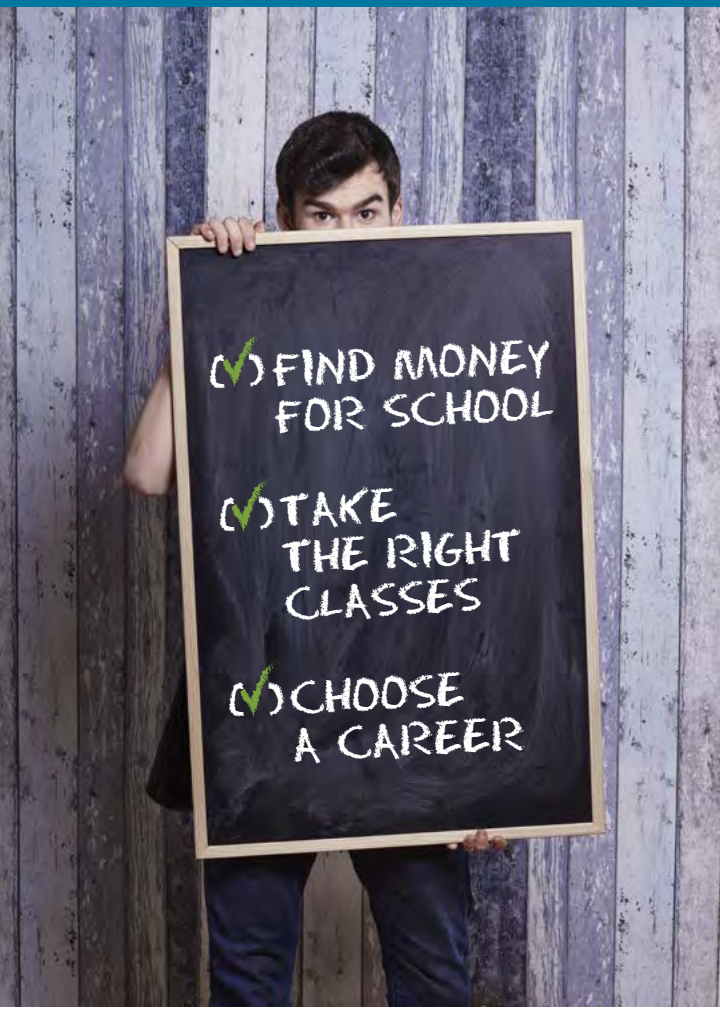
COLLEGE PREPARATION CHECKLIST



Federal Student Aid
An OFFICE of the U.S. DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

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Why go to college? A higher education introduces students to new people and new experiences and usually leads to a higher salary and lower chance of unemployment. This checklist will tell you how to get ready for college—and how the government will help you pay for it.

How to use the checklist

Q: Who should use the checklist?

A: Students of all ages who haven't attended college, and parents of students in elementary and secondary school.

Q: What is the checklist?

A: A to-do list, starting with elementary school, to help students prepare academically and financially for education beyond high school. Each section is split into subsections for students and parents, explaining what to do and which publications or websites might be useful to them.

Q: When should a student or parent refer to the checklist?

A: At the beginning of every school year, and then more frequently as college approaches. (Or, in the case of an adult student returning to school, as soon as possible!)

StudentAid.gov
1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)
TTY: 1-800-730-8913

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GETTING A LATE START?

Just decided that you want to go to college, but school starts soon? Too late to do all the checklist items in this document? Here is your must-do list.

If School Starts Next Month

( ) Apply for financial aid using the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) site at **fafsa.gov**. Turn to "FAFSA® Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist, and follow the steps there to apply for federal, state, and school funding.

( ) Ask the school you plan to attend what other financial help it can offer you: Does it have last-minute scholarships or payment plans available? Can you get a job on campus?

( ) Keep in touch with the school about any paperwork you need to turn in.

If School Starts Next Week

( ) Apply for federal student aid immediately at **fafsa.gov**. The site has many resources, including live chat with a customer service representative, to help you as you complete the application.

( ) Talk to the financial aid office staff at the school you plan to attend. Ask whether there are other forms you need to complete, and find out how and when you will receive your financial aid.

MONEY FOR COLLEGE

FEDERAL STUDENT AID

What Is Federal Student Aid?

Federal student aid comes from the federal government—specifically, the U.S. Department of Education. It's money that helps a student pay for education expenses at a college, career school, or graduate school.

Federal student aid covers such expenses as tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation. Aid also can help pay for a computer and for dependent care.

There are three main categories of federal student aid:

- **Grant**—Grant money usually doesn't have to be repaid. Most U.S. Department of Education grants are based on a student's financial need.
- **Work-study**—Work-study money is earned by a student through a job on or near campus while attending school and does not have to be repaid.
- **Loan**—Loan money must be repaid with interest.

For details about the federal student aid programs, including maximum annual amounts and loan interest rates, visit ***StudentAid.gov/types****.*

WHY GET A FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN?

Federal student loans offer low fixed interest rates; income-based repayment plans; loan forgiveness; and deferment (postponement of repayment) options, including deferment of loan payments when a student returns to school. Generally, repayment of a federal loan does not begin until after the student leaves school. And did you know that a student receiving a federal loan does not need a credit history or a cosigner? Private loans from banks often do not offer such benefits. So if you need to borrow money to pay for college or career school, start with federal student loans. More information is available at ***StudentAid.gov/federal-vs-private****.*

Who Gets Federal Student Aid?

Our most basic eligibility requirements are that you must

- demonstrate financial need (for most programs);
- be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen;
- have a valid Social Security number;
- be registered with Selective Service if you're a male (you must register between the ages of 18 and 25);
- be enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a regular student in an eligible degree or certificate program;
- be enrolled at least half-time to be eligible for Direct Loan Program funds;
- maintain satisfactory academic progress in college;
- sign a statement on the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) stating that
  - you are not in default on a federal student loan and do not owe money on a federal student grant, and
  - you will use federal student aid only for educational purposes; and
- show you're qualified to obtain a postsecondary education by
  - having a high school diploma or recognized equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or
  - completing a high school education in a homeschool setting approved under state law.

Note: There are some additional requirements and exceptions. For more details about our eligibility criteria, visit **StudentAid.gov /eligibility**.

How Do You Apply for Federal Student Aid?

Refer to "FAFSA® Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist for a step-by-step guide to filling out the FAFSA.

MORE SOURCES OF STUDENT AID

The U.S. Department of Education is the main source of financial aid for college, but it isn't the only source.

- Visit **StudentAid.gov/types#federal-aid** to find out about education funding available from other federal agencies.
- Visit **www.ed.gov/sgt** to find out about money available from state governments.
- Visit a college's website or ask its financial aid office about money the school offers its students.
- Read the rest of this page to learn where to look for scholarships from sources other than those listed above.

Finding Scholarships

Everyone wants free money to help them attend college. There are many types of scholarships (which don't all require that you have outstanding grades!) and many different organizations that provide them. Each scholarship provider has its own application and its own rules to decide who can get its scholarship. Your job is to find scholarships for which you think you might qualify and to apply by the deadlines.

And remember: There is no "secret" scholarship money out there. You don't need to pay a consultant or join a society just because they say they can help you find scholarships. You can find them yourself and save some money. Here are some free sources of information:

( ) the free scholarship search at **StudentAid.gov /scholarships**

( ) a high school, Upward Bound, or Talent Search counselor

( ) your library's reference section

( ) foundations, religious or community organizations, local businesses, or civic groups

( ) organizations (including professional associations) related to your field of interest

( ) ethnicity-based organizations

( ) your employer or a parent's employer

YOUR TO-DO LIST

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Students

TO DO:

( ) Do your best in school.

( ) Read a lot.

( ) Have fun learning!

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Visit **www.kids.gov** to learn about jobs and to find fun online games.

( ) Check out the Kids' Zone at **nces.ed.gov/nceskids** if you like such games as puzzles and math teasers.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Help your kindergartner develop an interest in reading by reading aloud to him or her.

( ) Check your child's homework and follow his or her progress in school by looking at report cards and attending teacher conferences.

( ) Start saving for your child's college education. Learn about the tax advantages of state-offered college savings plans and prepaid tuition plans at **www.collegesavings.org**.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Read *Saving Early = Saving Smart!* at **StudentAid.gov /resources#saving-early**. This handout explains why it's never too early to save money for college and how to use such resources as college savings plans and federal student aid.

( ) Check out *Helping Your Child Become a Reader* at **www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html** for advice on how to create a foundation for learning for children up to age 6. The publication provides a list of resources for parents and includes activities that turn daily routines into learning experiences.

JUNIOR HIGH OR MIDDLE SCHOOL

Students

TO DO:

( ) Think about college as an important part of your future. Discuss your thoughts and ideas with your family and with people at school.

( ) Start saving for college if you haven't already.

( ) Take challenging and interesting classes to prepare for high school.

( ) Ask your parent or guardian to help you research which high schools or special programs will most benefit your interests.

( ) Develop strong study habits.

( ) Do your best in school and on standardized tests. If you are having difficulty, don't give up—get help from a teacher, tutor, or mentor.

( ) Become involved in school- or community-based activities that let you explore your interests and learn new things.

( ) Speak with adults, such as your teacher, school counselor or librarian, relatives, or family friends, who you think have interesting jobs. Ask them what they like about their job and what education they needed for it.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Find out why you should prepare for college now at **StudentAid.gov/prepare**.

( ) Browse *My Future, My Way: First Steps Toward College,* a workbook for middle and junior high school students, at **StudentAid.gov/resources#my-future**.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Use *FAFSA4caster* at **fafsa.gov** to find out how much federal student aid your child might receive. This information will help you plan ahead.

( ) Continue saving for your child's college education. If you have not opened a savings account, you can find information about tax advantages and links to state plans at **www.collegesavings.org**.

( ) Talk to your child about his or her interests and help match those interests with a college major and career.

( ) Help your child develop good study habits, such as studying at the same time and place every day and having the necessary materials to complete assignments.

( ) Stay in contact with your child's teachers and counselor so that they can let you know about any changes in your child's behavior or schoolwork.

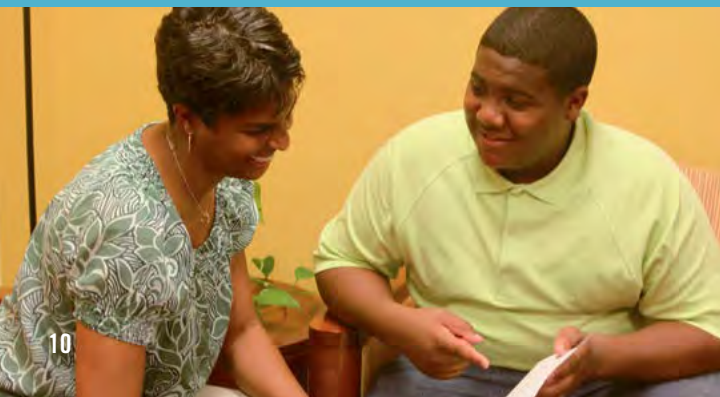
( ) Keep an eye on your child's grades, and help him or her find tutoring assistance, if necessary.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Get tips from the following documents at **www.ed.gov /parents/academic/help/hyc.html**:

- *Helping Your Child With Homework* offers suggestions on how to empower your child to successfully complete assignments.
- *Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence* addresses issues that parents of 10- to 14-year-olds generally find most challenging.

( ) Browse *Parent Power* at **www.ed.gov/parents/academic /help/parentpower/booklet.pdf** for ideas to help you support your child as he or she transitions into high school.



HIGH SCHOOL
Every Year in High School

Students

TO DO:

( ) Work with a parent to estimate your potential financial aid using *FAFSA4caster* at **fafsa.gov**, and continue to save for college.

( ) Take challenging classes in core academic subjects. Most colleges require four years of English, at least three years of social studies (history, civics, geography, economics, etc.), three years of math, and three years of science. Many require two years of a foreign language. Round out your course load with classes in computer science and the arts.

( ) Stay involved in school- or community-based activities that interest you or let you explore career interests. Consider working or volunteering. Remember that it's quality—not quantity—that counts.

( ) Talk to your school counselor and other mentors about education after high school. Your counselor can answer questions about what classes to take in high school, how to sign up for standardized tests, and where to get money for college.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Check out *KnowHow2Go: The Four Steps to College*, at **www.knowhow2go.org** for more advice on actions you can take as you start thinking about education beyond high school.

( ) Get answers to common questions about college by watching our videos on the "Prepare for College" playlist at **www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid**.

( ) Learn about managing your money in the "High School Youth" section of **www.mymoney.gov/Pages/for-youth.aspx**.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Continue to talk to your child about college plans as if he or she will definitely go to college.

( ) Keep an eye on your child's study habits and grades. Stay involved.

( ) Encourage your child to take Advanced Placement courses or other challenging classes.

( ) Add to your child's college savings account regularly.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Explore **StudentAid.gov/parent** for information on saving for college, borrowing for college, applying for financial aid, getting tax benefits to help make college affordable, and more.

Ninth Grade

Students

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Talk to your school counselor or teachers about Advanced Placement courses. Find out what courses are available, whether you are eligible, and how to enroll in them.

( ) Use the career search at **StudentAid.gov/careersearch** to research your career options.

( ) Make a list of your awards, honors, extracurricular activities, and paid and volunteer work. Consider participating in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, or science.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Visit **StudentAid.gov/whycollege** for a quick rundown on why deciding to attend college is a no-brainer.

( ) Find ways to get help preparing for college at **StudentAid.gov/prepare-for-college/help**.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Make sure you are fully aware of the provisions of any college savings accounts you have opened for your child.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Learn about the tax benefits of cashing in savings bonds to pay for your child's education; search for "Publication 970" at **www.irs.gov**.

10th Grade

Students

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their admissions requirements.

( ) Consider taking a practice Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) or PSAT™ 10, or the PreACT™.

( ) Plan to use your summer wisely: Work, volunteer, or take a summer course (away from home or at a local college).

( ) Go to career information events.

( ) Research majors that might be a good match with your interests and goals. Consider what fits well with your results from the career search at **StudentAid.gov/careersearch**.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Learn the differences between grants, loans, work-study, and scholarships at **StudentAid.gov/types**.

( ) Think about starting to research different colleges. Play around with the College Scorecard tool at **collegescorecard.ed.gov** to explore schools based on size, location, programs, and more.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

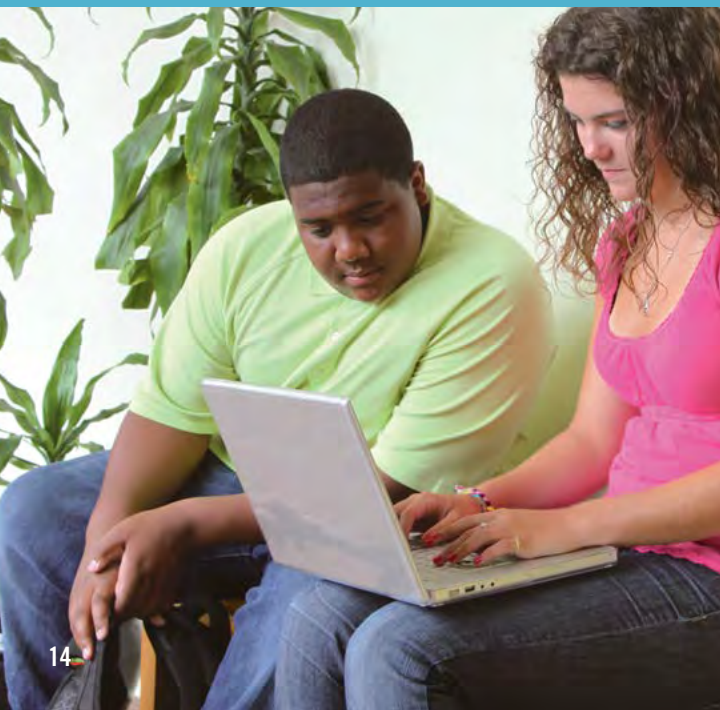
( ) Find out whether your child's school has college nights. Plan to attend those events with your child.

( ) Help your child develop independence by encouraging him or her to take responsibility for balancing homework with other activities or a part-time job.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Learn about the standardized tests your child will take during 10th, 11th, and 12th grades: the PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10, SAT and SAT Subject Tests (see **www.collegeboard.org**), and/or the PreACT and the ACT (see **www.act.org**).

( ) Get a brief overview of financial aid from *Federal Student Aid at a Glance* at **StudentAid.gov/glance**.



11th Grade

Students

TO DO:

...all year

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Explore careers and their earning potential with the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* search tool at **www.bls.gov/oco**.

( ) Learn about choosing a college (and find a link to our free college search tool) at **StudentAid.gov /prepare-for-college/choosing-schools**.

( ) Go to college fairs and college-preparation presentations hosted by college representatives.

...fall

( ) Take the PSAT/NMSQT.* You must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Scholarship Program.

...spring

( ) Register for and take exams for college admission.* The tests that many colleges require are the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests, and the ACT. Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.

( ) Use the free scholarship search tool at **StudentAid.gov/scholarships** to find scholarships for which you might want to apply. Some deadlines fall as early as the summer between 11th and 12th grades, so prepare now to submit applications soon.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Visit **www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid** and go to the "Types of Aid" playlist to see how the government can help you pay for college.

( ) Learn how to avoid scholarship scams and identity theft at **StudentAid.gov/scams**.

***REMEMBER:** *Register for all tests in advance, and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, ask your school counselor about getting the fee waived.*

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Take another look at your financial situation, and be sure you're on the right track to pay for college.

( ) Talk to your child about the schools he or she is considering. Ask why those schools appeal to your child, and help him or her clarify goals and priorities.

( ) Attend college fairs with your child, but don't take over the conversation with the college representatives. Just listen; let your child do the talking.

( ) Take your child to visit college campuses, preferably when classes are in session.

( ) Attend any financial aid information events at your child's school.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Get in-depth information on federal student aid programs at **StudentAid.gov/types**.

( ) Learn about student and parent loans in the *Federal Student Loans: Basics for Students* and *Federal Student Loans: Direct PLUS Loan Basics for Parents* booklets at **StudentAid.gov/resources#loans**.

Summer Before 12th Grade

Students

TO DO:

( ) Create a username and password called an FSA ID that you'll use to confirm your identity when accessing your government financial aid information and electronically signing your federal student aid documents. You and your parent will each need your own unique FSA ID. Learn about the FSA ID, and create yours, at **StudentAid.gov/fsaid**. Note: You must create your own FSA ID; if your parent creates it for you, that'll cause confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process.

( ) Narrow down the list of colleges you are considering attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.

( ) Contact colleges to request information and applications for admission. Ask about financial aid, admission requirements, and deadlines.

( ) Decide whether you are going to apply under a particular college's early decision or early action program. Be sure to learn about the program's deadlines and requirements.

( ) Apply for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow so you have less to pay back later.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Find out what government financial aid you can apply for, and how, in *Federal Student Aid at a Glance* at **StudentAid.gov/glance**.

( ) Watch the "Overview of the Financial Aid Process" video at **www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid** to learn about getting student aid from the government.

( ) Be careful when searching for scholarships. Read *Don't Get Scammed on Your Way to College!* at **StudentAid.gov/resources#consumer-protection** to learn how to avoid getting cheated out of money.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Create your own FSA ID if you don't have one yet. (See "To Do" in the "Summer Before 12th Grade: Students" section for details.)

( ) Review your financial situation and make sure your child is looking into or already has applied for scholarships.

( ) Ask your employer whether scholarships are available for employees' children.

( ) Find out whether your child has added any schools to his or her college wish list since the last time you visited colleges. Visit additional campuses if possible.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Take a closer look at **StudentAid.gov/types** and **StudentAid.gov/fafsa** to ensure you understand the federal aid programs and upcoming application process.

12th Grade

Students

TO DO:

...all year

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Work hard all the way to graduation—second-semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.

( ) Stay involved in after-school activities, and seek leadership roles if possible.

...fall

( ) As soon as possible after its Oct. 1 release, complete and submit your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) at **fafsa.gov**, along with any other financial aid applications your chosen school(s) may require. You should submit your FAFSA by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, usually by early February. Refer to "FAFSA Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist as you go through the application process.

( ) After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your *Student Aid Report* (SAR) within three days to three weeks. This document lists your answers to the questions on your FAFSA and gives you some basic information about your aid eligibility. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor.

( ) If you haven't done so already, register for and take such exams as the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT for

college admission.* Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.

( ) Apply to the colleges you have chosen. Prepare your applications carefully. Follow the instructions, and PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!

( ) Well before your college application deadlines, ask your counselor and teachers to submit the required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you're applying.

( ) Complete any last scholarship applications.

...spring

( ) Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.

( ) Review your college acceptances and compare the colleges' financial aid offers. Use the "Compare Financial Aid Offers" tool at **www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college** to analyze aid offers side by side.

( ) Contact a school's financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, paperwork you might need to submit, and other aid for which you might wish to apply.

( ) When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Refer to **StudentAid.gov/fafsa** to learn about the FAFSA process.

( ) Understand the FAFSA better by watching the videos in the "FAFSA: Apply for Aid" playlist at **www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid**.

( ) Follow or like the office of Federal Student Aid at **www.Twitter.com/FAFSA** and **www.Facebook.com/FederalStudentAid** to get regular financial aid tips.

( ) Make informed decisions about student loans; find important information at the "Why Get a Federal Student Loan?" section on page 4 of this checklist and the "Federal Versus Private Loans" page at **StudentAid.gov/federal-vs-private**.

***REMEMBER:** *Register for all tests in advance, and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, ask your school counselor about getting the fee waived.*

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Review "Every Year in High School" on page 11 of this checklist.

( ) Work with your child on filling out the FAFSA. See "FAFSA® Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist for specific instructions.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Make sure your child's personal information is safe when he or she applies for financial aid. For tips, read *Federal Student Aid and Identity Theft* at **StudentAid.gov/resources#consumer-protection**.

( ) Go to **www.irs.gov** and read *IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Education* to see how you might benefit from federal income tax credits for education expenses. Search for "Publication 970" from the IRS home page to find the most recent version of the document.

( ) Understand the benefits of federal student loans by reading "Why Get a Federal Student Loan?" on page 4 of this checklist.

( ) Help your child learn about the responsibilities involved in accepting a student loan by reviewing **StudentAid.gov/types/loans#considerations** with him or her.

( ) Look at communications from schools to which your child sent FAFSA information. If a school has offered you or your child Direct Loans, the *Federal Student Loans: Basics for Students* and *Federal Student Loans: Direct PLUS Loan Basics for Parents* booklets might be useful to you. Find them at **StudentAid.gov/resources#loans**.

ADULT STUDENTS

If you've never been to college, or started but never finished, we can help. Need to improve your skills or knowledge? Find a new career?

TO DO:

( ) Look into getting a General Educational Development (GED) certificate if you don't have a high school diploma; try searching online for "GED certificate" and your state's name. Other options include the HiSET (High School Equivalency Test) and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC).

( ) Research careers and the need for various jobs with the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* search tool at **www.bls.gov/oco**.

( ) Use College Navigator at **nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator** to find the right school for your career goals.

( ) Ask your employer if assistance is available to help you pay for school.

( ) Use the scholarship search tool at **StudentAid.gov /scholarships** to find scholarships.

( ) Apply for federal student aid by following the guidance in "FAFSA® Filing Time" on page 22 of this checklist.

( ) Read over *Federal Student Aid for Adult Students* at **StudentAid.gov/resources#adult-students** for a crash course on what aid looks like for adults.

( ) Get to know the financial aid staff at the school you plan to attend. They can help you with aid applications and explain the types of aid that are available.

TO EXPLORE:

( ) Use the College Scorecard at **collegescorecard.ed.gov** to compare schools' annual costs, graduation rates, and median salaries of individuals who attended.

( ) Try the career search at **StudentAid.gov/careersearch** if you're not sure what career you want.

( ) Ensure that you get your money's worth out of your career or technical education by following the tips in *Choose a Career School Carefully* at **StudentAid.gov /resources#consumer-protection**.

( ) Learn about the different kinds of federal funding available for your education at **StudentAid.gov/types**.

( ) Discover why federal student loans are frequently a better option than private loans by reading **StudentAid.gov/federal-vs-private**.

( ) Use **StudentAid.gov/fafsa/next-steps/accept-aid** to help you determine which loans to accept and how much to borrow.

( ) Go to **www.irs.gov** and read *IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Education* to see how you might benefit from federal income tax credits for education expenses. Search for "Publication 970" from the IRS home page to find the most recent version of the document.

FAFSA® FILING TIME

Students

You must complete and submit the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) to apply for federal student aid—that's government money for college or career school. Financial aid offices use information from the FAFSA to determine whether you are eligible to receive federal grants, loans, or work-study funds. States and schools also use the information from the FAFSA to determine whether you qualify for additional aid. In fact, some schools won't consider a student for the school's merit scholarships (i.e., scholarships awarded based on a student's grades, talents, or achievements) until the student has submitted a FAFSA. So be sure to fill out a FAFSA even if you think you won't qualify for federal aid.

DEADLINES

The FAFSA becomes available on Oct. 1 for the next school year. If you want to be considered for aid from your state or college, you must meet its FAFSA deadline.

State deadlines: *If you plan to go to college in the fall, your state financial aid deadline is probably going to be between March and May, though some states request that you submit your FAFSA as soon as possible after Oct. 1. So in that case, if you planned to start college in the fall, you'd fill out your FAFSA nearly a year ahead of time. The FAFSA site at* ***fafsa.gov*** *lists many state deadlines and tells you how to find yours if it's not listed.*

College deadlines: *College financial aid deadlines may be as early as February. For a college's deadline, check the school's website or contact its financial aid office.*

In any case, completing the FAFSA as soon as possible after its release the preceding October is your surest option.

TO DO:

( ) Get free information and help from your school counselor, the financial aid office at the college you plan to attend, or the U.S. Department of Education at **fafsa.gov** or 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). Free help is available at any time during the application process.

( ) If you think the Social Security Administration might have the wrong name or date of birth for you in its records, go to **www.ssa.gov** to find out how to correct any errors. Your information must be correct before your FAFSA can be processed.

( ) If you're filing the FAFSA online, it helps to create an FSA ID ahead of time. This username and password is used to confirm your identity when accessing your financial aid information and electronically signing your federal student aid documents. Your FSA ID is unique; it must be your own and not a parent's. **You must create your FSA ID yourself**. To create your FSA ID, and for more information, go to **StudentAid.gov/fsaid**. For a step-by-step guide, watch "How to Create an FSA ID" on the "FAFSA: Apply for Aid" playlist at **www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid**.

( ) Collect the documents needed to apply. You may be able to have the FAFSA automatically retrieve information from your tax return; otherwise, you'll need your federal tax documents or your income records. Here are some additional items you might need:

- Your Social Security number and your parent's (parents') Social Security number(s) if you are providing parent information
- Your Alien Registration number if you are not a U.S. citizen
- Information on savings, investments, and business assets for yourself (and for your parent[s] if you are providing parent information)

( ) Submit the FAFSA in time to meet school and state aid deadlines. Here are the ways you can complete the FAFSA:

- Apply online (the fastest and easiest way) by going to **fafsa.gov**.
- Download a PDF version of the FAFSA at **fafsa.gov**. Fill out the PDF and mail it to the address on the form. (You also can visit **www.edpubs.gov** or call 1-800-4-FED-AID to request a print-out of the PDF FAFSA.)
- Ask the financial aid staff at the college you plan to attend whether you may fill out the FAFSA with their help and have them submit it for you.

( ) Review your *Student Aid Report* (SAR)—the result of your FAFSA. You will receive your SAR by email or by mail. If necessary, make changes or corrections and submit your information for reprocessing. Your complete, correct SAR will contain your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)—the index number used by colleges to determine how much federal student aid you can receive. If you do not receive your SAR within three weeks of submitting your FAFSA, go to **fafsa.gov** and log in to check the status of your FAFSA; you may also call 1-800-4-FED-AID.

( ) Your school might request additional information from you. Be sure to respond by any deadlines, or you might not receive federal student aid.

( ) **All applicants:** Contact the financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered.

( ) **First-time applicants:** Review award letters from schools to compare amounts and types of aid being offered. Decide which school to attend based on a combination of (a) how well the school suits your needs and (b) its affordability after all aid is taken into account.

( ) Keep in touch with the school you choose to find out when tuition and fees are due, whether your financial aid will cover those expenses completely, and how much (if any) extra financial aid will come directly to you once your tuition and fees are paid.

( ) Pay special attention to letters or emails from schools, and contact the financial aid office if you do not understand what the school is offering you.

( ) Follow all directions on the FAFSA and on any communications from your school.

Parents

TO DO:

( ) Complete the "Students: To Do" list on pages 23–24 of this checklist with your child. If possible, file the FAFSA online—it's much faster and easier, and your information is safe because it's encrypted (i.e., we use a mathematical formula to scramble the data).

( ) If you're filing online, create your own FSA ID to be able to sign your child's FAFSA electronically. Your FSA ID must be separate from your child's and created by you (just as your child must create his or her own FSA ID). To create your FSA ID, go to **StudentAid.gov/fsaid**. For help with the FSA ID, watch "FAFSA and FSA ID Tips for Parents" in the "FAFSA: Apply for Aid" playlist at **www.YouTube.com /FederalStudentAid**.

( ) Examine the bill from the school your child chooses and make sure you understand all the fees and how they will be paid (e.g., through scholarships, student loans, etc.).

FOR MORE HELP

FAFSA® Videos and Step-by-Step Instructions

Learn more about the FAFSA at www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid (visit the "FAFSA: Apply for Aid" playlist) and at StudentAid.gov/fafsa.

Have questions about federal student aid and want to talk to a real person?

Call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or 1-800-730-8913 (TTY for the hearing impaired). Toll number: 334-523-2691.

Many of the publications mentioned in this checklist are available to order or download for free at www.edpubs.gov.

Find detailed federal student aid information at StudentAid.gov.

/FederalStudentAid

/FAFSA

/FederalStudentAid

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Federal Student Aid

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