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# Parents' Checklist

A Calm, Structured Roadmap for Supporting  
Your Student, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade to Enrollment



Parents' Checklist

This checklist is designed to help parents understand **what matters**, **when it matters**, and **how to support their student without taking over**.

Your role is not to manage every detail—but to provide stability, encouragement, and perspective.

By Dr. Nathan Hurwitz

University Professor ✧ Author ✧ Mentor ✧ Admissions Consultant



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### **The College Admissions Student Checklist**

**Print this page to mark off everything as you complete it!**

- 1. Focus on Academic Habits (Not Just Grades)** - - Begin in 9th grade (revisit and refine throughout high school)
- 2. Explore Interests Without Pressure** - 9th–10th grade exploration (narrow focus by late 10th grade)
- 3. Build Relationships with Teachers** - Start early (by 10th grade)
- 4. Begin Thinking About College Fit** - Spring of 10th grade (through 11th grade)
- 5. Create a Preliminary Résumé** - End of 10th grade (update every semester)
- 6. Plan Standardized Testing (SAT/ACT)** - Diagnostic: late 10th / early 11<sup>th</sup> /  
Primary testing: spring or fall of 11th
- 7. Visit Colleges (Virtually or In Person)** - Summer after 10th grade and throughout 11th grade
- 8. Finalize a Balanced College List** –Late spring/summer before 12th grade
- 9. Begin Essay Brainstorming (Before Writing)** - Summer before 12th grade
- 10. Request Letters of Recommendation** - End of 11th grade/early 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- 11. Draft, Revise, and Finalize Essays** - Drafting: summer / early fall (Final versions: fall of 12th grade)
- 12. Complete Applications Carefully** - Fall of 12th grade (Earlier for Early Action / Early Decision)
- 13. Prepare for Interviews (If offered)** - Spring of 12th Grade
- 14. Compare Offers Thoughtfully** - March–April of 12th grade
- 15. Make a Confident Final Decision** - May 1 (most schools)



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### *A Note to Parents*

*from*

### *Nathan Hurwitz*

The college admissions process has changed considerably, often causing stress or overwhelming families. This guide is designed to help you understand the steps, support your student, and know what to expect as we work together. My primary goal is to reduce anxiety, clarify the process, and empower your student to confidently express their identity. I look forward to discussing your student and collaborating with you to support your family through this exciting transition.

*Nathan Hurwitz*

If you are looking for “hands-on” support, contact me to schedule a consultation and take the next steps with confidence.



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### **Phase 1: Building Foundations**

*9th Grade – Early 10th Grade*

#### **1. Prioritize Strong Academic Habits Early**

##### **Your role:**

- Reinforce consistent study routines and time management
- Encourage early help when a class becomes challenging
- Normalize effort and growth, not just outcomes

##### **Why this matters:**

Colleges look closely at academic **trajectory**. Students who build strong habits early are far better positioned when coursework intensifies in later years.

##### **Timeline:**

- ✓ Begin in 9th grade
- ✓ Reinforce every year

#### **2. Encourage Exploration—Without Résumé Engineering**

##### **Your role:**

- Support trying activities without over-directing choices
- Resist the urge to optimize too early

##### **Why this matters:**

Admissions readers can easily identify résumé-padding. Long-term engagement grows naturally from genuine interest—and leads to stronger leadership and essays later.

##### **Timeline:**

- ✓ 9th–10th grade exploration
- ✓ Direction begins to narrow by late 10th grade



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### 3. Step Back So Teacher Relationships Can Form

#### Your role:

- Encourage respectful communication and engagement
- Avoid intervening with teachers unless absolutely necessary

#### Why this matters:

The strongest recommendation letters come from teachers who know your *student*, not from you, the parent.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ Begin early
- ✓ Especially important during 10th grade



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## Phase 2: Directions & Preparation

*Mid-10th Grade – 11th Grade*

### 4. Shift Conversations Toward College Fit

#### Your role:

- Ask thoughtful questions about size, location, learning style, and culture
- Listen more than you advise

#### Why this matters:

The most successful college outcomes come from fit—not prestige. This clarity reduces transfers, burnout, and regret.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ Spring of 10th grade
- ✓ Ongoing through 11th grade

### 5. Ensure Activities Are Documented Properly

#### Your role:

- Help your student maintain a running activities résumé
- Focus on responsibilities, growth, and impact—not titles

#### Why this matters:

This document becomes the foundation for applications, essays, interviews, and recommendations.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ By end of 10th grade
- ✓ Update each semester



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### 6. Take a Strategic (Not Emotional) Approach to Testing

#### Your role:

- Support diagnostic testing early
- Help evaluate whether testing strengthens the application
- Avoid last-minute panic decisions

#### Why this matters:

Testing should support—not dominate—the admissions process. Clear planning reduces stress dramatically.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ Diagnostic: late 10th / early 11th
- ✓ Primary testing: spring or fall of 11th

### 7. Participate Thoughtfully in College Visits

#### Your role:

- Attend tours when possible
- Observe rather than lead
- Ask your student what resonated *after* the visit

#### Why this matters:

Students develop ownership and clarity when they feel heard rather than directed.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ Summer after 10th grade
- ✓ Throughout 11th grade



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### Phase 3: Application Strategy Takes Shape

*Late 11th Grade – Early 12th Grade*

#### 8. Insist on a Balanced, Realistic College List

##### Your role:

- Ensure a mix of reach, target, and likely schools
- Address financial fit honestly and early

##### Why this matters:

A well-constructed list creates options and reduces disappointment later.

##### Timeline:

✓ Late spring / summer before 12th grade

#### 9. Protect the Essay Process

##### Your role:

- Encourage reflection before drafting
- Ask questions that promote insight, not polish
- Do **not** rewrite or over-edit

##### Why this matters:

Admissions officers can detect adult voices immediately—and it almost always undermines the application.

##### Timeline:

✓ Summer before 12th grade





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### 10. Ensure Recommendation Requests Are Handled Correctly

#### Your role:

- Encourage early, respectful requests
- Help your student provide helpful context materials
- Avoid contacting teachers directly

#### Why this matters:

Authenticity matters more than advocacy at this stage.

#### Timeline:

- ✓ End of 11th grade
- ✓ Early fall of 12th grade



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### Phase 4: Execution & Submission

*12th Grade*

#### 11. Provide Structure—Not Pressure—During Essay Writing

##### **Your role:**

- Reinforce deadlines and steady progress
- Be supportive, not directive

##### **Why this matters:**

Essays often determine outcomes at selective schools. Calm structure produces better writing than pressure.

##### **Timeline:**

- ✓ Drafting: summer / early fall
- ✓ Final versions: fall of 12th grade

#### 12. Help Manage Details Without Taking Control

##### **Your role:**

- Support organization and deadline tracking
- Encourage early submission
- Prevent last-minute chaos

##### **Why this matters:**

Careful execution signals maturity and responsibility.

##### **Timeline:**

- ✓ Fall of 12th grade



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### 13. Encourage Interview Preparation

#### Your role:

- Help your student practice articulating goals
- Reinforce confidence and authenticity

#### Why this matters:

Interviews reward preparation and emotional readiness.

#### Timeline:

✓ Fall / winter of 12th grade



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### Phase 5: Decisions & Next Steps

*Spring of 12th Grade*

#### 14. Guide Offer Comparison Thoughtfully

##### **Your role:**

- Review academics, cost, support, and outcomes
- Attend admitted-student events
- Ask final questions calmly

##### **Why this matters:**

Admission alone is not success. Fit, support, and affordability matter long-term.

##### **Timeline:**

✓ March–April of 12th grade

#### 15. Support a Confident Final Choice

##### **Your role:**

- Encourage a decision rooted in fit—not fear or prestige
- Assist with enrollment and housing logistics

##### **Why this matters:**

This decision sets the tone for your student's next chapter.

##### **Timeline:**

✓ By May 1



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### A Final Word For Parents

The families who experience the *least* stress—and the *best* outcomes—are the ones who replace guessing with guidance and reactivity with planning.

You don't need to do this alone.

A clear process and experienced support help keep everyone aligned, grounded, and focused on what truly matters: your student's long-term success.

[Contact now to set up your initial consultation](#)

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