9th Grade College Checklist

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

The one-line rule for 9th grade: grades are money now. Most scholarship money comes from colleges and state programs at published GPA cutoffs — and that GPA starts counting on the first day of 9th grade. Nothing this year is urgent, but everything this year compounds.

Fall — Set Up the Four Years

- **Meet the school counselor — parent and student both.** Ask one question: “Is my student on track for our state’s college-prep curriculum?” Many state grants require specific courses, and the plan is easiest to fix now.

  Your move: Introduce yourself by name. A counselor who knows the family is the one who flags fee waivers, programs, and local scholarships later.
- **Start a four-year course plan.** Map core subjects plus where honors, AP, or dual enrollment fit. Choose the hardest classes your student can do well in — rigor with a good grade beats an easy A. Keep a copy at home and recheck it every registration.
- **Ask about the PSAT 8/9.** Many schools give freshmen a practice PSAT. The score counts for nothing — it simply shows the family what the test looks like and gives a baseline.

  Your move: Ask the counselor whether 9th graders are enrolled automatically or need to sign up.
- **First-generation families: ask about TRIO.** If neither parent finished a four-year degree, Upward Bound and Talent Search offer free, federally funded tutoring, application help, and campus visits — and enrollment often starts in 9th grade.

All Year — Habits That Pay Later

- **Protect the GPA early.** Build study routines and ask for help at the first sign of trouble — a C repaired in October never reaches the transcript.
- **Pick one or two activities to grow into.** Depth beats a long list. Four years in one club with rising responsibility outshines eight one-year memberships.
- **Start the brag sheet — together, tonight.** Record every activity, honor, award, and volunteer hour with dates as they happen. Junior-year memory is unreliable; a running list is not. Paper works, or use our free brag sheet builder below.

Spring — First Money Moves

- **Register for 10th-grade classes with the plan in hand.** Keep the rigor climbing.
- **Look up your state’s aid programs.** Write down the GPA and test-score cutoffs that unlock money in your state. Known in 9th grade, a cutoff is a target; discovered in 12th, it’s a surprise.

  Your move: Open your state’s page in our 50-state guide below — it takes ten minutes.

Three Traps in 9th Grade

- **Writing off a rough semester.** Colleges notice upward trends. One bad stretch in 9th grade is a recoverable story, not a closed door.
- **Assuming college talk can wait until 11th grade.** The GPA cutoffs for automatic scholarships are being decided right now.
- **Paying for anything.** At this stage every worthwhile resource — counseling, TRIO, practice tests, planning tools — is free.

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
Full first-generation guide for parents	collegereadyparent.org/first-generation-college-guide

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.