

College Application Timeline for 9th to 11th Grade Students

9th grade:

- Take courses in all the main subjects: English, math, history, science, foreign language and the arts. No matter what your grades are, show that you are trying your best, working hard, and showing improvement.
- Strive to do your best in the introductory level courses. The best possible actions you can take this year are to improve your reading comprehension, writing ability, and computational skills.
- Your report cards track your school attendance throughout the year as well as comment on how well you fulfill your Guided Study commitments, so use the 9th grade to be exemplary in both.
- PCS kids focus more on professional or pre-professional 'careers' more than on any extra- curricular activities. After all, that is why you are here at PCS, right?! ☺ So, use this year to be the best professional child you can be! If you do want to be in some type of extra- curricular activity, consider becoming a peer tutor at PCS, get involved in the PCS student association, help on the PCS yearbook, or organize a charitable activity that takes place at PCS. Pick just one or two and do it well.

10th grade:

- Continue the good academic work you did during 9th grade and challenge yourself academically. Academics are the #1 factor when it comes to college admissions, not your SAT or ACT scores, not your recommendations, not your profession. Always make your work at PCS be your focus and keep your studies as your priority.
- See your teachers for extra help. At PCS, all the teachers are used to students coming in for extra one-on-one help. In fact, we admire kids who do that! In addition to the help these sessions offer you academically, we write about what a nice experience it was collaborating with you when we type up your college letters of recommendation.
- It is still way too early to start visiting or selecting any colleges. The best thing to do is keep having an open mind. Any 10th grader who says they already know which one they are going to definitely needs to stop, relax, and understand that there are many wonderful options out there that may actually turn out to be better for them.
- During the 10th grade, a student can try the PSAT and/or a Pre-ACT. The PSAT is the "Preliminary SAT," and the Pre-ACT is similar to a real ACT. PCS students typically take these tests during their sophomore and/or junior year. Since both are just practice tests, colleges will not see the scores. The scores are just for you and your parents to see, and these tests gives you the chance to practice taking a timed, standardized assessment.

When you get to the 11th grade, The College Board uses the scores to help select its recipients for National Merit Scholarships every year. The PSAT is taken at PCS in October. It lasts just over two hours: 50 minutes for a verbal section, 50 minutes for a math section, and 30 minutes for a writing section. The Pre-ACT, for those sophomores who elect to take it, is also offered in the spring and takes a comparable amount of time. Here are a couple of comments about these tests: The majority of students' scores go up in the 11th grade year and go up again when they get to the real SAT and real ACT. Also, no test prep is required or even advised for taking these practice tests. It is much more helpful to see what the students' natural strengths are and what the real numbers are without any special preparation. Besides, many colleges have now made SAT or ACT scores optional, so you might choose not to take these tests at all when you are in 11th or 12th grades.

11th grade:

- Do you know what the most important factor is in college admissions? The courses you take at PCS and the grades you earn in them! Your academics are the #1 factor when it comes to college admissions, not your SAT scores, not your recommendations, not your profession. Always keep the focus on your coursework and keep that as your priority.
- Junior year brings you higher-level courses at PCS. These courses are more sophisticated, the literature will be more challenging, the classroom style will be more 'collegiate' in its feel, the papers you write will be longer and will require more personal analysis, and you will be expected to participate actively in all your class discussions. That is why PCS is a college preparatory high school! Take all of this on with enthusiasm!
- Colleges who consider accepting PCS kids will weigh your professional or pre-professional 'careers' more than any extra-curricular activities. After all, that is why you are here at PCS, right?! ☺ If you do want to be in some type of extra-curricular activity, consider becoming a peer tutor at PCS, get involved in the PCS Student Association, help on the PCS yearbook, or organize a charitable activity that takes place at PCS. Pick just one of these and do it well.
- During fall of the 11th grade, a student can take another PSAT (this might be for the second time) as well as another Pre-ACT (this may also be for the second time). Since both are just practice tests, colleges will not see the scores. The scores are just for you and your parents to see, and these tests give you the chance to practice taking a timed, standardized assessment. The PSAT is taken at PCS in October. It lasts just over two hours: 50 minutes for a verbal section, 50 minutes for a math section, and 30 minutes for a writing section. The Pre-ACT is also about two hours long. No test prep is required or even advised for taking either of these practice tests. It is actually much more helpful to see what the students' natural strengths are and what the real numbers are without any special preparation. Remember that the actual SAT and ACT are now optional for many colleges, so you may not actually choose to even take the real test when it comes along.

- The PCS College Advisor will schedule the first meeting with you right at the beginning of the second semester. (That is in early February of 11th grade). There is no need to meet during the first semester. There is nothing that needs to happen during the first semester in terms of college admissions except for you to keep your focus on your academic work. By working hard in school, you are actually preparing yourself best for college and setting yourself up well for us to begin our college application work together in February.
- In May or June of the 11th grade, a student may want to take the actual SAT and/or ACT for the first time. We will discuss this when we all meet in February, and we can make a plan for it, and register for it, at that time.
- There are many opportunities to work on some preparation for the SAT and or ACT. For example, there is the official free test prep work program is offered to all of you on-line by Khan Academy and by the ACT website. I have test books in my office that I will happily give you for free. There are Princeton Review and Kaplan courses that you can pay for.
- If you feel like it would help you to visit a college for the first time, spring break during 11th grade or the summer after the 11th grade are the best times to do so. Colleges will offer a schedule of campus tours and information sessions on their websites (usually an hour long for each).
- Talk to two 11th grade teachers that you would like to ask to write letters of recommendation for you. Colleges typically require two of these letters, and your 11th grade teachers are often the best choices because of their knowledge of who you are and what your academic ability is at this point in your lives.
- You will begin working on your college application essays over the summer before the 12th grade, and the actual application forms are usually made available in August or September. We will be actively working together by this point!

12th Grade:

- By the start of the 12th grade, we will know each other well and we will be working together frequently to produce your college applications.
- Read through the PCS College Application Guide, which you received on College Night (and more copies are available in Room 701). This little book will give you the best information about applying to college.
- Re-connect with your two 11th grade teachers about writing letters of recommendation for you.
- Proofread your PCS transcript to make sure that it is perfect.
- Read what the colleges say on their own websites about their admissions procedures and standards. Each college has its own rules.

- Make a list of approximately nine colleges to which you would like to apply: three 'reach' colleges, three 'probable' colleges, and three 'safety' colleges.
- Open an account on the Common Application website as well as accounts for any conservatories or state university systems to which you'd like to apply.
- Develop an arts resume about yourself that you can include in your application.
- Edit your college essay so that it is perfect and have several people proofread it for you.
- Take the SAT or ACT so that you have a set of scores that you can submit to your colleges.
- Keep doing good work in all of your PCS courses. The colleges will see all of your grades, including those you earn for first semester of this year. In fact, you should be aware that colleges will request to see your grades for the second semester of senior year too!

General Tips:

- Read, read, read! Kids who read a lot do better in the college admissions process. They develop their comprehension skills better, they learn about verbal expression better, and they write better (all of which builds towards future SATs, ACTs, and the college essay).
- Relax and enjoy your high school years. We will help you every step of the way with all of these college tasks!