



STRATH HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE

A TO DO LIST FOR STUDENTS:

This “TO-DO” list is taken largely, with permission, from the Pennsylvania Career guide that we distribute to all sophomores each year. It is divided into three categories:

1. C: designates the four-year college bound track.
2. T: indicates other postsecondary training.
3. W: designates heading directly into the work force.

Whichever track a student follows, consider three critical points:

1. Keep your grades as high as possible. There is a large difference between a B (3.0) and a B+ (3.3) in the impact on your GPA.
2. Choose challenging courses.
3. Schedule counselor appointments for guidance through this process regardless of your post-secondary goals.

Although there is no specific monthly guide for sophomores, it is recommended that you:

1. Use the Naviance program (introduced by the counselors) frequently to gain a better understanding of your personality, explore possible careers, and majors. This will assist you when you begin considering specific colleges, technical schools, or jobs.
2. Take the ACT Plan seriously (given in school to the entire class in the spring). SHHS administers this test (normed for sophomores) to every student to help you determine which college entrance test may serve you best in your post-high school plans (ACT or SAT format).
3. Explore and build new interests in extracurricular activities and service projects in school or the community.

Fall of Junior Year:

C- Take the PSAT in October (sign up in the guidance office in September). Compare your ACT-Plan results from the spring of tenth grade to your PSAT results to decide which test may be better suited to your strengths. Make sure that you do as well as possible in every class. Each year is important, but junior year is the last set of grades that an admissions representative will see on your transcript. Begin a discussion with your parents about college and what restrictions (financial, geographic or otherwise) may be in place before you begin thinking about specific schools.

T- Take the PSAT in October. Not all two year schools require them, but the test will give you a good idea of your strengths and areas that may need improvement before applying to schools.

W- Take an interest inventory or skills test like the ASVAB. Think about what kind of work you might want to do and what you enjoy.

Spring of Junior Year:

C- Meet with your counselor to discuss possible colleges and universities. Find out if the schools you are looking at prefer the ACT or SAT (most schools have no preference, but it is a good idea to check). Register for SAT I, SAT II (if applicable), ACT and AP exams as needed January through June. It is time to begin asking teachers to write letters of recommendation for you. This is also a great time to visit nearby schools and take advantage of local college fairs. It is not too early to register with the NCAA Clearinghouse if you plan on playing a sport at Division I or Division II College at the following website: http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA_EMS/NCAA.html . Finally, the summer following junior year is a good time to write and edit your college essays while you are less stressed!

T- Begin asking bosses, teachers or other people if they will be willing write letters of recommendation for you. Meet with your counselor for help exploring two-year and technical school programs. Visit nearby technical schools or community colleges.

W- Use the career center and your counselor to search for summer opportunities that may help you decide what type of work you enjoy (and equally important what you do not enjoy).

September of Senior Year:

C- Get your applications and financial aid information from the schools you are interested in attending. If you plan on applying through an early action or early decision program, you should begin working on these applications now. Also, begin working on and submitting applications to colleges that have rolling admissions. Many colleges determine housing on a first come, first serve basis, so applying early to these schools can be advantageous. There are approximately 66 colleges and universities in Pennsylvania offering rolling admissions, including Penn State, University of Pittsburgh, West Chester University and Temple University. Also, begin searching for applicable scholarships. Some deadlines are as early as December.

T- Figure out where you want to be a year from now; plan to get training in that field. Learn as much about that career as you can, including getting a part time job or volunteering in that field. Meet with your counselor to help refine you list of school and technical programs.

W- Talk to you guidance counselor and explore the career center in guidance to get a better idea of what kind of work you want to do. Do your interests lie in a career that offers apprenticeships?

October:

C- This is the high season for college visits. Make sure you take advantage of the college admission representatives visiting your school. Take the SAT or ACT again if you are not satisfied with your score. Many schools only consider the highest of all scores that you receive even across different test dates. It is important to know the policies of all schools on your list. Make official transcript requests for any early decision or rolling deadlines from the guidance office a minimum of three weeks before the college deadline.

T- Figure out how post high school training fits in with your career plans. What kind of training will you need to do what you want to do and how long will it take? Are you hoping to earn a certification or an associate's degree? Will you be able to work while going to school?

W- Figure out and list your strengths, experiences and accomplishments. Also, list any jobs you have had in the past. Would your interests lead you to starting your own business? If so, look for resources on entrepreneurship.

November:

C- Continue editing your college essays or writing samples, and make sure to have them proofread. Submit applications for early decision, early action, and rolling programs.

T- Start researching what schools will have the training programs that you will need to get into your field of choice. You may be looking for degrees provided by a local community college, or something more specific such as studying electronics in a school that specializes in it.

W- Use the list of strengths, experiences and accomplishments you created to begin assembling your resume. Use the career center to develop a resume for job interviews. Ask your counselor about mock interview options.

December:

C- Go to the FAFSA website (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

www.FAFSA.ed.gov Also, check to see if any of your schools require the CSS Profile to be submitted as additional financial aid information. **Call admissions to make sure that your schools have received any information you or your school have sent including transcripts, letters of recommendation or official test scores.**

T- Begin visiting the schools you are interested in attending. Just because a school is close or in the same town doesn't mean you shouldn't spend the time to conduct a proper visit and tour of the facilities. Fill out the FAFSA and look for financial aid opportunities.

W- Polish your resume. The holiday break is a good time to post your resume online and mail it to potential employers in a field that interests you. Don't forget to ask teachers or counselors if they would be willing to be a reference for your resume.

January:

C- Work on your FAFSA and CSS Profile (if required). This requires your tax information so you need your parents to gather that as soon as possible. Do not wait until your parents have completed their official tax documents, the information can be estimated. Many priority deadlines occur in February for financial aid or scholarships. Begin a serious hunt for scholarships. Use the career center scholarship bulletin, the internet and your counselor to assist you. Be aware that schools consider your first semester grades from senior year in the form of the official midyear report that is automatically sent to all schools listed on the transcript request form you filled out.

T- Make a list of deadlines. Begin applying to schools and assemble your essays or portfolio if needed.

W- Work on planning a budget for yourself. Figure out what your fixed expenses are likely to be and don't forget to budget for incidental expenses that crop up from time to time.

February:

C- Complete the FAFSA and CSS Profile and send them electronically to your school choices. Continue searching and applying for possible scholarships.

T- Keep deadlines in mind and continue the application process. Follow up with schools to ensure that nothing is missing from your application. This gives you time to provide anything you may have forgotten. Bear in mind many schools may require you to come to campus to take their own placement test.

W- Work on your resume again, including your most recent part time employment. Remember, you're about to step up to full-time work, so think about what it is you want your resume to say about you, and revise it again.

March:

C- Watch the mail and your email, you should be hearing from schools soon. You should also receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) electronically in response to any financial aid applications.

T- Time to wait. Watch the mail and look for acceptance letters as well as notifications for scholarships or financial aid.

W- Time to start learning even more about potential employers; research companies that interest you to see what kinds of jobs they offer and how you would fit into the company. This kind of homework isn't just learning where to apply, it is learning about the mission and goals of the company. Having this knowledge will come in handy when you are interviewing.

April:

C- Wait until you have heard from your preferred school before you decline any offers. Also, make sure to meet any other deadlines such as housing, additional financial aid or scholarships. Make additional visits to schools and talk to your counselor as needed to help make your decision.

T- Continue watching the mail and email for acceptance letters and financial aid offers from schools.

W- Talk to the people you want to use as references. Get their permission before listing them; teachers, coaches, counselors and employers are all good choices. Make sure to get summer contact information for those who will be on vacation during the summer.

May:

C- Make your final college choice. The enrollment deadline for most schools is May 1, so make sure that you mail the form and deposit check to the school you selected.

Decline any offers that other colleges have made to you so that the spot being held for you can be given to the next person in line. Take any Advanced Placement (AP) Exams if possible; they can help you earn college credit before you begin.

T- Be prepared to begin any training or courses that might start before the usual fall semester begins. Some year long or two-year programs require you to begin earlier in order to complete them.

W- Get ready to get a job. Prepare a cover letter and practice interviewing, then get out there. A final piece of advice: don't just jump at the first job that comes along. Be sure to choose a job that fits both your needs and your skills.