SENIOR YEAR · AUGUST · MONTH 1 OF 10

August Senior Checklist (Class of 2027)

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

August is setup month. Almost nothing is due yet, which is exactly why it gets skipped, and why families who use it are calm in October while everyone else is scrambling. Three things drive the entire fall: the accounts that let you file for aid, the list of every deadline at every school, and the essay draft that has to exist before teachers get busy. Everything else here supports those three. **Counselors:** this sheet covers the Class of 2027, who file 2027-2028 aid forms this school year.

Start Here: The Three Things That Unlock Everything Else

1. Both StudentAid.gov accounts	The parent and the student each need a separate FSA ID with separate email addresses. Identity verification can take up to three days, so doing this now means filing the FAFSA the day it opens.
2. One deadline list	One row per college, three columns: admission, scholarship, honors. These are frequently three different dates at the same school. Most lost money traces back to a date nobody wrote down.
3. A finished first draft	Not a good draft, a finished one. A student with a complete draft can ask teachers for recommendation letters in September, while they still have time to write good ones.

What Your Student Does This Month

- [ ] Build the final college list: a few reaches, a few targets, and at least one school that is both an academic and a financial safety.
- [ ] Request an official transcript and confirm the counselor knows which colleges are on the list.
- [ ] Create the applications: Common App for private and some public schools, plus the separate ones many state universities use instead.
- [ ] Write the first full draft of the personal statement.
- [ ] Start one running document of activities, awards, hours, and leadership roles. It gets reused everywhere.
- [ ] Check whether each school has an **honors college** or **major-specific application**. These are separate, and they close early.
- [ ] Register for a fall ACT or SAT, but only after checking whether scores affect scholarship money.
- [ ] Create a StudentAid.gov account with a personal email address, not the school one.
- [ ] Set up one folder, physical or digital, for logins, confirmations, and deadlines.

What You Do as a Parent

- [ ] Create your own StudentAid.gov account. It is separate from your student's and you need it to file.
- [ ] Find your **2025 federal tax return** and put it where you can get to it in October. That is the year the FAFSA asks about.
- [ ] Build the deadline list and own it. Let your student own the words on the applications.
- [ ] Look up automatic merit cutoffs at every school before anyone signs up for another test.
- [ ] Ask the counselor whether your student qualifies for **fee waivers** for testing and applications.
- [ ] Have the honest money conversation now, before anyone falls in love with a school.
- [ ] If you are looking out of state, check whether a regional tuition exchange program applies.

Which Track Are You On

Senior fall looks completely different depending on where your student applies. Most checklists online only describe Track A.

Track A: the essay decides	Private and selective colleges. Admission is not guaranteed, the essay carries real weight, and supplemental essays multiply fast. August work is the draft. Pressure lands in October and November.
Track B: they will get in	State flagships and regional publics with published standards. Your student may be admitted within weeks, sometimes with no essay at all. That acceptance feels like the finish line and it is not. The competitive scholarship application and the honors application are separate, with separate deadlines, usually inside the same portal. No admission essay does not mean no scholarship essay.

One page at a time

You do not have to understand the whole system in August. Get the accounts made, get the list written, and get a draft on paper. Everything on page two builds on those three things.

Dates to Put on the Calendar Now

WHAT	WHEN	WHY IT MATTERS
2027-2028 FAFSA opens	On or about October 1, 2026	Uses your 2025 tax return. Last year's form opened a week early, so watch from late September. Some state and campus aid runs out, so early filers reach money late filers cannot.
SAT, October 3, 2026	Register by September 18	The last SAT that comfortably clears a November 1 deadline.
ACT, October 17, 2026	Register by September 11	There is no November ACT this year. It goes October 17, then December 12. If a score is needed for an automatic merit cutoff, this is the deadline that matters.
SAT, November 7 · December 5	Register by October 23 · November 20	Useful only for later deadlines. Confirm with each college first.
Priority and Early Action deadlines	October 1, October 15, and November 1	The three most common priority dates in the country. Priority usually means considered first for scholarships, and it is rarely binding.
Honors and competitive scholarship applications	November through February	Separate forms, separate deadlines, largest awards. This is the money families miss.

Test dates move. Confirm at act.org and satsuite.collegeboard.org before registering.

The Rules That Trip First-Time Families Up

Early Action and Early Decision are not the same thing	Early Action means apply early, hear back early, and stay free to compare offers. Early Decision is a binding contract: if admitted, your student must attend and withdraw the other applications, before you have seen what it costs. For a family that needs to compare aid, that is a real risk.
Test optional does not mean score optional	A college can ignore scores for admission and still use them to set scholarship amounts. Ask two questions: do scores affect scholarships, and do you superscore.
Senior grades still count	First quarter and first semester grades go to colleges. At schools with automatic merit tables, moving from a 3.49 to a 3.50 can be worth thousands a year for four years.
Applying once is not enough	At most public universities, admission and scholarships are two separate reviews. The acceptance letter does not mean the scholarship application was submitted.
Nobody will call you	Colleges communicate through the student portal and student email. Missing transcripts and unsubmitted letters sit there silently. Check weekly. Also: very few families pay sticker price, so do not cut a school from the list based on the number on its website.

If Money Is Tight, Ask About Fee Waivers Before You Pay Anything

Application fees run roughly $40 to $90 per school and test registration is about $68. For a family applying to six colleges, that cost quietly shrinks the list. Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, or whose families meet income guidelines, can receive testing and application fee waivers. Counselors issue most of them, and the Common App and NACAC have their own processes. Send one email this month. Waivers are almost never offered without being asked for.

What Happens in September

Recommendation letters get asked for, in person, followed by a brag sheet. National Merit Semifinalists are notified, and some universities attach very large automatic awards to that status. Test registration closes September 11 for the October ACT and September 18 for the October SAT. Portals go live, and every missing item shows up there. Full detail on our September checklist, linked below.

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

Federal student aid and the FSA ID	studentaid.gov
Our September senior checklist	collegereadyparent.org/september-senior-checklist
All grade level checklists, 9th through 12th	collegereadyparent.org/checklists
FAFSA explained in plain English	collegereadyparent.org/financial-aid-101
Scholarships at 400+ colleges, all 50 states	collegereadyparent.org/college-scholarships
New to all of this	collegereadyparent.org/first-generation-college-guide

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