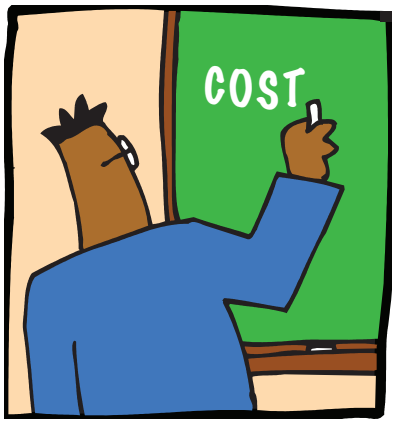
Lesson Four:
Paying for College



Lesson Overview

This lesson will focus on the resources available to help students pay for college. The lesson will provide students information on ways they may finance their education after high school, emphasizing the importance of scholarships and grants. The session will conclude with a review of all the information students have learned throughout the first four lessons of the program.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- list three ways that financial aid can help them pay for college.
- identify basic financial aid terms.
- identify opportunities for academic support and enrichment.

Vocabulary

- FAFSA
- financial aid
- grant
- loan
- scholarship
- work-study

Required Materials

- Materials for College Access Bingo
  (see the "Before the Lesson Checklist" on page 89 for more information)

Optional Materials

- Laptop and LCD projector (if using the PowerPoint)
- Computers with Internet access

Supplemental Activity

- Visualize Your Future (page 16 of the Supplemental Activities Guide)

Suggestion: Lesson Four is a great lesson to have one of your college/university partners talk with students about financial aid.

Resources

- Family Information Sheet (page 104–108)
- Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education — http://*acpe.alaska.gov*
- Alaska Performance Scholarship — http://*aps.alaska.gov*
- AKCIS (Alaska Career Information System) — http://*akcis.org*
- University of Alaska College Savings Plan — *https://www.uacollegesavings.com/*
- Federal Student Aid Information — http://*studentaid.ed.gov*
- FAFSA — https://*fafsa.ed.gov*
- Sallie Mae Fund "Plan for College" — https://www.salliemae.com/college-planning/
- Sallie Mae Scholarship Search Engine — http://salliemae.com/scholarship
- Student Guide to Financial Aid — http://*finaid.org*
- Scholarships and Other Types of Financial Aid — http://*finaid.org/otheraid/*
- Federal Trade Commission "Scholarship & Financial Aid Scams" *http://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0082-scholarship-and-financial-aid-scams*
- FastWeb, a free scholarship search engine — http://*fastweb.com*
- Asian Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund — http://apiasf.org/scholarships
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund — http://*hsf.net*
- The American Indian College Fund — http://*collegefund.org*
- United Negro College Fund — http://*uncf.org*
- MALDEF's list of scholarships for Latino students — http://*maldef.org/leadership/scholarships*
- NCAA Athletic Scholarships — *http://ncaa.org/about/resources/ncaa-scholarships-and-grants*

Before the Lesson Checklist

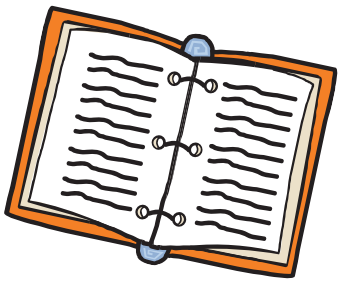
- ❑ Please review the Alaska specific scholarship and grant programs for students on page 94, and share this information with students during this lesson. Learn more at www.acpe.alaska.gov.
- ❑ Print a copy of the Facilitator's Cards on pages 97–101. Cut out each square, fold it, and place it in a container. You will draw the cards from this container during the game.
- ❑ Gather BINGO chips. (These may be squares of paper, actual bingo chips, or any other small object that will cover a student's square.) Students may mark on the BINGO cards in pencil, but doing so might prove confusing during multiple games as they erase and rewrite.

Lesson Four Timeline — Overall lesson time: One hour

Activity	Summary	Detailed Info.	Rationale
Opening Journal *(10 minutes)*	Students will answer questions in their Student Handbook while the class gets settled.	**Teacher's Edition:** page 91 **Student Handbook:** page 37	• To encourage students to reflect on what they learned during the previous lesson and start thinking about what they will be learning today.
Review of Lesson Three *(5 minutes)*	Teacher will review content learned during the previous lessons, including the three important factors for college admission and opportunities for extra help.	**Teacher's Edition:** page 92	• To review the information they learned in Lesson Three.
Financial Assistance for College *(17 minutes)*	Teachers will share information about the different types of aid available to help students pay for college. Include the following terms: • financial aid • grants • scholarships • work-study • loans • FAFSA	**Teacher's Edition:** pages 92–95 **Student Handbook:** page 39	• To make students aware of the financial aid available for them to finance their education.
College Access Bingo *(18 minutes)*	Teachers will lead students in a game of bingo designed to test students' college access vocabulary. This game is a review of terms learned during the course of the Kids2College program. Teachers will read the definition of the college access term and students will look for the vocabulary word on their bingo card.	**Teacher's Edition:** instructions, page 96; Facilitator Cards, pages 97–101 **Student Handbook:** bingo card, page 41; list of vocabulary terms, page 40	• To review important college access terminology. • To provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about terms related to college access.
Closing Journal and Discussion *(10 minutes)*	Students will reflect on what they learned about financial aid. Teacher will lead a brief wrap-up discussion about what they learned.	**Teacher's Edition:** page 103 **Student Handbook:** page 42	• To give students the opportunity to reflect on what they have learned.

Opening Journal

(My Path to Success Student Handbook, page 37)



Last time we met, you had a chance to explore the ways you learn best. During your closing journal time, you wrote about your learning style and how you can use that information to help you succeed in your classes. Take a moment to review what you wrote about how you can apply your learning style to the way that you study and answer the following questions.

- What kind of learner are you? _____

- What were some of the recommendations you had for yourself to study more effectively?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- Did you use these recommendations to change the way you studied?

  _____

- Did you notice any changes in the effectiveness of your studies?

  _____

- Did you have any tests or quizzes between then and now? If so, did changing the way you prepared help you do better?

  _____

  _____

  _____

Teacher Instructions: After students have completed their journal entry, have students get into small groups of three and discuss their responses to the questions.

Once the students are done discussing their learning styles as a small group, reconvene the class. Ask a few groups to share what their group discussed. If any student has put their learning style information to use, congratulate that student and encourage the rest of the class to do the same.

Review

In addition to talking about learning styles, we also talked about the academic factors that are important for getting into college.

Q: What were the three important things we should focus on? *Grades, class selections, and tests*

Q: I shared with you some opportunities to get help if you were having difficulties in your classes. Can anyone name one of these opportunities?

Paying for College

Students may follow along and take notes on page 38 of their Student Handbook

We've talked about why college is important — how it impacts your future and provides opportunities for different careers. We've also discussed how you can prepare for college in middle school and high school. Today we are going to talk a little bit about the resources available to help you pay for college.

Q: What do you know about how much college costs?

Q: How many of you are worried that college might be hard to pay for or too expensive?

While you can contribute to your education yourself, you may also receive help to pay for college. The United States government devotes a large amount of money to help students and their families pay for postsecondary education, as do many state governments, colleges, and private organizations. All students who are applying to and attending college may apply for **financial aid**. Financial aid consists of different types of financial assistance for students who are in college.

There are four types of financial aid you should be aware of right now:

- **Grants** are financial aid awards that do not have to be repaid. Grants are usually given to the students who need the most money.
- **Scholarships**, like grants, are financial aid awards that do not have to be repaid. Scholarships are typically awarded to students based on their achievements and may be awarded by religious organizations, professional organizations, businesses, and schools. Some states also offer scholarship programs.
- **Work-study** is a program that allows students to work to earn money for their tuition. Work-study students have jobs on campus or at a local organization. Work-study jobs are often related to a student's major. All work-study money is earned, so you do not have to pay anything back after graduation.
- **Loans** are financial aid awards which must be repaid. Different organizations lend qualified students or their parents money that they will pay back after they leave school. The federal government provides loans with low-interest rates specifically for college students.

Additional Information

Some financial aid is available specifically for people who have taken the classes we discussed in Lesson Three. The only way to have access to these resources is to meet all of those class requirements. Yet another reason why picking the right classes is important!

Teacher Instructions: Share state specific scholarship and grant programs with students at this time. Students should then complete the Calculating College Tuition Costs worksheet on page 39 of the Student Handbook.

To be eligible for grants, loans, work-study, and some scholarships, all students need to complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**, which determines eligibility for financial aid. Students who do not complete the FAFSA are not eligible for any federal aid, which includes grants, loans, and work-study. In addition, many states, private loan companies, and some private organizations rely on the information the FAFSA provides to make their financial aid decisions.

Did You Know?

- 63% of all college students pursuing bachelor's degrees received some sort of financial aid.
- 52% of public college students and 73% of private college students received grants
- 45% of public college students and 56% of private college students took out educational loans

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2005). 2003-04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04) Undergraduate Financial Aid Estimates for 2003–04 by Type of Institution (NCES 2005-163).

While you won't need to complete the FAFSA until you are a senior in high school, it is important to learn more about it and the financial assistance it offers now so that you know about all of your options. The important thing to remember is that there IS money available to help you pay for college!

Teacher Tip: If you have extra time and would like students to participate in an additional activity to help them think about their future, you may wish to have them participate in the "Visualize Your Future" activity on page 16 of the Supplemental Activities Guide.

Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS)

Did you know there's a scholarship for Alaska students? Let your students know how they can earn the Alaska Performance Scholarship when they complete high school.

Students should...

1. Challenge themselves with the classes they choose in high school! There are two rigorous curricular options to choose from – one focusing on Math and Science and one focusing on Social Studies and World Languages.

2. Keep up their grades and take the SAT/ACT*! Students who complete the required curriculum, earn at least a 2.5 GPA, and score either a minimum of 1060 on the SAT or a 21 on the ACT, will meet the minimum qualification.
   Higher GPAs and test scores combine to result in higher awards eligibility.

To apply for the scholarship, students fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In addition to meeting the curriculum, GPA, and test score requirements, students must:

- be Alaska residents,
- graduate from an Alaska high school, and
- have qualifying unmet costs of attendance after considering all other non-loan aid

Awards can be used at participating regionally accredited colleges or universities, or for approved career and technical education programs in Alaska. Scholarship recipients can be eligible for up to eight semesters of aid. The awards must be used within six years of high school graduation.

For more information, go to APS.alaska.gov.

**Students may qualify for an APS award for a career and technical education certificate program by earning a combined WorkKeys score of 13 or higher, with no score below 4.*

AlaskAdvantage Education Grant (AEG)

The AlaskAdvantage Education Grant provides need-based assistance to students. Grant awards typically range from $500 to $2,000 per academic year for students who have qualifying unmet financial need, and can be up to $3,000 under certain circumstances.

Calculating College Tuition Costs

Let's say you are in college, working on earning a bachelor's degree that will require you to take 120 credits. Your college charges $160 per credit for tuition.

(My Path to Student Success Handbook, page 39)

1 How much would tuition cost you?

_____

_____

2 How much is that tuition per year, assuming it took you four years to finish?

_____

_____

3 If you earn the top Alaska Performance Scholarship award ($4,755 per year) and use it to pay tuition, what amount of your annual tuition costs would be left over to be paid from other sources?

_____

_____

4 Besides tuition, what might be other costs of attending college?

_____

_____

_____

Answers:

1. **$19,200**
2. **$4,800**
3. **$180**
4. **Room and board, books**

College Access Bingo

Teacher Instructions: This activity is designed to help students remember the vocabulary associated with college and careers. Students will make their own Bingo cards, placing a vocabulary work in each square. You will read aloud the definition of one of the vocabulary terms and have the students mark the square of the "matching" term.

Prep Work

- Print a copy of the Facilitator's Cards found on pages 97–101. Cut out each square, fold it, and place it in a container. You will draw the cards from this container during the game.
- Gather BINGO chips. (These may be squares of paper, actual bingo chips, or any other small object that will cover a student's square.) Students may mark on the BINGO cards in pencil, but doing so may prove confusing during multiple games as they erase and rewrite.

Facilitating the Game

- The goal of this exercise is to help students remember the meanings of specific terms related to college. All of the terms are presented during the course of the Kids2College curriculum. Students will find the definitions to all of the terms located in the glossary, which begins on page 50 of their *My Path to Success* Student Handbook.
- Students will create their own BINGO card. There is a blank BINGO card located on page 41 of the Student Handbook (if additional copies are needed, please use the template on page 102). Students should place a different term of their choice in each square, leaving the middle square a "free space." A list of the vocabulary terms that students can place in the squares is located in their *My Path to Success* Student Handbook on page 40.
- Begin play as soon as students have created their cards and received their BINGO chips. Pull a Facilitator's Card from the container; read the definition (not the word!) on the card. Students are to find the corresponding vocabulary word on their BINGO card and place a marker on that spot.
- Continue reading definitions from the Facilitator's Cards until a student calls a "BINGO!" Students may get a traditional BINGO (five squares in a row across, down, or diagonally) or you may play other BINGO styles (such as four corners). Ask the winner to read their words aloud so that you can verify the definitions.
- Following each BINGO round, take a moment to ask for questions. It is not unusual for some students to miss one or more of the words or misunderstand a definition.

College Access Bingo Vocabulary Words

- ACT
- admissions counselor
- associate degree
- bachelor's degree
- career
- certification
- community college
- degree
- doctoral degree
- extracurricular activities
- FAFSA
- financial aid
- four-year college or university
- GPA
- grant
- license
- loan
- major
- master's degree
- salary
- SAT
- scholarship
- standardized test
- vocational school
- work-study

Facilitator Cards

ACT:

A standardized college admissions exam that tests students in English, math, reading, and science, with an optional writing section. Administered several times a year, and traditionally taken for the first time in the spring of a student's junior year.

Admissions Counselor:

A college or university employee responsible for making decisions about which student applicants will be admitted to their school.

Associate Degree:

A degree awarded after approximately two years of full-time study. It is usually equivalent to the first two years of a bachelor's degree program. Awarded by community colleges and some four-year colleges.

Bachelor's Degree:

An undergraduate degree that takes approximately four years of full-time study to complete. Required for some professions and for licensure in certain fields, as well as for admission to advanced degree programs, including law and medicine.

Career:

An occupation that usually requires special training.

Certification:

A document that shows an individual has met specific requirements that qualify them to perform a task or job.

Facilitator Cards

Community College:

A two-year postsecondary institution that offers academic programs suited to its particular community. Offers associate degree programs and courses for transfer to a four-year college or university, as well as non-academic courses for personal growth and enrichment.

Degree:

A certificate that signifies that a student has met the requirements to complete a program of study.

Doctoral Degree:

The most advanced postsecondary degree; requires 3–7 years of study and research in addition to a bachelor's degree and, often, a master's degree as well. Often referred to as "terminal" degrees; if a person has this degree, he or she is considered an expert in that field.

Extracurricular Activities:

Any club, team, event, or organized activity that a student participates in outside of their academic coursework.

FAFSA:

An online form that determines eligibility for financial assistance. Students who do not complete this form are not eligible for any federal aid, including grants, loans, and work-study.

Financial Aid:

Money to help pay for college.

Facilitator Cards

Four-year college/university:

A postsecondary institution where students can take coursework toward a bachelor's and/or master's degree.

Grade Point Average (GPA):

A number that represents the average of all the course grades a student receives in high school.

Grant:

A financial aid award that does not have to be repaid; often is need-based.

License:

Formal permission by the government or another authorized entity to do something. A test is usually required.

Loan:

A financial aid award, administered by the federal government or a private company, which must be repaid. Interest is charged during the repayment period, and sometimes when a student is in school.

Major:

The focus of a student's academic studies; usually in a particular academic subject or professional field.

Facilitator Cards

Master's degree:

A degree awarded to students who continue their education 1–3 years beyond their bachelor's degree. These degrees are more specialized and usually require completion of some research. Students in these programs typically focus on a specific topic in detail.

Salary:

The amount of money a person earns for doing their job.

SAT:

A standardized college admissions exam that tests students' abilities in math, critical reading, and writing; administered several times each year. Traditionally taken for the first time in the spring of a student's junior year.

Scholarship:

A financial aid award that does not have to be repaid. Usually merit-based.

Standardized Test:

Tests on which everyone taking the exam answers similar questions on the same content. The test maker ensures that everyone who takes the test is being measured against the same standard.

Vocational School:

A school that teaches specific skills for a particular job or profession. They are not focused on general education.

Facilitator Cards

Work-study:

A need-based federal program that is administered on campus. Eligible students are provided jobs on campus or at a local organization.

Kids2College Bingo

Test your Kids2College vocabulary. Get five squares in a row (either horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) and...BINGO!!!

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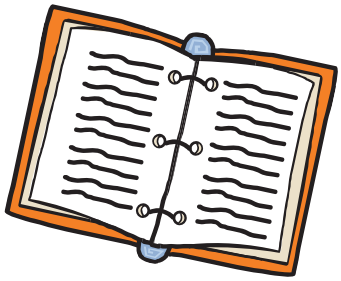
Closing Journal

(My Path to Success Student Handbook, page 41)



- What do I have to do in order to get access to financial aid?

_____

_____

- How can my grades in school influence my financial aid opportunities?

_____

_____

- What are the four kinds of financial aid you can receive for college?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

- How can my school success help me in my search for financial aid?

_____

_____

Closing Discussion

Q: What did you learn today?

Q: What are the four kinds of financial aid you can receive for college?

Q: What do you have to fill out in order to get them?

Q: What questions do you have about the steps you need to take to get to college and achieve your career goals?

KIDS 2 COLLEGE
THE SALLIE MAE FUND

Family Information Sheet Four: Paying for College!

Dear Family Member,

During today's lesson your student learned about the resources available to help you and your family pay for college. Financial aid is available from the federal government, state governments, colleges and universities, and private organizations. There are many options available to help your student meet the financial commitment of attending college!

In this week's information sheet, you will find information about financial aid. Today's lesson only covered the basics. We've provided much more information for you to keep as a resource for the future. The most important thing to remember is that there is money available to help you pay for college.

We also suggest that you start a college **savings account** for your student. Even if you are only able to set aside a small amount each month, this money can add up over time. Your student still has several years until they begin college. Saving even the smallest amount can make a big difference in the future.

Become familiar with financial aid and the steps you must take to access it. Speak with your student's guidance counselor to find out if there are any financial aid information nights planned. Learning about financial aid now will make the process of applying for that aid easier when your student becomes a senior.

Family Discussion Questions

As a family, discuss the following questions:

- Is college affordable?
- What are the four main types of federal aid that you can receive?
- Do many students receive financial aid?
- Think back to the people you identified during week one — friends or family members who went to college. Did any of them receive financial aid?

Thank you for helping your student as they work towards making the college dream a reality!

Sincerely,

The Kids2College Team

Money for College

Kids2College Family Information Sheet

START SAVING NOW! We encourage every family to start a college savings account for their student. Even if you just contribute a small amount to the account, those savings can add up over time and help your students reach their college goals. Financial aid is available to all students. Many scholarships are based on how students do in school, but other aid options have nothing to do with grades or test scores.

Types of Financial Assistance

There are four major types of financial assistance: grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans.

Grants

Grants are awards that do not have to be repaid. They typically are need-based and depend on the student's enrollment status. Grants are available from some states and private organizations, but most come from the federal government. There are four types of federal grants:

- **Pell Grants** range from approximately $400 to $5,920 per year and are awarded solely on the basis of financial need.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants** (FSEOG) range from $100 to $4,000 per year and are awarded solely on the basis of financial need.
- **Academic Competitiveness Grants** provide up to $750 for the first year of college and up to $1,300 for the second year to full-time students who are eligible for a Pell Grant and who have successfully completed a rigorous high school program. Recipients must maintain a 3.0 undergraduate GPA. This grant is in addition to the Pell Grant.
- The National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent, or **National SMART Grant**, provides up to $4,000 for third- and fourth-year full-time students who are eligible for a Pell Grant. Students must have and maintain at least a 3.0 GPA and be pursuing a specific major. This grant is in addition to the Pell Grant.

Scholarships

Scholarships, like grants, are awards that do not have to be repaid. Scholarships typically are given to students based on their achievements. They may be awarded by religious groups, professional organizations, businesses, and schools, as well as some states. Amounts can vary from $50 to the full cost of tuition. Not all scholarships are based on grades. Some are given for other achievements. It is important to research what is out there. Use the following resources to find scholarships:

- the Internet
- reference books
- colleges and universities
- state education organization

Scholarship Facts

- Each scholarship program has different requirements and its own application process. Some require an essay; others may require an exam.
- Some scholarships are one-time gifts, but others are given for all four years of a student's education. Scholarship recipients typically need to maintain a certain GPA or be involved in a specific activity each year in order to continue to receive money.
- Scholarships, like grants and loans, typically

are paid to the school and not the student. Any money left over after tuition and fees are paid will be returned to the student in the form of a check.

Work-Study

Work-study is a need-based federal program that is administered on campus. If a student qualifies, they are given a job on campus or at a local organization. The money they earn from this job goes towards their education. Work-study jobs can be tailored to relate to a student's major. All work-study money is earned, so nothing needs to be repaid.

Loans

Loans are awards which must be repaid. They are administered either by the federal government or by a private company. Students pay interest on loans; interest accrues as they are repaid. Some loans accrue interest while borrowers are still enrolled in school.

There are two categories of federal loans: subsidized and unsubsidized. Private loans also are available that are not administered by the government.

- **Subsidized loans** may be offered to students who have financial need. The interest that accrues while a student is in school is paid by the government until the repayment period begins. Unless the entire loan is paid off immediately, interest accrues on the balance remaining after each payment.
- **Unsubsidized loans** are offered to students who do not qualify for subsidized loans or who are in need of help beyond the maximum subsidized loan offered to them. Unsubsidized loans begin to accrue interest the moment they are accepted. Borrowers may pay off unsubsidized loans while they are in school, or may pay off the interest. They also may wait until graduation to do so.
- **Private loans** are similar to unsubsidized federal loans. They are given to students by private companies. Private loans tend to have higher interest rates and shorter repayment periods.

Applying for Financial Aid

To get financial aid, students need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This form determines eligibility for financial assistance. Students who do not complete the FAFSA are not eligible for any federal aid. This means they cannot receive grants, work-study, or loans. Many states, private loan companies, and some private organizations also use the FAFSA to decide who to give financial aid to.

The FAFSA is a free form and should not cost any money to complete. Many organizations offer to complete the FAFSA for a fee. Before using these services, families first should try to complete the FAFSA on their own, using the FAFSA website and guidance counselors to help. The form may seem confusing, but students and families can complete the FAFSA without having to pay for assistance.

Some fee-for-service companies offer to find scholarships that students might qualify for. But many use the same free resources that are available to students! Research these services carefully. The Federal Trade Commission provides tips for identifying scholarship scams: *http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/scholarship.*

Start Saving for College Now!

While 9 out of 10 parents of middle school children expect their students to go to college, only 3 have started saving (Source: Institute of Higher Education Policy, 2007). And the benefits of a college education aren't just financial. Research has shown that the average college graduate:

- Is more likely to vote and volunteer.
- Has better access to health insurance.
- Has a lower risk of a heart disease.
- Lives longer.

2017–2018 Average Annual Tuition, Fees, Room and Board

Public Four-year College	$20,770
Private Four-year College	$35,260+

Source: The College Board: *Trends in College Pricing*, 2015

On average, college tuition increases by 8 percent each year. This trend suggests that the cost of college doubles every nine years.

The cost of college may be intimidating, but should not scare you away from providing this opportunity for your student. With the proper planning, it can be affordable. Most students and their families pay for college through a variety of sources and financial assistance that include:

- Savings
- Scholarships
- Grants
- Part-time work
- Loans

The more you can save, however, the less you'll need to depend on other sources. If you start saving today while your student is young, even small amounts of money can add up to big dollars by the time the first tuition bill arrives.

If you're like most families, you may not be able to save enough to cover the full cost of college. That's okay — what's important is that you get started today, saving as much as you can.

Smart College Savings Strategies

Study your spending. Not sure where to find the money to start saving? Track every dollar your family spends for two months, and then review the results. You'll find lots of opportunities to cut back on spending. Choose a cheaper cable television package, make coffee at home instead of buying a cup at the local coffee shop, or get rid of the bells and whistles on your phone service.

Put savings on autopilot. The most successful savers are those who make savings automatic. How? By having money automatically transferred from their checking account to their investments every month. Do this and you'll never have a month when you forget to add to your student's college fund.

Give your savings an annual raise and a bonus. Each time you get a raise or a promotion, increase your automatic savings so a portion

Example of College Savings Account Growth

Dollars Saved Each Month	After 4 Years	After 8 Years	After 12 Years
$25	$1,443	$3,394	$6,078
$50	$2,886	$6,788	$12,156
$75	$4,329	$10,182	$18,233
$100	$5,773	$13,576	$24,311

Assumes 8 percent annual return and monthly compounding

of your higher income is channeled toward this important goal. When you receive extra money — like tax refunds or employer bonuses — send some of that money into your college savings account too.

Use tax breaks to your advantage. Open a college savings account like a 529 college savings plan or a Coverdell Education Savings Account. They allow your money to grow tax-free when it is used for education expenses, which means every dollar you save can be spent on college — not on taxes.

Suggest the gift of a brighter future. When friends and relatives ask for birthday and holiday gift ideas for your child, suggest a college fund contribution — a gift that will truly keep giving for a lifetime.

Understand account ownership. When setting up certain college savings accounts, don't be too quick to put money in your children's names. Money in "custodial" accounts belongs to the minor, not the parent, and that has two potential drawbacks:

- Children can spend the money however they please as soon as they reach adulthood.
- Money held in a child's name can reduce their chances of receiving financial aid.

Borrow from yourself. Some retirement accounts allow you to borrow or make a withdrawal from a 401(k) or IRA for higher education expenses. Be sure to check the rules of your account, investigate any tax consequences, and consider consulting with a financial adviser to weigh the impact on your retirement planning.

Look for free money. Check on the Internet for "college reward programs" where participating credit cards, stores, restaurants and even travel companies donate to your college account each time you buy their products or services. These rewards can then be transferred to a 529 college savings plan. These programs usually allow friends and family to contribute also — an easy way for them to help your family save for college.