

THE SCHOLAR'S ASCENT

The Launch Pad Manual

Your Grades 9-12 Parent Partnership Handbook
Preparing your scholar for takeoff -- college, career,
and life beyond high school.

\$4.99 PARENT RESOURCE

thescholarsascent.org

Reminiscent Road Media LLC · Founded by Dr. Ijezie-Desbois, PharmD

THE LAUNCH PAD ROLE

You Are the Launch Pad

A rocket doesn't take the launch pad with it. Your role in the high school years is to be the stable foundation from which your child launches into their future. You provide the support, the fuel, and the countdown -- but the flight is theirs.

This is the final stage of the parent partnership journey. You're shifting from advisor to consultant -- available when called upon, trusting in the preparation you've invested over the past 14+ years.

Stable Foundation

Be consistently available without being controlling. They need to know you're there -- but they need the freedom to fly.

Fuel the Mission

Help them identify their goals and provide the resources and encouragement to pursue them. Their mission, your fuel.

Trust the Countdown

Every year is a step closer to launch. Each grade builds on the last. Trust the process you've been building since kindergarten.

COLLEGE PREP TIMELINE

College Prep Partnership Timeline

9th Grade: Build the Foundation

- Understand how GPA works and that it starts NOW
- Choose challenging but manageable courses
- Join 1-2 extracurriculars they're genuinely interested in
- Start a simple resume or activity log

- Introduce the idea of community service
- Build a relationship with the school counselor
- Focus on strong study habits and time management

10th Grade: Explore & Expand

- Take the PSAT for practice (not pressure)
- Deepen involvement in extracurriculars (seek leadership)
- Start researching colleges casually (size, location, programs)
- Consider AP or honors courses for junior year
- Explore interests through internships, volunteering, or jobs
- Begin summer program research for the following summer
- Update the activity resume

11th Grade: Take Action

- Take the SAT/ACT (consider test-optional schools too)
- Visit colleges (virtual or in person)
- Build a balanced college list (reach, match, safety)
- Ask teachers for recommendation letters (spring semester)
- Begin brainstorming essay topics over the summer
- Research scholarships and financial aid options
- Have honest family conversations about college budget

12th Grade: Launch Sequence

- Finalize college applications (Early Action/Decision deadlines: Nov)
- Complete the FAFSA (opens October 1)
- Apply for scholarships continuously
- Submit Regular Decision applications (typically Jan 1)
- Compare financial aid packages (spring)

- Commit to a school by May 1 (National Decision Day)
- Celebrate the journey -- not just the destination

Remember: The goal is not to get into the "best" school. The goal is to find the right FIT -- academically, socially, and financially -- for YOUR child.

FAFSA OVERVIEW

FAFSA Overview & Timeline

What Is FAFSA?

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) determines eligibility for federal grants, loans, and work-study programs. Most colleges also use it to award institutional aid. Filing is free and required for nearly all financial aid.

When	What to Do
Summer before senior year	Create FSA ID for student AND one parent
October 1	FAFSA opens -- file as early as possible
October - November	Complete and submit (use IRS Data Retrieval Tool)
December - March	Receive Student Aid Report (SAR) and review
March - April	Receive and compare financial aid award letters
May 1	Accept aid package with chosen school

STAYING CONNECTED

Letting Go While Staying Connected

High school is the paradox years: your teen needs you more than ever, but they'll act like they need you less.

Stay Connected By	Let Go Of
Having one weekly "no agenda" check-in	Checking their grades daily (check monthly)
Knowing their friends (invite them over, drive them places)	Managing their homework or reminding about deadlines
Sharing meals together as often as possible	Choosing their courses or extracurriculars for them
Being available at unpredictable moments (late night talks)	Fighting their battles with teachers
Showing interest in their passions	Controlling their social calendar
Texting encouragement on hard days	Needing to know everything about their day
Attending their events without being asked	Living vicariously through their achievements

FINANCIAL CONVERSATIONS

Financial Aid Conversation Guide

Talking about money with your teen can be uncomfortable. Here's a framework:

1. **Be honest about what you can contribute** -- you don't need to share exact numbers, but be clear about boundaries
2. **Explain the difference** between grants (free money), loans (borrowed money), and work-study (earned money)

3. **Discuss the cost of student debt** -- help them understand what \$30,000 in loans means in monthly payments
4. **Explore all options together** -- community college, in-state schools, scholarship hunting, and employer tuition programs
5. **Make it a partnership** -- "Here's what we can do. Here's what we need you to do. Let's figure out the rest together."

Gap Year & Alternative Paths

College is not the only path to success. Depending on your child's goals, interests, and readiness, other paths may be equally -- or more -- valuable:

Gap Year

Structured time off to work, volunteer, travel, or explore. Students who take gap years often perform better in college. Key: it must have a plan.

Trade & Vocational

Electricians, plumbers, and skilled tradespeople are in high demand. Excellent earning potential, shorter training time, and minimal debt.

Community College

Complete general education at a fraction of the cost, then transfer. Many states offer free community college programs. Smart planning.

The Parent's Job: Support their path, not your dream. If your child wants to be a welder, support the best welding program. If they want Harvard, help them get there. The key is that it's THEIR vision, fueled by YOUR support.

INDEPENDENCE & LIFE SKILLS

Life Skills Checklist Before They Leave Home

- Do their own laundry
- Cook 5 basic meals
- Manage a simple budget
- Schedule their own appointments
- Handle a bank account
- Communicate with professors/bosses
- Manage their own medication
- File basic paperwork

- Navigate public transportation
- Grocery shop on a budget
- Understand basic car maintenance
- Handle conflict without a parent

SENIOR YEAR CHECKLIST

Senior Year Checklist

Fall Semester (August - December)

- Finalize college list and application strategy
- Complete Early Action/Decision applications (Nov deadlines)
- Request transcripts from the school counselor
- Follow up on recommendation letters
- Complete the FAFSA and CSS Profile (if required)
- Apply for local and national scholarships
- Maintain grades (colleges check senior year performance)

Spring Semester (January - May)

- Submit Regular Decision applications (Jan 1-15 deadlines)
- Continue scholarship applications
- Receive admission decisions (March - April)
- Compare financial aid award letters carefully
- Visit admitted student days at top choices
- Commit to a school by May 1
- Submit enrollment deposit

Summer Before College (June - August)

- Attend orientation

- Complete housing and meal plan selections
- Register for first-semester courses
- Set up a college bank account
- Practice life skills (laundry, cooking, budgeting)
- Shop for dorm essentials (wait for the roommate assignment first)
- Enjoy the last summer together -- take photos, make memories

The Launch Is Not the End

When that dorm room door closes or that first apartment lease is signed, your role doesn't end -- it evolves. You've gone from Gardener to Guide to Coach to Launch Pad. What comes next? You become the home base. The place they always know they can return to. The voice on the other end of the phone when life gets hard.

*"The greatest gift you can give your child is roots and wings."
You've given them both.*

The Scholar's Ascent Parent Guide Series

The Gardener's Guide (K-5) -- Nurturing the seedling years

The Guide's Handbook (Grade 6) -- Navigating middle school transition

The Coach's Playbook (Grades 7-8) -- Balancing support and independence

The Launch Pad Manual (Grades 9-12) -- You are here

Scholar Family Vocabulary Guide (Free) -- 30+ growth mindset phrase swaps

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