

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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High School Seniors: Map your route, be prepared for college

Senior year in high school isn't a time to coast — nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation encourages students to work hard and meet their deadlines!

In order to have everything in place for their journey to college next fall, seniors need to map their course now and check off the milestones as they pass them.

Begin with taking the ACT and/or SAT tests. These tests should be completed early enough that test scores will be available by Jan. 1 for reference by schools and scholarship selection committees. Visit www.collegeboard.com to sign up for the SAT and www.actstudent.org to sign up for the ACT. Students should have official scores delivered to their schools of choice. Take three, free practice ACT and SAT tests at www.SmartAboutCollege.org to prepare.

Now is also a good time for seniors to ask teachers, coaches, and mentors to write letters of recommendation to provide to scholarship committees, or the colleges of the student's choice. By providing those people with plenty of notice, they'll have time to gather their thoughts and put them down on paper.

During this timeframe, students should apply for scholarships using the wide range of resources available. Visit guidance counselors' offices and libraries, or go online (FastWeb.com, mtcis.intocareers.org, and more) to find scholarships for which to apply. Some scholarship deadlines come before the first of the year, so take note of that.

Students should also be applying to the schools they are interested in attending. Seniors need to contact the admissions offices and financial aid offices, or visit their websites, to request all required forms. Pay special attention to deadlines. Don't commit to a school before visiting the campus! If a school isn't a good fit, it will be difficult for a student to be successful in their studies.

As January — and tax season — draw closer, seniors should encourage their parents to gather their tax documents so they can get their taxes completed as soon after Jan. 1 as possible. In order to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), they will need the most accurate tax information available. Get free, one-on-one assistance completing the FAFSA at a College Goal Montana site in February. Visit SmartAboutCollege.org to get details about College Goal Montana events throughout the state. Remember, March 1 is the priority deadline for the FAFSA.

Senior year can be hectic, but plenty of help is available to keep students on the right track. Visit with guidance counselors, and the staff at the admissions and financial aid offices. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

For help with getting ready for college, visit www.SmartAboutCollege.org and find the SAF campus outreach office near you under the "Partners and Community" tab, or contact Rhonda Safford at rsafford@safmt.org or (406) 495-7750.

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to pursue and fund their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$22.4 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.smartaboutcollege.org.