

# DECEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER

MCNEAL SAMS  
COLLEGE CONSULTING



## WHO WE ARE

McNeal Sams College Consulting provides expert, personalized guidance to students and families throughout the college admissions process. With decades of experience in counseling, admissions and career services, our team helps students identify best-fit schools and build strong, strategic applications.

## ENJOY YOUR WINTER BREAK!

Take time this winter break to relax, recharge, and enjoy meaningful moments with family and friends. You've worked incredibly hard this semester, so let yourself rest fully. End this semester on a strong note so you can return in the new year ready to embrace new opportunities and start the semester with confidence and focus.

## WHAT WE ARE READING

"Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years" by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger, is a "what to expect" book for the transition from high school to college. This is a great resource for parents whose teens are about to leave home.

## IMPORTANT DATES

**Dec. 6-** SAT testing

**Dec. 13 -** SAT testing

**Dec. 31 -** New Year's Eve



## FIND YOUR FIT

A big Nike box arrives in the mail. You think to yourself, "These are the coolest shoes ever. Do they pinch my toes? Will I get blisters on my heels? I'd better walk around in them..." After a few cautious steps, you'll know whether the pair you picked is both cool AND comfortable. If not, you can return 'em with the receipt.



If only it were so easy to find your fit in a college. Yes, you can do virtual tours and information sessions; you can travel to campus if it fits your family's budget and busy schedule. (More on that later.) But here's the problem: if you choose to attend but realize after a few months there that it's the wrong place for you, you can't "return it with the receipt." So how can you gather the right information to be confident in your choice from the get-go?

For starters, don't limit yourself to offerings on the admissions website. It's been carefully curated to be attractive and appealing in every way. *Look! I could sit under a tree and study! Gosh, the students in the photo really seem to connect with their professor! And that has to be the most beautiful science building on the planet!* Not so fast, my friend. Do your homework. Got a friend a year or two ahead of you who went there? Tell them you need the real scoop. Take a look at several issues of the student newspaper. Is it sharing news and perspectives that fit your values? Go to the academic websites and dig deep: what are the professors' specialties, and do they match your interests? What are the requirements for your chosen major? And last but certainly not least, what's on the menu for lunch this week: fish and cheese casserole, or a tempting variety of tasty options?

*(continued)*

Another way to help yourself gather the right information is to be clear on what you need. Ask your McNeal Sams consultant about taking the Achieveworks Learning and Productivity assessment. It will give you rich insights into the conditions you need to learn best, whether it's at a quiet spot in the library, with frequent help from an instructor, or during a particular time of day.

Now, about those campus visits: it's not always possible to see a college before you apply. We get it! The great thing is, if you visit *after* you're accepted, the schools do their best to give you *lots* of useful information: special tours, student and faculty panels, receptions where you can meet future classmates. So unless you're applying Early Decision (in which case you should definitely see the campus before you submit your application), there is real merit in waiting until spring of senior year. By then, college is no longer hypothetical; it's real, and it's right around the corner, so you know your choices have real consequences.

One additional piece of advice: remember that the only second-rate college is one that doesn't meet your needs. Prestige doesn't keep you warm at night, and a high ranking in US News & World Report won't cure homesickness. Don't be dazzled by flash or slick advertising campaigns; think about what truly matters to you so that you can be happy and productive. That way, finding your fit will be less like stumbling around in the dark and more like, well, a nice walk in a comfortable pair of shoes.



# DECEMBER TO-DO LISTS

## Seniors

1. Submit remaining college applications, especially any January 1 or rolling-admission deadlines.
2. Review your applicant portals to ensure test scores, transcripts, and recommendations were received.
3. Complete the FAFSA if you haven't already done so. Look for special scholarships and programs applications.
4. Prep for potential interviews. We can help you prepare for your interviews. Let your consultant know and we will set you up with our interview specialist.
5. Notify your high school counselor and your McNeal Sams consultant of any new decisions, scholarships, updates, etc.
6. Send thank-you notes to those who wrote recommendation letters.

## Juniors

1. Register for spring SAT/ACT if testing is part of your strategy.
2. Maintain a strong GPA, especially as semester grades wrap up.
3. Make plans to have a productive summer. Many opportunities have deadlines between now and February.
4. Schedule time with your consultant to discuss schools for you to explore.
5. Gather materials for a résumé or activity list (accomplishments, leadership roles, hours, awards).
6. Plan productive winter break activities, such as job shadowing, volunteering, or reading in areas of interest.

## Sophomores

1. Schedule a meeting with your McNeal Sams consultant to check in on course planning for next year and to plan your summer.
2. Evaluate your extracurricular involvement: Are you showing commitment and growth? Consider leadership opportunities.
3. Explore interests by attending club meetings, trying new activities, or volunteering over winter break.
4. Begin light college exploration, such as virtual tours, campus drive-bys, and conversations with older students.
5. Track your accomplishments and service hours so you and your McNeal Sams consultant can start building your college resume.

## Freshmen

1. Focus on earning strong grades as your high school transcript begins.
2. Meet with your consultant or counselor to ensure you're in the right classes and adjusting well academically.
3. Try out different clubs, sports, and volunteer activities to discover what you enjoy.
4. Make plans for your summer. Your consultant can help with this.
5. Develop good routines: organization, time management, and study skills.
6. Read regularly and stay curious—building intellectual interests now pays off later.