

Perspective from  
**Franklin Templeton**  
Wealth Planning

# College-bound high school juniors and seniors focus on a strong finish

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As students get closer to making a final college decision, the last two years of high school are particularly important.

Parents will want to review their financial strategy to meet the costs of college, including a review of current savings, financial and merit aid, scholarships and loan options. Students face many deadlines for standardized tests and application requirements.

Having an action plan can help families focus on multiple tasks, stay on top of deadlines and decrease stress. Consider a four year-action plan that can be helpful for families to stay on track. Review the plan at <https://franklintempletonprod.widen.net/s/kqwrh7bb9/four-year-action-plan-to-prepare-for-college-flyer-apfc-fl>.

## Considerations for junior year

While not quite crunch-time in the task of preparing for college, the junior year is busy. Parents will research deeper into financial aid and juniors will focus more on academic requirements. Since the application process begins during the first half of senior year, a student's academic record during junior year is especially important.

## Financial priorities for parents

- Determine the Student Aid Index (SAI) for federal financial aid (formerly known as the Expected Family Contribution or EFC). This calculation will drive aid awards, including federal grants, needs-based aid from colleges and student loans. Parents and students should visit [www.studentaid.gov](http://www.studentaid.gov) to access the online financial aid estimate to get a sense of what a potential aid package might look like.
- Note that the calculation on the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA) is based on family and student income from the “prior-prior” year. This means that, for a student entering college in the fall of 2025, the financial aid calculation will be based on information from the 2023 calendar year tax return (which was generally filed in April, 2024). Note that increases in income, from selling a stock or changing your Roth IRA, for example, may hurt aid.
- Review 529 account ownership to determine if changes are appropriate when considering financial aid. There have been recent changes in how financial aid is calculated. For example, distributions from 529 plans owned by non-parents such as grandparents will no longer have negative impact on the aid calculation. Learn more about changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form in this article at <https://www.franklintempleton.com/articles-us/blogs/the-new-fafsa-what-every-advisor-parent-and-student-should-know>.
- Research whether targeted colleges require the College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS Profile) application as part of their financial aid process in addition to the FAFSA application. Be aware that additional information not required on the FAFSA submittal may be needed.
- Start compiling information for FAFSA submission, including tax returns and information on savings, investments and assets for both the parents and student(s).

## Action items for students

- Prepare for standardized tests (PSAT in the fall, SAT/ACT later in the year), and consider taking a test prep course or working with a tutor.
- Build a resume including interests, summer employment, internships, community service and achievements.
- Start compiling a target list of schools.
- Begin college visits, making sure to get contact information for the admissions contact assigned to your region and email each contact about your interests.
- Before the end of the school year, meet with teachers, coaches or mentors to request letters of recommendation.
- Make sure course work, such as the number of Advanced Placement (AP) classes, reflects the academic requirements of targeted schools.
- Register with the NCAA if pursuing athletics at a Division 1 or 2 college.

## Considerations for senior year

Senior year in high school is a memorable one as students focus on a major milestone: graduation. For students planning for college, it's a year with many deadlines and final preparations.

## Financial priorities for parents

- Make sure you have enough liquid assets for college-related expenses. This may require investment transfers within college savings accounts to more conservative options.
- Consider allocating funds within a custodial account. An UGMA (Uniform Gifts to Minors Act) or UTMA (Uniform Transfers to Minors Act) account or a regular savings account for travel costs are not considered “qualified expenses” for 529 plans.
- Identify which savings accounts to tap into first for expenses based on investment, tax or financial aid considerations. See “Strategies to make the most of college savings,” at <https://franklintempletonprod.widen.net/s/zmfhgzbf2p/strategies-to-make-the-most-of-college-savings-flyer-smmcs-fl>.
- Research tax credits and deductions to help with college costs. See the IRS page, “Tax benefits for education,” at <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf>.
- Attend a college aid workshop or meet with a professional college counselor.
- Complete the FAFSA form (between December 1 and June 30 for this year’s filing). Note that many states and colleges request FAFSA submission as soon as possible after the application period opens. The earlier you can submit the FAFSA the better since it may improve prospects for receiving aid.
- Have the student complete a health care proxy when turning 18 and before going to college.

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## FAFSA deadline moved to December 1

The US Department of Education recently announced a new schedule and process for the 2025-2026 FAFSA application. The FAFSA application will be made available to all students on or before December 1, 2024.

The deadline is part of a phased rollout of the revised form, following a testing period in the fall with limited groups of users. Feedback will be incorporated to ensure the instructions are clear. For more information read the details at <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-schedule-and-new-process-launch-2025-26-fafsa-form>.

## Action items for students

- Over the summer, start working on the Common Application and college essay.
- Consider taking the SAT in the fall, depending on your previous results and the range of scores required for the schools you are targeting.
- Review social media accounts before applying to make sure posted content would not jeopardize an admissions decision.
- Establish a professional presence by creating a LinkedIn profile.
- Complete applications as soon as possible. Be aware of early decision/early action and regular decision dates. Make sure the high school has the final list to send transcripts.
- Research and apply for local scholarships.
- Schedule official campus visits when school is in session to get a better sense of the typical student environment.
- If pursuing athletics, contact coaches to schedule official on-campus visits in the fall.
- Trim your college list to a range of options: safety, match, and reach schools.

## Consult with an advisor

A financial advisor can help families navigate the entire process. From saving and financial planning and taking advantage of tax-efficient strategies, an advisor can be a critical resource. It is important to consult with a financial professional who is familiar with your individual financial situation.

Explore Franklin Templeton's resources at <https://www.franklintempleton.com/planning-and-learning/planning-for/education/benefits-of-franklin-templetons-529-plan#whyfranklintempleton529> and learn how a Franklin Templeton 529 plan can help you invest for your child's education.

**For more information, speak with your financial professional.**

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