

Hunterdon Central Regional High School

Early College Planning

2018 – 2019



A post-secondary planning guide for 9th and
10th grade students and parents.

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These logos represent the most popular colleges for Hunterdon Central graduates in 2018.

Introduction

Dear 9th and 10th Grade Students and Parents,

Welcome to one of the most unique phases of high school – college planning. You may have heard this process can be exciting, stressful, complex, and even life-changing. We agree, and we are here to prepare you.

During some of the most competitive times in college admissions, we recognize the need to inform and educate our students and their families on this process – and to start doing it earlier. College is a tremendous investment in terms of money, time, and energy, and we are here to support you through the process in the early years of high school. Planning early provides many advantages to this process, which are explained in the packet and during presentations to students and parents.

We are prepared to guide you as you navigate the years ahead. Our ultimate goal is to help you be successful and choose a college that best fits you. Over the course of the college process, you will have plenty of questions and concerns. Please use all of your resources, and reach out to us.

Wishing you the best as you embark on the journey of planning for college!

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Why Plan Early?

We believe that there is an important time to start working on the process of college planning. The 9th and 10th grade years are times for acclimating to high school – socially, emotionally, and academically – and working through the transition of taking more responsibility, managing time better, and maturing. However, more research shows that these years are suitable for starting the college planning process. In an effort to assist families through this process, we've designed several pieces to our counseling curriculum to help you: an Early College Planning seminar for parents, introductory college planning/Naviance sessions for 9th grade students, career exploration sessions for 10th grade students, and this resource packet. We want to make sure you're navigating these years with the right tools and information. It is our hope that when the college process is fully underway in 11th grade, you feel more prepared having started your planning earlier.

Planning for college in the early years of high school gives you an opportunity to learn and understand the most important information about choosing academic courses, standardized testing, resume building, financial aid and scholarships, and support that is available to you at Hunterdon Central. Having this knowledge is, essentially, having power in the process. It puts you in an excellent position to attain a successful outcome after high school. The more investment that is made in the early years, the stronger foundation you have for being successful in the college admissions process.

The process of college admissions has become increasingly competitive over the last decade. With more students filing more applications than ever before, colleges simply can't grow fast enough. College-bound seniors are applying electronically, using tools like The Common Application, to complete those growing number of applications. With that demand, colleges have to be more selective. In turn, we hope that high school students will plan earlier to give themselves a better edge in this process. By taking appropriate courses, engaging in meaningful extracurricular activities, and simply stepping on campuses in the early high school years, we believe that our students will be more prepared for the process that lies ahead.

The process of early college planning need not be complex or overwhelming. It is, like any process, one that requires a few important tools:

- organization;
- support;
- an open mind;
- an understanding of what should be done, and when;
- an open dialogue between the student, parent(s), and counselor;
- a positive and realistic attitude.

Creating a Timeline

We've provided a step-by-step guide to help you through the early college planning years. With the comprehensive counseling curriculum at Hunterdon Central and guidance of your school counselor, many of these tasks are complete or in the process of completion. Most of these tasks are discussed in greater detail throughout the packet:

9th Grade

- *Meet with your counselor.* Keep an open dialogue about goals and plans. Make sure your counselor knows about your academic interests and extracurricular activities so they can help with recommendations for both.
- *Create an academic four-year plan.* Your counselor is the expert in helping you choose the right courses for your academic interests, achievement level, and colleges of interest. Keep in mind, no plan is set in stone. Your four-year plan is expected to develop over time, and what you choose in 9th grade may not necessarily be on your schedule in 12th grade.
- *Start strong.* The GPA earned in 9th grade sets the foundation for high school, so put your best foot forward.
- *Get involved in one extracurricular activity, or two.* Choose something that you think you will enjoy, even if it's not the popular choice among all students. This is a time of discovery.
- *Log your activities.* Start a resume or some type of document that reminds you of your activities and accomplishments. A transcript will describe what you've done in the classroom, but you are responsible for the piece that highlights your out-of-classroom experiences.
- *Athletes, take note!* If you are thinking about playing sports in college (an early thought, we know, but it requires preparation) then you must be sure that your academic courses are approved by the NCAA Eligibility Center. Talk with your counselor about this and become familiar with Eligibility Center website (www.eligibilitycenter.org).
- *Start the college search.* Even if it's just web browsing or reading through college brochures, it's never too early to get an idea of the various types of colleges. Begin determining what type of college may be best for you, realizing that the search develops over time and your mind may change. Utilize Naviance, which will be introduced to all freshmen in December.
- *Start thinking about careers.* This is just a thought process, not a commitment. Hunterdon Central has resources for you to take career assessments and interest inventories. Take advantage of these and inquire with people in careers of interest.
- *Discuss the process of paying for college.* This is a conversation for both parents and the college-bound student. College costs are no small matter, and everyone should understand how the tuition bill will be paid.

10th Grade

- *Keep meeting with your counselor.* Update him/her on changes to your goals, personal accomplishments and achievements, and non-academic concerns you may be facing.
- *Update your four-year plan.* Determine if you want more challenge and rigor in your schedule, or if you're comfortable continuing on your current level. Perhaps, you may even need to step back if you are feeling too much pressure. The courses you take in high school are one of the most important factors in the college admissions process, so you must be very mindful of your four-year plan.
- *Take the PSAT, typically offered once a year in October.* While very common to take in 11th grade, the PSAT may also be taken in 10th grade as it provides good feedback on your testing strengths and weaknesses. It also gives you more time to work on potential academic weaknesses while there is still ample time to improve them.
- *Keep your grades strong.* With one full year under your belt, this is no time to slack. Keep improving, and get assistance when you need it.
- *Evaluate your activities outside the classroom.* Are you spending your time wisely? Do you want to stick with activities you chose in 9th grade, and get more involved with them – or, is it time to look into other opportunities? Also, think about your summer plans (work, volunteer, shadow various careers).

- *Visit a college campus, if you haven't done so yet.* College campuses don't change drastically in a 2-3 years, so keep visiting in your early years of high school. If your family is traveling to an area that is not often visited, take advantage of colleges that may be nearby. Take photos and record notes.
- *Attend the college fair.* Hunterdon Central hosts the county-wide fair in the spring. This is an ideal forum for sophomores to begin browsing colleges and meeting admission representatives.

Extracurricular Activities & Summer Experiences

There is no magical number of clubs to join, sports to play, or musicals in which you can lead. There is no specific number of volunteer hours you can perform or work hours you can maintain. Some students may think that choosing extracurricular activities is the process of joining eight clubs and attending 1-2 meetings for each over a three-year period. This is not considered involvement, and colleges can see right through this "resume padding".

Quality over quantity is key. You will hear this often. Colleges want, and you should too, to see involvement in just a few activities that are important to you, but deep involvement with them. We are talking about committing to an activity for 3-4 years of high school. In clubs, it means running for a leadership position or elected office, chairing an event, or taking the club to a whole new level. In sports, it means shooting for captain or being a team leader. In work, it means sticking with the job for at least one year, preferably longer, and maybe earning a promotion to shift leader, or the person who closes the store every night.

Unusual talents are more appealing than run-of-the-mill ones. In the early high school years, you still have time to find ways to be unique, to stand out amongst the crowd. Talk with family members, friends, your counselor, and teachers and ask them *what makes you different*. Then, think about what you can do with *that*. Or, become a young entrepreneur. We've seen numerous students start businesses in childcare, cooking/baking, yard work, website building, athletic lessons, music lessons, and much more. What do you do well? Expand on that!

Summer programs are a great option to fill the 10-week summer break. Summer programs come in many types – offered through organizations, sponsored by colleges, designed for a specific talent. It's a good idea to research a summer program on the web and talk with your counselor before making a commitment. There are a few programs out there that appear glamorous, but offer little or no benefit to the student. It can be money and time wasted, for not much reward. On the other hand, many of our students do attend successful and enjoyable summer enrichment programs on college campuses. These provide a great sample of college life by staying in the dorms for the program duration, engaging in academic work, potentially earning college credit by taking college-level courses, and making new friendships. These programs can be found all over the web, usually on a college's official website. We recommend Peterson's, CollegeXpress, and Naviance for summer program searching. Do you have to attend a summer enrichment program? Not at all. However, you need to do *something* over the summer. Working is a great option.

Start creating a resume that lists all of your activities from 9th grade and on. Keep this log as a way to remember everything, then polish it junior year and ask your counselor to review it. The resume should be a working document throughout high school.

Overall, you should be involved in high school and beyond. Colleges are not looking for students who will sit in their dorm room. They are looking for motivated and talented students who will contribute to their campus.

Scheduling Classes

For two decades now, college admissions personnel have reported in the annual survey of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) that the most important factor in the admissions process is the *high school transcript, specifically the courses taken*. A grade point average (GPA) may seem like a very important statistic, and it is certainly a factor that is considered in the evaluation, but with GPAs varying across all high schools, colleges look at the *courses taken* as a considerable measure.

A student who is taking college preparatory courses (non-weighted classes) and earning straight A's is performing well at Hunterdon Central, and will have a strong GPA to prove it. On the flip side, a student who is taking courses that are weighted and more rigorous, such as Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and earning B's and A's, may have a lower GPA, yet better chances for admission to college. The reason is, colleges look for students who are *challenging themselves*, taking advanced courses, and even stepping outside their comfort zone by taking some risks. After all, these are all big parts of the college experience. The student's counselor will discuss these scenarios, while educating you on choosing courses that provide a reasonable challenge and will serve you better in the long run.

A tentative four-year plan is created during freshman year. These conversations may begin by discussing the end, with a question like "Where do you want to be in 12th grade?" This almost always gives a 9th grade student a reason to think about post-secondary plans, such as college. Counselors at Hunterdon Central are very experienced in knowing which classes are considered most important to be competitive in college admission, but it is very important to approach course scheduling as a team – student, parent, counselor, with recommendation from teachers.

Standardized Testing

Important Websites:

College Board – www.collegeboard.org

ACT – www.act.org

While standardized test scores are only part of the college admission process, and not as important as the high school transcript, preparing for these tests should start early in high school. How does a student prepare to do well on these tests? For starters, build strong academic, language, mathematics, and critical thinking skills by taking courses that are challenging to the individual. Read often, working to build your vocabulary.

It is important to take these tests seriously, even the practice tests, like the PSAT/NMSQT, which is explained on the College Board website. Tenth grade students can take the PSAT/NMSQT in October, yet you will see a larger number of 11th grade students taking it. By taking this practice test, you are giving yourself time to evaluate the score report and work on areas that may be weak. The College Board offers a free personalized feedback, practice questions, and college planning tools based off their PSAT/NMSQT scores. They have also partnered with Khan Academy to provide comprehensive test-prep services for all of their standardized tests.

For the most part, students will take SAT for the first time in 11th grade, but since every student is different, it is always wise to consult with your counselor about your most appropriate testing timeline. *Your academic plan and course selection will have a great impact on when you are ready to take the SAT.* Consider that taking

the SAT twice is expected, but more than three times is probably not necessary. And, you may not want to test after December of your senior year as you may receive scores too late for your application deadlines.

SAT Subject Tests, which are content-based tests that allow a student to demonstrate knowledge in a variety of subject areas, may be required for admission to some selective colleges and programs. Although most students take SAT Subject Tests during their junior year, there are some tests that you should take as soon as possible after taking the subjects. Students should consult with their teacher and College Board to determine the best time to take these tests.

The ACT is a different type of test than the SAT when it comes to the questions, format, content areas, and timing. To learn more about the differences between the SAT and ACT, visit the “College Testing FAQ” page on the HCRHS website in the “College and Career Services” section.

Hunterdon Central offers a SAT review course a few times throughout the year, providing test-taking tips and skill review. Visit the school website and search “SAT Review Course” or find more details in the “Counseling Services” section. In addition, test preparation services are available from a large number of local and national organizations.

Searching for Colleges

With the amount of technology engrained in the current generation of high school students and even the adults, it is inevitable that you will come across college information in your daily clicks. It is never too early to be interested in college, even specific ones, and start utilizing the resources available to you.

Naviance

In December of freshman year, students create a Naviance account. If you already created your account and you are not aware of your log-in information (email address and password you chose) please see your counselor. Naviance is a popular tool used for college and career planning. HCRHS has been lucky enough to use this software for over 10 years. It is filled with college admissions data representing past students' admission results. You can compare your GPA and standardized test scores (when available) to former students to measure your admission probability at hundreds of colleges. Aside from that widely-used feature, Naviance has general college data, career exploration tools, and other features to keep your college process organized. The “**colleges**” section of Naviance houses the most information. You can view the admissions data, complete a college search, compare colleges to one another, organize your college list, sign up for college visits, and request your transcripts and track your college application progress. The “**careers**” section of Naviance includes a comprehensive interest inventory (“career interest profiler”). This is a great assessment to help you discover yourself and find suitable college majors and career paths. Additionally, this section allows you to research any career to find job outlook, salary, training, and more. The “**about me**” section is a place to find your current GPA, standardized test scores, and anything you have created in Naviance, such as a college list or resume.

Along with Naviance, there are a few resources we recommend using in the early phase of college planning:

- College Board (<http://www.collegeboard.org>)
- College Navigator (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>)
- Princeton Review (<http://www.princetonreview.com/>), and their print materials
- Books by Edward Fiske (look for bright green and blue covers)

In addition to the above resources, here is a short list of factors to consider when searching for colleges:

- Physical size (small or large campus)
- Public vs. Private
- Cost
- Location (urban, rural, near a city, small town)
- Distance from home
- Residential opportunities (dorms, suites, apartments)
- Student body size
- Diversity (male to female ratio, minority population, religious background)
- Availability of special programs and diversity of majors
- Athletics, clubs, and activities
- Student support services (for students with disabilities, tutoring, writing center)

Ranking vs. Fit

It is expected that factors surrounding reputation, prestige, and name-brand status will play a part in your college search, even in the early years of high school. Many students and families will also resort to rankings published in magazines and on the web. However, we do not suggest this practice, simply because ranking is not nearly as important as fit.

Keep in mind, most of the rankings you will review are identifying prestige, not necessarily quality. Colleges are always looking for an edge in the rankings and ways to increase their reputation. It is wise to look beyond this to see the real nuts and bolts of the college and its' offerings.

College Visits

This is one of those early college planning topics where you may hear conflicting thoughts. Some think that the early high school years of 9th and 10th grade are too early to visit colleges, while others say it's absolutely necessary to start looking now. We think you should do what works best for your student and family. If visiting colleges over a planned school break or summer vacation doesn't result in extra hassles, then it's worth it to start seeing campuses when you have the chance. If a parent has to drag a student to a college visit, or a student simply feels like he/she is not ready to start looking, then the time is not right.

However, there is benefit to visiting colleges in the early high school years. Since campuses don't change much, you are seeing what you will see when you actually apply and attend. Sure, campuses build and renovate, but the overall look of one school will barely change. Seeing different types of campuses can give you a better idea of your type and what suits you best. Listening to an information presentation or taking a campus tour allows you to get an early idea of admissions, academics, and campus life. Always take pictures and jot down notes. It could be two years until you return, if ever, before the application process begins.

Where do you start when it comes to college visits? We're lucky to have great institutions right here in New Jersey, and some diverse options very close to our county. You can see Rutgers University, The College of New Jersey, and Rider University – all within a 45-minute drive – all very different. This trip provides you with a large, state research University and two smaller schools that look and feel different. You can head north to visit liberal arts colleges like Drew University and Ramapo College, or check out great New Jersey state schools like Montclair State University (also north) and Rowan University (south Jersey). Small and mid-size private institutions like Fairleigh Dickinson University, Centenary College, and Monmouth University (all to the north and east) would also give an early college planner a diverse glimpse of higher education.

Simply put, life will be much busier in 11th and 12th grade, and visiting colleges takes time and commitment from the entire family, so think about visiting now and getting ahead of the game.

Paying for College

With college costs rising, the discussion of paying for college, with both parents and their child involved, should begin in the early high school years. The conversation may assure, it may disappoint, and it may be left with unanswered questions, but the dialogue about affording college should start. The lack of preparation can be detrimental to a 12th grade student in the spring of their senior year when they realize that their dream school won't happen because the bill can't be paid – or, loans, grants, and scholarships didn't add up the way you thought they would.

The web is filled with tools to help you plan ahead. College Board has several tools and calculators (search “financial aid tools and calculators” from the home page) allowing you to estimate college costs, expected family contribution, loan repayments, and more. The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the application all families must use when applying for federal aid, and it provides an early estimate tool called the FAFSA4caster. You can search for this from the FAFSA homepage – www.fafsa.gov – and use it to get early estimates and college savings strategies.

Most importantly, it is your investment, so make sure you are getting a return. Question colleges on their ‘return on investment’ and make sure they can produce statistics and outcomes. Study the results, job placement rates, graduate school admission rates, and more – and be sure you are making a worthwhile investment.

Exploring Majors & Careers

Students may feel like they are constantly asked – “What do you want to study in college?” It's for good reason, as we (your counselors) want to guide you in the right direction. In 9th and 10th grade, many of your classes are prescribed and designed for you to get your requirements complete. In 11th grade you gain more flexibility with your schedule and can choose classes that are interesting to you, and that align toward your intended college major. Your counselor wants to help you with this process, but understandably, it can be challenging if you simply don't know. Therefore, it is recommended that 9th and 10th grade students start investigating careers.

Our high school's counseling curriculum allows for career exploration in grades 9 and 10, giving students a chance to use Naviance in 9th grade as an introductory tool, and again in 10th grade using more of the career exploration tools. During sophomore year, students will engage with their counselors in the many facets of the Naviance “careers” tab, by completing assessments and tasks to help them better understand their career options.

We also recommend College Board's website, which breaks down majors and careers in a very clear way. It recognizes that a major and a career are two different things. Your college major may not necessarily indicate your career path. It is important that you understand the difference between, for example, majoring in Psychology, and being a Psychologist. Visit College Board's website and search for “majors and careers” for two full lists of major and career profiles. There are hundreds of sub-categories to choose from, showing how

each major and career can break down into multiple options. Each major profile includes information about courses to take in high school, college-level courses, similar majors, and colleges that offer that major. The career profiles include thorough descriptions, required education, salary information, and similar careers.

When you take career and interest assessments through the websites mentioned above, or ones found on your own, you are encouraged to talk with your counselor about the results. Keeping an open dialogue about your interests helps your counselor get to know you better, and they may also provide you with opportunities that could be a good match for you.

College & Career Programming @ Central

The Early College Planning seminar and packet are only the beginning of college-related programs offered at Hunterdon Central. We are proud to have a strong college and career counseling component built into the overall counseling curriculum. Here is a listing of programs that you can look forward to:

- College Fair – evening program in March (specifically geared toward juniors and sophomores, but open to any grade level)
- 11th Grade College Planning Night for Parents – evening program, January of junior year
- 11th Grade College Planning Groups for Students – day program, January of junior year & May of junior year
- 12th Grade College Planning Night for Parents – evening program, September of senior year
- 12th Grade College Planning Groups for Students – day program, September of senior year
- 12th Grade Transition Groups – day program, May/June of senior year
- Admissions Panel for Students and Parents – evening program, spring (specifically geared toward juniors but an excellent resource for all audiences)
- Financial Aid Night for Parents – evening program, October of senior year
- Alumni Day for Students (we host Central alumni to discuss their college experience) – day program, early January (for juniors and seniors)
- College Bus Trips for Students – day program, October and April (juniors and/or seniors)
- College Visits for Students (college representatives visit the high school and meet with interested students) – day program, 150+ visits are held from September-November (juniors and seniors)