

COLLEGE PREP-101

Middle School/Junior High College Prep

Students, the following is a list of things you could/should do to start getting ready for college. Even though you'll need your family's help, support, or even permission for some of them, I want you to know it's your responsibility. Your parents can take you places or tell you to do things, but you have to see the value for it to do any good. You have to be interested in and involved in the process.

- Read, read, read! No matter how much you read, how well or how fast you read now, you should strive to increase and improve in each area. Read the newspaper, books, magazines... whatever interests you. Be careful not to go cross-eyed doing it (and get permission), but use the Internet to find other stuff that interests you. Even reading about motorcycles, collectible dolls, sports, politics, horses, whatever, will help you when you read about history or science or math. The faster you are able to read and comprehend material, the easier school will be, and the better you'll do on college admission tests.
- Take school seriously. Work hard, learn as much as you can (this isn't necessarily the same thing as getting good grades), and do your homework even when you don't *have* to. Know that the better you do in school and the more you learn, the easier it will be when you get to high school and when you go to college.
- Get a job – to make extra money and show your work ethic. It will also help develop a network of people who may be able to give you a recommendation letter later on. Think about putting some money aside in your own college account. With your family's permission and assistance, you could think about starting your own business! You could rake leaves, shovel snow, cut grass, babysit, tutor, walk dogs, etc. Talk to friends and neighbors and put up flyers around the neighborhood to generate customers. Based on those customers, go to the bank to borrow money for any necessary equipment (lawnmower, tools, dog biscuits, etc.). Call your state's tax commission to see how much money you can make before you have to pay taxes. All of that will look awesome on your resume.
- Talk to your parents/family about you going to college. Ask if they went to college, and where. Talk to them about what they did in college – studying, sports, classes, leadership, fun, etc. If they didn't go to college, ask why (my guess is money was at least part of the reason). Tell them you want to go to college and ask how you can work together to pay for it.
- Think about careers/majors/jobs you might be interested in. Research them on the Internet (use the occupational outlook handbook, one of my favorite sites – www.bls.gov/oco), and by talking to or interviewing someone who does what you're interested in doing. If possible, volunteer or get a job doing something

- related. Look for summer camps that relate to what you're interested in doing, or a camp that will help you look at different careers – colleges often host these.
- Get involved in extracurricular activities (if you're not already). Join clubs related to your interests, participate in sports, learn a musical instrument, take up a hobby, get active in student council or church youth activities. Run for an office or volunteer to coordinate an event or project. Build on what you start now throughout your middle school, junior high and high school years. Try out different types of activities or stay with the same things for years.
 - Volunteer your time to help people in your community – whether it's with the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, your school or church group, or with your family... Whether it's cleaning up along the highway or delivering meals to shut-ins, serving a holiday meal or spending time with senior citizens, you'll be helping other people and making yourself feel good in the process. Both extracurricular activities and volunteerism are highly valued by college admission committees, scholarship committees, and employers.
 - Spend time on college campuses. Go to events there when you can. Tell your family you'd like to go see what a college campus is like, and go do it. You probably won't want to go on the organized campus tour (but you could if you're interested and they'll let younger students go), and may just want to wander around campus to get a feel for what it's like. Call (or have a parent call) the admissions office to see what areas of campus are open to the public, and go visit. Try to plan extra time when visiting another town where there is a college, or going on vacation for this purpose. You'll start to understand what facilities colleges usually have, and get a feel for differences between different types of schools, and start to form opinions about what you like and don't like.
 - Stay off drugs and out of trouble – colleges *really* do care about that stuff!

Parents/Family – you need to be there to support all these efforts, whether driving on a campus tour expedition or helping your child find a place they can work at their age, or helping with homework or locating suitable reading material. However, your most important tasks are the following;

1. help college become a part of their consciousness, part of their goals, part of their life plan, and part of their future. Talking about it, showing it to them, and helping them experience parts of college will make it more likely that they'll go when they get older.
2. Save, save, save! If you haven't started, it's not too late. If you have started, consider saving more. You are the foundation of your student's college finances, and money saved today (regardless how much or how little) is easier on you than it will be when they're in college. Even \$500 saved over time is \$500 you won't have to come up with or \$500 your child won't have to borrow in college and pay back later in life. Also, talk to them about their responsibility to pay for a portion of their college expenses – and help them plan for it.