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Top Tips for College Preparation

- 1. Work Hard and Keep Your Grades Up**
- 2. Take Challenging Courses**
- 3. Make Sure You Are a Well-Rounded Student with Extra-curricular activities**
- 4. Check the Admission Requirements Of Colleges/Universities You Might Like To Attend Early in High School**
- 5. Take & Prepare for PSAT & College Entrance Exams (ACT & SAT)**
- 6. Choose a Career That Matches Not Only Your Values, Interests, & Lifestyle, But Also the Amount of Education You Are Willing To Pursue**
- 7. Prepare to Finance College**

1. Work Hard & Keep Your Grades Up

- Many seniors say their **biggest regret** is not working hard enough their freshman year
- Check on your **class rank and GPA (grade point average)** at the end of every semester in the counseling center
- **Top 10%** of high school graduates are automatically admitted to Texas public college/universities if students apply & submit the required application materials by the admission deadline. For more info go to <http://www.collegefortexans.com/additional/top10rule.cfm>
- The first semester of the freshman year is the beginning of the **permanent high school record or transcript** that colleges and some jobs will require.
- **Study guides and effective strategies** will help with this goal. See <http://www.studygs.net/> for suggestions and high school/college study techniques <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/lrnres/handouts.html>.
- Students can juggle academic, social, extra-curricular, work, and family by managing their time wisely. For time management tips visit <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/college-success/116.html>.

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3. Make Sure You Are a Well-Rounded Student with Extra-curricular activities

- Colleges like well-rounded students whose interests and achievements will help them be an **asset to their university**.
- Become involved & actively participate in **extra-curricular activities**. Lead or excel in a few activities. Many colleges want to know the impact you had on an organization.
- Think about **community service**. Many colleges/universities like to see how students give back to their communities. There are also scholarship opportunities available for community service. Besides developing into a concerned and caring young adult because of your service, you might also discover a talent or possible career because of your volunteerism.
- Begin working on a **personal resume** to list your achievements. Visit http://www.collegeconfidential.com/college_admissions/high_school_resume.htm for an overview of this process. Resumes are often sent with college and scholarship applications.
- Analyze your admission strengths & begin assembling your **portfolio**. Portfolios also help you better analyze and understand your assets. For more info see <http://www.pbs.org/tenstepstocollege/strength.pdf>.

4. Check the Admission Requirements Of Colleges/Universities You Might Like To Attend Early in High School

- For a list of Texas Institutions of Higher Education go to <http://www.collegefortexans.com/cfbin/inst.cfm>
- For a quick list of Texas college admission & financial aid deadlines go to <http://www.window.state.tx.us/scholars/schools/>
- **Top 10%** of high school graduates are automatically admitted to Texas public college/universities if students apply in timely manner & submit the required application materials. For more info go to <http://www.collegefortexans.com/additional/top10rule.cfm>
- If you don't meet the requirements, what do you need to do to get there? These requirements are usually for **automatic admissions**; however, your application may be **eligible for review** and possible acceptance based on this review. See the policy at your future school. Call the admissions office or visit the school's website.
- Generally, the higher your class rank, GPA, and test scores, the more likely you will be admitted into **competitive colleges/universities**. *However, there is a college/university for every class rank and GPA!*
- Analyze your **admission strengths & begin assembling your portfolio** during your freshman year. This is often done as late as the senior year, but by analyzing this early in your high school career, you can better address any weak areas. For more info see <http://www.pbs.org/tenstepstocollege/strength.pdf>.

5. Take & Prepare for PSAT & College Entrance Exams (ACT & SAT)

- Sign up for the **test prep class** in the Spring of junior year or the Fall of senior year
- **Free online help at TOPCAT** – Texas Online Preparation for College Admissions Tests - <http://testprep.collegefortexans.com/>
- **Free brief study guides** available in the counseling center
- **Scholarships** at many schools are available based on these scores
- Most schools will accept the best total score from one test administration of either the SAT or the ACT. After researching the **testing policy** at your future college/university, consider taking both tests. Some students do better on the SAT which is more aptitude based and some students do better on the ACT which is more achievement based.
- **PSAT (Preliminary SAT)** additional info at <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html>. At least take this test your junior year when the results are used for National Merit Scholarship Programs.
 - For more info about this program go to <http://www.nationalmerit.org/nmsp.php>
 - For a list of corporate sponsors and their requirements (many are for children of the company's employees) go to the current PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide <http://www.nationalmerit.org/06%20Student%20Guide-NMSC%20section.pdf>.
- Take **SAT** at least in the spring of the junior year and again in the fall of the senior year.
 - Signup brochures & additional info is in the counseling center.
 - Online info & registration is available at <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/reg.htm>.
- Take the **ACT** at least in the spring of the junior year and again in the fall of the senior year.
 - Signup brochures & additional info is in the counseling center.
 - Online info & registration is available at <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/index.html>.

6. Choose a Career That Matches Not Only Your Values, Interests, Lifestyle, But Also the Amount of Education You Are Willing To Pursue

- Use **Choices Planner** to continue to explore careers. Check with counseling center if you don't remember your username and/or password. Visit <https://access.bridges.com>.
 - **Career Finder** can be used to locate careers based on interesting characteristics
 - **Interest Profiler** can be used to answer questions about your work interests and to find good career matches
 - **Work page** can be used to find careers by zones and alphabetical lists.
- Visit **Reality Check** <http://www.cdr.state.tx.us/realitycheck> to make sure your career interests will earn you enough money to support the **lifestyle** you want. This will also be important when you consider how much debt you can accrue for college and reasonably pay back.
- Narrow career choices down to ensure you will be **taking classes in high school** that further explores that career possibility.
- Keep **family & friends informed** of careers you might like. They are great assets in helping introduce you to career professionals with similar interests as yours.
- Explore the online *Occupational Outlook Handbook* at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/> to find information about jobs including the training and education needed, earnings, expected job prospects, what workers do on the job, & working conditions.
- Use the *Occupational Information Network* at <http://online.onetcenter.org/> to find jobs by skills, knowledge, abilities, work activities, interests, & work values.
- Make an appointment with the counselors to take the **Campbell's Interest Inventory**. This is a more in-depth survey that will match your interests to career choices.

7. Prepare to Finance College

- **Federal Financial Aid**
 - **FAFSA** opens up to seniors & their families beginning January 1 of their senior year. It is much easier to complete the FAFSA after filling out Income Tax from the previous year.
 - Free Application for Federal Student Aid <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>
 - General student aid info from FAFSA <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/before014.htm>
 - List of other Federal Financial Aid Programs <http://www.window.state.tx.us/scholars/aid/aidfed.html>
- **State Aid**
 - For an overview of State of Texas financial aid visit <http://www.window.state.tx.us/scholars/aid/aidtx.html>
 - State aid is also available on a first-come, first-serve basis by completing the FAFSA.
- **Scholarships** are generally merit based, but can also be need-based.
 - Scholarships for each **college/university** are usually posted on the school's website or posted in the course guide. Contact the financial aid office at the college/university of your interest for more information. Generally students need to apply to the school first before being considered for aid.
 - Many are usually awarded by departments depending on a student's major
 - Many are based on academics such as SAT/ACT scores.
 - **Community** scholarships are posted on Mabank's website. See www.mabankisd.net <http://www.mabankisd.net/mhs/scholarships.htm>
 - **Free websites** offer information about scholarships & matches you with criteria you input. You will need a username and password to access the information. After completing this information, be careful. There is a default section that is checked indicating you want to receive information from sponsors. Uncheck this and you will still be able to receive the free scholarship information. Although these sites focus on senior opportunities, there are many scholarships also available for students at other grade levels – especially those where written competitions are the focus.
 - www.fastweb.com – 1.3 million scholarships
 - www.scholarships.com – scholarship database of 3,000 sources
 - Free Texas website that lists scholarships
 - By title of scholarship <http://www.window.state.tx.us/scholars/aid/faidalpha.html>
 - By subject of scholarship <http://www.window.state.tx.us/scholars/aid/faidsubj.html>
 - If you are interested in an **athletic scholarship**, talk to your coaches. They are aware of many opportunities.

- Website listing athletic scholarships at Texas colleges and universities - <http://www.college-athletic-scholarships.com/texas.htm>
- NCAA National Collegiate Athletic Association - <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal>
 - For a database list of schools and divisions that can be sorted by state visit <http://web1.ncaa.org/onlineDir/exec/divisionListing>
- NAIA National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics - <http://naia.cstv.com/>
- NJCAA National Junior College Athletic Association - <http://www.njcaa.org/>
- **Tax Incentives**
- Information on **tax benefits for education** including Hope and Lifetime Learning tax credits are available through the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p970/index.html>
- Changes in tax laws that give certain **educational savings plans** a boost according to US News and World Report - <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/060910/18savings.htm>