

# A COMPASS FOR **COLLEGE PREPARATION**



MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

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Scan the QR code to access  
the interactive version of  
A Compass for College Preparation.



# Note to Parents and Students •

Schools, parents, and students share a common purpose: We all want a successful, rewarding educational experience for each student; however, we each approach this common goal from different perspectives.

Parents understand their child better than anyone else, so support is extremely important. There are several challenges to parenting a young adult seeking to pursue a college education.

Students thrive when parents show them that they care and provide support without always agreeing. As students go through school and get closer to finishing high school, it is important for them to plan for the day they will eventually enter a postsecondary educational institution.

Also, it is important to remember it is your student who will be responsible when they enter postsecondary education. Parents who do the work for their children throughout their high school years need to eventually let their child take over and grow and develop into the independent, self-sufficient individual that they have been grooming all along.

The Mississippi Department of Education Office of Special Education has prepared this family guide to support the relationship between parents, students, and potential colleges by providing easy access to helpful information for parents and families.



## Introduction and Purpose

College planning is a team effort that involves students, families, and school professionals. There are many reasons students need the extra support: College costs are skyrocketing, admissions are increasingly competitive, and schools set high expectations in terms of essays, test scores, and extracurriculars. In this climate, it is understandable why families and students need additional guidance.

The Mississippi State Board of Education Goal #2 specifies that every student will graduate from high school prepared for college and a career. Therefore, the Mississippi Department of Education is tasked with providing a continuum of service for PreK-12 that assists in accomplishing this goal.

This planning guide is designed to inform decisions about curriculum, assessment, career development, and other important factors related to preparation for going to college. While students are in school, they should explore educational and occupational opportunities, learn about the workplace, and begin to identify the technical skills and individual qualities they need for making effective career decisions.

The purpose of this guide is to help families and students:

- Create awareness of available training and postsecondary options
- Recognize individual qualities necessary for job success
- Support career decision-making through knowledge of employment data and other available resources

This guide serves as a resource to families and students to inform decisions around a comprehensive PreK-12 education program which includes strategies to create awareness of careers in the early grades, exploration of careers in the middle grades, and planning for careers in the later grades. This includes ways to facilitate students' engagement in school and community extracurricular activities and support students in the transition from high school to college. Mississippi's Individual Success Plan (ISP) is important in creating a college mindset culture that will enhance access to and success in postsecondary education and careers by providing tools to help students make the connection.

# Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum •

▲ A rigorous and relevant curriculum is key to students' career development. Student schedules should be guided by their chosen career pathway. Students should be encouraged to select challenging courses such as

Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual credit courses, and career and technical education (CTE) courses. Additionally, students in need of remediation should be identified and supported.

## Why Attend a Postsecondary Institution?

▲ Some students do not see the benefit of continuing education beyond high school. This infographic shows how acquiring higher education increases job opportunities. The chart includes data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, indicating that workers who have higher levels of education typically earn more and have higher rates of employment compared with workers who have less education. [Source](#)

### Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2020

Educational attainment	Median usual weekly earnings	Unemployment rate
Doctoral degree	\$1,885	2.5%
Professional degree	\$1,893	3.1%
Master's degree	\$1,545	4.1%
Bachelor's degree	\$1,305	5.5%
Associate degree	\$938	7.1%
Some college, no degree	\$877	8.3%
High school diploma, no college	\$781	9.0%
Less than a high school diploma	\$619	11.7%

Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

undecided about a career or a college major can use a variety of career search tools to identify careers that might suit them. It is never too early—or too late—for students to explore different career options and adjust career plans. A good source is the O\*Net Online website which provides career exploration and job analysis. The BLS Career Exploration website is another helpful source. An additional resource for career exploration is MajorClarity, the approved statewide computer platform which manages college- and career-readiness goals and automates the Individual Success Plans (ISPs) for each student. These resources are available for all students in grades 7-12. A link to these websites is available in the resources section of this guide.

**It is never too early—or too late—for students to explore options for college.**

# Individual Success Plan (ISP) and Transition Plan Alignment

▲ The ISP is a personalized career plan for all students in grades 7-12. Each student should develop an ISP to help them make career and college decisions, plan a course of study, and make financial aid assessments with family members. It encourages students to explore strengths and interests, connect strengths and interests to a career pathway, and set career and academic goals based on a chosen pathway. The ISP is not de-

signed to limit student choices in college and career, but to provide an opportunity for students to connect school to interests and explore career pathways in a supportive environment. The ISP is to be revisited every year and evolve along with the students' interests and goals. For more information about the ISP, refer to the MDE PreK-12 Professional School Counseling and Support Services [website](#).

## Consider Interests and Goals

▲ Thinking about college early gives a student time to explore different career options and adjust career plans. It also allows students to select high school courses and extracurricular activities that

help make a more competitive application for the colleges of interest. To aid a student in specifying a career goal, start by encouraging the student to answer the following questions.

- **What careers do I find interest in and what are my strengths?**
- **What kind of jobs do I want to pursue?**
- **What kind of education do those jobs require?**
- **Do I want to attend college near my home?**
- **Will I need to earn money while I am in school?**
- **What kind of college will I need to attend to prepare for the jobs I am interested in pursuing?**



# Career Clusters and Pathways

The National Career Clusters Framework provides a vital structure for organizing and delivering quality Career Technical Education programs through learning and comprehensive programs of study. Career clusters are broad categories of related occupations. The clusters are further divided into more specific pathways, which show more specific career areas with sim-

ilar knowledge and skill requirements. Identifying a career cluster and pathway enables students to choose appropriate coursework and activities in middle school and high school to prepare for greater success in college and career. A link to the [National Career Clusters Framework website](#) is available in the resources section of this guide.



## Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources

- Agriculture & Natural Resources
- Agriculture, Power & Machinery
- Aquaculture
- Diversified Agriculture
- Food Products (Meats)
- Forestry
- Horticulture



## Architecture & Construction

- Architecture & Drafting
- Carpentry
- Construction
- Electrical
- Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning



## Arts, A/V Technology & Communications

- Digital Media Technology
- Simulation & Animation Design
- Television Broadcasting & Production



## Business, Marketing & Finance

- Business, Marketing & Finance
- Entrepreneurship



## Education & Training

- Educator Preparation



## Health Sciences

- Health Care & Clinical Services
- Sports Medicine



## Hospitality & Tourism

- Culinary Arts
- Lodging, Hospitality and Tourism



## Human Services

- Barbering
- Cosmetology
- Early Childhood Education
- Family & Consumer Sciences
- Natural Hair Care & Braiding



## Information Technology

- Information Technology
- Software Development



## Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security

- Fire Science
- Law & Public Safety
- Law Enforcement



## Manufacturing

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Industrial Maintenance
- Instrumentation Technology
- Furniture Design & Manufacturing
- Metal Fabrication
- Precision Machining
- Welding
- Shipbuilding Academy



## Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

- Engineering
- Energy
- Polymer Science



## Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

- Automotive Service Technician
- Collision Repair Technician
- Diesel Service Technician
- Logistics & Supply Chain

# Complete a College Planning Checklist

The United States Department of Education (USDE) Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) offers a variety of checklists with the steps to help your student's chances of getting into—and being able to afford—their school of choice. Each checklist is about more than the classes your student will take. It is also about developing the skills that your student will need to succeed in college and life. These checklists show the steps your student can take, as well as websites they can explore, as they prepare academically and financially for college or career. There are also checklists for families, as well as for adult students.

## Elementary School

PreK-12 students are introduced to college/careers through the comprehensive counseling program. Elementary School starts the student on the road to enjoying learning. Encourage the student to do their best in school, read and have fun learning. Parents help a young student develop an interest in reading by reading aloud to them. Checking your student's homework and following their progress in school by looking at report cards and attending teacher conferences shows the student that you care



and that their learning is important. This is also the time to consider starting to save for your student's college education. Learn about the tax advantages of state college savings plans and prepaid tuition plans.

## Middle School

Middle School is a critical time for the student to start thinking about high school and possible careers. A student should take challenging and interesting classes to prepare for high school, develop strong study habits, and do their best in school and on standardized tests. It is also a good time to become involved in school- or community-based activities that allow students to explore interests and learn new things. Parents should encourage students by helping them develop good study habits, such as finishing all work before going on social media or playing computer games. Talk with your student about their interests and help match those interests with a college major and career. Seventh graders have access to Major-

Clarity, the approved statewide computer platform which manages college- and career-readiness goals and automates the Individual Success Plans (ISPs) for each student.

# NINTH GRADE – FRESHMAN YEAR

Ninth grade is a crucial year for college prep, as it is when earned grades and chosen courses count toward your student's cumulative high school GPA. Your student may even take some academic classes in middle school that count for college prep. College-bound students should focus on choosing classes to fulfill college prerequisites.

Students who begin fulfilling college course requirements in the eighth grade may be able to enjoy a more relaxed schedule their junior and senior years, allowing them to pursue other college prep programs and activities in their spare time and enabling them to focus on good habits and creating an attitude for success.

## • Student Checklist for Freshman Year •

- Take challenging classes in core academic subjects. Most colleges require four years of English, at least three years of social studies (history, civics, geography, economics, etc.), three years of mathematics, three years of science, and many require two years of a foreign language. Round out your course load with classes in computer science and the arts. In the majority of cases, if you have met the requirements for graduation, you have also met these requirements.
- Get involved in school- or community-based activities that enable you to explore career interests. Consider working, volunteering, and/or participating in academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, and camps with specialty focuses such as music, arts, or science. Remember—it is quality (not quantity) that counts.
- Ask your school counselor or teachers about Advanced Placement courses, whether you are eligible, and how to enroll in them.
- Use career search tools such as MajorClarity to research your career options.
- Start a list of your awards, honors, paid and volunteer work, and extracurricular activities. Update it throughout high school.
- Learn how to manage money.
- Explore different reasons for going to college, and do not be afraid to ask for help from your parents, school counselor, and older students as you prepare.

## Parent Checklist for Student's Freshman Year

- Talk to your student about college plans as if he or she will definitely go to college.
- Keep an eye on your student's study habits and grades—stay involved.
- Encourage your student to take Advanced Placement or other challenging classes.
- Add to your student's college savings account regularly, and make sure you are fully aware of the provisions of the account.

# 10TH GRADE – SOPHOMORE YEAR

In the 10th grade, students may take the PSAT, PSAT 10, or Pre-ACT. Students can benefit from early exposure to the types of standardized tests they will most likely need to take to enter college.

Instead of waiting, many students prefer to take practice versions of the SAT or ACT exams. A student can use their performance on practice tests to help identify areas for improvement and begin preparing for the actual SAT or ACT.

A student should consider taking the ACT in the 10th grade. Research shows the more times they take the test, the better they will do.

Most colleges also look for extracurricular activities that demonstrate leadership, community service, and/or exceptional ability. While sports remain a popular activity, students may explore other options, such as debate and student government, or consider engaging in service opportunities to give to others.

## • Student Checklist for Sophomore Year •

- ⬡ Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their requirements.
- ⬡ Consider taking a practice [Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test \(PSAT/NMSQT\)](#), or check out the [ACT Aspire exam sandbox](#).
- ⬡ Plan to use your summer wisely: Work, volunteer, or take a summer course (away or at a local college).
- ⬡ Use career search tools such as MajorClarity to research career options.
- ⬡ Go to career information events to get a more detailed look at career options.
- ⬡ Research majors that might be a good fit with your interests and goals based on the results from your career search.
- ⬡ Learn the differences between grants, loans, work-study, and scholarships.

## Parent Checklist for Student's Sophomore Year

- ⬡ Find out whether your child's school has college nights or financial aid nights. Plan to attend those events with your child.
- ⬡ Start gathering key information about colleges your child is thinking about. Visit each school's website to see if virtual tours are available.
- ⬡ Encourage your child to take responsibility for balancing homework with any other activities or a part-time job.
- ⬡ Learn about the standardized tests your child will be taking at the 10th through 12th grade levels.
- ⬡ Get a brief overview of financial aid from [Do You Need Money for College? Apply for Federal Student Aid](#).

# 11th GRADE – JUNIOR YEAR

The junior year is far more intensive than the first two for completing many different tasks. The following checklists suggest steps your

family can take, as well as websites you can explore, as you prepare academically and financially for college.

## • Student Checklist for Junior Year •

- Explore careers and their earning potential with the [Occupational Outlook Handbook search tool](#). For a fun interactive tool, try this [career search](#).
- Use career search tools such as MajorClarity to research career options.
- Learn about choosing a college and find a link to our free college search tool.
- Go to college fairs and college-preparation presentations hosted by college representatives.
- Take the [PSAT/NMSQT](#). You must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Scholarship Program.
- Register for and take college admission exams. Many colleges require the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests, or the ACT.
- Find scholarships for which you might want to apply. Deadlines can be as early as the summer between 11th and 12th grades, so prepare now to submit applications.
- Find out what government financial aid you can apply for, and how, in Do You Need Money for College or Career School? Apply for [Federal Student Aid](#).

**REMEMBER: Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting the fee waived.**



## • Summer Before 12th Grade – TO-DO LIST •

- Create a username and password ([FSA ID](#)) that you will use to confirm your identity when accessing your government financial aid information and electronically signing your federal student aid documents. Learn about the [FSA ID and create yours](#). Note: You must create your own FSA ID; if your parent creates it for you, that will cause confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process. ([Watch a video about creating your FSA ID.](#))
- Narrow the list of colleges you want to attend. If possible, visit those colleges and request information and applications for admission. Ask about financial aid, admission requirements, and deadlines.
- Decide whether you are going to apply for admission under a particular college's early decision, early action, or regular decision program. Learn about the program deadlines and requirements.
- Use the [Federal Student Aid Estimator](#) to compare the costs at the colleges. Be sure to apply for [scholarships](#). Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow so you have less to pay back later.

## Parent Checklist for Student's Junior Year

- Review your financial situation regarding paying for college.
- Get in-depth information on the [federal student aid programs](#).
- [Create your own FSA ID](#) if you do not have one yet. (The FSA ID is a username and password that you will use for such purposes as signing your student's Free Application for Federal Student Aid.) Note: You must create your own FSA ID. If your child creates it for you, or if you create your child's, that will cause confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process. (Need help? You and your child should watch the ["How to Create an Account Username and Password \(FSA ID\)" video](#).)
- Talk to your child about the colleges he or she is considering and help him or her clarify goals and priorities.
- Attend college fairs with your child but do not take over the conversation with the college representatives. Just listen, and let your child do the talking.
- Take your child to visit college campuses, preferably when classes are in session.
- Make sure your child is looking into or already has applied for scholarships.
- Ask your employer whether scholarships are available for employees' children.
- Learn about student and parent loans in [Federal Student Loans: Basics for Students](#) and [Federal Student Loans: Direct PLUS Loan Basics for Parents](#).

# 12th GRADE – SENIOR YEAR

The senior year is the most intense for completing many different tasks. The following checklists suggest steps your family can

take, as well as websites you can explore, as you prepare academically and financially for college.

## • Student Checklist for Senior Year •

- ⬡ Work hard all the way to graduation—second-semester grades can affect [scholarship eligibility](#).
- ⬡ Stay involved in after-school activities and seek leadership roles if possible.
- ⬡ Use career search tools such as MajorClarity to research career options.
- ⬡ As soon as possible after its October 1 release, complete and submit your [FAFSA form](#), along with any other financial aid applications your chosen school(s) may require. These are usually due by early February.
- ⬡ After you submit the FAFSA form, you should receive your [Student Aid Report \(SAR\)](#) within three days to three weeks. It lists your answers to the questions on your FAFSA form and gives you some basic information about your aid eligibility. [Make any necessary corrections](#) and submit them to the FAFSA processor.
- ⬡ Register for and take the standardized tests required for college admission if you have not already done so.
- ⬡ Apply to the colleges of your choice. Follow the instructions and pay close attention to deadlines!
- ⬡ Ask your counselor and teachers to submit the required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you are applying.
- ⬡ Complete any last scholarship applications.
- ⬡ Understand the FAFSA process better by watching the videos in the “FAFSA: Apply for Aid” playlist at [YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8d311111111111111111111111111111).
- ⬡ Review your college acceptances and compare the [colleges’ financial aid offers](#). Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.
- ⬡ Contact a college’s financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that college has offered you.
- ⬡ When you decide which college you want to attend, notify that college of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many colleges require this notification and deposit by May 1.
- ⬡ Make informed decisions about student loans; the following resources are important at this point:
  - [Federal Versus Private Loans](#)
  - [Federal Student Loans: Basics for Students](#)

## • Parent Checklist for Student's Senior Year •

- Work with your student on filling out the [FAFSA form](#).
- Make sure your student's [personal information is safe](#) when he or she applies for financial aid. For tips, read [Federal Student Aid and Identity Theft](#).
- Read [IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Education](#) to see how you might benefit from federal income tax credits for education expenses.
- Understand the [benefits of federal student loans](#).
- Review with your student, "[What should I consider when taking out federal student loans?](#)".
- Look at communications from college to which your child sent FAFSA information. If a college has offered you or your child Direct Loans, the [Federal Student Loans: Basics for Students](#) and [Federal Student Loans: Direct PLUS Loan Basics for Parents](#) booklets might be useful to you.

**REMEMBER: Just like in your junior year, remember to register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting the fee waived.**





High school course offerings to consider are challenging subjects in accelerated programs, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, or even dual credit opportunities available at your school. Information regarding each of these types of course options is provided below.

## Accelerated Programs

▲ Students who participate in accelerated coursework in high school are more likely to enroll in and complete college. Mississippi's graduation require-

ments include advanced coursework to earn an endorsement. For more information about Mississippi's accelerated programs visit [Accelerated Programs](#).

## Advanced Placement Courses

▲ Advanced Placement (AP) courses are college-level courses offered by trained high school teachers in the regular high school setting. AP courses guarantee rigor in our classrooms. The high school teachers who offer AP courses are trained by The College Board to offer the course at a college level and have a syllabus approved by The College Board. AP courses are challenging, involve significant study time daily, and require sophisticated critical thinking skills. In May of each year, AP students take the AP exam(s). Students who score at the three, four, or five level may be able to earn college credit for these courses before leaving high school. Policies for college credits differ from college to college, and it is recommended to check college admissions and credit policies carefully.

Performing well on an AP exam means more than just the successful completion of a course.

Research suggests that students who complete AP courses are:

- Better prepared for college-level work
- Standouts in the college admissions process
- More likely to continue beyond their freshman year
- More likely to graduate within four to five years
- More competitive in qualifying for scholarships

For information about AP exam fee waivers, see your school counselor. For more information about Advanced Placement, AP courses, visit the Mississippi Department of Education Advanced Placement website. A link to the Advanced Placement website is available in the resources section of this guide.

# Dual Credit

▲ A dual credit student is enrolled in a Community College (CC) or Institution of Higher Learning (IHL) while enrolled in high school. The student may receive high school and college credit for the postsecondary coursework through an agreement between the local educational agency (LEA) and the CC/IHL. The agreement details how issues of tuition and

fees, transportation, instructional personnel, materials and sites, academic progress monitoring, and grade documentation are to be handled between the LEA and the CC/IHL. A link to the [MDE Procedures Manual for the State of Mississippi Dual Enrollment Accelerated Programs website](#) is available in the resources section of this guide.

## Mississippi Diploma Options

▲ The Mississippi Department of Education provides a variety of diploma options that give students the opportunity to earn an endorsement with their high school diploma and provides many students with disabilities an opportunity to earn a traditional diploma. The diploma options include a traditional diploma for all students and an alternate diploma option for students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. Students also have the opportunity to earn additional requirements to qualify for a traditional diploma with a Career and Technical Education (CTE) endorsement, an academic endorsement, or a distinguished academic endorsement. Students can earn more than one endorsement.

The traditional diploma requires all students graduating from Mississippi high schools to have the same basic requirements and to earn 24 Carnegie Units. After meeting the traditional diploma requirements, students can take additional CTE coursework to meet the requirements for the CTE endorsement or advanced college-preparation coursework to earn an academic or distinguished academic endorsement. The CTE and academic endorsements require students to earn 26 Carnegie Units. Students must earn 28 Carnegie Units to qualify for the distinguished academic endorsement. Also, the distinguished academic endorsement requires students to meet national college and career benchmarks above just earning credits.

Students completing Alternate Diploma Options are required to participate in the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate (MAAP-A). Only students identified by their Individualized Education Program committee as having a significant cognitive disability may be eligible to earn the Alternate Diploma. The Alternate Diploma meets accountability graduation requirements in the same manner as a Traditional Diploma. Students earning the Alternate Diploma must contact the postsecondary institution to determine eligibility for Ability to Benefit (ATB).

Any student with a significant cognitive disability who completes the minimum graduation requirements and has achieved a level of Passing or Proficient on the end-of-course MAAP-A assessments is eligible to receive an Alternate Diploma. Students must participate in the alternate assessments during the year the student is enrolled in the corresponding courses (Alternate Biology, Alternate English II, Alternate Algebra). The local school district may establish additional local requirements approved by the local school board as authorized under Miss. Code Ann. § 37-16-7.

A link to the [Mississippi High School Diploma and Endorsement Options Communication Toolkit website](#) is available in the resources section of this guide.

# High School College Readiness Courses

▲ To help prepare high school students for the transition to postsecondary study, Mississippi, in conjunction with Southern Regional Educational Board and seventeen other states, developed two courses that align with college and career readiness standards. Essentials for College Literacy and Essentials for College Math are senior-level high school courses designed to prepare students for college credit-bearing courses. Based on Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) Policy

608, students who meet the course entry requirements and complete one or both courses with an 80 or above are not required to take the corresponding remedial courses for College Algebra or English Composition I at any of the eight public Mississippi Universities. Course entry requirements for seniors are located in the [MDE State Board Policy Chapter 28, Rule 28.6 Essentials for College Math and Essentials for College Literacy Requirements](#).

## ACT State Testing

● The ACT college readiness assessment is a curriculum and standards-based educational and planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college. The ACT is administered to all students classified as juniors in order to increase the percentage of students ready for college as measured by ACT benchmarks in each content area.

When it comes to preparing for the ACT, there is no single magic solution; however, there are things the student can do in the months leading up to the ACT that will help achieve higher scores. Enroll in challenging courses in high school. The more challenging the class, the more prepared you are for the test. It is advantageous to take the ACT in the fall or early spring of the junior year. Doing this shows the areas where a student is succeeding and uncovers areas where a student can improve.



The following are things a student can do to help prepare to take the ACT.

- Prior to testing, take practice ACTs to become familiar with the format and types of questions asked.
- Schedule amounts of time regularly to study for the ACT over an extended period. Keep study times listed on a calendar to prioritize ACT study with other things like homework assignments, extracurricular activities, and other obligations.
- Be sure to spend time practicing skills in subject areas that the student excels in, as well as lower-achieving subject areas where improvement is also possible.

- For information about the ACT fee waiver, check with your school counselor. Visit the [Get2College website](#) for free ACT prep.
- Use ACT prep materials to become more familiar with the test format, gain confidence, and be ready on test days. There are free online practice tests, helpful study guides, interactive study tools, and more found on the [ACT website](#).
- When registering to take the test, choose a test date that is at least two months ahead of the application deadlines of all the colleges and scholarship agencies that you might want to apply to. Scores are normally reported within 2–8 weeks after the test date. Also, the ACT Writing Test is an optional 40-minute essay that measures writing skills. If

you take the ACT with writing, scores will be reported only after all your scores are available, including writing, normally within 5–8 weeks after the test date.

ACT research shows that 57% of students who take the test more than once increase their ACT Composite score. Look at the requirements for the colleges where you are interested in applying and see if your score meets their expectations. If chances of getting into a certain program or qualifying for a scholarship require raising your score, even by one point, then retake the ACT. One point on the ACT can make the difference in acceptance into college and/or thousands of dollars in scholarships. Use scores on previous tests to continue focusing on the areas that need more instruction. If you need to improve your score, test again early in your senior year.

Learn about taking the ACT with the [FREE eBook](#), *Before, During, and After: Three Stages of Taking a College Entrance Exam* (Also, the link to [everything you need to know about the ACT](#) is provided in the resources section of this guide.

## SAT Test

▲ The SAT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions. The SAT is given to provide colleges with one common criterion that can be used to compare all applicants. However, it is just one factor in the admissions decision. Schools also consider a student's high school GPA, academic transcript, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, interviews, and personal essays. The weight placed on SAT scores varies from school to school.



The SAT exam is offered nationally every year in October, November, December, January, March, May, and June. There are two main SAT sections: math, evidence-based reading, and writing. There is also an optional essay portion, and those results are reported separately. The SAT test will take students approximately three hours and 50 minutes to complete.

For more information, visit the [SAT Suite of Assessments](#). For information about SAT fee waivers, check with your school counselor.

# Preparing to Enroll in College

▲ Preparing for college is about developing the skills that will help you succeed in college and life (e.g., time management and financial

management skills), as well as deciding on the classes that you take and applying for financial aid.

## Research Different Types of Institutions

▲ All colleges and universities award degrees; however, the type of school you attend impacts the cost of your education, the courses of study you must choose from, and your overall college experience. There are several types of postsecondary institutions.

- Four-year public college or university
- Four-year private college or university
- Two-year community college
- For-profit college

- Online college or university
- Trade school or technical college
- In-state vs. out-of-state colleges or universities

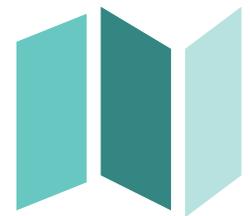
Consult with your high school counselor to learn more about the different types of schools you may be considering. For more information about how to start planning for college, review the [Mississippi Career Exploration and Planning Expectations \(Grades 6-12\)](#) and the [Mississippi Career Development Pacing Guide for Grades 6-12](#).

## Mississippi Articulation and Transfer Tool (MATT)

▲ The Mississippi Articulation and Transfer Tool (MATT) is available for schools to use to align career pathways with college plans. The MATT enables school counselors to advise students about college course selection based on their chosen pathway and ensure the dual credit courses students are taking in high school will transfer to a four-year university in Mississippi. MATT enables students to compare current courses against equivalent courses at another institu-

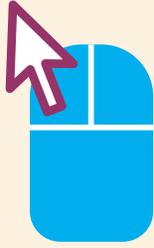
tion and learn how those courses meet degree requirements for a specific major. Students enrolling in a community/junior college before an IHL can also use the tool to ensure courses taken at a community college will transfer to an IHL.

A link to the [MATT website](#) is available in the resources section of this guide.



# College Information Search Tools

▲ There are several free college search tools on the web. The U.S. Department of Education's tool, College Navigator, allows students to search for schools by location, degrees offered, programs/majors, tuition and fees, setting, size, and much more. The search re-



sults for each school give them a wide range of information, such as estimated student expenses, types of financial aid provided, admissions requirements, accreditation, and graduation rates. A link to the [NCES College Navigator](#) is provided in the resource section of this guide.

## Mississippi Public Community Colleges

▲ Mississippi's public community colleges offer top-quality academic and job training programs that are tailored to the needs of communities and businesses in the state. There are 15 public community colleges throughout Mississippi as well as a virtual community college. The statewide network of community colleges serves the entire state, preparing students for success and supporting communities across the state.

These community colleges are local public schools that provide a great first step toward a full four-year college bachelor's degree. Community college academic and career and technical programs are traditionally one to two years in length, leading to certificates and/or an associate degree. Mississippi's fifteen community colleges also are the workforce training providers in Mississippi. Noncredit workforce education enables the colleges to respond to local labor market demands by meeting the workforce needs of current and future employers, as well as the needs of individuals for short-term skills training. Mississippi's public community colleges are usually affordable and have open admission policies. If you have a high school

degree or GED, you can usually enroll in a local Mississippi community college. For more information about academic, career and technical, or workforce training provided by Mississippi's public community colleges, visit [www.mccb.edu](http://www.mccb.edu).

Mississippi's public community colleges are listed below with links to their websites.

[Northwest Mississippi Community College](#)

[Northeast Mississippi Community College](#)

[Itawamba Community College](#)

[Coahoma Community College](#)

[Mississippi Delta Community College](#)

[Holmes Community College](#)

[East Central Community College](#)

[East Mississippi Community College](#)

[Meridian Community College](#)

[Hinds Community College](#)

[Copiah-Lincoln Community College](#)

[Jones College](#)

[Southwest Community College](#)

[Pearl River Community College](#)

[Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College](#)

# Mississippi Public Universities •

Mississippi's Public Universities consist of the eight public universities—Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, The University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi—and includes the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Mississippi Agricultural, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, 23 satellite centers, and various other locations throughout the state. For more information about Mississippi's public univer-

sities, visit [www.mississippi.edu/universities](http://www.mississippi.edu/universities).

Mississippi's public universities are listed below with links to their websites.

[Alcorn State University](#)

[Delta State University](#)

[Jackson State University](#)

[Mississippi State University](#)

[Mississippi University for Women](#)

[Mississippi Valley State University](#)

[The University of Mississippi](#)

[The University of Southern Mississippi](#)

## Financial Aid: Planning and Funding Your Student's Education

There are a variety of different types of financial aid available to students from federal, state, school, and private sources. Eligibility criteria for different kinds of financial aid vary. Tuition is the largest college expense; however, other costs, such as housing, meal plans, and textbooks, can add up. Families also pay out-of-pocket for things like extracurricular activities, clubs, etc. These expenses make researching and applying for financial aid an important aspect of preparing for college. Financial aid is available from the federal government in the form of grants, work-study funds, and loans. Students use the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) form to apply. Visit the [Get2College](#) website for more information about financial aid.

### GRANTS

A grant is a form of financial aid that does not have to be repaid (unless, for example, you withdraw from school and owe a refund, or you receive a TEACH Grant and do not complete the service obligation). A variety of federal grants are available, including Pell

Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), and Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants. Other Mississippi grants include but are not limited to:

HELP Grant - Created by the Mississippi Legislature, this program is designed to provide tuition assistance to qualified students whose financial need, as demonstrated by federal student aid eligibility, will not be met with gift aid from other sources. The program provides full tuition to qualified students for up to four years.

Mississippi Tuition Assistance Grant (MTAG) - This program is designed to provide financial assistance to Mississippi residents attending state-approved public and private not-for-profit two-year and four-year eligible colleges and universities. The primary objective of MTAG is to offer educational opportunities for students who wish to pursue postsecondary education in the state and do not already benefit from federal need-based aid.

Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant (MESG) - This program is designed to provide financial assistance to Mississippi residents attending state-approved public and private not-for-profit two-year and four-year eligible colleges and universities. The primary objective of MESG is to provide educational opportunities for high-achieving high school students who wish to pursue postsecondary education in the state.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Many nonprofit and private organizations offer scholarships to help students pay for college or career school. These are sometimes based on academic merit, talent, or a particular area of study. Scholarships can help you manage education expenses. Some college scholarships are merit-based. You earn them by meeting or exceeding certain standards set by the scholarship-giver. Merit scholarships might be awarded based on academic achievement or a combination of academics and a special talent, trait, or interest. Other scholarships are based on financial need.

Many scholarships are geared toward particular groups of people; for instance, there are scholarships for women or graduate students. And some are available because of where you or your parent work or because you come from a certain background (e.g., scholarships for military families).

A scholarship might cover the entire cost of your tuition, or it might be a one-time award of a few hundred dollars. Either way, it's worth applying for because it'll help reduce the cost of your education.

To learn more about scholarships, contact the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend or search for scholarships online.

## WORK-STUDY JOBS

The Federal work-study program allows students to earn money to pay for college expenses by working part-time.

## LOANS

Student loans allow you to borrow money to attend a college or career school. However, loans plus interest accrued must be repaid. It is critical

to understand loan repayment options to be able to successfully repay student loans.

The U.S. Department of Education's federal student loan program is the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program. Under this program, the U.S. Department of Education is the lender. There are four types of Direct Loans available:

- **Direct Subsidized Loans** are loans made to eligible undergraduate students who demonstrate financial need to help cover the costs of higher education at a college or career school.
- **Direct Unsubsidized Loans** are loans made to eligible undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, but eligibility is not based on financial need.
- **Direct PLUS Loans** are loans made to parents of dependent undergraduate students and to graduate or professional students to help pay for education expenses not covered by other financial aid. Eligibility is not based on financial need, but a credit check is required.

Information about the types of financial aid can be found at [USDE FSA Types of Financial Aid](#) and the [Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid](#). Also, fact sheets, videos, and infographics are available at [USDE FSA Resources](#). Use the [USDE FSA Financial Aid Toolkit Search Engine](#) to search financial aid tools and resources. Links to each of these resources are found in the resources section of this guide.

For more information about additional resources for funding and financial planning, check out resources from the Pacer Center, such as [Possibilities: A Financial Resource for Parents of Children with Disabilities](#).

# Plan Ahead to Meet Important Deadlines

Applying to college involves carrying out many tasks. It is important to keep track of the important tasks, dates, and deadlines. The deadlines are associated with college admissions, college applications, SAT and/or ACT preparations, scholarship applications, and filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

**Each year, the FAFSA opens October 1. Students seeking federal financial aid have until June 30—approximately a year and a half after the FAFSA open date—to submit the form.**

Those who do not file by the end of June are ineligible to receive federal, state, and institutional aid for that FAFSA's academic year. In addition to the federal deadline, there are also state and institutional deadlines to meet. Most states and colleges have their own financial aid programs that usually have deadlines that are earlier than June 30. With so many deadlines to keep track of, it is critical to plan to navigate the financial aid system. The sooner you can fill out the FAFSA the better because institutional deadlines vary from school to school and often come well before the federal guideline. If you are considering multiple colleges, make sure you are aware of each college's FAFSA deadline (if applicable) and apply by the earliest deadline. FAFSA deadlines are usually listed on each college's financial aid website.

**Each state also sets its own FAFSA deadline, which is usually early in the spring semester, but you should not wait until then to submit an application.**

States often have limited funds and offer grants, scholarships, and other types of aid until they run out, so it is very important to submit FAFSA as early as possible to maximize chances of receiving state-issued and institutional aid.

## How to Complete the FAFSA

**1 Create an account username and password (FSA ID).**

*If you are a dependent student, your parent will also need to create an account username and password (FSA ID).*

**2 Begin the FAFSA® form and create a save key.** This will allow you to save your FAFSA® form and access it later if needed.

College admission deadlines are also critical. *College applications generally open in August and are due in the late fall or early winter of senior year, so most students start applying in the fall of their senior year.*

Get a head start on certain application materials, such as securing good SAT/ACT scores and asking for letters of recommendation, toward the end of junior year or during the summer before senior year. Early decision and early action deadlines are earlier in the fall, usually in November. If your student plans to apply for early admission, he or she needs to get started on the application process sooner.

# Complete FAFSA® Form

**3 Complete the student demographics section, including entering your name and birthdate.**  
If you've completed the FAFSA® form before, this information will auto-populate.

**4 List the schools you want your FAFSA® information sent to.** Even if you haven't applied or been accepted yet, make sure you include all the schools you are considering.

**7 Provide your and your parent(s) financial information.**  
You will use your 2021 tax return for the 2023–24 FAFSA® form. Tip: Using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool can help make this step simpler.

**6 If you were determined to be a dependent student, complete the parent demographics section.**

**5 Answer the series of questions to determine your dependency status.**  
The dependency guidelines are set by Congress and are different from those used by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

**8 Sign your FAFSA® form!**  
If you're a dependent student, have your parent sign your FAFSA® form as well. Once signed, submit your form.

Federal  
Student  
Aid  
OFFICE OF THE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Getting Ready to Attend College

When a student is accepted to the college he or she plans to attend, there is a wonderful sense of relief. Students and parents must then think about what comes next. You will need to create a summer to-do list to prepare to begin the journey to college. Check email regularly, as most colleges communicate via email. Make sure important emails are shared with family members involved in the process. Emails contain things like lists of required vaccinations, orientation dates, scholarship and major department deadlines, etc.

Get your student ready to handle personal finances. Students benefit from planning a monthly budget for the first year. If you have not already, you will want to open a bank account that has a branch in your area or an ATM on or within walking distance to campus. Ask the bank about a "college account" which usually requires a lower minimum balance. If the student does not want a bank account, then he or she will need at least a debit card for emergencies. When selecting a meal plan, never select the highest one; save money and go for the medium or lower one. You can always pay for more toward the end of the semester if needed, but you will not be refunded

what you do not use of the higher option.

Go ahead and schedule your doctor, dentist, and other health-related appointments before your student leaves for school, otherwise it may be winter break before you have time to visit a medical professional. This includes refilling medications like asthma inhalers, epi-pens, and other prescriptions needed for daily health and safety.

Make sure you have insurance cards for your health plans. Colleges often require students to have health insurance.

Schedule orientation early in the summer rather than later, as you will probably be required to participate in a session. Read your emails and make sure you complete any online requirements prior to orientation.

If you have Advanced Placement or Dual Credit results, be sure to send those in prior to orientation to have them applied to your freshman college transcript before orientation.

You will need a laptop computer. Colleges usually offer good deals on computers, so consider purchasing one during orientation and check out any student discounts on university-provided access to software.

## Off-to-College Packing List

[Use this checklist](#) to make sure you have everything you need for your first year at college. These are just suggestions; you should adapt this list to suit your own situation. To save packing space or shipping costs, it might make sense to buy some of these items after you arrive. It might also make sense to pack for one season at a time and switch items when you go home during breaks.

- **ROOM NEEDS/STORAGE**

Lamps, alarm clock/clock radio, trash can, storage bins and under-the-bed storage trays, fan, drying rack for laundry, bulletin board and pushpins, dry-erase wall calendar/board, mini toolkit (including screwdriver, hammer, wrench), picture hangers (double-sided tape for concrete walls)

- **LINENS/LAUNDRY SUPPLIES**



Sheets and pillowcases (Two sets. Check with the college for the size needed — some college twin beds are extra long.), towels (bath, hand, and face), pillows, mattress pad (check with college for size needed), blankets, comforter/bedspread, clothes hangers, laundry bag/basket, laundry detergent, fabric softener and stain remover, lint brush, mini sewing kit

- **OFFICE/DESK SUPPLIES**

Memory cards and USB flash drives, stapler and staples, printer paper, pens and pencils, pencil holder and sharpener, notebooks, folder with pockets, labels of various sizes, 3×5 index cards, sticky notes, paper clips and binder clips, rubber bands, tape, scissors, highlighter pens, ruler, stackable desk trays, stamps, and envelopes



- **ELECTRONICS**



Laptop, printer, HDMI cord, Ethernet cord for computer (check whether your room has wireless), surge protector, extension cords, outlet adapters, headphones, cell phone

- **SHARED ITEMS — CHECK WITH ROOMMATE(S)**

Audio equipment, TV and DVD player, coffeemaker/hot pot/microwave (if allowed), small refrigerator (if one is not provided), area rug, posters/art



- **TOILETRIES**



Antacids, aspirin or other pain relievers, vitamins, antidiarrheal medicine, anti-nausea medicine, adhesive bandages, antibiotic ointment, cough drops, shower caddy, shower shoes, shampoo and conditioner, hairstyling products, soap, travel soap container(s), toothpaste and toothbrush, dental floss, comb/brush, tweezers, nail clippers, hair dryer/straightener/curling iron, razor and shaving cream, lotion and/or facial moisturizer, cotton swabs

- **CLOTHING**

Underwear, socks, pants, jeans, shirts, blouses, sweats, pajamas, slippers, flip-flops, sweaters, light/heavy jackets, gloves/scarf/hat (and other weather-related gear as needed), boots, sneakers or comfortable walking shoes, business-casual clothes, dress shoes, swimsuit



- **HOUSEHOLD AND KITCHEN ITEMS**



Paper towels, trash bags, lightbulbs, all-purpose cleaner, plastic storage bags, food-storage containers, dish soap, wet wipes, tissues, bowl, plate, cup, coffee mug, water bottle, silverware, can/bottle opener

- **MISCELLANEOUS**

Umbrella, backpack, sports equipment

# Tips for Parents to Help Students With Intellectual Disabilities Think About College

- Talk about college — How it is something to consider beyond high school and how it is different from high school (e.g., students do what they need to do with very little supervision or assistance).
- In college, the student decides what they want to learn, not their parents or teachers. Students can learn about a topic or subject that interests them.
- Visit some of the local colleges. If possible, sit in on a class to see what it is like. Take time to eat lunch and talk with some students. Visit the library or other places students hang out.
- If possible, encourage your child to take a class while still in high school to see the difference between college and high school courses.
- Discuss with your child things they are interested in other than academics—things that may be meaningful to them.
- Discuss different kinds of adult learning opportunities, including community college, continuing education, parks and recreation classes, and training/classes offered through local stores on crafts and home improvement projects that might be of interest.
- Try to make the connection between learning goals and life: A cooking class can help a student become independent in the kitchen; a Microsoft Office class can help prepare for a job in an office; classes just for fun allow you to meet people who have similar interests.
- Discuss accommodations that are being provided in high school and how these may be different in college. Teach your student to ask for support in different environments from those they may not know. Help your student communicate needs by creating appropriate ways to indicate a need.



# Resources

**ACT** – The ACT® test is the nation’s most popular college entrance exam, accepted and valued by all universities and colleges in the United States. The ACT is based on what students learn in high school and provides personalized information about their strengths for education and career planning

➔ [act.org](http://act.org)

**ACT WorkKeys** – A series of assessments that measures skills essential for success in the 21st-century workplace. The ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (ACT WorkKeys NCRC) is a credential that is issued based on competencies on three assessments: Applied Math, Graphic Literacy, and Workplace Documents. Examinees must score a 3 or higher on each of the three assessments to earn an ACT WorkKeys NCRC, which is issued at four levels – Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

➔ [mdek12.org/CTE/ACT-Workkeys](http://mdek12.org/CTE/ACT-Workkeys)

**Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi** - Offers a variety of courses for high school students, beginning with grade 7 and continuing through grade 12

➔ [mdek12.org/ESE/Approved-Course-for-the-Secondary-Schools](http://mdek12.org/ESE/Approved-Course-for-the-Secondary-Schools)

**Bureau of Labor Statistics Career Exploration** – An interactive website that allows students to explore careers based on interests and learn about the education and skills necessary for various careers, as well as the pay, job outlook, work environment, and more

➔ [bls.gov/k12/students/careers/career-exploration](http://bls.gov/k12/students/careers/career-exploration)

**Career One Stop** – Source for career exploration, training, and jobs

➔ [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org)

**College and Career Readiness (CCR) Course** – Developed to support the vision and mission of MDE that all students who graduate from high school are prepared for college, career, and active citizenship. The CCR course curriculum outlines the knowledge secondary students should obtain and the types of skills relevant for a successful transition to postsecondary and the workforce

➔ [www.mdek12.org/ese/College-and-Career-Readiness](http://www.mdek12.org/ese/College-and-Career-Readiness)

**College Preparation Checklists provided by the USDE Office of Student Financial Aid** – Checklists are provided with the steps you can take to help your chances of getting into—and being able to afford—the college or university of your choice

➔ [studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov)

**Get2College Center** – Access help with ACT prep, completing federal and state financial aid applications, career exploration, college search, interviewing skills, resume writing, and scholarship search

➔ [get2college.org](http://get2college.org)

**MajorClarity** – A platform all Mississippi schools can access to provide students opportunities to discover and explore career interests through virtual career simulations, Q&As with industry professionals, and even work-based learning opportunities—essentially, a hands-on approach to identifying a potential career pathway

➔ [mdek12.org/ESE/Counseling-and-Support-Services](http://mdek12.org/ESE/Counseling-and-Support-Services)

**Mississippi Articulation and Transfer Tool (MATT)** – Provides information about whether courses offered at one institution will be accepted for transfer credit at a partner institution

➔ [matttransfertool.com](http://matttransfertool.com)

# Resources

**Mississippi Career Development Pacing Guide for Grades 6-12** – This pacing guide outlines career development activities critical at each grade level and links to resources to complete each activity  
➔ [mdek12.org](http://mdek12.org)

**Mississippi Career Exploration and Planning Expectations for Grades 6-12** – Provides detailed information and links to guide each student’s development of their ISP, helping them make career and college decisions, plan a course of study, and make financial aid assessments with family members  
➔ [mdek12.org](http://mdek12.org)

**Mississippi Community Colleges** – Explore the public community colleges throughout Mississippi  
➔ [mccb.edu/colleges](http://mccb.edu/colleges)

**Mississippi High School Diploma and Endorsement Options Communication Toolkit** – Information about Mississippi Diploma Options and Traditional Diploma with Endorsement Options  
➔ [mdek12.org/OCGR/diploma](http://mdek12.org/OCGR/diploma)

**Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)** – Access all information pertaining to MDE offices, professional development, strategic plans, etc.  
➔ [mdek12.org](http://mdek12.org)

**MDE Accelerated Programs** – Information about Mississippi’s Accelerated Programs  
➔ [mdek12.org/ESE/Accelerated-Programs](http://mdek12.org/ESE/Accelerated-Programs)

**MDE Advanced Placement** – Information about college-level courses offered at Mississippi high schools  
➔ [mdek12.org](http://mdek12.org)

**MDE State Board Policy Chapter 28, Rule 28.6 Essentials for College Math and Essentials for College Literacy Requirements** – Information regarding the two Essentials for College Math and Essentials for College Literacy course requirements  
➔ [mdek12.org](http://mdek12.org)

**MDE Office of Career and Technical Education** – Information about career and technical education and workforce training in Mississippi  
➔ [mdek12.org/CTE/](http://mdek12.org/CTE/)

**MDE Procedures Manual for the State of Mississippi Dual Enrollment Accelerated Programs** – Information about Mississippi’s Dual Enrollment and Accelerated Programs  
➔ [mdek12.org/ESE/Accelerated-Programs](http://mdek12.org/ESE/Accelerated-Programs)

**Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services** – State agency that provides resources to help Mississippians with disabilities find new careers, live more independently, overcome obstacles, and face new challenges  
➔ [mdrs.ms.gov/Pages/default.aspx](http://mdrs.ms.gov/Pages/default.aspx)

**Mississippi IHL’s College Preparatory Curriculum** – Outlines Mississippi IHL’s college preparatory curriculum admission requirements  
➔ [mississippi.edu/admissions/curriculum.asp](http://mississippi.edu/admissions/curriculum.asp)

**Mississippi Work-Based Learning Teacher Resource Guide** – Provides information about Mississippi’s work-based learning opportunities  
➔ [mdek12.org/CTE/PA/WBL](http://mdek12.org/CTE/PA/WBL)

**Mississippi’s Public Universities** – Explore the public institutions of higher learning in Mississippi  
➔ [mississippi.edu/universities](http://mississippi.edu/universities)

**National Career Clusters® Framework** – An organizing tool for career and technical education programs, curriculum design, and instruction. The 16 Career Clusters in the National Career Clusters Framework represent 79 career pathways to help learners navigate their way to greater success in college and career.  
➔ [careertech.org/career-clusters](http://careertech.org/career-clusters)



# Notes

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# Notes



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