

POST-HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING RESOURCE GUIDE

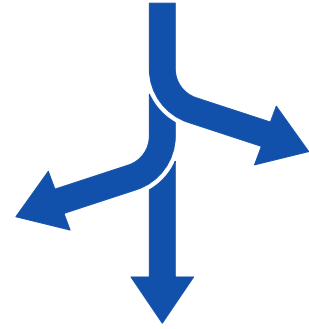
A PARENT'S GUIDE TO NEXT STEPS AFTER GRADUATION

UNDERSTANDING POST-HIGH SCHOOL OPTIONS

There is no single “right” path after high school.

Success looks different for every student and depends on:

1. ACADEMIC READINESS
2. TIME MANAGEMENT
3. GOALS
4. COSTS
5. LONG TERM OUTCOMES



POST HIGH SCHOOL PATHWAYS

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE



Best for: students pursuing careers that require a degree or seeking academic depth.

Consider:

- Student debt and total cost
- Completion rates and major-to-career alignment

Ask: Is the return on investment realistic for this major and school.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Best for: Students seeking a lower-cost, flexible path with transfer options

Consider:

- Transfer agreements with four-year colleges
- Availability of career-specific credentials

Ask: Does this pathway reduce cost while keeping future options open?

TRADE SCHOOLS & APPRENTICESHIPS



Best for: Students pursuing hands-on, in-demand careers

Consider:

- Quality and recognition of credentials
- Job placement and local demand

Ask: Will this program lead directly to employable, in-demand skills?

WORKFORCE/EMPLOYMENT



Best for: Students ready to earn income and gain real-world experience

Consider:

- Opportunities for skill development
- Potential for advancement or training

Ask: What skills, credentials, or growth opportunities come with this job?

MILITARY SERVICE



Best for: Students seeking structure, training, and education benefits

Consider:

- Length and nature of the commitment
- Long-term obligations and risks

Ask: Does the student fully understand the commitment and long-term implications?

GAP YEAR



Best for : Students needing time to explore goals before committing

Consider:

- Structure and clear purpose.
- Cost and future readiness

Ask: Is there a clear plan with goals, accountability, and next steps?

PLANNING AND SUPPORT

THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

Guidance counselors play an important role, but they are not decision-makers. Families should understand what counselors can support and where parents and students must lead.

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS CAN:

- ✓ Explain graduation requirements
- ✓ Provide general information on post-high school pathways
- ✓ Submit transcripts and required school documents
- ✓ Offer basic college and career guidance

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS CANNOT:

- ✗ Decide your child's post-high school path
- ✗ Decide which options are "best" or "most valid"
- ✗ Make financial decisions for your family

Note: Counselors often manage large case-loads and may default to college-first advise. Parents should view counselors as resources not gatekeepers.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNSELORS

- ✓ What options has my student explored beyond college?
- ✓ How do school offerings align with my child's goals?
- ✓ What credentials or experiences can my student earn before graduations?

PLANNING BEYOND COLLEGE

Plan around skills, credentials, and outcomes—**not just degrees!**

Key questions to ask:

- What skills will this path produce in 1, 3, and 5 years?
- What debt (if any) will be incurred?
- Can the student pivot if goals change?
- Does this path support independence and long-term sustainability?



TIMING & COSTS

PLANNING TIMELINE:

JUNIOR YEAR



- Course planning (AP, Dual Enrollment, certifications)
- Career exploration

SENIOR YEAR – FALL



- Applications (college, trade, military, jobs)
- FAFSA opens
- Scholarship deadlines begin

SENIOR YEAR – SPRING



- Decision-making
- Graduation requirements verified
- Financial aid comparisons

POST-GRAD SUMMER



- Onboarding for the chosen path
- Housing, transportation, and work readiness
- Backup plans in place

PAYING FOR LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

FAFSA Basics

- FAFSA is not an obligation to attend college
- Understand the Student Aid Index (SAI)

Scholarships

- Merit-based vs. need-based
- Local scholarships are often under-applied for
- Trade and workforce scholarships exist

Non-College Costs to Consider

- Tools, equipment, certifications
- Opportunity cost of unpaid programs
- Housing and transportation

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Assuming college is the default or safest option
- Waiting too long to discuss cost
- Relying solely on school guidance
- Treating non-college paths as failure

