Countdown to Graduation

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Overcome the fact that the teen brain is not prone to planning.

Use this guide to break down the post-secondary planning process so it is not overwhelming.

Your child’s school counselor is your expert guide.
OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

* The transition from high school to post-secondary life is the biggest your child has faced thus far.

* Resistance usually occurs when a student is feeling overwhelmed or is not ready to face important decisions.
  > Listen for clues to identify your child’s level of readiness.

* Sit down with your student, using your checklist to set expectations, to plan, and to accomplish tasks.

* Attend parent information nights to stay connected to "the process".

* Enlist the help of your child’s school counselor.
4 years to go...9th grade

- Understand graduation requirements (found on the PWCS website, course catalog, or on your school's counseling page).
  - Advanced diploma allows for the student to meet college entrance course requirements.
  - Standard diploma allows flexibility for specialty programs (Cosmetology, Practical Nursing), dual enrollment at NOVA, or for students to go to work and take care of family needs.

- Take challenging courses (course rigor); balance school & home activities.

- Students should get involved in school and community activities. Focus on leadership and service. Link extracurricular activities to a passion.
  *Activities should be unique, with high impact.*
4 years to go...9th grade

Use FAMILY CONNECTION!

*Every 9th grader is introduced to Family Connection, an online college research and career exploration tool. (PWCS provides a free account for each student.)

- Self exploration tools (find a career match!):
  * Personality Type assessment (Do What You Are)
  * Strengths Explorer
  * Learning styles inventory

- Research majors and colleges based on assessment:
  * Supermatch college search

- Build a resume of activities and awards using template.

- Set goals/journal activities.
3 years to go...10th grade

- Maintain **good grades** in **challenging courses**.
- Look for **leadership** opportunities and continue volunteering.
  *Search "Enrichment Opportunities" on Family Connection.
- **Update resume** on Family Connection and share activities with your school counselor.
- Begin a list of possible schools, using "**Colleges I'm Thinking About**" on Family Connection. This feature allows students to view deadlines, scattergram charts, and to be invited to in-school college visits.
- Understand college entrance requirements for intended schools. Example: math or science requirements vary per school and intended major.
3 years to go...10th grade

- Take the **PSAT** in October:
  * Focus on the personalized feedback on skills. Do not focus on score.

- Use College Board’s student-specific **SAT study plan** (Khan Academy):
  * Includes personalized skills feedback (practice questions organized by skill.).
  * Students use the access code on their score report to access the program.

- SAT is more popular in this region but colleges accept both SAT and ACT. Some VA schools are now score-report optional, noting a GPA threshold or extra recommendations.

- SAT is a 1600 max score for 2 sections (Reading/Writing Language & Math, 800 max score each); essay will be optional; no penalty for incorrect multiple choice responses;
  * See PWCS Student Services website, “College & Career Planning” for details.

- Take the practice questions for ACT test (called PLAN) if interested.
3 years to go...10th grade

- Use the AP Potential report (based on PSAT results) and teacher recommendations to guide selection of 11th grade courses. Counselors assist with course planning to meet student goals.

- If a student is interested in applying to a PWCS specialty program in order to earn an industry certification for workplace readiness, s/he should note that deadlines range from February 1 through March.
  *Information for the various specialty programs can be found on the PWCS website*

- Governor's School @ Innovation Park application is due the first week of February (many components are required- see GS@IP site for info).
2 years to go...11th grade

- "Context of curriculum" is a focus for college admissions.
- Balance is key - maintain good grades and extracurricular activities (research Enrichment programs on Family Connection).
- Narrow list of schools to 5-7. Visit colleges.
- Attend college fairs and in-school college visits.
- Student athletes should register for the NCAA Eligibility Center.
- Students interested in service academy appointments should start the process in spring (meet with counselor).
- Think about teacher recommendations for applications.
- If interested in NOVA dual enrollment, take placement tests and meet with counselor.
- Take SAT I and/or ACT in Spring. Take SAT II subject tests if needed.
- During summer: review college applications and possible essays. Think about application deadlines. Early? Priority (scholarship)? Regular?
- Set up organization system (spreadsheet, files) to manage college applications.
- Get ready because senior year is busy!
REFLECT & REFRESH
Find your happy place
1 year to go...12th grade

- Determine if senior should take tests in the fall. SAT I and/or II? ACT?
- Review intended college applications, write & rewrite/edit essays, secure recommendations early.
- Determine deadlines- Early? Priority (scholarship)? Regular?
- Attend senior conference with counselor to review goals, clarify questions, & understand Family Connection transcript-request process.
- Apply for scholarships (use Family Connection to research).
- Parents attend Senior Parent Night & Financial Aid Night.
- After October1, apply for FAFSA (attend Super Saturday).
- Maintain grades- GPA & rank are recalculated mid-year.
- Students attending NOVA should apply, meeting priority deadlines, and tour the campus (understand "Guaranteed Admissions" to transfer and pursue a bachelor's degree.) Placement tests are required.
- Study for spring tests (AP, IB, AICA). Note intended school's crediting policy for these scores (released in July).
- Select college/university and identify it in your Family Connection account so final transcript will be sent. Pay your deposit to secure spot.
GRADUATION

THINK HAPPY THOUGHTS

Stephanie Ryan