

# A Guide to College Admissions



JFK High School  
Guidance Department  
CEEBS # 310581

# Preparing for the Process:

## THE COLLEGE LIST AND FINALIZING IT

By the fall of the year, a senior and his family should be completing the process of selecting those colleges to which application will be made. The college list should consist of schools that meet an honest set of objectives and specific criteria defined by the student and his family as important to his college experience. It should include colleges to which a student is almost certain to gain admission (safe schools) as well as schools that are increasingly competitive for that particular student (solid and reach schools). Counselors will be happy to share their knowledge as to the viability of that college list, using the experiences of past JFK students as a guide.

Which colleges and the number of colleges ultimately selected for application are the choice of parents and students. The final list should include at least three to four schools completely acceptable to both student and parent and which fall into the category of likely acceptances. This aspect of the search process takes on an even greater importance in a time of the ever-increasing competitiveness of college admission. As counselors, we know how much more difficult it has become to predict outcomes, and we encourage seniors to be guided by who they are and what they want rather than the need to go to a college whose name is recognized readily. With thoughtful investigation and consideration, the final list can usually be readily limited to six to ten schools, but many families choose to apply to more.

## Early Decision, Early Action

There has been a tremendous increase at JFK and in the country in the number of students applying for admission under an early plan. A student applying for an early decision is stating an unequivocal preference for a school and an acceptance is binding. A student accepted under Early Decision must withdraw all applications to other schools. A student applying early action is not bound to attend the school if accepted and may often apply to more than one Early Action school.

**Read the application with great care to make certain of the rules for each individual school.** The guidance department at the high school encourages students to consider any form of early a clear first choice. Early Action is a non-binding decision!!!!!!

## **College Visits (in session)**

Visiting a college may give a student a better idea of campus life and will certainly provide an opportunity to see the school and its surroundings. It is usually not practical to visit every college on a list, but it is possible to visit a few campuses that can serve as prototypes: a large university, an urban, suburban and rural school. Most colleges have regularly scheduled tours and/or information sessions. It is always wise to call the admissions office in advance to learn the times of such programs and to determine if a reservation is necessary.

Some admissions offices will make arrangements for a senior to stay overnight in a dorm and attend a class, or a student can make such arrangements himself if he knows someone attending that school. Please keep in mind that a prospective student's view of a college can be unfairly colored by the experience he had on a visit, by the personality of his host or even his opinion of the college tour guide.

The Guidance Department strongly recommends that a student considering attendance at a school he has not seen make every effort to visit that school before making a final commitment. There is usually ample time to visit after the acceptance has been received and before the deposit is due. This is not true, however, if a student chooses to apply to a binding Early Decision. The Early decision candidate should have visited the college to which he is making application prior to reaching that decision.

# Interviews

More and more schools have eliminated the individual interview, and the majority of schools that continue to provide a student with the opportunity to meet with a member of an admissions staff or with a student interviewer stress that the interview is non evaluative. (In other words, it will not be used to evaluate a student and will not have an effect on the decision.) Some of the smaller private schools continue to offer a personal interview but very few require it. Most college admissions personnel characterize the interview as an opportunity for the candidate to learn more about the college.

A student who chooses to interview should take advantage of the opportunity to let the college know something about his life and his experiences. Use the questions asked as starting points for providing information. Talk about relevant school experiences, academic and extracurricular, discussing things that have particular significance for you. Be yourself, be real and know something about the college, which is unique or of interest to you. It doesn't hurt to impress the interviewer! Growing in popularity among colleges is the group interview, which is essentially an information session with an opportunity for participating students to provide some brief personal comments.

A student interested in interviewing at a school providing the opportunity exists, should call the admissions office to request an appointment well in advance of the desired date. He should dress neatly but comfortably, arrive at least ten minutes prior to the time of the appointment and be as natural as possible during the interview. He should request a business card from the interviewer which will provide the proper name and title when sending a follow-up thank-you note or making contact later in the year.

## **College Visitors at JFK High School**

Each year, colleges from New Jersey will send representatives to JFK High School to meet with interested students. A student may request a pass from his counselor to attend such a college conference, but the pass must be obtained at the Guidance Office the day before. A student unable to attend may speak with his counselor and request that materials for him are left by the representative. A list of the colleges is posted in every homeroom and on the website.

## **Standardized Testing**

Most colleges still require the submission of standardized test results as part of the application process. However, there are an increasing number of colleges that do not require test results and make the submission of such data optional. Students should read the information sent by each college with great care and follow each school's instructions.

Standardized testing is not a part of the JFK transcript and results will not appear as part of that official document.

## **PSAT/NMSQT**

The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Qualifying Test is a part of the CEEB Test Program. Given in October, this test follows the same format as the SAT I but is shorter and is designed for students in the junior year of high school. Freshmen, sophomores and juniors will sit for the test, which is given on a designated Wednesday in October. All students at JFK High School are given the test at no charge and only the junior score is used for National Merit consideration.

## SAT I

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (Reasoning Exam/CEEB test program) is a three and a half hour test in three sections measuring critical reading, mathematical reasoning ability, and writing. Administered at various test centers throughout the year, the test will be administered at JFK High School in October, January, March, May and June. The test will also be given in December and January but not at JFK. See <http://sat.collegeboard.org> to register for test dates and get current information on deadlines and fees.

**\*\*\*Please note the SAT's is changing the format in 2016, we as a department are encouraging students to wait until the change.**

## SAT II (highly competitive schools)

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (Individual Subject Exams/CEEB test program) is a one-hour test measuring knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge in a specific subject area. A maximum of three tests can be taken on any test date. Many colleges do not require or even recommend SAT II tests, so students must carefully check specific requirements for each school. The best time to take the SAT II is at the end of the study of the subject to be tested and it is recommended that those students taking individual subject area tests complete as many as possible by June of junior year.

## ACT

The ACT Plus Writing includes the four subject area tests plus a 30-minute writing test. All 4-year colleges and universities in the US accept ACT results. The ACT includes 215 multiple-choice questions and takes approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes to complete, including a short break (or just over four hours if you are taking the ACT Plus Writing). Actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes (plus 30 minutes if you are taking the ACT Plus Writing). The ACT assessment includes curriculum-based tests that measure students' educational development in English, Mathematics, Reading Comprehension, Science Reasoning, and Writing. Scores are reported in each area and a composite average is also given. The ACT is administered at WHS and possible at JFK in September, October (WHS), December, , April, and June (WHS).



## **Financial Aid**

Many families are understandably concerned about meeting the cost of higher education. A college education is a major investment, and the cost of that investment continues to rise each year. In the past, most colleges were need-blind in making admissions decisions; in other words, the admissions staff without knowledge of financial need acted upon student applications. It is important to note that the practice of need blind admission is no longer as prevalent as it once was. Most schools identify themselves as “need aware.” There are two types of financial assistance: need based and merit based. Need based assistance is financial assistance based on demonstrated need, while merit based awards are given without regard to need. The vast majority of financial awards are need based.

### **FAFSA**

Students applying for need based aid will be asked to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This form will be used to determine “the estimated family contribution” or a family’s ability to meet the cost of a particular school. Once established, the family contribution remains constant for each school to which the student applies. Financial need is defined as the difference between the cost of the college education and the family’s ability to meet that cost (family contribution). The more expensive the school, the more likely a student will demonstrate need. No need means that there is no demonstrated financial need. Students interested in applying for financial aid should file this form after January 1<sup>st</sup> of the student’s senior year (<http://fafsa.ed.gov>).

## **CSS/Financial Aid Profile**

The majority of financial aid applicants applying to private colleges and universities will be required to complete the Financial Aid Profile, in addition to the FAFSA. The Financial Aid Profile, disseminated by the College Scholarship Service (CSS), the financial aid division of the College Board, charges a per institution fee for processing. This form collects information about the student's total family income, assets and expenses. Many colleges and universities use this profile to award nonfederal private student aid funds. The CSS profile application can begin in September of the student's senior year. (<https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>)

The new format surrounding financial aid awards gives more discretion to the individual college, and thus a student, particularly a student who wishes to attend a private school, may now find it advisable to contact the financial aid officer at that college if his financial award does not meet his need. Most schools however, will not give monies in excess of demonstrated need according to the FAFSA.

There is some concern that the current state of the economy might negatively affect financial aid opportunities. Students should be aware that colleges may not be completely forthcoming about whether they are need-blind, (colleges that will accept student regardless of their need). Although such policies will not affect candidates who are clear admits, they might affect students whose profile places them on the cusp.

Completing a financial aid application is neither mysterious nor difficult. The information required is the same or comparable to that needed to complete income tax returns. Although individual college forms may vary, they are easily mastered if careful attention is paid to instructions.

## **Aid Packages**

Most students who receive a financial award through a college receive a financial aid package. This term is used to describe the total amount of need-based assistance a student receives. A package will generally consist of three components:

1. Grants: either federal or institutional. Grants are awards that do not have to be repaid.
2. Loans: federal, state or institutional. Any aid described as a loan requires repayment with interest, to the source of the funding. In most instances, when loans are made to the student, repayment is deferred until a student has completed his education, and in some cases, the government pays interest until that repayment begins.
3. College work-study, funded by the government or the institution. The student is provided with on-campus employment during the school year for an hourly wage, which is paid directly to the student and is designed to help cover day-to-day expenses. The amount of time required for work each week is often as low as ten hours and does not impede a student's college life either academically or socially.

In addition, there are many attractive financing plans to assist families in meeting the cost of a college education. Most of these are administered by the college or by financial institutions and repayment, which generally begins immediately can be extended over several years. One of the more popular plans is the PLUS loan available through banks to parents. The colleges provide information on them.

## **Outside Scholarships**

Individuals, local groups, religious organizations, clubs, corporations and foundations frequently sponsor scholarships. Although many of the awards do not carry significant monies, some do. The Guidance Department provides a continuously updated listing of all scholarships and scholarship information sent to the high school and either the applications or information on how to apply is available in the office. Please note that each organization selects its own recipients, and most, but not all, specify the demonstration of need. A student receiving an outside scholarship who also receives a financial aid award from his college must notify the college of the additional award. Failure to do so can result in the cancellation of the college's financial award.

## **Preparing the Application**

Each application should be approached as if it is the only application a student is submitting. It is the one aspect of the admissions process that provides the applicant with the opportunity to provide the college with a “third” dimension, a true and positive picture of himself as an individual. During the summer prior to senior year, a student should consider compiling a resume to aid in completing applications. The résumé, along with responses to the Guidance Department’s Senior Survey should also be given to the counselor to ensure the most complete and unified application possible.

Be organized. Begin to complete your applications well before the deadline. More than 500 colleges accept the Common Application [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org) in lieu of their own application. Read the application instructions and the application itself completely and thoroughly, and consider printing a copy of the Common Application to use as a worksheet.

Make the application as error free as is humanly possible. Proof read, check spelling and follow directions. A request for a list should be answered with a list; a request for a one or two sentence response should not be answered by a two-page essay. An application should be thoughtful, well planned out and neatly completed. Above all, it should be grammatically correct. When completed, submit the application on-line and, if possible, print a hard copy for reference.

## **The Essay**

Most seniors approach the task of writing a personal essay with trepidation. How important is it? What is the college looking for in the essay? Well, the essay is important. According to one admissions director: "It makes the facts in the student’s folder come alive for us. Because it is the student’s personal statement, no single piece of admission evidence gets as much attention and provokes as much

discussion." The college essay is the student's opportunity to reveal his intelligence, talent, sense of humor, enthusiasm, creativity, maturity; to express his individuality and demonstrate his writing ability. Talking about oneself on paper is not an easy task. It requires a different kind of writing than most high school assignments require. Try to capture your own voice -your ideas, your hopes, your dreams, and your passions. And, remember, colleges have become very adept at recognizing essays that are not a reflection of the student. If written effectively, the essay will serve to complement the transcript and recommendations being sent on the student's behalf. While very few students are admitted to college simply because of an essay, the essay can provide the admissions committee with another reason to admit.

## **Guidance Office Procedures**

The Guidance Department has instituted a set of procedures to optimize the effectiveness of processing requests for transcripts. Following these procedures will facilitate the submission of school documents to the colleges.

A separate guide, explaining the procedures in detail, has been distributed to seniors and is available on the Guidance website. Please remember that CEEB (SAT/ACT) test results are not a part of the official transcript. Students must have test results sent directly from the College Board or ACT.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

A letter of recommendation written by the counselor will accompany each transcript sent to a college. Many colleges, particularly those that are private, request up to two additional letters of recommendation, and some may be very specific as to who should write those letters (for example: a teacher from junior year; one humanities area teacher and one math/science teacher). Seniors should carefully note individual

college requirements. Students should approach a selected teacher and request a recommendation at an appropriate time and in an appropriate place i.e., not in the middle of the hall immediately before the start of a class. Teachers will provide students with specific requirements and/or instructions. Most teachers will use

Each teacher handles teacher recommendations individually. Some are willing to write in unlimited quantities, while others prefer to limit their letters. Students who have applied to a school for an Early Decision and wish to hold further applications until receiving a decision should check with the teacher writing his recommendations as to procedure. Rest assured that teachers who write recommendations are doing their very best to help students gain admission to the colleges of their choice.