11th Grade College Checklist

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

The one-line rule for 11th grade: this is the pivot year — test, list, and money map. By June, the family should have real test scores, a working college list, and a written map of what each college and your state will actually pay. Junior year is the last full year of grades colleges see when applications go in.

Fall — The Test That Counts

- **Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October.** This is the sitting that counts — the only chance to qualify for National Merit, and there is no retake. Semifinalist standing triggers full-tuition automatic offers at a number of colleges.

  Your move: If your student enrolled in the prep class at last spring's registration, it's doing its job right now. Either way, free official practice tests are enough — never pay for the basics.
- **Build the ACT/SAT plan: first sitting in winter or spring, and plan to test twice.** Many colleges superscore — they combine the best sections across dates — so a second sitting almost always helps and can move scholarship money.

  Your move: Ask the counselor about fee waivers — eligible students test free and apply to colleges free.
- **Guard the grades.** This transcript is the one admissions and scholarship offices read first.

Winter — Build the List Around Money

- **Take the first ACT/SAT sitting.**
- **Start the college list with money on the page, not just fit.** For every school, note three numbers: the automatic-merit cutoffs, your state-aid eligibility, and the Net Price Calculator result. Include in-state and out-of-state options.

  Your move: Check whether neighboring states discount tuition through a regional exchange (WUE, ACM, MSEP, or NEBHE) — see our reciprocity guide on page 2.
- **First-generation students: look up fly-in programs.** Many colleges pay for first-gen students to visit campus — flights, meals, and housing. Applications open in spring and summer for senior-fall visits.

Spring — Ask Early, Retest Smart

- **Ask two teachers for recommendation letters before summer.** Popular teachers cap how many they write. Asking in spring beats the senior-fall rush.

  Your move: Build the brag sheet together the night before asking — it turns a generic letter into a specific one. Our free kit below shows exactly what to include.
- **Retest the ACT/SAT if the score sits near any cutoff.** With superscoring, one more sitting that crosses a scholarship line can be worth thousands of dollars per year for four years.
- **Visit colleges** — spring break trips, local campuses, or the free fly-in programs above.
- **Register for senior year with the checklist in hand.** Keep the rigor, and confirm every state-required course is finished by spring of senior year — some state grants require specific units and will not count summer school after graduation.

Summer — Draft and Map

- **Draft the main college essay** — growth, leadership, or a challenge, in the student's own voice.
- **Start the scholarship tracker, in this order:** automatic merit from colleges first, state aid second, local awards third — and national contests last, as long shots.
- **Run the Net Price Calculator for every school on the list.** Keep or cut with real numbers. Every college is required to post one.
- **Write down every priority scholarship deadline.** Many fall between October 15 and December 1 of senior year — often earlier than the admission deadline, and they control the money.

The Money Map: What to Have on Paper by June

Source	What to write down	Where to find it
Automatic merit from each college	Exact GPA and test-score cutoffs, award amounts, renewal terms	Each college's scholarship page, or our 400+ college guide below
Your state's programs	GPA/test cutoffs, required courses, the application, and its deadline	Your state's page in our 50-state guide below
Each college's real price	Net Price Calculator result for your family's numbers	Every college's website (required by law)
Local awards	The counseling office's list of town, employer, church, and civic scholarships	Ask the counselor — far better odds than national contests

Five Questions to Ask on Every College Visit (You're Allowed to Ask)

- Does this school offer automatic merit aid, and what are the exact GPA and test-score cutoffs?
- What is the priority scholarship deadline — and is it earlier than the admission deadline?
- Do you superscore the ACT/SAT?
- Can awards be stacked — merit, state grant, and outside scholarships at the same time?
- What does your Net Price Calculator say a family like ours would actually pay?

Aid offices answer these all day — it's their job. Ask again if you get a vague answer.

Four Traps in 11th Grade

- **Starting the scholarship search with national contests.** Big-name contests are the smallest pool of money with the longest odds. Automatic merit and state aid are where the predictable money is; local awards have the best odds after that.
- **Waiting until senior year to ask for recommendations.** The best letters go to students who asked in spring.
- **One-and-done testing.** With superscoring, stopping one point below a cutoff can leave four years of scholarship money on the table.
- **Assuming you make too much for the FAFSA.** There is no income cutoff to apply, and many merit awards require it on file. Plan to file it in the fall of senior year.

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

Scholarships at 400+ colleges	collegereadyparent.org/college-scholarships
Search 6,000+ scholarships by GPA and test score	collegereadyparent.org/crp-scholarship-search-tool
Aid guides for all 50 states	collegereadyparent.org/state-scholarships-and-grants
Out-of-state tuition discounts	collegereadyparent.org/college-tuition-reciprocity
Brag sheet builder + recommendation kit	collegereadyparent.org/brag-sheet-builder
All four grade-level checklists	collegereadyparent.org/checklists

Produced by CollegeReadyParent.org — an independent, parent-built resource. No paywall, no accounts, no lead forms, no student data collection. Sources are cited on every scholarship and state aid page.

Course names, test dates, and program rules vary by school and state. Always confirm current details with your school counselor, each college, and studentaid.gov.