

MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS HANDBOOK

FOR THE CLASS OF 2026



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Message to Students:

At Mahwah High School, we are committed to ensuring that every student is prepared for success at the college level, and that includes a well-supported College Search, Application, and Admission cycle. This handbook is written to help you in this process. Although you will have many chances to meet with your counselor, you will find the information contained in the following pages extremely useful. We encourage you to read through this handbook carefully and perhaps more than once. Applying to colleges can be intimidating and overwhelming, but if you are familiar with the process, much of your stress will be reduced. We will be asking you to take many steps on your own. Remember, this is YOUR college experience. What you are willing to put into the search and application process is a rather predictive indicator of your college readiness.

Message to Parents:

Welcome to the College Search process. Our philosophy is that there is a college and pathway for every student. We encourage students to research schools thoroughly, and to think critically about the right “fit” for them. We encourage you, as parents, to do research, as well, and to keep an open mind about your child’s unique, individual preferences. As parents, engage your child in conversation; help them think about important factors such as geographical location, size, and type of school, cost, and campus culture.

We will ask your child to:

- Read the monthly Guidance newsletters
- Check their school emails
- Regularly use their SCOIR account throughout the college search and application/admission process. We will also ask students to request appointments with their counselor throughout the year
- Create a prospective list of colleges to which they will apply. We will aim for one or two reaches; target three or four range schools; fall in love with two really sure schools
- Attend “optional” events Mahwah offers- Summer Application Boot Camp, Common App Lunch Drop-Ins
- Complete college applications, essays, and portfolios
- Meet all Mahwah High School and college/university deadlines

At any point should you have a concern, please reach out to your child’s counselor via email (the easiest way) and we will answer any and all of your questions.

Stress Inducing Myths

- **It takes all A’s to get into a “good college”**
 - NO! Grades are only one piece to the application puzzle.
- **My SAT/ACT scores will make or break my admissions chances**
 - NO! The SAT or ACT are only one piece to the application puzzle. [FAIRTEST.ORG: 1800+ test optional colleges](http://FAIRTEST.ORG:1800+test-optional-colleges)
- **College admissions is a science**
 - NO! There are many factors that are taken into consideration:
 - Test scores
 - Grades
 - Rigor of courses
 - Extra-curriculars
 - Recommendations
 - Essay & Supplemental Essays

- **If I don't get into a Name Brand ("good") college, I will have no future...**
 - Cal State University: Tom Hanks, Oscar winning actor
 - College of William & Mary: Jon Stewart, Entertainer
 - University of Delaware: Joe Biden, U. S. President
 - University of Nebraska--Lincoln: Warren Buffett, Billionaire business investor
 - Tennessee State University: Oprah Winfrey, Entertainer
 - Oregon State University: Linus Pauling; Nobel Prize in Chemistry; Nobel Peace Prize
- **The more selective a college is, the better it is...**
 - Attending a well-known, highly selective college does not seal a student's destiny. The odds of success increase at schools where the fit is right. Top students who attend small, high quality colleges generally tend to get more leadership opportunities than students at more well-known colleges.
- **If I haven't heard of a college or university, it can't be very good**
 - Only four CEOs of the top ten Fortune 500 companies attended highly selective colleges. In 2017-2018, Indiana University produced more Fulbright students than Penn, Columbia, Yale, Stanford, and Cornell. Similarly, in 2014-2015, St. Olaf College produced more Fulbright students than Middlebury, Swarthmore, Grinnell, Bowdoin, and Wesleyan.
- **A public university will cost me less than a private one**
 - That's not always the case. In fact, the out-of-state tuition for a public university can be even higher than the standard tuition at a private college. The lesson: Never eliminate a college or university from consideration purely because you think it will cost too much. Even if the full tuition is out of your budget, you may be eligible for financial aid and scholarships that will drop the cost of tuition into your price range.
- **There's only one right college for me; my life will be ruined if I don't get admitted to my first-choice school.**
 - There isn't just one pair of shoes that is a good fit for your feet. There are a bunch of shoes that would give you a really comfortable fit.

Stress Reduction

- Communicate with your parents, friends, counselor
- Recognize warning signs
- Applaud success: Be proud of what you do!
- Ration use of electronics
- Learn stress management skills: go for a run, read for pleasure, listen to music, etc.
- Sleep!
- Remove a stressor

College Application Checklist (Please post on your refrigerator)

Use this checklist to help you stay on top of your application tasks, paperwork, and deadlines.

Spring of Junior Year

	Focused on GRADES! GRADES! GRADES!
	Registered for the SAT (https://www.collegeboard.org/) and ACT (https://www.act.org/)
	Asked my two teachers by May if they would write my letters of recommendation and requested letters of recommendation in SCOIR on the "My Colleges" page
	Selected my senior courses carefully and took into consideration my intended Career Pathway; be sure to continue challenging yourself academically. You need to demonstrate depth and breadth in academics. If appropriate, seriously consider taking AP classes. These courses could save you a lot of money when you enroll in college
	Planned a few college visits during my April break. Call the admission office to arrange a tour, a class visit, and a meeting, even an interview with an admissions officer. If you can't afford to visit all the colleges on your list, at least watch a video about the college on their website
	After my college visits, evaluated my college list and eliminated colleges that I am no longer interested
	Applied for special summer academic or enrichment programs such as a pre-college summer program, an internship in a possible career field, or traveled abroad
	Did well on my final exams. My GPA after junior year is used by colleges to determine admission decisions

July

	Completed the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse form if you plan to play Division I or II sports
	As an athlete, I contacted coaches at the schools to which I am applying to get any information I need about the process. Be sure to include an athletic resume in your correspondence with coaches
	Began working on my application; drafted college essays, collected writing samples, if needed, assembled portfolios, and any other supplementary material needed. Also made sure I compiled a general academic resume
	Logged on to the Common Application website(https://www.commonapp.org/), set up an account, and began completing the application
	Worked on my resume in SCOIR
	Register for ACT/SAT if needed

August

	Completed Junior Questionnaire and Parent Questionnaire in SCOIR by Sept. 1 st
	Narrowed my list of schools to the 8-10 I am applying to
	Completed the FERPA in my SCOIR account
	Completed a good solid rough draft of my essay
	Completed a resume in SCOIR that highlights my extracurricular activities
	Attended the College Application Boot Camp at MHS (Dates TBA)

September

	Followed up with my teachers about my letters of recommendations and provided them with my deadlines
	Requested Transcripts in SCOIR 15 school days prior to my deadline-as published.
	Attended Mahwah High School Senior/Parent College Night (Date TBA)
	Attended Mahwah High School Senior Financial Aid Night (Date TBA)

October

Completed FAFSA (Free Federal Application for Student Aid). Available after October 1st
Completed any institutional aid forms (Call your school)
Submitted (CSS/Financial Aid Profile) by February 15 (available after October 1 st)- checked with each school for deadlines.
Proofread my essays for spelling and grammar
Finalized my essays and had 2 other people read them
Completed Early Decision (ED) agreement (if applicable)
Sent SAT scores through my College Board student account (if desired or required)
Sent ACT scores through my ACT.org student account (if desired or required)
Sent AP scores through my College Board student account (if applicable)
Sent a handwritten thank you to my teachers for writing my letters of recommendation

November

Submitted all applications, supplements and paid fees to the colleges I am applying
Requested 1 st MP grades be sent

December

Checked SCOIR for local scholarships, deadlines, and criteria
Called my colleges and confirmed that my applications are complete

January

Checked SCOIR for local scholarships, deadlines, and criteria
Requested Midyear grades be sent (Can't be done until after the end of the 2 nd MP)

February to June

Checked SCOIR for local scholarships, deadlines and criteria
Met with my counselor to discuss my college options
Updated my SCOIR account with my college responses and decisions

SAT Test Dates: [Click Here To Register & For More Info](#)

Test Dates	Registration Deadlines		
	Regular	Late Fee Required	Online Score Release
March 8, 2025	February 21, 2025	February 25, 2025	March 21, 2025
May 3, 2025	April 18, 2025	April 22, 2025	May 16, 2025
June 7, 2025	May 22, 2025	May 27, 2025	June 20, 2025
August 23, 2025	August 8, 2025	August 12, 2025	September 5, 2025
September 13, 2025	August 29, 2025	September 2, 2025	September 26, 2025
October 4, 2025	September 19, 2025	September 23, 2025	October 17, 2025
November 8, 2025	October 24, 2025	October 28, 2025	November 21, 2025
December 6, 2025	November 21, 2025	November 25, 2025	December 19, 2025

ACT Test Dates: [Click Here to Register & More Info](#)

Test Dates	Registration Deadlines		
	Regular	Late Fee Required	Online Score Release
February 7, 2025	January 3, 2025	January 17, 2025	Feb 18; Apr 4, 2025
April 11, 2025	March 7, 2025	March 21, 2025	April 22; June 6, 2025
June 7, 2025	May 2, 2025	May 16, 2025	June 17; Aug 1, 2025
July 12, 2025	June 6, 2025	June 20, 2025	July 22; Sept 5, 2025
September 6, 2025	August 1, 2025	August 15, 2025	Sept 16; Oct 31, 2025
October 25, 2025	September 19, 2025	October 3, 2025	Nov 11; Dec 12, 2025
December 6, 2025	October 31, 2025	Nov 14, 2025	Dec 16; Jan 30, 2026

IMPORTANT: It is YOUR responsibility to send your ACT or ACT scores (if desired or required). MHS DOES NOT report scores. If you indicate you will submit scores, or the school requires them, your application will be considered incomplete.

SAT/ACT Comparisons

You only need to send your ACT OR your SAT scores to colleges. Colleges will accept either. Use this chart to compare which score to send. If you have questions, reach out to your counselor.

The chart below can be a handy tool for determining whether it's in your best interest to submit ACT scores or SAT scores to a school. For example, if you scored a total of 1250 on the SAT and a 26 on the ACT, according to the chart, these are comparable scores. Since neither score is significantly "higher" or "lower" than the other, you could submit either score (or both) to colleges. If, however, you scored a total of 1130 on the SAT and a 27 on the ACT, according to the chart, your ACT score is "higher" and would likely be a better score to submit to colleges.

SAT and ACT Conversion Chart

SAT Composite Score	ACT Composite Score	SAT Composite Score	ACT Composite Score
1600	36	1130-1150	23
1560-1590	35	1100-1120	22
1520-1550	34	1060-1090	21
1490-1510	33	1020-1050	20
1450-1480	32	980-1010	19
1420-1440	31	940-970	18
1390-1410	30	900-930	17
1350-1380	29	860-890	16
1310-1340	28	810-850	15
1280-1300	27	760-800	14
1240-1270	26	720-750	13
1200-1230	25	630-710	12
1160-1190	24	560-620	11

SAT/ACT Test Preparation Options

- **Khan Academy**: Khan Academy is a non-profit educational organization created in 2006 by educator Salman Khan with a goal of creating an accessible place for people to be educated. The organization produces short lectures in the form of YouTube videos. <https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- **CollegeBoard.org**: You can use your PSAT score report to develop a personal plan for improvement.
- **Private Tutors**: Reach out to your counselor for options.

The Resume: [Click Here For More Information](#)

- In SCOIR in the “ME TAB”.
- To reveal interests: sports, extracurricular activities, academic pursuits, and activities you have participated in outside the classroom—these do not show up on your high school transcript so it’s important they go on your resume.
- School-related Activities: List any activities in which you have participated beginning with grade 9. These can be clubs, class activities, performing groups, sports, etc. Be sure to mention any leadership roles you have undertaken. Something as simple as being chairman of a committee can show leadership.
- Honors and Awards: If you have received any honors or awards, be sure to list these.
- Community-Related Activities: List all community-related activities that you have participated in beginning with grade 9. Include any leadership roles you have undertaken and any volunteer work.
- Enrichment Activities: Include any summer enrichment programs, travel experiences, and/or hobbies related to your educational experience. Include leisure activities only if they reflect accomplishments or skills that you’d like a college/scholarship evaluation committee or an employer to know about.
- Work Experience: For each paid work experience, include your job title; the name, address, and telephone number of the business; and the dates of your employment.

Thunderbird Externship/Internship Program & Summer Programs

Summer Programs are great enrichment opportunities for exploring interests and potential college majors.

- [Thunderbird Externship/Internship Program](#): The MHS Thunderbird Externship Program: Career Pathway Exploration & Job Shadowing is an opportunity for rising juniors (grade 11) and rising seniors (grade 12) to gain real-world work experience. This program is available to students in good academic standing who are on-track with their educational plan.
- [NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS](#): Programs in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Business, etc.
- [Summer Programs in England, France and Spain](#) & [Rustic Pathways](#): culturally-immersive adventure & volunteer programs.
- These schools routinely offer summer opportunities. Go directly to their websites: School of the Visual Arts, Ramapo College, NYU, William Paterson University, and many others.
- OR do a simple Google search...”college summer programs”... for interesting and educational summer experiences. If you have any questions, reach out to your counselor.

Volunteering

Do you want to give back to the community by volunteering? It looks great on a college resume! Check out these sites:

- www.bergenvolunteers.org
- www.Teenlife.com
- <https://kidsthatdogood.com/>
- <https://www.volunteermatch.org/>
- www.iparticipate.org/

By completing the necessary paperwork, you can earn high school credits for your volunteer efforts! Reach out to Mrs. Mandel, for more information. smandel@mahwah.k12.nj.us.

Starting the College Application Process

Where Do You Begin?

What's important on your journey?

- Location & Campus Culture: What will living there be like?
- Academic Culture: How will I learn?
- Academic Support: What if I need help?
- Opportunities: Activities and internships?
- Prestige: Where will I go afterward? Outcomes?

I want to get into a "GOOD" college! What is a "GOOD" college?

- Is in the location/environment YOU want
- Offers the academics YOU are interested in
- Offers the internships/research opportunities/career placement YOU need
- Offers activities YOU are interested in
- Is affordable for YOU and your family
- Is a place that will both challenge and support YOU
- Is a place YOU will graduate from

SCOIR

[SCOIR](#) (Click the link for the user guide) is THE BEST place to start the process.

1. Explore college profiles: Search for colleges based on various criteria like location, major, size, and view detailed information about each institution including virtual tours and campus events.
2. Compare colleges: Utilize the "compare" feature to side-by-side analyze multiple colleges on key factors like acceptance rates, tuition, and program offerings.
3. Create a "My Colleges" list: Save colleges that interest them to a personalized list for easy reference and tracking.
4. Follow colleges: Stay updated on news and events from colleges they are interested in by following them on Scoir.
5. Access career exploration tools: Discover potential career paths based on their interests and identify colleges that align with their desired career field.
6. Manage application materials: Store important documents like transcripts, letters of recommendation, and awards within their Scoir profile to easily access them when applying to colleges.
7. Communicate with counselors: Directly message their school counselor through Scoir to discuss college options, deadlines, and application concerns.
8. Receive college suggestions: Get personalized college recommendations from their counselors based on their academic profile and interests.
9. Track application deadlines and checklists: Set reminders for application deadlines and manage their application process with built-in checklists.
10. View financial aid information: Access details about financial aid packages available at different colleges.

Types of Colleges

There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States and most of these differ in many respects. Here are the most common types:

- **Liberal Arts Colleges**: Most four-year liberal arts colleges offer undergraduate degrees and focus on providing a broad exposure to a science and humanities curriculum. [Wesleyan (CT), Amherst (MA), Smith (MA), Mount Holyoke (MA), Bryn Mawr (PA), Middlebury (VT)].

- **Universities:** Universities offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees and are traditionally broken up into smaller colleges which specifically address the academic interests of their students. Universities can range from 3,000 to 50,000 students. [Ohio State University (40,000 students), Rutgers University (28,000), University of Michigan (26,000), University of Rhode Island (13,000), University of New Hampshire (12,000), East Stroudsburg University (6,000), Bentley University (4,235), Brandeis University (3,500)].
- **Specialized Colleges:** These are degree granting colleges which offer specialized programs in majors such as engineering, business and the arts (Rhode Island School of Design, Juilliard, Boston Conservatory, Albany College of Pharmacy, and University of the Sciences in Philadelphia).
- **Junior Colleges; Community Colleges:** Most offer two years of college-level work. The students may pursue a two-year associates degree and/or continue their education at a four-year college. (Bergen Community, Rockland Community).

How to Choose a College

- **Program:** Do you know what you want to major in? Does the school have strong offerings in that area? Do you want a career-oriented school, i.e. engineering, art, or a general liberal arts program?
- **Profile:** Do you fit the profile of the school, i.e. standardized test scores, GPA, rank? Use the college profile in the college guidebooks, and the SCOIR program.
- **Location:** Do you plan to commute? How far from home are you willing to go? Do you prefer a rural, suburban, or urban campus?
- **Size:** Have you visited schools of different sizes and decided on a preference?
- **Finances:** What are the costs of the school? Is financial aid need-blind? Does the school have cooperative education programs?
- **Quality of Life:** Do most students live on campus? Do many students leave on weekends? What kinds of housing are available? For how many years is housing guaranteed?
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Will you be able to play the sports you like, take part in musical or theatrical productions or pursue other activities you most enjoy?
- **Student Body:** Is the student population diverse in ethnic and socioeconomic background? Do you see yourself as a “fit” both academically and socially?

College Visits

The best way to see if a college is right for you is to go visit. Go to the colleges’ website and make an appointment for a campus tour. First, you need to make sure you fill out the proper paperwork so your absence is excused. Juniors get 2 excused absences; seniors get 4. [MHS COLLEGE VISIT FORM](#)

Here are a few tips:

- Take the admissions tour. The tour guide will show you the main parts of the campus as well as answer any questions that you may have. Take advantage of this opportunity to find out history and other facts about the college.
- When you go on your visits “play tourist” and take a lot of pictures. Take pictures of any brochures or other handouts so you have them.
- Jot down 5 thoughts immediately after the visit in the notes section of your phone. These could be good, bad, or interesting things you learned. You will find that after you do a few visits, the schools start to blend together.

- Take your own tour. After the admissions tour is over, you may want to take time to tour the campus on your own. This will allow you to view areas that were not part of the admissions tour, such as the parking facilities or actual classrooms. Check out areas that will specifically pertain to your major. If you want to major in biology, check out the labs. If you want to major in music, take a look at the practice rooms and music library.
- Don't forget to ask questions. You may want to prepare a list of questions to ask beforehand just to make sure that you don't forget anything.
- Eat in the cafeteria. A great place to meet current students and ask questions.
- Talk to the students. Don't be shy about stopping a student on campus and asking them how they like it. Or why did they apply? Most students have no problem offering an opinion.
- Grab a copy of the school newspaper. Tons of information about the flavor of the school you won't find in any guidebook or online.

Admission Terms and Processes

- **Regular Admissions**: The college reviews the admissions folder and returns a decision on a specified date. This is a non-binding application and deadlines vary by school.
- **Rolling Admissions**: The college reviews the admissions folder as soon as all information is complete and returns a decision in a timely fashion on a "rolling" basis (no specific date). This is non-binding.
- **Early Action**: This is a non-binding decision which follows the same timetable as Early Decision but allows candidates until May 1 to accept or decline. Students can be accepted, deferred to the regular pool or denied admission outright (not be deferred to regular admissions pool).
- **Priority Deadlines**: Some large universities have priority deadlines. Completed applications received before the priority deadlines are more favorably looked upon.
- **Early Decision**: The student applies to their first-choice school by a specified date early in the fall and signs a **binding agreement** to enroll in that college, if admitted. Students can be denied admission or deferred to the regular applicant pool. Early Decision is intended for students who have a definite first choice school to which they are ready to make a commitment if accepted. Please speak to your counselor about completing additional applications.
 - Some colleges offer Early Decision I and Early Decision II; both are binding agreements.
- **Restrictive Early Action**: Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. They may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, they have until May 1 to confirm. This is non-binding.

The Application List

Students should look to apply to 8-10 colleges. If you want to apply to more than that, please discuss this with your counselor.

- **Reach Schools**: A school one is aspiring to attend, but one's academic profile may not meet all the admissions' criteria established by the specific school (i.e. SAT scores and/or GPA). A reach school may also be one which is so highly competitive that it is very difficult to predict acceptance.
- **Realistic Schools**: A school where the applicant's profile lies comfortably within the range of criteria.
- **Likely Schools**: A school where admission appears very likely (i.e. SAT scores and GPA are within the high end or exceed the admissions' criteria).

Some Things to Think About as You Start the Process

- If you need to make contact with a school about anything—questions about admissions, applications, financial aid---the STUDENT should reach out.
- A list of big schools that don't feel like big schools: Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, University of Massachusetts, Bowling Green (OH), Kent State (OH), University of Vermont, SUNY New Paltz (NY), University of Pittsburgh.
- In a given year, the Ivies and an "Ivy-ish" university (University of North Carolina, Duke, University of Virginia, Boston College, etc.) will reject 70% of students with SATs over 700 (over 1400 on the SAT's). Also, students who apply to the very top schools and present all A's on their transcript –60% don't get in. Conclusions: when applying to America's top schools always have backups as college admissions is not always fair! Sometimes you do everything you can and it still doesn't work out.
- Students who attend college often leave that university because the place is an "animal house." There's just not enough serious studying going on. So, ask a lot of questions about the social aspects of the school when visiting. What percentage of students are in fraternities? What is the alcohol policy at the school? At schools like Arizona State, the weekend starts on Wednesday---not Friday! Do you have the self-discipline to say no?
- Here is a list of colleges that get more positive comments than others; places that really care. What's a college that "cares"? A place where you don't feel like a number and there's a family-oriented attitude throughout the campus. Investigate these schools: Furman (SC), Dayton (OH), Marist (NY), Haverford (PA), Vanderbilt (TN), Barnard (NY), Siena (NY), Niagara (NY), Moravian (PA), Juniata (PA), Lycoming (PA), James Madison (VA), Elon (NC), University of Iowa, Davidson (NC).
- A student who is looking for financial aid should always apply to colleges in groups of two—schools that are similar academically and financially. The point being, if the student DOES get into both, and gets a \$10,000 grant from one and \$7,000 from another, the move here would be to ask the \$7,000 grant school if they could kick it up to \$10,000. It's best if the student calls the financial aid office on the negotiations.
- Don't be afraid to think outside the box when developing your list. Here is a list of a few schools, that you may have never heard of with great opportunities:
 - Clark University (MA): Offers a 5-year BA/MA program including master's in biology, biochemistry and molecular biology, chemistry, geographic information science, environmental science and policy and physics. The 5th year is free. Visit the website to see all eligible programs.
 - Hampshire College (MA): There are no pre-set majors or minors. Instead, students create a personalized, experiential, and interdisciplinary program of study with the support and guidance of a faculty advising committee. For example, a student may build a concentration in behavioral economics that incorporates coursework in economics, psychology, and anthropology.
 - Juniata (PA): 97% of graduates have jobs or advanced study plans within six months of graduation. While at Juniata, most students take advantage of experiential learning opportunities including study abroad, internships, and research.
 - Allegheny College (PA): Is one of a handful of colleges that requires both a major and minor program of study. With the freedom to select from over 900 combinations of majors and minors, students expand their concentrations beyond one division of the liberal arts and sciences, developing the skills essential in today's global marketplace: being articulate, innovative, analytical, collaborative, and creative.

Financial Aid Info

[Click Here For More Financial Aid Resources](#)

- **FAFSA:** ([FAFSA WEBSITE](#)) The FAFSA is available on October 1, 2025. Additionally, prior-prior year income is reported, meaning 2024 income is used for the 2024–25 FAFSA. What does this mean? Students and families can easily fill out the income section on their FAFSA using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool because 2024 taxes are already complete. Estimating income prior to completing a tax return is no longer necessary.
- **CSS Profile:** (<https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/>) is the financial aid application service of the College Board. More than 200 colleges, universities, graduate and professional schools and scholarship programs use the information collected on the PROFILE to determine eligibility for non-federal student aid funds.
- **The Net Price Calculator:** (<http://netpricecalculator.collegeboard.org/>) is a tool that you can use to estimate your “net price” to attend a particular college or university. Net price is the difference between the “sticker” price (full cost) to attend a specific college, minus any grants and scholarships for which you may be eligible. Sticker price includes direct charges (tuition and fees, room and board) and indirect costs (books and supplies, transportation, and personal expenses).
How does it work?
 1. First, the Net Price Calculator looks at the sticker price.
 2. Then, using the financial information you enter into the calculator, the Net Price Calculator estimates the amount of money your family would be expected to contribute to pay for college. Results will only be as reliable as the data you provide-use your most recent financial information.
 3. Finally, the Net Price Calculator evaluates your eligibility for financial aid at specific colleges by matching your financial and personal characteristics to the criteria that schools use to distribute financial aid (need-based grants as well as merit-based scholarships).
- **SCHOLARSHIPS:** Check SCOIR for updated local scholarships & list of search engines on page 15.
- **FINAID:** (<http://www.finaid.org/>) FinAid is the most comprehensive free resource for objective and unbiased information, advice and tools about student financial aid.
- **College Scorecard:** (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>) Allows you to sort and filter search results to compare school costs, average student loan amounts and future earnings.
- **FAFSA Estimator:** (<https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>) This website will forecast what you might expect to pay for college based on your income.
- **College Board Scholarship Search:** (<http://apps.collegeboard.org/>) A good place to start to help locate scholarships, internships, grants, and loans.

NCAA Eligibility

The basics to be eligible to participate in athletics on the Division I or Division II level:

- Graduate from high school.
- Complete 16 core courses in English, math, science, history, and world language.
- You must have a minimum core GPA of 2.3 (Division I) and 2.2 (Division II).
- You must file student release form with NCAA Eligibility (<https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>)

Applying to Visual and Performing Arts Programs

[Click here for more information.](#)

- You will need to access specific information from the college you are applying to. No two schools do it the same way. In most cases, there is a supplemental application and fee for auditions. Auditions usually occur in January or February.
- Performing Arts students should consider making an [Acceptd.com](#) profile as many institutions use this for pre-screening. It is also a search engine. Students should also become familiar with the National Unified Auditions listing to see the top performing arts schools in the country and the audition dates in NYC. [National Unified Auditions](#)
- Check each school's requirements carefully. Each one may have different requirements. For example, an art school may accept only a certain amount of submitted artwork. One dance school may allow you to send in a videotape in lieu of a live audition while another just down the highway may demand that you appear live on stage. Make sure you know what's expected and prepare accordingly.
- See if you can take a lesson with the person who teaches your instrument. If you play oboe and there's one oboe teacher and you don't get along well, it makes for a bad time.
- Your admission to a competitive fine arts school will be based, in part, upon review of traditional criteria such as your grade point average, level of coursework, test scores, essays, and interviews. However, for most professional colleges, whether it is a music school, dance school, or theater college, the evaluation of your portfolio or your audition will supersede the review of all other criteria for admission.
- Many visual arts colleges even pre screen potential applicants by reviewing portfolios prior to application in order to determine eligibility for admission. This process usually occurs during senior year and can give you valuable guidance early in the admission process (in other words, you'll know which schools not to apply to!)
- If you think your chances of getting into a competitive fine arts school are questionable, apply to comprehensive colleges and universities that offer majors in art and music as well as a variety of other fields. Most of them will rely on academic criteria to make an admission decision and your portfolio or audition, if required, will play a secondary role.
- Please reach out to your counselor, theater or music teacher for more guidance

The Essay

[Click Here For More College Essay Resources](#)

The “main essay” is capped at 650 words—about 1 ½ to 2 pages. In many instances, students will have to write one main essay and a few supplemental essays (anywhere from 50 to 500 words depending on the college). The college essay is your chance to show an admissions representative that you are more than just an SAT score or GPA; that you are a living, breathing human being. Be yourself! Don't try to tell the college what you think they want to hear. Your essay should be no more than two pages and focus on ONE main idea. If you could let an admissions representative know ONE thing about you—what would it be? You can find sample essays online to brainstorm some ideas. Remember: Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! This is something you will brainstorm with your junior year English teacher.



The Common Application



More than 1000 colleges accept the Common Application. Some schools only accept the Common Application while some schools don't. SCOIR will let you know which schools accept which application. Using this shared application will help you to save time in the application process. To get started, you will need to set up an account on the website: (<https://www.commonapp.org/>). Please use your MHS e-mail. You will need to link your Common Application account to SCOIR. Additional information about how to complete your Common App will be sent in July.

The Coalition Application

The Coalition for College Access is a group of more than 150 colleges and universities across the U.S. that joined together to increase students' access to higher education. We strongly encourage using the Common Application. **DO NOT USE THE COALITION APP UNLESS YOU TALK TO YOUR COUNSELOR!**

The SRAR (Self-Reported Academic Record)

The Self-Reported Academic Record (SRAR) is a list of a student's high school grades and courses that they've completed or will complete. Students can use the SRAR instead of sending their official high school transcript to some colleges during the application process. Not every school requires, but some do and it **MUST** be completed. Here is the list:

[SRAR INFORMATION](#)

The Junior Questionnaire & Parent Questionnaire

These are 2 extremely important pieces to your application. Your counselor will use the information provided to develop a thorough letter of recommendation. Your counselor will not process your college applications unless these documents are thoroughly completed in SCOIR. These questionnaires are confidential. The only people who can see your responses are you and your counselor--unless you gave someone else access to your SCOIR account. The letter of recommendation is an important piece to your college application so the more detailed you are with your responses, the better letter your counselor will write. If you have any questions or problems, reach out to your counselor. For parents to fill out their questionnaire, they must login to their own account.

Ranking

Mahwah High School doesn't report decile ranking on a student's transcript, only the Cumulative Weighted GPA will be reported to colleges and universities. We understand that colleges seek to understand a student within the context of the larger student body, but we wish to display our students in the most favorable light. The goal is for the admissions representative to view the entire transcript and not to focus on where a student places amongst his peers. In the rare instance a scholarship or program requires more specific information regarding rank, please reach out to the Director of Guidance.

Requesting Transcripts

What is your transcript? It is a record of all courses taken in high school, and the grades and credits earned in those classes. It also lists your GPA and personal information. A transcript is official only if it bears the raised school seal and is sent directly from our school to a college, agency, or other institution.

- Requesting Transcripts: Once you move a college to the "Applied" or "Applying" list in SCOIR, your counselor will be notified to send your transcript. If you **DO NOT** do this, your transcript will not be sent. [SCOIR: How to send transcripts](#)
- All college applications and many scholarship applications require an official high school transcript, faculty/staff recommendations and other supporting data. *It is very important for students and parents to be aware of application and transcript deadlines.*
- We cannot provide official copies of transcripts to students or parents. We can only send official transcripts to agencies, colleges, companies, employers, and organizations that provide scholarships. We can provide students with an unofficial copy of their transcript. Students can also get this information from their Realtime portal.

Requesting Teacher Recommendations

First, you need to ask, face-to-face, if your teacher will write one for you. If they say yes, you need to submit a request in SCOIR (MY COLLEGES >APPLICATION DOCUMENTS>SELECT NEW REQUEST. Begin typing in the name of the person and choose from the dropdown. Specify the type of recommendation whether it's for all colleges or a specific one, add a note, and select SUBMIT. You can only ask 2 teachers. If you need more than 2 teacher letters, please reach out to your counselor. [SCOIR: How to request letters of recommendation](#)

- Ask for a letter of recommendation from a teacher who knows you well.
- It doesn't have to be from a teacher in a class you got an A. Your letter is all about your character so if you struggled in a class and really put forth a lot of effort, a teacher can detail that wonderful work ethic in your letter.
- Give the writer time! Don't you hate being assigned a report that is due the very next day? Your teacher does too. Request your letters NOW in SCOIR. Teachers get bombarded with letters so you don't want your request to be at the bottom of the pile—particularly if you are going to apply early decision/action.
- Provide your resume to your recommendation writer. The more information you can provide, the better your letter is going to be. Your teacher is not going to remember all the amazing things you did in their class, so REMIND THEM!
- A teacher isn't required to write a letter for you, although most happily will because they want to help you in pursuing your dreams. Please make sure you ask them politely and give them any information they ask for. If your deadline is approaching, please send a respectful reminder of your request. In addition, send a thoughtfully worded thank you after they have completed your letter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How will the MHS Counseling Department help me through the college process?

A: We are always just an e-mail away! Reach out to your counselor at the first sign of trouble. In addition, we will be sending monthly guidance newsletters with specific direction on what you should be doing in the coming months. Read the newsletters and you will be fine!

Q: Besides focusing on my grades, what else can I do to prepare myself for college in my junior year?

A: Take a look at your resume (You can input information in the resume section on SCOIR.). What are you missing? Community Service? Leadership? When you figure it out—fix it!

Q: How many times should I take the SAT or ACT?

A: After you settle on your testing strategy, most students take the test 2 times in the spring and if you need to once in the fall of senior year. Studies have shown that any time after 3 doesn't improve your score.

Q: What's the FERPA?

A: When requesting letters of recommendation in SCOIR, you will need to complete the FERPA the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act in the Common Application. Before a teacher will write a letter of recommendation on your behalf, you must waive your right to access it at a later time. It is in your best interest to waive your right. If you don't, it sends a message to a college that you have something to hide, and that's why you want to retain access to your letter. If you have any concerns, reach out to your counselor. You will be able to review and sign your FERPA Release Authorization and Waiver of Rights forms by clicking the Review and Sign links beneath each form from the My Profile page.

Q: Should I take the SAT or ACT?

A: According to Princeton Review, the best way to decide which test is right for you is to take a timed full-length practice test in each. Since the content and style of the SAT and ACT are very similar, factors like how you handle time pressure and what types of questions you find most challenging can help you determine which test is a better fit. For example, the pace of the SAT gives you a tad more time to think through problems, while the ACT can be more of a time crunch. Some students really thrive under the pressure of the clock, while others prefer the extra time to ponder a question. If given the opportunity to take a practice test to assess your preparedness or comfort with the tests, you should do so. Please reach out to your counselor if you have further questions.

Q: I am getting inundated with mail from colleges, what should I do with it?

A: The trick is to read the information carefully, looking for the college characteristics that interest you. If you already know that you want a small- to medium-sized liberal arts college located in the Midwest, for example, keep that in mind as you look at college mail. The text can also offer you clues about the college's "personality" or educational philosophy. When you find a college with characteristics that interest you, put the brochure in a separate box or pile-your "possible" box. When you're ready to start some more in-depth research, the "possible" box will be a good place to start.

Q: When can I start applying to colleges?

A: Common Application accounts created in 2024-2025 will roll over to 2025-2026! This means that juniors can create their account now -- or whenever they are ready -- and it will be available for them in 2025-2026 as seniors. You can create an account now at [Commonapp.org](https://commonapp.org). Accounts created this year will roll over. Please use your MHS e-mail to register. Any student who is not planning to enroll in college in the next 12 months should select "Other student" on the registration page. Your user name and Common App ID will all be preserved. This means you will be able to sign in to next year's application system using the same email address you used this year. All Common App data will be preserved.

Q: A college I am interested in asked me if I want to interview, should I do it? How should I prepare?

A: An interview is a chance for you to meet with a representative from the college. It's a great way to show your interest in the college, form a relationship with college admissions and put your "best foot forward." College Board has some insight on questions you may be asked, and hints on how to answer them: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/interviews>

Important Links

- [MHS COLLEGE & CAREER COUNSELING WEBSITE](#)
- [SCOIR](#)
- [COLLEGE BOARD WEBSITE](#)
- [ACT WEBSITE](#)
- [TOEFL: TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE](#)
- [FAIRTEST.ORG: More than 1800 four-year colleges that are SAT and ACT Optional](#)
- [NCAA CLEARINGHOUSE ELIGIBILITY CENTER: Info for Division 1 & Division 2 Athletes](#)
- [COMMON APPLICATION WEBSITE](#)
- [FAFSA \(Free Application for Federal Student Aid Website\)](#)
- [CSS PROFILE WEBSITE](#)
- Scholarship websites:
 - You should start in your SCOIR Account under Scholarships
 - [FASTWEB](#)
 - [SCHOLARSHIPS.COM](#)
 - [MY SCHOLLY. COM](#)

Junior Conference Agenda: Spring 2025

NOTES

1. "Everything You Need to Know About the College Application Process Handbook for the Class of 2026"

2. Student Transcript

- Discuss GPA
- Graduation Requirements
- Activities: Can be checked on portal
- Next Year's Courses
- Career Pathways Transcript Endorsement
- Thunderbird Internship/Externship Program

3. Required Tests

- [Colleges That Are SAT/ACT Optional](#)
- Test Plan
- You are responsible for sending test scores

4. The Essay/Personal Statement

- Focus on 1 Idea
- 1.5 to 2 pages
- Randy Levin(April 10), College Essay Help!
- English 11 & English 12 classes
- Supplemental Essays

5. Letters of Recommendation

- Junior Questionnaire
- 2 Teachers

6. The College Process & SCOIR

- What did your "Career Interest Profiler" say?
- Visiting Schools: [Niche.com](#) & [Youvisit.com](#)
- How many applications should you send out?
- Registering with the Common Application
- The SRAR (Self-Reported Academic Record)
- Regular, ED, EA, Rolling
- Developing your list

7. Final Summation...3 Things to do by Sept.

- Narrow Down your Schools
- Create Your Common Application Account
- Solid Rough Draft of Essay

8. Final Reminders

- Senior Parent/Student Night in September
- READ the monthly Guidance Newsletters
- College Bus Trip: April 9, 2025 (TCNJ, ROWAN, & ST. JOSEPH'S)
- Relax & don't hesitate to ask questions
- Randy Levine: College Essay Advice (April 10)
- MHS College Application Boot Camp in August

Login Information

CommonApp

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

SCOIR

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

College Board (SAT, CSS Profile)

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

FAFSA

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

ACT

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

Self-Reported Academic Record (SRAR)

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

Other Sites

Website: _____

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

Website: _____

- Username: _____
- Password: _____

Website: _____

- Username: _____
- Password: _____