



## 9th Grade College Preparation Timeline

For students and parents wondering how to begin preparing for college, it's never too early! At SAGE Scholars, we believe that early college planning can help you maximize your investment and ease the stress of college admissions. That's why we're here to help! For rising ninth-graders, the next four years can help prepare your application. While that is a lot of time, it will go by quickly, and it's important not to miss critical steps along the way.

### 1. Create a Four-Year High School Plan

Planning for college can seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. One of the most effective ways to prepare for college can begin with creating a four-year plan. Think about how you want to use the next four years of your high school experience to pursue and find your passions. This will help you figure out what kind of college is best for you, but it can also set you up for career planning. Get to know your college or academic counselor your freshman year. They will likely be writing your letter of recommendation and will be a critical resource for you when finding scholarships and putting together your application.

## 2. Get Your Classes in Order

The classes that you take your freshman year can either put you on the path to taking AP courses or honors courses later or not. It's important to make sure that your curriculum is sufficiently rigorous for you as a student and that the courses you take keep options for AP courses open. Though you do not have to take AP courses to receive college acceptance, colleges do like to see that you maximize the possibilities for learning that your school offers to you. Ensure that you are taking the required courses these years to enter honors and AP courses during your junior year.

## 3. Explore AP and Honors Courses

Again, not all schools offer AP courses, and that is ok! College admissions will not penalize you if your school does not offer AP courses, but they will look to see that you sufficiently challenged yourself with the courses made available to you at your school. If your school does offer AP courses, explore the options and learn what you need to do to use them for college credit, advanced placement at University, or both when you enroll in college.

## 4. Start Thinking About Interests Outside the Classroom

Now's the time to begin thinking about jobs and careers that interest you. If you know you're someone who loves writing, what can you do to immerse yourself in this passion. Similarly, if you love coding and robotics, what programs are available to you—both within your school and in your community—that you can learn from. Keep in mind, that your interests may change as you move through high school, so it's important to be receptive to options and opportunities that come your way over the years.

## 5. Talk to Your Teachers and Community Members

You're not expected to know everything! Freshman year can be overwhelming. Your friends may be stressed about the new classes and increased responsibilities. Those around you can be immensely helpful in navigating this new phase of your life and education. Talk to your community members and teachers. Explore your interests and ask how you may be able to get connected to others who share similar passions.

## 6. Extracurricular Activities

Quality over quantity is the name of the game! Many of your friends may try to sign up for as many things as possible—jampacking their schedules with sports, clubs, and

other extracurriculars. While it's essential to be involved, colleges look for intentional commitment to organizations, sports, community activities, volunteering, and school clubs over time. Be selective with your time and ensure that your presence in any space contributes to its betterment.

If you're interested in playing sports, watch for team tryouts during your respective athletics season. If you can, get to know the coach and learn more about the team. If you think you may be interested in college sports, make sure you research the NCAA and that you're compliant with their eligibility requirements.



### 7. Save for College

Any amount you save for college can and will impact, and it's never too early! Learn about financial aid, student loans, and scholarship opportunities. For more information on college funding, visit our Tuition Rewards website to learn how you can earn points toward your college tuition at our over 440-plus member institutions.

### 8. Make Summers Count

Every summer is an opportunity to immerse yourself in your interests. Whether that's sports, theater, sciences, or literature—colleges want to see that you make an effort to continue your learning. The experiences you gain over the summer, whether work, athletics, volunteer, or other opportunities, can help put you on the path to college admissions and your future career.

### 9. Familiarize Yourself with PSAT Related Assessments

Though many schools are doing away with standardized testing, it's still important that you take these tests to ensure that your college options are not limited. Keep an eye on what kind of schools are best for you. Generally, students in the Midwest take the ACT, and students on the coasts take the SAT. For now, your focus should be on determining if the PSAT is offered at your high school. This test helps prepare you for the SAT and ACT and puts you on colleges' radars for admissions information and funding opportunities. If the PSAT is available to you, sign up!