



Special Report

Time Management for Your College Admissions Campaign



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A successful college admissions campaign hinges on how well you manage 32 critical elements over a 12 to 18 month period of time. This special report identifies those critical milestones, shows you what to do and when. Detailed guidance notes for each milestone are provided. If you've been wondering where to begin and what to do to start college planning for your son or daughter, look no further. This is your starting point.

Dear Parent of a soon-to-be college student,

For over two decades, my colleagues and I have been advising families about the best ways to approach college planning. We provide professional oversight, project management, strategies and tactics as part of our professional engagements, but there is one element we cannot provide: Time. That's something doled out in equal quantities to every college bound family. How to make *effective* use of the time at your disposal is the subject of this report.

At the end of this report, you will find our Recommended Milestone Planning Chart. Refer to the chart in order to see the ideal window of time to complete each milestone. And remember, some of the milestones require several iterations. In other words, they need to be addressed several times as new data emerges.

Finally, let me say that we have used milestone planning in our private practice with thousands of families over the past two and a half decades, and I can assure you that it works. Parents report that there is less stress at home than they expected, and that working with a *system* keeps them focused on the tasks at hand. The students we've assisted typically

- finish their admissions applications early in November of senior year
- are admitted to the nations' better colleges at rates better than the national average
- have several *affordable* college options from which to choose

I'm pleased to be able to introduce you to the concept of planning for college with project milestones and to share these milestones with you. If you would like to establish your own plan of action using the milestones, consider becoming a member of our online community. There, you can get more information about each phase of college planning, interact with me and my professional colleagues and with other families who are part of our community.

You can join our community free of charge at www.members.strategiesforcollege.com. Become a member of our growing online community and get first hand help from our experts. Inside the member web site, you will find video training modules that walk you through each of the milestones. You can use these for reference again and again. You will also be able to participate in our members only forum AND get questions answered by me and other members of our professional team through our private Q&A area. Try it free for thirty days. Trust me, you won't find this type of service anyplace else.

Thanks for reading. I hope to meet you soon in our member community.

Best regards,



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Milestone #1 – Set Priorities and Get Events on Calendar

Typically, families who begin the college planning process early start by thinking through **WHAT** needs to be done and **WHEN**. This exercise includes an overview of their financial circumstances, their student's academic progress and getting a feel for how many years of higher education needs to be funded. Those who really get serious about planning factor in their retirement needs, potential elder care issues, insurance needs and the likelihood of their family income remaining stable through the college years. Professional assistance with these issues is recommended. It is in this phase that setting up an overall planning calendar based on the Milestone Chart is a good idea. Make college planning a family priority.

Milestone #2 – Initiate or Finalize Financial Plan for College

This is more involved than you might think, but it is not beyond the grasp of most families if they have the right tools for the job. Simply stated, you must determine how colleges will assess your financial circumstances in order to calculate what you could be expected to "contribute" toward college costs. This contribution is referred to as your "EFC" or Expected Family Contribution. You must learn the mechanics of two formulas that determine "aid eligibility" and assess whether strategic changes to your financial resources could make a difference. This is called optimizing the EFC. Following this exercise, a thorough analysis of your resources should be undertaken in order to determine whether or not you can afford the EFC or if you must shop for colleges based on the resources you have. In many cases, families are surprised to learn that colleges they may have considered too expensive are ideal candidates.

Milestone #3 – College Major & Career Assessments

Nowadays it's a good idea for students to have a general idea of how they are wired "under the hood" and which career areas would provide maximum satisfaction based on that particular wiring. There are many ways to accomplish this, but we always recommend getting assistance from a qualified professional. Think about it: If your son or daughter graduates in four years instead of five years because they knew the direction to pursue, you save a full year of college cost. You do the math.

All too many families focus on the "getting in" aspect of the admissions process with little or no attention paid to "fitting in if admitted." This is troublesome in that some students who are admitted to selective and highly selective colleges are not able (or not willing) to fully engage in the academic rigor that is required for success. We highly recommend that each student complete an assessment of his or her academic attitudes, learning skills, maturity, social-interpersonal skills, and dependence on family and others prior to the initial college search.

Milestone #4 – Prepare for and take the PSAT

For college bound students, the PSAT is usually their first milestone. While the PSAT itself is not used for college admissions, it is used for several other important issues. The most important thing to keep in mind is that **the PSAT is NOT simply a "practice" SAT**. It does provide important feedback to the student with regards to his or her national and state standing in mathematics and verbal reasoning, but it also serves as the number one identifier of academic talent for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. Top scorers may receive modest

scholarships and commendations that will be of great help if applying at selective and highly selective colleges. For most students, the PSAT is a way to get on the radar screens of many colleges who are recruiting from various score bands, zip codes and other criteria important to them. Get a grip on this assessment by going through several practice tests to learn the strategies and be prepared on test day.

Note: If the PSAT is taken in Grade 10, it is indeed a “practice test.” The Grade 11 PSAT is the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

Milestone #5 - Review Curriculum Strength for Grades 11-12

If you plan to apply at selective or highly selective colleges, this is the time to plan out your high school curriculum for junior and senior year. Better colleges want to see you take challenging courses in core subjects (Math, English, Social Studies, Foreign Languages, Natural Science). Sit down with your high school counselor and get this done. Take the most rigorous courses you can handle.

Milestone #6 - Review PSAT/MNSQT Results

You should have results for the PSAT in November/December after you take the test. Pay attention to the details of the score report. You’ll want to know where you stand against the national pool of college bound students in Math and Critical Reading. You will also want to know where you made mistakes so you can improve on the SAT.

Milestone #7 - Establish Student Competitive Position (CAP Index)

Your SFC Advisor can calculate your competitive position and compare your admissions statistics to any of 455 colleges we track in our data base. Or, you can do this yourself using our online College Admissions Profile Index (CAP) calculator. The purpose of this exercise is to find the right mix of colleges for you – neither too difficult (reaches) nor too easy (safeties). What we want is a list of target colleges that will challenge you. The CAP Index has proven to be remarkably accurate over the past 20 years in getting this job done.

As just about any college admissions officer will tell you, grades in college prep courses are the single most important item in making an admissions decision. This does not mean that ECAs (extracurricular activities) and standardized test scores are not considered. It does mean that they are viewed within the context of how much the student embraced challenging course work in high school and the subsequent performance in those courses. While it is not necessarily critical to take every honors or AP level course available, it is important to take higher level courses in areas of interest to the student. A straight A average won’t necessarily get you into your top college, nor will a C or two keep you out. Activities should be chosen wisely. It is not in your best interests to be so involved in sports, drama, student government, community service, etc. that your grades suffer. Choose a few activities that you really like and be excellent in those. Learn to manage your time well.

Milestone #8 - Establish Standardized Test Strategy

Your assessments back in Milestone #3 are going to be helpful in determining which standardized test you should be taking. Ask the professional who explained your test results to advise you. If you don't have a professional to do this for you, get a copy of the SAT and the ACT from your high school guidance office or from an online test prep company. Take them both. Compare the results. Did one test feel more comfortable than the other? You may find that you scored considerably higher on one. If so, you now have the right test. The next step is to get prepared and be ready on test day!

Milestone #9 - Identify College Search Criteria

Before you begin searching for colleges, you need three major inputs: financial input, competitive position input and qualitative input. The qualitative input, or college search criteria, involves the more traditional items like distance from home, size, location, setting, etc. Be sure you and your family are in agreement on your search criteria. Spending some extra time here will save you lots of time down the road.

Milestone #10 - Begin Initial College Search

This step usually overwhelms most families, but if you have taken the steps noted above it should be easier for you. The college search should be driven by clearly defined criteria and preferences. Among these, size, available majors, geographic location, grant and scholarship eligibility, campus facilities and overall competitive position are most important. The student should do his or her best to identify precisely what the key criteria and preferences are and then locate colleges that are suitable and appropriate with regards to the admissions criteria and rigor required of enrolled students. Be willing to look a little further away from home for some outstanding opportunities. And, if money is a key consideration, avoid loading up on "reach" colleges. Stay with colleges where you'll be among the top 25 percent of typically admitted students.

Milestone #11 – Identify SAT/ACT National Test Dates & Rule Out Conflicts

This is pretty simple: Go to the respective websites for the SAT and ACT and locate the test dates that are applicable to you. **DO THIS WELL IN ADVANCE OF WHEN YOU PLAN TO TAKE THE TEST!** Once you have the test dates, you can schedule other events around the test. Be prepared: if you are an athlete, you have a 99.99% chance of having a playoff game scheduled on the same day as the SAT or ACT. Stay flexible!

Milestone #12 - Prepare for SAT/ACT

Much has been written about preparing for these assessments and an entire industry has been spawned from the idea of being prepared prior to taking any of these admissions tests. Needless to say, you will do better if you are prepared no matter which test you take. What does not get nearly the attention it deserves however, is which of these to take. Experience with thousands of students has taught us that for some, the SAT is a better choice. For others, the ACT is a better fit. We recommend that you take diagnostic assessments of each and make a decision as to which is more comfortable. The SAT and ACT are very different. Each should be

investigated. And, don't forget the importance of timing. When to take these tests often determines how well you perform.

Milestone #13 - Take AP/SAT/ACT

Self-explanatory

Milestone #14 - College Research & Evaluation

Let's face it, college is expensive. Nowadays, four years at a public university will cost at least \$80,000 and four years at a private college will approach \$300,000. What would you do before you purchased a home in this price range? You'd do a whole lot of fact finding, wouldn't you? This same diligence needs to be applied as you research the colleges on your list. We recommend that you focus more on "outcomes", that is, what do graduates of these institutions actually do, earn, accomplish as opposed to how fashionable or "in" a particular college might be. As the adage says, the proof is in the pudding. Be a savvy consumer.

Hint: <http://payscale.com>

Milestone #15 - Letters of Recommendation

Every college bound student in your class will need at least one, and usually two letters of recommendation from faculty (or others who know you very well) who know you well and can speak to your classroom accomplishments. Choose these people carefully! When you request your recommendation, provide the faculty member with a short biographical summary of your activities, awards, honors and other significant events from high school along with a copy of your high school transcript. This will give your recommender something to reflect upon as he or she composes your letter. Depending on the procedures at your high school, your recommender may be required to mail the letter out to several colleges personally. If so, provide addressed, stamped envelopes. Check with your guidance office to determine the procedures at your school. If your school subscribes to eDocs through the Naviance Family Connection portal, be especially careful to check on school procedures as your Common Application and Family Connection accounts will be synced.

Recommended Action: Ask for letters of recommendations from teachers prior to the end of junior year to provide lead time. It's a courtesy that will be appreciated.

Milestone #16 - College Visits

The purpose of researching your colleges is to determine which ones to physically visit. Nowadays, the competition is such that visits are not optional if you want the best shot at admission and scholarship money. You must *demonstrate your interest* by showing up! The best times to visit are when students are on campus and the college is in session. Summers are okay, but you will miss the life of the college. On your visit, don't just settle for "the tour." Instead, have some questions prepared that you can ask of admissions personnel, faculty and students. And do visit the dormitories, the student union, bookstore and athletic facilities. Your goal is to get a feel for the campus, the faculty, and the students with regards to how you fit in. Don't forget to have lunch, too!

Recommended Action: Do send a **thank you note** (no texts or emails) to any college representatives with whom you interact. Be un-common!

Milestone #17 – Refine – Then Finalize Your College List

After visiting your selected colleges, you are ready to refine the list. There will be some colleges to which you are strongly attracted as well as others you like but may not be on your “A” list. What you want to accomplish here is to keep some balance in your list. Don’t have so many highly selective or selective colleges on the list that you introduce more risk than necessary. Attempt to get a list of finalists that meet your criteria, where you have a reasonable chance of being admitted and where you fall into the top 25%-30% of admitted students (*especially if financial aid is a concern*). The refined list is your first attempt at coming up with the final list of colleges to which you will apply. Be sure that you are on the mailing list of each school for updates and announcements that may be of importance to you.

Eventually, you’ll need to determine the “finalists.” Usually, this will be a group of 6-10 colleges that fit you and that know you are interested, either from your personal visits or from correspondence you have initiated and followed through upon. Remember, any college that makes it to this stage is one in which you are willing to enroll.

If you are not willing to enroll, don’t apply! If you have done your homework well, you do not need the typical “safety school” approach. Load your list with target schools at which you can thrive!

Milestone #18 - Register For Common App

Self-explanatory. Visit <http://www.commonapp.org>

Milestone #19 – Identify & Put Admissions & Financial Aid Deadlines On Your Calendar

When the refined list is established, we recommend that you determine the deadlines for admission, financial aid and merit scholarships. These are usually posted on college web sites or in the print literature you have received directly from the colleges. Be sure to put these in whatever calendar you are using and allow at least two week’s lead time in order to complete the applications. You should also be identifying which colleges accept the Common Application, which have supplements to the Common Application, which colleges have additional essays to complete and what forms are required to apply for financial aid and merit scholarships. At this stage of the game, you’ll begin to discover the FAFSA and CSS Profile. They will soon become part of your everyday vocabulary.

Milestone #20 – Complete Fall College Visits, Interviews & Attend Portfolio Days

Self-explanatory.

Milestone #21 – Draft Your Common Application & Personal Statement

Your Personal Statement is an opportunity for you to shine! College admissions officers want to know what interests you, how you write, how you express yourself. Typically, this is done in a 500-600-word statement on a topic of your choice or one assigned by each college. Much has been written about how to do this, and the most important thing to remember is this: Be yourself – not the person you think the college wants you to be. And keep in mind that although your English teacher may be a great writing coach, you'll want a lot of input on this essay. It's different from anything you have attempted in the past. Be prepared for multiple iterations. Don't be in a hurry to "finish" or to just "get it done." While deadlines are looming, your goal should be to "do it right" and on time!

Milestone #22 – Identify Common Application Supplements & Supplemental Essays

Self-explanatory.

Milestone #23 – Complete Common Application Supplements & Supplemental Essays

Self-explanatory.

Milestone #24 – Submit Common Application AFTER Third Party Review

The main point here is to have somebody you trust review your entire application and all of the essays you plan to submit. If you are working with a professional admissions advisor, this will most likely be part of the service you get. If not, be sure to find somebody who can provide an objective review of your applications and essays.

Milestone #25 - Submit CSS Profile (Financial Aid Applicants)

Many – but not all - private colleges require this form. Please review the list of colleges that participate in the CSS Profile program to determine which, if any, of your student's colleges require the Profile. This program also includes the Noncustodial Profile, IDOC and Business Farm supplement. Here's the link:

<https://profileonline.collegeboard.org/prf/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet.srv>

You may begin the Profile after October 1 of your student's senior year in high school. Go to <https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/> and register for the correct version **only if you need it**. Once registration is complete, you are able to download a worksheet that will familiarize you with the information required.

TIP: For CSS Profile, use the same username/password combination your student used for SAT registration. It will save you time!

Here's a great set of videos to help you learn about the CSS Profile form:

<http://css.collegeboard.org/>

In situations where biological parents are separated or divorced, many colleges will also require the Non-Custodial Parent to file the Noncustodial Profile form.

Milestone #26 – Get FSA ID & Complete FAFSA

In order to file the FAFSA, you will need an electronic signature and password. The new system (as of May 2015) is called the FSA ID. You will need to create an FSA ID for the **student** and for one **parent**. You may get these at <https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>. We recommend that you take care of this before November 30th of senior year. If you have contracted Strategies For College, Inc. to guide you through the financial aid paperwork process, we will create the FSA ID for the student and one parent – in this instance, you will not need to create the FSA ID on your own.

Procedures for having this form reviewed prior to submission are described below.

Here's a great set of videos to help you learn about the FAFSA form and Federal Student Aid: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FederalStudentAid>

Milestone #27 – Identify “Campus Based” Merit Scholarships

Upon identifying your final list of colleges, it is essential to make sure that you know the scholarship opportunities, and their respective deadlines for application. For example, some colleges may offer scholarships to students based on their applications alone. No additional work needed. While other colleges may require the student applicant to write additional essays, or interview, or submit a portfolio, etc., to be considered for endowed scholarship funds. And most importantly, know the deadlines for consideration. If your application for admission and/or scholarship is received after a deadline, then there is generally no funding left.

Milestone #28 – Fall Standardized Testing if Needed

Consider the colleges you are planning on applying to, and in particular, the application deadlines. For students applying Early Action or Early Decision (generally in November of Senior year) you will want to have your testing completed by October. If applying for admission by January deadlines, then you may have an opportunity to take a standardized test as late as November. Please check the admissions requirements of your respective colleges to determine what your goals and deadlines should be.

Milestone #29 – Complete Federal Tax Returns (Parents & Student)

The FAFSA and the CSS Profile will now be using tax data from two years prior to the student entering college. In addition, as each of the forms may be submitted as early as October 1 of the student's senior year. Note: If your income during the year preceding college will be substantially LOWER than the tax year ending two years before college, you have grounds for appeal and should seek professional assistance.

Milestone #30 - Evaluate Financial Aid Awards

In Milestone #3, your family determined the EFC and set a financial strategy in motion. A clear threshold of “affordability” was established and you applied to colleges that had a high probability of meeting your financial objectives. Now it’s time to take a close look at the offers of financial aid. Start by determining which offers result in the lowest “*net cost*” to your family. Look at each offer in detail. The lowest net cost is determined by subtracting the grants and scholarships you have been awarded from the total cost of attendance at each college. Do not subtract student loans and work study from the total cost, because these come with strings attached. You want to know the true cost. Determine which of these is “best” for you, and sleep on it for a few days. Visit the college(s) again if needed. This is no time to act hastily. If your top college has not offered enough aid to be affordable, call the financial aid office or your contact in the admissions office and politely let them know how much more money you will need to attend. The response may be indicative of how you might be treated in the future if you enroll, so pay attention. And don’t be bashful!

Milestone #31 - Make Final College Visits (if necessary)

Self-explanatory

Milestone #32 - Final Decision & Enrollment Deposit

On or before May 1st, you will need to make your final decision. After doing so, be sure to mail the “Candidate’s Reply Card” with your required deposit. We recommend that you use “Certified Mail – Return Receipt Requested”, FedEx or UPS to make sure your deposit is received. If the college has an online payment system for deposits, you might want to use that instead of the mail. In addition, it would be a good idea to call the college you have chosen and inform the admissions office that your deposit is on the way. As a courtesy, you should call the other colleges to which you were accepted and let them know you have decided to enroll elsewhere. They may be able to admit somebody from their wait list as a result of your courtesy.

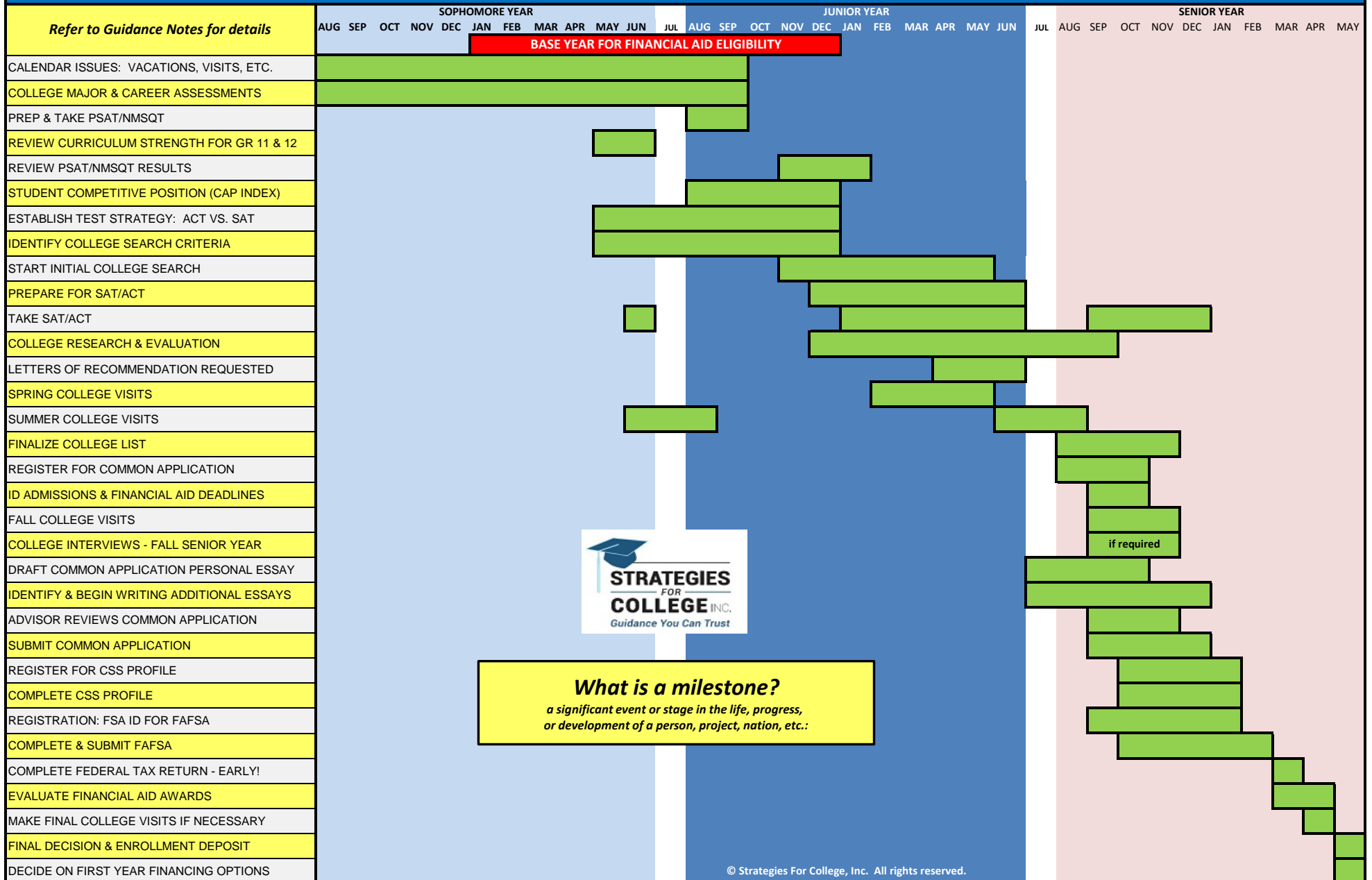
The Final Paperwork

Finally, remember to watch your mail for additional paperwork that will be required for you to enroll. This will range from student (and/or parent) loan instructions, to surveys about potential roommates. Pay attention to these things and get them done right away. This will prevent needless anxiety and stress during the first week of college.

END

MILESTONE PLANNING FOR COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS

Green bars represent ideal time to complete each milestone



What is a milestone?
a significant event or stage in the life, progress, or development of a person, project, nation, etc.: