

10th Grade College Checklist

A one-page checklist for parents and students. Free to copy, print, and share.

The one-line rule for 10th grade: explore wide — and learn your state’s cutoffs. This is the low-stakes year to test interests, take the practice PSAT, and learn exactly which GPA and test numbers unlock scholarship money. One spring registration decision this year can be worth more than any scholarship contest.

Fall — Practice Round

- **Take the PSAT 10 in October.** The score counts for nothing, which is exactly the point: it shows which sections need work while there is still unhurried time to fix them.
Your move: Confirm registration yourself — some schools do not automatically enroll sophomores.
- **Review the four-year plan with the counselor.** Adjust courses to stay on the college-prep track your state’s aid programs require.
- **Go deeper in one or two activities.** Take on a real role — organize an event, lead a project. Leadership grows from responsibility, not titles.

Winter — Explore

- **Explore careers and majors with free tools** — low-pressure browsing now makes the junior-year college list far easier to build.
- **Keep the brag sheet current** — roles, dates, and outcomes while they’re fresh.
- **Be a memorable student** — this year’s teachers are next year’s recommendation letters.

Spring — The Registration Decision That Pays

- **At course registration, ask whether the school offers a PSAT/ACT prep class — and enroll for junior fall.** The junior-year PSAT is the only chance at National Merit, and Semifinalist standing alone triggers full-tuition automatic offers at a number of colleges. By the time junior year starts, this roster was set months earlier.
Your move: This is the question college-experienced parents ask by instinct. It costs nothing, and that free elective slot can be worth more than any scholarship contest.
- **Ask about dual enrollment and AP for junior year** — college credit earned in high school is the cheapest college credit your family will ever buy.
- **Recheck your state’s aid cutoffs.** Compare them with your student’s current GPA. A gap found now has two full years of runway.

Summer — One Real Thing

- **Do one meaningful thing:** a job, steady volunteering, or a free academic summer program. One sustained commitment reads better than a busy list.
- **Visit any campus, formally or not.** A walk through the nearest college makes the whole idea concrete — especially for a student who would be the first in the family to go.

Three Traps in 10th Grade

- **Skipping the PSAT 10 because “it doesn’t count.”** The score doesn’t; the information does.
- **Missing the prep-class window.** Junior-fall schedules are set at spring registration. Ask in February, not September.
- **Restarting activities junior year to impress colleges.** Admissions readers see the timestamps. Depth built now is what holds up.

Free Resources — No Account, No Cost, No Data Collection

All four grade-level checklists	collegereadyparent.org/checklists
Aid guides for all 50 states	collegereadyparent.org/state-scholarships-and-grants
Brag sheet builder + recommendation kit	collegereadyparent.org/brag-sheet-builder