9 Practical Ways Young Students Can Prepare for Scholarships Now

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Many students (and parents) assume that they don’t need to worry about scholarships until they are getting ready for the senior year. But failing to take action now means winning a scholarship could be more challenging in the future, making it harder to secure enough funds to finish college debt free.

**In fact, there are a lot of ways younger students can set themselves up for success with scholarships. Here’s how your child can get started today.**

1.    Start College and Scholarship Discussions NOW

Sometimes, it can be hard for your student to focus on activities that will help them land scholarships with going to college feels theoretical. If your conversations refer to getting a degree as an “if” instead of a “when,” it makes it feel either optional or like it may not be attainable.

Instead of discussing college and scholarship goals like they may not happen, switch up the language to be more definitive. This makes it feel more real (to the both of you) and makes planning seem increasingly crucial to their success.

2.    Focus on Good Grades

Having your child keep their grades up can make a big difference come scholarship time. While not every scholarship is based on academic performance, many of them do either focus on it or factor it into the decision-making process.

Now, this doesn’t mean your child has to maintain a 4.0 GPA their entire lives (though that certainly doesn’t hurt), aiming for A’s and B’s is a smart move. This also gives them a little wiggle room if they are struggling, as it relieves the pressure associated with a perfect GPA, but is often attainable by almost any student who applies themselves.

*Having good grades also makes it easier to become a member of the National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society, both of which offer scholarships to members and serve as strong credentials for other scholarship applications.*

If your child’s grades need improvement, check out this article: [The Final Stretch: How to Improve Grades Last Minute](http://www.thescholarshipsystem.com/blog-for-students-families/the-final-stretch-how-to-improve-grades-last-minute/)

3.    Pick a Hobby

Many scholarship committees want to see that your child is interested in things outside of school or work. Having a hobby on the side such as scrapbooking, painting, hiking, or whatever else your child can think of can also make them more competitive when it comes to applying for scholarships.  They don’t need to spend tons of time on this but having an answer to “what do you do outside of school?” can be an important one!

4.    Get a Part-Time Job

Committees love to see work experience on a student’s application. A part-time job can include babysitting or helping around the family business, or it can be at a fast food restaurant or local retailer. No matter what the job is, having a part-time gig that makes them some money shows that they take initiative, are responsible and disciplined, all qualities committees like to see.

If your child is struggling to come up with ideas, check out this article: [7 High Paying Jobs for College Students & High Schoolers](http://www.thescholarshipsystem.com/blog-for-students-families/7-high-paying-jobs-college-students-high-schoolers/)

5.    Get Involved

Volunteering and community service can be valuable experiences for your child on their own, as it teaches your student the value of helping others and contributing to society. But, the benefits don’t end there. Many scholarship committees want to know about volunteer hours and community involvement, with some considering it the deciding factor when it comes time to select who gets the award.

The earlier your child starts accruing volunteer hours, the easier it is to hit any minimums that may be stated in the scholarship application requirements. Plus, if they choose a cause they believe in, they’ll benefit from the intrinsic rewards of doing the work. And, if they select something that relates to their future career goals, your student could gain valuable experience that can help them land a job down the road.

Easy Ways to Build Experience

Too busy to volunteer?

Have your student help an elderly neighbor monthly or weekly.

Or try to make it fun so it becomes a priority to your child.

You can do so by spinning one of their hobbies into a way to volunteer. For example, some students enjoy magic tricks, playing the guitar, baking, etc. If your child enjoys a hobby like this, they could go to a retirement home or a Ronald McDonald House and do their hobby there to entertain people. This will be a great selling point on an application!

Jot Down Their Experiences for Future Scholarships

*Many scholarship essays ask your child to describe an experience they’ve had, so taking notes about their accomplishments as they occur can make writing these common application requirements easier.*

After time has passed, it can be difficult to remember the details about a particular experience, so encourage your student to keep a journal or a computer file (that they back up regularly) that contains quick thoughts and feelings about what they’ve achieved or overcome. That way, they can simply refer back to their notes when it comes time to write a winning scholarship essay.

Keep Awards and Certificates in a Safe Place

Any time your child wins an award or receives a certificate, they need to be placed somewhere safe so they can be easily located in the future. This ensures they are readily available when it comes time to apply for scholarships, as many do have designated spots in the application to discuss their prior accomplishments

Keep a paper file in a secure location and consider scanning the documents so you can back them up on a computer. This keeps everything in one place and makes it all highly accessible.

6.    Explore AP Classes

If your child is particularly strong in a subject, have them sign up for the advanced placement (AP) version of the class. Not only is the material more advanced, replicating the standards of most colleges, but those who pass the AP exam at the end of the course can earn college credit. This means your student won’t need to take those classes in college, shortening the amount of time required to graduate and saving money along the way too. As an added bonus, they may improve your child’s GPA, as many AP courses count for more than a 4.0 if they get an A in the class.

Many high schools offer AP courses for major subjects like English, Science, Math, and History, and the classes are typically part of the core requirements your student must complete while earning their degree, regardless of the degree they choose.

**The GPA boost can make it easier to land a scholarship while the college credit lessens the total cost of their education, making it worth the effort. Also, by taking an AP class, your child sends a positive message to committees that they are hardworking and dedicated to their education.**

7.      Build Up Trusted Recommenders

There will come a day, very quickly, when your child needs to ask for a recommendation letter. Building relationships now with teachers, administrators, counselors, coaches and other adults in your child’s life will make it much easier when they need a recommendation letter. Each new school year, have your child choose one adult in their life that they can foster this type of relationship with.

How can they build these relationships?

Simply by updating the person on what they accomplish in school or new involvements they pursue. Students can also just drop by and chat with the teachers, administrators or other potential recommenders outside of normal class or meeting times. Opening the doors for a professional relationship will increase the chances of receiving a great recommendation letter, not to mention all they can learn from having this role model in their life.

8.      Check Out Colleges

If your child has an idea of what they want to major in, then there’s no reason not to start discovering which colleges offer the program. During their exploration, they can learn about tuition costs and other expenses, helping them determine how much they may need in scholarships to attend, as well as institutional scholarship and their requirements.

While some of these details can change with time, having an initial understanding of what to expect early is incredibly useful and is worth the time commitment.

9.      Start Scholarship Applications

Did you know that not every scholarship is limited only to seniors or current college students? It’s true!

There are a lot of scholarships out there that younger students can apply for, including some that are limited to those under a particular age or below a specific grade level. That means, if your child waits to start their scholarship search, they could miss out on opportunities that won’t be available once they become a senior or get ready to head to college.

Getting ahead of the crowd can have a lot of benefits, so there’s no reason not to begin exploring the scholarship process today. Plus, by starting early, your student won’t be under the same amount of pressure when their senior year arrives, as every dollar scored today is one less they have to worry about tomorrow