

# Iowa College Decision Day

Building a College-Going Culture



**Celebrate Your Students!  
Celebrate College!**

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**Celebrate your students!**

## What is Iowa College Decision Day?

Iowa's College Decision Day is a new statewide initiative with the goal of recognizing high school seniors for their postsecondary plans and encouraging younger students and families to prepare early for postsecondary education. College Decision Day is held annually on or around May 1 and is designed to coincide with the date that most seniors must inform a college of their plans to enroll.

College Decision Day is inspired by the NCAA's National Signing Day to reinforce that excellence in the classroom should be given as much pomp and circumstance as excellence as an athlete. NCAA's National Signing Day is when high school seniors sign a letter of intent to play sports at a specific college. Traditionally players participate in press conferences to announce their intentions. Our goal is to mimic this excitement for ALL students going to college.

## Why Host College Decision Day?

- To recognize all students for their postsecondary plans
- To encourage and remind students it's time to make a decision
- To support the best match and fit for each student
- To influence younger students as they prepare for college
- To support a college-going culture and wrap up the school year with a celebration

## Expectations of Host Sites

While each school must decide for itself the benefit of hosting Decision Day and will organize an event that meets the needs of the school, at a minimum it is our goal to see host sites create an event that fulfills the following.

- Recognizes ALL students for their postsecondary plans (2-yr, 4-yr, military, postsecondary certificate)
- Recognition to happen in front of the entire student body
- Contact local media – encourage publicity beyond the high school building
- Have fun!



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## What “College” Means To Your Students

College is important, there’s no doubt about it. Nationally, the numbers of new jobs in occupations that require some postsecondary education are expected to experience higher rates of growth through at least 2018 than those in on-the-job training categories<sup>1</sup>. In Iowa, nearly two-thirds of the top 50 fastest growing occupations require some type of formal training program or postsecondary education<sup>2</sup>. Of the top 50 jobs in Iowa with both high demand and high salaries, 98 percent require postsecondary education<sup>3</sup>. By 2020, it is projected that nearly 70 percent of all jobs in Iowa, will require postsecondary education or training beyond high school<sup>4</sup>.

Every Iowa student should plan to complete some type of education beyond high school. Iowa’s colleges and universities assist in that goal, offering a wide variety of educational options that meet the unique needs of all of our state’s students:

### Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a training program that combines classroom studies with on-the-job training supervised by a trade professional where students earn wages while learning a skilled profession in a specific field. It can take several years to become fully trained in a chosen occupation. Examples of careers requiring an apprenticeship include electrician, plumber and carpenter.

### Certificates and Diplomas

A certificate or diploma program focuses on a particular skill needed for a specific career and can generally be earned in two years or less at a community college, career/technical/business college or some four-year colleges. Examples of possible careers requiring a certificate or diploma include paralegal, cosmetologist, welder, chef, certified nursing assistant and radiological technician.

### Associate Degree

Associate degrees can usually be earned in two years (sometimes less) at any community college or some career/technical/business colleges and four-year colleges. Some associate degrees can be applied toward a bachelor’s degree at a four-year college or university. Examples of possible careers requiring an associate degree include dental hygienist, administrative assistant, registered nurse, veterinary technician and auto mechanic.

### Bachelor’s Degree

A bachelor’s degree, or undergraduate degree, typically takes at least four years to complete at any four-year college or university. Careers that require a bachelor’s degree include teacher, engineer, accountant, dietitian and social worker.

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition.

[2] Iowa Workforce Development. Iowa Occupational Projections 2008-2018. Chart Source: BLS Division of Occupational Outlook.

[3] Iowa Workforce Development (December, 20110). Iowa’s Hot 50 Jobs 2008-2018.

[4] Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. (June 2013). Recover: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020.



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## Iowa College Decision Day Planning Checklist

Date Completed	Recommended Completion Date	Task	Notes
	03/21/16	Determine type of event(s) and schedule based on resources and budget: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Half day commons event (low-cost)</li> <li>• Pep rally</li> <li>• Lunch celebration</li> <li>• Evening reception</li> <li>• Community picnic or fair (high-cost)</li> </ul>	
	03/28/16	Confirm College Decision Day location and time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share plans with school administration and staff.</li> <li>• Register your event with Iowa College Aid at <a href="https://www.iowacollegeaid.gov/content/iowa-college-decision-day-registration">https://www.iowacollegeaid.gov/content/iowa-college-decision-day-registration</a></li> </ul>	
	04/01/16	Invite/contact potential college representatives and/or guest speakers.	
	04/01/16	Contact colleges and local businesses asking for donations and sponsorship. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleges may provide t-shirts, water bottles or lanyards to hand to students that have selected them as their college choice.</li> <li>• Local businesses may sponsor the purchasing of Decision Day t-shirts, gift cards and/or gas cards.</li> <li>• Offer businesses Decision Day posters to hang in their window.</li> <li>• How will they be recognized as a sponsor?</li> </ul>	
	04/01/16	Providing food? Contact a local restaurant or catering company. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider asking the food be donated</li> <li>• Provide estimate of the number of people invited</li> <li>• Schedule if food will be delivered or picked up</li> </ul>	



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	04/04/16	Add event information to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning/afternoon announcements</li> <li>• School website</li> <li>• Official school marquee/kiosk/outdoor signs</li> <li>• School newspaper</li> <li>• School newsletter (to staff, parents, community)</li> </ul>	
	04/04/16	Give the "Ask Me About It" flier to all staff and request they hang it on their door.	
	04/11/16	Send student and parent letter. Notify both students and parents of the planned activity(ies). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage parents to attend</li> <li>• Include information about comparing financial aid packages</li> <li>• Remind them that it's not too late to consider college</li> </ul>	
	04/22/16	Finalize volunteer list. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm the time and place with all volunteers.</li> <li>• Provide school visitor/volunteer policy (if applicable).</li> <li>• Encourage them to wear college clothing.</li> </ul>	
	04/25/16	Distribute press release to media. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask Iowa College Aid to assist with media outreach if multiple high schools from one region are hosting events (if applicable).</li> </ul>	
	04/25/16	Remind teachers, counselors and administrators of the day's schedule and planned activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask them to wear college clothing on event day and decorate their classrooms with "college-going culture" materials.</li> </ul>	



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	04/25/16	Ensure your event supplies are ready. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prizes or giveaways</li> <li>• Certificates printed</li> <li>• Decorations</li> <li>• Print student roster with college choice</li> <li>• Music player works</li> <li>• Banner(s)</li> </ul>	
	04/25/16	Follow up with media to determine if they've decided to attend. (Most media outlets will not decide until day of)	
<h2>College Decision Day</h2>			
	04/26/16	Distribute media advisory day of event.	
	04/26/16	Remember to take pictures during Decision Day events and upload them to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. using the hashtag #ReachHigher, #IApplied or #DecisionDay.	
	05/20/16	Submit summary of activities to Iowa College Aid via survey to be provided by Iowa College Aid. Share any photos.	



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## Testimonials From High Schools

"Last year we held the first annual College Decision Day at Thomas Jefferson High School. It was an awesome attempt at highlighting the efforts at creating a more prevalent college culture here. There was definitely a buzz in the air as we embarked on this new event. I think that one of the most valuable lessons did not come from a graduating senior but an underclassmen. He shared that he liked knowing that there were people just like him going on to further their education after graduation from high school. Every student who enters the building walks under, near or around the big banner that was signed by the Class of 2014. It is a daily reminder of the doors of opportunity that each and every student has ahead of them. As part of the event, we had media here. We were tweeting signing day pictures out. We also had a resource table available for students who needed help deciphering their award letters. We were there to help students at whatever stage they were at in the process."

-Carla Hartenhoff, Senior Counselor at Thomas Jefferson High School

### Example #2:

We hold a Signing Day that highlights academic scholars who have been accepted to college. We mimic the NCAA model with purpose to reinforce that excellence in the classroom should be given as much (if not more) pomp and circumstance as excellence on the field, court, etc. We host a school wide assembly, usually before lunch, where all students witness our seniors commit and physically sign a statement of intent to enroll, accompanied by admissions representatives from their respective schools. I'd even go so far to say it ROCKS. We also celebrate ALL seniors during a morning assembly once every kid has received an admission letter. We play a slide show of EVERY school that accepted our students and allow kids to wear sweatshirts/tees with the college of their choice over their school uniform. Since many of our students rely on Financial Aid to actually accept offers, we try to not push the kids to advertise where they are going since their dream school may not fund them and pushing them to recognize this fact hurts more the helps our mission.



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## Testimonials From High Schools

### Example #3:

We did this for the first time last year and loved it. We wanted to honor every senior's postsecondary plans whether they included 2-year, 4-year, military or certificate so we called it Postsecondary Celebration Day and held our event on 5/1. We kept it casual and had a quick morning event. We invited all seniors, their parents, underclassmen, and faculty to mingle in the cafeteria at 7:15 am to 7:45 am. We wanted parents to be able to stop in on their way to work. Students and faculty were instructed to wear college t-shirts. We had each senior picture hung up with their name and their plans. The PTO donated simple breakfast items such as coffee, juice, water, and muffins. We played college fight songs in the background. At about 7:30 our principal made a few quick remarks about how proud we are of our seniors and their wonderful plans, etc. It was a great day!

### Example #4:

On May 1st or the closest to May 1st as possible, we do a senior signing where seniors wear the t-shirt/sweatshirt of the college they will be matriculating to. The faculty and staff also wear college gear of their choice. The seniors go to an area where they meet their counselor and sign a pennant with their name and the name of the college, career or post educational option. We take pictures and tweet them out and hang all of the pennants on the outside windows of our college center.



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## College Admissions Checklist

Even after you have applied to a college, there's still work to be done! Colleges require students to officially enroll, typically on or before May 1. Follow this checklist to ensure you are on track:

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon after January 1 as possible. Watch for your Student Aid Report (SAR) and direct questions to your college's financial aid office.
- Complete the Iowa Financial Aid Application at [www.iowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.iowaCollegeAid.gov) to apply for state scholarships and grants.
- Follow the enrollment directions in your official acceptance letter/email from your college. This will likely direct you to the college's website where you will need to log into their student information system. Don't hesitate to ask questions about the process.
- Check your college and university website to apply for any available scholarships.
- Use scholarship searches to find private scholarships and grants. Some reputable sites include: [IHaveAPlanIowa.gov](http://IHaveAPlanIowa.gov), [ScholarshipAmerica.org](http://ScholarshipAmerica.org), [FastWeb.com](http://FastWeb.com), [CollegeGreenLight.com](http://CollegeGreenLight.com), [careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch](http://careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch) and [chegg.com/scholarships](http://chegg.com/scholarships).
- Decide whether you will be living on or off campus. If you will be living on campus, submit a housing request and room deposit.
- Make certain that you understand your financial aid award letter from your college and what your options are to pay for your college expenses prior to accepting all or part of the aid offered.
- Watch for information from your college on how to register for summer orientation and any required testing.
- Attend orientation and enroll in classes. While there, ask about testing out of courses you excel in.
- Don't melt this summer! "College Melt" means not showing up to college in the fall, even after following all the admissions and financial aid steps. You can avoid "College Melt" if you:
  1. Make plans for how to physically get to college in the fall and ask for help if you need it.
  2. Stay active over the summer through jobs, internships, sports and clubs.
  3. Ask for help if you have questions over the summer about your orientation, financial aid, college costs, placement tests or class registration.



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## College-Going Culture and Decision Day

College Decision Day is the perfect time to focus on building and enhancing a college-going culture within your school. Given the goal of College Decision Day is to recognize high school seniors with postsecondary plans and encourage younger students and families to decide on postsecondary education, here are some ideas for how this might look in your community.

Schools should acknowledge College Decision Day will be an emotional day for all involved – positive emotions celebrating their successes but also the possibility of some negative emotions for students who may not have been accepted to their top college of choice.

### What is a college-going culture and how does it relate to Decision Day?

- **College Talk** – engaging everyone, at all times, in a variety of places, in talk about college – ensures that no matter where students turn or who they are talking to, college is being discussed and the question of “where are you going to college?” is asked by all to all.
- **Clear Expectations** – communicating and reinforcing the belief that all students can go to college and can take the steps to officially enroll in a college.
- **Information and Resources** – connecting students to relevant and necessary information about how to take the steps to officially enroll in college, and what to do if the student hasn’t yet applied to college or been admitted.
- **Comprehensive Counseling Model** – helping students and families with not only the steps involved in preparing for and enrolling in college, but also in dealing with the related stress of the college preparation, application and enrollment processes.
- **Testing and Curriculum** – supporting students through the college test preparation and exam process, what to expect with college placements exams, and how performance on these tests may impact a student’s postsecondary journey.
- **Faculty Involvement** – engaging educators both within and outside of the classroom to create a college-going culture among students. Tap into the school’s teachers to be part of the Decision Day celebration both inside and outside the classroom.
- **Family Involvement** – engaging family members to increase the chances of student success in the college preparation, application and enrollment process.
- **College Partnerships** – developing relationships between schools and postsecondary institutions to support the official enrollment process and transition to college.
- **Articulation** – weaving in college access throughout a student’s life, starting at the earliest possible point and supporting the student all the way through high school graduation (and beyond)! Don’t forget to engage your middle school students and families in College Decision Day activities to get them prepared early for what it takes to officially enroll in college.



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## Social Media Tips



Facebook: Post at least 3 times a week leading up to important dates and deadlines. It is important to post items that will engage the audience and encourage them to participate in the conversation. Open-ended questions and asking for opinions are good ways to initiate dialogue. We also recommend the use of pre-selected hashtags.

Facebook examples:

- Seniors! May 1 is College #DecisionDay. Tell us where you are attending? #ReachHigher
- May 1 is College #DecisionDay! Join us in congratulating our seniors for this big decision.
- Congratulations seniors on your college decision! #ReachHigher
- Today is the day our seniors tell us where they are going to college. Don't forget to wear your college gear to celebrate!
- Tomorrow is College #DecisionDay. Show your spirit as we celebrate your future! We are proud of our seniors.
- You've taken the ACT and you've filled out the FAFSA, now your hard work is about to pay off! College Decision Day is [date]. We can't wait to hear where you are going this fall!
- College #DecisionDay is around the corner. What factors will weigh into what college you choose?
- While you're thinking about who you're taking to the prom, don't forget to keep thinking about where you're going to college this fall. Whether it's a university, community college, certificate program or the military, you've made a big decision to keep learning. The [LCAN/school/community] is here to support you every step of the way.



Twitter: Twitter has a limit of 140 characters per post. To leave space for users to retweet your post and add a comment, try to keep posts to 120 characters or less. We recommend the use of pre-selected hashtags. Simply note on posters or fliers a chosen hashtag or note it in Facebook posts (e.g. for College Decision Day, use #ReachHigher and #DecisionDay).

Twitter examples:

- May 1 is #College #DecisionDay. Where are you going?
- Congratulations seniors on your #college selections #DecisionDay
- It's Iowa College #DecisionDay. Show us how you're celebrating. #ReachHigher
- College #DecisionDay is next week. Remember to wear your #college colors to school.

**For additional tips and downloadable resources, visit:**  
<http://www.iowacollegeaid.gov/content/iowa-college-decision-day>

