate yourself on the college process, so you can then help empower your teen.

College Research:

bigfuture.collegeboard.com

niche.com

Fiske Guide to Colleges

College Parents of America—Membership organization for current/future college parents
(collegeparents.org)

FAQS—ACTIVITIES

1. How many activities should my student get involved in?

The number of activities is not as important as the commitment to the activity. Five hours spent with one club is more valuable than one hour spent with five different clubs.

2. Are students who have to work penalized because they can't get involved with school activities?

No. A job is viewed as an “activity” that holds equal importance to other school-based activities such as student government and athletics. Admissions officers view work opportunities as a place for students to mature, collaborate with adults, be responsible, etc. Definitely don’t diminish part-time job experience on an application, because it may just give your student the extra edge they need.

3. How important is it for a student to do community service?

Students won’t be penalized in the admissions process for not engaging in community service if that

time was productively spent elsewhere instead. But community service is one of many extracurricular activities highly respected by admissions and broadens the student's understanding of the world beyond the high school bubble. Colleges look to understand how the applicant has grown as a result of doing community service, rather than just noting service exists on the application.

FAQS—ACADEMICS

1. Does freshman year really matter to admissions offices?

Yes, it does. In many high schools, the freshman year formally begins the high school experience. Freshman-year grades are also included on the transcript reviewed by colleges. Admissions officers look at the complete picture of a student's academic performance in high school, starting with freshman year, up to and including as much of senior year as possible.

2. What kind of classes should my child take during high school?

Your teen's course selection will be guided by the Foundation High School Graduation Program, which is required to graduate from high school in Texas. The plan [calls for specific credits](#) students need to earn—but your child should always be aiming for the most challenging courses possible (including AP classes) to help impress future college admission officers. The Foundation Graduation Program also allows students to pursue additional interests by [choosing endorsements](#), which are specific areas of study (like public service or arts and humanities) they want to explore through elective courses.

3. Which subjects do college admissions officers require?

Most colleges will adhere to the graduation requirements set forth by individual, accredited high schools. Families may notice that admission requirements tend to change for colleges with a particular academic focus, such as technological institutes or music conservatories. Also, consider that meeting the minimum requirements is only the first step towards becoming a competitive applicant. Especially for selective colleges, admissions officers expect students to achieve beyond the minimum standards.

4. My student is not very strong in one academic subject. What should we do?

Most students have favorite subject areas and tend to do better in those subjects. Students are, however, expected to understand why all subjects are important and should make a genuine effort to do as well as possible in all subjects—even if extra help is needed.

FAQS—STANDARDIZED TESTS

1. What are standardized tests?

Most colleges and universities require standardized tests—either the ACT or the SAT. Also, a much smaller number of colleges require one or more SAT Subject Tests.

2. Where and when should my student take standardized tests?

The ACT, SAT, and SAT Subject Tests are offered at many high schools. To be assured that your student has a space at their school or a school close to your home, it's important to register early. The SAT and SAT Subject Tests are given monthly on one Saturday morning in October, November, December, January, March, April, May, and June. Not all SAT Subject Test exams are administered on every date. The ACT is given monthly on one Saturday morning in September, October, December, February, April, and June.

3. How do colleges and universities receive standardized test scores?

Both testing organizations will allow your student to send score reports to four colleges for free at the time they register. If you need to add more schools, you can request that the College Board or ACT send the scores, although you'll be charged a fee. Their user-friendly websites are helpful tools to accomplish any task related to standardized testing.

4. Where can we find more information about standardized tests?

Information on both tests is available in most high school guidance and college counseling offices. Your student may also consult the College Board website at www.collegeboard.org or the ACT website at www.actstudent.org.

FAQS—APPLICATIONS

1. Is the Common Application viewed differently than the institutional application?

No, it isn't. There are nearly 700 colleges and universities that use the Common Application—and all have agreed to view it equally with their own application. That also means colleges don't look more favorably at students who use the institution's application over the Common Application. In fact, many schools now only use the Common Application and no longer have an institutional application.

2. How important is the essay?

The essay is vital in the admissions process because students have the opportunity to share details about their personality, interests, and achievements, which aren't reflected on the transcript or in standardized testing. Basically, the essay is a chance for the student to add a third dimension to the application. Therefore, significant time should be spent brainstorming, drafting, and editing.