

IVY LEAGUE + HIGHLY SELECTIVE COLLEGE ROADMAP

Freshman to Senior Year | Build rigor, depth, and a clear story

9TH

BUILD

- Take strong core classes: English, math, lab science, history/social science, and begin/continue the same world language.
- Choose Honors/AP only when appropriate and sustainable.
- Join a few meaningful activities; start a simple activities/resume tracker.
- Build strong study habits and relationships with teachers.

10TH

DEVELOP

- Increase rigor when ready; continue math, science, English, history, and world language.
- Consider one dual-enrollment course if academically ready and it adds real challenge or major exploration.
- Take PSAT if available; explore summer programs, service, work, research, arts, athletics, or independent projects.
- Start developing depth in 1-2 interests instead of collecting random clubs.

11TH

STRENGTHEN

- Take the most rigorous reasonable schedule available: AP/IB/Honors and/or dual enrollment.
- Keep English, math, science, history/social science, and world language strong; advanced courses should fit your goals.
- Prepare for SAT/ACT based on each college's current policy; research colleges, costs, scholarships, and QuestBridge if eligible.
- Pursue leadership, impact, research, work, service, or a major-related project; identify potential recommenders.

12TH

APPLY

- Do not coast: keep a challenging senior schedule, including advanced or dual-enrollment courses when appropriate.
- Finalize a balanced college list; complete Common App and school-specific supplements; request recommendations early.
- Complete FAFSA/CSS Profile as required; compare net cost, not just the school name.
- Keep grades strong after applying and send required updates/documents on time.

DUAL ENROLLMENT: Use it strategically. A strong college course can show readiness and help a student explore a field, especially when the high school has limited advanced options. It should complement, not replace, a coherent high-school program.

WORTH MORE TIP: Highly selective colleges do not have one guaranteed formula. Rigor, grades, intellectual curiosity, meaningful involvement, strong writing, recommendations, and context all matter.

There's Just Not One Pathway to Success. | Plan early. Know your options. Choose your pathway.

Current as of August 2026. Admission policies can change; verify each college/campus during the application year. Official references: Harvard College - Preparing for College / Secondary School Course Requirements.