

MCNEAL SAMS COLLEGE CONSULTING NEWS AND NOTES

JUNIOR CHECKLIST

- SCHEDULE:** It is time to schedule a meeting with your college consultant. We want to make sure you enter your junior year prepared to meet with the college admission representatives who visit your school and that you know what else to expect this fall.
- PREPARE.** You will sit for the PSAT in October. You may have already taken a PSAT as a sophomore. This year the PSAT is also the qualifying exam for the National Merit Scholarship Program. We also suggest you take a practice ACT this fall; November is an ideal time. If your school is not offering one, let your counselor know. We can arrange for you to take one. See page 2 of this newsletter for more about testing.
- ESTABLISH:** A study schedule and habit. Junior year matters on many levels. Set yourself up for success.

THE JUNIOR YEAR ... IT MATTERS

Given that you haven't even started your junior year yet, these end of year may seem far off. They're not. We are big planners here at

McNeal Sams and we want to help you set goals for the year and work toward them. Here are just some of the big milestones to be thinking about now:

First, in the spring of your junior year, you're going to ask at least two teachers for letters of recommendation to support your college applications. The ideal is two core teachers (English, math, social studies, science, foreign language) from your junior year. Why does that matter in August? Because you need to do your very best from the start of the school year. Participation in class an excellence in your work are two of the areas teachers are asked to comment on. They can also include their sense of you – how you interact with peers and how well they know you. Some will ask you to complete a form to help them to help you, but a personal touch is always nice, so be present and do your best!

Second, while you will continue to meet with your McNeal Sams consultant throughout the fall, the work begins in earnest around toward the end of the year, when we will meet to suggest schools, help you launch your research and begin your Common App. The Common App is an important you will become much more familiar with as you go through your process. The essay writing begins soon thereafter. Applications take time.

Finally, and we cannot stress this enough, junior year grades matter. The stronger your start to the academic year, the better equipped you will be to devote the necessary time to your applications. If you anticipate a particularly difficult class, or if you've taken on an especially challenging course load, think now about what measures you might need in place in the event that your workload is more challenging than you expected it to be. Will you go in for extra help after school? Do you have tutors at the ready? Do you know where and to whom to turn if you are falling behind? It happens! If you find yourself in this situation, please reach out – to your teacher, your parent, your school counselor, or your McNealSams consultant.

Start Strong... stay on track... and get ready for success.



CONTACT YOUR CONSULTANT: NAME@MCNEALSAMS.COM

CORNELIA MCNEAL
NELIE@

BARBARA SAMS
BARBARA@

JEANIE GRIMM
JEANIE@

ELIZABETH SCHNELL
ELIZABETH@

ANN MCCURTIES
ANN@

MCNEAL SAMS COLLEGE CONSULTING

NEWS AND NOTES

TALK AROUND TOWN

A few recommendations for you:

Article: [College Rankings: What Do They Really Mean?](#) A brief but pithy reminder that rankings do not guarantee college happiness and success.

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Podcast: [The College Essay Guy Podcast](#) "Practical, up-to-date interviews with experts in college admissions, financial aid, personal statements, test prep and more."

Book: [If I Could Tell You Just One Thing](#), by Richard Reed

KINDNESS CORNER: THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

The junior year can get overwhelming at times. Your coursework is more demanding, you are expected to be a leader in your activities, and your college search journey gets real.

Don't let it get the best of you. In the words of Audrey Hepburn, "Nothing is impossible, the word itself says I'm possible."



STANDARDIZED TESTING: IT'S TIME!

Standardized tests have traditionally been part of the college application process. However, many colleges became test-optional or test-blind (they will not consider scores) beginning in 2020, so you will want to talk with your McNeal Sams consultant about the best strategy for you.

In most cases, you are encouraged to test and then make a decision about when to submit test scores. This means it is time to begin your testing in earnest.

Here's a our basic recommended testing calendar:

August or September:

- If required (many high schools will automatically register you), register for the PSAT at your high school (given October 2 through October 31 - check with your counselor for exact date).

October:

- Take PSAT. You may have taken the PSAT last year. Take it again this year! The junior year PSAT is the one used to determine who will enter the National Merit Scholarship competitions.

November:

- To compare the SAT and ACT, take a practice ACT in November. Your high school may offer one; if not, talk to your McNeal Sams consultant. We can arrange for you to take a practice ACT. NOTE: At this point, every US college accepts either test. So choosing the test that makes the most sense for you and focusing your efforts on producing the best result on that test is to your advantage.

December:

- Receive PSAT results. Please enter them into your CustomCollegePlan account under the TESTING tab and make sure your McNeal Sams consultant knows they are there. The results from your PSAT and your practice ACT will be important information used by your consultant in making recommendations about future testing, test preparation, and developing a suggested college list for you.

December through winter:

- Discuss testing plan with your McNeal Sams consultant. The timing of *your* testing for ACT or SAT will depend on your readiness and your preparation plans.

Winter, spring, summer:

- Take the ACT and/or SAT as appropriate. The goal is to complete your standardized testing before your senior year begins.