
Roots & Wings

A Student and Family Guide to Life After High School

In 2026, our academic year theme, A Life Well Chosen, resonated deeply with me as our student support counselor, particularly as I considered our first graduating class and the many classes who will follow in their footsteps. This guide, Roots & Wings, was created to help our students navigate the choice before them and begin intentionally building a life well chosen.

A Life Well Chosen is cultivated through authentic experiences and a willingness to learn along the way. The choices we make, what we value, how we respond, and who we become shape the life we ultimately choose. As our students begin looking toward life beyond JXC, Roots & Wings is intended to help them approach the future with thoughtfulness, confidence, and purpose. There is no single “right” path after high school. College, trade school, community college, the military, or entering the workforce can each be meaningful paths toward a life well chosen. What matters is that students understand their options, make informed decisions, and choose a path that aligns with their goals and values.

This guide will highlight the key steps, deadlines, resources, and decisions students and families should know as they prepare for what comes next. As our first graduating class begins this transition, our hope is that students leave JXC not only prepared for their next step, but confident in their ability to choose a life rooted in truth, goodness, and beauty.

Rooted in Purpose,



Student Support Counselor

Jacksonville Classical Academy

Your Role As The Parent, Guardian, or Trusted Adult

As students begin making decisions about life after high school, the role of the adults who support them becomes especially important. Your role is not to have every answer or make every decision for your student, but to provide a steady foundation as they explore what comes next. This means helping them understand their options, asking thoughtful questions, encouraging them to take ownership of their decisions, and offering guidance when the path feels uncertain. This time is busy for your student(s), they are hitting new milestones, celebrating traditions, and gearing up for a big transition. It is important to know where you stand and what your role should look like during this time. We encourage you to talk to your student, ask them what they want your role to look like and then it is your job to respect their request and support them along the way. Below are a few examples of what is yours to carry and what is not yours to carry throughout this process.

What is Yours to Carry

Keeping a calm, parental awareness of deadlines

Understanding the financial picture: FAFSA, Scholarships, what you can reasonably contribute

Being available to support logistically: Pay fees, navigating loans, proofreading if asked

What isn't Yours to Carry

The essay content and voice

The list of colleges/universities your student creates, even if you have strong feelings about them

The emotional weight of every rejection or acceptance, feel it with them, not instead of them

Support Without Hovering

As students move through high school, they need support but they also need opportunities to practice independence. Help your student understand deadlines, talk through options, and know where to find resources. As trusted adults we need to make the conscious effort to resist the urge to take over. Let your student send the email, make the phone call, complete the application, or ask the question. They may not always do it exactly the way you would and their urgency may not be your urgency, but that is part of learning. The goal is not to remove every obstacle from their path, but give them the confidence and skills to navigate those obstacles themselves.

Our Role as JXC Educators, Administrators, Coaches, and Student Support

The JXC team believes that parents and guardians are the primary guides in the post-secondary decision making process. Our role is to come alongside you by providing support, guidance and expertise as you help your student explore and prepare for the many paths available after JXC. This is a shared responsibility. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you, encourage your student and help provide the tools and guidance they need to take their next steps with confidence.

Classical versus College Preparatory

Jacksonville Classical Academy prides ourselves on remaining rooted in the classical education model. By aligning with a model that cultivates the hearts of students in a content rich classical education, there are factors that will be different from a traditional or college preparatory high school. While we have the same end goal, to ensure our students have a plan for post-secondary life, the work toward that goal will be noticeably different due to our classical alignment, faculty structure, and school community.

Many college preparatory schools have dedicated advisor teams that work with students beginning their freshman or sophomore year, meeting regularly to review goals, develop action plans, and provide individualized support. At Jacksonville Classical Academy, our approach is intentionally different. Rather than relying on an advisor to manage the post-secondary planning process, we encourage our students to gradually take ownership of their future. Along the way our student support counselor will facilitate meetings with our Juniors and Seniors to check in and provide assistance as needed or requested. Faculty, Coaches, and Administrative members of the Jacksonville Classical team are also on hand to provide support and assistance as needed when a student approaches them. We recognize that meaningful mentorship and guidance can come from many members of our school community.

This approach reflects our classical framework. We believe students should not simply be guided toward a life well chosen, they should be equipped to understand themselves, evaluate their options, make thoughtful decisions, and advocate for themselves. Our goal is not to remove support, but to help students develop the independence and self awareness necessary to seek and use it effectively. College and career readiness is not something done for students, it is developed with students and ultimately owned by them.

The Timeline

The college and post-secondary journey begins long before applications are submitted. **Freshman** year is a time of transition, growth and discovery, Students are laying the foundation for high school, building new friendships, discovering interests and beginning to define who they are. When grades begin to slip or a student seems withdrawn, our role is to support them without doing the work for them. Encourage students to seek tutoring, spend additional time studying and learn how to advocate for themselves. This is also when students can begin working toward their **Bright Futures** volunteer hour

requirements. A good goal is to complete approximately 25 volunteer hours each year, working toward the required total of 100 by graduation.

Once **Sophomore** year rolls around students will have completed a quarter of their high school career. This is a great time to become more intentional about their extracurricular involvement. Whether they choose to be involved in clubs, athletics, the arts, student leadership, or other interests, involvement is very important. Encourage students to reflect on what they genuinely enjoy, how they want to grow, and whether they see themselves taking on leadership roles. Sophomore year is less about having everything figured out and more about discovering where their interests and strengths come together.

In their **Junior** year things take a big jump. Post-secondary plans begin to take shape and their ideas about their next steps after graduation start to become a realist to pursue. Students may elect to take more rigorous course, such as **AP** or **FACT**, but students should be thoughtful about balance and choose rigor that challenges them without overwhelming them. This is also time to begin developing a college or post-secondary list, preparing for and taking the **SAT/ACT/CLT**, exploring career and educational options, and beginning to think about essays and recommendation letters. Junior year can feel like a lot because many pieces of the post-secondary puzzle begin to converge at once. Encourage students to use the resources available to them and connect with the Student Support Counselor or a trusted adult when they need support.

By **Senior** year, our students are almost ready to take flight. Students should be moving from exploration to action. This is the time to finalize their post-secondary plans, complete applications, request letters of recommendation, visit colleges, prepare for interviews and keep track of important deadlines. But senior year is more than applications and deadlines. It is also time to pause, reflect, and appreciate the final moments of high school. Encourage students to finish well, make memories, and take pride in how far they have come.

How to Build a College/Program List

When a post-secondary list is more than finding a school with a familiar name or a program that sounds appealing. Encourage your student to explore a variety of options and consider what truly fits their goals, interests, values, and circumstances. As they research colleges, universities, trade and technical programs, military options, or other pathways. Students should consider the topics and factors below.

Academic: Programs/majors Admission Requirements Class Size/Population size Academic Support Services	Personal: Location/Distance from home Campus/Community Size Activities
Financial: Net Price Scholarships Housing Costs Transportation	Career: Internship Opportunities Graduation Rate Job Placement Career services

A strong list should include options that challenge your student, make them feel confident and provide different pathways toward their goals. The goal is not to create the longest list but to create an intentional list of opportunities that could help your student build their life well chosen.

Standardized Testing

The accepted standardized tests are the SAT, ACT, and CLT. Students should start taking these exams the winter or spring of their junior year. Testing locations and dates for the SAT and ACT can be found on their respective websites. DCPS schools do host exams through the testing season on Saturdays, advanced registration is required for both SAT and ACT exams. Students may request fee waivers directly through the college board website. Students may receive two waivers total per test.

Students will complete the CLT in school on our designated testing date. If a student wishes to retake their CLT for a higher score, they may do so but will be responsible for the additional cost.

Each college will have their own score requirements. It is important to look into this while creating your college list to understand where you want to aim. Scores can be sent directly to selected colleges and universities electronically.

Financial Aid: Know Your Options

Paying for education or training after high school is an important part of planning for what comes next. Financial aid can come from many places, including federal and state aid, scholarships, grants, work study and institutional or program based assistance. The process can feel overwhelming, but it becomes much more manageable when students and families start early, understand their options, and keep track of important deadlines. Financial planning is part of choosing an opportunity or path well.

Task	When to Complete
Create Florida Aid Account	By August 31 of senior year
Complete FAFSA	When application opens, typically October 1st
Evaluate Bright Futures Eligibility & Complete Volunteer Hours	Junior and Senior Year
Research Scholarships	Junior and Senior Year
Compare total costs of programs	Before Committing
Review Financial Aid Offers	Senior Year

Keep in mind, a scholarship is not the only way to make a program affordable. Grants, work study positions, military benefits, employer assistance or choosing a lower cost education or training pathway can all be part of the financial picture.

Don't ask, "how much does this school cost?" Ask, "how much will this school actually cost me or my family?"

Bright Futures Scholarship Program

Florida Academic Scholar

- 3.5 Cumulative Unweighted GPA
- 1330 SAT Score
- 29 ACT Score
- 95 CLT Score
- 100 Service Hours

This scholarship covers 100% tuition and eligible fees at eligible Florida public institutions. Private institutions award a dollar amount per credit hour. This scholarship automatically renews, students must maintain an unweighted GPA of 3.0 throughout college to maintain their scholarship.

Florida Medallion Scholar

- 3.0 Cumulative Unweighted GPA
- 1190 SAT Score
- 24 ACT Score
- 82 CLT Score
- 75 Service Hours (100 Preferred)

This scholarship covers 75% tuition of eligible fees at eligible Florida public institutions. Private institutions award a dollar amount per credit hour. This scholarship automatically renews, students must maintain an unweighted GPA of 2.75 throughout college to maintain their scholarship.

Students should create an account **October 1** of their senior year. Students are encouraged to apply regardless of their college goals. Each year Florida Bright Futures releases a guidebook with instructions on how to track service hours and complete the application. Be sure to review the appropriate guidebook on the Bright Futures website and stay up to date on community service tracking requirements.

Key Dates Throughout The School Year

August - September - October August 1st - Common Application & Most College Applications Open August 10th - First Day of School & Senior Breakfast September 1st - Start Requesting Letters of Recommendation, Transcripts, and Finalize Essays September 18th - College Crash Course October 1st - Florida Bright Futures Application Opens October 1st - Free Application for Federal Student Aid October 1st - Florida Financial Aid Application Opens October 15th - UF & FSU- Early Decision Due October 16th - Career Day October 20th - College Fair & Admissions Night October 23rd - Registration deadline for 11/7 SAT October 24th - Homecoming Dance	January - February - March January 1st - 15th - Regular Decision deadlines January 5th - First Day Back from Winter Break January 15th - UF Applications Close January 22nd - Registration deadline for 2/27 ACT January 30th - Enrollment deposits for Early Decision due February 9th - Late Deadline for 2/27 ACT February 19th - Registration deadline for 3/6 SAT February 23rd - Late registration for 3/6 SAT February 27th - ACT Exam Day March 1st - Rolling Admission schools reach capacity and Notifications for fall 2027 enrollment decisions begin. March 15th - 19th - Spring Break
November - December November 1st - UCF/USF Early Action Closes November 7th - SAT Exam Day November 23rd-27th - Thanksgiving Break December 1st - FSU Applications Close December 1st - Senior Picture Day December 15th - USF Applications Close December 21st - January 4th - Winter Break	April - May April - CLT Exam (date to be determined) April 10th - Junior/Senior Prom April 15th - Senior Grad-bash May 1st - College Decision Day (<i>Enrollment Deposits Due at Most Colleges/Universities</i>) May 7th - Senior Skip Day May 14th - Senior Final Lap and Senior Sunset May 15th Graduation

Beyond College: Other Paths to Consider

A Life Well Chosen does not look the same for every student. While a four year college may be the right path for some, it is only one of the many meaningful ways to build a future. Students should be encouraged to explore their strengths, interests goals and values before deciding what comes next. For some, that may mean learning a skilled trade, serving in the military or entering the workforce directly after graduation. The goal is not to choose the path that looks most impressive, but choose a path that is intentional and aligned with the life they hope to build.

Trade and technical programs provide focused, hands-on training for students who enjoy learning by doing and want to enter a specific career field. Programs may prepare students for careers in areas such a construction, electrical work, plumbing, automotive technology, aviation, healthcare, cosmetology, culinary arts, and many more. Depending on the program, students may earn a certificate, license or associate degree and enter the workforce in a relatively short amount of time. Students should

research programs, length, costs, job opportunities, and earning potential before making their decision. J-Tech, FSCJ, and Tulsa Welding are some of the programs local to Jacksonville that offer a variety options and career paths.

Military Service is another path students may consider after high school. The military offers opportunities for service, personal growth, career training, educational benefits and leadership development. Students should take time to research each branch and understand the commitment involved before making a decision. Speaking with recruiters, veterans, and trusted adults can help students gain a realistic understanding of military life and determine whether this path aligns with their goals and values.

Entering the workforce directly after high school may be the right choice for some students. Employment can provide valuable experience, financial independence, and the opportunity to discover what they enjoy before pursuing additional education or training. Students should consider opportunities that allow them to build transferable skills, develop a strong work history, and continued professional growth. Entering the workforce does not mean education or training ends, many careers offer opportunities for apprenticeships, certifications, leadership training or continued education along the way.

Path	Typical Length	Cost	Leads to	Good Fit For
Community College	2 to 4+ years	\$\$	AA/AS, transfer, certificates.	Students wanting affordability and flexibility.
4 Year College or University	4 or more years	\$\$\$	Bachelor's degree	Students wanting broad academic and professional preparation.
Trade or Technical School	Months to 2 years	\$-\$\$	Training for a certificate or license.	Students who are hands on learners or are interested in a specific trade or field.
Military	Varies	Often Funded	Training and career experience.	Students interested in service and structure.
Workforce	Immediate - Varies	Low upfront	Employment and experience.	Students ready to work and grow.

It is important to remember that not every path has a single application process or enrollment season. Trade programs, apprenticeships, military enlistment and employment opportunities often have different requirements and timelines. Start exploring early, understand the requirements, and keep track of deadlines for the specific program or opportunity you are considering.

Conversation Check-Ins and Mindful Moments

Preparing for what comes next can take a significant toll on students as they are thinking through many variables and for some making huge choices for the first time. As a parent, guardian, or trusted adult it is important to take a minute to check in with them along the way. In this section I will share a couple conversation starters and mindfulness activities that can help them reduce stress during this time.

1. Boundaries are important, necessary, and the core of self care. It's essential and healthy to establish clear boundaries during the post-secondary process. Set aside a time or schedule "appointments" to discuss the post-secondary process. This can help separate the conversation so it does not become overwhelming.
 2. Self Care is a topic emphasized in many avenues of our lives. It truly is the component that helps reduce stress and allows us time to decompress as needed. Creating a list of useful self care tactics can help students identify what helps them and when to utilize it. For example, going for a walk or listening to music, an audiobook or podcast. There are MANY self care tactics to choose from.
 3. Grounding is another topic utilized to help reduce anxiety and help individuals reset. My favorite grounding technique to share is the 5-4-3-2-1 method. Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can smell, 2 things you can hear, and 1 thing you can taste. Sometimes I add in a mint or sour candy to help my nervous system regulate.
 4. Gratitude and Thank You notes are a great way to show appreciation to teachers, coaches, or trusted adults who have supported along the way. A handwritten note is the most personalized way to express our gratitude and appreciation to those who have supported you along the way. Be sure to keep track of individuals who wrote recommendation letters, supported with volunteer hours, or supported you throughout this time.
 5. Time to reflect is very important when we have decisions to make. Time is also a gift, it is okay to sit with your offers, choices, or opportunities for a bit and be intentional with your next steps.
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Trust The Process

The path after high school rarely unfolds exactly how we plan it, and that's okay. Students may change their minds, find new interests, encounter setbacks, or take a route the next originally considered. Our job as trusted adults is to help them stay open to the process rather than feel pressured to have everything figured out. Take time to encourage your student to explore, ask questions, learn from their mistakes and make intentional choices. A life well chosen is not built from one perfect choice, it is built through many choices, adjustments, and experiences along the way.

Wins Worth Celebrating

Not every accomplishment will come with an acceptance letter or scholarship. Celebrate the moments that highlight your students growth such as asking for help, improving a grade, showing up after a setback, or submitting an application. Share those moments with our team! We love hearing about what our students are up to and celebrating these moments with them. These moments may seem small, but they are building confidence, resilience and independence. As we prepare students for life after JXC, remember that the goal is not simply to get them somewhere, it is to help them become someone who is ready for where they are going next.

Resources & Helpful Links

ACT Suite: <https://www.act.org>

SAT Suite: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org>

Classical Learning Test: <https://www.cltxam.com>

College Prep Genius: <https://collegeprepgenius.com>

Khan Academy: <https://www.khanacademy.org>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>

CareerOneStop Florida: <https://www.careeronestop.org/GetMyFuture/default.aspx>

Federal Student Aid Support: <https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/fafsa-support>

Federal Student Aid Estimator: <https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>

Florida Student Scholarship & Grant Programs: <https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/>

Florida Bright Futures: <https://www.floridabrightfutures.gov>

Common App: <https://www.commonapp.org>