

Path to College Implementation Ideas

**Compiled from TN Counselors during Counselor Collaborative Meetings*

College Application and Exploration Week

All Levels:

- **College Representatives:** Invite representatives from your local TCATS, community colleges, universities, and/or military recruiters to a mini college fair or to set up an information table during lunch to provide age appropriate information to students or answer questions.
- **Use Enrichment or Advisory Periods or Collaborate with Teachers to Incorporate College/Career Topics into Lessons:** Utilize existing resources in CollegeforTN.org or the TN Student Success Course (updated materials available Spring 2018) to create college and career focused lesson plans.
- **Fight Songs:** During College Application and Exploration Week, play college fight songs during morning announcements or during class changes. Consider creating a competition where students or homerooms guess which school the fight song is from or which teacher attended that school. Students or homerooms who guess each fight song or teacher correctly all 5 days, get a prize at the end of the week (such as a jeans day).
- **Interest Inventories:** Allow students to complete interest inventories (such as those available through CollegeforTN.org) to identify and explore potential career interests.
- **College Door Decorating:** Have each teacher/class decorate their door with a college theme. Make it a competition with a prize for the best decorated door.
- **Photo Booth:** Set up a photo booth with college props for students to take selfies. Use #collegeappweek and create a hashtag for your school.
- **Morning Announcements:** Use announcements to share college trivia and spread the word about college events.
- **Mock Applications:** Have students complete age appropriate mock applications and write mock college essays in their English classes.
- **Resumes:** Assist students with the creation of resumes. For younger students, create an age appropriate template (for example, fill in the blank). Older students can create resumes through www.collegefortn.org.
- **Scavenger Hunts:** There are many ways to use a scavenger hunt to help students learn about college. Some ideas include:
 - o Asking students to find teachers who attended certain colleges
 - o Designing a college website scavenger hunt
 - o Placing images of college mascots throughout the school and asking students to try to spot them
- **Human Bingo:** Create a human bingo board with college trivia related to people in your school. Students will need to obtain signatures from people who meet the criteria on the board to get BINGO. For example, one square could say "attended college outside the state of TN," and a teacher who attended college out of state would sign that square.
- **College Tours:** When possible, offer field trips for college tours. If field trips aren't possible, help students take "virtual" tours. Check college websites to see if they have video tours posted or consider using ecampustours.com.
- **Spirit Week:** Have college-themed dress up days throughout the week. For example, college t-shirt/college colors day, "bright futures" day where students wear sunglasses, "interview day" where students wear attire appropriate for a job or college interview.
- **Teachers:** During College Application and Exploration Week, encourage teachers to wear a t-shirt from their alma mater and talk to their students about their college choice and college experience.
- **Bulletin Boards:** There are countless great ideas for bulletin boards. Some include:
 - o Using a US map and teacher's photos to show where they attended college
 - o Posting celebrity photos and where they attended college

High School

- **College Application Events:** Host college application events in the computer lab or library where students are allowed to apply for college during or after school. Track which students attend and where they are applying. Recruit volunteers to help students with applications.
- **Decorate Parking Spaces:** Allow students to decorate their parking space with college logos; have a decorating contest.
- **GPA:** Teach GPA calculations in 9th grade classes.
- **Career Luncheon:** Survey students about their career interests. Invite local professionals in those careers (or similar careers) to a career luncheon. Assign students to tables with professionals in their field of interest to ask questions and network.
- **Offer Application Incentives:** One incentive idea is to have a movie night in the school auditorium. The ticket for admission is a copy of the student's college application confirmation.

Middle School

- **Alumni:** Invite high school seniors or students who are enrolled in college and are alumni of your school to speak to your students about their college choice and application process and allow students to ask questions.
- **GPA:** Teach students how to calculate a GPA, research GPA requirements for various colleges and scholarships (such as the HOPE), and emphasize the importance of maintaining a high GPA throughout high school.
- **College Brochure:** Have students research, design and create a college brochure for their favorite college.
- **College Research** Have students pick a college they are interested in and learn about it. Ask them to share one new thing they have learned about the school each day of college app week during advisory/enrichment.
- **Extracurricular Awareness:** Help students explore extracurricular activities offered in feeder high schools and explain how these are important to college applications. Print out college applications from various schools and show them to 8th graders so they can see what colleges will be asking.

Elementary School

- **Dress Up Day:** Have dress up days. Consider "mascot day" where students dress up as their favorite college mascot or "when I grow up day" where students dress for their future dream job.
- **Kid Search and Career Town:** Use this resource from CollegeforTN.org that helps elementary students explore career options.
- **Mascots:** create a mascot matching game where students match a picture of the mascot to the college or have students make and decorate masks for the mascot of their favorite college.
- **Host a Senior Breakfast:** Invite local seniors to visit the elementary school for breakfast. Have them fill out a 3x5 card with their postsecondary plans. Share these with 4th/5th graders and have them write their own cards.
- **College Vocabulary:** Teach college vocabulary lessons, do a college word search and/or create a college word wall.

TN FAFSA Frenzy

High School

- **Host FAFSA Frenzy Events:** Invite your TSAC Outreach Specialist to do a FAFSA presentation and assist with a FAFSA filing event, assist students with filing the FAFSA during and after school, open the computer lab or library to students and parents during and after school for FAFSA filing, recruit and train volunteers to assist students and parents with the FAFSA.
- **Offer Incentives:** Some incentive ideas include: drawings for gift cards, scholarships, or sporting tickets, priority graduation parking for those who attended a FAFSA filing event, or free breakfast for students.
- **Use Your FAFSA Frenzy Toolkit:** The toolkit can be downloaded from www.TNFAFSAFrenzy.gov. It contains countless resources for volunteer recruitment and training, the FSA ID, event promotion ideas, and much more.

Middle School

- **Early Exposure to FAFSA:** Show middle schoolers a PDF of the FAFSA to familiarize them with it and eliminate a fear of the unknown.
- **Teach Financial Literacy:** Incorporate lessons on budgeting. For example, give students fake profiles with salaries and have them create budgets. Compare salaries and budgets based on postsecondary credential attainment.
- **Vocabulary:** Teach basic financial aid vocabulary—grants, scholarships, loans, interest, etc.
- **Scholarship:** Have students research a variety of scholarship opportunities and the scholarship criteria (GPA, financial need, extracurriculars, etc) to help them understand what they need to do in high school to be competitive for certain scholarships. Scholarship information is available on www.collegefortn.org.

Elementary School

- **Vocabulary:** Teach students financial vocabulary. Play FAFSA terminology bingo or create a financial aid word search.
- **Budgeting:** Create age appropriate lessons for “life budgeting” emphasizing the difference between incomes with and without a postsecondary credential.
- **Myths of Financial Aid:** Create a true/false activity or a bulletin board that debunks some of the myths about financial aid. For example, “college is too expensive” or “scholarships are only available to students with really high grades.”

College Planning Nights

All Levels:

- **Panel Discussion:** Host a panel discussion with college and career representatives, current college students, and/or parents of current college students. A great topic for parents and students to discuss is “what I wish I knew about college in [elementary/middle/high] school.
- **Coordinate and Prioritize Convenience:** Consider timing your event for when parents and students are already in the building. For example, offer college planning resources during parent/teacher night or hold sessions during your spring college fair. Additionally, consider offering childcare during the event.
- **College Corner:** During lunch once a week or bi-weekly, host a “college corner” where students can eat with you and ask questions about college. Consider having themes for your “college corner.” For example- applications, scholarships, choosing a major, being successful in college, etc.
- **Coffee with a Counselor:** Offer parents the chance to sign up for a time to have “coffee with a counselor” in the morning or evening to discuss college planning. Parents can sign up using a google doc.
- **Incentivize Attendance:** Some incentive ideas include: drawing for gift cards, scholarships, or sporting tickets, priority graduation parking for those who attended the event, or free breakfast for students.
- **Stations:** For your college planning event, create different stations in classrooms or at booths that students and families can rotate through. For example, information about applying, financial aid, getting involved in college, etc.
- **Collaborate:** Consult with other schools in your area and your feeder schools to find out what events they are hosting and put that information on your school calendar. For example, elementary and middle schools can list college fairs and college information sessions on their calendars and invite parents to attend. Also, if you know a college representative is visiting the local high school, invite him/her to visit your middle or elementary school while they are in the area.

High School

- **College Planning Night Powerpoint:** Use and adapt the College Planning Night powerpoint to do an event presentation to the parents of juniors to prepare them for their child’s senior year.

Middle School

- **Webinars:** Create a webinar for parents with introductory financial information, terminology, etc. or promote existing webinars (such as the Financial Aid webinars on www.TNFAFSAFrenzy.gov) in your school communications.
- **Checklists:** Utilize the Path to College middle school poster to create college preparation checklists for each grade level to send to parents.
- **Interviews:** Have students write interview questions for college bound seniors from the feeder high school. Have students vote on their top 10 favorite questions and partner with counselors at feeder high schools to have some students submit answers back to your class.
- **Study Skills:** Teach study skills and tie those in to future academic plans and academic success.
- **Newsletter:** If your school sends home a newsletter, create a college column or put college information on your school’s website.

Elementary School

- **Parent Sessions:** Offer a parent session focused on saving for college and the TN stars program. Invite local organizations to discuss financial planning or distribute information at parent/teacher night or back to school night.
- **“Path to College” Wall:** Create a path to college wall that looks like Candy Land and has the steps to get to college.

College Signing Day

All Levels:

- **College Walk:** Have seniors walk the halls in their caps and gown on the way to their college signing ceremony. Play music or have the band lead the way. Allow underclassmen to line the halls, make signs, and cheer for their classmates. When possible, partner with middle and elementary schools to allow the seniors to walk through their halls as well.

High School:

- **Pep Rally:** Organize a pep rally to celebrate graduating seniors and their postsecondary plans. During the pep rally, invite seniors up to say their name and where they plan to attend college.
- **Banners:** Have seniors sign a banner and list where they plan to attend college. Display this banner in the halls so that underclassmen can see where the seniors are going.
- **Signing Ceremony:** Invite college representatives to set up a table and have seniors sign where they will be attending college. Invite the entire school to celebrate.
- **Roll Out the Red Carpet:** Host a “red carpet event” and collaborate with the TV and Film classes to conduct interviews on the red carpet about where seniors will be attending.
- **Display Acceptances:** Create a bulletin board to display college acceptance letters to celebrate seniors’ success.

Middle & Elementary Schools

- **Congratulate Seniors:** Assign different classes seniors from a feeder high school to celebrate. Have students make and decorate congratulations cards for their assigned students.
- **Make a Pledge:** Imitate high school signing events by having elementary and middle students sign a pledge to attend a postsecondary institution or to “keep going” to the next step in their education.
- **Bulletin Board:** Create a “Look At Us Now” bulletin board featuring former students and where they are now.
- **Photo Booth:** Make a photo booth using college pennants as a back drop. Have students hold “class of ____” signs.
- **Bright Futures Ahead:** Have a dress up day where students wear sunglasses for their “bright futures”.
- **Graduation Caps:** Allow students to make and decorate graduation caps for the year of their graduation.
- **Pennants:** Help students make college pennants decorated with their future school and career choice.