

Section II: How to help your child prepare for college

The great majority of Latino parents want their children to be successful—to succeed educationally and economically—and to reach higher and achieve more than they themselves have achieved. The key to this success is higher education, and the earlier the student begins preparing for college the better the results. There are certain things parents can do to help increase their child's opportunities to attend college. For example:

- Get involved early, preferably during middle school
- Get to know and work with the teachers and the guidance counselor at the school
- Learn that there are different types of high school diplomas
- Learn which high school classes are important to take and in what sequence
- Learn the necessary requirements for college application and admission
- Learn about financial aid: loans, scholarships, and other sources of financial aid

Get involved early and let the teachers and counselors help you!!

Even though the great majority of Latino parents believe that a college education is very important, they find it difficult to be involved in their children's school. There are many barriers that stand in their way, from working long hours to limited English language skills to a lack of knowledge about the American educational system. As a parent, make it your business to learn what you have to do to help your son or daughter get into college. Your most important allies will be the high school counselor and the teachers—make special efforts to get to know them. Another source of help is other parents at the school, especially those who are more involved with school activities and who may be bilingual.

Not all high school diplomas are equal!!

In Virginia, students can earn either a Standard Diploma or an Advance Studies Diploma. In either case, specific requirements for each type of diploma require students to take different types of courses. The Standard and Advanced Studies Diplomas require different combinations of courses. For specific information about high school diplomas and specific credit requirements, please go to Opportunities: 2006-07 Virginia Guide to Education After High School, available at <http://www.schev.edu/OpportunitiesVaFinancialAidPrograms/Opportunities2006-07VaSpanish.pdf>

It's important to take the right classes in high school!!

If your son or daughter is thinking about going to college, it is very important that he/she take the right type of classes that will qualify him/her to apply to many different colleges and universities. Students can increase their chances of getting into college by:

- Taking the highest level of the required math, science and English course and at least two years of a foreign language, *even if you speak Spanish at home*.
- Taking as many college preparatory, advance placement (AP), or dual credit courses as possible, beginning with the 9th grade or freshman year

College preparation courses can be challenging, but these classes provide the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college. For many students, it is better to make A's and B's in college preparatory, AP, and/or dual credit courses than on easy courses that are not designed to prepare students for college.

Some high school courses can be taken for college credit, and are called dual-credit programs. *Dual Enrollment* courses are usually offered by the community college but take place at the high school. Guidance counselors are familiar with the rules and regulations for dual enrollment credits and with the institutions that offer them. *Advanced Placement* (AP) classes are designed to teach high school students college freshman level material and are offered in many different subjects. Once the course is completed, the student can take the AP national exam for that particular course. Usually, if a student scores a 4 or 5 in the national exam, he/she may receive college credit at the institution they wish to attend.

Another type of academic program that can prepare students for college is the *International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program*. This program is offered at many high schools in Virginia. The IB program is a rigorous college preparatory program offered in more than 1000 schools in 92 different countries. The IB Diploma is highly regarded by colleges and universities as a superior preparation for the academic challenges of postsecondary education. For more information (in Spanish) about the IB programs, go to the International Baccalaureate Organization at www.ibo.org/es/facts/fastfacts.

College Admissions Tests: The SAT and ACT.

A student must take either the *SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)* or the *ACT (American College Test)* if planning to go to college; these tests are a key part of a student's preparation to apply to college. The PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) is considered a practice test for those students planning to take the SAT. Colleges and universities consider both the SAT and ACT as measures of a student's ability to do college-level work. Institutions differ as to which test—the SAT or ACT—they prefer, so it's a good idea to ask.

- **PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)**—Considered a rehearsal for students who plan to take the SAT, which is the test many colleges require for

admission. The PSAT is given each year around mid-October, and lasts two hours. Its format consists of alternating verbal and math questions. Students may use a calculator. The PSAT can be taken multiple times during the sophomore and junior years, but scores are not sent to any colleges unless the student requests so.

There is a fee for the test, but fee waivers are available for those who cannot afford the fee.

- **SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)**—The SAT is used as a measure of how well students will do in college, and as a way to compare students from different schools and areas. Although important and, in most cases, required by the colleges, the SAT score is only one of several factors institutions consider for admission. Other factors include high school academic record, extracurricular activities, essays, recommendations, and interviews.

The best way to prepare for the SAT is to spend time looking at sample questions, review the test directions and become familiar with the answer sheet, and take a practice test. *Test preparation materials are available for loan at school and public libraries.*

There are other SAT tests—known as SAT II—that measure skills in specific subjects, such as mathematics, English, history, and science. Many colleges do not require SAT II tests, although students can take the tests to demonstrate their knowledge of these subject areas. These tests are one hour in duration. For a schedule of SAT and SATII test dates and fees, please go to www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees.html.

- **ACT (American College Test)**—The ACT is a national college admission test covering mathematics, English, reading and science reasoning. The ACT measures the knowledge, understanding and skills that students have acquired throughout school. Some students take both the SAT and ACT, but usually it is only necessary to take one or the other. *Most colleges in Virginia will take either or both, but it is best to check with the institution to be sure as to which test they require.*

The ACT is different from the SAT in that it is possible to “prepare” for the exam—meaning that one can actually study and improve the quality of the content knowledge. The ACT questions are directly related to what the student has learned in high school. The actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes, and the exam is offered several times per year. For test dates and locations, please go to www.actstudent.org/index.html.

- *Admission Requirements.*

Admission requirements vary from institution to institution, and it is important to carefully review each school's list. Colleges and universities usually include detailed information about their admission requirements on their web sites. *To access a list of public and private institutions in Virginia, please go to www.schev.edu/students/collegeListAlpha.asp.*