



12TH GRADE COLLEGE PREP CHECKLIST

Congratulations! You are officially a senior in high school, which means graduation is getting closer and closer! With that comes the extra importance of staying on top of your to-do list and completing the tasks that will help you easily transition into your future.

AUGUST:

- Stay on Track — Visit with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate high school and meet college admission requirements.
- Research scholarship opportunities on the **Statewide Scholarship Bulletin Board**, and use a spreadsheet to **track important deadlines**.

SEPTEMBER:

- Ask for personal references from teachers, school counselors or employers early in the year (or at least two weeks before college and/or scholarship application deadlines). Follow your school's procedure for requesting letters of recommendation for scholarships, if it has one.
- Take (or Re-Take) the **ACT** and/or **SAT**, if you haven't already. If you need to sharpen your skills, consider taking the free, self-paced **Methodize ACT Prep** available to all South Dakota Students in grades 9-12 on SDMyLife.com.
- Watch for a Fast Track Admission letter in your home mailbox and email. This will tell you which universities you've been directly admitted to – without even having to apply!
 - **Fast Track Admission** is a new pilot program in South Dakota that lets eligible high school seniors bypass the college application process for participating universities based on their academic achievements.
 - Activate your Fast Track Admission by selecting the universities of interest on the Fast Track Activation Form found with your letter.
- **Explore Colleges** and Academic Programs
 - Talk to College Admission representatives. They are there to help you navigate the process of entering college. They can give you tips on connecting your career interests with college search criteria and finding scholarships you should consider.
 - If you haven't already, schedule a **college visit** to those schools you are interested in learning more about.
- Apply for **Scholarships**
 - Search scholarship opportunities on the **Statewide Scholarship Bulletin Board**, and use a spreadsheet to **keep track of important scholarship deadlines**.
 - Apply for college-specific scholarships by their stated **priority deadlines** for the best opportunity to receive money!
 - Call the **admissions offices, financial aid offices** and the academic program departments at the college(s) you are interested in to make sure you are aware of all your scholarship opportunities.
- Prepare for the **FAFSA**
 - The FAFSA (or Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the major factor in determining the financial aid you may qualify for.
 - **Create your account** at StudentAid.gov by setting up your FSA ID while you wait for the FAFSA application to open December 1 or before. Your FSA ID is your username and password for your StudentAid.gov account. You and anyone contributing to your FAFSA (like a parent) will need their own StudentAid.gov account.
 - Find out if your school holds an **informational event on FAFSA** and attend if offered at your school.
 - If you need additional assistance, families and students can get the answers to college planning and financial aid questions for free by contacting Mapping Your Future via email (feedback@mappingyourfuture.org) or phone (1-800-374-4072). Mapping Your Future is a nonprofit organization funded by the South Dakota Community Foundation.

OCTOBER/ NOVEMBER:

- Apply to College (Ideal Time: October-November)
 - Apply to South Dakota's technical colleges and public universities for free during the **Free College Application Period**.
 - If you've been offered Fast Track Admission to a university, you do not need to apply there. However, you will need to activate your Fast Track Admission by selecting the university or universities of interest on the Fast Track Activation Form.
 - Ask your high school to send your transcript to the colleges where you've applied.
 - For those participating in Fast Track Admission, the process of sending transcripts is authorized through the Fast Track Activation Form.
 - Share ACT, Accuplacer, and other test scores with the colleges where you've applied.
 - Pay attention to **priority deadlines** for college-specific scholarships and the requirements for particular academic programs.
- Continue to **Explore Colleges** and Academic Programs
 - Consider how college programs of study align with your interests and familiarize yourself with college admissions requirements.
 - Attend **college fairs** in your region to learn as much as you can about the colleges that interest you.
 - Schedule a college visit if you haven't already.
 - Talk to college admissions representatives who come to your high school. Admissions representatives are great at taking your career interests and other college search criteria and then pointing you in the right direction.
- Take Advantage of Coursework Opportunities
 - Visit with your school counselor on coursework opportunities that save you time and money in college.
 - Consider taking **High School Dual Credit** courses in the spring semester. (Remember to keep working hard! Dual credit courses show up on your college transcript and affect your GPA.)
 - Determine whether a **College Readiness Course** in the spring semester is right for you.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER:

- Complete the **FAFSA**
 - The 2025-2026 FAFSA application is scheduled to open December 1 or before. (This application will require the use of 2023 tax data.)
 - Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible to be considered for all funding opportunities and to meet any financial aid priority deadlines set by the college or university.

JANUARY-MARCH:

- Continue to Apply for **Scholarships**
 - Search scholarship opportunities on the **Statewide Scholarship Bulletin Board**, and use a spreadsheet to **keep track of important scholarship deadlines**.
 - Apply for college-specific scholarships by their stated **priority deadlines** for the best opportunity to receive money!
 - Call the **admissions offices, financial aid offices** and the academic program departments at the college(s) you are interested in to make sure you are aware of all your scholarship opportunities.
- Keep working hard all year — Second semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.

APRIL-MAY:

- Decision Time (Ideal Time: April)
 - With your FAFSA completed and your Fast Track Admission activated and/or college applications submitted, now **compare financial aid offers** from different colleges.
 - Talk it out with friends, family, teachers and your school counselor, and decide which college you want to attend.
 - Once you select your college, find out and follow the required steps and deadlines to enroll.
 - Keep track of and observe deadlines for sending in all required fees and paperwork.
 - Figure out your housing situation — do you plan on living at home or on campus? What are the residence halls like? Will you have a roommate?
 - Make plans to attend your college or university's early registration or new student orientation programs.
- Before Graduation
 - Request that your high school send the official final high school transcript to the college you will attend.
- Consider getting a summer job to help pay for some of your college expenses, and prepare a **budget** to manage your money while in college.
- Graduate and celebrate!