Dream BIG, but get REAL
It’s fun to dream about all the cool things you can do with a college education. Study the rain forest. Look for a cure for cancer. Start your own business. Make good money. But make sure you get the facts about what it takes to go to college.

- How much education will you need for your chosen career?
- What will you earn with that degree?
- Do you know people who have that job? Ask them what it’s like or—better yet—ask if you can go to work with them for a day (some workplaces have a “Take a Child to Work” program).
- Get to know your school or community librarian. He or she can guide you to career-planning resources.

Get PREPPED
Remember that the courses you’ll take in high school need to match what most colleges expect you to know—what’s called the “college preparatory curriculum.” At least four of the classes you take each year should be college prep.

- Take the right courses. Your school counselor will be able to provide you with a list of courses that match up with most college’s minimum expectations—but some colleges may expect more.
- Take a challenging course load. It may hurt now but it will help you in the long run.
- Take Algebra I in 7th or 8th grade, BEFORE you get to high school. Taking challenging math courses now sets you up for the right math and science in high school and college and prepares you for whatever courses you might need in college to pursue your dreams.

SHARPEN your SKILLS
You know all the habits your teachers and parents are always hammering into you? Turn your homework in on time, turn off the TV, music and your cellphone when you study, limit your video gaming, write neatly….Well, they’re right. If you want to get good at something, you have to practice and play by the rules. Learning good study skills will serve you well in high school and in college and lead to more money to help you pay for college.

Start a “ME” file
Create a file of important documents and notes. Hang on to copies of report cards, lists of awards and honors you’ve received, and notes from your boss at work, and keep a list of school, religious and community activities in which you are involved each year.

FIND a college MENTOR
It’s always good to talk to your parents about your plans for college, but there may be other people you know—a teacher, school counselor or family friend—who can serve as a sounding board where college is concerned. If you don’t have someone in mind, contact the Ohio College Access Network (ohiocan.org) to get connected. It’s always a good idea to find someone who can offer guidance about your future and help you achieve your goal of a college education.

College may seem far away, but the future comes at you fast. With high school right around the corner, here are some things you can do now to prepare for college. Be sure to talk about these tips with your friends and family members.