

JANUARY 2026 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.

WHAT WE ARE READING

"For parents of seniors, check out "They're Ready. Are You?: A Parent's Guide to Surviving the College Transition" by Liz Yokubison. This book is a reassuring, practical guide that helps parents let go, communicate effectively, and confidently support students as they navigate independence, change, and the emotional realities of the college transition.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

Continue researching and applying for local, regional and national scholarships. Also, complete the FAFSA if you have not already done so.

IMPORTANT DATES

Jan. 7 - Registration deadline for ACT on Feb. 14

Jan. 19 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

NEW YEAR! NEW YOU?

Ever notice how crowded the gym is in January? That's because it's filled with "resolutionaries" –well-intentioned folks determined to prove that THIS time, they'll stick to those lofty fitness goals and experience a complete transformation. For real. No, I mean it.



Then February hits, along with slush and gray skies. You find there are now plenty of parking spots at the gym and there's always an elliptical available. What happened? People got discouraged, that's what happened; they were overambitious.

Is all of this energy we devote to making New Year's resolutions a waste of time? No. Is there hope for real change? Yes. If you're eager to set realistic goals, use the SMART acronym:

SPECIFIC: "I need to practice the violin more." Instead, substitute "I'm going to polish the opening 20 measures of my Mozart concerto."

MEASURABLE: "My room is such a mess. I don't even know where to start." Yes you do. "I'm going to recycle 10 pieces of paper." Hey! You accomplished something!

ACHIEVABLE: "I need to be ready for an ultra-marathon by April." Nah. Try "I'll get outside and walk/run for one mile." Mission accomplished, and you still have the energy to do it again the next day.

RELEVANT: Set yourself up for success. If you need to get more sleep (who doesn't?), turn off all screens 30 minutes before bed.

TIME-BOUND: "I'll write all of my college essays in the next two weeks." Nope - that's too vague. Set a deadline: "I'll knock out the University of Vermont prompt during my free period today."

For New Year's resolutions to work, they need to be gradual and manageable. Break them down into bite-sized action steps. Start small. Build up good habits. Encourage yourself and give yourself credit for each achievement. Now THAT'S a transformation!

JANUARY TO-DO LISTS

Seniors

1. Send mid-year transcripts if not already submitted.
2. Check college portals for college admission decisions and missing materials.
3. Be sure to update your McNeal Sams consultant about your decisions AND scholarship awards.
4. Research and track scholarship deadlines (national + institutional).
5. Schedule or attend admitted student events, either virtually or in-person.
6. Keep grades strong; offers are conditional.

Juniors

1. Review first-semester grades and identify improvement goals.
2. Meet with your McNeal Sams consultant to map senior year courses.
3. If you have not done so already, meet with your McNeal Sams consultant to create an initial list of schools to explore.
4. Finalize your summer plans.
5. Register for spring SAT/ACT testing.
6. Update your activities résumé with fall accomplishments.

Sophomores

1. Reflect on what's going well and what needs adjustment academically.
2. Meet with your McNeal Sams consultant to map your course selection for next year.
3. Explore potential career interests or academic curiosities.
4. Plan for meaningful summer involvement, such as work, volunteering, and learning.
5. Build strong relationships with teachers.
6. Practice time management and self-advocacy skills.

Freshmen

1. Set academic goals for the new semester.
2. Meet with your McNeal Sams consultant to map your course selection for next year.
3. Make plans for your summer. Explore your interests.
4. Develop strong study and organization habits.
5. Ask for help early. Reach out to teachers, counselors, and advisors.
6. Try something new that stretches your comfort zone.
7. Focus on growth, not perfection, this semester.