

# Training Module



**National  
College  
Access  
Network**

*Building Connections. Advancing Equity. Promoting Success.*



## **Early Awareness & Preparation Activities**

Advisor Training Module

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## **Chapter Four**

## National College Access Network

The mission of the National College Access Network (NCAN) is to improve access to and success in postsecondary education for disadvantaged and underrepresented students and those who are the first generation in their families to attend college. NCAN does this by supporting a network of state and local college access programs that provide counseling, advice, and financial assistance; sharing best practices among the network; providing leadership and technical assistance; and helping establish new college access programs.

NCAN college access programs serve students and families in almost every state and the District of Columbia. NCAN member programs work in inner cities, rural communities and suburbs. Through hands-on advising and financial assistance, NCAN programs share a commitment to inspiring and motivating young men and women to obtain a college education and help them pay the tuition. For assistance in establishing a college access initiative in your community or state, please contact us.

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**[www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org)**

The *Advisor Training Module* is made available in different formats. This book is the first in a series of four mini-modules. The remaining books are listed below. The entire training module is also available on the NCAN web site, in the *Building Blocks* section B/Advisory services.

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# Training Module

## Advisor Training Module – Chapter Four

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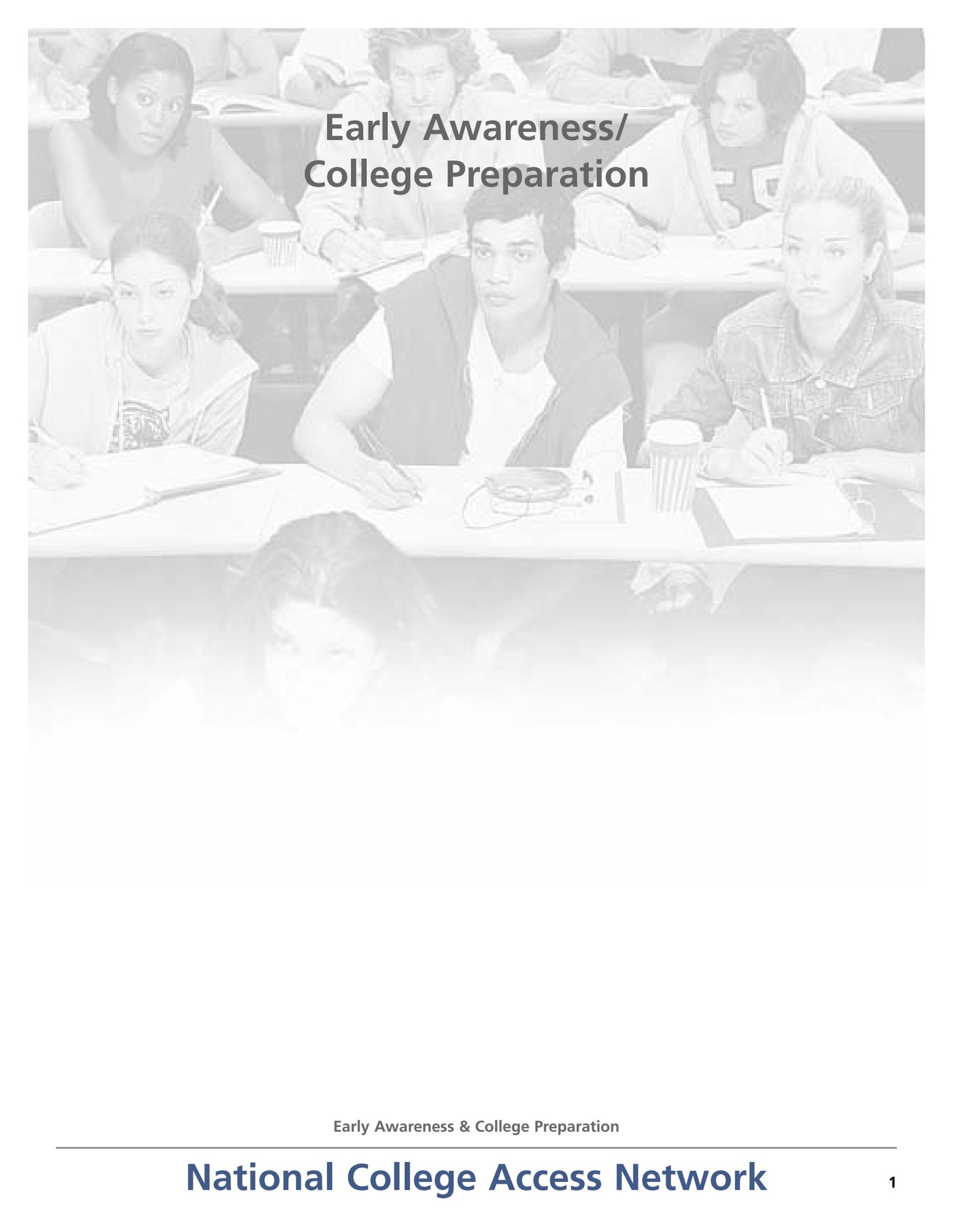
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**National College Access Network**



# Early Awareness/ College Preparation

Early Awareness & College Preparation

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## National College Access Network

# Early Awareness/ College Preparation

To be a successful access advisor, you should adopt the philosophy that “it is never too early to talk to children about going to college.” Communities generally create access programs because they have a need to increase the college-going rate of their students. Nurturing aspirations to attend college in children at the earliest age possible forms a critical foundation for their future plans. Motivating students to dream of getting a college degree is the first step in the long process of preparing students for college. This chapter will attempt to outline types of activities, sequences of events and necessary steps for properly preparing a student to enter post-secondary education.

Access programs tend to develop with a target population in mind. Almost by magic, programs begin to zero in on a specific age range of students targeted to receive assistance. Many access programs may begin by serving high school students, seniors in particular. Other access programs may begin focusing on motivating middle school students to build the aspiration and foundation for college. Programs may have a special component for adult learners, while access centers may have adult learners at the center of their mission.

Federal programs such as TRIO-Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services and GEARUP have a broad emphasis on middle school through college students. One theme tends to run throughout all access and federal programs: whenever a college preparation program and a student meet, everyone wishes it was earlier along the students’ path to college.

If your access program is offering or wants to provide programming and activities for students prior to their senior year, review the following steps for launching an early awareness program. This sequence of steps will help ensure that students and parents are receiving the right kinds of services at the right time in the process.



# Launching an Early Awareness/ College Preparation Program

Early Awareness & College Preparation

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## National College Access Network

# Launching an Early Awareness/ College Preparation Program

## Launching an Early Awareness Program

**Step 1** – *Identify the primary goals you want to accomplish with your program and plan your activities accordingly.*

Do you want to influence the academic curriculum choices of middle and high school students? Increase high school graduation and college attendance rates? Familiarize students with a college or financial aid environment? Identifying your goals early will help you with all the other aspects of launching your program. Important: Plan to involve parents, mentors, and/or counselors. Without these key individuals, programs have a harder path to success.

**Step 2** – *Identify a focus group of underserved schools or communities.* Determine what early awareness programs are already in place and what information and encouragement students and families need.

If programs already exist for the students you want to target, try to build on these programs rather than reinvent them. A program that reaches most students in a school may result in less personal attention than a longer-term program for a smaller group of students. The quality of the program matters most.

**Step 3** – *Don't create a program in a vacuum.* Individuals and organizations that will carry out the program and benefit from it should be involved in the earliest planning stages. Failing to include them may result in the creation of an early awareness program with the best intentions that simply does not fit the needs of the school or community. Developing a program together from the start also helps create a partnership and shared sense of commitment among the participants that will strengthen the program immeasurably.

**Step 4** – *Budgetary considerations may have an impact on your program.* If necessary, identify funding to help cover program costs. Nothing is more discouraging to young students than having hopes dashed by a program that promises a lot and delivers little. If you are making a long-term commitment, you may wish to consider outside funding. Possible sources include local businesses, banks, foundations, and colleges.

**Step 5** – *Evaluate the effectiveness of your program so you can improve or refine it in the future.*

The ability to show that you operate an effective program will be a plus when recruiting volunteers or seeking funding. These steps and additional considerations and sample materials are available in the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.collegeaccess.org](http://www.collegeaccess.org), Building Blocks Section B/Early Awareness.

The remainder of this chapter will provide an outline of the types of programming, activities, and processes that students and/or parents may need or want as they plan for the student's opportunity to attend college.

### Elementary School

Students need to build a strong foundation for learning in elementary school. Developing excellent reading, math and thinking skills is one of the best ways a student can prepare for college. High expectations and a constant, consistent message about preparing for the option to attend college from teachers at the elementary level are critical factors in building aspirations for the future. Parents are usually very active in an elementary child's education and they need to help support their child's academic achievement.

The concept of college and its importance and necessity in pursuing most careers may be the best method to communicate to elementary students. If you elect to provide programming for elementary students, keep these options in mind:

- Field Trips – Offer trips to local area businesses, colleges, museums, service industries, police and fire stations. Business representatives should always mention their educational background as they introduce themselves to students.
- Career Fairs – Create job title lists that include whether you need to attend college in order to secure a particular type of job.
- Occupational Books – Make sure classrooms or the school library contain age-appropriate books about different careers.
- Vocabulary Lists – Ask teachers to include vocabulary words that are associated with the concepts of college that coincide with the appropriate difficulty level of vocabulary lessons.
- Vocabulary Usage – Ask teachers to use language common to college, i.e. refer to tests as exams or grading periods as quarters or semesters.

- Curriculum Enhancements – Ask teachers to incorporate college concepts throughout the curriculum and/or lesson plans. Have teachers collaborate and review academic lessons and determine how the language or activities could be enhanced with subtle references to college. For example, incorporating locations of colleges in geography lessons or developing writing lessons that use college essay topics as writing prompts are simple ways to help prepare young students for what lies along the path to college.
- Parental Support – Provide parents with materials that suggest ways in which they can be supportive in helping with their child's academic work. Ask parents to chaperone or simply join in on a field trip to a college. Design simple college information materials that could be distributed at orientations, welcome nights, open houses or other school sponsored events.

For a sample elementary school activity guide that contains classroom lessons for students in Kindergarten through Grade 5, visit the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org), *Building Blocks* Section B/Early Awareness or follow the direct link:

[http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCANBB/RestrictAccess/Uploads/2006100608Elementary\\_Book.pdf](http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCANBB/RestrictAccess/Uploads/2006100608Elementary_Book.pdf)

### Middle School

Middle school often is pinpointed as the stage during which students check in or check out of a successful educational experience. Keeping students on a positive academic track and getting them to establish personal and educational goals and aspirations at this critical juncture needs to be the focus of access programs that target middle school students. Based on financial and personnel resources available, access programs may elect to serve entire middle schools or select targeted groups of students to serve instead.

Resources, both print and electronic, for this age student and his/her parents have become more readily available. As Steps 2 & 3 indicate on page 4, determine what resources may already be available in the school or community and collaborate with teachers, counselors, or other community programs so that you are not reinventing the wheel. Access program services should be designed to supplement—not supplant—what is currently available to students and parents. For example, career exploration activities or software use may be required as a standard part of the curriculum in a course offered. Confer with school counselors to determine what types of presentations or workshops are offered to students and/or parents on a regular or annual basis.

Access programs may wish to focus on programming and activities for middle school students/parents that support the following areas:

- Academic Curriculum & Rigor – Students must be encouraged to take the most challenging courses available in middle school. Many school systems offer courses that are requirements for high school diplomas. Research has shown that successful completion of Algebra I is key in predicting which students will attend and be successful in college. Access programs also may focus on providing academic support programs (tutoring, test preparation) to boost students' academic achievement levels. Including college concepts and vocabulary in various academic curriculums should be standard practice at the middle school level.
- Building Aspirations – Students and parents must have an understanding of the benefits of a post-secondary education. "Why College?" lessons and information need to be presented to students and parents. Strong connections to career opportunities can be shown as a way to encourage students. Research continues to tell us that college graduates will have lifetime earnings of one million more dollars than high school graduates. Programming should be included that breaks down barriers and dispels the myths around not going to college. Access programs may wish to offer a college information night or workshop for parents that offers them information and timelines for preparing for college.
- Classroom Activities & Presentations – Access programs often develop activities or presentations designed to be presented in the classroom format. These activities and/or presentations may focus on such areas as:
  1. Tips on Preparing for College-Good Study Habits, Time Management, Test Taking Skills
  2. College Prep Curriculum Requirements
  3. Completing Sample College Applications
  4. Researching Colleges on the Internet
  5. Mapping, Contacting and Requesting Information from Colleges
  6. Vocabulary Exercises with College Related Words and Definitions
  7. Types of Colleges and Degrees
  8. College Costs
  9. Financial Aid and Saving for College
  10. Career Exploration
  11. College Entrance Exams-PSAT, PLAN, ACT & SAT
  12. Alternative Paths to Diplomas & Degrees-Early Colleges, Dual Enrollment Programs, AP & IB Courses and Exams

- Summer Academic Enrichment Opportunities – Access programs may offer summer programs that help students advance in academic areas or perhaps help students catch up academically. In addition, students who participate in TRIO or GEARUP programs are likely to have a summer component as well. Many colleges throughout the country offer summer programs or “camps” that focus on academic areas targeted to middle school students. Building partnerships and collaborations with colleges or other organizations that offer these types of programs will be beneficial for your students and perhaps economically advantageous to the access program. Students who participate in camps held on college campuses (particularly overnight camps) have a tremendous opportunity to experience and become familiar with “college life.”

For additional information and sample activities and forms, visit the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org), *Building Blocks* Section B/Early Awareness, Advisory Services and Career Development. The Early Awareness portion of the web site contains a sample middle school activity guide for grades 6-8 at: [http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCANBB/RestrictAccess/Uploads/2006094548Middle\\_School.pdf](http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCANBB/RestrictAccess/Uploads/2006094548Middle_School.pdf)

### High School

As students reach high school age, it is misleading to describe access programming and activities as “early.” Access advisors understand that from the first day of high school, students need to be on the track to college. It may take to the end of the senior year for some students to get on the track. Sadly, others will drop off along the way and some will never get on the track. Access programs should focus their efforts on researched-based “best practices” that can assist the entire student body at a school or school district. Research-based evidence of best practices in college access programming is available in the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org/BestPractices](http://www.CollegeAccess.org/BestPractices). Limited resources or programs with very focused missions may lead to access programs serving a smaller target group of students. Student tracking

and data collection needs to begin as soon as a student enters the access program. Access advisors usually are the primary staff members responsible for the collection of data related to the students’ participation in your program.

Depending on the program’s design, access advisors may be working with students in grades 9-11 as well as seniors. The background information contained in several other chapters of this training module is necessary for advisors to be familiar with if they want to be the best resource possible for students and parents. In addition to this module, the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org) has a *Building Blocks* Sections A-B-C that contains a vast array of program information, materials, presentations, sample forms, timelines, etc. provided by access programs from around the country. Advisors are strongly encouraged to spend time reviewing these sections of the web sites to gather new ideas, learn various ways to provide programming and perhaps build the capacity of your own program. Sharing effective practices from access programs in this format is designed to help programs stretch limited resources to provide programming in an efficient manner.

Resources, both print and electronic, for this age student and his/her parents are in abundance. Visit the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org) – *Building Blocks* Section B/Advisory Services for a tremendous amount of sample materials, programming, manuals, timelines, etc. that can be adopted and adapted to your program. As Steps 2 & 3 indicate on page 4, determine what resources may already be available in the school or community and collaborate with teachers, counselors, or other community programs so that you are not reinventing the wheel. Access program services should be designed to supplement, not supplant, what is currently available to students and parents. Access programs can conduct a mini-gap analysis to determine what services/programs are available in the school and/or community and design the access program to target students not currently receiving services or supplement services currently available. In many cases, such an analysis might determine the need for comprehensive access programming when no such services are currently being delivered to the targeted population.

As access advisors work with students in high school, the steps towards college are perhaps best associated with a timeline for certain events. However, there are some areas that need to be addressed regardless of the grade level of the student. Early awareness programming should pay consistent attention to the following areas:

- Academic Curriculum & Rigor – Students must be encouraged to take the most challenging courses available in high school. Research has shown that the successful completion of Algebra I is key in predicting which students will attend and be successful in college. Collaborating with counselors, teachers and parents to encourage students to take the most rigorous curriculum available must be at the forefront of preparation. Those students who get on track to college later in high school need the same message as the new freshman when it comes to rigorous coursework. Access programs also may focus on providing academic support programs (tutoring, test preparation) to boost students' academic achievement levels. High stakes graduation tests, college entrance exams, and standardized tests are a significant reality for high school students. Test scores often reflect poor academic achievement. High school reform and transformations are occurring around the country. Many high schools are now offering alternative paths to a high school diploma that include earning college credit simultaneously. Dual enrollment programs are growing. Access advisors should strongly encourage students to participate in these options if they are available. Students should be encouraged to take Advanced Placement courses and exams if available. Successful completion of a rigorous curriculum creates a wide variety of options for students pursuing post-secondary education. Better prepared students entering college should yield better outcomes for college access programs.
- Building Aspirations – Students and parents must have an understanding of the benefits of a post-secondary education. "Why College?" lessons and information needs to be presented to students and parents. Even at the high school level, it is critical that students and parents have a vision that includes college as the next step beyond high school. This is a message better late than never. High schools may offer a college information night or workshop for parents that offers them information and timelines for preparing for college. College access programs and advisors should collaborate and coordinate these types of programs. High schools should be encouraged to design programs that are for parents of students at all grade levels, not just juniors and seniors as is often the case.
- Student Profile – Students need constant support and reminders about building a profile for college applications. Numbers count and students need to keep abreast of things like grade point averages, test scores, class rank, etc. Encouragement needs to be given to students to participate in extra-curricular and community activities. Having students complete sample college applications while in 9th or 10th grade can give them a preview of how they may look to potential colleges.
- Career Exploration – Not every student must know exactly what he/she intends to major in on their first day on the college campus. However, students need continued exposure to career exploration, interest inventories, internships and job shadowing. This area may not be the central focus or responsibility of the access program or advisor, but collaboration and support of what may be already available at the school is strongly encouraged. Scholarship opportunities for colleges often are aligned with particular majors. Students entering college completely undecided about career options may be limiting their potential funding sources for college.

- Financial Aid Options – While the formal financial aid process begins during the senior year, access programs and advisors need to provide a series of workshops, classroom presentations and web-based resources that inform students and parents about the types of financial aid resources available throughout high school. Access advisors should thoroughly review the entire Building Blocks Section B of the NCAN web site which has various handouts, presentations, timelines, etc. that focus on financial aid details. This preliminary type of information needs to lead in the direction of completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) during the senior year. Students and parents need to be assured that there are options available, and access programs should lead the way in providing information as well as assistance with completing financial aid forms.
- College Research & Search – Students and parents need to be encouraged to start the college research and search process as soon as possible. Please see the Admissions chapter of this module for specific ideas and resources designed to guide students and parents through this process. The key is to get them to start the process prior to the fall of the student’s senior year. Access programs often collaborate or coordinate college fairs, college field trips, campus visits, and college tours. While many of these activities occur during the senior year, early awareness of college options will help students make and refine their college “list” in a much more timely fashion.

The remaining portion of this chapter will be presented in a timeline format for students and parents. The items listed below are intended to be steps or options for students. Access programs may use these as a guide for deciding the services necessary to assist students through this process. Use the information below as a general guide and know that variations may be appropriate for your students.

### **Ninth Grade Timeline**

- Enroll in and plan for a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.
- Investigate career options/interests.
- Get involved in school and community activities and keep a record of involvement, achievements and honors.
- Develop a support network of school counselors, access advisors, and teachers who can assist along the way to college.
- Perform to one’s highest academic ability; get extra support when struggling with coursework.
- Begin researching college options and identifying college access type web sites like The College Board, Big Futures, WiseChoice, ConnectEDU, etc.
- Talk with parents regarding college options.
- Consider participating in alternative programs that lead to a high school diploma and college credit.
- Read books, magazines and newspapers and then read more!
- Explore options for paying for college.
- Continue saving money for college.
- Participate in access program activities as well as other educational programs such as TRIO, GEARUP or any summer academic enrichment options, if available.

### Tenth Grade Timeline

- Continue rigorous coursework.
- Continue to refine career exploration.
- Continue involvement in school and community activities and maintain record of activities and honors.
- Participate in preliminary college entrance exam tests such as the PSAT and the PLAN.
- Increase time researching college options through the Internet, college print materials, college fairs, college visits or field trips.
- Continue high academic achievement-good grades, good test scores.
- Continue exploring options to pay for college and begin reviewing scholarship search process.
- Attend college information nights with parents provided by school, access program and/or local area colleges.
- Consider participating in accelerated programs for earning college credit.
- Participate in access program activities as well as other educational programs such as TRIO, GEARUP or any summer academic enrichment options, if available.
- Continue saving money for college.
- Attend college information nights with parents.
- Continue high academic achievement: good grades, good test scores.
- Begin scholarship search via Internet and research local area scholarship options.
- Participate in access program activities as well as other educational programs such as TRIO, GEARUP or any summer academic enrichment options, if available.
- Continue conversations with parents regarding college interests, financial aid options and scholarship searches.
- Consider participating in accelerated programs for earning college credit.
- Draft essays with potential to be used for college admissions or scholarship applications.

### Eleventh Grade Timeline

- Continue rigorous coursework and enroll in AP or IB courses if available.
- Review high school course selections for alignment with college and career interests.
- Continue participating in school and community activities and maintaining accurate records.
- Take the PSAT to determine eligibility for National Merit Scholarship Program.
- Participate in preparation courses for college entrance exams if available.
- Take college entrance exams-ACT and/or SAT.
- Refine and narrow college search and create potential college list.
- Understand admission criteria and processes for potential colleges.
- Schedule visits, with parents if possible, to college campuses and continue participation in college fairs, campus tours, etc.

Access programs and advisors should provide or collaborate with the schools or other community programs to provide assistance to students along this timeline. Programming that targets the steps listed above will result in well prepared students who want to enter the post-secondary education world. Access advisors should review the Internet sites listed in the Web Resources chapter of this module. Several of those web sites will contain information to use with students in the “early awareness” process. It is strongly recommended that you peruse the Members Only Section of the NCAN web site at [www.CollegeAccess.org](http://www.CollegeAccess.org) for a vast amount of information regarding early awareness for students and parents. In addition, *Building Blocks* Section Be/EarlyAwareness/Human Resources, Staffing & Volunteers contains a job description for an early awareness coordinator position. It is never too early or too late to start a student down the path to college.

It cannot be stressed enough that access advisors will play a critical role in collecting data and tracking students throughout the early awareness process. This type of information will help access programs determine the most effective services to provide to students and parents as they move along the track to college.