

Provided by ACT, in partnership with the
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Preparing Your Student for College and Career

How to Help your Student
Achieve their Best



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Like all parents or guardians, you want your student to achieve his or her full potential. That's why it's important to support your student's preparedness for college or a career in partnership with your student's teachers, counselors and school administrators.

This booklet:

- Explains what is meant by college and career readiness, as defined by ACT, Inc., the not-for-profit organization that developed the ACT college entrance exam.
- Provides tips to help your student achieve more academically during their high school career.
- Offers suggestions to prepare your student for college or a career.

Decades of Research Define College and Career Readiness

You may hear teachers, school administrators or school district officers discuss how they are working to make sure that every child in their class, school or district is “college and career ready.”

“College” refers to two- and four-year colleges, trade or technical schools. “Career” refers to any profession a student chooses to pursue after high school or college.

ACT is the only organization with more than five decades of research data showing exactly what happens to high school graduates once they get to college or to work and how they can maximize success—based on their preparation from kindergarten through high school.

ACT research shows that the same level of academic achievement is needed for success in college or a career. This research reveals:

- What employers expect employees to know before they enter the workforce
- What students should know to succeed in high school and stay on track for college or career success
- What colleges expect freshman to know when they enter college

College and Career Readiness Defined

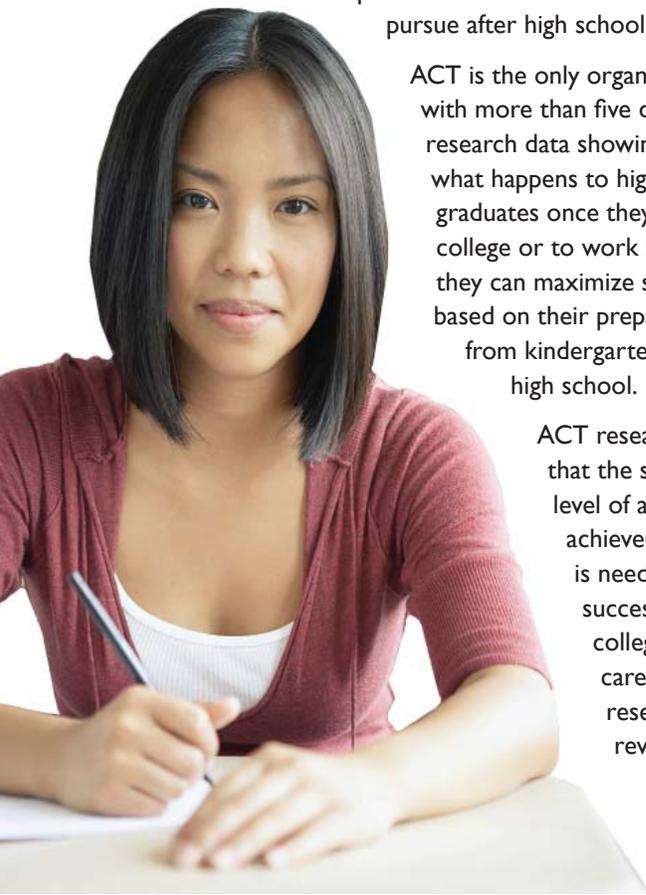
The research also supported ACT's definition of college and career readiness as the acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll in and succeed in credit-bearing first-year courses at a postsecondary institution (such as a two- or four-year college, trade school, or technical school) without the need for remediation. Remediation means that a student may be required by a college to take courses to acquire skills that he or she should have learned in high school.

ACT College Readiness Standards Adopted Nationally

ACT developed college readiness standards that are detailed descriptions of the skills and knowledge associated with what students are likely to know and to be able to do as they progress through school.

The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in college and careers.

Secondary schools (grades 7-12) and two- and four-year colleges, recognize these standards of preparedness.



ACT's definition of college and career readiness was adopted by the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

ACT also developed college readiness benchmarks to establish college readiness as measured by performance scores on EXPLORE®, PLAN®, or the ACT® test. These exams are given at prescribed stages in a student's pre-high school and high school years.

EXPLORE is a test for 8th graders that assesses their knowledge and skills in English, reading, mathematics, and science. PLAN is an exam for 10th graders that measures a student's knowledge in the same subjects. The ACT test is primarily for high school juniors and seniors and also assesses a student's skills in these four major subjects.

ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks are the minimum English, reading, mathematics, and science assessment scores required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college course.

Described in this chart are the benchmark scores for each

For more information about the Common Core Standards go to: www.corestandards.org/

subject area on each test—EXPLORE, PLAN and the ACT. To be on target for college and career, you want your student to meet these benchmark scores.

Finally, remember that colleges look for more than an entrance test score. They want applicants who have talents and passions and who work hard. Grades, volunteering, personal essays and extracurricular activities are important components of the college application process. Colleges want diversity in their student body—diversity of ideas, of backgrounds, of regions, and of experiences.

Majority of Parents Support College Readiness

According to a March 9, 2011, MetLife survey, 93 percent of secondary school parents said it's important that all students graduate from high school ready for college. When asked if college readiness should be one of the highest priorities in education, 73 percent of parents said yes.

Businesses that were surveyed stressed the importance of teamwork. They also rated critical thinking (99 percent), problem solving (99 percent), and strong writing skills (97 percent) as absolutely essential or very important.

ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks

Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance or of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. These college courses include English Composition,

College Algebra, Biology, and an introductory social science course. Based on a nationally representative sample, the Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and as such represent a *typical* set of expectations. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are:

| College Course | Subject Area Test | EXPLORE Benchmark | PLAN Benchmark | ACT Benchmark |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| English Composition | English | 13 | 15 | 18 |
| Social Sciences | Reading | 15 | 17 | 21 |
| College Algebra | Mathematics | 17 | 19 | 22 |
| Biology | Science | 20 | 21 | 24 |

So what's the best way to ready students for life after high school? ACT recommends that your student take the most rigorous (challenging) classes offered at his or her school.

If a student takes challenging courses, he or she will be prepared for the ACT college entrance exam. Because the ACT is an achievement test—based on what students actually learn in school—taking challenging classes will not only prepare your student for the ACT test, it will also prepare your student for college and career.

Why College Preparation in High School is Important

A first-year college student that is not college-ready may be required by a college to take the school's remedial classes to acquire the required skills in English, math, science or reading. Remedial classes cover the skills the student should have learned in high school.

Remedial classes are not free; students must pay tuition to take them. Students do not receive college credit for remedial classes.

This results in a student spending more time and money to complete a college degree and delays their entrance into the workforce.

It's better for the student to learn these skills in high school.

As you work with your student during their pre-high school and high school years, consider these questions:

- Is your student prepared for college and career?
- Is your student taking core courses in high school—four years of English, three years of math, three years of science and three years of social science?
- Are his or her core courses challenging and rigorous enough?
- Are your younger children on target for college and career?
- How can you work with your student's teachers and counselors to be sure your student acquires the knowledge and skills needed to perform or exceed readiness benchmarks?

Learn more about college preparation course requirements at:
www.actstudent.org/college/require.html

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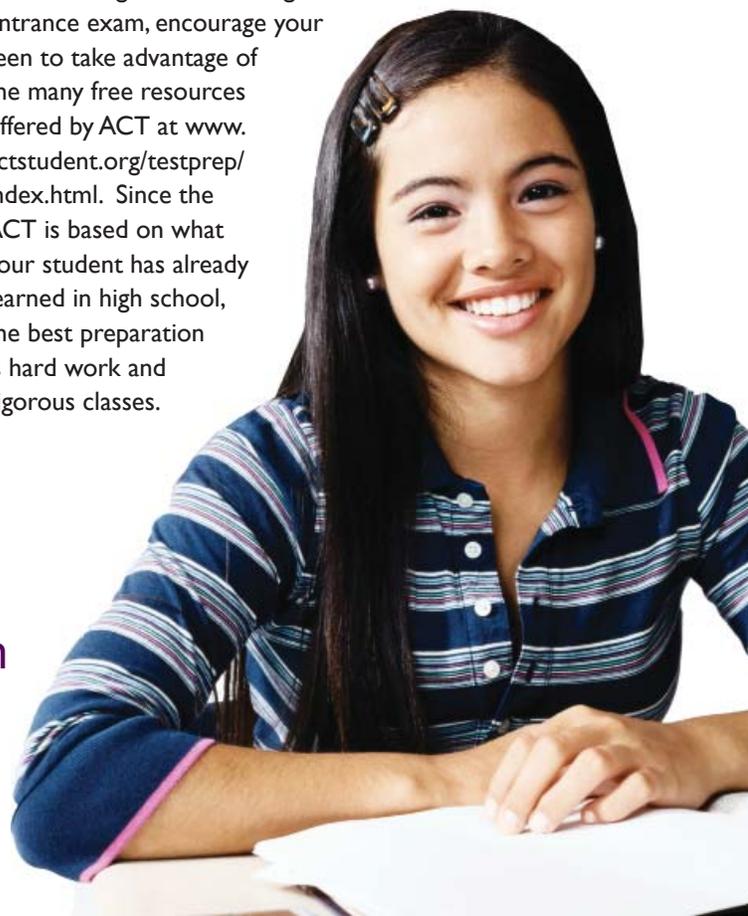
Quality Courses Count; Colleges Care

Not all high school classes are created equal. And at no other time is that more evident than in high school. One of the most effective ways to ensure your student is college and career ready is to encourage him or her to take the toughest, most rigorous and challenging classes available. Why?

If your student is simply taking an easy load that isn't challenging, it does not help their college applications. One of the many aspects college admissions officers consider is the rigor and quality of the high school classes. If Student A aced an easy elective class, but Student B earned a B in calculus, whose transcript will stand out?

If your student is just pursuing a high GPA by coasting through high school, his or her college admission test scores may be lower and he or she won't be well prepared for college.

Before taking the ACT college entrance exam, encourage your teen to take advantage of the many free resources offered by ACT at www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html. Since the ACT is based on what your student has already learned in high school, the best preparation is hard work and rigorous classes.



Why Should Your Student Go to College?

When a student is in middle school, or even the first years of high school, it can be hard to understand why college or good grades are important. If your student is uncertain about going to college or needs some reassurance about the path to college, here are a few reasons to share about why college is important:

- *Every bit of education obtained after high school increases the chances to earn good pay.* College graduates earn almost twice as much as those with just a high school diploma, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- *Besides good pay, the more education he or she obtains the more likely he or she will always have a job.* According to one estimate, by the year 2028 there will be 19 million more jobs for educated workers than qualified people to fill them.
- *Continuing education after high school is much more important for your student's generation than it was for your generation.* Today, most good jobs require more than a high school diploma. Businesses want to hire people who know how to think and solve problems.
- *The student will gain specialized training in their field of choice.*
- *Education beyond high school gives your student a lot of other benefits, including meeting new people, establishing valuable networking contacts, taking part in new opportunities to discover and explore interests, and experiencing success.*

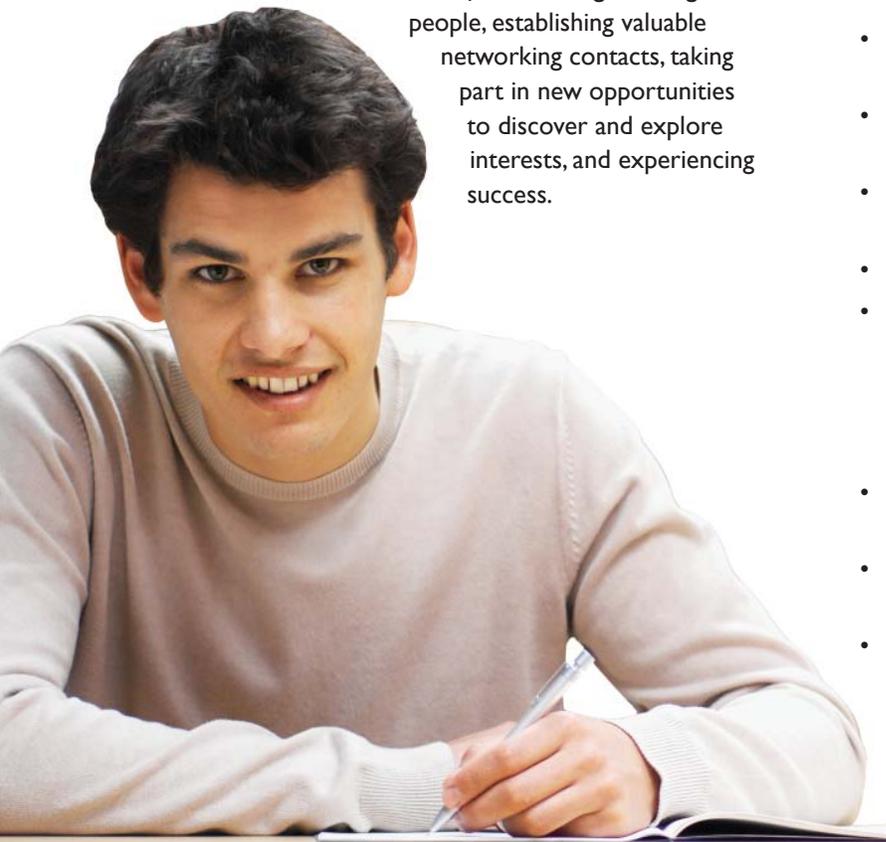
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Preparation Begins in the Junior Year in High School

The junior year in high school is the time to spring into action. Ideally, juniors have already been thinking about college and investigating their choices.

Juniors should:

- Continue to take challenging courses. When registering for classes, they shouldn't just sign up for easy courses, because doing so may hurt their chances for college admission. Also, students who go the easy route could pay later when they arrive at college and can't handle the coursework.
- Begin making a preliminary list of colleges to investigate. Search the Internet and use college resources in the counseling office or library.
- Fill out a college comparison worksheet while investigating colleges. ACT offers one for download from the junior year college planning checklist at www.actstudent.org/college/11.html
- Make plans to visit colleges this spring when classes are in session.
- Check if your high school's policy allows for absences to visit schools.
- Your school counselor can also tell you if college representatives plan to visit your school.
- Start or update an academic resume.
- Register for the ACT. Juniors should be academically ready to take it by spring of their junior year. If not, they should work hard in school, check out ACT's free sample test questions, and take it in the summer or fall. Your counselor can provide you with more information.
- Check into applying to colleges online. Some colleges offer this option for free.
- Investigate scholarship opportunities. Many colleges offer unique scholarships—ask them for more information.
- Begin to explore financial aid options. Learn more at www.actstudent.org/finaid/.



Career Planning Made Easy

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Those 10 words are something most teens hear a lot. Yet some adults admit that they still don’t know the answer to that question. So don’t be disappointed if your student doesn’t have a ready reply. You can help your student explore options for majors and careers while he or she is still in high school.

With decades of solid research as our foundation, ACT offers many practical, up-to-date and interactive ways to help your teen match his or her interests with a career.

Career planning tips are a great general starting point for discussion if your student hasn’t yet taken the ACT. Once your teen has considered some career questions, ACT’s World-of-Work Map is a good next step in the exploration. See the map at www.actstudent.org/wwm/world.html.

Encourage your teen to experiment by selecting areas of interest on the outer area of the map’s circle (for example, does he or she prefer working with things or people?). From there, your student can drill down to specific occupations, salaries and educational requirements for the job. Knowing a destination makes high school and college planning so much simpler.

Apprenticeships are one alternative to college. However, ACT research shows your child will still need the same rigorous and challenging school preparation to succeed. If your teenager is college bound, the Map of College Majors is a useful resource at www.actstudent.org/majorsmap/index.html

As you follow your teenager’s educational and vocational journey, try to remember how you felt at his or her age. Were you excited about the future? Nervous about making decisions? Confused about jobs? Whatever you felt is probably what your teen is feeling now. Tell your student you understand and that you’ll always be there to support his or her decisions.

Entering the Workforce

If your high school student wants to put college on hold for a few years or to enter job training directly after high school graduation, it’s important for you both to know about employment opportunities. ACT research shows that the same level of academic achievement is needed for success in both college and career.

ACT’s publication *Occupational Opportunities* splits out potential jobs into three sections:

1. “Now”—jobs commonly available to high school graduates
2. “Next”—occupations that typically need further training, including on-the-job training or education through a community college or other provider
3. “Later”—jobs that typically require a college degree and may call for professional experience

See the publication *Occupational Opportunities* at: <http://act.org/workkeys/pdf/OccupationalOpportunities.pdf>.

Each section includes a list of job titles, with U.S. median annual gross earnings and the number of projected annual openings for each. That’s important information needed for making sound career decisions.

Learn more about preparing your student for college and career.

Find additional resources to help you prepare your student for college and career at: www.act.org/path/parent/

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upporting your student to reach their full potential in high school

A student's high school years fly by. High school is the time for students to figure out who they want to be and to develop a plan to get there. The years can be challenging but can be most rewarding when a student and his or her parents or guardians have a plan in place to produce a positive high school experience.

Both a student and his or her parents or guardians should work together to develop good habits and create an environment that enables a student to achieve their full potential.

Here are tips and suggestions about how to support a student during their high school years to be ready for college or a career.

Motivating Your Student to Achieve

You've probably heard your student shout out one or more of the following during the early-morning rush:

"I can't find my homework."

"I don't have anything to wear."

"Can you sign my permission slip?"

"I need lunch money!"

"I missed the bus. Can you drive me?"

After taking a deep breath, you rush to the rescue. But what if mornings and nights were well organized and calm, allowing your

child to concentrate on what matters most: schoolwork. Well, it is possible. Try one or more of the following strategies so you and your student can begin and end the school day on a smooth note. Tell your child "I want you to..."

- Set your clothes out the night before.
- Keep a binder with dividers and pockets for each subject.
- Start homework as soon as you get home.
- Put completed homework in your backpack ready to grab as you go out the door.
- Bring me any school notes or forms by a set time each night.
- Keep a master calendar with all your assignments and activities.
- Set your alarm clock to wake up on time.
- Get at least eight hours of sleep each night.
- Tell me if you're struggling in a subject or class.
- Turn off the television and other distractions while you're doing homework.

Depending on the level of chaos in your home, the previous suggestions may be easy or tough to implement. But, you can make a tangible difference in your student's education by starting good habits at home. The more structure you provide, the more time your teen can devote to successful academic behaviors.



Get Involved in Your Student's Education

Here are ways to get involved in your student's education to be on track for college or career readiness and to achieve their best:

- At the beginning of the school year attend registration and/or orientation with your student.
- Work with your teen to make sure all school fees and forms are filled out ahead of deadlines.
- Communicate your expectations for the year. Review your teen's successes from the past year and discuss what he or she could improve upon and how you are willing to help.
- Ensure your student has the proper supplies for classes and activities.
- Talk to your teen about time management.

Homework is Important

According to ACT research, students who spend less than six hours per week at home doing homework are nearly twice as likely to be low achievers as high achievers (33% vs. 18%). As a parent, there are some practical ways you can help your student succeed.

Not only does homework enhance new skills and concepts for which there isn't time in the classroom, it's your opportunity to become involved in your teen's learning. Motivating teens (and many times, yourself) to do homework is challenging.

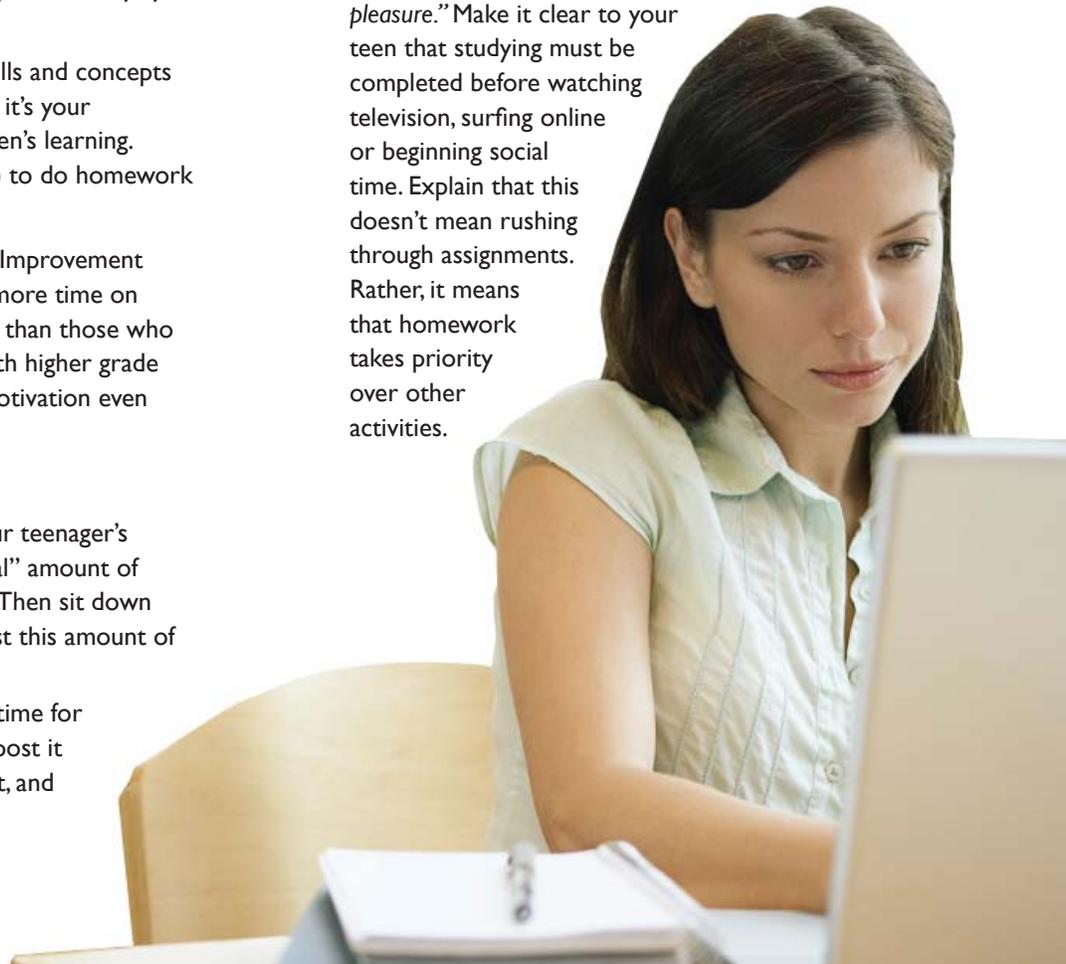
The U.S. Office of Education Research and Improvement points out that those children who spend more time on homework, on average, do better in school than those who spend less time. Those benefits increase with higher grade levels, making your high school student's motivation even more important.

To help, keep some simple ideas in mind:

- *Set clear goals and expectations.* Ask your teenager's counselor or principal what the "typical" amount of homework is each night at the school. Then sit down together and work to carve out at least this amount of time in the family schedule.
- *Set a schedule and post it.* Set a regular time for homework, create an actual schedule, post it where everyone in the family can see it, and stick to it.

Students who spend more time on homework, on average, do better in school than those who spend less time.

- *Choose the right environment.* Find a place within your home where your student can concentrate, away from distractions like a television, radio or computer games. It can be the dining room table or an actual home office space. Set and enforce appropriate rules for homework time.
- *Keep plenty of supplies on hand.* Be prepared with writing paper, a ruler, a stapler, a dictionary and thesaurus within reach. For projects, keep on hand poster paper, paint and anything else your student might need so as to avoid any last-minute dashes to the store.
- *Don't use homework as punishment.* It should be treated as an opportunity to learn rather than given a negative connotation.
- *Lead by example.* During homework time, be available to work with your teen.
- *Live by the credo "Work before pleasure."* Make it clear to your teen that studying must be completed before watching television, surfing online or beginning social time. Explain that this doesn't mean rushing through assignments. Rather, it means that homework takes priority over other activities.



How to Help Your Student Achieve their Best

- *Step in when needed.* If your student is struggling—whether it's with comprehension, time management or study skills—show your support. If you cannot help resolve the problem, ask school administrators and teachers for their assistance.

Learn how schoolwork applies in the real world at www.act.org/path/parent/motivate/schoolwork.html

For more on homework motivation, go to:
www.act.org/path/parent/motivate/homework.html

Test Taking: Tips for Your Student to Improve Performance

Tests are a way to measure what your student already knows and what they still need to learn to increase readiness for college and career. Here are suggestions to help your student boost their test-taking success. Tell your student to:

- Carefully read the instructions on the cover of the test booklet.
- Read the directions for each test carefully.
- Read each question carefully.
- Pace yourself—don't spend too much time on a single passage or question.
- Pay attention to the announcement of five minutes remaining on each test.
- Come to the test with three soft lead No. 2 pencils with good erasers. Do not use a mechanical pencil or ink pen; if you do, your answer document cannot be scored accurately.
- Answer the easy questions first, then go back and answer the more difficult ones if you have time remaining on that test.
- On difficult questions, eliminate as many incorrect answers as you can, then make an educated guess among those remaining.
- Answer every question. Your scores on the multiple-choice tests are based on the number of questions you answer correctly. There is no penalty for guessing.
- If you complete a test before time is called, recheck your work on that test.
- Mark your answers properly. Erase any mark completely and cleanly without smudging.

- Do not mark or alter any ovals on a test or continue writing the essay after time has been called. If you do, your scores may not count.

Help Your Teen Prepare for College

Getting into college doesn't just happen. It takes a plan, as outlined below.

- Encourage your high school student to begin investigating and applying to colleges. ACT research shows that most students say their parents are very important in the college planning process, so get involved. Beginning as early as middle school, you can help your teenager map out a college plan.
- Help your teen create a college checklist calendar. High school juniors and seniors need to stay on top of test and application deadlines and need to request teacher recommendations and other paperwork.

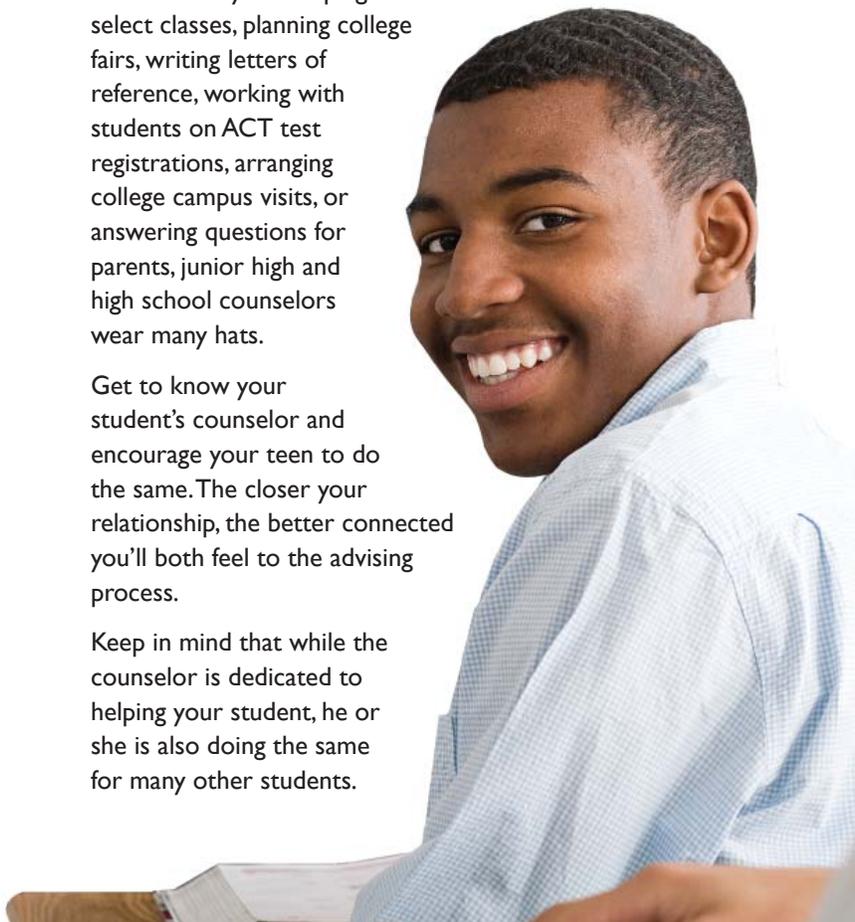
For more information, check out ACT's College Planning site at <http://www.actstudent.org/college/>.

School Counselors Provide Valuable College Resources

Whether they are helping students select classes, planning college fairs, writing letters of reference, working with students on ACT test registrations, arranging college campus visits, or answering questions for parents, junior high and high school counselors wear many hats.

Get to know your student's counselor and encourage your teen to do the same. The closer your relationship, the better connected you'll both feel to the advising process.

Keep in mind that while the counselor is dedicated to helping your student, he or she is also doing the same for many other students.



Be mindful of deadlines and considerate of the counselor's time. Your counselor wants your student to do well in school, on a college entrance test and in their post-school career as much as you do.

Steering Clear of Senioritis

High school students anticipate graduation from the first day they enter their senior year.

For some, it's an exciting time. For others, a serious case of "senioritis" rears its ugly head. How is your senior feeling right now?

Whether your student has been accepted by a college, is still waiting for an offer, or plans to work immediately after high school graduation, spring term of senior year is not the time to succumb to senioritis.

Sure, your senior has worked hard during the last four years. But rather than throwing in the towel, it's a good time to remind him or her to finish strong. Future employers and colleges are watching. Some universities may withdraw offers of admission to students who drop college prep classes or begin earning lower grades.

It's the full four years that count, not just the first seven semesters of high school.

If your senior starts slacking, colleges might send a warning letter or add certain stipulations to their admissions offer, such as requiring a specific grade point average during the first year of college.

Taking it easy may feel like the right thing to do. But staying focused and mentally sharp will make the transition from high school senior to college freshman much easier.

Enjoy the Journey

High school years can be challenging for both students and their parents or guardians.

There will be bumps in the road on the way to graduation, but they will be outweighed by memories of events and milestones that will last a lifetime.

Enjoy the journey.

For more information go to www.actstudent.org.

About ACT

Founded in 1959, ACT is not-for-profit organization primarily known for the ACT college entrance exam. ACT also offers secondary, post-secondary and workplace data-driven research-based assessments for college and career readiness. ACT's additional solutions and services include research, information, and program management for teachers, counselors, schools, state and local administrators, national government agencies and businesses to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum, their students' knowledge, the behavioral factors that impact a student's ability to learn, and the skills workers bring into the workplace. The mission of ACT is to advance lives by helping people achieve education and workplace success.