

Ideas for Success in the College Application Process

This list is intended to assist Eden Prairie students with the college application process. It is not a complete checklist, but it is intended to ensure that key considerations are not overlooked as a student progresses through his/her high school years. Moreover, students do **not** need to accomplish everything listed below. Rather, students should find a balance where they are challenged but not overwhelmed.

Freshman Year

- Contact your Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator and/or your counselor if you have questions about your schedule and your future class interests.
- Go to the CRC/Career Resource Center and meet Mrs. Kerns. Get an idea of what is available to you. Review the scholarship binder. There are scholarships already available beginning your freshman year.
- Consider signing up for Careers 9/10 this year or next.
- Take as rigorous a course load as you can without overextending yourself. Plan the remaining three years of your schedule taking into account the distribution of AP courses over the years.
- Your grades begin to count towards your college application NOW. Put your best foot forward. You are building academic skills that you will need in college. Colleges look at both grades and rigor.
- Start keeping track of your activities. Create a computer document to track them.
- Colleges look for depth in your activities. Attend the Activities Rush in October. Choose a few clubs that interest you. Test-drive those activities in your freshman year. Take note of Academic Clubs, Fine Arts Clubs, and Service Clubs...anything that sparks your interest.
- Keep track of all volunteer hours; use SLIC (Student Learning in Communities). Service hours and giving back are important ways to show you care about your community and the world.
- Join or continue your favorite sport(s). They can be JV or Varsity. Intramurals are also strong at EPHS. Colleges look for a natural balance in your life.
- For parents, attend the "What I Wish I Knew" PTO evening session offered in the fall.
- Join EPCGT to meet with other parents and students to learn and share ideas.

Sophomore Year

- If you did not take Careers 9/10 in 9th grade, consider adding it to your schedule for this year.
- Double up in language (Levels 3 & 4) if this is an area of interest to you. Once you have completed Level 4, any gaps in your language studies will be less significant.
- Consider taking AP Courses this year so that you don't have so many AP tests to take Junior and Senior Years. Take these exams as seriously as your entrance exams. Scores go directly on your application and may count towards college credit.
- Double up in science either this year or next in order to take advantage of all AP Science offerings if that is an area of interest to you.
- Online classes, while not free, can help fill in schedules for music students.
- Take the PSAT test in October if you tend to score well on standardized tests. The Careers class will cover the career aspect of the PLAN test that you will miss. You can also choose to order career inventory assessments from your counselor that the PLAN test covers.
- You will start receiving college mailings. Begin collecting them in two separate bags, those to consider and those to donate to the CRC. (The CRC especially needs college catalogs.)
- Touch base with your Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator or counselor if you have questions.
- Continue to visit the CRC to review the scholarship binder and begin to learn more about on-site college admission visits and all that the CRC offers. Ask questions.
- Continue to study diligently so that you are building skills and so that your GPA reflects your best effort. Get help in the ACE or SLIC centers if needed.
- Continue with your chosen sports and activities.
- Get a summer job. Summer work teaches you skills you can't learn in school. Start applying for summer work in December.
- Schools are looking for the whole package --- excellent test scores, passionate learners, great leaders, superb recommendations, well-written essays, and work or activities inside and outside of school. Follow your passions. Passions are not necessarily what you are best at, but rather what gets you fired up!

Junior Year

- The summer before Junior Year is a great time to take the PSAT review class. You can also take a course at the beginning of your junior year. If you only need to focus on English or Math, discuss this with your course director. He/she may tailor the course for you. Take your PSAT for National Merit eligibility again in October.
- You may also want to consider taking a course specific to ACT testing.
- If you didn't take Careers 9/10, consider taking Careers 11/12 this year.
- Sign up for AP Courses as appropriate to spread them out over this year and next.
- Check the daily bulletin to see what colleges are visiting EPHS. Schedule appointments with those you are interested in. Continue checking the bulletin throughout this year and next.
- **Sign up to take the SAT or ACT.** You will want to take this exam as close to taking the PSAT as you can. Make sure you have taken the courses covered (e.g., English 11 or Adv. English 11) before taking the SAT or ACT.
- **You will want to take your 2-3 Subject Tests in your junior year if possible.** The highly rated colleges require these exams. Purchase the Princeton Review Subject Test books at Barnes and Noble in the areas you are focusing on. Give yourself a few months to study. Subject tests are given on the SAT exam dates. Register similarly. They are shorter tests and you can take one or two in a single morning. If you are taking courses your senior year that would better prepare you for these exams, this would be the only reason to delay taking any of these exams until senior year.
- Download the Common Application and begin completing it.
- Ask two teachers of your choosing if they will write recommendations for you. Let them know why you are choosing them. Remember to thank them verbally if they are willing to do this for you. They are not paid to do this extra service for students. Provide information to them before summer begins or just as school starts your senior year.
- If you want to improve your SAT score, study the specific areas that you are weakest in. Consider taking the exam again in your junior year or at the very beginning of your senior year. With your already high scores, you typically won't see much change.
- Consider taking the ACT with writing if you want to give a college more confirmation of your abilities. If you take this test, practice writing an essay in 25 minutes. Time yourself so you realize what a challenge this is. Be prepared to write a response even if the topic on the exam is not of interest to you.
- Visit colleges throughout your junior year while school is in progress. Ask for the Erie Newspaper in the CRC to receive names of alumni with whom you can connect while visiting the school. With the "extra" something you participate in besides academics, make sure you set up an appointment with a coach, symphony instructor, etc. and get to know them while visiting campus.
- Don't disregard your "gut" feel about the college.
- Create a resume independent of your common application. It should include the following sections: Education, AP/College Level Course, Activities, Leadership Experience, Community Service, Work Experience, Awards and Honors, and Travel Experience. This resume will be used in several ways: 1) As a discussion piece to review with the Gifted and Talented Coordinator or school counselor so they get to know you better, 2) To provide to the two teachers you have selected as references so they also get to know you better, and 3) To provide to college interviewers if they want to use it during the interview process.
- Review everything you have written over the years for possible use as essay material on your application. Make sure your essay is a story and does more "show" than "tell". Make sure your essay answers the question asked.
- Make sure you have a strong finish to Junior Year. Your initial application will only include your first 3 years of high school. Make every class count.
- **Write your common application essays the summer before senior year. Ask an English teacher to review for grammar. Hire or ask one to two people who are known for their writing skills to read for content, but do not choose people who will change the voice of your work. Ask the CRC for recommendations.**

Senior Year

- You may be able to squeeze in a college visit just as summer is ending because some of your college choices will have already begun classes. If not, use MEA weekend for tours. Most of your college visits should be completed by now. If you wait to visit schools once you have been accepted to them, then plan to use your senior year Spring Break for final tours.
- In the first week of school, e-mail the two teachers who are writing your recommendations to thank them again for writing and to ask them for a time to drop off your list of colleges, any paperwork the college needs completed, envelopes to mail recommendations (if not completed on-line), and a copy of your resume. Update your resume to include everything through your junior year. Write your teachers a cover letter that reminds them what classes you had with them, what activities you have done together, and what qualities lead you to choose the schools on your list.
- Meet with your GT Program Coordinator or counselor to review your resume. Give them a copy of your essays and resume. However, EPHS counselors use a template for garnering information from students (http://ephs.edenpr.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=166#downloads). The goal is to make sure your counselor knows you and can write a reference that is genuine despite the fact they serve a huge number of EPHS seniors.
- Narrow your college selections to 5-7 choices with one being “safe” and one or two being “reach”. If money is an issue, make sure you discuss how this affects your search. Try very hard not to apply to more than 7 schools. If you do, it will only take away from the good efforts you are putting towards the schools you really want to attend. More visits, more applications, more interviews...it all adds up. Costs add up too, about \$100 per school for the application fee and any financial aid filings.
- If you are being recruited for sports or anything else the school is seeking, make sure you don't spend time on the phone with colleges once you have decided they are not on your list. You are wasting your time and theirs.
- If you need help with interviewing skills, contact Mrs. Kerns in the CRC. She, or a trained adult volunteer, will assist you.
- Your interview should be a discussion. Make sure they see what “sparks” you. Also, it is critical that you have studied the college you have applied to and why it is of special interest to you. Do your homework and ask questions. Go to the CRC for help on this.
- Early Decision is binding and is a great option if you know the college that is for you. Make sure you can fully afford the school; financial aid information is not available at the time of Early Decision. Go to the CRC for help on this.
- Early Action is non-binding and is a way to apply early without commitment. If you are satisfied with Early Action offers, you can make your college decision by December instead of waiting until April/May. As with Early Decision, financial aid information is not available for Early Action decisions. Go to the CRC for help on this.
- Make sure you have fully investigated the academic scholarships available at your colleges of choice. Most highly competitive schools do not offer them, but many highly rated schools do. Put time and effort into those essays.
- Make sure your FAFSA is completed as soon as your tax return is completed for the year (typically January/February).
- Apply for financial aid no matter what. If you don't qualify, it may still result in a work study or other alternative monetary benefits offered by the college.
- Remember to write your counselor and teachers a thank you note for taking the time to write those recommendations. They are an important part of your application.
- Don't pick a school because it sounds like the right thing to do. Pick the school that you truly believe is the right fit for you and your family (e.g., fits your career goals and life goals). Avoid competing with your peers. This is your college choice.
- There are a lot of bright students out there. Your something “extra” that you offer a school (ex: newspaper editor, swimmer, violinist) is what might be a key to entrance. Schools need to keep their programs running. Make sure these interests come through in your essays and interview.
- **If you don't get into a school, do not take it personally. Just make sure the 5-7 colleges you choose, whether a safe school or a reach school, are acceptable (winners) to you. Then, no matter what, your college search has been a success!**