Springfield Township High School

Post-Secondary Planning Guide

2026-2027

School District of Springfield Township

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Dear Class of 2028,

Over the next year we will work closely with you as you plan for life after high school. Whether you are looking to go on to college, the military, and/or vocational training, our goal is to provide you with as much information as possible to assist you as you make this important decision about your future. We encourage you to explore different possibilities and consider all of the options available to you.

We have prepared this guide to help you plan for college. The materials provided to you are Springfield High School's Counseling Department's guidelines and recommendations. Since each student has different goals and needs, we encourage you to meet with your counselor individually. We recommend that you use this resource throughout your junior year, over the summer, and into your senior year. Answers to many of your questions will be found in this guide.

Starting in January, please schedule a meeting with your counselor and parents to discuss your post-secondary plans and to go over the application process.

We understand this process can seem overwhelming but we are here to assist you along the way.

Sincerely,

The School Counseling Team

Table of Contents

1. **Forms**
    a. The College Application Process at STHS
    b. Getting Organized: A General Timeline
2. **Naviance**
    a. What is Naviance?
3. **Standardized Testing**
    a. College Admission Testing
    b. ACT-SAT Comparative Feature Chart
    c. SAT/ACT General Information and Dates
4. **The College Search**
    a. Where to Begin
    b. The College Search
    c. Campus Visits
    d. Glossary of Admission Terms
5. **Application Components**
    a. Factors Involved in College Admission
    b. The Common Application & The Coalition Application
    c. Personal Statement / Essay Writing Tips
    d. Preparing for the Interview
6. **Special Categories**
    a. Student Athletes
    b. NCAA Eligibility Guidelines
    c. Service Academies
    d. Suggestions for Students with Learning Differences
7. **Financial Aid**
    a. Websites
    b. PA Resources
    c. Scholarships
    d. Sources of Financial Aid
8. **Helpful Websites**

The College Application Process at STHS

1. Required Forms

- All Forms can be found on the High School Counseling Website.
- **Permission to Release Records Form & Activities Sheet**: Complete this once and submit to your counselor
- **Transcript Request Form** (specific to your counselor). A google form that must be completed every time you submit a college application. **Turn these in 2 weeks prior to your deadline** to ensure everything is processed by your college on time.
- **Counselor Brag Sheet:** Many colleges require a counselor letter of recommendation, speak to your counselor if you would like a counselor letter and complete the brag sheet.

2. Important steps to ensure your applications are complete.

- Login to Naviance- see your counselor if you need login information
- If you are using the Common Application, you **MUST** link your Common Application with your Naviance account. To do this you must first sign the FERPA waiver on your Common Application. (Go to "My Colleges" in the Common Application, click on "Recommenders and FERPA". The FERPA instructions and waiver will appear if you have not signed it). Then, log into Naviance and go to "Colleges I'm Applying to" and "Match Accounts" and follow the instructions to match your Naviance and Common Application accounts. **If you have questions about FERPA, see your counselor before answering that question.**
- Colleges that are not on the Common Application need to be added manually
- **Teacher Recommendations**: Log-in to Naviance to request your teacher recommendations using the link on the bottom of the page in "Colleges I'm Applying to" Please make sure teachers are aware of your deadlines or when you plan to apply.
- **Test Scores:** Visit collegeboard.org or act.org to have scores submitted directly to the colleges (for a fee). **SAT/ACT scores are not reported on the transcript**. Some colleges accept self-reported SAT/ACT scores from the application, check with your college, this will save you money
- Self-reported transcripts (STARS): STARS Record Some colleges require to complete a self-reported transcript, this step must be completed in order for the application to be considered complete.

3. Tips

- Stay Organized, keep track of requirements and deadlines
- Apply early, don't wait until the last minute- aim for October/November
- **DO NOT wait for the transcript or letters of recommendations to be completed, submit** your part of the application first, then complete the transcript request form and those will be sent.
- Check your email frequently, your counselor and colleges will contact you for missing information. It is important to stay on top of your applications and to follow up.
- For students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, please see your counselor as you are eligible for college application fee waivers at many colleges.

Getting Organized: A General Timeline

JUNIOR YEAR: NOVEMBER THROUGH JUNE

- Begin researching colleges, visiting schools, and obtaining information
- Establish a "Colleges I'm Thinking About" list in Naviance
- Meet with your counselor for a post high school planning conference with parents
- Begin taking standardized tests (SAT/ACT)
- Fill out Counselor Brag Sheet, **provide to your counselor before the summer**
- Ask teachers to write recommendation letters, preferably before the summer
- Attend a Spring College Fair visit: www.nationalcollegefairs.org
- Look into applying for a summer enrichment program or internship

JUNIOR YEAR: SUMMER

- Continue visiting, gathering information
- Continue to volunteer and stay involved, perhaps attend a summer program or internship
- Narrow down your "Colleges I'm thinking about" (5-7 schools)
- Move "Colleges I'm thinking about" to "Colleges I'm applying to" in Naviance
- Register for account with the Common Application, www.commonapp.org - after 8/1
- Request two teacher letters of recommendation electronically through Naviance after 8/1

SENIOR YEAR: SEPTEMBER-JANUARY

- Complete Student Activity Sheet & Records Release form, turn into guidance
- Complete Transcript Request Forms-1 for each college
- Complete STARS for schools that required self-reported test scores
- Register for another SAT/ACT if needed
- Release scores directly from www.collegeboard.org and www.actstudent.org
- Proofread and refine all college essays
- Investigate scholarships, submit applications for any scholarship you can
- Complete the FAFSA (opens 10/1) or complete FAFSA opt-out form
- Continue to visit colleges and meet with college representatives scheduled at STHS
- Attend Financial Aid Night Presentation
- Find out if your college requires the CSS profile and make sure to meet deadlines
- Maintain your grades, 1st quarter and mid-year grades are often requested from colleges

SENIOR YEAR: JANUARY-MAY

- Continue to research scholarships and apply
- ED candidates who get accepted should withdraw their applications from other schools
- Review your acceptances and revisit campuses if necessary
- Talk to your parents, counselor, teachers about making your final decision
- Review financial aid packages thoroughly before deciding
- Notify the college you plan to attend and send a deposit
- Accept the financial aid award letter by following the instructions given by the college

What is Naviance?

Springfield Township High School uses a college and career planning program called Naviance Family Connection. Naviance compiles student data such as GPA, test scores, assessments, and extracurricular activities in one place where it can be accessed by teachers, students, and families in order to make informed decisions as you plan for your future. The use of Naviance is important throughout high school and becomes an integral part of the college process junior year.

Accessing Naviance Family Connection:

- **Website**: https://www.connection.naviance.com/sdst or visit the High School Website www.sdst.org and click on the "Naviance" link on the left hand side of the main page
- **User ID and Password**: Username will be your school or personal email and a password that you created. If you need help accessing your Naviance account, contact your counselor to reset your username or password.

Through Naviance at Springfield you will have access to:

- **Academic profile:** GPA, standardized test scores
- **Scholarships & Enrichment Summer Programs:** links to access hundreds of scholarships and opportunities for summer enrichment.
- **College Visit Schedule:** An up-to-date calendar of the college representatives coming to SDST is available on Naviance.
- **Tools:** Resume writing tool, Student Activity Sheet, journal
- **Career Resources:** Starting in 9th grade students complete career surveys in Naviance. If you are struggling to figure out your future goals, meet with your counselor and we can reset some of these surveys for you to try again
- **College Research:**
    - ***College search***: Set criteria to conduct your own extensive searches and save your college list.
    - ***Super Match***: Find the best fit school for you and add to your college list.
    - ***College Look Up:*** Provides a basic profile of the college, including a link to its website
    - ***College Compare:*** Pick two or more colleges and Naviance will produce a table of data based on past SDST applicants to the college you selected.
    - ***Scattergrams:*** A visual on how SDST students have fared. It plots the average SAT or ACT/GPA of accepted students and compares you.
    - ***Much More!*** Visit Naviance to begin.

College Admission Testing

Most colleges in the US require/accept college admission testing. High School grades are the most important measure of your readiness for college level work but college admission test scores, in combination with your high school records, are also an indicator of probable college achievement.

ACT: http://www.actstudent.org

SAT Reasoning Test: College Board

TOEFL: http://www.ets.org/toefl

The Test of English as a Foreign Language is used to evaluate the English proficiency of those whose native language is not English. The test consists of four sections: Listening, Structure, Reading, and Writing. Testing is recommended for students at the 11th grade level or above.

Fairtest: http://www.fairtest.org -TEST OPTIONAL

A comprehensive listing of colleges and universities that are test-optional and DO NOT require the SAT's or ACT's for acceptance.

Important Information about testing

- Springfield Township High School CEEB Code: 393515 (list this when registering so that we receive your scores)
- DO NOT change your personal information on the registration from one test to the next or your records could be lost or delayed. DO NOT use nicknames, you must use the same name you use to apply to colleges, the name that appears on your official transcript. See your counselor if you have questions.
- Students with disabilities must have accommodations approved by the testing organization, see your counselor.

SAT vs. ACT: Current Test Comparison (2026-27)

The table below shows the comparison between the digital SATs and ACTs

	SAT (Digital)	ACT
Length	About 2 hr 14 min; 98 questions. Taken digitally in the Bluebook app.	Required sections (English, Math, Reading): 125 min, 131 questions. With optional Science: about 2 hr 45 min (171 questions). Optional Writing adds 40 min. Paper and online options.
Sections	Two sections, each split into two adaptive modules: Reading & Writing (2 x 27 questions, 32 min each) and Math (2 x 22 questions, 35 min each).	Three required sections: English (35 min), Math (50 min), Reading (40 min). Science (40 min) and Writing (40 min) are optional.
Scoring	400-1600 scale; Reading & Writing and Math are each 200-800. Adaptive: Module 1 performance affects Module 2 difficulty.	1-36 scale for each section and the Composite. Composite averages English, Math and Reading. Science (if taken) gets its own score plus a STEM score but does not affect the Composite.
Guessing	No penalty for guessing; no advantage to leaving questions blank.	No penalty for wrong answers; answer every question.
Score Choice	Send a single test day's scores or all SAT scores. Section scores from different days cannot be mixed. Some colleges require all scores regardless.	Choose which test dates to send. Some schools require all scores; some superscore. Sections from different dates cannot be mixed when sending.
Content	Reading & Writing: short passages with one question each (vocabulary in context, grammar, evidence). Math: algebra, advanced math, data analysis, geometry/trig. Built-in graphing calculator available throughout.	English: grammar and rhetoric. Math (45 questions): includes more geometry and trig. Reading: longer passages. Optional Science: data interpretation and scientific reasoning. Optional Writing: 40-minute essay.
Reg. Fee	$68- includes four score reports. International testers pay an extra $43.	$70 for English, Math and Reading; +$5 for Science; +$25 for Writing. Includes reports to you, your school and up to four colleges.
Fee Waiver	Covers two free test administrations, unlimited score reports, and college application fee waivers at participating colleges.	Based on household income and location. Covers registration for a limited number of test dates (sources differ between two and four; confirm with ACT or your counselor), plus additional score reports and application-fee waivers at participating colleges.
SSD (Accommodations)	College Board Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). School SSD Coordinator submits the request and documentation via SSD Online. Once approved, accommodations apply across College Board assessments. Extended time is set per module.	Requested through ACT's own accommodations process via the school's Test Accommodations Coordinator. Extended time lets students pace themselves across sections. Extra breaks and other supports available. Not available for standby testing.

Fees and policies are subject to change. Confirm details at collegeboard.org and act.org before registering.

SAT/ACT General Information and Test Dates

1. Many colleges require that you send your official SAT/ACT/SAT Subject test scores DIRECTLY to each college you apply. Go to www.collegeboard.org or www.actstudent.org to send your scores. Many colleges however, are moving toward "self-reported" test scores, see each college's individual policy regarding test scores since there is a fee associated with sending scores.

2. Students can send your SAT and ACT scores for NO charge to four schools at the time of registration and up to the date of the test. School can receive scores for an additional fee after that date (see respective sites for fees)

2026-2027 SAT Test Dates and Deadlines

The table shows the testing dates with their deadlines and when the late fees are given for the SATs

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Deadline (late fee)
November 7, 2026	Oct 23, 2026	Oct 27
December 5, 2026	Nov 20, 2026	Nov 24
March 6, 2027	Feb 19, 2027	Feb 23
May 1, 2027	April 16, 2027	Apr 20
June 5, 2027	May 21, 2027	May 25

2026-2027 ACT Test Dates and Deadlines

The table shows the testing dates with their deadlines and when the late fees are given for the ACTs

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Deadline (late fee)
December 12, 2026	November 6, 2026	Nov 29
February 27, 2027	January 22, 2027	Feb 9
April 10, 2027	March 5, 2027	Mar 23
June 12, 2027	May 7, 2027	May 25
July 10, 2027	June 4, 2027	Jun 22

Visit www.collegeboard.org or www.actstudent.org for registration fees, late registration, sending scores, and other general information and fees.

For students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, please see your counselor to inquire about fee waivers, these are also linked to college application fee waivers.

Visit for a comprehensive up to date list of colleges that allow self-reporting of SAT or ACT Scores: https://www.compassprep.com/self-reporting-test-scores/ (this list is subject to change, always check with the college to confirm accuracy).

Choosing a College

The US has thousands of colleges and universities: public and private, large and small, urban and rural, religious and secular, general and technical. Don't fixate on one school. Compare several, since each has its own strengths. Ask yourself these questions before you commit:

- **Purpose:** Why are you going to college, and what are the alternatives?
- **Priority:** What matters most to you in a school?
- **Major:** Does the college offer your intended major, and how strong is the program?
- **Experience:** How do you want to spend four years (academics, activities, social life, internships, jobs, co-ops)?
- **Distance:** How far from home do you want to be, and what will trips home cost by plane, train, or bus?
- **Community:** Do you want classmates who share your interests, or a mix of fields?
- **Setting:** Do you prefer a city, suburban, or rural campus?
- **Size:** Do you want a very large, very small, or mid-sized school?
- **Social life:** How important is it to you?
- **Rigor:** How challenging do you want your academics to be?

The College Search

1. Search for colleges. Use Naviance and/or College Board. Both have college search tools that let you filter by the factors most important to you.
2. Develop a college list. Consider these factors:
    - ☐ Location: Close to home, a specific state, urban, suburban, or rural
    - ☐ Size: Very large, large, medium, or small
    - ☐ Type: Public, private, religiously affiliated, HBCU, vocational, two-year, or four-year
    - ☐ Majors offered: Do you have a specific major or career goal in mind?
    - ☐ Special programs: Support for students with learning disabilities, tutoring, etc.
    - ☐ Extracurricular activities: ROTC, theater, athletics, music, community service, Greek life, etc.
    - ☐ Financial considerations: Will cost influence your decision? Will your family apply for financial aid? Will merit-based scholarships be critical?
    - ☐ Admission criteria: Do your GPA and SAT/ACT scores meet the school's criteria? Is the school test-optional? Does it require interviews?

3. Meet with your counselor in the spring of junior year for your post-secondary planning meeting. We encourage parents to attend, since they play a big part in the planning process.
4. Refine your list. Include at least one of each of the following. See the “Glossary of College Admissions Terms” for definitions.
    - ☐ Reach school
    - ☐ Match school
    - ☐ Safety school
5. Visit colleges. Visiting is the best way to find out whether you’ll like a school, and we strongly recommend it before you make a final decision. If you can’t visit in person, take a virtual tour. Amtrak offers travel discounts for college visits.
6. Talk to admissions representatives when they visit Springfield.
7. Explore college websites and social media accounts.
8. Attend college fairs, such as the Philadelphia National College Fair.

Campus Visits

No publication or website can give you a complete picture of a college. A campus visit is the best way to see for yourself what student life is really like. Most colleges welcome visitors and offer open houses and tours. Plan ahead: call the Admissions Office or check the school's website to make an appointment.

While on campus:

1. **Take a tour.** Check out the dorms, library, student union, and dining hall.
2. **Talk to current students.** Remember that they're sharing their own personal views.
3. **Sit in on classes.** If you can, speak with a faculty member or the chairperson of a department that interests you. Some schools also let you spend a night in a dorm.
4. **Meet a coach** if you're interested in playing a sport.
5. **Get a feel for campus life.** Read the campus newspaper and check student bulletin boards.
6. **Visit the Financial Aid Office** and ask questions.
7. **Ask about the Career Placement Office.** How good are its services?
8. **Ask questions** of students, admissions counselors, and tour guides (see below).

Questions to ask

Academics

- How large are most classes?
- Who teaches them: professors or graduate assistants?
- Is there a core curriculum, and how restrictive is it?
- When must you declare a major, and which majors are most popular?
- What can you tell me first-hand about the _____ department?
- What percentage of students study abroad?

Campus life

- Tell me about housing. Are some dorms much better than others? Do many students live off campus, and why?
- What are weekends like? Are there alternatives to the party scene?
- Where do students come from? Is the community diverse?

Overall experience

- What do you like best about your experience and education here?
- Why did you choose this school, and what others did you apply to?
- Which kinds of students are happiest here, and which are least happy?

Can't visit in person? Take a virtual tour on the school's website or at campustours.com.

Glossary of Admission Terms

EARLY ACTION

Non-binding plan where you apply to college early (usually around November 1st) and hear back around December 15th. You are NOT obligated to attend and you MAY apply to more than one school under Early Action plans. You can either accept the offer or wait until May 1st to decide. (Some schools have restrictions, check each school's website for details)

RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION

A non-binding early application option allows candidates to apply to only one Early Action institution and NO institutions under Early Decision. Admitted students usually have until May 1st to decide, which allows them to compare financial aid awards across institutions.

EARLY DECISION (frequently referred to as ED)

For students who are sure of the college they want to attend. It is understood that when a student applies Early Decision, they are committed to attending that college. The deadline is usually around November of the senior year. This is a binding agreement, therefore if you are accepted under an Early Decision plan, you must withdraw all other applications and enroll at the institution. You can only apply to ONE school under early decision. Some schools have multiple early decision deadlines ED I and ED II.

OPEN ADMISSION

The college admissions policy in which the only criterion for entrance is a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

REGULAR DECISION

Students apply to a college by a specific date and are reviewed after that date. Notification letters are mailed in mid-spring.

ROLLING ADMISSION

An admissions procedure by which the college considers each student's application as soon as all of the required credentials, such as school record and test scores, have been received.

CSS PROFILE

The CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE (often written as CSS PROFILE), short for the College Scholarship Service Profile, is an application distributed by the College Board in the United States allowing college students to apply for financial aid. It is primarily designed to give private member institutions of the College Board a closer look into the finances of a student and family. It is much more detailed than the FAFSA.

FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (known as the FAFSA) is a form that can be prepared annually by current and prospective college students (undergraduate and graduate) to determine their eligibility for student financial aid (including the Pell Grant, Federal student loans and Federal Work-Study).

HONORS PROGRAM

A special program at certain colleges that offers the opportunity for educational enrichment, independent study, acceleration, or any combination of these. The application criteria are more stringent. Some colleges automatically consider you for an honors program, others require an additional/separate application process.

MATCH SCHOOL

Schools where your credentials for admission are similar to those admitted in previous years.

REACH SCHOOL

Colleges where the percentage of admitted students is small. These are often Ivy League Schools and highly selective colleges. A reach also refers to schools where your credentials are not as strong as those students who have been admitted in past years. Your SAT scores/GPA might be lower than the average student accepted in the past.

SAFETY SCHOOL

Schools where your credentials are stronger than most and where you're fairly confident you will be admitted. Keep in mind, it is not a "safety school" if you cannot afford to attend or if you don't want to attend.

STATE AFFILIATED COLLEGES

Universities in Pennsylvania which are statutorily established as an instrumentality of the commonwealth and receive an annual appropriation. There are 4 in Pennsylvania:

Pennsylvania State University, Temple University, Lincoln University & University of Pittsburgh

STATE SCHOOLS

The system comprises 14 state-owned schools called The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). They are the only colleges and universities in Pennsylvania that are publicly owned and governed. These include:

> Cheyney University, Commonwealth University - Bloomsburg, Commonwealth University - Lock Haven, Commonwealth University - Mansfield, East Stroudsburg University, Indiana University of PA, Kutztown University, Millersville University, PennWest California, PennWest Clarion, PennWest Edinboro, Shippensburg University, Slippery Rock University, West Chester University

STARS- SELF-REPORTED TRANSCRIPT AND ACADEMIC RECORD SYSTEM

Many colleges and universities require students to self-report grades. This is a final step for many applications and applications will be considered incomplete without this.

Factors Involved in the College Admission Process

1. Academic Record/High School Transcript

Your grades, starting in 9th grade, are the best indicator of your ability to complete academic work. Colleges will consider rigor of coursework selected and will look for an upward trend in grades. Colleges evaluate students on the difficulty of their course selection in comparison to the most rigorous curriculum offered and how the student compared with their classmates.

2. Standardized Tests

Most schools require scores from a college admission test, the SAT or ACT. Usually they are not looking for a specific score, but scores that fall in a certain range. Many schools are now test-optional. Reference college admissions policies for standardized testing requirements.

3. Personal Statement/Essay

Most applications request an essay or personal statement. This shows your ability to express yourself and communicate something other than what is found on your application or résumé.

4. High School Standing

The official GPA and class rank is calculated at the end of the junior year based upon final grades in grades 9-11. Extra weight is given to Honors and Advanced Placement courses. Colleges and universities receive this information when transcripts are submitted in the fall of senior year. Mid-year grades and first quarter grades are often requested.

5. Recommendation Letters

Written evaluations by your teachers and counselor are an important part of the evaluation process. They can mention special qualities or circumstances that are not listed anywhere else.

6. Extracurricular Activities & Community Service

Colleges are looking for meaningful extracurricular involvement and leadership development opportunities that compliment your academic profile. Community service, internships, athletics, clubs, research and work experience are all examples of extracurricular activities. .

7. Interview/Audition/Portfolio (if applicable)

Some colleges require an interview, sometimes these are optional. If the interview is optional, strongly consider if this is a strength of yours. Auditions and portfolios might be required for certain majors, check each college's requirements for your major.

8. Number of Applications

Many competitive colleges fill a large percentage of their enrolling class through early admission programs. It is beneficial to apply early to institutions that have a rolling or priority admissions policy.

The Common Application

Apply to college with Common App | Your future starts here

The Common Application is the preferred application for almost 900 colleges and universities. Students must create an account for the Common Application and can apply to multiple colleges using the same applications. All member institutions give equal consideration to the Common Application and the college's own application, if they have both. Some member colleges and universities require a supplemental application form in addition to the Common Application.

Common Application Essay Prompts *

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

* **These are the previous year's questions and are subject to change from year to year.**

Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success

The Coalition provides a single platform of online tools to assist in the experience of applying to college. The Coalition for College is a diverse group of more than 170 distinguished colleges and universities across the U.S. that are fully aligned with the vision and mission of the Coalition. These institutions have demonstrated their commitment to access, affordability, academic outcomes, and student success, and are leaders in actively building supportive environments that foster a sense of belonging for all students.

Some Coalition members will exclusively use the Coalition App, while many other Coalition members will accept applications from a number of sources. Admissions offices do not provide preferential treatment to applicants based on which of their approved technological platforms they decide to use to create and submit their application.

For more information & prompts visit: *http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org*

Personal Statement/Essay Writing Tips

1. The best essays are the ones that help Admissions Officers understand your character better, or what factors have influenced your life.
2. Don't write the "safe" essay. Pick a topic that only you can write about. It could be something that others also experienced but make sure to have your own personal take on how it affected you.
3. Think of the essay as a "slice-of-life" rather than a chance to tell your whole life story. Focus on one incident that shows what you are really like.
4. The most effective essays take a small, seemingly insignificant incident and elaborate on it and make it come alive. Avoid the generic and get specific. Don't write that you're well-rounded or that many people have impacted you. Tell the reader what you've done, how you've been influenced and by whom.
5. Keep it positive. You can write about a negative experience, but be careful just make sure you show how you handled it or became a stronger person. Don't complain. If you have endured difficult circumstances, it is appropriate to share your story. But don't point fingers, whine, or sound like you've given up. It's important to demonstrate perseverance and resilience. The better essay will talk about how you have dealt with and hopefully overcome the obstacles presented.
6. The essay is a creative way to express your unique qualities, something that is not already in your application. There is no need to share your participation level (hours per week and weeks per year) because colleges ask for that information on your activity list. Use every opportunity to provide insight into who they are and impress the admissions office. This doesn't mean you can't talk about your extracurricular activities in your essay, but talk about *how* and *why* you're involved in these activities, rather than listing them all.
7. The essay should give insight into your personality and individuality. If you don't get across some aspect of your personality, you haven't written a successful essay.
8. Rather than describing what you're like ("I'm a leader, I'm a great guy"), let it come across in your essay ("show" don't "tell").
9. Find your "voice." This means use a natural conversational style in your writing. The language should sound like you. "Voice" conveys the personality behind your words. As a rule, you might want to steer clear of anything you would feel uncomfortable saying aloud in a class discussion or in a friendly conversation.
10. Directly address the prompt and stick to the subject at hand. Consider the *who, what, where, when* and *why* of the prompt, and once you've written a full draft, make sure you have addressed each one of the parts.
11. Unique essays stand out from the crowd. If the reader wants to drop everything and meet you in person, you've written an excellent essay.

12. Proofread! If you're using the same essay for multiple colleges, avoid using the name of the wrong school. Have someone else proofread before you submit- however, there is nothing more discouraging than an over-edited essay. Most experienced readers can pick out essays where adults have edited and added more sophisticated words that don't sound like you.

13. Don't talk about rankings. Many students love focusing on the numbers when they are writing their "why this college" essay. They believe they are flattering the college by telling them that the reason they want to attend is because the college is highly ranked in *U.S. News & World Report*. Schools are aware of their rankings but they want to know why *you* want to attend.

14. Remember: the essay is only ONE piece of the review process that determines your admission. There are many other factors that are equally, if not, more important.

15. Read the question very carefully. These prompts are not as simple as they appear. Many have layers and sub-questions. Make sure you fully understand the question before answering it.

For more resources on writing your college essay visit:

https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays

Preparing for the Interview

- Be on time and err on the side of being early.
- Dress professionally.
- Be prepared: research the school before your visit.
- Answer questions to the best of your knowledge, and don't be afraid to admit when you don't know something.
- Be ready to discuss your SAT/ACT scores, class rank, GPA, and coursework.
- Be yourself, and relax!
- Come prepared with questions of your own.
- Send a thank-you note to your interviewer afterward.

Potential Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in our college?
3. What can I tell you about our college?
4. Who in your life has influenced you most?
5. Why do you want to major in _____?
6. What do you do in your free time?
7. Tell me about a challenge you overcame.
8. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
9. Does your high school record accurately reflect your effort and ability?
10. If you could change one thing about your high school experience, what would it be?
11. Can you recommend a good book?
12. How do you plan to get involved on campus outside of the classroom?
13. What three adjectives best describe you?
14. Tell me about your community service.
15. Do you have any questions for us?

Check with each admissions office to learn its interview policy. Students often need to schedule interviews on their own.

Student Athletes

1. Send a letter/email of interest your junior year to coaches at the colleges indicating your interest in their program. Your letter should include:

- Your interest in the athletic program and your particular sport.
- That you will be forwarding your application to the admissions office.
- Your experience in the sport, position, any stats.
- A list of honors or awards in the sport.
- List the contact information for anyone who can be contacted regarding your credentials. Advise them if they will be writing you a recommendation or contacting them in the future on your behalf.
- Mention your availability for a visit/interview.

2. Keep detailed records of every meeting with recruiters/coaches.

3. Prepare an athletic resume.

4. Check with your high school coach or athletic director on the level of play you should consider and have them make contact on your behalf.

5. Prepare a highlight video to forward to the coach showcasing athletic skills in a competitive situation. Accompany it with a statistics summary.

6. At the completion of your junior year, file the NCAA Eligibility form online (for Division I and Division II) at NCAA Eligibility Center. At this time, an official transcript of grades 9-11 should be sent to the Eligibility Center from the High School Guidance office. Complete a "Transcript Request Form" before the summer and bring it to your counselor or Mrs. Kane. Remember to also send your **official** SAT or ACT scores to the NCAA by entering the code #9999 as a reporting selection when you register for the exam. Visit https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/ for all eligibility rules and requirements.

For more information visit:
https://professionals.collegeboard.org/guidance/prepare/athletes/college

NCAA Eligibility Requirements

the table shows the 16 course rule differences between Division I and Division II

Division I 16 Core Course Rule	Division II 16 Core Course Rule
4 years of English	3 years of English
3 years of mathematics (Algebra I or higher)	2 years of mathematics (Algebra I or higher)
2 years of natural/physical science (including 1 year of lab, if offered)	2 years of natural/physical science (including 1 year of lab, if offered)
1 year of additional English, math OR natural/physical science	3 years of additional English, math OR natural/physical science
2 years of social science	2 years of social science
4 years of additional courses (any area listed above or foreign language or comparative religion/philosophy	4 years of additional courses (any area listed above or foreign language or comparative religion/philosophy
Earn a core-course GPA of at least 2.3 to be considered a full qualifier	Earn a core-course GPA of at least a 2.2 to be considered a full qualifier
Ten of the sixteen core courses must be completed before the seventh semester (senior year) of high school. Seven of the ten core courses must be in English, math, or natural/physical science.	

*For more information and to view sliding scales visit www.eligibilitycenter.org or www.2point3.org

Service Academies

The United States Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY: www.usma.edu
The United States Naval Academy (USNA), Annapolis, MD: www.usna.edu
The United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), New London, CT: www.uscga.edu
The United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), Kings Point, NY: www.usmma.edu The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), Colorado Springs, CO: www.usafa.edu

IMPORTANT: The process for applying to the service academies begins in the spring of the junior year.

1. Visit the academy's website for basic requirements.
2. Apply for a nomination: contact the offices of both U.S. Senators and your U.S. Representative for their procedures on applying for a congressional nomination. (The Vice President can also nominate candidates.)
3. Complete the online Candidate Questionnaire to start a file with the academy.
4. Take the SAT and/or ACT and send your scores electronically (via College Board or ACT).
5. Begin the academy application on its website.

Requirements will include:

- Medical exam (through DoDMERB, the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board)
- CFA (Candidate Fitness Assessment)
- Teacher evaluations

Admission criteria differ among the academies. USMMA requires a congressional nomination, and the Coast Guard Academy does not require one. USMA, USNA, and USAFA each have their own application and nomination process. Visit each academy's website for admission information.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC): A college program offered at many colleges and universities across the United States. It prepares young adults to become officers in the United States military. Students who earn an ROTC scholarship receive a paid college education and a guaranteed post-college career, and in exchange they commit to serve in the military after graduation. Interested students can find more information on each branch's official ROTC website. The deadline for the four-year high school scholarship varies by branch and changes each year, so students should check each branch's deadline and contact the ROTC coordinator at the college.

Sources: Citadel ROTC scholarship deadlines; Rep. Kean's academy nominations FAQ

Suggestions for Students with Learning Differences

Students diagnosed with learning differences have undergone evaluation by a qualified professional who provided formal documentation. While high school accommodation plans such as IEPs or 504 plans mandate specific educational services under law, post-secondary institutions operate differently. Colleges are required to provide reasonable accommodations rather than replicating high school support systems. To access these services, students must formally disclose their diagnosis to the college's disability services office.

Most post-secondary institutions ask for current evaluation results completed within the last three to five years. Although sharing a previous IEP or 504 plan is helpful for demonstrating accommodations that proved successful in high school, it typically does not fulfill the documentation requirements on its own.

We strongly recommend contacting the disability services office during your college search, as available levels of support vary significantly across different campuses.

These recommendations are based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education release, "Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities," available via the Transition Guide.

Additional online resources are listed under the "Helpful Websites" section of this guide.

Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Differences and Disabilities

Please note this is not an exhaustive list.

- **American University** (Learning Services Program), Washington, DC
- **Beacon College**, Florida
- **Curry College** (Program for Advancement of Learning, PAL), Massachusetts
- **DePaul University** (PLuS Program), Illinois
- **Landmark College**, Vermont
- **Northeastern University** (Learning Disabilities Program), Massachusetts
- **Rochester Institute of Technology** (EMPOWER Program, Academic Support Center), New York
- **University of Arizona** (SALT Center), Tucson, Arizona
- **University of Connecticut** (Beyond Access Program), Connecticut
- **University of Denver** (Learning Effectiveness Program), Colorado
- **University of Iowa** (REACH Program), Iowa
- **University of Massachusetts Dartmouth** (College NOW/START Program), Massachusetts
- **Widener University** (Academic Coaching), Pennsylvania

Financial Aid

We encourage everyone to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA now opens earlier than it used to. The 2027–28 form, for students in the class of 2027, opened in September 2026, ahead of the traditional October 1 date. Even if you do not demonstrate financial need, the FAFSA establishes your eligibility for most federal, state, and institutional aid. Federal student loans are available regardless of income, though parent loans require a credit check and loan limits apply. Check studentaid.gov for current terms.

File financial aid forms as early as possible, since some schools run out of funds. Check each college's priority deadline.

Sources of Financial Aid Available:

1. Federal government
2. State government
3. Institutional (the college itself)
4. Private

Types of Financial Aid

There are two types of financial aid: **merit-based** and **need-based.**

Merit-based aid is offered based on academic, athletic, artistic, or other criteria evaluated in the admission process. Many outside organizations also offer awards based on those same criteria, as well as community service, character, and leadership qualities. The most common merit awards are college-sponsored scholarships, government-sponsored scholarships, and athletic scholarships for talented Division I and II athletes.

Need-based aid is the most common form of financial aid. Most colleges and universities require a student to submit the FAFSA to be considered for need-based aid, and some also require their own forms or the CSS Profile. Families who plan to apply for need-based aid should start researching early in the junior year to estimate their eligibility. The FAFSA calculates a Student Aid Index (SAI), which replaced the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Every college must post a net price calculator on its website to help you estimate your final costs.

Forms

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): The FAFSA is required for anyone seeking federal and state aid, and one form applies to all types of federal and state aid. Complete it online at studentaid.gov. Processing times vary, and after you submit you will receive a FAFSA Submission Summary. FILE EARLY! Before you begin, the student and each parent who will contribute information should create an FSA ID at studentaid.gov.

CSS Profile: The CSS Profile is offered through the College Board at cssprofile.collegeboard.org, where you can also find the list of colleges that require it. Colleges and scholarship programs use it to award non-federal institutional aid. The Profile typically

opens October 1. Check the deadlines at your colleges and file at least two weeks before your earliest deadline.

Important Telephone Numbers/Websites

- Pennsylvania State Grant/Loan Division (PHEAA): (800) 692-7392 or www.pheaa.org
- Federal Student Aid Information Center (FAFSA): (800) 433-3243 or studentaid.gov
- CSS Profile Customer Service: (866) 630-9305 or cssprofile.collegeboard.org

Sources: Education Department opens 2027-28 FAFSA early (WJLA); FSA Partner Connect, Federal Student Aid Information Center; CSS Profile contact page; CSS Profile home

Financial Aid Resource Guide

Start with the FAFSA, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), and each college's financial aid office. These resources can help families identify grants, scholarships, work-study, and other ways to pay for education.

1. Essential Financial Aid Websites

Federal Student Aid / FAFSA: studentaid.gov
Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), create an FSA ID, review federal aid options, and use the Federal Student Aid Estimator.

PHEAA: Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency: www.pheaa.org
Pennsylvania's primary resource for state grants, scholarships, and financial aid guidance.

BigFuture: (College Board): bigfuture.collegeboard.org
Explore colleges, estimate costs, search scholarships, and plan how to pay for college.

College Scorecard: collegescorecard.ed.gov
Compare colleges by cost, graduation rates, typical student debt, and post-college earnings.

EducationPlanner.org: www.educationplanner.org
Explore college and career planning information and guidance on paying for education.

2. Pennsylvania-Specific Programs and Resources

PA State Grant Program (PHEAA): www.pheaa.org/grants/state-grant-program
Need-based grant assistance for eligible Pennsylvania residents attending approved postsecondary institutions. Complete the FAFSA and monitor the PHEAA/GrantUs account for any additional requirements.

PA Ready to Succeed Scholarship (RTSS): www.pheaa.org
Scholarship program for eligible students. Review current academic, financial, and enrollment requirements and application steps through PHEAA and GrantUs.

Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program:
www.pheaa.org/funding-opportunities/grow-pa-scholarship-grant-program
Supports eligible students pursuing approved in-demand career fields in Pennsylvania. Awards may be up to $5,000 per year; service and repayment conditions apply. Check the official site for current deadlines and eligibility.

PA Department of Education- Financial Aid:
www.pa.gov/agencies/education/resources/student/empoweru/financial-aid
Central resource for Pennsylvania financial aid programs and scholarship-search resources.

PA FAFSA Go!
www.pa.gov/agencies/education/resources/student/empoweru/resources-for-institutions/campaigns/pa-fafsa-go

FAFSA completion guidance, resources, and support for Pennsylvania students, families, and schools. Pennsylvania has a FAFSA completion or authorized opt-out requirement for high school graduation; check current state rules and guidance.

PHEAA Special Funding Opportunities: www.pheaa.org
Explore programs that may support eligible students with foster care experience, career-training students, blind or deaf students, and eligible Pennsylvania National Guard members or families. Program requirements vary.

3. Scholarship Search Websites

Fastweb www.fastweb.com
Scholarship matching based on student profiles and interests.

Scholarships360 scholarships360.org
Scholarship database, eligibility details, and application advice.

CareerOneStop Scholarship Finder
www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-scholarships.aspx
U.S. Department of Labor resource for scholarships, grants, and fellowships.

Scholarship America scholarshipamerica.org/students
Scholarships sponsored by organizations, employers, and foundations.

Bold.org bold.org/scholarships
Search scholarship opportunities with a range of eligibility criteria.

Sallie www.sallie.com/scholarships
Scholarship search tools and college financing information.

4. Other Funding Sources to Explore

College financial aid offices: Ask about institutional grants, merit awards, need-based aid, special-circumstance reviews, and appeal procedures.

Local community foundations: Check foundations serving the student's hometown or county for local scholarships.

Employers: Parents' employers, unions, and students' own workplaces may offer scholarships.

Community organizations: Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Clubs, religious organizations, and other civic groups may offer awards.

Military-connected scholarships: Explore opportunities for eligible students with military affiliations.

Career and technical education: Students attending Eastern Center or pursuing certificate programs should ask about program-specific grants and workforce funding.

Naviance: If available through the school, check scholarship resources and local scholarship listings maintained by the counseling department.

5. Important Reminders for Pennsylvania Families

Check deadlines early. Pennsylvania FAFSA deadlines vary by student type and institution. Confirm the deadline for the applicable aid year with PHEAA and the college.

Compare net price. Compare each college's total cost of attendance minus grants and scholarships. Review loans and work-study separately from gift aid.

FAFSA is free. Use the official StudentAid.gov website. Families do not need to pay a third-party service to submit the FAFSA.

Monitor accounts and email. Check college portals, StudentAid.gov, and PHEAA/GrantUs for missing documents, requests, and award updates.

Verify every scholarship. Confirm the sponsor, eligibility rules, deadlines, and whether any fee is being requested. Be cautious of guarantees or pressure to pay.

Counseling Department Note: Program details, award amounts, deadlines, and eligibility rules can change. Always confirm current information on the official program website or with the college financial aid office.

Sources of Financial Aid

Federal Government: Federal Student Aid

- The federal government offers several types of financial aid, including grants, federal student loans, and work-study opportunities.
- Eligibility requirements vary by program. Some programs are based on financial need, while others have different eligibility criteria.
- Many federal aid programs are administered through colleges and universities. Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to determine your eligibility.

Pennsylvania State Government: PHEAA

- Pennsylvania offers financial aid programs, including need-based grants and scholarships, to eligible students.
- Eligibility requirements vary by program and may depend on residency, financial need, academic progress, and enrollment in an approved institution or program.
- Complete the FAFSA and review the requirements for the Pennsylvania State Grant and other programs through PHEAA. Check your PHEAA/GrantUs account for additional requirements and deadlines.

Colleges and Universities

- Colleges and universities may offer their own merit-based scholarships, need-based grants, and other forms of financial assistance.
- Financial aid packages vary by institution. Some colleges may offer substantial institutional aid, including grants that reduce the cost of attendance.
- Contact each college's financial aid office to learn about available programs, eligibility requirements, application deadlines, and whether additional forms are required.

Private Scholarships and Other Sources

- Many organizations offer scholarships to students based on factors such as academic achievement, community involvement, intended major, career interests, or family affiliations.
- Potential sources include community organizations, local foundations, religious organizations, professional associations, employers, and civic groups.
- Ask your parents or guardians to check with their employers about scholarships, tuition assistance, or educational benefits available to employees and their families.
- Explore reputable scholarship search websites and local scholarship opportunities through your high school's counseling department.

Helpful Tip: Start by completing the FAFSA, researching Pennsylvania financial aid programs, and checking with each college's financial aid office. Apply early, keep track of deadlines, and remember that scholarships and grants generally do not need to be repaid, unlike loans.

Helpful College & Career Websites

Use these online tools to explore post-secondary options, complete applications, prepare for standardized testing, investigate career pathways, navigate financial aid, and review resources for college athletics or learning differences.

1. General Information and College Search

College Board www.collegeboard.org
Research higher education institutions, access SAT and AP testing details, and utilize post-secondary planning tools.

EducationPlanner.org www.educationplanner.org
Comprehensive platform offering assistance with career exploration, school searches, financial guidance, and future planning.

Peterson's www.petersons.com
Offers higher education searches, test prep materials, graduate program details, and general educational resources.

CampusTours www.campustours.com
Provides access to virtual tours, campus media, and information for scheduling institutional visits.

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) www.nacacnet.org
Admissions advice and support materials designed to guide families through searching and applying.

College Navigator nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator
A Department of Education resource to evaluate institutions by expenses, enrollment numbers, academic majors, and completion rates.

CollegeData www.collegedata.com
Evaluate institutions, review admissions profiles, and access post-secondary planning features.

2. College Applications

Common App www.commonapp.org
Submit applications to hundreds of participating post-secondary options using a centralized online system.

Coalition for College www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org
Review application procedures and explore participating Coalition member schools.

Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) www.passhe.edu
Explore Pennsylvania's fourteen state-owned universities, including degree offerings, admissions guidelines, and costs.

3. Standardized Testing and Test-Optional Admissions

SAT College Board satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat
Complete test registration, review upcoming exam dates, find practice materials, and access score reports.

ACT www.act.org
ACT exam registration, schedule details, prep tools, and score distribution services.

FairTest fairtest.org
Look up institutions with test-optional policies. Always verify specific testing rules directly with each admissions office.

TOEFL www.ets.org/toefl.html
English proficiency assessment information for non-native English speakers when required by admissions.

4. Career Exploration and Military Service

Occupational Outlook Handbook www.bls.gov/ooh
Investigate occupations, job expectations, necessary training, earning potential, and growth projections via the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Mapping Your Future mappingyourfuture.org
Guidance for career pathways, post-secondary education, financial aid options, and money management skills.

MyFuture myfuture.com
Explore post-high school choices, including vocational routes, college pathways, and military enlistment.

Today's Military www.todaysmilitary.com
Overview of armed forces branches, enlistment opportunities, training programs, benefits, and military roles.

5. Financial Aid and Scholarships

Federal Student Aid / FAFSA studentaid.gov
Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and review federal grant, loan, and work-study possibilities.

PHEAA www.pheaa.org
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency details regarding state grants, regional scholarships, and financial planning.

CSS Profile cssprofile.collegeboard.org
Secondary financial application required by specific private colleges and programs to award institutional aid.

Fastweb www.fastweb.com
Free scholarship search database that matches opportunities to individual student profiles.

U.S. Department of Education www.ed.gov
Federal educational policies, updates, and national student resources.

EducationPlanner.org www.educationplanner.org
Information on college costs, financial aid, scholarship search tools, and budgeting strategies.

MySmartBorrowing www.mysmartborrowing.org
Interactive PHEAA tool assisting families in calculating how college selection impacts educational debt and repayment.

You Can Deal With It www.youcandealwithit.com
Practical financial advice and debt management tools for current students and recent graduates.

College Scorecard collegescorecard.ed.gov
Compare colleges based on average costs, graduation outcomes, student borrowing statistics, and post-grad salaries.

6. Student-Athletes

NCAA Eligibility Center web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3
Register and monitor academic and athletic eligibility requirements for prospective Division I and II student-athletes.

NAIA www.naia.org
Information regarding NAIA member institutions, varsity athletic programs, and recruitment guidelines.

PlayNAIA play.mynaia.org
Official eligibility center for students planning to participate in NAIA college sports.

7. Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) www.ncld.org
Advocacy, research, and support information for individuals managing learning differences.

Learning Disabilities Online www.ldonline.org
Articles, guidance, and accommodations advice for students with learning differences and ADHD.

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) www.ahead.org
Professional resources regarding disability services and equal educational access in higher education.

International Dyslexia Association dyslexiaida.org
Information, resources, and research dedicated to supporting students with dyslexia.

Wrightslaw www.wrightslaw.com
Comprehensive information on special education law, accommodations advocacy, and student rights.

National Center for College Students with Disabilities nccsdonline.org
National clearinghouse offering resources, campus accommodation guides, and support for post-secondary students.

Counseling Department Note: These resources serve as general guidelines. We encourage families to review specific eligibility rules and deadlines on official websites.