

Four-Year High School to College Planning

Getting into College is a 4-year process, but with good planning it can be a fun, interesting experience. Use the following information to guide you as you go through your four years of high school.

Freshman Year

As you enter high school you are probably not thinking about college. Anyone planning to go to college, however, should remember these important points for their freshman year.

Academics:

- Study, study, study! Starting with 9th grade your grades contribute to your overall GPA. Develop good habits such as study skills and sleep! These good habits will carry you through high school and college.
- Talk to your teacher and access available support services if you are struggling in any classes.
- Colleges care about what courses you are taking so pick courses each year that challenge you. Most colleges require 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 3 years of science and 3 years of social science. Many also require 2 years of a foreign language. Highly selective institutions want to see more than the minimal requirements.

Activities:

- Get involved! You are developing talents and interests that will catch a college's eye. Participating in school or community-based activities helps you to explore possible career interests. Getting involved is also a great way to get to know other students and get connected to school.
- Continue activities during the summer and find programs that build on your favorite subjects, extracurricular activities, or hobbies.

Testing:

- Your EXPLORE test was used to guide your freshman year courses and is an ACT predictor.
- You'll take the PLAN in freshman year. It can also be an ACT predictor.
- Use both tests to see what areas you may need to work harder.

College and Career Exploration:

- Begin talking with your parents about your thoughts on possible careers and going to college. The conversation should include the financial piece so you can plan accordingly.
- Talk to your counselor about your plans and interests and pick your courses accordingly.
- Research your career interest on-line or by using other resources available to you (e.g. Career Mentor, D214 Career Nights, Career Cruising and Naviance).

Sophomore Year

Now that you have finished your first year of high school, look back at your freshman year. Are there areas you can improve upon this year? Continue to develop good study and time management skills and to be involved.

Academics:

- Grades are still contributing to your GPA so keep working!
- When it's time, choose your junior year courses wisely.

Activities:

- Continue with the activities you started your freshman year and consider starting some new ones. Not only will these activities be great experiences but they will also lead to some wonderful and compelling college essays.
- Plan to use your summer wisely. Work, volunteer, play sports, or take summer classes, it will pay off!

Testing:

- Take the PLAN test seriously and use it as a tool to gauge your strengths and weaknesses. This test is a practice for the ACT and will give you a projected ACT score. The ACT score is one of the factors colleges use for admission.
- Students with a strong academic record are encouraged to consider taking the PSAT. The test, along with an SAT in the junior year, could lead to possible scholarships.

College and Career Exploration:

- Start exploring college websites and write down things that appeal to you. Decide which characteristics are important to you such as the size of the school, distance from home, extracurricular activities, and cost.
- Continue to talk about career interests with your parents and counselor.
- Research your career interest on-line or by using other resources available to you (e.g. Career Mentor, D214 Career Nights, Career Cruising and Naviance).



Junior Year

This is an important year as much of what you do will represent a big chunk of the data colleges will use for admission. This is a big year for testing and your transcript - which will present six semesters of your work at the end of the year, which colleges will look at closely.

Academics:

- Continue to work on your academics. You want to get the best grades you can.
- These will be the most recent grades your colleges will have when you apply next year. Therefore, study hard and do not hesitate to seek help from a teacher or other resource if necessary.
- Speak up in class. You will need to ask your junior year teachers for college recommendations. They can't know you without hearing your thoughts.
- Think about the college, and major, in which you may have an interest to make sure that you are signing up for appropriate courses during your senior year.

Activities:

- Develop a leadership role in some of your activities. This shows that you've worked hard, are dedicated to an activity, and work well with others.
- Begin making a resume of activities, academic experiences, hobbies, and awards. This helps you take inventory of all you've done. You will be able to use this information as part of your college applications.

Testing:

- Discuss testing plans (ACT and/or SAT) with your parents and counselor.
- Consider taking the ACT Prep Class offered through the Assessment Center.
- Don't worry if you don't get your ideal score the first time. Just remember, not only can you take the ACT more than once, you are encouraged to do so.
- Take the Advanced Placement (AP) exam for your AP courses.

The College Search Process:

- Talk with your counselor and begin to build a college list.
- Make plans for college visits on your days off and over the summer. Take notes during each visit. Consider using a college comparison chart, available in the College and Career Room (CCR) and on the CCR website (http://rmhs.d214.org/college_resources/default.aspx).
- Attend college fairs such as the District 214 fair (in April) with your parents. Talk with the representatives at these fairs. They can give you a feel for what the college is like and they will be good as a future contact.
- Attend some of the college representative visits in the CCR.
- Attend college information sessions hosted by colleges at local hotels and on college campuses.
- Consider making an appointment with the College Counselor if you need help in developing a list of college options.

Senior Year

Almost done! This is a year of hard work and continued college preparation. Colleges can, and will, rescind offers to students who slack off. Keep working hard – it'll pay off when you go off to college and make the transition easier.

Academics:

- Make sure you have completed your graduation requirements and are meeting the course requirements of the colleges on your lists.
- Your admission is contingent upon a consistent academic performance, as shown on the final transcript. Keep up the hard work!

Activities:

- Continue your involvement.
- Build a list of activities, or resume. You can do this in your Naviance account or as a word document. You can share this information with your counselors and teachers, if you ask for a letter of recommendation, and with the colleges to which you apply.

Testing:

- Take the ACT or SAT again if you feel you need to boost your score for college admission or scholarship consideration.
- Take the Advanced Placement (AP) exam for your AP courses.

Applications:

- Review your college list with your counselor and parents. Take note of the application deadlines and apply accordingly. We recommend trying to have all of your applications out anytime after September 15, but before November 1.
- Complete and submit your Transcript Release Form in the CCR for your transcripts to be sent to the schools that require them as part of your application.
- If REQUIRED by a school, ask your counselor and teacher(s) to write your college recommendation letter for you well in advance. It is necessary to give them 3 weeks to write your recommendation so plan ahead.
- A month from the date you submitted your application, call colleges and confirm that your application is complete.
- Look into potential scholarship possibilities by visiting the CCR, the CCR website, or your Naviance Account.
- Attend the Senior Financial Aid Night for District 214. Many colleges require FAFSA and CSS (financial aid) forms to be turned in by February.
- As decisions arrive stay calm and breathe! Explore the colleges where you've been accepted. Visit the campuses again. Make sure the environment is a good fit for you.
- **May 1:** Make your college decision official by sending in your deposit. Finally!

Don't forget to bookmark the CCR webpage! The CCR website is extremely helpful and filled with lots of college and career information. It can be accessed through the Rolling Meadows High School homepage. Go to: Student Resources > College Resources.