



How Parents Lead the Way in College & Career Planning

Pop Quiz:

Who has the greatest influence in helping high schoolers choose a college and career?

- A. Guidance counselors
- B. Older siblings
- C. Friends
- D. Teachers
- E. None of the above

If you picked “E”, you’re right!

Research clearly shows that *parents* are the #1 influence on their child’s career choice. That’s not surprising when you think about it. After all, from the day your child was born, you’ve influenced many of his or her choices — not only through the advice you have provided but through the examples you’ve set as well. Your children naturally look to you for leadership and guidance in all aspects of their lives, including choosing a career path.

You Don’t Have to Have All the Answers

Guiding your son or daughter throughout the college and career planning process may seem pretty straight forward at first. After all, there are *many* people helping your teen already —like counselors, teachers, coaches, and tutors. But you need to be aware that each of them has his own perspective and goals for your child, based on his area of specialization.

In addition, the college and career search process has become much more complex over the past few decades. So, someone needs to coordinate the process and help your teen see how all the moving parts come together. And that “someone” is *you*.

As a parent, you’re in the best position to see the big picture and to provide leadership for the decisions your family must make regarding college and career planning. Does that mean you have to have all the answers? No, certainly not.



At Career Vision, we advocate a “parent as leader” philosophy. Your role is to:

- **guide the process** and
- **provide access** to the people, tools, and resources your high school or college student needs to find good-fit colleges and career paths.

Lead the Way

According to Stephen Covey, *“Most people think of leadership as a position, and therefore don’t see themselves as leaders.”* Whether by title or by the actions you take, you’re a leader already — in a variety of roles and in many different ways. For example:

- As a parent, you direct your family every day.
- In the workplace, you manage projects all the time (whether executing your own work or as a member of a team responsible for achieving a common goal).
- If you volunteer, you may be involved in planning and organizing events or guiding others in accomplishing tasks.

Use what you already know about effective leadership to help your child explore, narrow down, and choose good-fit colleges, majors, and career options.

- ***Good leaders have a vision.***

Look ahead to the future and begin with the end in mind. What is your vision for your son or daughter? A vision of *“I just want my child to be happy”* is pretty vague. Parents who have a clear and specific vision can engage in meaningful discussions with their children to define what it means for them personally.

As a parent, you’ll build your own vision, which might be something like this:

“My daughter will be accepted into a college and academic department / major that is a good fit for her — academically, socially, and emotionally — while preparing her for the world of work. She will graduate from college on time. As a result of her academic preparation, internship experiences, and access to job opportunities, my daughter will launch successfully from college into the workplace. She will be employed in a full-time position in her chosen career within six months of graduating from college.”



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- **Good leaders set expectations.**

With the vision in mind, talk with your high schooler about your expectations for college and career planning. In the same way that business leaders set boundaries, clarify for your teen which types of decisions:

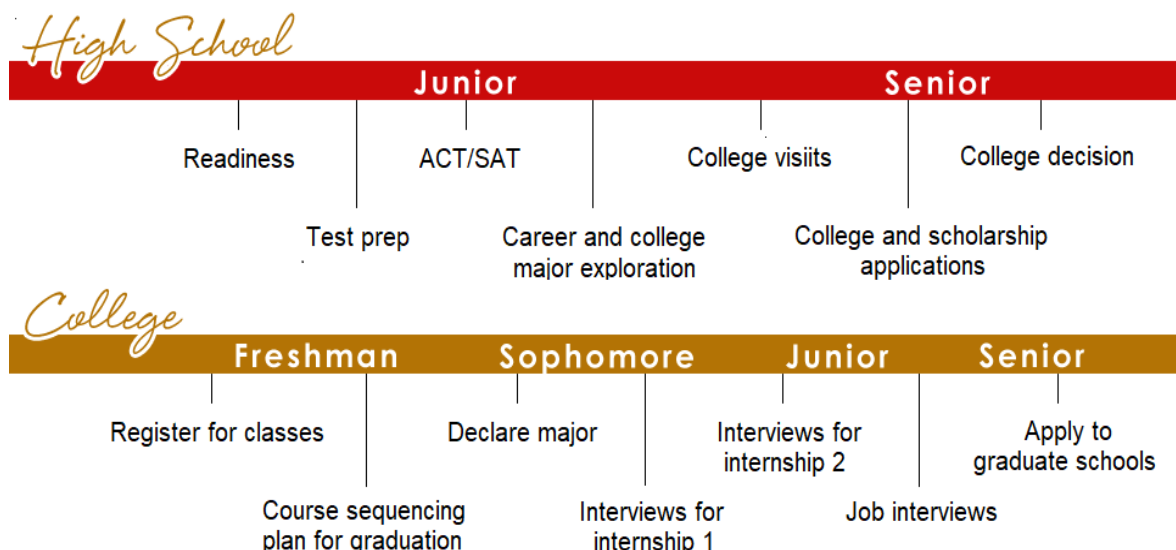
- can be made *independently*,
- will be made *collectively as a family*,
- will be made only by you — *the parent*.

Discuss how college will be paid for as well as cost limitations. Do you expect your son to graduate college in four years? Do you want him to attend community college then transfer to a four-year school? Is it okay to look at schools outside of your home state? Be clear about your expectations *before* your teen starts exploring post-secondary options.

Equally important, set expectations about *staying* in college (e.g., go to classes, keep up with coursework, maintain good grades, seek support when needed, behave responsibly, etc.). Will there be consequences if these expectations are not met? If so, talk about them upfront.

- **Good leaders align goals and expectations.**

The timeline below shows the key milestones for college and career planning throughout high school and college.





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With this big picture in mind, help your child set goals for college and career planning. Now's the time to do some planning. Guide your teen in determining and documenting the different types of research and tasks that must be completed as well as the decisions that must be made along the way. Put together a timeline for achieving each goal.

- ***Good leaders guide and encourage necessary actions.***

The benefit of setting goals is that you can help your high schooler break the tasks and decisions into smaller steps, making the college and career planning process much more manageable. Your son or daughter will have a clear, concise, and actionable plan. And, as a parent, you will have a great tool to monitor progress towards achieving the goals.

Remember, as a parent, your role is to ***lead the process***; your child is accountable for ***doing the work***. When each step of the process has a due date, it's easier for both you and your teen to avoid last-minute challenges.

- ***Good leaders provide the necessary tools and resources.***

Effective leaders know they don't have all the answers. They call upon subject matter experts as needed. For example, maybe your family needs a:

- tutor to assist your teen with ACT / SAT preparation,
- financial planner to provide advice on saving for college and applying for financial aid,
- guidance counselor to identify the right mix of high school classes to prepare for college,
- career professional to share insights about the occupations under consideration and / or help your high school or college student identify satisfying and rewarding career options.

Communicate

Last, but certainly not least, strong leaders communicate frequently. Schedule time for on-going discussions about the college and career planning process with your child. Keep the discussions focused on the tasks at hand, using the action plan as a guide.



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Your teen will benefit from knowing that you remain engaged and interested in her progress and that you are ready to provide support as needed. And, as a parent, you can be confident that your child is making realistic and achievable plans for a bright future ahead.