

St. Anne's-Belfield School

Dear Sophomores and Parents/Guardians,

During this school closure, the College Counseling team plans to ensure your college process is **not** disrupted and to support you remotely – and, when appropriate again, in person. We remain committed to providing you with the same care and attention you would have received if school was in session. We are also communicating with our extensive admissions and college counseling network and using the information we are learning to inform our work with you.

What's new?

As you know, the College Counseling Office has three full-time counselors (Sandra Sohne-Johnston, Ann Wicks, and Kelly Hedgpeth) and an administrative assistant (Barb Sanford) who work with and guide Upper School students through the college process. Ms. Hedgpeth has been an incredible member of the College Counseling team. She will be relocating to California at the end of this academic year. While we are sad to say goodbye, we have a transition plan in place to ensure that students and family members currently assigned to Ms. Hedgpeth will have a smooth transition to Colleen Belak, who will join us in August for the 2020 - 2021 academic year.

Ms. Belak is currently in the midst of completing her M.Ed. at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education (HGSE). Previous to her studies at Harvard, Ms. Belak served as associate director of admissions at the University of Chicago in Illinois. During her time as an admissions officer, she led recruitment efforts for students from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (she read applications from our school for one year), China, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. She reviewed more than 1,000 student applications each year, supervised more than 80 student employees, and led workshops about the college admissions process for students. Ms. Belak holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a minor in human rights from the University of Chicago. In addition to her graduate studies, she currently serves as a part-time reader for a small liberal arts college and manages the alumni ambassador program for HGSE's Office of Admission. In preparation for Ms. Belak's arrival in August, we would like to begin the process of allowing students to connect with Ms. Belak and vice versa this spring. At a date to be determined, we will offer juniors and their parents the opportunity to schedule one-on-one meetings with her.

Will there be a Sophomore Parent/Guardian Fireside Chat?

Although we had hoped to be able to meet with parents and guardians in person on the evening of April 1, we will be shifting our presentation to a digital format. For planning purposes, you can either keep a portion of that evening available to watch, or you can choose to view it later at a more convenient time. Be on the lookout for an email from us on the afternoon of Wednesday, April 1, which will include a link to our digital presentation.

What about College Counseling assignments?

College counseling assignments for the sophomore class are made during the month of March and shared with students via SCOIR the day after the Sophomore Parent/Guardian Fireside Chat.

How do I use SCOIR?

In early April, students will receive an email from the College Counseling office that includes information about accessing SCOIR. SCOIR is a very user-friendly platform that allows students to search for schools based on interests

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and selected parameters (school size, geographic location, extracurricular interests, etc.), as well as “visit” schools of interest to learn more about the defining characteristics of an institution. In addition to using SCOIR to research schools, students will also use SCOIR to manage their application plan once they have decided on the schools to which they will apply. Within our office, SCOIR is used to manage the school documents we submit to colleges and universities in support of a student’s application. We encourage students to watch [this tutorial](#) before April 2.

What communication can we expect to receive from College Counseling?

During the sophomore year, you can expect to receive email communication from us periodically. Beginning in the second half of the junior year, the frequency of email correspondence from our office will increase. In addition to email communication, we also share important and timely updates in our monthly newsletter. You can access the newsletter in Mr. Quagliaroli’s Weekly Digest.

Each member of the sophomore class will receive a printed copy of the [College Counseling Handbook](#) which includes an overview of our college process, a definition of terms, a comprehensive calendar and timeline for the junior and senior years. This year, members of the Class of 2020 and their parents have shared advice about how to navigate the college process. Please take the time to read through the handbook. We hope you will enjoy reading through the handbook and will refer to it as needed throughout your child’s process.

How has the college landscape shifted?

The landscape is ever-changing, and we place a premium on keeping current with these changes by carving out time to visit colleges, attend professional conferences, and communicate with and present St. Anne's-Belfield School to our admissions colleagues.

Some recent trends we have been following:

- Each year, the number of test-optional schools increases
- More and more students are applying early through Early Action (non-binding) and/or Early Decision (binding) options
- The need for subject tests is under review at many schools, particularly in light of recent COVID-19 test date cancellations and postponements
- We anticipate an increase in marketing throughout the admissions cycle as colleges respond to recent changes to NACAC’s Code of Ethics and Professional Practices as the result of antitrust concerns raised by the Department of Justice
- College Board continues to increase testing scrutiny as a result of the Varsity Blues scandal and other testing anomalies that have surfaced

What has not changed:

- The transcript continues to be the most important document in the application
- Academic performance alone does not determine outcome: Colleges also value applicants who will contribute to their communities in a myriad of ways
- Students need to be able to articulate why a particular school is a good fit
- Essays should be authentic and clearly written by the student; they should not be over-edited by others

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- Many schools still value demonstrated interest, so students should take advantage of the opportunity to meet with admission officers when they visit St. Anne's-Belfield in the fall
- Since onsite school visits are not feasible for everyone, showing interest can take many forms; if unable to travel and visit a school of interest, be sure to discuss with your college counselor the many different ways to demonstrate interest
- Research supports the benefits of a gap year
- Our office is here to support students every step of the way!

What about summer activities?

With so much uncertainty about what the next few weeks, if not months, will look like, you may be wondering about summer activities. Please do not be worried if plans for the summer need to be changed. While we encourage students to engage in meaningful summer activities, whether serving as a junior camp counselor, doing volunteer work, getting a part-time job, and more, we understand that this summer might look a bit different. We will all be challenged to seek creative outlets and growth opportunities, whether through reading or pursuing a variety of creative pursuits, collaborative explorations, and/or community outreach through virtual means. Undoubtedly, creativity and patience will be critical components of every undertaking. The important feature of summer engagements should be that students learn a bit about themselves, others, and the world around them.

If you have concerns that a disrupted summer might have a negative impact on your child's college applications, do not fret. Colleges and universities are already reaching out to assure high school communities that they fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on future applicants to their institutions. A recent communication from Columbia University included the following:

Furthermore, as we consider younger students, we understand that disruptions may significantly alter the trajectory of their extracurricular, athletic and other pursuits. Students might not have access to summer programs or other enrichment experiences. Their college applications will likely look different than they have in the past. We remain committed to our holistic and contextual review process that considers the individual circumstances that shape each applicant's journey.

What about standardized testing?

We will offer the PSAT and a practice ACT in the fall. The results from both tests will allow us to develop a customized standardized test plan for juniors.

Which test should my child take: SAT vs ACT?

The majority of colleges require students to submit standardized tests scores as part of their college application, though they do not have a preference as to which test (SAT or ACT) students take. Either test is acceptable.

Most sophomores took the PSAT in October and have a clear sense of that test. As such, to help students choose between the ACT and SAT, we were scheduled to offer a full-length proctored practice ACT test to members of the sophomore class later this spring. The practice ACT will now be offered in the fall. We find it helpful for students to have an analysis of their performance on the ACT to compare to the results of their PSAT when deciding which test to

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take. When developing each student's test plan, this information should also be balanced against whether or not your child shows a preference for the SAT or ACT.

On Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2020, we will administer the PSAT/NMSQT on our campus. The College Counseling Office will oversee ordering the test and registering students.

Do I still need to take SAT subject tests?

A small number of colleges (14 in the United States) either require or strongly recommend taking SAT subject tests. We recognize that the cancellation of tests like the SAT, ACT, and AP exam will impact thousands of high school students, and we encourage you not to panic. Our advice is to develop a testing plan that prioritizes the SAT or ACT, and we will work with you on this. We will share updates as they become available but expect some colleges to modify their requirement.

Will AP exams still take place?

The College Board has confirmed that AP exams will move to an online format. Below is an excerpt from an email I received. Students who have registered for one or more AP exams can expect to receive additional emails from me.

"Students remain eager to take AP Exams and have a chance to earn credit and placement. We surveyed 18,000 AP students and 91% indicated they want to complete this important step, urging us not to cancel this opportunity."

The AP Program will invest heavily over the next month in the following ways:

- For the 2019 - 2020 exam administration only, students can take a 45-minute online exam at home. Educator-led development committees are currently selecting the exam questions that will be administered.
- Some students may want to take the exam sooner rather than later, while the content is still fresh. Other students may want more time to practice. For each AP subject, there will be two different testing dates.
- AP curricula are locally developed and we defer to local decisions on how best to help students complete coursework. To be fair to all students, some of whom have lost more instructional time than others, the exam will only include topics and skills most AP teachers and students have already covered in class by early March.
- Colleges support this solution and are committed to ensuring that AP students receive the credit they've worked this year to earn. For decades, colleges have accepted a shortened AP Exam for college credit when groups of students have experienced emergencies.
- Students will be able to take these streamlined exams on any device they have access to—computer, tablet, or smartphone. Taking a photo of handwritten work will also be an option.
- We recognize that the digital divide could prevent some low-income and rural students from participating. Working with partners, we'll invest so these students have the tools and connectivity they need to review AP content online and take the exam. If your students need mobile tools or connectivity, you can reach us directly to let us know.
- The exam questions are designed in ways that prevent cheating. We use a range of digital security tools and techniques, including plagiarism detection software, to protect the integrity of the exams. Scoring at-home work for an AP Exam isn't new to the AP Program. For years the AP Program has received and scored at-home student work as part of the exams for the AP Computer Science Principles and AP Capstone™ courses.

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What if my child needs testing accommodations?

Students with a diagnosed learning impairment who have already been approved for school accommodations are eligible to apply for testing accommodations with ACT and/or College Board (which administers the SAT, PSAT, Subject Tests, and AP Exams). To be eligible for testing accommodations, both testing agencies require complete psycho-educational testing that must include tests of aptitude and achievement, as well as a specific diagnosis. The date of the psycho-educational testing must fall within the allowable time frames specified by each testing agency.

[Ann Wicks](#) serves as the school's SSD Coordinator and is available to help facilitate the application process and answer questions about the different guidelines.

What impact will virtual learning have on my college process?

Admissions deans are assuring college counselors and prospective students that virtual learning will not have a negative impact on application review or a student's enrollment status. Here are a few of the messages we have received.

Several states have closed their schools and moved entire school districts to virtual platforms. You are among thousands of students who have moved to a virtual platform. In addition, hundreds of colleges and universities have also closed their campuses and have moved their classes to online platforms. This is the new normal for high school and college-aged students.