The transition from high school to college can be daunting for many students as they adjust to new responsibilities. High schools can help bridge the gap for students during senior year, the summer after graduation and through the first year of college, providing a source of support and information as students navigate a new environment.

# Build a college cohort

## Senior cohort night

### DESCRIPTION

Host a senior cohort night prior to graduation, so students who will be attending the same college have an opportunity to gather and develop peer relationships that can be further developed and sustained throughout college. Consider including a “digital cohort” for students who will be the only ones from your high school on their campus and/or partnering with nearby high schools to increase the size of cohorts.

Encourage cohort bonding and support through “Minute to Win It”-style team competitions and conversation.

### MATERIALS

Food

Stopwatches

Items for “Minute to Win It” competitions

Prizes (optional)

### AGENDA

*First 5 minutes* General welcome: congratulate students on their postsecondary plans!

Explain the format of the evening

*Next 15 minutes* Break students into teams based on where they will be attending college. Group students together who will be the only ones at their college from your high school (ideally by similar type of institution: out-of-state, liberal arts college, trade school, etc.) Teams should come up with a team cheer and team handshake.

*Next 20 minutes* Teams compete in a series of “Minute to Win It”-style challenges to build support and collaboration.

*Next 30 minutes* Eat! Students should eat with their teams. Encourage a conversation about their plans for next year. One option: play *Two Truths and a Lie*. Students go around the circle sharing three facts about their college plans, expectations and fears: two of which are true, and one is a lie. Other students try and guess the lie, as well as offer solutions or ideas for overcoming fears.

*Final 5 minutes* Announce winners of the “Minute to Win It” challenges!

Send the participants off with the following action steps:  
1) Ask students to share contact information with each other and the school.  
2) Remind students how the school will be in touch and available for support.  
3) Remind students about next event.

## Summer send-off

### DESCRIPTION

Take a cue from the many colleges that call on regional alumni groups to host summer send-off parties for incoming freshmen and their family by hosting a send-off picnic/BBQin late summer or early fall for graduating seniors who will be attending college. Students who will be attending the same college (or similar colleges) should re-connect at the event and make plans to support each other during the year. Hold the event in conjunction with another school or community event, and of course, offer food!

### MATERIALS

Food!

Index Cards

Pens/Pencils

[College Terms Swat! Game](http://oregongoestocollege.org/resources/college-terms-swat-game)

* Poster paper/markers/masking tape or white board/markers
* Questions and answers
* Fly swatters (optional)
* Small prizes (optional)

### AGENDA

*First 5 minutes* General welcome: congratulate students on their college/career plans

Explain format for the evening

Ask students and parents to write on index cards one thing they’re excited about and one thing they’re nervous about for college (collect, but keep cards separate).

*Next 20 minutes* Eat!

*Next 20 minutes* Break into small groups (college cohorts, including parents or students v. parents) to play College Terms Swat! Game.

*Next 20-30 minutes* Break into two groups – 1 for students and 1 for parents

Facilitate a conversation about what each group is excited/nervous about for college. Read anonymously off of the note cards if people are reluctant to share and encourage the group to brainstorm solutions together.

*Final 5 minutes* Send the participants off with the following action steps:  
1) Provide contact information for students to be in touch/how to stay connected.  
2) Remind students and parents about next event.  
3) Best of luck with the start of college!

# Keep alumni connected

## Homecoming tailgate

### DESCRIPTION

Organize a homecoming tailgate specifically for recent alumni, especially those who are attending college. Celebrate community and provide a forum for alumni to talk about their experiences – include talking about challenges and possible solutions.

### MATERIALS

Food (encourage students to bring something to share)

Football or other item to toss

### AGENDA

*First 5 minutes* General welcome

*Next 20 minutes* Eat

*Next 20 minutes* Ask students to form a circle (break into smaller groups as necessary). Give one student the football or item to toss and ask him/her to share one great thing about college and then toss it to another student who will share his/her experience. Continue until all students have shared at least one item.

Repeat the process but with students sharing one challenging thing about college. Encourage other students to offer ideas and solutions. Be sure to write down any issues that face multiple students so you might be able to better prepare students in the future.

*Final 5 minutes* Send the participants off with the following action steps:  
1) Remind students how the school will be in touch and available for support.  
2) Remind students to go to class, have a regular study schedule, and to ask for help when they need it. Also, the FAFSA and ORSAA open in December and to re-apply for financial aid.  
3) Reminder about next event.

## Holiday party

### DESCRIPTION

Host a holiday party for recent alumniat the start of winter break. Include a celebration of success after the students’ first finals. Invite alumni from 5-10 years out to talk about their current lives/careers in a “speed dating” style format. Use this as an opportunity to build connections based on career interests.

### MATERIALS

Food

Questions for presenters

Notecards

Pens/Pencils

### AGENDA

*Pre-event* Invite presenters, ideally alumni who have graduated from college. Prepare your presenters by providing them with a copy of the pre-determined questions.

*First 5 minutes* General welcome: congratulate students on finishing finals!

Explain the format of the evening

*Next 20-30 minutes* Ask students to brainstorm questions for presenters about their college experience and career choice and write them down on notecards. Break into small groups based on the number of presenters. Hand out the questions for presenters to students in each group and give each group 5-7 minutes with each presenter.

*Next 20+ minutes* Eat! Encourage students to network and ask additional questions of presenters, as well as socialize with peers.

*Final 5 minutes* Send the participants off with the following action steps:  
1) Remind students how the school will be in touch and available for support.  
2) Remind students to start the next term strong; even if they didn’t do very well first term they can bounce back.