

**College
Decision
Day
South Carolina**

Planning Resources





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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

About College Decision Day

What is College Decision Day South Carolina?

The goal of College Decision Day is to recognize high school seniors for their postsecondary plans and encourage 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 attention and recognition as excellence in athletics. NCAA's National Signing Day is when high school seniors sign a letter of intent to play sports at a specific college. Traditionally, student-athletes participate in press conferences and signing ceremonies to announce their intent to attend a college. The goal of College Decision Day is to generate this excitement for ALL students going to college regardless of their participation in a sport.

Why Host College Decision Day?

- To recognize all students for their postsecondary plans
- To encourage and remind students that 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 there is no standard format on how a school should celebrate College Decision Day, CHE has found the most successful College Decision Day events, at a minimum, follows these guidelines:

- Recognize ALL students for their postsecondary plans (2-yr, 4-yr, military, postsecondary certificate)
- Hold recognition in front of the high school's entire student body
- Contact local media – encourage publicity beyond the high school community
- Have fun!

SECTION II – IDEAS FOR YOUR EVENT

Ideas for Celebrating College Decision Day

College Decision Day will look different at each high school. It is important to plan an event that fits the needs of your students and community. During the planning and implementation stages of your College Decision Day event, it is very important to keep your school staff apprised of the event schedule. Work with members of your school’s staff to identify the most effective schedule possible for your specific high school.

Celebrate your seniors and their families, and acknowledge their decision to enroll in college.

- *Create a “College Wall.”* Seniors write the names of the college where they plan to attend on banners or strips of construction paper to hang in a main hallway. Utilize art teachers (if available) for additional promotional materials to create a “college-going culture” on the walls of your school.
- *Announcements.* Make announcements over the school audio/video system to acknowledge students who decided to enroll and share where they will be going to college.
- *Assembly.* Host an all-school assembly to celebrate the postsecondary accomplishments of each of your seniors and their families. This event assembly could be an add-on to an already established school event or a stand-alone assembly. Make sure to invite students of all grade levels to participate.
 - *Consider giving prizes or “SWAG”:* Ideas might include a calculator, tablet, I-pod, college survival kit, pencils, flags, t-shirts
 - *Serve cake or cupcakes* or other refreshments
- *Community Event or Fair.* Host an afterschool community-wide picnic or celebration. This may require a larger budget, but will involve more community members and students of all ages.
 - *Food:* Pizza and BBQ are always a hit.
 - *Entertainment:* Consider a DJ or local band, plan a flash mob, or provide games for all ages.
- *Guest speakers.* Whether you host a school assembly or a community event, invite high school alumni, elected officials, college admissions and financial aid representatives, local business leaders and parents to congratulate the students on their decision to go to college and to emphasize, from personal experience, the importance of college.
- *Interviews.* Interview seniors about their college plans and write articles for local newspapers and the school newspaper. Incorporate quotes from seniors in public service announcements for local

radio, intercom/homeroom announcements, or ads in the school newspaper. Or, create a special section in the school newspaper that gives the names of seniors and their selected college.

- *College gear.* Encourage students and school staff to wear college t-shirts on the day of your event and/or a particular day of the week.
- *Social media.* As students bring in evidence of their postsecondary plans in the form of a college acceptance letter, military orders, or a similar offer letter, take pictures of the students with those letters/forms and post it through the school’s social media channels using the hashtag: #DecisionDaySC, and #ReachHigher.
- *Involve teachers and staff.* During College Decision Day, ask teachers to share their college experience, wear their alma mater gear and post signs on classroom doors showing where they went to college. Promote the idea of college, not a specific school.

Provide early awareness of the steps needed to enroll in college for younger students and families.

- *Workshops.* Provide workshops to younger students and their families.
 - Possible topics: decision making, learning styles, study habits, the importance of GPA and high school course selection, college test prep, how to get help with grades and test prep, essay writing, applying to college, college admission criteria, paying for college, “I’m admitted – now what?”, etc.
- *College spotlight.* In the months or weeks leading up to College Decision Day, choose a different college or university to feature in each morning’s announcements. Play the school’s fight song. Ask trivia questions and award prizes for correct answers.
- *Adopt-a-College.* Each classroom can “adopt” a college to represent for the rest of year. This can be the teacher’s alma mater or the class may select a college/university. Students can decorate the classroom door with the college/university colors and logo.

Conduct one-on-one or classroom visits with seniors and ask students if they have:

- Applied to college?
- Been admitted to college?
- Officially notified the college or university that they will enroll?
- Completed the FAFSA?

Gather students’ college choices in advance. Some schools require seniors to bring evidence of their postsecondary plans in the form of a college acceptance letter, military orders, or similar offer letter.

- *Day of event:* The simplest and quickest way to ensure you have the college decision for each student is by handing the student a blank note card a few minutes before the event begins. Ask each student to write down their name and selected college. This method is sometimes used during graduation ceremonies.

- *Week(s) prior to event:* Survey the seniors or schedule one-on-one visits. Ask the seniors to provide basic information of where they plan to go to college, where they are in the enrollment process, questions they have, and how you can assist them.

Promoting College Decision Day in the Community

The following are recommendations for promoting your College Decision Day event.

- *Form a planning committee* to decide on the options and brainstorm additional activities, then make assignments and deadlines. This committee may include different groups such as faculty, staff, families, student groups, college representatives, and community members.
- *Set goals* for the number of seniors enrolling, number of younger students engaged, number of volunteers, etc. Remind everyone of these goals and the importance of reaching as many people as possible in order to promote a college-going culture in your school community.
- *Hold one or more “Senior Meetings”* with school staff to facilitate communicating high expectations regarding College Decision Day activities to students. Often, principals hold these types of meetings to communicate information.
- *Send email or phone call reminders* to all parents, students, and school staff in addition to the official Student/Family letter. Also, *include information in the school newsletter and post fliers* around the school and community about your College Decision Day event.
- *Media.* Write and send a press release inviting local media to your event(s). Make sure to also send your press release to CHE, too! For additional information and guidance.
- *Recruit volunteers from students’ families and community organizations.* Be creative! Send a version of the attached form volunteer letter to your Local, volunteer groups, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, church groups, city and county government, local businesses, etc.



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

(Bold content to be inserted based on school and event details.)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, please contact:

Name, Phone, E-mail Address

SCHOOL NAME HOSTS COLLEGE DECISION DAY in South Carolina

CITY, SC (DATE) - In an effort to recognize and celebrate the academic achievements and choices of our state's high school seniors to access higher education, **Name of Your High School** will participate in College Decision Day South Carolina, a statewide initiative sponsored by the South Carolina Commission during the month of May.

Name of Your High School will host an event, College Decision Day, to work with their senior and junior classes on **Your School's Event Date** to recognize and celebrate the decision to attend college upon high school graduation as a part of this college access initiative.

The goal of College Decision Day is to recognize high school seniors for their postsecondary plans and encourage 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 attention and recognition as excellence in athletics. NCAA's National Signing Day is when high school seniors sign a letter of intent to play sports at a specific college. Traditionally, student-athletes participate in press conferences and signing ceremonies to announce their intent to attend a college. College Decision Day's purpose to generate this excitement for ALL students going to college regardless of their participation in a sport.

Name of Site Coordinator, College Decision Day event Site Coordinator for **Name of Your High School**, is expecting more than **Insert Number** seniors to participate with the help of **Insert Number** volunteers from **Insert School Faculty, Administration, College, Community Resources that will help**.

For more information about **Name of Your High School** College Decision Day event, please contact **Name of Site Coordinator and contact information**.

SECTION III - PLANNING YOUR EVENT

Site Coordinator Checklist

This is a recommended planning process and timeline that utilizes the recommendations found throughout this Resource Guide. You are welcome to adjust dates to fit your school best. Ultimately, your College Decision Day event will depend on the available budget and time. It is our hope this Resource Guide will save you some of that time and cost! Remember, the earlier you are able to complete these tasks the better.

WEEKS BEFORE EVENT	DATES	TASKS
8-7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Set up a College Decision Day committee or team at your school to discuss the timeline and event (school counselors, teachers, administrators, students, parents/guardians, higher education admissions/outreach staff, LCA representative, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate resources and budget for event <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm possible speakers to invite, agenda for the event
6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm event location, date and time. <input type="checkbox"/> Share information with school administration, teachers and staff. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss possible tie-in assignments with teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Share final plans with CHE.
5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Invite potential guest speakers <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to local businesses and colleges asking for donations and sponsorships <input type="checkbox"/> If providing food, reach out to restaurant/catering company
4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide seniors with enrollment checklist (see p. 10) <input type="checkbox"/> If necessary, begin volunteer outreach <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and prepare outreach and publicity efforts: Develop a press release to send local newspapers and TV stations (template provided), and brainstorm locations to hang fliers outside of the high school

<p>3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send students and parents letter to notify them of the activities, encourage parents to come (optional), info about financial aid, reminder that it's not too late for college <input type="checkbox"/> Make robocalls or text message alerts to parents (if school already has system in place) <input type="checkbox"/> Use any social media presence the school has. <input type="checkbox"/> Add information about event to daily announcements, school website/newspaper/newsletter, marquee, etc.
<p>2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize speakers and agenda for event <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute press release to media <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize volunteer list <input type="checkbox"/> Buy necessary (non-perishable) supplies <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm any additional personnel needed (custodial staff, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Wrap up senior meetings, going over expectations of the event, and confirming college plans with each of the students
<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Remind teachers, counselors, administrators of the day's schedule and planned activities. Encourage them to wear college clothing on the day and decorate their classrooms. <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure all event supplies are ready, pick up food (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute media advisory day of/day before event; follow up with media contacted earlier to confirm if they will attend
<p>DAY OF EVENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Set up venue. <input type="checkbox"/> Take pictures and upload them to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. using the hashtags #CollegeDecisionDay, and #ReachHigher
<p>AFTER EVENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send follow up letter to students who participated and their families (see p. 15). Congratulate them on being one step closer. Remind them of steps to take this summer. <input type="checkbox"/> Send thank you letters to volunteers, school administration, catering, businesses, colleges and universities, and guest speaker(s).



Budget

In the early stages of planning, we recommend that you determine your school’s budget for this event, as well as a list of supplies and services you will need to execute the event. While it is up to each school to figure out what works best for them, College Decision Day does not require a large budget. Even if your school is interested in providing food or prizes, many businesses are willing to donate supplies.

Funding from High School: \$ _____

Other Sources of Funding/In-Kind Donations: _____

Item/Service	Purchased/ Donated	Anticipated Cost	Actual Cost	Notes

SECTION IV – PREPARING STUDENTS

Senior Checklist Common Enrollment Steps

Colleges and universities require students to officially enroll in college, typically on or before May 1st. Here are common enrollment steps, but be sure to check the college or university's official website and correspondence for specific and up-to-date information.

- Talk to your family, teachers, counselors, college advisers, college outreach program staff, and people you trust to help you make your decision about where to enroll.
- If you've applied for financial aid by completing a FAFSA, read and understand your Student Aid Report (SAR) to find out how much financial aid you have received. If you have questions, be sure to share them with your college's financial aid office.
- To enroll, follow the directions in the official acceptance letter/email you received from your college. Each college has its own steps and system for officially enrolling. Most likely, you will be directed to the college's official website and instructed to log into the internal student information system. If you need help, don't hesitate to ask questions of your college.
- Some colleges require a monetary deposit to officially enroll. This deposit can range from \$100 to \$500 or more. If you need help, don't hesitate to contact the college's financial aid office to discuss options.
- As part of the enrollment process, you may be prompted by the college to sign up for a campus email, campus housing, accept your financial aid award, and/or start the advising process to sign up for classes.
- After you have officially enrolled, you will also get information from your college about summer orientation and placement exams. Be sure to sign up for any required testing and attend orientation events.
- After you have officially enrolled, make sure to request a copy of your final high school transcript to be sent to your college.
- Check out your college's summer reading list to get a jump start on your college experience.

- Don't melt this summer! "Melting" means you have followed all the steps to officially enroll in college, but for some reason, you don't show up in the fall. To keep you from melting, here are some tips:
 - a. Stay active this summer through jobs, internships, clubs, sports, etc.
 - b. Talk about your college dreams, plans, and fears to your friends, family, and people you trust.
 - c. Figure out how you will physically get to college in the fall, and ask for help if you need it.
 - d. Help your family prepare for your college experience – this isn't just a life change for you, but also for them.



SECTION V – ENGAGING FAMILIES

Use these letters to strike up conversations between students and their families about College Decision Day, to recruit volunteers, and inform the school community of activities to promote a college going culture in your school. Disseminate via hard copy and /or email.

Student/Family Informational Letter

SCHOOL LOGO

SCHOOL ADDRESS

[date]

Dear Students and Families, [change this based on who you're sending letter to]

The administration and staff of [high school name] invites you to attend College Decision Day on [date] from [time] to celebrate the Senior Class of [year] as they make the decision on their next steps after high school.

May 1st is a big day across the state and nation in the college admissions process. It's the day by which seniors nationwide declare what they want to do with their futures and decide where they will go after high school. [School name] will host its [inaugural, 3rd annual, etc.] Decision Day to celebrate the Senior Class of [Year] as they make this important decision to achieve greatness by attending college, trade school or enlisting into the armed services. This celebration also applauds the college-going culture within [school name] as well as within [community name].

[Insert information about all activities leading up to and during College Decision Day. Include speakers, games, prizes, food, etc. Parking information and/or visitor pass if necessary]

All graduating seniors are expected to attend and are encouraged to wear a t-shirt of their college selection.

Parents, school administrators, teachers, staff and community members are invited to join the celebration. To RSVP, [insert information]

We are extremely proud of our Senior Class of [year] and hope you will join us in celebration. We look forward to seeing you on [date].

Sincerely,

[SCHOOL COUNSELOR/PRINCIPAL/SITE COORDINATOR]



Student / Family Follow-up Letter

SCHOOL LOGO

SCHOOL ADDRESS

[date]

Dear Students and Families,

Recently, your student participated in College Decision Day South Carolina hosted by [high school name]. Congratulations on taking this important step toward your student's education!

Now that your student has enrolled in a college, it is important that students consider the following next steps:

- If you've applied for financial aid by completing a FAFSA, read and understand your Student Aid Report (SAR) to find out how much financial aid you have received. If you have questions, be sure to share them with your college's financial aid office.
- To enroll, follow the directions in the official acceptance letter/email you received from your college. Each college has its own steps and system for officially enrolling. Most likely, you will be directed to the college's official website and instructed to log into the internal student information system. If you need help, don't hesitate to ask questions of your college.
- Some colleges require a monetary deposit to officially enroll. This deposit can range from \$100 to \$500 or more. If you need help, don't hesitate to contact the college's financial aid office to discuss options.
- As part of the enrollment process, you will likely be prompted by the college to sign up for campus housing, accept your financial aid award, and start the advising process to sign up for classes.
- After you have officially enrolled, you will also get information from your college about summer orientation and placement exams. Be sure to sign up for any required testing and attend orientation events.
- After you have officially enrolled, make sure to request a copy of your final high school transcript to be sent to your college.
- Check out your college's summer reading list to get a jump start on your college experience.

If you have any questions, please call [name, title], at [phone number] or email me at [email]. Thank you for supporting your student's future and helping them navigate the path to college!

Sincerely,

[SCHOOL COUNSELOR/PRINCIPAL/SITE COORDINATOR]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide is adapted from a toolkit originally produced by the Florida (FCAN) and Michigan College Access Networks (MCAN). A special thanks to FCAN and MCAN for permission to adapt this guide for use in South Carolina, as well as their guidance on the process.

Thank you for hosting
College Decision Day!