

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW! WHAT YOU NEED TO DO!

The sooner you begin to prepare yourself for college, the easier your transition will be. It is wise to begin preparing for college as early as middle school or junior high. While you will need to complete most tasks during your later high school years, it is important to know what you can do early in the application process. Since there are so many things to do, here is a suggested timeline that allows you to do one thing at a time. This timeline is broken down yearly with a step by step guide for you to follow. You may want to check off each step as you complete it.

BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL (6 Steps)

- _____1. Begin a transition portfolio. A portfolio is a great way to make sure everything is kept in one place. Make sure your portfolio includes all personal documentation, work samples, and information about going to college (brochures, financial aid forms, etc.). You may not have much to start, but this is a great way to start keeping track of everything now.
- _____2. Plan to take the SOL tests at the end of eighth grade. These tests are for Virginia residents only. Make sure to check with your school and find out what state tests you must complete by the end of eighth grade, if necessary.
- _____3. Begin speaking to a high school guidance counselor. Talk to this person and ask about what high school classes will best prepare you for college.
- _____4. Have you talked to your parents about your future plans to attend college? Talk to them now and plan to work together. Set goals for yourself and keep your parents aware of those goals. Your parents are there to help you and keep you on track.
- _____5. Begin looking at ways to save money for college. Start by searching for financial aid information and what will be available to you and your family. While you do have four years, this is something you need to start doing right away.
- _____6. Work on reading, mathematics, and writing skills. Identify any problems you are having in these subjects and seek tutoring if needed.

FRESHMAN YEAR (10 Steps)

- _____1. Learn how to participate actively in your IEP (Individualized Education Plan), especially your transition plan, which is your plan to help you achieve your goal of attending college. Develop your transition plan with your case manager and IEP team.
- _____2. Will you graduate with a Standard Diploma or Advance Studies Diploma? Plan ahead and develop your course of study accordingly. If you are unsure, speak to a guidance counselor. There are specific diploma options for Virginia residents. Check out this website for more information on diploma options: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/2plus4in2004/>
- _____3. Work with your guidance counselor. This person is there to help you succeed. There are a number of services you can obtain from speaking to a guidance counselor, so develop a working relationship early.
- _____4. Ask your guidance counselor to teach you about the college resources available in your school. Visit the career center and explore different types of career options that appeal to you.
- _____5. Get involved! Participating in school or community service activities is a great way to find out what interests you.
- _____6. Learn how to use academic adjustments and auxiliary aids. This is a good way to develop independence and learn strategies that you will need in order to succeed in college.
- _____7. Carefully plan your course of study. Make sure you are taking the classes and getting the credits you need to graduate on time.
- _____8. Prepare for and pass the SOL tests required at the end of each course.
- _____9. Continue to work on basic skill Math, English, and Writing skills.
- _____10. Continue to add to your transition portfolio.

SOPHOMORE YEAR (10 Steps)

- _____1. It is now time to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). Register and take the exam during the fall of this year. You should consider using testing adjustments and auxiliary aids if needed.
- _____2. Speak to college representatives that visit your high school for guest visits and college fairs. Ask them what types of services for students with disabilities are available at their institutions.
- _____3. You may want to start visiting college campuses. Ask what types of services for students with disabilities are offered. During your visit, talk to college students and ask for their opinions about what they like and dislike on campus.
- _____4. Continue visiting the guidance counselor. Discuss with this person the colleges you are interested in and their requirements.
- _____5. Continue to actively participate in your IEP transition planning with your case manager and IEP team.
- _____6. Continue to participate in extracurricular activities, hobbies, and work experiences.
- _____7. Continue saving for college and investigating financial aid sources.
- _____8. Continue taking courses to prepare you for college.
- _____9. Continue working on Math, English, and Writing skills.
- _____10. Continue adding to your transition portfolio.

JUNIOR YEAR (12 Steps)

- _____1. Make sure that the documentation of your disability is up to date. Colleges usually ask for current testing. Your documentation should be less than three years old when you begin college.
- _____2. Keep a current list of the academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services you used in high school. Put this list in your transition portfolio.
- _____3. Look for college campuses that have majors you might be interested. Identify the type of campus community you would like to live. Focus on matching your interests and abilities to the appropriate college choice.
- _____4. Identify academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services that you will need in college. Learn how to use them efficiently. These services include assistive technologies such as electronic devices and specialized computer software.
- _____5. Prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Test or the ACT Assessment (ACT). There are many preparation classes available you might consider taking. Then, take the SAT or ACT in the spring. You can take these tests more than once. Consider taking the tests once with testing adjustments and then once without them.
- _____6. Gather information about college programs that offer disability services you need. Speak to college representatives whom visit your high school. When you visit campuses, speak to professional service providers. These individuals will be able to assist you and answer questions.
- _____7. Learn how to advocate for yourself. Make sure you can explain the nature of your disability to professors, administrators, and other students. This is especially important if you need accommodations. Not everyone will understand your disability. Use this opportunity to be an educator to others.
- _____8. Think about people you can ask for recommendations. Teachers, counselors, employers, coaches, are great examples of people who can say a lot about you and your accomplishments.
- _____9. Investigate your financial aid availability. Look at Federal, State, local, and private sources. Find out the availability of scholarships provided by organizations, corporations, labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations, and credit unions. You may be eligible for grants or scholarships you do not know. The web is also a good place to search for scholarships and financial aid. Check out <http://fastweb.monster.com/>

- _____10. Contact the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) Counselor who serves your school to determine your eligibility for DRS services. Invite the DRS counselor to attend your IEP meeting.
- _____11. Continue to participate in your IEP transition planning with your case manager and IEP team.
- _____12. Continue saving for college. Continue to add to your transition portfolio.

SENIOR YEAR (11 Steps)

- _____1. Meet with your school guidance counselor early in the year to discuss your plans.
- _____2. If it was not done during your junior year, contact the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) counselor to determine your eligibility for DRS services while in college.
- _____3. Ask three to five people to write recommendation letter on your behalf. Do this early in the academic year. Your teachers/coaches/employers will need plenty of time to write the recommendation and submit it.
- _____4. Plan to visit college campuses early in the year. Colleges will often have "Preview Days" or "Open Houses" in the fall semester, specifically for students enrolling the following year.
- _____5. Take the SAT again, if needed.
- _____6. Colleges may require an interview as part of the application process. Learn how to be interviewed. Role-play college interviews with counselors, family members, and teachers. Ask your guidance counselor if any workshops are available for students to attend.
- _____7. Your transition portfolio should be relatively full by now and containing the following:
 - Copies of your psychological and educational evaluations
 - Transcripts
 - ACT or SAT scores
 - Your current or latest IEP
 - Your medical records (if needed)
 - A writing sample or other work samples related to your major choice.
 - Your letters of recommendation
 - The current list of academic accommodations and auxiliary aids and services you may need in college (be sure to include assistive technologies)

_____8. Here is what you should do if you are planning to visit a college you are interested in applying:

Send an email or call college admissions officers and service providers requesting a visit to campus.

Be prepared when you visit colleges to write or talk about your experiences and to take placement tests if required.

Admissions officers will provide information about admissions procedures and financial aid opportunities.

Take your transition portfolio with you to share with disability service providers, if appropriate.

Try arranging to meet disability services staff members

Talk with college students. Ask students you see on campus what they like and dislike about the campus. You should also try talking to other students with disabilities receiving disability support services. Ask disability service staff if they could help arrange this meeting.

_____9. Compare the various colleges you visited or received information. Think about the aspects of each college and what you would like. Ask yourself the following questions and see if the colleges you are looking at meet your needs:

Do you want to live on campus? Do they have a lot of options for campus housing?

What leisure activities are available?

Do you want to be part of athletics?

What are the class sizes? Is there a small or large student to teacher ratio?

Do I feel comfortable with the disability services staff?

_____10. Apply to two or more colleges. Try this strategy: Apply to one that is a “Reach” school, one that you expect to get into, and one “Safety” school you KNOW you will be accepted.

- _____11. Fill out the applications. Make sure you prepare them carefully. Pay close attention to the directions and deadline dates. Make sure your applications are neat and legible. Make sure your applications are truthful and accurate.

When you are accepted, consider attending a pre-admission summer program, if your college has one available. College Bound is an example of this type of program. It might be worth your time if it will help with your transition when you begin in the fall. For more information about College Bound, go to

<http://www.swvats.atc.vt.edu/graphical/collegebound.htm>

Congratulations! You have completed the steps necessary to prepare for college. We know that preparing for college takes a lot of time, work, and energy, but hopefully this step by step guide helped you get there. Want to find out more? There are plenty of other websites that may help. You can find some of those listed below. Good luck 😊

References:

<http://vacollegequest.org/charting/charting.shtml>

Other Website Resources

Campus Dirt <http://www.campusdirt.com/index.cfm>

College Answer: The Planning for College Destination
<http://www.collegeanswer.com/index.jsp>

College Board: Connect to College Success <http://www.collegeboard.com/splash>

College Is Possible <http://www.collegeispossible.org/>

Hobson's College View <http://www.collegeview.com/>

The Princeton Review <http://www.princetonreview.com>

Virginia College Quest Resources <http://vacollegequest.org/resources/resources.shtml>