



How will we pay for college?



What does it take to get in to college?



# MEFA's Early College Planning Guide for Parents

*mefa*  
**COUNSELOR**

A Guide to Thinking About Your Child's Future

## How to Use this Guide

**MEFA's Early College Planning Guide for Parents** is designed to help families start thinking about college. Many families find it helpful to start thinking about how to pay for college before the bill is due. College may be expensive, but there are many types of financial aid and financing options available to help every family afford higher education.

MEFA offers [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org), a one-stop Web site with a listing of free seminars and information about planning early, applying and paying for higher education. MEFA also created an **Early College Planning Workbook for Students** designed to help students think creatively about their options for higher education. MEFA's resources can help high school students discover their unique goals, talents and interests while making the most of their time in high school to prepare for higher education. For a free copy, visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)

Many of MEFA's services are also available for Spanish-speaking families.

### MEFA Counselor Emails

MEFA provides step-by-step guidance as families prepare for college. Sign up for our free MEFA Counselor emails today.

**WHO?** Parents of high school students

**WHAT?** Emails with helpful hints about college admissions and financing and important deadline reminders

**HOW?** Fill out the **MEFA Counselor Email Enrollment Card** in this booklet and drop it in the mail or give it to your seminar presenter. Please include your email address. Or register online at [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)

MEFA Counselor emails are also available in Spanish. MEFA believes in protecting your privacy and will never sell or share your information with a third party.

For more information,  
visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)

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# Myths and Facts about Financial Aid

**MYTH:** College is too expensive for my family.

**FACT:** More than \$97 Billion in financial aid is awarded each year to undergraduate college students. The government offers certain grants and low-cost loans for families that have significant need. Many colleges offer their own financial aid to offset college costs.

**MYTH:** If we apply for financial aid, it will hurt our child's chances of being admitted to the college.

**FACT:** Most colleges practice need-blind admissions, where the applicant's financial aid status has no bearing on the admissions decision. You won't be penalized for applying for financial aid at schools that practice need-blind admissions.

**MYTH:** My child needs good grades and high SAT scores to receive financial aid.

**FACT:** Of the \$97 Billion in financial aid awarded to undergraduate students annually, most of it is based entirely on financial need, not merit.

**MYTH:** If my child has good grades, he or she may go to college for free.

**FACT:** Financial aid policies vary from institution to institution. Students may be eligible for a merit scholarship based on their grade point average or college entrance test scores at one college but not at another. The competitiveness of the institution as well as the other candidates applying for admission may be a factor.

**MYTH:** We have a lot of personal debt, so we should be eligible for more financial aid.

**FACT:** Financial aid formulas are used to measure your family's overall financial strength based on your income and assets. Personal debt, such as credit card and auto loans, is not considered when determining financial aid eligibility.

**MYTH:** I make too much money to be eligible for financial aid.

**FACT:** Don't make assumptions. Your financial aid eligibility may differ from school to school.

**MYTH:** If I save for college, I won't get any financial aid.

**FACT:** While assets are considered in determining your eligibility for aid, income is the biggest factor in calculating the parent's contribution to college costs. Families who save have more options when determining how to pay for their children's education. **Additional information regarding how assets affect financial need is available on page 8.**

**MYTH:** Financial aid means free money.

**FACT:** Grants, scholarships, loans and federal work-study are all forms of financial aid. Almost half of the financial aid that is awarded comes in the form of education loans. **See the chart on the next page for additional information regarding the types of financial aid available and their sources.**

Visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)  
to find a list of free  
local seminars near you.

What types of financial aid are available?



## Sources of Financial Aid

The following chart shows the types and sources of financial aid your child may be eligible for. Loans may be included in the financial aid award and make up a significant portion of financial aid that is awarded annually. Education loans may be offered to the student, parent or both. Most have low, fixed interest rates, and principle payments may be deferred until after the student graduates or leaves school.

Type of Financial Aid	Description	Source
<b>Grants</b>	Awarded based on financial need. The student is not required to repay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• College or university</li> </ul>
<b>Scholarships</b>	Typically awarded based on academic, athletic or other talent. The student is not required to repay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College or university</li> <li>• Civic or religious</li> <li>• Businesses or corporations</li> </ul>
<b>Loans</b>	Must be repaid to the lender including interest. Education loans are available for both parents and students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• College or university</li> <li>• Private lenders</li> </ul>
<b>Federal Work-study</b>	Provides students with the opportunity to work part-time and earn money for college related expenses such as books and supplies. Not deducted from the school bill.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal</li> </ul>

# Financial Aid Eligibility

Colleges calculate financial aid eligibility with a simple formula.

## Cost of Attendance (COA)

– Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

= Financial Aid Eligibility/Financial Need

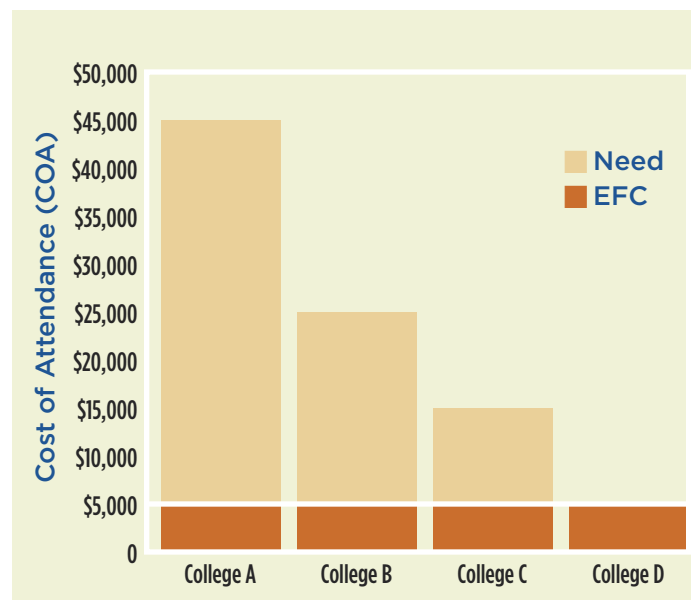
The **Cost of Attendance (COA)** is established by the school and will vary from college to college (see chart below). The COA represents the total cost of being a student for a year and includes fixed, direct costs like tuition and fees, room and board, as well as estimated allowances for books, supplies, transportation and personal expenses.

The **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** is the amount your family may be expected to pay towards college annually. It is based on the information you provide on your financial aid applications, and is calculated using standard formulas.

When financial aid is awarded, the family's contribution is taken into consideration first, as it is the primary responsibility of the family to pay for a college education. A student's eligibility for financial aid is what's left after applying the Expected Family Contribution to the Cost of Attendance.

Financial aid offices allocate their resources differently. While the preliminary EFC may be the same or similar from school to school, the amount and type of financial aid that each school offers may vary quite a bit. The reality is that the EFC may not be all that the family is required to pay. The vast majority of schools will not be able to provide enough aid to meet every student's full financial need.

## Financial Aid Formula in Practice



In this example, the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is \$5,000.

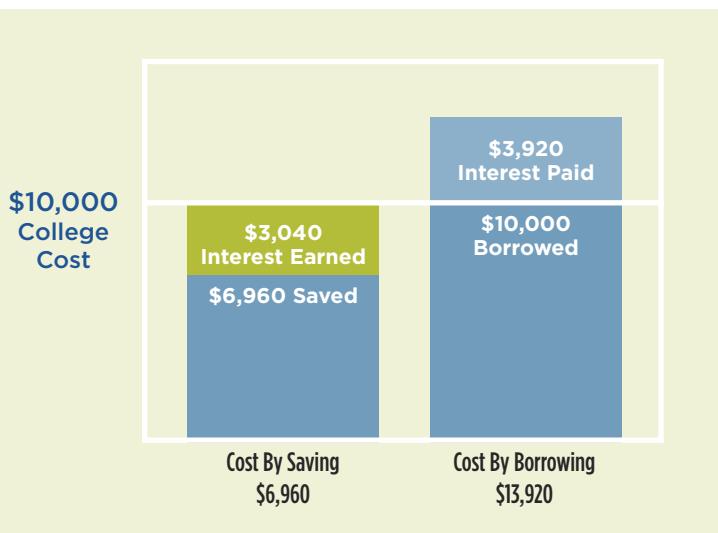
Sign up for MEFA Counselor emails to get periodic information about financial aid.

# Saving vs. Borrowing (Loans)

While education loans are frequently an option when it comes to paying the college bill, using savings is a much more cost-effective strategy. Borrowing money means spending your future income plus interest.

When you save for college instead of using loans to cover education costs, you earn interest instead of paying interest. For example,\* to accumulate \$10,000 in 10 years at 7% interest, you'd need to save \$58 per month. To borrow \$10,000 over 10 years at 7% interest, you'd have to repay \$116 per month.

## The Real Cost of Borrowing\*



\*Estimate only. Market conditions may change.

In this example, you actually make a cumulative investment of \$6,960 and earn interest of \$3,040 to reach \$10,000 in savings. If you take out a loan for \$10,000, you will pay an additional \$3,920 in interest, for a total of \$13,920. So repaying the loan instead of saving will cost an additional \$6,960.

How do we start saving for college?

## 10 Tips for Saving for College

- 1 Set a clear goal that you can attain within your particular timeframe.
- 2 Add saving for college to your regular budget, like saving for retirement or paying your household bills.
- 3 Set up regular, automatic transfers to move money into your savings account. Increase the amount every time you get a pay raise.
- 4 If you receive a bonus, tax refund or other unscheduled income, set a portion of it aside for college.
- 5 Get your children involved: ask them to save a certain portion of their allowance or earnings from after-school jobs.
- 6 Consider starting a college savings plan, like the U.Fund or U.Plan, and for special occasions like birthdays, ask family members to contribute.
- 7 Save and roll your change, and deposit it at the bank.
- 8 Bring your lunch to work. It can save you up to \$3,000 per year.
- 9 Continue to make childcare payments into a savings or investment account after the child enters school.
- 10 Consider other factors in your situation:
  - A. Will the student be attending longer than 4 years? Many students continue their college education through graduate school.
  - B. Do you have multiple children?

# Your Expected Family Contribution

## Concerned that your savings will affect your financial aid award?

Here is an example of how parent assets (including savings) might affect the EFC (Expected Family Contribution).

Example 1	Family A	Family B	Family C
Parent Income	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Parent Assets*	\$0	\$75,000	\$150,000
EFC	\$4,420	\$5,230	\$8,800
Difference	\$0	\$810	\$4,380

**Example 1** shows the minimal impact that assets have on financial aid for most families. Family A and Family B have a difference of \$75,000 in assets, but Family B is only expected to contribute \$810 more toward education costs. Family B's financial aid may not be affected very much by their assets, yet they have many more options for paying the college bill. Although Family C's EFC is even higher, they also have much greater financial stability and flexibility than Families A and B, even after paying the higher EFC.

*\*The equity in your primary residence, value of your retirement plan and life insurance is not currently included in the federal formula for calculating EFC, as of June 30, 2009.*

Here is an example of how parent income might affect the EFC.

Example 2	Family D	Family E	Family F
Parent Income	\$60,000	\$100,000	\$150,000
Parent Assets*	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
EFC	\$4,420	\$14,559	\$30,660
Difference	\$0	\$10,139	\$26,240

**Example 2** further illustrates that the federal EFC formula is generally income-driven. The asset difference between Family A and C was \$150,000 and the EFC increased by only \$4,380. When we compare families D and F, where the assets are the same but the income increases by up to \$90,000, the difference between EFCs is \$26,240. The higher the income, the greater a family's ability to absorb educational expenses, and the higher their EFC.

*Please note: These examples are based on the current federal methodology for a family of 4, with one child in college. Numbers provided are for illustrative purposes only, and should not be used to estimate what your family EFC may be.*

## What will your EFC be? Find out with the FAFSA4caster.

Complete the FAFSA4caster, and you can:

- Receive a preliminary estimate of your federal EFC.
- Find out your current eligibility for Federal Student Aid.
- Pre-populate data on the FAFSA when you do apply for financial aid.
- Jump-start your family's familiarity with the financial aid process.
- Access the FAFSA4caster at [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)



## Paying the College Bill

Financial aid awards may vary from school to school, even among schools with similar costs of attendance. The earlier you start planning, the more options you will have. Families of college students have the three methods below to pay for their share of educational expenses not covered by financial aid. Choose the combination that works best for your own financial situation.

**Past Income:** Savings and other assets  
Please see pages 10 and 11 for saving options.

**Present Income:** Current salary and/or other personal income  
Many colleges offer interest-free monthly payment plans to manage your annual tuition bill.

**Future Income:** Parent and student loans, which are paid back gradually over time  
Historically, MEFA has offered some of the most competitive education loan interest rates in the country.

For most families, paying for college happens over time, spanning their past, present and future resources. Any money you are able to set aside today will give you greater flexibility to manage the impact of college expenses while also pursuing your other financial goals.



The earlier you start planning,  
the more options you will have.

# MEFA's College Savings Plans

Which savings plan makes the most sense for our family?

## The U.Plan and the U.Fund: What's the difference?

MEFA and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have developed two innovative college savings options to help you save and keep up with the rising cost of college. You can use both the U.Plan<sup>SM</sup> and the U.Fund<sup>®</sup> to save for college. **Here are some of the key differences between the two plans:**

	<b>UPLAN</b> Prepaid Tuition Program	<b>UFUND</b> College Investing Plan
<b>What is it?</b>	A prepaid tuition program that allows participants to lock in tuition rates at participating Massachusetts colleges and universities.	A market-based 529 investment plan that lets families invest in portfolios of mutual funds.
<b>What can you use the proceeds for?</b>	Tuition and mandatory fees at 80 participating public and private colleges and universities in Massachusetts, for undergraduate education only.	Tuition, fees and other qualified expenses including room, board, books, supplies and equipment, at any accredited college or university nationwide, for undergraduate or graduate education.
<b>What kind of return will you get?</b>	Tuition percentages are guaranteed, regardless of inflation. However, if you do not use your Tuition Certificates to pay for a participating college, your savings may not have kept pace with the rate of college inflation.	Your earnings may keep pace with or beat college inflation, but there's no guarantee of a return on your investment, and it's possible to experience a negative return.

*For more information on the U.Plan Prepaid Tuition Program or the U.Fund College Investing Plan, see the savings comparison chart on the next page or visit [www.mefa.org](http://www.mefa.org).*

# MEFA Plans vs. Other College Savings Options

This chart compares several popular college savings options<sup>1</sup>. An investor must consider risk when comparing different options. Generally, attaining higher returns involves more risk. The U.Plan offers a low-risk investment with a guaranteed return.

	<b>UPLAN</b> Prepaid Tuition Program	<b>UFUND</b> College Investing Plan (529 Plan)	Custodial Accounts (UGMA/UTMA)	Coverdell Education Savings Account	Taxable Account
<b>Ownership/ Control of Account</b>	Owner	Owner	Custodian controls for the minor until age of majority.	Generally parent or legal guardian controls for the beneficiary.	Owner
<b>Guidelines for Use</b>	Locks in tuition and mandatory fees only at 80 participating MA public and private college and universities for undergraduate education.	Qualified higher education expenses (tuition, room, board, books, and required supplies and equipment) at accredited post-secondary schools anywhere in the U.S.	If used before the age of majority, must be used for the benefit of the child. No restrictions on use when under the control of the beneficiary.	Qualified higher education expenses (tuition, room, board, books, and required supplies and/or primary or secondary at accredited post-secondary school expenses) by the time beneficiary turns 30.	None
<b>Adjusted Gross Income Limit</b>	None	None	None	Single filer: \$95-\$110k Joint filers: \$190-220k (phased out).	None
<b>Annual Contribution Limit</b>	No annual limit. Cumulative limit equal to four years of the most expensive school in the Plan.	No annual limit. Cumulative limit of \$300,000. Gift \$65,000 per donor. (\$130,000 per couple) per beneficiary in a single year without incurring Federal gift tax treatment. <sup>3</sup>	No limits. Gift up to \$13K/year (\$26K per couple) to a child's UGMA/UTMA account without being subject to Federal gift tax treatment. <sup>3</sup>	\$2000 per designated beneficiary under 18. Contributions to the same Coverdell Account can be made by any taxpayer who meets AGI limits.	None
<b>Taxation of Earnings<sup>4</sup></b>	State and federal tax free with some limitations. <sup>2</sup>	Qualified distributions are federal income tax free. Tax free for Massachusetts residents.	At least part of the investment earnings may be exempt from federal income tax and some or all may be taxed at the child's generally lower rate in the year in which earned.	Qualified distributions are federal income tax free. Tax free for Massachusetts residents.	Earnings are taxed in the year realized.
<b>Taxation/Penalty upon Non-Qualified Withdrawal<sup>4</sup></b>	U.Plan Tuition Certificates are liquid. Participants should expect to hold to maturity. Certificates pay interest at rate of increase in CPI until maturity date if not used for tuition at participating Massachusetts colleges and universities.	Earnings portion of non-qualified withdrawals taxed as ordinary income to the participant and is subject to a federally mandated 10% penalty tax. Penalty-free (but taxable) withdrawals permitted in the event of scholarship, death/disability of the beneficiary or rollover to another 529 Plan.	N/A	Earnings taxed at account owner's rate and 10% penalty tax on distributions (earnings portion) that exceed or are not used for qualified higher education expenses or qualified primary or secondary education expenses.	N/A
<b>Change of Beneficiary</b>	Can change beneficiary to a qualifying member of the designated beneficiary's family tax free and penalty free.	Can change beneficiary to benefit a member of the designated beneficiary's family tax free and penalty free.	Not permitted. Contributions are irrevocable gifts to the child.	Can transfer account balance to another Coverdell Account of family member of designated beneficiary tax free and penalty free.	N/A
<b>Effect on Financial Aid</b>	Currently treated as an asset of the account owner (if parent or dependent student, up to 5.6% of parental assets factored into federal financial aid formula).	Currently treated as an asset of the account owner (if parent or dependent student, up to 5.6% of parental assets factored into federal financial aid formula).	Currently treated as the child's asset (20% factored into federal financial aid formula).	Currently treated as the asset of the account owner (20% factored into federal financial aid formula).	Currently treated as an asset of the account owner (if parent or dependent student, up to 5.6% of parental assets factored into federal financial aid formula).

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the savings alternatives set forth in the chart, several states have established tax-advantaged prepaid tuition programs under Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. Those programs generally provide tuition lock-in features at state colleges and universities located within the sponsoring state. The Tuition Plan Consortium, a non-profit organization, has launched the "Independent 529 Plan", a nationwide prepaid tuition program involving certain private colleges. Prospective purchasers of U.Plan Tuition Certificates may wish to

review available information about such other prepaid tuition programs and assess the relative benefits of such programs and the U.Plan in light of their higher education savings objectives.

<sup>2</sup> See the Tax Matters section of the Program Description and Offering Statement for further information.

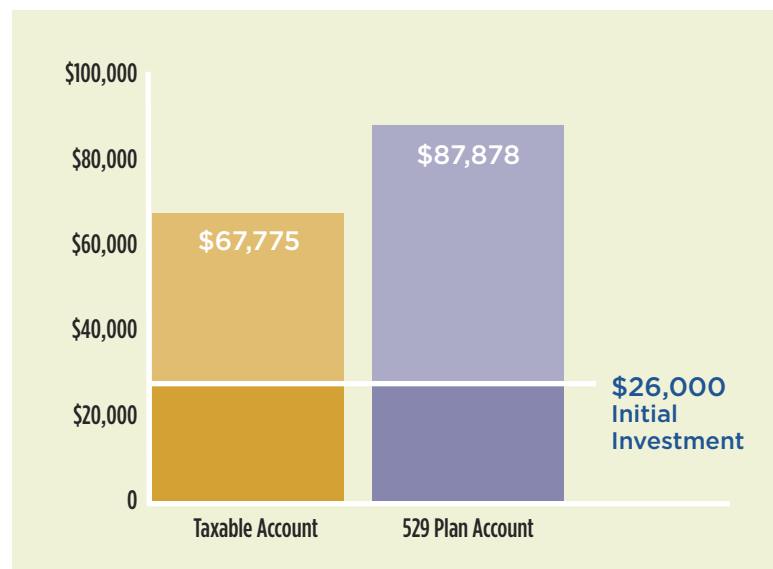
<sup>3</sup> Must currently be prorated over five years to avoid Federal gift tax treatment.

<sup>4</sup> Please consult an expert tax advisor and/or review the relevant laws and regulations to determine how this applies to your particular situation.

# The Potential Value of Tax-deferred Growth

When saving for college, consider the tax advantages of investments that offer tax-deferred growth of earnings, such as a U.Fund Account. Tax-deferred products may offer a greater opportunity to build on any growth of previous years' earnings.

## Taxable Account vs. 529 Plan



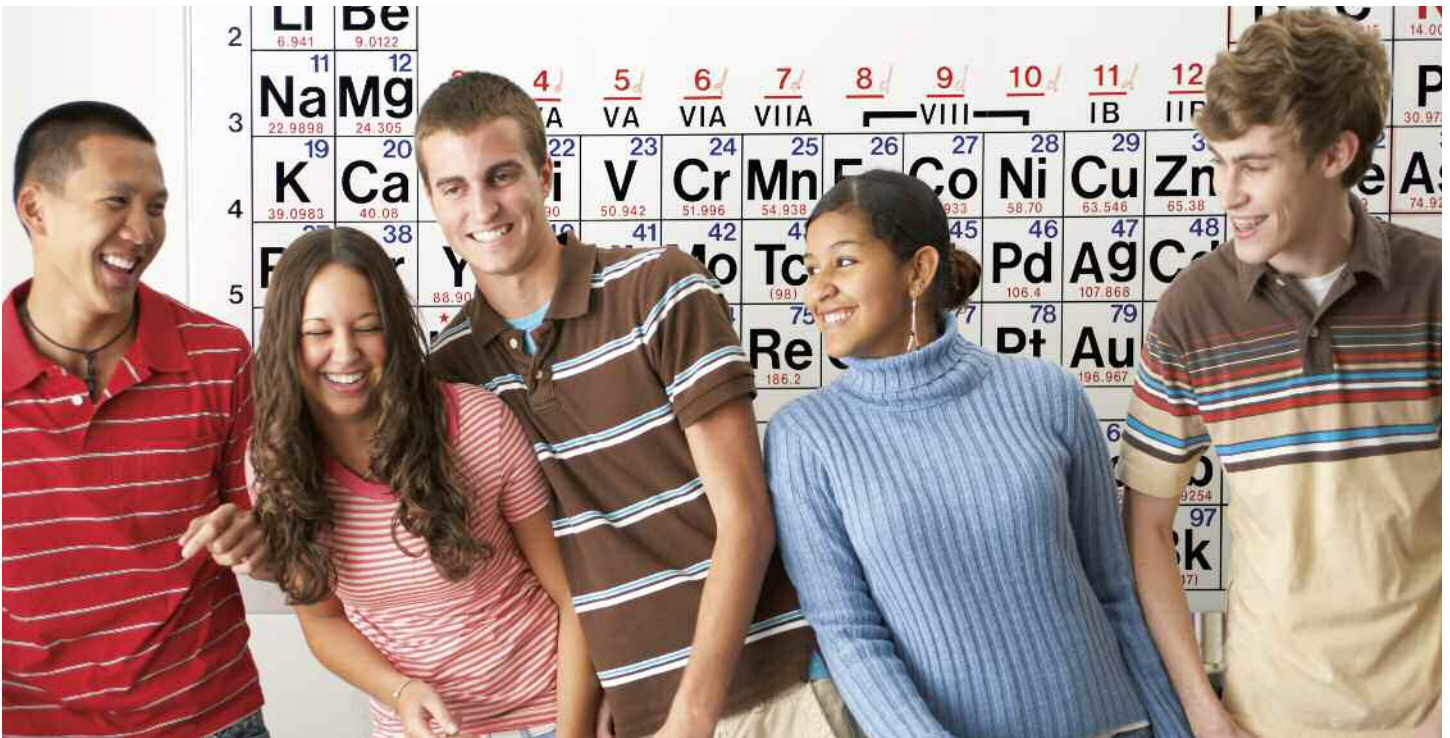
The hypothetical compares tax-deferred 529 plan account and taxable account investing and after-tax amounts potentially available with each. Assumptions are: (1) an initial after-tax investment of \$26,000 invested for 18 years, (2) 7% annual rate of return, (3) an imputed constant annual federal income tax rate of 21.9% on taxable account earnings, and (4) use of 529 plan account distributions to cover qualified higher education expenses (with no federal income taxation). State and local taxes and account fees and expenses are not taken into account. If they were, results would be lower from the 529 plan account. The hypothetical is not intended to predict or project the investment performance of any security. Distributed earnings not used to cover qualified higher education expenses are taxable to the distributee and are subject to a 10% federal penalty tax. Contributions to a 529 plan account are considered gifts to the account's beneficiary. Currently, an individual may gift \$13,000 (or \$26,000 per married couple who gift split) per beneficiary each year without federal gift or generation-skipping transfer tax impact.

In this hypothetical example, the Initial Investment is \$26,000.

Potential difference in growth after 18 years of lump sum invested in taxable account versus tax-deferred account (529 plan account).

For more information about the MEFA U.Fund Massachusetts 529 plan visit [www.mefa.org/ufund](http://www.mefa.org/ufund)

**Tax-deferred savings options allow you greater opportunities to build on previous earnings.**



What does it take to get in to college?

# Planning for College Admissions

**Planning ahead for college takes more than financial planning. The following pages provide important information about how students may plan for college during their high school career.**

# Planning for College Admissions Success

What kind of course load does my child need?



One of the most important parts of any college application is the student's academic record. Colleges want to know if students have challenged themselves. Have they taken classes in many subjects? The Massachusetts Department of Education recommends taking the following set of courses, known as MassCore, to prepare students for college and career.

These guidelines are a good minimum benchmark to apply to any college, although some colleges may have different requirements. Information about academic guidelines is often available through a college's admissions office, or their Web site. It's

also a good idea to find out your child's high school's graduation requirements, which may be different from the high school courses suggested here.

If the student hasn't taken all the courses listed below, it's still possible to go to college. For example, Massachusetts community colleges may admit any high school graduate or GED recipient. If the student transfers to a four-year college, their community college academics will be reviewed in addition to their high school academics.

## Suggested High School Courses

<b>English</b>	4 years
<b>Math</b>	4 years (Algebra 1 & 2 and Geometry or Trigonometry)
<b>Science</b>	3 years (including 2 with a lab component)
<b>Social Science</b>	3 years (including U.S. and World History)
<b>Foreign Language</b>	2 years in the same language
<b>Electives</b>	1 year in the arts and 5 additional "core" courses such as business education, health and technology

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. This information is current as of November 27, 2007.*

For more information about the Massachusetts Department of Education's MassCore, visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)

# College Planning Timeline

As your son or daughter gets closer to college, there are specific things he or she can do each year to prepare. These suggestions don't have to be followed in the exact order below, but may help your child stay on track.

Throughout High School Career	Freshman and Sophomore Years	Junior Year	Senior Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit and research colleges.</li> <li>• Maintain academic progress.</li> <li>• Become involved in extracurricular activities.</li> <li>• Save for college expenses.</li> <li>• Sign up for MEFA Counselor emails to receive college admissions and financing reminders throughout your child's high school career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make an academic plan by identifying courses to take during high school.</li> <li>• Take a sample PSAT and/or the PLAN.</li> <li>• Complete the FAFSA4caster.</li> <li>• Start a list of extracurricular activities and update it regularly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take the official PSAT.</li> <li>• Go to college fairs.</li> <li>• Take the SAT and/or ACT in the spring.</li> <li>• Pursue leadership roles in extracurricular activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sept-Dec</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue researching and visiting colleges.</li> <li>• Register and take the SAT and/or ACT.</li> <li>• Determine colleges to apply to.</li> <li>• Manage admissions and financial aid applications and deadlines.</li> </ul> <p><b>Jan-Feb</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the FAFSA.</li> <li>• Research private scholarships.</li> </ul> <p><b>March-April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive admission decision letters.</li> <li>• Financial aid award letters sent to admitted students.</li> </ul> <p><b>May 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Tuition Deposit Deadline</li> </ul>

# College Entrance Exams

Most colleges require students to submit scores from college entrance tests as part of the application. The majority accept scores from both the SAT and the ACT, but you should verify the required tests at each college.

There are several key differences between the two tests, and some students find that they do better on one test than on the other and may choose to take both tests. Colleges usually consider only the highest score the student submits.

Generally a high school transcript is more important than any test score.

## SAT

The SAT measures the student's critical thinking skills. There are three sections—critical reasoning, math and writing—and each are measured on a scale from 200 to 800.

The PSAT, or practice SAT, is taken either in the sophomore or junior year. Score reports provide individualized study guides to help students prepare for the SAT.

**There are many free resources available to help students study for the ACT and SAT exams. Test preparation workbooks may be available from a high school counselor.**

How important  
are the  
SAT and ACT tests?

## ACT

The ACT measures subject knowledge in English, Math, Reading and Science Reasoning, plus an optional Writing section. Scores range from 1 to 36.

PLAN, or the pre-ACT, is ideally taken during a student's sophomore year of high school. The test can assess how well they may do on the ACT, as well as identify the student's stronger and weaker subjects. Additionally, PLAN includes an Interest Inventory to assess relevant career options.

## Other Tests

Some colleges may require SAT Subject Tests. Like Advanced Placement (AP) tests, the SAT Subject Tests may allow the student to be awarded college credit. The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is sometimes required for students who attend a non-English-speaking high school, or who do not speak English as a primary language.

MCAS is a state graduation requirement in public school systems, but most colleges do not require MCAS scores to be submitted.

# The Massachusetts State College/University **Sliding Scale**

For freshman applicants to the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and the state colleges of Massachusetts, the minimum GPA required for admission is 3.00 (weighted). If your child's GPA is below 3.00, then your child's standardized test (SAT or ACT) scores will be an important factor for admission. The lower the GPA is, the higher the SAT or ACT score needs to be.

Please note that meeting these guidelines does not guarantee admission.

## Sliding Scale for UMass

If your GPA is...	Then your verbal/math SAT (ACT) scores must total at least...
2.51 - 2.99	950 (20)
2.41 - 2.50	990 (21)
2.31 - 2.40	1030 (22)
2.21 - 2.30	1070 (23)
2.11 - 2.20	1110 (24)
2.00 - 2.10	1150 (26)
Below 2.00	Not admissible

## Sliding Scale for MA State Colleges

If your GPA is...	Then your verbal/math SAT (ACT) scores must total at least...
2.51 - 2.99	920 (19)
2.41 - 2.50	960 (20)
2.31 - 2.40	1000 (21)
2.21 - 2.30	1040 (22)
2.11 - 2.20	1080 (23)
2.00 - 2.10	1120 (24)
Below 2.00	Not admissible

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. This information is current as of November 27, 2007.

Visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org) to find test dates and free MEFA college admissions seminars.

# Preparing for College

## Outside the Classroom

### Exploring Interests

Colleges and even future employers may ask students how they used their spare time during high school. The high school years offer a great opportunity to get involved in clubs, activities, hobbies, community service, jobs and sports.

At the same time, students should be selective about extracurricular activities, and get involved only in activities that they truly care about, or that expose them to new areas of interest. Students should take active roles in their activities, too—not just join, but participate.

Demonstrated leadership is a characteristic that signals potential for success in college, in a career and throughout life.

Student government

Sports

Music

School newspaper

After-school job

Volunteering

Art & theater

Religion

Tutoring

### Exploring Colleges

It's never too early to visit college campuses. You can explore on your own or on a tour. A college visit gives students and parents an initial impression of the college, including the physical setting and what campus life is like. There are over 4,000 colleges in the United States, and they vary greatly in size, setting, available programs/majors and cost. To help your child find a college that's a good fit, keep an open mind and start searching as early as you can.

Options for exploring colleges include:

- School counselors
- College fairs
- Internet searches
- College Web sites
- College guidebooks
- [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org)

**The college search process is a time for students to think about themselves—their likes and dislikes, their abilities and their long- and short-term aspirations.**

# MEFA's Free Services for Families

## MEFA Counselor Web Site

MEFA has developed [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org) to provide Massachusetts families with free, credible information about college planning, applying for admission, financial aid and paying for college. Three distinct sections allow families at all stages to learn more about the necessary steps to prepare for college.

### Parents with Students in Grades 7-10:

- Common financial aid myths and facts
- Estimate financial aid eligibility with FAFSA4caster
- Tips on saving for college
- Explore U.S. colleges and universities

### Parents of High School Juniors:

- Links to register for standardized tests
- Unique college search tool
- Tools for the college admission process
- Suggestions for staying on track through senior year

### Parents of High School Seniors:

- Links to financial aid applications
- Outside scholarship search tool
- Information about federal and state financial aid resources
- College financing options

## MEFA Counselor Email Program

Over the next few years, your family will have many opportunities to plan ahead for college. The MEFA Counselor email program may help you every step of the way, with helpful hints and reminders about preparing for higher education.

### Email topics include:

- Standardized tests
- Campus visits
- Writing the personal essay
- Filing the FAFSA
- Comparing award letters

Sign-up for the MEFA Counselor free email program today.

Enrollment in MEFA Counselor emails is free and can be cancelled at any time. **To enroll, you can complete the postage-paid postcard in this book, or visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org).** MEFA Counselor emails are available in Spanish.

If there are younger children in your family, you also may be interested in signing up for MEFA's **Saving Cents** emails, containing tips for savings and notices of special events. Visit [www.mefa.org](http://www.mefa.org) to sign up for *Savings Cents*.

MEFA believes in protecting your privacy, and will never sell or share your information with a third party.

Visit [www.mefacounselor.org](http://www.mefacounselor.org) to sign-up for our free email program. Much of the information on the site is available in Spanish.

# MEFA is here to help.

**mefa** is a not-for-profit organization that works to make higher education more accessible and affordable for students and families in Massachusetts. MEFA offers community education programs, college savings plans and low-cost financing options. In our nearly 30-year history, we have issued more than \$3.5 billion in bonds and have assisted hundreds of thousands of families in financing a college education.

## *mefa* **COUNSELOR**

We offer free comprehensive college planning and college financing seminars for parents and students at over 300 Massachusetts high schools. Check with your guidance counselor for dates and information.

## *mefa* **UPLAN** Prepaid Tuition Program

With the U.Plan, families can lock in tomorrow's tuition at today's rates at 80 public and private colleges and universities in Massachusetts.

## *mefa* **LOANS**

Our low-cost loans assist families of undergraduate and graduate students from all states attending college in Massachusetts, as well as Massachusetts residents attending college outside of Massachusetts.

## *mefa* **UFUND** Massachusetts 529 Plan

Our College Investing Plan lets families invest for qualified higher education expenses through professionally managed mutual funds, in partnership with Fidelity Investments.

For more information on how MEFA can help you through the college financing process, visit us online at [www.mefa.org](http://www.mefa.org) or call 800.449.MEFA (6332).

*The information presented in MEFA's Early College Planning Guide for Parents is accurate as of June 30, 2009.*

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# *mefa* **COUNSELOR**