El Camino Fundamental High School  
College Planning for Juniors

This is a key year in the college planning process because you’ll be taking standardized tests, narrowing down your college list, and learning more about financial aid. In addition, you’ll need to stay involved in your high school courses and activities.

**SPRING**

**Stay on track with your classes and grades.**
Check your transcript and make a list of the courses you still need to take. Check on your class rank and your GPA. Even if your grades haven’t been that good so far, it’s never too late to improve. Colleges like to see an upward trend.

**Evaluate your education options.**
Now is the time to follow a more specific path. Decide whether you want to pursue full-time employment, further education or training (such as a vocational-technical school, career college, community college or four-year university), or a military career. If you’re interested in attending a military academy, now is the time to start the application process. Go online to check requirements.

**Continue gathering college information.**
Go to college fairs, attend college nights, and speak with college representatives who visit your high school. You may be able to narrow your choices or add a school to your list.

**Organize a testing plan.**
Figure out when you’ll be taking important tests like the SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, and AP exams, and mark the dates on your calendar. You’ll want to have plenty of time to prepare.

**Make sure you’re meeting any special requirements.**
If you want to play Division I or II sports in college, start the certification process and check the NCAA website to make sure you’re taking the core curriculum that meets their requirements.

**Stay involved with extracurricular activities.**
Colleges look for consistency and depth in the non-academic activities you pursue. Taking on leadership roles and making a commitment to the same groups are most important than trying out tons of new activities each year.

**Begin narrowing down your college choices.**
Make sure you have all the information you need about the colleges you’re interested in (entrance requirements, tuition, room and board costs, course offerings, student activities, financial aid, etc). Then begin comparing the schools by the factors that are most important to you and rank your choices.

**Prepare and take standardized tests (SAT/ACT).**
Find out if the colleges you are interested in require the SAT, ACT, or SAT Subject Tests. Register to take the tests you need; most juniors take them in the winter or spring. You can’t take them again in the fall of your senior year if you’re unhappy with your scores.

**Talk to your family.**
Have a discussion about the colleges you’re interested in. Your family can learn about what you want to pursue and you can hear any concerns or suggestions they might have.

**Prepare a challenging schedule for senior year.**
Plan what classes you’ll take next year and make sure you’re on track for graduation. When you pick your classes, don’t load up on easy electives. Colleges do consider your senior year courses and grades, so stick with a schedule that challenges you.

**Start a scholarship search.**
There are lots of scholarships out there; you just need to spend the time and effort to find them. Check the El Camino website for scholarships from local organizations and use the web scholarship search tool to find a wider range of options. The sooner you start looking for scholarships, the easier it will be to select some to apply to during your senior year.
Contact your recommendation writers.
Teachers and guidance counselors are often asked to write recommendations for lots of students. Consider whom you want to ask now and let them know so they’ll have time to prepare before getting tons of requests in the fall. On the El Camino website you can print out a “Letter of Recommendation Worksheet”. Use this as a helpful tool when asking for a letter of recommendation. Ask teachers who know you well and who will have positive things to say. Letters from a coach, activity leader, or adult who knows you well outside of school are also valuable.

Apply for a summer job, internship, or volunteer.
Summer employment and internships in fields you’re interested in will look appealing on a college application or resume. The money you earn can also be used to help pay application and testing fees in the fall.

Set up appointments at your top college choices.
You’ll often have to plan ahead when visiting colleges. Call the admissions office to set up a personal interview, tour, and a meeting with a professor or coach if you’re interested.

SUMMER
Visit colleges.
Visit the campuses of your top five college choices. Take a tour and speak with the admissions and financial aid staff. You may also be able to talk to students if some classes are in session. If you have an interview, be sure to send a thank you letter to the interviewer once you return home.

Get advice from other college students.
If you have friends or relatives in college, talk to them about what college life is like; especially if they attend a school you’re interested in. Although it’s important to hear what the admissions staff has to say about a school, it’s also important to get the students’ perspective.

Organize your financial aid information.
Develop a plan that includes a list of the aid sources, requirements for each application, and a timetable for meeting the filing deadlines. Getting organized will help make the process of applying a lot easier because you’ll know where to find important information.

Start working on your application essays.
Compose rough drafts of the essays you’ll need for your college applications. Have a teacher read and discuss them with you so you can see what to work on. Make any revisions to your essays and prepare final drafts. Don’t forget to proofread your final essays a few times.

Make early decision preparations.
If you plan to apply early decision to any school, take the time to visit the school again and make sure you’re willing to commit. If you elect to apply early decision, you should start working on your application as soon as possible because its deadline will be earlier than others.