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RESOURCES FOR LATE HIGH SCHOOL:
PARENT/GUARDIAN WORKSHOP*Objectives*

- To introduce parents to the high school-to-college transition and the college application process.
- To encourage parents and guardians to engage in organized, step-by-step planning of their children's educational goals.

Message

With more than 3,400 two- and four-year colleges in the US, how will students pick the right one? Beyond taking the right courses and doing well, what steps will students need to follow to get into college? How can families help?

This section will focus on these questions and concerns by following the road to college. Preparing for college is an extremely exciting time in the life of the student, filled with challenge, opportunity and decision-making.

Because the process of selecting a college is very personal, it must begin with self-reflection. Students may wish to examine their goals, strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for going to college. Then, the student may want to determine what characteristics he or she will look for in deciding which colleges to explore.

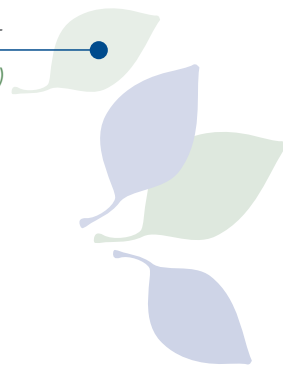
While the student is going through this awareness or assessment period, it is important to be realistic. As one experienced counselor said about the college exploration process, “Dream, but keep one foot on the ground.”

Methods

Parents, guardians and counselors can help in college exploration by encouraging the student to find the answers to a number of questions. It's extremely important to have the student—not the parent or guardian—answer the questions. The role of the family is to guide, not steer, the student through the exploration process. Parents should resist the temptation to impose their values and goals on the student's answers to these exploratory questions.



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Introductions

Any time you have a workshop for parents and families, it is a great idea to have an icebreaker. The “How Do You Define College” worksheet from Session I of the Late High School Curriculum is perfect for opening this workshop.

Discussion Questions

This workshop affords the Step by Step presenter a number of opportunities to engage in dialogue with parents and participants. Some of the questions and discussion topics to interject are listed below:

- When discussing the questions a student should consider in choosing a college, the Step by Step presenter can compliment the message by citing specific examples of colleges that fit the various questions.
- When discussing the college application process and admission folder, it might be useful to distribute sample applications and display an admission folder with an actual transcript or other school records. Be certain to protect the anonymity of the subject.
- Ask parents to consider appropriate support roles after the college responds to the application. How should parents respond to admit, deny, or wait list decisions?

Activities

- Ask parents and guardians of college students to talk with the group.
- Invite several students to participate in the discussion of the questions a student should ask when exploring college opportunities.
- Distribute a number of sample college mailings, viewbooks, and comprehensive guides to let the parents and guardians see the various options that exist for students considering a four-year college or university.
- Demonstrate how the Internet can be used to research college and financial aid options.
- Schedule a visit to the admission office at a local college or university or invite an admission counselor/officer to make a presentation. When visiting a campus, arrange for parents to see the same things that students would see.
- Schedule a visit to a National College Fair (if one is held in your city or metropolitan area) or a college fair program sponsored by the local school district.

Resources

In addition to the resources that follow, presenters may wish to acquire the following NACAC resources:

- *A Guide to the College Admission Process* (\$13e for members and \$16e for nonmembers per 100 copies)
- *Guide for Parents* (Set of 100: \$12 for members and \$17 for nonmembers, also available in Spanish)

These guides are available from National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201. Call 800/822-6285, or visit www.nacacnet.org, Publications and Resources, Marketplace.

Step by Step presenters can also gather the following local information for use as handouts:

- College brochures, catalogs and viewbooks
- Information from college websites
- A sample admission folder, including the college application

Asking the Right Questions

- Does your child want a small college or a large university? A two-year or four-year program? Large or small classes?
- Does your child want a school with a specific major or a school that offers a variety of majors and programs? Is he/she interested in liberal arts? Business? Engineering? Trade or technical?
- In what geographical area does the student want the college to be? How far away from home? Urban environment with lots of options or small town serenity? Does he/she want to live on campus or live at home and commute?
- What extracurricular activities, athletics and clubs are offered? Are there fraternities and sororities? What type of housing?
- What are the costs? How will these costs be met? How much and what type of financial aid is available?
- How diverse is the campus? What is the ethnic, racial, and religious make-up of the student body? Is it coeducational or a single-sex institution? Is it political or non-political?

Once your child has had an opportunity to review these questions and come up with at least tentative answers, it is time to involve the school counselor once again. The counselor can relate these answers to the student's academic profile including grades, rank in class, test scores, and student activities. With the help of the counselor, the student can make a list of colleges that meet his or her specific needs and are consistent with the student's academic profile.

A Note on the Right College

Every student aspires to find the right college and it is very possible to achieve that goal. Students and parents should keep in mind, though, that there is seldom just one right school or 3,000 wrong schools. In reality, there are a number of right colleges and universities waiting to be discovered by students.

More important is finding a college that is right for the student, and that the goals and personality of the student are well matched with the college. Students who think first about who they are and what they want are more likely to choose a college that fits them. The use of interest and personality inventories may be useful to help students understand their

personality, learning style and identify careers that may best suit them.

Gathering Information About Colleges

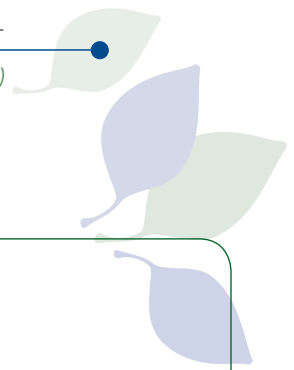
With his or her list of colleges in hand, the student should begin to learn as much as possible about each school. The search may begin in the guidance office and continue on the Internet.

Many school guidance offices offer technology to assist students in making a list of colleges and finding out more about specific colleges. Guidance offices may collect brochures and catalogs from a variety of colleges. Students can browse through college guidebooks and books on the college application and financial aid process (available in the guidance office, libraries and local book stores).

The Internet is also a rich source of information on colleges. Most schools and public libraries offer free access to computers and the Internet. Students can visit comprehensive college and financial aid websites, as well as the websites of specific colleges.

The search for the right college may not be over until the student has participated in a college fair and visited college campuses, if possible. Some schools and community organizations provide field trips to local colleges. Parents and guardians should encourage this information-gathering process and participate with their children.

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Ask the Right Questions Checklist

When helping your student determine postsecondary options, use this checklist.

College Size	Large	Medium	Small	
Class Size	Large	Medium	Small	
Type of Institution	Two-Year	Four-Year		
Majors	Liberal Arts	Business	Engineering	Trade or Technical Other _____
Geographic Area	Urban	Suburban	Rural	
	Far from Home	Close to Home		
	On campus	Commuter		
Extracurricular Activities	Athletics	Clubs	Fraternities/Sororities	Other _____
Costs	High	Mid	Low	
Financial Aid	Participates in federal programs		Does not participate*	
Campus Diversity	Ethnic	Religious		
	Co-ed	Single-sex		
	Political	Non-political		
Special Considerations	_____			

***Be very cautious about considering a school that does not participate in federal student aid programs.**



College Breakdown

1. Preparing

Talk – talk with your family, your high school counselor, friends, coaches, and anyone else who has served as a positive role model for you about your hopes, dreams, aspirations, fears, and desires for your future.

Learn – engage your education, learn how to study and take the most challenging courses that are available and appropriate for you. A strong academic performance in high school demonstrates to a college you are ready for the academic challenges you will face there.

Participate – get involved in a few extracurricular activities you really enjoy and commit to them. Strive to become a leader in that activity. Start writing for the school newspaper in ninth grade and work your way up to editor senior year. Life on a college campus is more than classes and a college wants students who will enrich the experience for others.

Plan – what do you need to do between today and when your college applications are due to make yourself a viable applicant to the college or university of your choice? Are you taking the necessary courses? What standardized tests are required?

2. Researching

Learn as much as you can about schools that interest you to discover if they are right for you. You should learn a lot more than just whether or not they offer your possible major. Empower yourself by having the necessary information to make knowledgeable decisions. Fortunately, learning about colleges has never been easier. The information you should be looking for is usually just a click away.

Some questions to help you get started:

- How much does it cost to attend and might you qualify for financial aid? (The schools' online Net Price

Calculator is a good place to start, but contact the admission/financial aid office to discuss aid options).

- What types of financial aid are available?
- What resources are available? How do they support a student with learning differences or who is physically challenged?
- What activities and clubs are available?
- What are your housing options?
- Does the college have a career guidance and placement office? Pre-professional advising (pre-med, pre-law, pre-vet, etc.)?

Your counselor will be able to help you think of many, many more questions that you should be considering.

And if you can...visit the college or university. There is no substitute for first-hand experience.

Resources to help your research:

Financial Aid: www.studentaid.ed.gov

Campus Safety: <http://ope.ed.gov/security>

General Information About Schools:

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>

www.collegeresults.org

<http://nsse.iub.edu>

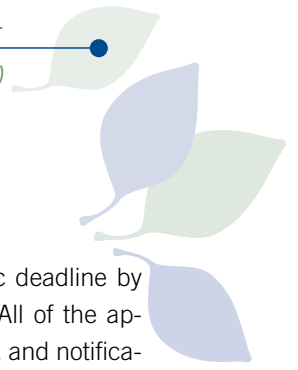
www.nationalcollegefairs.org

3. Applying

Actually applying for admission to a college is not as intimidating a task as you may think. Yes, you will need to complete forms online; gather information about yourself, your family, your activities; and, most likely, you will need to write a personal statement. It is all very doable. Your counselor is there to help—ask.

Some things for you to remember:

Do not miss deadlines—submitting an application for admission or financial aid after the deadline may automatically make you ineligible for consideration.



Fill out the FAFSA and/or additional financial aid forms because financial aid procedures can differ from school to school. No application for admission can be due prior to October 15. This is a bonus for you!

You need to be the sole author of your application—complete it yourself. You may ask for advice, but the words need to be yours.

No college should ask you where they rank on your list. You are not obligated to tell a college where else you are applying.

You should never feel pressured into applying to a college—admission officers are there to tell you about opportunities and give you accurate information.

*Different application plans
have different requirements
and obligations.*

Be sure you understand them:

Early Decision – if you apply Early Decision, you are committing yourself to attend that college if admitted. You file the application early in senior year and are notified of the college’s decision around the end of the fall semester. You may have only one active Early Decision application filed at a time.

Early Action – you apply to the college during fall of your senior year and the college notifies you well before their Regular Decision deadline as to their decision. You are not obligated to attend the school. You may submit Early Action applications to multiple colleges.

Single Choice Early Action or Restrictive Early Action – this is the same concept as Early Action, BUT the colleges that use this form will restrict your ability to apply Early Action or Early Decision to other colleges.

Rolling Admission – a college will make its admission decision soon after an application is completed. Decisions are released on a “rolling” basis.

Regular Decision – A college has a specific deadline by which all application must be completed. All of the applications are evaluated, all decisions made, and notification letters are then mailed to all applicants.

Deciding

Once the admission offices have notified you of their decisions, you need to make your decision as to which school you will attend. It is a big decision, and an important one

- Take your time, carefully evaluate all of the information and make the choice that is best for you.
- No college can require you to commit to attending prior to May 1, the National Candidates Reply Date, with the exception of Early Decision or NCAA athletic scholarship programs.
- If you have received financial aid offers, compare them carefully. Determine exactly what your out-of-pocket cost will be to attend each school.
- Attend prospective student events at the colleges to which you were admitted.
- Talk to your family, your counselor and those you trust.
- You should never submit an enrollment deposit to more than one school. It is an unethical practice that may result in your acceptances being withdrawn by the colleges involved.
- Once you have decided, notify the colleges that you will not attend and request to have your application closed.
- If you have been offered a spot on a college’s Wait List, learn what you need to do to be an active member of the Wait List.
- Be sure that you have a place to attend if you are not eventually offered admission off the Wait List.

The School Counselor: A Valuable Resource

Counselors are one of the best resources your student has; they are students' allies throughout middle/high school and the entire college admission process. It is in students' best interest to meet with their counselors regularly. Counselors can:

- Review the student's academic record, suggest areas that need improvement and recommend courses that qualify for college admission.
- Provide specific information on a student's high school performance—rank in class, test scores and grade point average are all details that colleges ask for when a student applies.
- Help the student identify the questions (and find the honest answers) that start the admission process. These questions include “Do I want to stay near home? Does the college have my major? What clubs, sports and activities are offered?” and the others listed earlier in this section.
- Suggest schools that might match a student's answers to those questions.
- Show students where to find more information, such as books, catalogs, brochures, websites, and DVDs, on either the admission process or a specific college or university.
- Recommend evening programs that may be of value; refer students and parents to the guidance department website; remind students and parents to carefully read all information that is sent home about the college admission process.
- Clarify or explain terms, ideas and experiences that students encounter during their research, campus visits or interviews with college representatives.
- Help students meet deadlines for filing applications and taking college admission tests.
- Provide the necessary forms and explain the criteria students must satisfy to qualify for financial assistance.
- Write a letter of recommendation to colleges or universities, and help the student select teachers who can write letters of recommendation.
- Offer the emotional support, warmth and encouragement that students need during the college admission process.

Ask Your Student's Counselor

1. In what subjects can my student improve?
2. Can you recommend courses that will count toward college credit?
3. What is my student's class rank and GPA?
4. What are important questions to ask when considering an institution?
5. Ask about specific schools the student is interested in.
6. Where can I find more resources?
7. Are there after-school programs that would be helpful?
8. Clarify any terms or steps you're confused about.
9. Reaffirm deadlines.
10. What financial aid is available?
11. Who would you suggest to write a letter of recommendation for my student?
12. What else can I do to encourage my student?

Prepare for College Checklists

Junior Year

1. Often junior year grades are the final grades that will influence the college application.
2. Continue involvement in activities that will develop leadership skills; update the academic and extracurricular portfolio. If you are not involved in extracurricular activities or work, it is not too late.
3. Register for the October PSAT/NMSQT; register for SAT, ACT and SAT Subject Tests in the spring.
4. Set up the college application process checklist, college folders and calendar.
5. With your family, begin to learn about financial aid (grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study).
6. Meet with the school counselor to discuss the preliminary list of colleges; continue to research colleges of interest. Aim for a final list of three to eight colleges.
7. Attend college fairs and visit college campuses during spring break and summer vacation.
8. Choose meaningful summer activities: academic or enrichment programs, volunteer activities or employment.
9. Begin preparation for the application process (draft essays, assemble portfolios, contact coaches if you are an athlete, consider letters of recommendation, etc.).
10. Continue saving for college.

Senior Year

1. Continue to monitor academic progress throughout the senior year... No Senioritis!
2. Continue involvement in activities that utilizes leadership skills; update the academic and extracurricular portfolio.
3. Take college admission tests as needed: SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, and have test scores sent to the appropriate colleges.
4. Update the college application checklist and college folders. Write due dates on the calendar and meet them.
5. Complete all portions of the college application and submit on time. Make copies of everything.
6. Complete financial aid applications (for grants, scholarships, loans and work-study). This may include the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), the CSS Profile (if required), and the college's financial aid forms.
7. Set up interviews and plan final visits to colleges.
8. In the spring review offers of acceptance, and compare financial aid packages, then make a decision of which college to attend.
9. Notify all colleges of your decision by May 1. Send required deposits.
10. Plan meaningful summer activities and pack for college.



SAT and ACT

Colleges and universities may require either of these standardized tests for admission. To determine which test students should take, ask their high school counselors.

For SAT details, visit www.collegeboard.com; for ACT details, visit www.actstudent.org.

Gathering Information About Colleges

Every college and university in the nation produces an array of written information, including brochures, catalogs, viewbooks, and related materials. These materials are mailed directly to students who call, write, or email the admission office and request this information. The information sent to students by the college will be up-to-date, while general college guides and other resources may be dated. However, students shouldn't make decisions based solely on photographs or other public relations materials. Read and think about the academic and extracurricular offerings at each college.

College Fairs and High School Visits

One-on-one conversations with college admission counselors or alumni representatives can give students and parents considerable information about colleges and universities. Such contact with representatives from a variety of schools can be most easily accomplished by participating in college fairs and college night programs when they are offered in your school or community.

NACAC sponsors the National College Fair program, which offers more than 50 college fairs and more than 30 performing and visual arts fairs in major cities and metropolitan areas across the nation. Students can register for free at www.gotomyncf.org. When they register, they will receive a bar code that colleges will use to collect data (rather than filling out the old information cards). Representatives from hundreds of colleges are present at these fairs to explain their academic programs, admission requirements, extracurricular activities and answer questions. Similar programs are offered by counselors in many school systems. Parents are encouraged to participate in these programs.

To benefit from a college fair, students should use their list of important college characteristics (see *Asking the Right Questions* on page 304) to choose which colleges to visit at the fair. Students should also read fair materials to discover which colleges will attend the fair. Then, students and families can plan which college booths to visit first so that students are sure to meet with the representatives of all the colleges that interest them. Students should also write down a list of questions to ask every college representative with whom they speak. It may be helpful for students to bring a small notebook to jot down notes on their conversations with each college representative.

College admission representatives are also available to visit with students in their high school. The school counselor usually assists in scheduling these visits and maintains a calendar of

colleges and visitation dates. Many admission representatives schedule both group meetings and individual appointments during these school visits. College fairs and high school visits permit the student to explore beyond the information contained on the Internet and in publications and guidebooks. These visits allow students to personalize questions that are tailored to their specific needs.

Campus Visits

As students refine their list of colleges, encourage them to visit campuses of colleges in which they are interested. In fact, parents should accompany their student to each campus as the experience will be informative for all. The time to visit a campus is after the student has looked at several sources of information about a school and decided that he or she would like to see the campus. Whenever possible, try to visit a college while classes are in session and students are on campus. There is no charge for visiting a college and no obligation to apply to that college. **See pages 240-244 for more material about campus visits and college comparisons.**

To make the most of a college visit, be sure to call the admission office a few weeks before the visit and make an appointment to take a tour, meet with an admission representative, or attend an information session. Many colleges also have programs that coordinate overnight visits so that prospective students can spend the night with a current student in a residence hall. Some students may wish to talk with a particular faculty member or coach or to see a part of the campus not likely to be on the usual tour, so it is even more important to make arrangements in advance.

The visit should include a meeting or interview with an admission officer, visiting a class or two, and discussions with students and faculty. The interview and class observation will provide the student with a unique opportunity to get a real sense of the college experience. Encourage your child to ask questions of students, admission officers and professors who are most qualified to provide answers about their college.

Most colleges recommend that students meet with an admission representative, but only a few require interviews as a part of the application process. As a result, these meetings are usually viewed as an opportunity for the student and the college to get to know each other better, and not as an evaluation of the student. Still, it is important for a student to make a good impression. Therefore, students should make an appointment in advance, be prompt, be dressed neatly and appropriately and be well prepared. To get the most out of an interview, the student should research the college before the interview and bring questions based on that information and on the student's interests and needs. The student should

answer questions truthfully and completely, but it's perfectly acceptable to say that he or she does not know the answer. The interview is also a perfect opportunity for students to talk about their academic and personal strengths.

Students may meet with an admission professional or a student interviewer. Some colleges also offer the option of interviewing with alumni of the college. If alumni interviews are available, the applicant for admission will be contacted. If a college does not offer an interview, do not worry. Instead, convey information the college should know in the college application materials.

Make sure your child spends enough time to determine if she or he feels comfortable in the college surroundings. After the visit, students should write a thank-you note to the interviewer(s) and tour guide(s).

If time, distance, or money precludes visits to the colleges that most interest the student, he or she might want to visit nearby colleges that may be similar. For example, visiting the main campus of a local state university will give the student a feel for large, public, residential universities. A virtual tour can also be informative, but neither option can take the place of a personal visit. Counselors highly recommend that students visit a college or university before they make the final decision to study there. Many colleges sponsor free or inexpensive visits to campus for specific students (e.g., visits for gifted athletes or prospective engineers). The student should ask the counselor or check with the college to determine if there are special visitation programs for which he or she might qualify.

The School Counselor

As the student continues to investigate college options, encourage him or her to visit the school counselor. Counselors know a great deal about specific colleges and universities. If they are unable to answer a question immediately, they have the resources to find the answer or help students locate the needed information. They can also help clarify information from other sources.

Websites

Most colleges have websites where prospective students can learn about admission requirements, academic courses, majors, extracurricular activities, social life, faculty, academic departments, graduation requirements, alumni, and career placement. Virtual tours of campus are helpful, but they do not substitute for actual visits to college campuses and conversations with college students and professors. Using the college's website or the admission office's email address, students can often request that information about the college be sent to them. Some colleges set up specific email addresses or Internet chat rooms for current students to talk with prospective students about the college.

Many colleges prefer that students apply for admission on the Internet. (The application fee, high school transcript, and letters of recommendation may be mailed to the college.)

When exploring a college website, students should not limit themselves to the admission office or prospective student pages. Many college sites offer links to a variety of *unofficial* websites: personal home pages of current students and faculty, sites set up by student organizations, and the student-run newspaper are examples of pages that can give students a more detailed and informal look at the college. Many colleges also have Facebook and Twitter accounts where students can sign up to receive information or speak to the admission office.

Also, there are many comprehensive college admission websites. These sites are designed for students and families and provide information about college selection, admission, and financial aid. Examples of comprehensive sites are:

- College is Possible: www.collegeispossible.org
- College Board: www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org
- College View: www.collegeview.com
- Hispanic Colleges and Universities: www.hacu.net
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities: www.hbcuconnect.com
- Jewish Student Life: www.hillel.org
- KnowHow2Go: www.knowhow2go.org
- Virtual College Tours: www.campustours.com, www.ecampustours.com

There are many financial aid websites, some of which also include financial planning and estimators of financial need. Some examples are:

- College Savings Plan Network: www.collegesavings.org
- The Financial Aid Information Page: www.finaid.org
- Financial Aid Search Through the Web: www.studentservices.com/fastweb
- Federal Government Student Financial Aid Programs: www.fedmoney.org

Ask a school counselor for more information about college and financial aid websites on the Internet. Many colleges have produced videos about their schools.

Students can acquire a great deal of basic information through the study of any one of a number of good college guides or reference books. These books present a snapshot of the college. However, parents or guardians and students should be cautious of publications that rate colleges and universities or their programs. Most college rating systems are not comprehensive or objective and should not carry much weight in the decision-making process.

Applying to College(s)

As the junior year of high school ends, your child may have already made some decisions about colleges on the initial list. Colleges that do not fit the student's needs can be eliminated from consideration. Colleges that are especially appealing should be investigated more thoroughly.

It will be valuable to meet with the school counselor to review the information obtained and gain the counselor's perspective of the colleges on the list. However, don't expect the counselor to create the final list of schools or rank the final choices. The counselor's job is to help students make good decisions, not make the decisions.

The number of colleges to which students should apply is up to the individual student, although counselors recommend a range of between three and eight schools. These should all be schools that the student would be happy to attend. They should cover a range of selectivity and financial cost. Students should apply to at least one school to which they are sure to be accepted.

During the spring of the junior year, summer, or very early in the senior year, the student should visit the websites of the colleges to which he or she has decided to apply and determine how to apply for admission and financial aid. Most have online applications, which should be treated with the same level of professionalism as a paper applica-

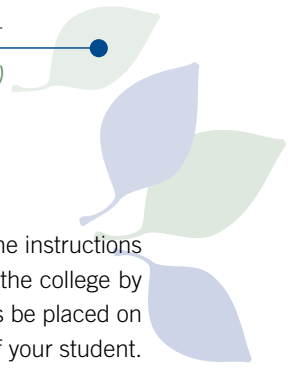
tion. Students should write and edit essays or responses before submitting the application online. The student and parent or guardian should review all applications to determine what actions need to be taken and to learn the deadlines for each application. Write down all of these deadline dates on the family calendar and make every attempt to complete the application ahead of schedule. Utilize the school counselor throughout the college application process. He or she will see that school-generated information is forwarded to the colleges to which the student will apply, but students should follow up with counselors to ensure the information has been sent.

The student and parent or guardian should review all applications to determine what actions need to be taken and to learn the deadlines for each application.

Organizing the College Application

Follow these steps to help students organize their college information and applications.

1. Make and keep a separate folder or file for each college.
2. Keep notes on each college and put them in the appropriate file.
3. Use a college application checklist to record due dates for each admission or financial aid requirement (e.g., applications, transcripts, test scores, letters of recommendation, essays, interviews, or financial aid forms). Then note on the checklist the date when each requirement is completed.
4. Use a calendar that has room on which to write notes. Record due dates, college fairs, interviews, college visits, and special programs on the calendar.
5. Read promptly all information sent by the colleges. Add to the checklist the deadlines for applications, test scores, recommendations, interviews, etc.
6. Set up columns of likes and dislikes, pros and cons for the different characteristics the student has decided their ideal college must have. Take particular note of special programs and requirements. As the student decides where to apply, he or she should take into account these requirements.
7. Take time to read and think about the information provided by each college. The student's notes assist in comparing each college. Research those colleges which seem most appealing and which are a good fit.
8. Make copies of every application for admission and financial aid before submitting the application. Be sure their applications are complete before the deadlines, if confirmation has not already been received.
9. Be efficient. Students can make their application process more standardized and organized if they use the Common Application (www.commonapp.org) or Universal College Application (www.universalcollegeapp.com) when applying to multiple colleges that accept it.



Making the Application Work

The two most important steps in completing the college admission application are also the simplest: 1) read the instructions from beginning to end before starting to fill out the form and 2) send the application so it will be received at the college by the due date. For the student, the application is like a final test. Although it's true that the greatest emphasis is placed on the courses, grades and, in some cases, the test scores, colleges want to know about the personal qualities of your student. The application, essay, and interview (if available) are the student's opportunity to profile himself or herself.

The most important concept to keep in mind when assessing admission criteria is the level of selectivity at the college in question. The more applicants a college has for each spot in its entering class, the more selective that college can be. The student should assess the selectivity of a college or university during the exploration process. This information will guide the student in targeting specific schools and in determining the number of applications to make. Students should consult the high school counselor and college admission counselor if they have any questions about the competitiveness of their application.

Awaiting the Results

When the application has been reviewed by the college or university, a number of possible responses can come back to the student.

If the student has done his or her work carefully in choosing which schools to apply to, the chances are reasonable that an acceptance letter will be forthcoming. If offered admission by more than one college, the student must weigh the choices carefully and make a final decision.

Should the student be granted conditional admission or placed on a wait list, she or he should consult with the school counselor. Conditional admission could mean that the student must meet additional requirements. The counselor can assist in evaluating the likelihood that the student might move from wait list status to admission or in appealing a decision if the student feels that his or her application has not been given proper consideration.

Once the student notifies a college that she or he is accepting an admission offer, notification should be sent to other colleges that also offered admission, telling them that the student will not be attending. This allows these colleges to extend their offer to another student who may be on their waiting list. Under no circumstances should the student indicate an intention to enroll at more than one college.

Parts of the Admission Folder

When a student applies to college, the college admission office collects a folder of information to consider as it makes a decision about the application. Parents should be aware of the parts of an applicant's folder. As one admission representative said: "Students don't apply to colleges, folders do."

See more about applications on pages 267-278.

The most important concept to keep in mind when assessing admission criteria is the level of selectivity at the college in question. The more applicants a college has for each spot in its entering class, the more selective that college can be.



The Application Packet

The application includes basic biographical information such as birth date and family information. Students may be asked to write essays, which are intended to acquaint the admission committee with certain student experiences, strengths and weaknesses, and writing ability. This is where students have the opportunity to present themselves in the best possible light.

Academic Record

The most important factor in the applicant's folder is the high school academic record. Many consider the academic record to be the best indication of later college success. The program of study, specific courses, credits earned, and the grades the student received are aspects of the record that admission officers will consider in evaluating the student's transcript (the student's official academic record). Colleges pay special attention to the challenging courses the student has successfully taken. Fortunately, the student has much control over his or her academic record.

When a student's record is compared with that of his or her classmates, he or she is assigned a class ranking relative to the others in the class. Class rank is important as a means of showing admission officers the level of competition the student has encountered and how well he or she has achieved compared to the competition. Not all high schools compute class rank. Most high schools compute grade point average (GPA), which is a method of summarizing grades earned in academic subjects or all subjects. Some schools give extra weight to the GPA for honors, accelerated, Advanced Placement (AP), and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and calculate a weighted GPA. The GPA can be determined for each year and/or cumulatively (e.g., an average of the GPAs earned in grades 9, 10, and 11 would yield a cumulative GPA for grades 9 through 11.)

College Admission Tests

Standardized tests (the SAT and ACT) have been the focus of much discussion in recent years. More institutions are re-evaluating the overall role of the tests in the admission process and seem to be placing less emphasis on the importance of the test results. A few colleges have decided not to require college admission tests as part of the application process. Some colleges accept academic portfolios in lieu of or in addition to standardized test results.

The colleges that require college admission tests will use the scores in several ways. First, they may look at the scores as one way of predicting a student's success in college. Second, colleges may use scores to compare students who come from similar backgrounds and schools or from different geographical areas. Finally, colleges may use test scores to help place students in appropriate courses. Students who plan to take a standardized test may improve their performance by attending classes to acquaint them with the tests, using test prep computer software, or by taking free practice tests available from the test publishers often available on the Internet or at bookstores. However, the best preparation is hard work in school.

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Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are prepared by teachers, counselors and others who are significant in a student's academic, extracurricular or employment experience. These letters are an important part of the admission folder. Teachers may comment on the type of contributions the student made to the class by using specific examples. The counselor may highlight strengths that would differentiate this applicant from other candidates for admission and provide an overall appraisal of the student. The employer can comment on a student's maturity and ability to manage a variety of responsibilities. The letter of recommendation allows the writer to go beyond the information requested in the general application and tell the admission committee about the student's unique qualities and characteristics.

Student Activities and Employment

Although the student academic record is the primary factor in determining admission, the student's record of involvement in activities (both inside and outside of school) can be significant. Out-of-school activities such as work, Scouting, church groups, and volunteer activities should not be overlooked. Many college applications request information about a student's extracurricular involvement, work or volunteer experience, and summer activities. Students who have maintained an extracurricular portfolio will be able to complete this portion of the application easily.

Membership in an organization is not enough; the level of involvement and accomplishment is what matters. It is better for a student to be involved in one activity as a *significant contributor* to that activity than to be involved superficially in a number of organizations and activities. Some examples of being a significant contributor include serving as an officer in the Key Club, writing regularly for the school newspaper or yearbook, becoming an Eagle Scout, or being on the planning committee for a community service project or school social event.

The Golden Rule

As the student finalizes the list of colleges and begins filling out the applications, follow the Golden Rule of the college admission process: *Never apply to a college that you would not gladly attend if offered the choice.*

If the student researches colleges thoroughly, only applies to the ones that meet his or her needs and interests, and follows the Golden Rule of Admission, the student will improve his or her chances of gaining admission. It also sends a signal to the college that the student is sincere about attending. During the admission process, the student has certain rights and responsibilities, which are contained in a policy written by NACAC and endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Review these rights and responsibilities with your son or daughter. NACAC has developed the Statement of Principles of Good Practice, a code of conduct to guide institutions and individual counselors as they guide students through the school-to-college transition.

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The Parent and Guardian's Role in the College Admission Process

The application period can be a time of anxiety for students. Help them by seeing that they follow the procedures properly and meet all deadlines. Be an active participant in the exploration process and offer guidance as your student weighs information and creates the list of schools to which he or she will apply. Be certain that all admission requirements are met in accordance with required deadlines. With your child, file all required financial aid forms by the deadline. Colleges may require one or more of the following financial aid forms:

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), required by all colleges for applicants for need-based aid and/or loans from state and federal sources. There is no charge to submit the FAFSA.
- CSS Profile of the College Scholarship Service, required by some colleges and universities (mostly private). Check to determine whether each college requires the CSS Profile and send the Profile only to the colleges that require it. There is a fee for processing the Profile and sending it to each college.
- The college may have its own financial aid form, which is returned directly to the college and for which there is no fee.
- Financial records as requested by the college, most often copies of the parents' or guardians' and student's federal income tax returns.

The college application process can be time consuming and detract from routine student responsibilities. Make sure that students keep up with all schoolwork and maintain good study habits during this time. Encourage patience, persistence and good humor.

If students have applied to a range of schools, they will have a choice of schools to select from. Should a negative response be received, however, provide consolation and support. When good news is received, seize the time to praise and congratulate your child. It will be a very happy time for everyone.

