

Is College in Your Plans?

Tips for you and your child

College is about reaching new goals, learning new things, and going new places. It's also about planning and money. And with proper research and investing, getting that college degree can become a reality.

Whether you're the parent of a child with college ambitions or an adult professional going back to school, these planning tips can help you along the way.

Plan Early, Stay the Course

Suggest the idea of college to your child at an early age and reinforce the importance of a college education as he or she grows older. By the first two years of high school, you should be able to gauge your child's enthusiasm toward going to college.

Standards for college vary from institution to institution, so it's important to be aware of basic academic requirements. As your child enters high school, consult with a high school career or guidance counselor routinely, to ensure your child is taking the right courses, as well as proper scholastic aptitude and

college entrance exams, such as the ACT or SAT. Additional exams may be necessary for special college programs or scholarship opportunities.

There are ways students can get ahead academically. High school students can take advanced placement (AP) courses, and gain college credit based on their performance on the AP exam. Some colleges also grant credits based on results of the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). These options can streamline college application approvals and decrease the time for getting a degree — reducing college expenses.

Get the Right Information

The right institution should meet your academic and social requirements, fit your budget, and present the best opportunities upon graduation. There are many sources for finding what's right for you. High school career and resource centers, college guidebooks and the Internet can help you get started. Other valuable resources include college fairs, ranking books, company resources, libraries, college brochures and catalogs, family, friends, counselors and teachers. You can also talk with college students and alumni about their school's faculty, academic merits, and programs of interest.

Find the Right College

There are thousands of colleges to choose from and all promise a unique and rewarding experience. Key things to look for are:

- Low student-to-professor ratios
- On-campus support and learning groups
- Resources for placing graduates



thrive!

live and work well

You can reach the goal of sending your child to college, or returning there yourself. It just takes the right planning.

As you start to identify the top choices, visit campuses to make sure the look and feel matches your personality and interests. Go when classes are in session to read the campus buzz. Some schools may even allow you to attend a class that interests you.

Quick Tip

When pursuing a bachelor's degree, completing the first two years at a junior college is an affordable and convenient way for some students to get started. Most two-year colleges offer general education courses that are transferable to four-year institutions.

Start a College Savings Plan

Many colleges offer scholarships for athletes, musicians, those with high SAT or ACT scores, and academic achievers. Also, look into public and private scholarship programs offered by service organizations and foundations. Scholarships rarely cover all expenses so get reasonable estimates for tuition and books, cost of living, and travel to and from home — and research options to stretch your budget.

Start saving as soon as your income gives you the flexibility. There are many options, including the Qualified Savings Tuition Plan (Section 529) and other education savings accounts that offer tax benefits.

While many people are leery of accepting new debt, a student loan may be your best option and, in the long run, could compare favorably to a common car loan. Student loans often feature low interest rates and interest on many doesn't accrue until after graduation. Remember, your return on investment comes with graduation and, possibly, a higher-paying job. Investigate all your loan and financial aid options, including those from colleges, banks, and federal and state programs.

Some companies have continued learning programs for their employees that cover some or

all of the tuition, especially if your area of study is related to the business.

Yes, You Can

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Resources

www.petersons.com

Find colleges, graduate programs and test preparation information.

www.collegeboard.com

College planning and online test registration and preparation.

www.savingforcollege.com

Details on the Qualified Savings Tuition Plan.

www.finaid.org

Guide to financial aid.

www.fafsa.ed.gov

Free application for Federal Student Aid from the US Department of Education.

Or call: 1-800-4-FED-AID.

Is College the Best Option?

College isn't for everyone, but there are many alternatives that can prepare you for a productive career.

- Vocational training for electrical, plumbing or other skill
- City or county government agency training
- Culinary academies for the art of food preparation and service
- Art, craft or entertainment institutions
- Armed forces training – either as a career or reservist
- Peace Corps or other volunteer organizations

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