Combating Educational Disparities in Macon-Bibb County:
Implementing a College-Going Culture

Project Summary:

The initial idea for my project was to somehow increase the college-going culture of Macon-Bibb County schools. I first became passionate about this when I volunteered in AVID because I could see that many of these students did not seem at all motivated to go to college. When I was thinking about what my project should be, I immediately began looking at ways to help increase the preparedness of high school students for college. I wanted to find ways other than simply increasing SAT scores to help students want to and succeed in college, and this thought is what brought me to the idea of implementing a college-going culture. Studies have shown that low income, high minority schools have little college-going culture when compared to primarily middle class, white schools (Welton & Williams 2015). Macon-Bibb county statistics show that most of the schools in this system can be described as high minority and low income due to the fact that over 50% of the students receive free or reduced lunch and over 50% of the students are minority (Public Schools K12 2010). My project seeks to first determine if Macon-Bibb County high schools have a lack of college-going culture and then, once a lack of college-going culture was discovered, to develop a plan for a club that seeks to initiate a college-going culture. This project consists of two aspects. First, I conducted research through interviews with local experts in both the high school and college setting. Secondly using information from the interviews along with online research, I developed a plan for a club in a high school including curriculum and handouts.
**Project Analysis, Evaluation, and Recommendations:**

Overall, I believe that the project went very well. In the beginning, I had hoped to implement the curriculum that I created for a club myself, but I simply did not have enough time to conduct research and interviews, to compile the curriculum, and to organize the club. Thankfully, I have found someone who will be implementing the club with my curriculum next year.

I achieved my goal of determining whether or not Macon-Bibb County needed a stronger college-going culture through the interviews. The interviews also revealed to me many club aspects I had yet to consider, for example the importance of having parent involvement in their students' college learning process. I believe that the interviews were so successful due to the time that I spent preparing for them. After reading a book on qualitative research, I was able to form questions that allowed me to glean the information I needed. Even though the interviews went well, I had hoped to conduct more than three. The fact that I could not get enough people willing to be interviewed was the biggest barrier that I encountered in my project. Initially, I emailed eleven potential interview candidates, and after sending three emails, only four of them responded and only three indicated that they had insight to give to the project. I would recommend that when seeking interviews with community members, students either find a way to be introduced to the person via a faculty mentor or use contact methods other than email, such as phone calls or visiting. I also achieved my goal of writing curriculum for a club that will hopefully start conversations about college in the schools. This part was harder than the interviews because there is so much information that I could have included, but I used the interview ideas as a guide to determine what aspects of a club would be most beneficial.
I think that the biggest improvement that could be made would be to compile and develop materials that focus on character education as a part of students’ preparation for college. During the interviews many experts spoke of how influential their students character is to their drive to go to college, and how their character is developed based off of their friendships. I have spoken with the person taking over the project next year, and I believe that she intends to include character building through mentor relationships between high school and Mercer students.

Personally, I have learned a lot from this project. As student, I have learned how to take a passion and turn it into a project that will impact the community. I have also learned that even though I am capable of doing research-based projects, I enjoy people-based projects more. I learned so much from being able to talk with different people, and I wish that my project had included more interaction with others. I wish that I could be here next year to implement my project because working with others to achieve their dreams is wonderful. I truly feel like my talents are best used in interactions with others.

Dissemination Plan:

Next year the project will be continued and implemented by a fellow Mercer student, I have met with her to discuss the materials I compiled and to decide on what we believe is the best way to run the club. I also plan on giving the materials I have created to Mercer faculty that work with the high schools and in the community because one goal of the project was to create materials that can be used by any party hoping to increase the college readiness and overall college-going culture in their community. I have attached all of the materials except for the PowerPoint presentations along with my field notes to the end of this document. The PowerPoint Presentations could not be included in this word document, but if anyone would like a copy, they can email me at savannah.eichhorn@gmail.com.
Citations:


In general, higher education institutions have little understanding of how to equip low-income students as they typically focus on diversity through other channels such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Students from poverty are less likely to pursue college in general and the research presented in this article searches to discover attributes and strategies that make low-income students successful in college. The qualitative research presented details common themes found through interviews with 18 low-income students who successfully finished their second year of college. The research includes a description of each of the participants as a way to explain each individual’s demographics, their current living situations, and how they came to live in poverty. The common answers revealed through these interviews show areas in which not only higher education can consider and implement changes, but also areas in which high school staff and personnel can intervene. When asked about what influenced the student to attend college, most interviewees answered that they desired higher employment opportunities that would allow them to leave the cycle of poverty. In fact, the research stated that none of the participants in the study credited their K-12 educators for encouraging them to attend college, a fact that proves shocking to many because public high schools seem to focus on helping students prepare for achievement at higher levels of education. Most of the interviewed students also conveyed that they were not at all ready for college, that they lacked resources, skills, and support systems. The advice that the interviewees had for other students included learning topics such as time management and effective study skills, using available resources, and having...
confidence to remain focused on long-term goals, all of which can be instilled in students during their high school careers. This research suggests that K-12 education systems should provide a comprehensive college preparatory curriculum to students who are low-income. Macon-Bibb County is home to a large number of low-income students who will face similar situations such as those described in these interviews, and thus would benefit from increased programming to address the difficulties and strategies that were presented in this research.


This website contains demographic data for Bibb County High Schools from the 2009–2010 school year. There are six high schools along with one career center in Bibb County. The statistics presented in this website help to confirm that Bibb County schools are both high minority and high poverty. In order to be classified as high minority a school must have a minority population of over 50 percent. Similarly, to be high poverty over 50 percent of students must have a family income defined as in poverty, this statistic was measured through this website by identifying the percentage of students that were eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Central High School show that the student population was 85 percent black, 11 percent white, 2 percent Asian, 1 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent other, along with 67 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Howard High School show that the student population was 52 percent black, 40 percent white, 4 percent Asian, 2 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent other, along with 43 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Northeast High School show that the student population was 98 percent black and 2 percent white, along with 77 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Rutland High School show that the student population was 48
percent white, 46 percent black, 4 percent Hispanic, 2 percent dual race, and 1 percent other, along with 48 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Southwest High School show that the student population was 98 percent black, 1 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent white, along with 88 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for Westside High School show that the student population was 83 percent Black, 12 percent white, 2 percent Asian, 2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent other, along with 66 percent of students eligible for free lunch. Statistics for William S. Hutchings Career Center show that the student population was 82 percent black, 14 percent white, 3 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian, along with 72 percent of students eligible for free lunch. These statistics show that five out of the seven schools in Bibb County are high minority, high poverty high schools.


This article details research concerning the effects of high minority, high poverty student populations on the college-going culture of a high school. The article begins by acknowledging the fact that in all schools the new high-stakes testing emphases have caused a decrease of college-going culture, but that this emphasis has caused for a greater negative impact to students from high minority, high poverty schools. The research was conducted in a Texas high school that fits the high minority, high poverty criteria due to the fact that over 50 percent of the student population is in poverty and a student of color. Qualitative data was collected from interviews and observations of a set of 17 students, their teachers, and school administration. This research
concludes that high minority, high poverty schools experience a culture that is counter intuitive to college readiness due to negative social stigmas and high staff turnover along with the pressures of standardized testing. Instead of having a college-going culture this high minority, high poverty school had a culture of failure and negativity. As the demographics of the school changed to include more students of color many of the experienced teachers left, and this constant change in teachers caused for the students to have little trust in teachers, who are the leaders necessary to build the foundation of a college-going culture. The new teachers that the school received had lower academic standards for the students because state administration was pressuring the school to have a higher achievement on standardized graduation tests. Many teachers focused only on test material and stopped requiring homework, and some students reported that they felt like they were only in school to pass the tests. By lowering academic standards, teachers stopped requiring students to learn skills necessary for college success. Towards the end of the research the principal reinstated the schools college and career center, which helped to increase the percentage of students who entered college post-graduation. This center provided students resources to help write college essays, complete financial aid applications, call prospective colleges, and overall to induce a college-going culture. Even though this center was successful, not all students used this resource. In high minority, high poverty schools, like those present in Macon-Bibb County, having a college-going culture requires a collaborative effort to overcome not only the pressures of standardized testing but also negative social stigmas.

This article begins by acknowledging that schools must begin to make new approaches to ensure that students of color are college ready. This change is imperative not only due to the current statistics that students of color receive less college preparatory resources but also due to the predicted increase in the percentage of students who are of color. Research was conducted in two Texas high schools that qualitatively determined the college readiness of students of color through interviews and observations. The research showed that due to multiple factors, students of color do not receive college preparatory resources that are available to and often presented to white students. Perhaps the most glaring difference that disadvantages students of color is the tendency to take a less rigorous academic curriculum. Students of color do not often receive the support from teachers and counselors to take college preparatory courses, such as advanced placement or dual-enrollment, because they believed that students of color would have higher passing rates in non-advanced classes. Students of color who attended high minority, high poverty schools do not have the opportunity to take these college level classes due to the lack of high quality teachers. These classes are imperative to success in college because they prepare students for the responsibility, rigor, and study habits of college. Due to students of color taking less college preparatory classes, they also receive less information regarding college enrollment and scholarships. Many students of color are also affected by negative stereotypes that insinuate that minorities are not headed on a college pathway. Students that participated in the research identified that they looked forward to breaking the stereotypes and proving to others that minorities could succeed. Often parents of students of color in high poverty situations push their children towards college in order to have a better quality of lives than themselves. The article
ends with suggestions made by the students interviewed, suggestions that can be applied to Macon-Bibb County schools. The students believed that their path to college would be made easier if they had a strong relationship with their counselors and teachers, if schools integrated college level work into all high school courses, and if school personnel encouraged every student to take advanced college preparatory classes. The researchers suggest that all school personnel must begin to recognize that students of color have college potential and must then create a culture that pushes students towards college.
Field Notes

To whom it may concern,

These are my very random field notes. What you will find below is my documentation of the things that I did and thought about. Not every single thing is included because often times I have ideas when I do not have my computer out.

Thanks,
Savannah Eichhorn

Summary of Project:

My project seeks to determine if Macon-Bibb County high schools have a lack of college-going culture and then, once a lack of college-going culture was discovered, to develop a plan for a club that seeks to initiate a college-going culture. This project consists of two aspects. First, I conducted research through interviews with local experts in both the high school and college setting. Secondly using information from the interviews along with online research, I developed a plan for a club in a high school including curriculum and handouts.

Interview Information:

The interviews were what I learned the most from. I learned a lot of information from online research (this information is included in my annotated bibliography), but the information gleaned from people who are working in the field is invaluable.

Potential Interview Candidates:
1. Dr. Mary Alice Morgan
2. Dominique Johnson
   a. Or other people at Upward Bound
3. Simeon Cullens
4. Dr. Don Andrews
   a. Southwest High School Admissions Counselor
      Don.Andrews@bcsdk12.net
   b. School Website with information about college
      http://www.bcsdk12.net/Domain/3063
5. Michael Laney
   a. Central High School/Howard Middle School Counselor
      william.laney@bcsdk12.net
6. Dr. Sheryl Hogges
   a. GEAR UP Graduation Advisor Northeast High School
I emailed people #3-10 asking for an interview, but I only interviewed people # 5, 8, and 10 because I did not receive responses from the others, which is very aggravating. I emailed them three times, and never received even regrets from the others. I definitely believe that my project could have benefited from a wider range of interviews, for example I would have preferred to have also spoken to someone who graduated from a Macon-Bibb County school and someone who worked at a local college such as CGTC.

General Interview Questions:
1. Could you please explain your role (or interactions) with the Macon-Bibb County school system in regards to college-readiness?
2. What do you think is stopping Macon-Bibb County students from continuing their education?
3. Do you believe that more Macon-Bibb County students could or should be going to college after graduation?
4. What resources or programs does your school currently provide students? Are they helpful? Are there any resources or programs that you wish the school provided?
5. Explain project… do you believe that a resource like this could be used either by teachers in their classroom or by extracurricular activities? In what ways do you think that this could be most helpful? What topics do you think would be most helpful for Macon-Bibb County students?

Sample email to ask for interviews:

Good afternoon,
Hello, my name is Savannah Eichhorn, and I am a junior Service Scholar at Mercer University. Service Scholars is a part of Mercer’s Honors Program that focuses on service learning, more specifically on learning how to make a positive impact in your community. As a part of the Service Scholar Program, I am doing a capstone project on college-going culture in Macon-Bibb County public schools. Through volunteering in the Macon-Bibb County School System, I have seen what I believe to be a deficit in the college-going culture of students in our county and thus become very interested and passionate about the college-readiness of the students in this area.

Specifically, I am looking to do qualitative research to determine what programs Macon-Bibb County has implemented and lacks. I am looking to determine what programs would most impact Macon-Bibb in regards to implementing a college-going culture. I would love to meet with you to talk about your experiences through….

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Interview Notes:

1. High School Counselor
   - He has been a counselor for both high school and middle school students
   - Middle School has started offering high school credit to middle school students
     - This is mostly taken advantage of by well-off students
   - Standardized testing is used to identify students who are falling below acceptable knowledge levels, so that intervention can occur and the students can be placed in special connections classes to help increase their score
   - In high school, in addition to contacting army recruiters and some college recruiters, his main job as a counselor was to make sure that students were on course to graduate
     - Also, made sure that students had information about scholarships and job fairs
     - He was VERY busy, worked with AP, AVID, etc.
   - As a middle school counselor, he is also very busy. He mainly deals with more of the emotional side of counseling.
     - Middle schoolers are dealing with a lot of emotions. They are coming into adulthood physically but they do not really know what to do with it emotionally.
     - Home-lives. Many students do not have a good home life and therefore there is a lot of self abuse that occurs.
     - Students at Howard from every walk of life.
   - Difference in academics based on home lives
     - Students that have both parents, tend to do better!
     - Not to say that these students are more intellectual, but that they need the discipline. They want to know that someone cares about them and that someone has certain expectations of them.
     - When you have one or two parents missing, the expectations for success are not in place. These are the kids that you have to work with most. When you say something positive, they respond. They can tell the difference between someone who really cares and someone who does not.
Sometimes academically these students are so far behind that it is difficult for them to overcome

- Knowledge of college information when entering high school. i.e. classes to take, GPA, scholarships
  - As a counselor it is his job to tell students this information
  - He had aspirations of going into every 8th grade classroom and teaching them what a GPA is, how to calculate it, how one bad grade can change it, what types of GPA there are, etc.
  - The reality is that he has only been able to go into two classrooms in the last two years because he is constantly dealing with the emotional needs of the students along with handling attendance and accommodations for students with learning needs
  - There are not enough counselors or resources. Administration acknowledges this.

- Topic ideas to focus on that students need to learn about in regards to college
  - How and when to look for and apply to scholarships
  - How to begin the process of finding a career
    - Get them educated on career choices
    - Occupation Outlook Handbook
    - They can see what they need to do to get the job they desire

- Desire to go to college
  - Some students know that it is expected for them to go to college, some do not think that they can make, some do not care because they don’t know what they want to do
  - Bibb County is focusing on talking more about being either career and/or college ready
  - Students can enroll in career preparation classes, where students get bused to the technical high school

- Ideas about the club
  - He thinks it could be effective
  - Probably will have a lot of interest
  - Include a pacing guide for the students
    - i.e. in 9th grade start thinking about GPA, in 10th grade do not forget to take the PSAT, when to take the SAT and ACT, when to start talking to admissions counselors
  - Information about how to find colleges, how to navigate the ACT and SAT, etc.
  - Make sure that students know what they need to do in high school to prepare to get into colleges and to get the scholarships
    - i.e. the foreign language requirement

- Thoughts on AVID
  - AVID is supposed to take students who show promise yet seem to be falling behind and help them gain the goal of college
  - He agrees that AVID is not reaching its goal. The students are not learning the skills that AVID aims to teach. They do not know how to take Cornell notes,
they are not utilizing the skills that they were taught in the AVID classroom, etc.

- Realistic goals? He believes that the purpose of the college encouragement (i.e. Harvard, Yale, GA Tech) is to show the students that they can hope to reach their goals because someone believes in them, even though many of them will not. These goals helped to give confidence to someone who had none. If they shoot for Harvard, they might make it to UGA.

- When he worked at Central, he had a few students who got into Ivy League schools. These students were in the IB program and involved in other activities. The main reason that these students had these dreams and were able to achieve them is due to the fact that their parents constantly had high expectations for their life. They grew up with these expectations so they became an understood part of their life.

2. Director of an office that assists students in the college process

- Works to help students who are first generation or minority in surrounding counties to go to college
- Students come from low-income households and therefore there are a number of issues that these students face.
  - 80% of parents do not have a bachelor degree and therefore do not know how to guide their children through the college process
  - These students also have lower ACT and SAT scores
- One of her main jobs is to help students receive higher scores on SAT and ACT
  - Help them understand the guidelines of the test, answer questions about the test, teach strategies for success
- Provides individual help
  - Help on college applications, financial aid, and scholarships
  - Tutoring to help students pass the Georgia Milestones
- Parent involvement
  - Parents do not have a relationship with administration and they do not know how to advocate for their students
  - She recommends that I talk to the parents about the college process and educate not only the students but also the parents so that they can encourage their students
  - We need parents to advocate for their children’s academics
  - Student who got into college and had financial aid decided not to go because her mother had the irrational fear that when girls went off to college they normally got killed.
  - Generational poverty tends to afford a certain idea about college
  - One student had the capability of getting into UGA and other more prestigious schools, but choose to stay close to home and got to CGTC in order to help take care of her family.
  - Pull and tug between student’s family and success and financial need
  - There is a disconnect in parents understanding of the process
  - Could involve parents through an orientation, separate classes, etc.
- Lack of college-going culture?
  - It depends on the area.
  - Houston County vs. Baldwin County has a big difference in culture
- EOC created a “go to college” initiative. A pep rally with Mercer cheerleaders and Toby along with a presentation of colleges. Gave out free stuff such as “I am going to college” t-shirts.
- Followed up the pep rally by using counselors to inform students that they can receive direct help from EOC with applications, etc.
- Tried to answer all of their questions about college
- Houston has administrators, teachers, and counselors backing up EOC initiatives
- Baldwin did not seem to have any students excited about the process. The attitude of their entire school body was not one of excitement for college.

**Topic ideas:**
- SAT and ACT help
- Time management
- Study skills
- Planning for post-secondary/college
- College students to serve as mentors
  - To check-in with them, to keep up with their lives
  - Relationship building is prime
  - Students need to trust you to learn from you, they want to know that your motives are sincere, that you truthfully care about their lives
  - Advise students, tutor students, encourage students, having an invested interest in lives, students need someone who cares and expects things from them
- Incentives for students to attend
  - Food/snacks
  - Transportation back home
  - Can possibly get support from a community partner

3. Director of an office that helps Macon-Bibb County students go to college
- Programs assist students who are considered disadvantaged (first generation, low-income households, adult students) to prepare for college and ultimately to graduate from college
- Upward Bound
  - HANDOUT
  - Summer camp- six weeks at Mercer- emerges them in a college-going culture
- EOC Program
  - Displaced adults
  - Not as intensive as Upward Bound
  - Typically offers specific services when needed
  - Could provide people to come in and teach on some topics
- Challenges:
  - Students need someone to help guide them, e.g. counselor or teacher
- Thinks that the idea of a club is good
  - Must make sure that it is focused on a particular goal
In early high school (9th and 10th grade) focus on social skills and independence because the students social life is going to influence their track towards college. They do not know how to find or make friends that will help them in their studies.

Financial literacy - students need to understand how to manage their money and to have realistic goals for a future

Small group settings - to help students become supporters of each other. Especially for females, their friends influence their motivations and wants. If they have a good friend who is also trying to get into college, they can hold each other accountable and have someone who is doing everything with them.

In relation to mentoring, the students will not care what you are teaching them until they know that you care. Smaller group setting will allow the students and mentors to gain a more natural friendship.

Relationships with parents and counselors

Could do a focus group with some high school students to see what they would be interested in

- Parents
  - Students need their parents to go to college. They need tax information from their parents and oftentimes parents are hesitant to give this to their children.
  - Parents in low-income households tend to rely on their children for support and companionship. The easiest solution to this is to look at local colleges.
  - Parents do not know how to be supportive in regards to what their child needs.
  - Keep parents in the loop in regards to what the students should be doing so that parents can hold the students accountable for their work.
  - Help the parents realize that in order for their children to reach the goal of college they must have to make some sacrifices. Remind parents of the steps that it takes so that they know how they will be supporting their children.

- What is stopping students from going to college?
  - The desire. It is the matter of looking around. It is the matter of the environment and climate that they are living in. If no one is talking about college on a regular basis, then it is not something that they are thinking about.
  - Before you know it, outside influences have taken the choice of going to college away from them. They get involved with a gang, do too poorly in school, get in trouble, get arrested for drugs, or get pregnant. They have to be strategic and very motivated.
  - They need to know what steps to take early on so they can be prepared.
  - Having someone like a teacher or a counselor can be a deciding factor on whether or not they go to college.
Curriculum:

I am planning on making 7 meetings worth of curriculum, possible curriculum topics (the bold ones are the final topics I decided to do):

- **Navigating the College Board**
- Time Management
- Stress Management
- Study Skills
- **SAT & ACT Information**
- Financial Aid
- **General Application Help**
- Scholarships
- Essay Writing
- **Realistic Matching**
- **Tips for College Success** (will include aspects of time and stress management and study skills)

I also decided to include curriculum including:
- A parents acknowledgement sheet
- College planning timelines by grade level
- Presentation tips
- A general club outline sheet for prospective schools and teachers

BEAR Day:

Annalise and I presented our work at BEAR Day 2017. We titled our presentation “Combating Educational Disparities in Macon-Bibb County” because we felt like both of our projects worked to equalize education in Macon-Bibb County. Annalise’s project was about increasing the readiness of Hispanic students for the Georgia Milestones Assessment, while my project looked to increasing the college-going culture for all high school students (especially due to the fact that almost all of Macon-Bibb County’s high schools can be classified as high minority, low income). The presentation went well, we actually took too much time so we had to cut of some of the end.

Random Ideas, Information, and Thoughts:

College Board UN: seichhorn1

Ideas about club structure:
- Cohort model
- Parents information
• Calendar
• Community Partner to provide snacks
• Mercer students as mentors
• College planning timelines by grade level

Running list of ideas:

• Talk to Savanna about PA PowerPoint
• Possibly bring someone with me to the interviews to take notes or record
• Look up One Goal — may have good curriculum
• Timothy Lewis about how to get data

Linzi Prpich will be taking over and implementing the project during the next school year. I have provided her with all of the materials that I have compiled.
College Going Club (CGC) Outline

Purpose:

The College Board defines college-going culture as one that “builds the expectation of postsecondary education for all students—not just the best students. It inspires the best in every student, and it supports students in achieving their goals.” The purpose of the College Going Club is to increase the college-going culture among students through generating conversations about students’ futures and helping students with the college process.

Goals:

1. Guide students through the college process
2. Answer students’ questions about college
3. Form friendships between students with similar future goals
4. Use Mercer students as mentors for high school students

Meeting Outline:

1. Introductions and Icebreakers (10 min.)
   This would include a weekly activity to help all of the students and Mercer mentors to learn each other’s name and become comfortable interacting with each other.
2. Presentation (20 min.)
   This would include either one of the prepared PowerPoint presentations on the college process, a presentation by a visiting speaker, or an activity about character development.
3. Mentor Group Discussions (20 min.)
   Relationships are the most important aspect of this initiative. Students need to be able to discuss their future with mentors in order to gain encouragement and to have someone holding them responsible for their actions.
4. Debrief (10 min.)
   This would include allowing any students or mentors to comment to the entire group about something they felt has helped them today.
Parent Acknowledgement Form

Congratulations!

Your student has indicated interest in joining the College Going Club. We are so excited to start this club at Southwest High School this year! Our goals for CGC are to:

1. Guide your student through the college process
2. Answer all of your student’s questions about college
3. Form friendships between students with similar college goals
4. Mentor your student

As a parent or guardian, you are a very important part of your student’s success. Without your support, your student will have a very hard time pursuing their goal of college. As a parent here are some ways that you can support your student: by asking them what we have been talking about at club meetings, by reading the handouts they bring home, by being available to answer their questions regarding financial aid, and by constantly encouraging them in their goal of college. The most important thing is to encourage your student. If you do not expect them or encourage them to succeed, then they will not believe that they actually can.

Please sign the bottom of this form and keep it on your fridge or on the counter as a reminder of your commitment to your student to encourage them and ask them questions.

I ___________________________ commit to supporting my student throughout their process of pursuing college. I believe that they can get into college. I will be available to answer their questions and I will help them to the best of my ability.

X ___________________________ Parent Signature

X ___________________________ Date

X ___________________________ Student Signature

X ___________________________ Date
9th Grade College Prep Timeline

Congratulations! You have finally made it to high school and you are already preparing for your future! As a 9th grader, you do not have too many things that you need to complete in regards to the college application process, but below is a checklist including tasks that can make your college application process easier and more successful.

- Meet and get to know your high school guidance counselor
  Your counselor is one of your best resources when it comes to college planning. One of the best things you can do is have a meeting with your counselor to discuss plans for the future.

- Become acquainted with the requirements for college admissions
  Research what classes are required to get into college (for example: chemistry, foreign language, service requirements, etc.) so that you can make sure to complete these in the next few years.

- Get involved in extracurricular activities
  Not only will you have fun in extracurricular activities, you will also become a well-rounded student, which colleges look for.

- Make good grades
  Your GPA is one of the first things that colleges look at, and every single grade will impact your GPA. Making good grades will not only increase your chances if getting into the college that you want but will also help you get scholarships.

- Explore your interests and related careers
  College is just a step towards finding a future career. You want to study something that interests you and that will make you a great candidate for your dream job.

- Investigate college savings plans
  This is something that you must begin talking to your parents or guardians about. Some of your parents might have a college savings plan for you, but if not now is a great time to begin saving.

- Learn about college
  Learning about college is really exciting because it gives you something to look forward to in the future. You can learn about college through many online resources like The College Board or Peterson’s.

Adapted from Peterson’s College Planning Timeline
10th Grade College Prep Timeline

10th grade is an important year when it comes to building your college resume. Hopefully by this time in your high school career, you have begun to research colleges and have a general knowledge of the college process, and this checklist should help you stay on track. If you have not already started preparing for college, do not worry because it is not too late.

- Stay on track in your classes
  Not only will your grades be one of the most important aspects of your college applications, but also being involved and learning in your classes will prepare you for college admissions tests. The information you learn in all of your high school classes is the foundation for your learning in college.

- Take the PSAT
  The PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) is basically a practice SAT, all juniors are required to take the PSAT but sophomores can also take it. Taking the PSAT now will help you to practice for taking it next year when your score could earn a scholarship, to begin preparing for the real SAT, and by releasing your name and address to colleges so that they can send you information.

- Begin preparing for the SAT and ACT
  These are the two college admissions tests. The first step is to learn about how these tests are alike and different. Oftentimes students will do better on one test over the other so it is important to prepare for them both. The easiest way to prepare is to buy the official test book from the test maker.

- Continue and expand your involvement in extracurricular activities
  In clubs that you are already involved in and enjoy, you begin considering taking a leadership role. If you have become interested in new things, try to join a new club. Colleges are looking for more than good grades, they are also looking for students who are involved in their community.

- Meet with your guidance counselor
  Your guidance counselor will always be your best resource for the college process. Your counselor can help keep you on track and will be sure to answer all of your questions.

- Search and contact colleges that interest you
  As you begin to discover what you are interested in, you can search for schools that have certain programs. If you find a school that you like, email or call them so that you can get put on their mailing list.

- Consider getting a job
  This is a good way to be a well-rounded student and to make some money.

Adapted from Peterson’s College Planning Timeline
11th Grade College Prep Timeline

11th grade is a critical year when it comes to preparing for college. This year you should be focusing on taking standardized tests, narrowing down your college search, and learning about financial aid and scholarships, but you also must remember to stay involved in your classes and extracurricular activities.

- **Stay on track in your classes**
  Ask your counselor for a transcript, which will detail both your GPA and your class rank, so that you can know how well you are doing. If you are not doing as well as you hoped, it is never too late to improve. Colleges like to see both good grades and upward trends.

- **Take the PSAT**
  This year taking the PSAT will qualify you for the National Merit Scholarship, which is one of the many ways that you can earn money for college. The PSAT is also another opportunity to practice for the SAT.

- **Evaluate your education options**
  Now is the time to decide what specific path you want to follow. Going to a four-year college is just one of your options, you could also attend a two-year college, vocational-technical school, or decide to enter the military. Talk to your counselor about which of these options is best for you.

- **Make a college list**
  Continue to gather information about colleges but also narrow down a list of your favorites. Important things to consider are size, location, cost, academic majors, and special programs. Try to keep all of your college information organized.

- **Prepare for and take the SAT and ACT**
  Some colleges will require different tests so first find out which one(s) you need to take. In the winter, try to create a plan for studying and register to take them in the spring. In the spring, take them for the first time and if you are not happy with your scores you can take them again the fall of your senior year.

- **Research financial aid and scholarship options**
  You must talk to your parents about paying for college because you will need their help throughout the financial aid process. You can learn about financial aid through your counselor or online. In regards to finding scholarships, there are many online resources that have a list of scholarships along with their requirements available.

Adapted from Peterson’s College Planning Timeline
12th Grade College Prep Timeline

Congratulations! You made it to your senior year of high school! 12th grade is such a busy year, as you will be applying to colleges along with continuing your classes and extracurricular activities. The most important thing to remember is to stay organized, most importantly keeping a to-do list and a calendar with testing dates and deadlines for applications.

- **Finalize your college list**
  You can determine which colleges you want to apply to from online research and college visits, which can give you an idea about what it would be like to attend the school. It is good to apply to both colleges that you think will be difficult to get into and colleges that are easier to get into. Talk to your parents and counselors about deciding what to include on your list.

- **Take the SAT and ACT**
  Decide what test date you want to do and sign-up online. When you sign-up, make sure that you arrange to have the scores sent to the colleges on your list. Continue to prepare for the tests by learning how the test is structured and reading test strategies.

- **Complete the applications**
  There are many pieces to application. Most applications are now online so you do not have to worry about mailing, but you need to make sure that you get everything in by the application deadline, most applications will include applications essays, transcripts, test scores, and recommendations. Contact your counselor to get your transcript sent and so that they can proofread your essays.

- **Submit Financial Aid Forms and Scholarship Applications**
  The FAFSA is the federal financial aid application, and in Georgia you must complete the FAFSA to receive any government aid such as PELL, HOPE, and Zell Miller. You also need to make sure that you continue to search for and apply to scholarships.

- **COMMIT TO A COLLEGE**
  This is the most exciting part of your senior year! There are so many aspects to consider when deciding which college to attend. If you do not have a clear choice, the best way to decide is by comparing aspects such as cost, location, class size, programs offered, and general feel (which you can get by visiting).

Adapted from Peterson’s College Planning Timeline