

# College Application Timeline for 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students

## 9<sup>th</sup> grade:

- Take courses in all of the main subjects: English, math, history, science, foreign language and the arts. No matter what your grades are, show that you are trying your best, working hard, and showing improvement.
- Strive to do your best in the introductory level courses. The best possible actions you can take this year are to improve your reading comprehension, writing ability, and computational skills.
- Your report cards track your school attendance throughout the year as well as comment on how well you do fulfilling your Guided Study commitments, so use the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year to be exemplary in both of these areas.
- PCS kids focus more on professional or pre-professional ‘careers’ more than on any extra-curricular activities. After all, that is why you are here at PCS, right?! ☺ So, use this year to be the best professional child you can be! If you do want to be in some type of extra-curricular activity, consider becoming a peer tutor at PCS, get involved in the PCS student association, help on the PCS yearbook, or organize a charitable activity that takes place at PCS. Pick just one or two and do it really well.

## 10<sup>th</sup> grade:

- Continue the good academic work you did during 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and challenge yourself academically. Academics are the #1 factor when it comes to college admissions, not your SAT scores, not your recommendations, not your profession. Always make that the focus be on your studies and keep them as your priority.
- See your teachers for extra help. At PCS, all of the teachers are used to students coming in for extra one-on-one help. In fact, we admire kids who do that! In addition to the help these sessions offer you academically, we write about what a nice experience it was collaborating with you when we type up your college letters of recommendation.
- It is still way too early to start selecting any colleges. The best thing to do is keep having an open mind. Any 10<sup>th</sup> grader who says they already know which one they are going to definitely needs to relax and understand that there are many wonderful options out there that may actually turn out to be better for them.
- During the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, a student can try the PSAT and/or a practice ACT. The PSAT is the “Preliminary SAT,” and the practice ACT is an old version of a real ACT. These practice tests for the SAT and ACT are often composed of questions from previously-administered tests. PCS students typically take these tests during their sophomore and/or junior year. Since it is just a practice test, colleges will not see the scores. The

scores are just for you and your parents to see, and the test gives you the chance to practice taking a standardized assessment. When you get to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, The College Board uses the scores to help select recipients for National Merit Scholarships every year. The PSAT is taken at PCS in October. It lasts just over two hours: 50 minutes for a verbal section, 50 minutes for a math section, and 30 minutes for a writing section. The ACT, for those sophomores who elect to take it, is offered one Saturday in the spring. It lasts four hours. Here are a couple of comments about these tests: The majority of students' scores go up in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and go up again when they get to the real SAT and real ACT. Also, no test prep is required or even advised for these tests. It is much more helpful to see what the real numbers are and what the students' natural strengths are.

- On rare occasions, a student who has gotten straight A's all year in a particular subject at PCS may want to consider taking an SAT Subject Test in that subject in June. Talk to your teacher about whether it is appropriate for you to take the SAT Subject Tests this spring. Fewer and fewer colleges actually require these tests any more, but it might come up as a topic for you to consider and, if so, please contact the PCS College Counselor before May.

### **11<sup>th</sup> grade:**

- Do you know what the most important factor is in college admissions? The courses you take at PCS and the grades you earn in them! Your academics are the #1 factor when it comes to college admissions, not your SAT scores, not your recommendations, not your profession. Always keep the focus on your coursework and keep that as your priority.
- Junior year brings you higher-level courses at PCS. These courses are more sophisticated, the literature will be more challenging, the classroom style will be more 'collegiate' in its feel, the papers you write will be longer and will require more personal analysis, and you will be expected to participate actively in all your class discussions. That is why PCS is a college preparatory high school! Take all of this on with enthusiasm!
- Colleges who consider accepting PCS kids will weigh your professional or pre-professional 'careers' more than any extra-curricular activities. After all, that is why you are here at PCS, right?! ☺ If you do want to be in some type of extra-curricular activity, consider becoming a peer tutor at PCS, get involved in the PCS Student Association, help on the PCS yearbook, or organize a charitable activity that takes place at PCS. Pick just one or two of these and do it really well.
- During fall of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, a student can take the PSAT (this would be for the first or second time). The PSAT is the "Preliminary SAT." This practice test for the SAT is often composed of questions from previously administered tests. Since it is just a practice test, colleges will not see the scores; only the College Board, the PCS Associate Head and Head of the Upper School, the student, and the parents will. The

College Board uses the scores to help select recipients for National Merit Scholarships every year. The PSAT is taken at PCS in October. It lasts just over two hours: 50 minutes for a verbal section, 50 minutes for a math section, and 30 minutes for a writing section.

- The PCS College Advisor will schedule the first meeting with you at the beginning of the second semester. (That is in early February). There is no need to meet during the first semester. There is nothing that needs to happen during the first semester in terms of college admissions except for you to keep your focus on your academic work. By working hard in school, you are actually preparing yourself best for college, and setting yourself up well for us to begin our college application work together in February.
- In May or June of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, a student may want to take the actual SAT and/or ACT for the first time. We will discuss this when we all meet in February, and we can make a plan for it, and register for it, at that time.
- There are many opportunities to work on some preparation for the SAT and or ACT. For example, PCS and *The School of American Ballet* typically co-sponsor an SAT prep class for 11<sup>th</sup> graders that takes place during February, March, and April. It meets twice weekly, Wednesdays and Sundays, to help prepare students for the May and June SAT. The enrollment limit for this class is 12 students. The PCS College Counselor will have more information on this test-prep class at the college meeting in February. Also, there is the official free test prep work that is offered to all of you on-line by Khan Academy and by the ACT Academy websites.
- On rare occasion, a student who has gotten straight A's all year in a particular subject at PCS may want to consider taking an SAT Subject Test in that subject in June. Fewer and fewer colleges actually require these tests any more, but it could come up as a topic to consider, and, if so, please contact the PCS College Counselor before May.
- If you feel like it would help you to visit a college for the first time, spring break of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade or the summer after the 11<sup>th</sup> grade are the best times to do so. Colleges will offer a schedule of campus tours and information sessions on their websites (usually an hour long for each).
- Talk to two 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers that you would like to ask to write letters of recommendation for you. Colleges typically require two of these letters, and your 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers are often the best choices because of their knowledge of who you are and what your academic ability is at this point in your lives.
- You will begin working on your college application essays over the summer before the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and the actual application forms are usually made available in August or September. We will be actively working together by this point!

### **12<sup>th</sup> Grade:**

- By the start of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, we will know each other well and we will be working together frequently to produce your college applications.
- Read through the PCS Guide to Applying to College, which you received on College Night (and more copies are available in Room 701). This little book will give you the most information about applying to college.
- Re-connect with your two 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers about writing letters of recommendation for you.
- Proofread your PCS transcript to make sure that it is perfect.
- Read what the colleges say on their own websites about their admissions procedures and standards. Every college has its own rules.
- Make a list of approximately nine colleges to which you would like to apply: three 'reach' colleges, three 'probable' colleges, and three 'safety' colleges.
- Open an account on the Common Application website as well as accounts for any conservatories or state university systems to which you'd like to apply.
- Develop an arts resume about yourself that you can include in your application.
- Edit your college essay so that it is perfect and have several people proofread it for you.
- Take the SAT or ACT and/or the SAT Subject Tests so that you have a set of scores that you can submit to your colleges.
- Keep doing good work in all of your PCS courses. The colleges will see all of your grades, including those you earn for first semester of this year. In fact, you should be aware that colleges will request to see your grades for the second semester of senior year too!

### **General Tips:**

- Read, read, read! Kids who read a lot do better in the college admissions process. They develop their comprehension skills better, they learn about verbal expression better, and they write better (all of which builds towards future SATs, ACTs, and the college essay).
- Relax and enjoy your high school years. ~ We will help you every step of the way with these college tasks!