

Traveling the Road to College



A Guide for Parents

Helping Your Child Prepare for College

This guide discusses steps you can take to help your child prepare for college. This adventure is an opportunity for you to help them learn life-long values and priorities and see how to successfully complete a major project. Working together will be a great experience and will help your child both grow and mature. For your child, this will be the first of many crucial life decisions they will make. It can overwhelm them. It is scary! Their procrastination may not be laziness . . . It could well be fear! They are facing issues and decisions they are not fully equipped to make, and they know it. They need you, and this is why they have you – to help them make good decisions on issues that are beyond their maturity level.

Your best resource is your child's counselor. Counselors have access to excellent publications and computerized materials and know the right people to contact at the colleges and universities you want to explore.

Here is a year by year roadmap for your child's future at K Kiowa County High School. I hope you will find it useful.

Freshman Year

The #1 priority for college-bound freshman: Work hard and **GET GOOD GRADES!!!** The first three years' grades are critical when colleges assess your child's performance. Doing poorly as a freshman cannot be fixed when they are seniors.

When a student becomes a freshman, everything starts to "count." Freshman grades are used in determining GPA. Freshman activities, honors, and awards can all be listed on college and scholarship applications. Freshman courses, grades, and credits all become part of the student's transcript. In high school every course counts--electives carry the same weight on GPA as core classes--9th graders sometimes need to be reminded of that! During freshman year, students begin to identify their personal abilities, aptitudes, interests, talents, and skills. These identified areas are important criteria to use in building a strong college profile.

Monitor academic progress. Make sure that you see all progress reports and report cards. Do not assume that someone will contact you if there is a problem. Provide encouragement and support, making certain that your son or daughter understands that freshman grades are very important. Encourage your son or daughter to become involved in a wide variety of activities.

In addition to asking students to list their high school activities, many college and scholarship applications ask for evidence of leadership. If your son or daughter has leadership potential, encourage him/her to develop his/her leadership skills by being an officer of a club, captain of a team, etc. Depth of involvement in any activity (e.g. four years in band, soccer, etc.) is also important because it shows focus and commitment.

Encourage your son or daughter to also participate in activities outside of school (e.g., church, scouting, recreational sports). Any type of volunteer work or community service is particularly impressive on an application.

- Tip: During your son or daughter's freshman year, start keeping a list of school activities, honors, awards, leadership positions, employment, volunteer work, community activities, etc. Keep a list and include everything! If you have a home computer, start an "Activities & Awards" file and update it often. This will be very helpful when your son or daughter is required to list activities, honors, etc., on college and scholarship applications.
- Tip: One idea is to keep a pizza box on the top of the refrigerator to store significant student work you would like to keep, award certificates, and other information for future reference.

In the spring, review your son's or daughter's pre-enrollment schedule and make certain he/she has selected the most appropriate courses for his/her sophomore year. Check to see that courses selected for sophomore year meet the requirements for admission to the colleges for which he/she plans to apply.

Help your son or daughter plan meaningful activities for the summer. Many excellent summer programs are available on college campuses. Of course, many of the more traditional summer activities can also be very worthwhile. Your son or daughter could, for example, join an athletic team, take a course, mow yards, babysit, perfect a skill, take lessons, develop a hobby, read, and/or volunteer. If you have not yet done so, start a college savings account.

Your wisdom on the realities of the work world will help them think about their future. Help your child develop good study skills. Evaluate their past performance in grade school and junior high school. If they need extra help on skills or specific academic subjects, help them find the resources and motivation to strengthen these areas.

Meet your child's counselor. Talking with the counselor early in your child's career at the high school will help him/her know your concerns and gain insights into your child. He/She will be better prepared to assist you and your child over the next four years.

Sophomore Year

The #1 priority again is **GET GOOD GRADES**. There is no substitute for this. Colleges and future employers want to know what your child does with their abilities. Good performance in their academic subjects is crucial. Evaluate your child's academic plans for the next three years. Make sure the courses they plan to take will prepare them for college. If you have questions about these issues, call or visit his/her counselor. Make sure your child understands and explores career options.

Continue to monitor academic progress.

Continue to encourage your son or daughter to be involved in activities and to develop leadership skills. Doing community service will be important for college scholarships.

Junior Year

The junior year is when students should seriously begin examining their post-secondary options, take college tests, visit colleges, and start searching for scholarships.

Guess what the #1 priority is! **GET GOOD GRADES!** There is no substitute for excellent academic performance!

Continue to monitor academic progress.

Continue to encourage your son or daughter to be involved in activities and to develop leadership techniques.

Talk about college options. Encourage your child to visit many college representatives that come to the school.

Attend the College Planning Conference held at Newton High School or Butler Community College (usually in November).

There are over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. As you start looking at colleges, consider the following: Location/Size/Facilities/Majors/Reputation/Cost/Competitiveness/Community.

Early in the selection process, determine what is important to you and to your son or daughter. After you have determined what you are looking for in a college, you can then begin to search for more colleges that meet your criteria. A wealth of information is available on the Internet.

- Tip: Early in the college selection process, have a frank discussion with your son or daughter with regard to the amount of money you are able and/or willing to contribute to his/ her college education.
- Tip: Once you have identified colleges that you would like to investigate further, contact the admissions offices to be placed on the mailing lists. You can usually do this online or you can call the admissions offices directly. You will then receive information on visitation days and upcoming events.
- Your child should take the ACT or SAT this year. These tests are designed to evaluate your child based on what the college bound student should know. Many scholarships are awarded based on a student's ACT or SAT score.

Your child has one college visit during second semester this year. This is an excellent way for them to see the reality of college life. The best resource for finding out about visitation days is the calendar on the KCHS website (www.usd422.org). If you have a specific college you want to visit, call the college or your counselor to find out their visitation days.

Carefully select courses for senior year.

Be certain that senior courses meet all requirements for graduation, for the college(s) your son or daughter may attend, and for the NCAA Clearinghouse (www.eligibilitycenter.org) if they plan to play sports. Encourage your son or daughter to continue taking college prep courses, even though he/she may express an interest in “taking it easy his/her senior year.” Colleges want to see that seniors are continuing to follow a strong college preparatory program. Therefore, they will generally request that a list of the senior courses be included with the application and/or transcript.

- Tip: Some colleges require students to take math placement tests before registering for freshman courses. A student who does not take math as a senior is more likely to have difficulty with these tests. You should encourage your son or daughter to sign up for a math course his/her senior year.

Start checking into scholarships.

Although students will complete the majority of their scholarship applications during the first half of their senior year, you should start looking at scholarship possibilities during junior year.

- At the end of the year, update the “Activities and Awards” file. (Still in the pizza box!)

Help your son or daughter choose meaningful activities for the summer months. You may want to consider one of the summer programs many colleges offer to outstanding juniors. Students can also work, volunteer, and/or do community service.

Continue to put money into your college savings account.

Senior Year

The senior year is when everything comes together. It is also the year in which students see the rewards of their hard work and planning.

First Semester:

The #1 priority: Continue to **GET GOOD GRADES!** This is no time for your child to coast in their studies. A strong finish to their high school academic career ensures good performance in college. Help your child strengthen any areas of academic or study skill weakness now. Your child should narrow their college possibilities to three to five schools. They should apply to these schools before Christmas to beat the rush. Some colleges will have even earlier application and/or scholarship deadlines.

Students need to know that many colleges request a seven semester transcript. At the end of the year, high schools also forward a final transcript (which includes all senior grades) to the college the student plans to attend. Help your son or daughter set up a calendar for

the year. Use this calendar to record test dates, application deadlines, college visitation days, etc.

KCHS allows seniors college visits. However, many Senior Days take place on Saturday which would provide the opportunity for your child to visit additional colleges. Your child should meet with college representatives when they come to the high school.

Attend the College Planning Conference held at Pratt Community College.

Apply for all scholarships you qualify for that accept applications during the fall and early winter. The counselor can help you with this process.

Your child can re-take the SAT or ACT if they wish. This should be done during the fall semester. Take a look at your son or daughter's previous scores and determine if he/she needs to retake any of these tests. The highly competitive colleges will be looking for ACT scores of 30+ and SAT scores of 1300+. The moderately competitive colleges will be looking for ACT scores in the 25+ range and SAT scores in the 1100 range. For the majority of their programs, most state universities look for ACT scores of 20-23 and SAT scores of around 1000. If your son or daughter is hoping to be accepted into a competitive college or program, or if he/she is applying for scholarships, having high test scores could be important. If your son or daughter does not score well on the ACT and/or the SAT, this does not mean that he/she will not be accepted into the college of his/her choice or that your son or daughter will not be successful in college. Admissions officers look at many criteria when evaluating applicants, and there are many students who do not do well on these tests, but who are nevertheless successful in college.

Obtain and complete college applications in the fall. Applications for some colleges will be in the KCHS Counseling Office. Call, write, or email the college(s) and request applications for admissions, scholarships, and financial aid. You may also want to check the Internet as more and more colleges are making it possible for students to apply electronically. Almost all applications will require a high school transcript, and many will have one or more sections for the high school counselor to complete. As a parent you should do the following:

- Make certain that the student portion of the application is completed neatly, thoroughly, and accurately. Do not complete it for your child.
- See that the application is given to the counselor at least one week before the deadline if there is a section for the counselor to complete. Counselors have many responsibilities and will have numerous applications to complete between Oct. and Feb. Understand that it takes time and thought to complete an application correctly and/or write a letter of recommendation.
- The request for a recommendation letter should be put in writing, explaining exactly what is needed, when it is needed, and instructions on where to submit it when it has been completed. If the teacher is to mail it, he/she should be provided with an addressed, stamped envelope.
- Tip: A thank you note to a teacher who has written a recommendation would be appropriate and very much appreciated.

- Tip: Make sure that all applications are completed and mailed well before the deadlines. Always make a copy of everything you send.
- Tip: It is important that your son or daughter apply to at least one “safe” college. This is a college to which he/she will definitely be accepted, and one that you can definitely afford. It is also important to have an acceptance in hand to fall back on, for transfer purposes, during freshman year in the event your student does not have success at his/her college attended.
- Tip: Many colleges will send a postcard to let you know they have received your application. If you do not hear from the college, you may want to call to make sure they have received your application and that they have all of the information they need.

Apply for financial aid and scholarships.

- Tip: File your income tax return early this year. As soon after January 1st as possible, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) should be completed. The FAFSA is a federal form that asks for information on income and assets. Approximately 3-10 weeks after you have mailed your FAFSA, you will receive an SAR (student aid report) which will inform you of your EFC (estimated family contribution). This is the amount they have determined you can afford to pay for your son’s or daughter’s education that year. If the cost of the college is more than your EFC, you have a financial need and should be eligible for financial aid. This aid, however, may come as loans. You are encouraged to complete the FAFSA online at www.fafsa.ed.gov to get speedier results.
- A Financial Aid Night will be held at KCHS in January. Financial aid will be explained in greater depth, and you’ll have the opportunity to ask questions about the FAFSA.

Second Semester:

The #1 priority remains **GET GOOD GRADES!** This is no time to take a breather! Colleges review how your child performs academically this semester and may use this information for their final acceptance decision. Now is the time to fill out the FAFSA form. The Federal and State programs require it for all their educational aid. Most colleges use it as the basis for evaluating your need for aid. It is based on your federal income tax information, so it can’t be done until after January 1st of your child’s senior year. Get your taxes done early, and mail in the FAFSA paperwork or apply online as soon as possible. Your child should make their final college choice and notify all colleges that have accepted them.

Once you have notified the chosen college of your acceptance, make housing arrangements if your child will live on campus. College dorms fill up quickly; do not delay this step.

Some final recommendations:

Visit the financial aid office of every college you visit. You will learn more every time you do this and get adept at handling this process. This part of the college search and decision process can be very stressful, especially for you!

Your child's academic performance is crucial. Stress to them how critical good grades are for their future success in life. The first three years in high school are examined closely by the colleges, but they also pay attention to the senior year's grades and courses taken, too.

Pace yourself through this process. There are many steps in this adventure. Starting early can help reduce your stress and give you time to explore more options and make wise choices.

Above all, enjoy this time with your child. It can be the most rewarding time you have together as you help them face the big decisions of life. Enjoy your child as you watch them grow and mature. Your involvement with them during this adventure will lay the groundwork for how you relate to them as adults. This will be one of the last significant stages in their lives as children and for you as the parent of a child. You will see depth of character in them you may never have seen before. They will have the opportunity to experience your wisdom and love as they face these difficult issues. Your support and encouragement will help them be successful and help them face these difficult decisions with confidence

FYI:

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

Colleges will use some, if not all, of the information listed below when determining whether or not to accept an applicant. Individual colleges differ in how they evaluate this information. For example, one college may place a great deal of importance on test scores, while another college may not.

- Grade Point Average
- Class Rank
- Strength of subjects
- ACT and/or SAT score
- Recommendations
- Activities/Awards
- Personal Essay
- Interviews

GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

Even though individual colleges use their own criteria when evaluating prospective students, virtually all colleges consider a student's GPA to be an important criterion for college admissions. GPA is simply the average of a student's semester grades, starting with the freshman year. At Kiowa County High School we use a 4.0 scale where any A = 4, B = 3, C = 2,

D = 1. Since college applications are generally completed during the fall of the senior year, the GPA at the end of the junior year is very important.

CLASS RANK

Class rank is used to show where a student stands academically in relation to the other members of his/her graduating class. The student who has the highest GPA is number one in the class, the student with the second highest GPA is number two, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to have a high GPA in order to have an impressive class rank. Class rank is presented with the student's place in class followed by the total number of students (e.g. 13 out of 32). Rank can be particularly important when applying for scholarships because many scholarships stipulate that a student must be in the top 10% (or 20%, 25 %, etc.) of his/her class.

TEST SCORES

The student will have the opportunity to have ACT and SAT test scores sent to selected colleges. Therefore, they need to do their very best on the tests. Have your child talk to the counselor to determine if he/she should take the ACT, the SAT, or both.

TRANSCRIPT

Almost all college and scholarship applications will request that a transcript be submitted with the application. A student's transcript provides the college admissions and scholarship committees with important objective data. Usually they will request an official transcript. This means that the transcript must include a signature, stamp, or seal.

A transcript can be requested by completing a Transcript Request Form, which is available in the counselor's office or on the KCHS website.

COLLEGE RECOMMENDED COURSES

Four-year colleges recommend students complete certain college preparatory courses while in high school. These generally include:

- Four credits of English, one each year
- Four credits of Math--Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, etc. (plan to include a math senior year)
- Four credits of science
- 3 credits of Social Studies
- 2 credits of the same foreign language
- 1 credit of fine arts

- 1 credit of computer application

Students admitted into college without all of these courses may be required to take remedial and/or additional courses at college. College bound students should try to complete all of the above recommended courses if possible. Actually, some of the more competitive schools and/or programs consider the above as “minimum requirements.” As a general rule, students should take as much college preparatory math, science, English, foreign language, and social studies as they can handle academically and as will fit into their four-year high school plans.

COLLEGE TESTING

SAT I (Scholastic Assessment Test) – a college entrance examination, generally taken during the junior and/or senior years.

ACT (American College Test) – a college entrance examination, generally taken during the junior and/or senior year. Students receive scores in English, Reading, Math and Science Reasoning, as well as a Composite score. An optional writing portion is also offered.

SAT II: Subject Tests – one hour tests that measure a student’s knowledge of specific subjects, and his/her ability to apply that knowledge. Some selective colleges require these tests.

WHY TAKE THE ACT AND/OR THE SAT?

Almost all four-year colleges require scores for either ACT or the SAT I. Many colleges will accept scores from either test; however, some colleges require, or prefer, scores from one or the other. Students should check the college’s catalog for information regarding which test a college may require or prefer. Students may retake these tests as many times as they want; colleges will generally use their highest composite score. In addition, some schools will use the scores for placement in classes. It is important for students to take these tests no later than spring of their junior year so that they will have time to retake them if their scores are not as high as they need to be.

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR THE ACT AND THE SAT

You are encouraged to register online. However, students can pick up registration packets and study guides at the KCHS Counseling Office. Students need to read the study guides, take the practice tests, and then go over what they missed on the practice tests. To help students with additional preparation for both the ACT and the SAT I, there are numerous books and computer programs available. A strong college preparatory curriculum in high school is, of course, the best preparation for both the ACT and the SAT.

The ACT is generally offered in September, October, December, February, April, and June. The SAT I is generally offered in October, November, December, January, March, May, and June. The SAT II is offered on the same dates as the SAT I. Registration deadlines are four to five

weeks prior to each test date. Students should register online or complete registration forms a couple of months before they plan to take the test. Approximately two to three weeks before the test date, registered students receive “tickets” to enter the test along with instructions. Both the ACT and the SAT I are given on Saturday mornings and take approximately four hours. Students receive their scores four to eight weeks after the test date. All KCHS juniors will be given the ACT free of charge in April during a school day.

HOW IS THE ACT SCORED?

The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, Reading, Math, and Science Reasoning. Students are given a score for each test, with scores ranging from 1 to 36. These four scores are then “averaged” to arrive at a Composite score. Since there is no penalty for guessing, a student should answer every question. In February 2005, ACT began offering an optional writing section. Students will receive a rating of 1-6 from two independent scorers, and the scores will be added together to get the writing score.

NCAA REQUIREMENTS

Before an athlete can play a sport or receive an athletic scholarship at a Division I or II college, he/she must meet specific academic criteria as set forth by the NCAA. Because the NCAA has such specific requirements, and because these requirements can be confusing, it is very important that athletes discuss these courses with their guidance counselors. Athletes need to make sure that their four-year plans include courses that will satisfy NCAA requirements. For more information, visit www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.

TWO-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

Although only 20% of today’s careers require a four-year college degree, 85% require education/training beyond high school. A four-year college education is not for everyone. In fact, students can often best prepare for many of today’s high growth career fields by attending a community college or technical school.

Students should take as many academic courses in high school as possible. However, community colleges and technical schools will generally accept anyone with a high school diploma or GED. As a general rule, students who apply to a community college or technical school are not required to have followed a college prep curriculum in high school, nor are they required to take the ACT or SAT. (Please keep in mind that to be eligible for certain scholarships, an ACT or SAT score will be required.)

Students who prefer to take courses that relate directly to a particular career, and/or students who enjoy a more hands-on approach to education should consider a community college or technical school as a post-secondary option. Students may also begin their education at a two-year college and then transfer to a four-year college to complete their bachelor’s degree. Students need to check with the four-year school to ensure that the community college credits will be accepted.

MAKING THE MOST OF A COLLEGE VISIT

The spring/summer of the junior year is an excellent time to take college visits. If you do this during the school year, please remember to prearrange this absence with the counselor. If you wish, the counselor will set up the college visit for the student if the student fills out a College Visit Request Form which can be found on the KCHS website or in the counselor's office. If you make your college visits during the summer months, however, be sure to revisit the colleges you are seriously considering in order to get a feel for what the college is like when it is in "full swing."

In order to plan a college visit, call the admissions office several weeks ahead of time. Explain that you are the parent of a junior and that you wish to set up a college visit. You might first ask if they have any visitation days, preview days, or open houses scheduled. These programs can be very informative for prospective students and their parents. They generally include tours, information on specific majors, and sessions on financial aid. If you want to visit a college on a day when no specific program is planned, you can schedule individual appointments and tours through the admissions office.

- Prepare for your visit by learning as much as you can about the college.
- Have questions ready.
- Take a tour and note how the students look, the cleanliness of the campus, the atmosphere, the size, etc.
- Many colleges now offer group information sessions for parents and students. Attend if possible.
- Talk to someone in the department your son or daughter is considering as a major (e.g., business, education, etc.). Be sure to check out the labs, computers, and other facilities for that major. Also, ask what kinds of jobs their graduates get, what the average starting salary is, etc. If your son or daughter is a particularly outstanding student, check to see if the university has an Honors Program. Honors Programs offer a variety of unique opportunities for students who qualify. These may include priority scheduling, access to low enrollment honors courses, and/or honors housing.
- Visit a dorm, ask to see a room, and if possible, eat in one of the student cafeterias. You may want to also check out the freshman dorm options so that you will know which dorm to request if your son or daughter decides to attend that college.
- Inquire about special programs, activities, or sports of interest to your son or daughter (e.g., band, co-op, tutoring, intramural sports, Greek life, etc.)
- Visit the student union and talk to students. Ask them what they think of the school, what they like about it, what they dislike, what they do on weekends, etc. Students are generally friendly, honest, and happy to give you their opinions. (Consider personal opinions with care, however.) If you are concerned that your son or daughter may have difficulty in being accepted, or if there are aspects of your son or daughter's academic record that you would like to explain (e.g. low grade due to an illness), make an appointment with an admissions counselor. Take a transcript with you.
- If you are interested in financial assistance, ask if you can make an appointment with a counselor in the financial aid and/or scholarship office. If you would like information on scholarship possibilities, be sure to have a transcript with you.

- Three concerns that parents seem to have relate to the safety of the campus, the practice of having T.A.s (teaching assistants) teach classes and/or labs in place of professors, and the ability of students to schedule the classes they need in order to graduate in four years.
- An admissions representative or tour guide should be able to address these issues, as well as answer any other questions or concerns you may have. In order to get a feel for what's happening at a college, pick up a campus newspaper.
 - Tip: Have your son or daughter write a thank-you note if you had a personal interview or conference.
 - Tip: Once you start contacting colleges and making visits, start a filing system. In this filing system, keep notes on contacts made and subjects discussed. Include names, dates, etc. Also keep copies of all correspondence, completed applications forms, etc.
 - Tip: Print a College Visit Summary Sheet from the KCHS website and take one to each college visit.

With thanks to friends at Goddard, Great Valley, Wichita, Olathe, Blue Valley & Lawrence. Please always check with the counselor and/or websites for the most up-to-date information.