The High School Parents'

SURVIVAL GUIDE

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2011
Conner High School

Are you thinking about going to college?

Please note that although you can complete most of the necessary tasks in your junior or senior years of high school, you should start planning as early as the eighth grade. Not only will this improve your chances of getting into your college of choice, but it will also make applying much easier.

Below is a general guideline of steps you should follow while preparing for college.

1. **Prepare for college early.**
   Vague advice, perhaps, but invaluable. Early preparation will help you greatly in positioning yourself to get into your college of choice. We recommend that you start as early as the eighth grade, and start using the freshman planner (found at www.gohigherky.org) in your freshman year of high school. It's not too late, however, if you are in your junior or senior year of high school. You can still choose, apply and be accepted to the college best for you if you plan carefully.

   Regardless of the grade you are currently in, there are some general guidelines to remember and rules to follow:

   - Pay attention to dates and deadlines.
   - Keep in mind that even though they may not be required for high school graduation, most colleges require at least three, and often prefer four, years of studies in math, English, science, and social studies. Plan to take the pre-college curriculum required by all public universities in Kentucky.
   - In addition, most colleges require at least two years of the same foreign language.
   - Your grades are important but the difficulty of your coursework can also be a significant factor in a college's decision to admit you. In general, most colleges prefer students who challenge themselves with tougher courses, even if they earn only average grades, than students who opt for easier courses that will boost their GPAs.
   - Honors and advanced placement courses are often weighted more heavily than other courses in calculating a student's grade point average.
   - Computer science courses or courses that require students to use computers in research and project preparation can also help aid your future college performance.
   - College admission officers will pay the closest attention to your GPA, class rank, AP and other honors-level courses, and scores on standardized tests.
   - Participation in extracurricular activities is also a good idea in high school. Activities that require time and effort outside the classroom (such as speech and debate, band, communications, and drama) indicate that you are a well-rounded individual with many interests and a willingness to cooperate with others, putting forth the effort needed to succeed.

- Volunteering at various organizations within the community can also be beneficial, giving you a chance to gain experience in and observe various work environments, while showing others your ability to reach out to those in need.

2. **Plan a career**
   Choosing a career can be difficult, but by figuring out what you most enjoy and what skills and abilities you have, you'll get a better idea of the careers in which you are most interested and their corresponding majors. Having this information in mind will help you decide which colleges are right for you.

3. **Find the college that's right for you**
   There are three ways you can select a college on this site.
   - By name
   - By comparison: Use the comparative view to find and sort colleges using preferences such as college type, location, size, cost, campus life, academics, etc.
   - By preference: The matching assistant allows you to indicate the factors you want to consider when choosing a college and matches the schools participating in the Mentor system to those factors, helping you to narrow down your list of schools.

4. **Visit the college(s) of your choice.**
   Once you have narrowed your selection, visit your top choices through our Campus Tours. If possible, you should also arrange to visit the campuses in person. Most high schools offer 'college days' that won't hurt attendance.

5. **Research your payment options.**
   You should look into scholarships, student loans, and other financial aid options before you apply to a particular college or university. Since there is so much financial aid available and since colleges are generally willing to work with you to put together a favorable financial aid package, money shouldn't be a primary concern when considering a college.

6. **Apply online.**

7. **Come back in January for financial aid assistance. Most financial aid forms have to be filed after the first of the year, after your taxes and/or your parents' taxes have been filed.**
   High school and college counselors can help you sort through the financial aid process and give you information that will help you complete your financial aid forms and teach you other ways to get money for college.

8th Grade

- Talk to you guidance counselor about the following:

  - Going to a college or university
  - Courses to start taking in the 9th grade
  - The importance colleges and universities place on grades, and at what year in school grades will start to be considered in the admissions process
  - College preparatory, AP, and other honor-level courses you should be taking in high school (9th through 12th grade)
  - Academic enrichment programs (including summer and weekend programs) available through your school or local colleges

  Remember, you will have more options if you start planning now and do your best to earn good grades.

- Take EXPLORE- a set of four tests that measure academic achievement. EXPLORE results can be a benchmark before taking PLAN and the ACT assessment.

Think about pursuing extracurricular activities (such as sports, performing arts, volunteer work, or other activities that interest you).

Freshman Year

- Talk to your guidance counselor about the following:
  - Attending a college or university
  - Establishing your college preparatory classes; your schedule should consist of at least 4 college preparatory classes per year, including:
    - 4 years of English
    - 3 years of math (through Algebra II or trigonometry)
    - 2 years of foreign language
    - 2 years of natural science
    - 2 years of history/social studies
    - 1 year of art
    - 1 year of electives from the above list
  - Enrolling in algebra or geometry classes and a foreign language class for each semester (most colleges have math and foreign language requirements)

- Create a file of the following documents and notes:
  - Copies of report cards
  - Lists of awards and honors
  - Lists of school and community activities in which you are involved, including both paid and volunteer work, and descriptions of what you do.

- Start thinking about the colleges you want to attend. Once you have narrowed down the list of colleges and universities in which you are interested, start visiting the campuses; our campus tours section can also give you some valuable information.

- Become familiar with college entrance requirements.

- Find out about AP and other honors-level courses:
  - What courses are available
  - Whether or not you are eligible for the classes that you want to take

Sophomore Year

- Talk to your guidance counselor about the following:
  - Reviewing the high school curriculum needed to satisfy the requirements of the colleges you are interested in attending
  - Finding out about AP and other honors-level courses:
    - What courses are available
    - Whether or not you are eligible for the classes that you want to take
    - How to enroll in them your junior year

- Update your file or start one if you haven't already.

- Continue extracurricular activities, as admissions officers look at students' extracurricular activities when considering them for admission.

- Continue participation in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, science, etc.

- Take the ACT PLAN test in the fall, normally in October or November. This is a valuable test to help you prepare for the ACT which you can take during your junior year in April or June.

- Take the PSAT in October. The scores will not count for National Merit Scholar consideration in your sophomore year, but it is valuable practice for when you take the PSAT again in your junior year when the scores will count, as well as for the SAT I exam which you should also be taking in your junior year. You will receive your PSAT results in December.

- Start preparing for the SAT I.

- Register in April for the SAT II subject tests that you will be completing before June.

- Take the SAT II in June.

Junior Year

Fall Semester

August:

- ❑ Start your year off right: Talk with your guidance counselor about your options and your plans. Be sure to ask about test dates for the PSAT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.

- ❑ Sign up for courses with your eyes on the prize: college and money to pay for it! A tougher course load may pay off with scholarships and may get you a better chance to get admitted to the school of your choice.

- ❑ Start investigating private and public sources for financial aid. Take note of scholarship deadlines and plan accordingly.

- ❑ Sign up for activities to boost your college applications.

September:

- ❑ Find out about schools you are interested in attending. Treat your school selection process like a research paper: Make a file and gather information about schools, financial aid, and campus life to put in it. Go to college fairs and open houses and learn as much as you can from the Internet about schools.

- ❑ Begin planning college visits. Fall, winter, and spring break are good times because you can observe a campus when classes are going on.

October:

- ❑ Take the PSAT. You'll get the results by Christmas.
- ❑ Sign up for ACT or SAT prep courses. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Do your top college picks require essays or recommendations? Now is the time to begin planning your essays and choosing whom you'd like to ask for a recommendation.

November:

- ❑ Applications for the Governor's Scholars Program are available in your guidance counselor's office. The program offers high school juniors a taste of college life.

- ❑ Sign up for the ACT and SAT, if you haven't already.

- You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.

December:

- Begin the application process for service academies (West Point, Annapolis, etc.)
- Decide if you should take AP exams in May. Investigate the CLEP program.

Spring Semester

January:

- Meet with your guidance counselor again to develop your senior schedule.
- Organize your Individual Graduation Plan.

February:

- Think about lining up a summer job, internship, or co-op.
- Plan campus visits for spring break.
- Memorize your Social Security number if you haven't already. It will be your identity on campus.

March/April:

- Get ready for AP exams next month.
- Write a resume.

May:

- May 1 is the last day for students to accept or decline their Governor's Scholars appointments.

Senior Year

Fall Semester

August/September:

- ❑ Review your high school transcript. Will you meet all graduation and college entrance requirements?
- ❑ Narrow your list of schools; request catalogues and admissions information.
- ❑ Register for September/October SAT and/or ACT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Sign up for ACT or SAT prep courses.

October:

- ❑ Review admissions applications; begin writing essays.
- ❑ Meet with college admissions representatives or schedule visits to schools you are interested in attending. Talk with students and staff.
- ❑ Register for December ACT and/or SAT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Attend college fairs and financial aid nights.
- ❑ Request recommendations from teachers, employers, and guidance counselors.
- ❑ If applying for Early Decision, send in application.

November:

- ❑ If you haven't already, register for December ACT and/or SAT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Watch for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that will be available from your high school counselor, the financial aid office of the school you plan to attend, or www.fafsa.ed.gov.
- ❑ Continue working on application essays.
- ❑ Begin preparing your college applications.
- ❑ Watch scholarship deadlines.

December:

- ❑ Register for January SAT and/or February ACT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Finalize application essays and complete the admissions procedures for your top school choices.
- ❑ Remind your references of application deadlines. Send thank-you notes to these people.
- ❑ Mail all applications or turn them in to your high school, depending on the system your school uses.
- ❑ Keep copies of all admissions applications.

Spring Semester

January:

- ❑ If accepted for Early Decision, withdraw other applications.
- ❑ Gather the information necessary to complete the FAFSA. Submit as soon as possible after January 1.
- ❑ Keep copies of all financial aid applications.

February:

- ❑ Register for March SAT and/or April ACT. This may be your LAST CHANCE to earn your full KEES scholarship award. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Obtain a physical examination. Forward to each school requiring a physical exam as a condition of admission.
- ❑ Review college acceptances and compare with financial aid offers.
- ❑ Make sure that mid-year transcripts have been sent to the school to which you have applied if required.

March:

- ❑ Register for May SAT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Make a final decision about a school. Send in a deposit and notify other schools of your decision.
- ❑ Request course descriptions and schedules from the school you have chosen.
- ❑ Watch for your Student Aid Report (SAR); review it for accuracy.

April:

- ❑ Register for June ACT/SAT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Confirm housing arrangements. If necessary, send in deposits.
- ❑ Research Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examinations Program (CLEP) exams.
- ❑ If you do not qualify for need-based aid or need additional financial assistance, consider other sources such as loans, work-study, or cooperatives.

May:

- ❑ Register for June ACT. You must take the ACT/SAT before high school graduation to qualify for the KEES scholarship bonus award.
- ❑ Complete AP examinations.
- ❑ Submit scholarship acceptance forms.
- ❑ Make sure you have returned all financial aid award notices.
- ❑ Plan to attend freshman orientation and registration.

June:

- ❑ Make sure your final transcript is sent to the school you will be attending.
- ❑ College can be expensive. A summer job can help pay some of your expenses.

Summer After Senior Year

July:

- ❑ Make a list of what you will need to take with you for your dorm room.
- ❑ If you haven't met your roommate, call, write, or e-mail to get acquainted.

August:

- ❑ Make sure housing documentation is quickly accessible when you move into the dorm.
- ❑ Review a campus map. Learn how to get around at your new school.
- ❑ Buy your books and supplies after the first class meeting.