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Paving the Path to Higher Education for Your Child

Do you dream of your child graduating high school and continuing on to college or vocational training? If so, you have the ability to turn that dream into a reality. The suggestions below will help you pave a path—brick by brick—that leads your child to graduation day, postsecondary education and future success.



Kindergarten - Elementary

Your child learns skills and behaviors in kindergarten and elementary school that provide a strong academic foundation for the schooling that follows. Your support in these early years directly impacts your child's school performance in a positive way, all the way through to high school graduation! You help to build the foundation for college when you:

- Ensure your child attends school regularly and on time.
- Voice your belief in your child and his ability to succeed in school and life.

- Communicate clearly your high expectations for your child's education and her school responsibilities. Let her know that your family values education.
- Note your child's progress in school by monitoring grades, report cards and standardized test reports. Attend parent-teacher conferences. Work with your child's teacher if your child is falling behind academically.
- Talk with your child about his future goals and current interests. Help your child to see the connections between goals or interests and school subjects.

Middle School / Junior High

Middle school or junior high is a time of transition. Children use critical thinking skills in school, are allowed to choose more classes, and are expected to be more independent in managing responsibilities. Schools implement these changes with high school and beyond in mind. You help prepare your child for college when you:

- Continue to practice the suggestions for the elementary years.
- Support your child's learning of time management for school, extracurricular and home responsibilities.
- Help your child learn organizational techniques for school materials and assignments.

- Encourage your child to take core classes that are as challenging as possible and elective classes that allow her to explore current interests.
- Make sure your child takes and passes the math and language arts classes that are needed in order to take college-track courses in high school. Speak to your child's teachers or guidance counselor if you are unsure about what is required.

High School

The skills your child worked on in middle school are being deepened and refined in high school. In addition to that, high school is a time of completing the checklist of "requirements" that are needed to enter college or other places of higher education. To help ensure your child graduates and is able to enter college or vocational training, you can:

- Continue to practice the suggestions mentioned earlier.
- Make sure your child is taking and passing all classes needed to meet the high school's graduation requirements.
- Have your child take the SAT or ACT test his junior or beginning of senior year in high school for admission to college, or the AccuPlacer test for admission to a community or technical college.

- Monitor your child's performance on the MCA-II tests. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments - Series II are the standardized tests in reading, math and science that Minnesota public schools give to students. The state uses them to see how well schools are teaching the state academic standards and grade-level benchmarks for the standards. A student must attain a "meets standards" score or higher to graduate.
- Encourage your child to take challenging classes, including Honors or Advanced Placement classes. If your child wants to attend college, he or she generally needs four years of language arts and math, at least three years of science, two or more years of a world language and at least two arts classes. These requirements may differ from the high school graduation requirements.
- Urge your child to become involved in a job, extracurricular or volunteer activities.
- Visit the high school guidance center to learn about its staff and resources that can help in finding and applying to postsecondary schools.
- Visit college or vocational school campuses whenever possible with your child. Read college guides to learn about schools you cannot visit.
- Create a list of schools your child would like to attend that offer a realistic chance of acceptance.
- Find out what needs to be included in applications to these colleges or vocational schools and when they are due. Do this no later than the beginning of your child's senior year.
- Learn about financial aid, scholarships and their due dates to help with college costs.

Please call the Minnesota Parent Center at (952) 838-9000 / (800) 537-2237 toll free if you have questions about this information.

Frequently Asked Question

Parent's Question: "I never went to college. My daughter is just starting high school and would like to go, but I'm not sure what to do. How can I help her?"

You have done a good job of teaching your daughter the importance of education! Learn about the classes your high school offers, and encourage your daughter to sign up for challenging ones. Her interests and the fields of study she's considering may influence her class choices as well. Make sure she is taking enough classes to fulfill both graduation and college admission requirements—many times graduation requirements aren't as rigorous as college admission requirements.

Colleges like to see well-rounded and engaged students, so encouraging your daughter to be involved in extracurricular activities, to volunteer and find a job when she is not in school is a good idea. Your daughter needs to take the ACT or SAT college admission test during her junior year or the beginning of her senior year in high school. If she's thinking about community or vocational college, she will need to take the Accuplacer test. Finally, meet your daughter's guidance counselor and visit the career planning office. From them, you can learn about the different types of schools and degrees your daughter can earn, the due dates for testing and application, and possible sources of funding school.

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The MN PIRC is a statewide project that helps families and schools build stronger ties to benefit students. It provides free training, individual assistance and information to families and schools. Minnesota Parent Center is a project of PACER Center, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization. PACER supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities.