

**Parker's Post-Secondary
Planning
Guidebook**

Class of 2024

Preface

This booklet, **Parker's Post-Secondary Planning Guide**, is updated and reprinted annually by the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School College and Transition Counseling Office Staff. It is given each year to parents of juniors in order to provide important information as students begin planning for their post-secondary education.

The booklet includes specific information on college entrance testing, the college search process, college application procedures, financial aid, and college planning in general. Some sections are designed to raise questions about individual priorities and to offer general guidance concerning adequate high school preparation. Other parts provide information about resources available for further research. Finally, there are suggestions on a variety of alternatives for students who choose not to continue on to college at the conclusion of their high school career.

Students and parents are encouraged to contact the college counselor any time they would like assistance with post-secondary planning. The counselor is happy to meet with students and parents in the spring of junior year or early fall of senior year to establish a direction for future activities. During their second semester, all juniors will have a chance to discuss issues surrounding post-secondary planning and will also begin meeting individually with the college counselor.

In addition, the College and Transition Counseling page of the Parker website is a great place to start when looking for answers to any questions you may have when planning for post-graduation:

<https://www.theparkerschool.org/students/college-and-transition-counseling/>

We hope you will find this resource useful as you plan your educational opportunities for after high school. As always, we look forward to assisting you.

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1.0 College Entrance Testing

Students planning to attend college after graduation should take the SAT and ACT Examinations. Most Parker students take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT), offered once per year in October, and a practice ACT test which was offered this year in January. Students should plan to take the SAT offered by the College Board in the spring of the junior year and again in the fall of their senior year. The ACT is an alternative to the SAT for students who would like to try a “content-based” test rather than the SAT “reasoning” test. It is administered by the American College Testing Service.

The AP Examinations are administered each year in May and represent the culmination of college-level work in a given discipline in a secondary school setting. Rigorously developed by committees of college and AP high school faculty, the AP Exams test students' ability to perform at a college level. While Parker doesn't offer AP courses, we do offer testing for students that prepare independently for an exam.

For Nursing Students – Some colleges require students to take an additional college entrance exam called the TEAS. Individual colleges may require students to take the TEAS before applying and ask for the test scores as part of the admission process. Please make sure to check each school carefully and prepare for this test if you plan on applying as a nursing major.

Fee waivers are available to students who need financial assistance. Students that are granted fee waivers are also eligible for four free college applications. If the cost of making applications to college will be an obstacle, it is important to ask for the SAT or ACT fee waiver to ensure this benefit. Fee waivers are also available for the SAT Subject Tests. See your counselor for details.

1.1 SAT College Board Examinations

The SAT Reasoning Test is a 3 hour exam that measures ability to reason verbally and mathematically. The SAT is required by most four year colleges and some two year colleges. Registration takes place on-line at <http://sat.collegeboard.org/>. If you cannot access the site from home, you are able to register in the College Counseling office.

SAT Subject Tests have been eliminated!

The Parker School College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) High School number is 220689. Please note that the Parker School is not a Test Center. Test Centers are listed on the websites. Students are reminded to bring a picture I.D. and their registration form with them to the test.

1.2 ACT Examinations

The ACT is composed of four 35 to 50 minute sections in English usage, mathematics usage, social studies reading, and natural science reading. There is an optional writing test. The main difference between the ACT and the SAT is that the ACT is a yardstick of both reasoning ability and knowledge of specific subject matter covered in classes. If students need more information about the ACT, they should seek out an ACT guide, check with their counselor and go to the website <http://www.act.org/>.

1.3 Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations

The Advanced Placement Test (AP Test) allows current high school students to demonstrate college level proficiency achieved in demanding high school course work. A student does not need to be enrolled in a specifically designated AP course to take the exam in that subject, but it is expected that advanced study in a demanding curriculum will be necessary to perform well on Advanced Placement exams. AP Tests

are administered in early May and must be arranged for by early March. More information and study guides are available at <http://apstudent.collegeboard.org/>.

The AP exam is not required as part of the college admissions process, and many students who choose to take AP exams do so in the spring of their senior year, well after admissions decisions are made. College policies vary in how AP scores are used. Students are advised to check with the college they plan to attend to determine the college's policy on AP scores and whether an AP exam might be of use for a given student. High scores on AP exams may permit students to be exempted from certain college courses, may provide credit for some college course work, or may provide access into honors or other specialized programs.

1.4 Test Scores and Score Reports

Students' score reports are available online within a few weeks after the test. If students request that their scores be sent to colleges or scholarship programs, a report will be sent to each, usually within four weeks from the test. The Parker School will also receive a score report when the student provides our high school code number, **220689**.

For the SAT and the ACT, students may select which test date results to send to colleges since both test companies now offer score choice. (Note: with the ACT, all test scores from all test dates are NOT sent together in one file.) *Requests for scores to be sent from test companies should be made online at least four weeks before the date colleges and scholarship programs need to receive a report.* For AP exams, you will send one score report in July after your senior year to the school you will be attending. During the application process you simply self-report your scores of tests that you have already taken .

2.0 Naviance's Family Connection at Parker

Parker students are provided with accounts for Family Connection from Naviance. The link to Naviance can be found on the College Counseling page of the Parker website. This web-based service is a valuable tool for post-secondary planning. It allows students to explore their learning styles, personality types, career interests, and colleges they want to learn more about. Family Connection includes several interest and career cluster inventories, as well as an in-depth college search program which allows students to ascertain individualized and comprehensive results. It also includes a resume builder, ideal for work, the application process and keeping track of your activities.

As seniors, students will use Family Connection when applying to the schools of their choice. Most colleges accept applications online, either through the Common Application website or through their own individual websites. Seniors at Parker will link their Naviance account to their Common Application account. Teachers will upload recommendation letters and the College Counseling staff will process transcript requests via Naviance. This process allows the College Counseling staff to send all of the students' information electronically – saving time, paper, and money! In addition, the fall schedule of visits from college representatives, local scholarship opportunities, and other pertinent web resources will be available through Family Connection. It is also used as a means of communicating important information to juniors and seniors in regards to applications, deadlines, and scholarships.

3.0 The College Search

In addition to a college offering your chosen field of study, there are many factors to consider when choosing which schools to apply to. Students will start off by adding schools to their "colleges I'm thinking about" list in Family Connection and then will move some schools to their "colleges I'm applying to" list. By December of their senior year, students should have applied to at least one school which they are confident they can be admitted to and afford to attend. Their total list of schools to apply

to will contain at least the aforementioned “safety” school, some “target” schools, and some “reach” schools.

When asked, “How did you decide where to apply?” this successful senior responded:

“I first started my college search on the College Board, Big Future Search and getting an idea for what schools I was interested in visiting. My family and I started going on college tours for colleges we had already heard of and were interesting to learn more about. As I moved into my junior year, before I took the tests, I thought about where I wanted to be geographically and how close the schools I was interested in were to one another. I used my vacation time to visit several schools that were relatively close to each other (within a few hours). Once I got my standardized test results back, I started to look at what schools would be "safety", "target", and "reach" schools and visited as many schools as I could. This gave me the opportunity to see if I liked the academic atmosphere at the school, but it also showed me what the living environment was like in those areas. I had interviews, and visited classes, and asked students on the campus who were not tour guides what they thought of the school. I emailed professors in the major I was interested in before visiting to see if they had any time to talk with me about the program. I tried the food at many of the campuses, and ventured out into the towns and cities to see what there was to do off- campus. In addition, I used the college search engine on Naviance and made pro and con lists for each school.”

3.1 Variables to Consider When Choosing a College

Before beginning their college search, students should consider their interests, abilities, goals, and expectations. Students should review the course work, extra-curricular activities, or community service that they have found most interesting throughout their lives. Academic summaries, standardized testing, and feedback from teachers, coaches, club advisors, and other adults can help students assess their abilities. Career interest inventories and personality type assessments available under the “about me” tab in Family Connection may be useful in considering personal and career goals. Students are encouraged to meet with their counselor to explore all these factors.

After performing the self-reflection described above, students should consider which of the following school characteristics are important to them:

- Type of institution - two or four year, coed or non-coed, public or private
- Geographic location - region, state, distance from home
- Majors offered/curriculum - liberal arts, technical, business
- Setting - urban, rural, suburban
- Size of institution - small, medium, large, very large
- Selectivity - very difficult, moderately difficult, open
- Cost - tuition, room and board, books fees, travel, financial aid
- Diversity - race, religion, national, international, age
- Extracurricular activities - sports, entertainment, culture, religious, educational
- Housing - on/off campus, coed, single sex, special interest, size of room, food, meal plans, rules, roommates

- Facilities - building, architecture, libraries, student unions, classrooms, lecture halls, labs, recreational/athletic offerings, stores, laundry, handicapped access
- Specialized Programs - programs and services for students who are learning disabled, physically challenged, or for whom English is a second language
- Honors College – A smaller academic setting within the campus that offers more demanding course work, smaller class sizes, and often undergrad research or stipends

3.2 Computer Searches

Internet searches enable students to perform a college search, get information about specific colleges, explore occupations, and obtain additional sources of financial aid much more quickly and efficiently than by any other means. Students should take advantage of the college search, lookup, and match tools found under the colleges tab of Family Connection. In addition, there is a collection of many useful links on the College and Transition Counseling page of the Parker website under Resources.

The website <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search> can help students who want to develop a list of colleges or look for specific information about individual schools. The collegeboard.org site contains information on approximately 4000 two-year and four-year colleges. It enables students to explore colleges that match certain factors selected by students, such as degree desired, geographic location, school size, and more. Once a list is obtained, students can explore individual colleges and learn about degree programs, entrance requirements, student life on campus, and extracurricular activities.

Some other useful internet resources are listed here:

- <https://www.naviance.com/> - This is the website we use at Parker and will use starting during sophomore year to get students exploring their interests and career clusters
- <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> - National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator search tool allows side by side comparisons
- <http://www.petersons.com> - Petersons Education Center provides a wide range of information and resources
- <http://college-insight.org/> - College Insight from the Institute for College Access and Success provides statistics for any school on such topics as college affordability, graduation rates, and college diversity, including the racial and ethnic breakdown of students and professors
- <http://www.projectonstudentdebt.org/> - info about college debt and student loans including schools that have pledged to limit or eliminate the use of student loans in financial aid packages
- <http://www.collegemajors101.com/> - offers information about what you can do with dozens of majors, as well as what you can expect academically if you pursue these majors
- <http://ope.ed.gov/security> - Rates campus safety

3.3 College Representative Visits at Parker

The College Counseling Office will host between 35-40 college admissions representatives who will visit Parker to speak with students and staff.

Beginning in early-September, these college representatives will be available to meet with students in pre-arranged small group gatherings. This is an opportunity for the visiting representative to promote their school's programs. These meetings with college admissions reps are not intended to replace a personal interview or campus visit, but allow students the opportunity to gain a general impression of a college and ask specific questions about programs, activities or admissions at that college. Students should make an

effort to attend visits of schools they plan to apply to, as the rep is often the one that reads the application process.

Students should review the following suggestions:

- Develop a few specific questions to ask the representative. Questions might include: special academic interests, particular sports, support services available, or financial aid procedures
- Sign a card provided by the college which will put your name on a mailing list to receive more information from the school. If you have already visited the college or had an interview, a quick hello to the visiting admissions person provides a good way to be remembered
- Ask about off-campus interview opportunities, if interested
- Be open to schools that might not have been on your original investigating list but which seem interesting

3.4 Visiting a College Campus

A personal visit to a post-secondary institution is often the most useful step in helping students and their parents decide whether or not to apply to a particular school. Students are encouraged to make use of group tours, open house events and group information sessions as a way of obtaining first-hand impressions of schools they have previously researched.

Visits during the regular academic year provide a more accurate view of the academic and social life of a campus, but families often make use of summer vacation to visit several schools that are at a distance. When possible, it is a good idea to avoid the distortions of registration, final exams and special campus events. Several high school holidays such as Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, and February and April vacations, allow students who visit colleges to minimize the disruption to their own academic program.

Students should begin planning college visits after they have given considerable thought to their abilities, interests, and career plans. Students should always “check-in” at the admissions office of the school they are visiting. Schools track student interest, which is a college visit, an email, or a campus tour. Emailing your admissions rep directly with any specific questions is always a good idea.

Some students begin visiting colleges during the spring of their junior year. Others visit campuses during the summer between the junior and senior year. Others prefer to wait until the fall of their senior year. By starting early, the process will feel less stressful.

Students should visit the school’s website when they are interested in visiting. On the website, the student can see when they have open houses, individual and group tours, and other options that could include recruiting visits and classroom visits.

What are some questions to ask a college admissions representative?

- What constitutes a typical freshman program?
- What is the average class size of introductory classes?
- How widely used are teaching assistants on your campus?
- What departments are the strongest?
- What opportunities are there for undergraduate research?
- Is there a culminating senior year experience?
- What work-study opportunities are there?
- What is your four-year graduation rate?
- What percentage of freshmen return for sophomore year (retention rate)?
- How do you provide academic advice to students?
- How many students at the college get internships?
- What percentage of students study abroad?
- What percentage of financial need does the school typically meet?
- What is the average merit award?
- What is the average college debt that students leave with?
- What type of career services do you have?
- Do most students go home on the weekend?
- What percentage of the study body belongs to a sorority or fraternity?
- Is campus security an area of concern to students or faculty?

** Do not ask questions that can be easily accessed on the school's website **

3.5 The College Admissions Interview

College interviews can take a variety of different shapes and often differ from school to school. A lot of colleges, especially the large universities do not allow for any type of interview, while smaller, more selective colleges still use the interview as part of the application process. Some schools require an interview while others “recommend” it (which is an offer students should not refuse). The trend at colleges and universities is away from the once all-important personal interview and toward a more relaxed, general information meeting. However, the college interview can take on many forms.

- College Admissions Interview-This is done on campus in either a one-on-one setting or panel setting and can be done Spring Jr year through Fall senior year.
- Alumni Interviews- These are done by an alumni from the school that lives in your vicinity. You schedule a meeting in a public place and have about a 45 minute conversation
- High School Interview- When a school has a large number of students applying and all wanting/needing interviews, they will sometimes send a rep to the school.

- Internet (SKYPE) Interview- More and more admissions reps are utilizing technology to interview students from around the country via Skype.

As mentioned above, universities and colleges tend to have very unique criteria around their interviews. Some require it to be done before application deadlines, others prefer after the application is completed. It is your responsibility to know the specific procedure for your schools. If you are unsure, call the admissions office and ask how to go about scheduling an interview. Start early so you do not miss deadlines.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Arrive promptly, dressed in a manner which you feel represents your "best foot forward"
- Conduct yourself in a friendly, inquisitive, and interested manner
- If your parent have to drive you, they should not be a part of the interview process. This is a chance for you to talk about yourself and show your independence .
- Avoid being overly impressed by a "super salesperson" in the admissions office.
- Be sure to prepare in advance a list of questions to ask about the school. Bring a written list to be sure you don't forget your questions due to nervousness or excitement in the interview
- Avoid asking questions that can be readily answered by visiting the website. This approach enables you to make the most effective use of your limited interview time and may show a knowledge of the catalog and a thoroughness of planning on your part
- Bring a copy of your transcript. It is available through the College Counseling Office
- Take advantage of the campus tour often provided by the admissions office and given by a current student. The library, student union, freshmen housing, music, drama, and athletic facilities are areas to consider in addition to the academic classes and labs
- Talk to students in the dorms, in the student center, at the bookstore, or wherever they congregate.
- Sit in on classes if you are given the opportunity

When you prepare for an admissions interview, you should also consider how you might respond to questions asked by the interviewer.

What are some questions you may be asked by an interviewer?

- Why have you selected this particular college?
- In what academic areas are you interested? Why?
- What kind of things are you most interested in outside of school? Why?
- What type of reading matter do you enjoy? How has a certain book influenced you?
- What, in your opinion, is a college education? What do you hope to gain from college?
- Is there a certain current event you are following? Why is this event important to you?

After your interview, you should send a thank you letter to the interviewer. While a hand-written letter is always best, an email is also acceptable. A sample is provided here for your convenience.

(your address)

(date)

(name of college visited)

(address of interviewer)

Dear *(name of interviewer)*:

I was very pleased to meet with you on *(date of interview)* and would like to thank you for the time and consideration you gave to me during my admission interview to *(name of college)*.

I particularly enjoyed *(add point(s) which impressed you)*.

Sincerely,

(your signature)

(your printed name)

3.6 Summer College Planning Activities for Upcoming Seniors

Although summertime is a welcome break for most students from their high school education, it is a good time to make progress in planning for education beyond high school. During the summer before the senior year, there are several things students can do to help prepare for college applications in the fall. Listed below are some suggested activities related to college selection and the application process:

- Develop and expand your current list of schools to investigate using resources available online and the suggestions of family and friends. Summer is a good time to do the research you may not have found the time to do in the spring. Learn the competitive level of the different colleges, the entrance requirements and the difference between liberal arts and specialized majors
- Try to visit colleges that are difficult to reach during the school year. Even though the regular students may not be present, you can still gain much information about the college environment that will help you make final selections about the schools to which you want to apply
- Email colleges in which you have an interest, requesting desired information such as financial aid. Current applications may not be available on-line until late summer, and many schools use the common application
- Talk with older students who are home from colleges about which you want to learn more. They should have first-hand knowledge to share
- Review college entrance exam dates for the fall and mark them on a calendar with registration deadlines. (Deadline for registration for the first exam is during the summer)
- If you have not scored as well on previous entrance exams as you would like, you may want to use the summer for individual preparation or for an SAT or ACT prep course
- Begin a rough-draft list or resume of activities and interests. There is a resume feature in Naviance under the “about me” which is useful for entering this data. Students might want to include extra-curricular activities, honors and awards, volunteer or work experience, travel or special interests. This information will eventually be sent to colleges and is often asked about during interviews

- Try writing drafts of the types of essay questions most commonly found on applications. It helps to begin thinking of how you might respond to questions concerning books, career goals, influential people in your life, special interests, achievements and events of particular importance. Essay writing summer workshops may be offered through the Parker School. Take advantage of this great opportunity

3.7 Information for Students with Learning Differences

Students with identified learning differences may want to investigate the programs and services that are specifically designed to meet their post-secondary educational needs. Within a four-year college there are often special support services necessary for the student to succeed in regular classes. These programs also frequently provide non-credit courses which help the student identify her or his learning style and develop appropriate compensatory skills. There is often a separate admissions process to enter a Learning Differences program.

As students explore post-secondary options, they should raise questions about the availability of support services, the presence of trained learning specialists, and the provision for classroom modification, if necessary. In most instances, students should indicate in the application process the nature of the learning services they have received in high school, and the nature of accommodations that will be necessary in college, if any. If the school has a special learning support program, the student should also be in contact with the director of that program during the admissions process. Colleges that have a program for students with learning differences frequently require professional assessments that document and identify the specific learning disability of the student who is applying.

Students with documented hearing, learning, physical or visual differences which might impact their performance on college entrance examinations (SAT or ACT) may be eligible to receive special accommodations for testing. These accommodations can include additional time to take the tests, large type test booklets and answers sheets, a sign-language interpreter or a reader. These accommodations are available during specific periods of the academic year and do not cover all regularly scheduled test dates.

To be eligible for these special accommodations a student needs to either have an Individualized Educational Plan that identifies the need for these testing conditions, a "504 Plan" in force, or documentation which provides independent verification of the existence and nature of the difference signed by an appropriate licensed or certified professional. In either case, to qualify for modifications, a student also needs to be currently receiving in school those modifications for instruction and assessment that they would receive on the college entrance examinations tests. The testing companies will review all materials and determine which, if any, accommodations they will allow. Information about non-standard admissions testing is available from the College Counseling Office. Normal registration deadlines apply to non-standardized testing.

*Be pro-active- you should plan to meet with the Service for Students with Disabilities Dept. before you apply to ensure the program and services are a good fit for the student.

3.8 Information for the Student Athlete

Athletics is an area of special talent that can make a difference in the college admissions and financial aid process. At most colleges, athletics are regulated by the rules established by the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association). The NCAA has instituted several rule changes in the last few years. We suggest that student athletes do the following:

- Let the counselor know that you are interested in competing in athletics at the Division I or II level ASAP. The counselor can help you to outline the athletic recruiting process by the end of Jr year

- Inform your high school coach that you are interested in playing that sport in college. Work with the coach and ask if he or she will contact college coaches on your behalf. Give them a copy of your athletic resume
- When visiting colleges be sure that you have read the NCAA Guidelines which will inform you of the rules regarding contacting college coaches
- To be eligible to participate at the Division I or II level, students must be certified as eligible by the NCAA. We are now an NCAA Clearinghouse eligible school, so the college counselor will work with you and your high school and college coaches to ensure that you are cleared and have taken all necessary classes at Parker.

4.0 Applying to College

The Common Application (<http://www.commonapp.org>) is accepted by over 700 schools and will be used by most seniors to apply to at least some of their schools. Other schools accept applications via their own website; very few rely on paper applications. Seniors will link their Common Application account to their Family Connection account to manage their applications and request transcripts. All applications, commonapp and non-commonapp, will be tracked by the student and college counseling staff with Family Connection/Naviance.

4.1 College Admissions Policies

Explained below are the most common application plans that students may encounter during the college admissions process. ***Students should research the colleges carefully to determine which plans they offer and the specific plan details as determined by that school.***

Regular Application Deadline - Many colleges establish an application deadline by which all applications must be received. All students are then notified of the college's decisions at a uniform response date, typically on or before April 1st.

Early Decision - Many colleges offer this plan to applicants who are sure they want to attend the college. This college should clearly be the applicant's first choice. Traditionally, the deadline for early decision applications has been November 1st or 15th. Colleges then render a decision by mid-December. Some colleges also have a second round of early decision (usually in January). These later plans have the advantage of giving students more time to think through their decision. *If accepted under this plan, the student is under strong ethical obligation to attend the college and to withdraw or forego applications to all other colleges. Some colleges exchange lists of students accepted under this program.*

Early Action or Early Admission - This program is similar to early decision, except that, if admitted, the applicant is not ethically obligated to withdraw other applications and has until May 1st to decide.

Rolling Admission - Under this program a college considers a student's application as soon as all the required credentials have been received. Notification of acceptance or rejection is mailed as soon as a decision is made. Colleges that follow this practice may make their admissions decisions continuously over several months, in contrast to the practice of other colleges who accumulate their applications until a deadline date and then announce all their decisions at the same time.

Deferred or Delayed Admission - Most colleges allow an accepted candidate to postpone enrollment in a college, generally for one semester or one year.

Open Admission - An open admission policy grants acceptance to all high school graduates without regard to additional qualifications.

Candidate's Reply Date/National Decision Day - At most colleges, May 1st is the date by which accepted applicants must indicate their intention to enroll. By use of a Universal Reply Date, students may evaluate all notices of admission and financial aid awards before deciding on any one college.

4.2 The Transcript Package

In addition to the student's portion of the application, colleges and universities require a number of supplemental pieces of information which, taken together, form a student's "transcript package". This transcript package is collected by and sent from the College Counseling Office directly to each college to which a student is applying. Students request the transcript package be sent through their Family Connection account on Naviance when they add schools to the "colleges I'm applying to list" or later under the resources/transcripts option. The electronic version of the package is transmitted to most schools including all common application schools. A student's transcript package can include:

- A transcript grid of high school courses attend(ed/ing) and narrative summary for grades 9-11
- Secondary School Report
- A school recommendation letter written by the college counselor
- The Parker School Profile, a list of schools that have previously accepted our students, and an explanation of Parker assessments with links to the course description booklet and Parker brochure
- Teachers' letters of recommendation, usually one MST and one AH
- Senior year first term progress reports, mid-year reports, and final reports

Official standardized test scores need to be sent directly from the SAT and ACT companies, as applicable. This is the responsibility of the student.

It is also the student's responsibility to see that their application is complete by checking the status of their application through the student portal of each individual school.

4.3 Teacher Recommendations

Although college requirements vary with respect to teacher recommendations, it is suggested that all students get academic teacher references. Colleges prefer recommendations from teachers of courses taken in the junior or senior years. *Students should not ask more than two academic teachers to write them a reference* unless specifically indicated as necessary by a college. If a student feels that she or he may need more than two references, they should talk to the counselor. During spring of the junior year, students are provided with a printed sheet which facilitates requesting letters of recommendation from teachers and is returned to the college counseling office. The requests are then entered into Naviance. Once a student identifies the teachers they wish to ask, they should do the following:

- Be sure you allow your teacher at least **four weeks before your first college admissions deadline** to complete your recommendation as these letters take a great deal of time to write. It is preferable to ask at the end of junior year, as many teachers will start these letters over their summer break
- Be prepared to provide the teacher with information such as a written summary of activities (a resume), names of colleges to which you are applying, and a list of your personal goals in order to assist the teacher in writing the recommendation
- Check the status of the request under Teacher Recommendations on the "colleges I'm applying to" page of your Family Connection account on Naviance

It is the responsibility of the student to follow up with teacher recommendations to be sure that all letters are submitted to colleges on time.

4.4 Other Items in the Application Package

Resume/Activities Record Worksheet - This form, which outlines your extra-curricular activities, may be included as additional information and uploaded to the common application, or mailed directly to the college.

SAT and ACT Test Scores - *In most cases, colleges consider entrance test scores sent by high schools as unofficial, therefore they are not sent from Parker.* Students are responsible for having official scores sent directly from the test companies. Students may identify the colleges to which they wish to send scores on the registration material for each test administration or after taking a test by indicating this on the testing companies' websites.

First Quarter/Mid-Year Report/Final Report - The College Counseling Office will send first quarter and mid-year assessments to all schools for which an application has been sent. At the end of the fourth quarter in June, your transcript will be automatically sent to the school that you will be attending along with the June final progress report narratives.

4.5 Transcript Package Release Procedure

The Narrative Summary of Assessments of all academic work from grades 9-11 and a transcript grid of all classes taken in Division 2 and 3 serves as the student's official transcript. The narrative summary, usually two pages long, is composed for each senior in the fall, and then reviewed, discussed, and approved by the parent/guardian and student. A Summary Release form documents the approval and also serves as a release form for the documents that comprise the transcript package to be mailed or uploaded to the common application or schools.

4.6 The College Essay

The college essay is one part of the application process that gives students the opportunity to inform admissions officials about their special abilities, interests, and qualities, or about any significant factors that might set them apart from a large number of qualified applicants. As many colleges begin to doubt the usefulness of standardized test scores, college essays are being given more weight than ever in the admissions process. While a superb essay will not cancel out a poor high school record, a well-written essay can make a student with a good record stand out from the other applicants.

Colleges that ask students to write essays really do want to know the person behind the numbers. A good essay can present the student as an interesting and valuable person who is worth knowing, who is genuine, thoughtful, engaging, and able to handle what he or she has set out to do. An essay can also comment on any setbacks the student has suffered or explain any gaps in the academic record.

In general, essays are evaluated on **three basic criteria**:

1. The student's ability to use standard written English that is correctly written, punctuated, and contains correct grammar, usage, and syntax.
2. The content, substance, and depth of insight which reflects the student's ability to think about him/her self and to convey authentic feelings or opinions about a topic.
3. Creativity and originality which shows an individual who would bring qualities such as intellect, initiative, energy, and a fresh viewpoint to the college community.

Students writing college essays would do well to **avoid the following**:

- Inflating experiences, trying too hard to impress, or adopting a pompous or overly intellectual tone
- Expressions of anger or hostility toward others - bitterness
- Mere repetition of information that is available elsewhere in the application
- Undue influence by parents or other adults in the writing of the essay; the voice of an adult can easily come through an essay too strongly and drown out the authentic voice of the student writer
- General statements and clichés that make the essay unremarkable from hundreds of similar essays which are read by admissions officials; telling details and specifics makes the essay "come alive"
- Being overcautious or too eager to please the admissions committee; a mediocre essay won't hurt the applicant much, but a truly good one can help immensely

The Common Application posts the following year's prompt in late April of students' junior year

Current Common Application College Essay Questions?

- 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.
- 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?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- 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.

Supplemental Options

- Please describe the reasons that influenced you in selecting your intended field of study.
- If you could travel through time and interview a prominent figure in the arts, politics, religion, or science, for example, whom would you choose and why?
- Describe your experience in living in a racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse environment; what do you expect to need to know to live successfully in the multicultural society in the future?

There is an article with essay writing tips and some sample essays written by past Parker students available on the College Counseling webpage under Resources.

5.0 Once You're Accepted

As college decisions start rolling in, it is important for seniors to remain focused. Colleges offering acceptance will request continued reports on the student's performance. The students need to meet deadlines for financial filings and evaluate financial aid packages. The student will also need to reevaluate which factors are most important to them when deciding which school to attend. Many students find their top choice from the fall is no longer the case when spring arrives. It is recommended to visit your top choice schools after being accepted with a new perspective.

5.1 Financial Aid: Sources and Programs

MEFA hosts Financial Aid webinars in October or November for Junior and Senior parents. Stay tuned for the date and time. Also, many helpful hints can be had at www.mefa.org.

Financial aid programs are designed to assist those who, without such assistance, would be unable to meet the costs of a post-secondary education. Financial aid comes from several different sources: The federal and state government, colleges and universities, local private organizations and scholarship programs and banks. The websites <http://www.finaid.org> and <http://www.fastweb.com> may be helpful.

Merit aid is financial assistance awarded not on the basis of need, but for scholastic excellence, athletics, or other specialized talents. This is money that is given to the student that the student does not need to pay back. There is often set criteria that a student needs to meet to continue to be eligible for the aid each year.

However, much of the financial aid awarded is need-based, especially at more competitive colleges. Need will vary from college to college according to the cost of attending the school and how much the student/family is expected to contribute to the student's education. Need is not one set dollar amount.

The student/family's expected contribution (EFC) is an amount determined by a formula established by Congress that indicates how much of a student's family's financial resources should be available to pay for school. Student/family financial information is collected in two ways:

1. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov
2. The CSS (College Scholarship Service) Financial Aid/PROFILE form at www.collegeboard.org

While the FAFSA is used to apply for most federal and state aid, the PROFILE is the form used by many private institutions to determine where to dispense their institutional funds. Colleges may also require students to fill out financial aid forms specific to their given institution. In determining the financial aid package, private colleges are not bound by the analysis of need presented in the FAFSA.

The FAFSA should be filed on-line as soon after October 1st as possible (but not before). One may register for the PROFILE service early in the fall. This is especially important for students applying early decision or early admission. The organizations and colleges that are to receive the results must be identified on the FAFSA and PROFILE. One may apply on-line for both forms. An FSA ID (Federal Student Aid) is required as part of the FAFSA application. The FAFSA requires that parents and students have their own FSA ID numbers. Make sure to create a FSA ID at <https://fsaid.ed.gov/>.

A student eligible for aid will likely be offered a financial aid package composed of the following components: self aid (loans and work study) and gift aid (grants and scholarships which do not have to be repaid). Some schools vary the proportion of each kind of aid and may offer merit awards based on the student's academic performance or other factors.

The amounts of each program may vary from year to year depending on federal funding for financial aid. See <http://studentaid.ed.gov/> for more information. Some common financial aid programs are:

- Federal Direct Loans - Loans offered directly from the U.S. Department of Education to eligible students between \$5,500 to \$12,500 per year in Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans depending on certain factors, including your year in college. Subsidized loans will have their interest paid by the government while a student is in school full time
- Perkins Loan - This is a federal loan program but administered by the individual colleges and provides low-interest educational loans for qualified students who are enrolled at least half-time
- Direct Plus Loan (Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students) - Parents may borrow up to the full cost of education minus any financial aid received with this fixed rate (currently 7.21%) loan having payments beginning shortly after the funds are disbursed
- Pell Grants - These federal grants, awarded to eligible full and part-time undergraduate students, are based on financial need. The amounts vary up to \$5730 a year
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Program (FSEOG) - These federal grants, of up to \$4,000 yearly, are offered to students with exceptional need
- Massachusetts State Scholarship - Eligible students can receive grants from the state. No separate application is required as this offering is also a result of filing the FAFSA. There is also information on state grants and scholarships at <http://www.osfa.mass.edu/>
- Work Study Program - A government funded form of aid that is available to students who complete the FAFSA. The amount does not get deducted from your total bill, but the student works on campus and receives a paycheck.

5.2 Continued Academic Performance

Admissions decisions are also contingent on the successful completion of all course work, and admissions officers reserve the right to question poor second semester performance and, in some cases, to reverse an admissions decision already made.

A letter sent by the University of New Hampshire to a student whose concluding high school transcript was considered unsatisfactory contained the following statements:

"We have received a report of your final grades for the academic year and consider them unacceptable. It is clear that your admission status must be reevaluated and, consequently, I have suspended your admission.

If you wish to communicate with us about your circumstances, please do so in writing within the next five days. It is our preference not to talk with you or your parents until we have received your written communication.

We will contact you again once we have received and reviewed your statement. At that time we will make a determination as to whether it is appropriate for you to meet with us.

We look forward to hearing from you shortly."

5.3 The Wait List: Questions and Answers

Should I ask to remain active on the wait list? - Only if you are seriously interested in attending that college. If you are, then you should indicate that by informing them in writing or by returning the postcards many colleges provide for that purpose as soon as possible. If you definitely will attend if admitted, tell the college that. It is also acceptable to include any new accomplishments, both academically and personally, that you have experienced since your application was submitted.

When will I learn if I will be admitted from the wait list? - The very earliest you can expect to hear from colleges is late April, but usually not until after the first week of May. Most colleges will finalize the status of students by June 1st. Occasionally colleges will extend to students the opportunity to remain on a wait list throughout the summer.

Should I call the college? - No. Colleges will only ask you to indicate your position in writing. Until the first week or so of May, colleges rarely have any information that will be helpful to you as you try to calculate your chances.

What are my chances? - Until early May this is an impossible question for even the colleges to answer. Quite simply, they do not know. Colleges must wait to hear from all of the students to whom they have extended an offer of admission. Those students have until May 1st to respond. Often times those responses, mailed on April 30th, do not arrive until May 3rd or 4th. A college's past action regarding their wait list does not suggest what their future decisions will be. It will all depend on how many admitted students decide to enroll before May 1st.

How many applicants usually end up on a wait list? - Usually quite a few. For even a small school 300-500 is not unusual. Remember, not everybody who is offered a position on a wait list will wait to be considered. The initial number placed on a wait list usually "melts down" quite significantly.

What can I do to improve my chances? - If your transcript since mid-year is good, sending it along to the colleges may help. If you've taken on responsibilities or in any other way distinguished yourself since you applied, don't hesitate to let the colleges know. Remember, though, even if you've completely turned things around this will not make a difference if the college does not go to its wait list.

Should I try to set up another interview? - Colleges rarely permit second interviews, particularly before May 1st. If you happen to be in the area it doesn't hurt to stop by "just to check on things" and to say hello. A major investment of time and money to visit a college where you have been placed on a wait list is probably not worth the effort. Consult with your counselor regarding this matter. It will vary from case to case.

What should I do while I wait? - Assume you are not going to get in off the wait list. Statistics clearly indicate the chances are quite a bit less than 50/50. The most important thing for you to do at this time is to focus on the options you do have and make an informed, rational decision regarding those options.

Should I make an enrollment deposit at my second choice college? - YES! Unfortunately this fee is normally not refundable, but it is important for you to guarantee that you have a place in a college next year. Make your deposit before May 1st.

What should I do if I have been placed on several wait lists? - There is nothing wrong with remaining on more than one wait list as long as each one of them is a school that you are more interested in than the options you currently have. Obviously you can only indicate to one of them that they are your first choice.

Who should I keep informed about my wait list status? - Your parents and your counselor should be kept advised of your status. There should be no miscommunication or lack of communication during this time.

6.0 Additional Post-Secondary Options

Many students are not yet ready or prefer not to go directly to college or to some other degree granting educational program immediately after completing high school. Some choose to work full time before enrolling at a college while others seek alternatives for a single transition year. There are also students who find attending a trade school to learn a specific skill set the right option for them.

6.1 Career Decision Making

Students who are unsure of their future educational and/or occupational plans, unable to decide whether or not to continue with their education, or confused by the number of educational and/or occupational possibilities, can use the assistance and materials available in the College Counseling Office to help them:

- Obtain information about career or educational options,
- Identify those options that have possibilities,
- Evaluate the possible outcomes of different options, and
- Choose one or several options to pursue.

Through the use of interest surveys, computer-aided educational and occupational searches, and by exploring the available materials, students can either narrow or increase their options, depending on their objective. Students who are having some difficulty putting together their post-secondary plans or would like to discuss questions about their future plans are encouraged to see their counselor.

Sometimes, summer opportunities can be used to gain experience which will help make appropriate choices more clear. The College Planning Office has a comprehensive collection of brochures, handbooks, and guides containing lists and descriptions of numerous organized summer programs for students such as camp, travel, study, community service, and environmental programs.

6.2 The Gap Year

In a process called deferred admissions, students can apply to college in the fall of their senior year and in the spring ask permission of the college they wish to attend to defer their admission for one year. Admission can also be deferred until the following January. In other words, students wanting to pursue this option can maintain their acceptance to a college but not begin until a year or six months later.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

The following information is quoted from National Association for College Admission Counseling

<http://www.nacacnet.org/>

Know Your Rights in the College Admission Process

SPGP Requirements:

The National Association for College Admission Counseling member colleges and universities adhere to the Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP), a set of good practice rules they agree to abide by to make the process more fair, which includes Students Rights and Responsibilities.

Students Rights: What You Should Expect from Colleges

Application:

- Colleges must relay factual and comprehensive information about admission, costs, aid opportunities, practices and packaging policies (including any early admission plans), and housing policies.
- Colleges cannot use high-pressure sales tactics.

Admission:

- You are allowed to wait until May 1 to respond to an offer of admission and/or financial aid.
Exception: Students accepted Early Decision.
- Colleges that request commitments prior to May 1 must clearly offer you the opportunity to request (in writing) an extension until May 1 that will not jeopardize your status for admission and/or financial aid.
- Wait/alternate list notifications must include the number of students on the waitlist, the number of students offered admission, and the availability of financial aid and housing.
- Colleges can't require deposits or written commitments as conditions of you remaining on their waitlists.
- Colleges must notify you of your waitlist status by August 1.

If you think your rights have been denied, you should contact the college or university immediately to request additional information or the extension of a reply date. In addition, you should ask your counselor to notify the president of the NACAC affiliate in your region.

If you need further assistance, send a copy of any correspondence you have had with the college or university and a copy of your letter of admission to NACAC, 1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22201.

Student Responsibilities: What You Need to Do

Application:

- Talk to your school counselor early in the process. He or she will help you through the whole process, from research to filing your applications.
- Research, understand and comply with the policies/procedures of each college's application fees, financial aid, scholarships, and housing, especially when it comes to making deposits.
- Attend a National College Fair to meet face-to-face with college representatives and get answers to your questions straight from the source.

- If you can, visit colleges on your list.
- Complete the applications and submit them on time.
- Be honest—no one else should be applying for you!

Admission:

- Notify each college whether you are accepting or rejecting its offer by May 1 (postmark date).
- Enroll at only one school and, if required, submit a deposit. Exception: the waitlist. If you are accepted at a school where you were waitlisted, you may enroll and submit any required deposit. You also must immediately notify the first college at which you enrolled and let them know you've changed your decision.
- If you are accepted Early Decision, you must promptly withdraw applications submitted to other colleges. *Exception:* financial aid. If you are waiting to hear about financial aid before you make a decision, you don't have to withdraw the applications.

Federal Requirements: From the US Department of Education!

Congress requires colleges to disclose important information called "Students Right to Know" via the web. Here's a sample (http://www.kysu.edu/about/divisions/officeofthepresident/institutionalresearch/Students_Right_to_Know.htm)—you'll see that colleges must provide:

General:

- The cost of attending—including tuition, books and supplies, housing, and related costs and fees
- Requirements and procedures for withdrawing, including refund policies
- Names of associations that accredit, approve or license the school
- Special facilities and services for disabled students

Academics:

- The academic programs, including degrees, programs of study and facilities
- A faculty and instructional personnel list
- Completion or graduation rates at the college
- Community colleges (and other transfer colleges): information about the transfer-out rate

Financial Aid:

- Types available, including federal, state and local government, need-based and non-need based, and private scholarships and awards
- Methods for determining eligibility; how and when the aid is distributed
- Work-study aid programs: terms and conditions of campus employment

Campus Security:

- Procedures/policies for reporting campus crimes and emergencies, and the system of adjudication
- The number and types of campus crime reported
- The drug offense policy, awareness and use prevention programs

College Glossary

ACT	American College Test - A standardized test used in the admissions process by some schools, instead of the SAT. It is offered five times a year and measures achievement in four areas: English, Math, Reading, Science plus Writing. Each section is scored and the final score is the average of those four scores. The writing test is optional and the score is reported separately
Bachelor of Arts & Bachelor of Science	The degrees which are typically offered by colleges, depending on one's field of study
College	An institution of higher learning, usually providing a general or liberal arts education rather than technical or professional training, which may be part of a university
College Board	A non-profit organization which produces and administers the SAT and SAT Subject Tests, Advanced Placement Tests and provides the CSS Profile
Common Application	A form which is used by over 500 colleges which simplifies the process of applying to those colleges
Community Colleges	Institutions of higher learning which are typically two-year colleges which offer full and part-time study and offer certificate programs or lead to an Associate's degree which may be used to apply elsewhere
CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE	This is for select schools only. The financial aid application service of the College Board. The two-step application process involves registering and then completing and submitted the profile by a school's financial aid deadline. Register at https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile to start the process. Those schools that require the PROFILE are listed on the website as well
Distance Learning	Options for earning course credits through correspondence courses involving cable television, the internet and other means
Early Action	An option used by a number of colleges, in which a student may apply in November or December and receive a decision in December or January without the need to make a commitment until May 1
Early Decision	An option in which both the student and the college make the final commitment by December
EFC	The Expected Family Contribution reported in the SAR. There is an EFC calculator that takes about twenty minutes to complete that will give families a "ball-park" figure for how much they may be expected to contribute. It can be found at www.collegeboard.org . Another reliable website for information is www.mefa.org

FAFSA	<p>The Free Application for Federal Student Aid should be filled out by all families that are interested in receiving financial aid by visiting www.fafsa.ed.gov. The form cannot be filed until October 1st and a FSA ID is required. To complete the FAFSA, use the Prior Prior Year's Tax Return. Pay close attention to deadlines.</p> <p>The FAFSA is submitted electronically and you have the ability to edit it, save and continue later, and update it as needed. The FAFSA determines the eligibility for a student to receive federal grants, federal student loans, and the federal work study program. .</p> <p>When it comes to the FAFSA, time is of the essence. The FAFSA clearinghouse will send families a Student Aid Report based on the information received. The best place to get accurate information when filling out these forms is from the college's financial aid office that has the nearest filing deadline</p>
Financial Aid Package	<p>The total amount of financial aid offered by the college to students who have been offered admission. It may include scholarships, loans and work on and off campus.</p> <p>Scholarships and grants awarded students from outside sources (not the school they plan to attend, but from private organizations) may require disclosure during the summer after senior year. When financial aid offices learn of these awards, they are likely to deduct all or part of the award from the financial aid package awarded the student. It is important to know this because it may affect how much scholarship searching you do</p>
Legacies	<p>Special (although not over-riding) consideration in the admissions process for children of alumni – this process is becoming less and less significant in the application process</p>
Merit Scholarships	<p>Financial awards made to certain students without reference to the student's financial needs (based on academics, athletics, artistic ability, etc)</p>
Need Analysis	<p>The process used to evaluate an applicant's financial situation in order to determine how much a family can pay for college</p>
Need-Blind Admissions	<p>The policy in which a college makes the decision to admit or deny a candidate without reference to the student's financial aid request</p>
PSAT/NMSQT	<p>A test which is taken in October of "sophomore" and "junior" years to give practice for the SATs and to determine if junior applicants qualify as National Merit Semi-Finalists and Commended students</p>
Rolling Admissions	<p>An admission option in which a candidate is told whether or not he or she is admitted within a few weeks of the application rather than following a "set" schedule. Admissions remain open until the class is full. The more competitive programs still tend to fill early.</p>
SAT	<p>Most colleges use this or the ACT as part of their admissions requirements.</p>

