**High School Checklist for Graduation**

Now that you're in high school, it's time to start thinking about which career(s) you may be interested in. By starting early, you'll be better prepared and, knowing your career goals, can help when choosing your classes and a college. Here are a few things to keep you on track for success in high school.

1. Maintain good study habits to help keep your grades up.
2. Check your preliminary HOPE GPA in February of each year and your final HOPE GPA in June to see if you are tracking to be eligible for the HOPE Scholarship.
3. Take the [PSAT/NMSQT](https://www.gafutures.org/college-planning/college-decision-guide/test-prep/psat/) or [ACT](https://www.gafutures.org/college-planning/college-decision-guide/test-prep/act/).
4. Talk with your guidance counselors, teachers, family members or trusted adults about your plans to meet your education and career plans. Make sure you are taking the right courses.
5. Be active in your community through volunteer work and participate in extracurricular activities.

**Helpful College Prep Vocabulary**

* **529 Plan**: Tax-advantaged savings plan designed to encourage saving for future college expenses. Path2College is Georgia’s 529 plan.
* **COA (Cost of Attendance):** Total cost of attending a college or university, including tuition, room and board, books, lab fees, transportation and basic living expenses.
* **Contributor**: Any individual required to provide signature and consent on the FAFSA form, including the student; the student’s spouse; a biological or adoptive parent; or the parent’s spouse (stepparent).
* **FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid**): Filling out a FAFSA is the first step in the financial aid process. To be eligible to receive federal financial aid, a student must complete a FAFSA.
* **FSA ID**: Provides access to Federal Student Aid’s online systems and can serve as your legal signature. You must have an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA.
* **Grant**: Money given to students for their education that does not typically have to be repaid. Often based on need, grants may come from federal or state programs, or sometimes from private charitable organizations.
* **HOPE GPA**: Your HOPE GPA determines if you are academically eligible for the HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship. It includes only grades earned in core subjects – English, math, science, social studies and foreign language. You can check your HOPE GPA beginning in 10th grade through your My GAfutures account.
* **Merit-based**: Financial aid based on academic, athletic or some other type of achievement.
* **Need-based:** financial aid is reserved for low-income students.
* **Pell Grant**: Federal program that provides need-based educational grants for low-income students. Pell Grants do not typically have to be repaid.
* **SAI (Student Aid Index**): A calculation of the amount of need-based financial aid a student is eligible to receive.
* **SAR (Student Aid Report**): Your SAR summarizes the information entered on your FAFSA form and shows the amount of your EFC.

**Freshman Checklist (9th grade)**

* Create a GAfutures account at GAfutures.org. Gafutures is a great resource to help you explore and plan for college and your career/.
* Be sure to stay connected to your teachers and Director. They are here to help you succeed and help you make the right decisions in your classes.
* Know your graduation requirements and take challenging classes if possible.
* Find out if and when you might be eligible for Honors classes and/or Dual enrollment classes.
* Start building your high school portfolio. Keep track of your awards, recognitions, and extracurricular activities (volunteering, sports, etc.)
* Make the decision to do your best. Your HOPE GPA begins calculating as soon as you set foot into high school.

Parents of 9th graders

* Get to know your child’s class schedule and teachers
* Check Renweb regularly to keep current on your student’s grades
* Learn about the tax benefits of Georgia’s Path2College 529 Plan.

Sophomore Checklist (10th grade)

* Research careers that fit your interest and match them up with college majors.
* Use your GAfutures College Searrch tool to start researching colleges and create a list of top choices.
* Attend College Fairs in your area if you are given the chance.
* Consult with your teachers regularly to make sure your grades are in good standing. Look into skilled trade centers and the HOPE Career Grant.
* Think about how to spend your summer; work, volunteer or take a college-level course through Dual enrollment, if you’re eligible.
* Update your portfolio with all your achievements and activities.

10th grade parents’ checklist

* Encourage your child to take responsibility by balancing homework and other activities, maybe even a part time job.
* This is the last year your student will take Standardized testing at HOPE. Look at your child’s areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Junior checklist (11th grade)

* This is the year to fine tune your classes and grades. Meet with your teachers and make sure you are on track to graduate and meet all of the necessary requirements for graduation
* Continue to explore college and career choices.
* Sharpen your test taking skills.
* Take a PSAT or ACT
* Start drafting essays to use for scholarships and college admissions
* Search scholarships you may be eligible for to help pay for college
* Schedule campus tours
* Consider college level classes, honors, or dual enrollment

11th grade parents’ checklist

* Keep dialogue with your student about goals and priorities
* As you search colleges, compares costs and financial aid offers
* Attend college fairs with you student

Senior checklist (12th grade)

* It’s your senior year! You did it! Continue to stay focused and connected to meet your graduation requirements.
* Meet with your teachers and Director to make sure you are on track
* If you have not already done so, take the necessary SAT or ACT.
* Pay attention to deadlines and apply to the colleges you have chosen.
* Ask your teachers and counselors to submit required documents (letters of recommendation) to your preferred college.
* Beginning October 1, plan to complete the FAFSA.
* Be sure you are balanced and meeting all of your responsibilities. If you are getting overwhelmed, reach out to your teachers, parents, and school administration for help.
* Consider dual enrollment classes.
* Complete scholarship applications.
* When you have made a decision about which college you will be attending, notify your school and submit any financial deposits required. Also, notify the other colleges you were accepted to and withdraw your application.

12th grade parents’ checklist

* Know the importance of completing FAFSA, create your own FSA ID
* Plan to visit the college at the top of your child’s list to help make final decision.
* Confirm housing plans, freshman orientation dates and course registration. Send any necessary deposits.
* Review your financial situation and make sure you’re planning for the cost of college appropriately.
* Visit the College Planning section of GAfutures for additional information on preparing for college.
* Enjoy this last year with your student and cherish each moment!