



COLLEGE PLANNING RESOURCES FOR SENIORS

In this handbook, you will find the following items:

- Graduation Requirements and SCHS Details
- Senior Year Checklist
- SAT and ACT Information
- College Admission Glossary
- Campus Visit Checklist
- Networking Tips
- Factors in the Admission Decision
- Essay writing tips and prompts
- Common Application Tips
- Using Naviance
- Financial Aid
- Additional Websites for Seniors (Scholarships, college planning, and more)

South Carroll CEEB Code: 211005

Prepared by the South Carroll High School Counseling Center

Available online at <https://sch.carrollk12.org/counseling/college-and-career-planning>

Graduation Requirements for Class of 2026 and Beyond

Credit Requirements: A minimum of 25 credits must be earned to meet graduation requirements. Many of these credits are required in specific areas as outlined in the chart below.

NOTE: This chart may be subject to change pending any State (MSDE) revisions to graduation requirements.

Subject	Required Credits	Required Courses
English	4	-English 9 -English 10 <i>or</i> English 10: AP Seminar -English 11 <i>or</i> AP Language and Composition <i>and/or</i> AP Seminar -English 12 <i>or</i> AP Literature and Composition <i>and/or</i> AP Research* (AP Seminar <i>or</i> AP Language and Composition may be taken as well)
Social Studies	3	-Government <i>or</i> AP United States Government and Politics -United States History <i>or</i> AP United States History -World History <i>or</i> AP World History
Science	3	-Conceptual Physics <i>or</i> AP Physics 1 -Chemistry of Earth and Space Science -Biology
Mathematics	4 All students must enroll in a mathematics course each year of high school.	-Algebra I -Geometry -Other credits must be 1 credit in duration and may be selected from the Program of Studies Mathematics course offerings.
Physical Education	1	-Physical Education I (½ credit) -½ credit of any other Physical Education course to fulfill 1 credit graduation requirement.
Health	1	-Health I -Health II
Visual and Performing Arts	1	-Completed credit in any Visual and Performing Arts course may be applied to the state Fine Arts graduation requirements unless otherwise indicated.
Technology Education	1	-Foundations of Technology <i>or</i> Exploring Computer Science <i>or</i> Principles of Engineering (part of Project Lead the Way completer program), <i>or</i> AP Computer Science Principles.
Graduation Pathway: • World Language • <i>Or</i> American Sign Language • <i>Or</i> State Approved Career and Technical Education Completer Program	2 2 3 - 9	-2 credits of the same World Language -American Sign Language I, II, and III (for 2 credits total) -See Completer Programs in the Program of Studies.
Financial Literacy	½	-Financial Literacy <i>or</i> -Managing Personal Finances Using Excel (1 credit)
Electives	4 ½ - 12	
Total Credits Required	25	

*Students who earn scores of 3 or higher in AP Seminar *and* AP Research receive the AP Seminar and Research Certificate™. Students who *also* earn scores of 3 or higher on four additional AP exams at any time in high school receive the AP Capstone Diploma™.

Notes

- Credit will be awarded for high school courses completed successfully in middle school.
- Students who successfully complete high school level mathematics courses prior to high school can count the earned credits toward their requirement but still need to be enrolled in a mathematics course in each year of high school.

Student Service-Learning Requirement

The state mandated 75 hours of service-learning requirement may be met by completing the course-related option and/or the exemplary service option. Students must earn 55 service hours to earn senior status. Additional information can be found on the [CCPS Service-Learning page](#).

Additional Requirements

- Four years of approved study beyond grade 8.
- Four credits must be earned after the completion of grade 11.
- Students must meet the High School Assessment requirements for Algebra I, English 10, Biology, and Government. Testing requirements and passing scores vary based on the year of course completion. Details related to each content area are provided below.
- All students shall be assessed no later than grade 10 to determine if the student meets the Maryland State Department of Education criteria for College and Career Readiness in English Language Arts and Mathematics.
- Transition courses or other instructional opportunities will be provided to students who have not achieved College and Career Readiness by the end of grade 10. Additional information about College Career Readiness can be found at [College + Career Readiness – Blueprint \(marylandpublicschools.org\)](#).

High School Assessment Requirements

NOTE: These assessment requirements may be subject to change pending any State (MSDE) revisions or requirements.

Algebra I

- Students taking Algebra I will be required to participate in the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment (MCAP) for Algebra I and pass the Algebra I course to meet the graduation requirement.

English 10

- Students taking English 10 or English 10: AP Seminar will be required to participate in the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment (MCAP) for English and pass the English 10 or English 10: AP Seminar course to meet the graduation requirement.

Biology

- Students in the 2026 graduating class taking Biology will be required to participate in the Life Science Maryland Integrated Science Assessment (LS MISA) to meet the graduation requirement.
- Students in the 2027 graduating class and beyond will be required to take the Life Science Maryland Integrated Science Assessment (LS MISA) for science as an end-of-course exam in Biology. The score will count for twenty percent of their final grade.

Government

- Students in the 2026 graduating class taking Government or AP US Government and Politics will be required to participate in the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment (MCAP) for government to meet the graduation requirement.
- Students in the 2027 graduating class and beyond will be required to take the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment (MCAP) for government as an end-of-year course exam in Government. The score will count for twenty percent of their final grade.

College and Career Readiness Standard

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was passed by the Maryland General Assembly to transform Maryland's public education into a world class education system. One of the main objectives is to prepare students to be college and career ready upon graduation. Pillar three of the Blueprint, College and Career Readiness (CCR), sets a standard to prepare graduates for success in college and the workforce by ensuring students have the knowledge and skills necessary to compete. The Blueprint aims to have all students meet the CCR standard by the end of their 10th grade year.

A student may meet CCR in several ways, which allow them to access additional benefits outlined in the programs below.

Meeting CCR by the end of 10th Grade (Choose 1 option)

- GPA (unweighted) of 3.0+ AND earn an A, B or C in Algebra 1 or score proficient or above on Algebra 1 MCAP assessment.

Meeting CCR in the 11th or 12th Grade:

- 1-year GPA (unweighted) 3.0+ in 11th or 12th grade AND earn an A, B, or C in a high school math course at any point in the student's high school career.

Other Ways to Meet CCR (any grade in high school) (Choose 1 option)

- **2 Dual Enrollment (DE) courses:**
 - o Grade C or better
 - o 1 course in mathematics
 - o 1 course in English, Science or Social Studies
- **2 AP courses:**
 - o Score 3 or better
 - o 1 assessment in Math
 - o 1 assessment in English, Science or Social Studies
- Earn a 50+ score on **ASVAB**
- **SAT and PSAT:**
 - o **SAT/PSAT:** 480+ in Reading and Writing and 530+ in Math
 - o **ACT:** Score 18+ in English and 22+ in Math
- Score *AT TARGET* on Math and ELA **DLM Alternate Assessments**
- Earn Silver + on **ACT WorkKeys Assessment**
- Earn a State-Approved **Industry Recognized Credential (IRC)**
- Complete the high school level of a registered **apprenticeship**

*All College and Career Readiness Standards are subject to change based upon the Maryland State Department of Education.



South Carroll High School

1300 West Old Liberty Road

Sykesville, Maryland 21784

(410) 751-3575

CEEB Code: 211005

Graduation Date for Class of 2027: June 2027

School Counselor Information:

Student Last Name:

A – Fe	Mr. Ed Wharton	ewwhart@carrollk12.org
Fi – Le	Mr. Matt Schwarzenberg	mrschwa@carrollk12.org
Li – Re	Mrs. Jessica Quinn	jzquinn@carrollk12.org
Rh – Z	Mrs. Emily Marasco	eemaras@carrollk12.org
Registrar	Ms. Audrey Domino	acdomin@carrollk12.org
Clerical	Ms. Karrie Neary	ksneary@carrollk12.org

GPA Scale: 4.0 Weighted (your transcript provides a weighted and unweighted GPA)

Course Scheduling System: Semester (block schedule)

Class Rank: Exact

Individual Student Information:

Transcripts can be seen in Home Access, but these are not official. Official copies of transcripts must be requested in Naviance or through the School Counseling Center. You can also request an unofficial copy for your records from the School Counseling Center.

**As of today's date, (check HAC for updated information during the school year):*

Class Rank	
GPA	
Service Hours	

For more resources and information, visit our school website:

<https://sch.carrollk12.org/counseling/college-and-career-planning>

➤ Look for Grade Specific Resources



South Carroll High School Senior Checklist

Summer - Fall

- ☐ Continue to have college discussion(s) with your family.
- ☐ Organize materials from colleges; decide which you are interested in visiting.
- ☐ Finalize your list of colleges that you are applying to in **Naviance** (Approx. 4-6)
 - Most applications open on August 1st.
 - Work on essays over the summer!
 - Start a [Common Application Account](#).
- ☐ Meet with your school counselor and review your plans.
- ☐ Will you take the [SAT](#) or [ACT](#) again? Register - *watch the deadlines!*
 - Send test scores - if needed - as soon as possible.
- ☐ Complete your Counselor Information Form on **Naviance**
- ☐ Ask for letters of recommendation as early as possible (give at least a 3-4 week notice) and send thank you notes a bit later.
- ☐ Make a calendar or checklist with deadlines and materials needed for applications and financial aid.
- ☐ Request transcripts through **Naviance**.
 - Give at least 10 school days' notice. The first 3 are free; \$2/each after the first 3.
- ☐ Obtain your [FAFSA ID](#) - required before completing your Financial Aid Forms
- ☐ Register with the [NCAA Clearinghouse](#) if you are hoping to be a college athlete.

Winter

- ☐ File the [FAFSA](#), [CSS Profile](#) (mostly private schools) and/or [Maryland State Financial Aid Application \(MSFAA\)](#) if you are not eligible for FAFSA.
 - File the FAFSA when it opens (October) and before any college and state deadlines. (Maryland's deadline is usually March 1).
- ☐ Request mid-year transcripts in **Naviance** if your colleges require them. Let colleges know if you have made changes to your class schedule.
- ☐ Keep up your grades!

Spring

- ☐ As you obtain acceptance letters, watch for financial aid and housing information.
 - Carefully analyze financial aid offers.
- ☐ Notify all colleges of your decision and accept an offer by May 1; send in your deposit.
- ☐ Study hard for AP exams, finals, and finish strong!

SAT / ACT TESTING INFO

SCHS CEEB Code: 211005

Most students take the SAT/ACT during their Junior / Senior year in high school. At least half of all students take the SAT twice – in the spring of their Junior year and in the fall of their Senior year. Most students improve their score the second time around.

SAT - The SAT measures critical thinking skills you'll need for academic success in college. The SAT is typically taken by high school juniors and seniors. The now digital test is composed of two sections: Reading/Writing and Math. Each section is scored on a scale of 200 - 800. It is typically administered seven times a year. Scores are usually available two weeks after taking the test. Free practice is available through [Khan Academy](https://www.khanacademy.org/). (www.khanacademy.org/) For more information, testing dates, online sample questions, preparation materials, and to register for a test, go to www.collegeboard.org

ACT - The ACT is another widely accepted college entrance exam. It assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work in the areas of English, math, reading, and science. There is also an optional writing test. Each section is scored from 1-36 and there is a composite score. It is typically offered six times a year. Free practice is available through ACT Academy on the ACT website. For more information and to register, go to www.act.org.

***** Please also note that some colleges will be Test Optional for the upcoming application cycle. Be sure to check with the colleges you are applying to for their most up to date policy. *****

FEE WAIVERS: Students may be eligible for fee waivers from the College Board or ACT based on family income. This is often determined by qualification for Free & Reduced Meals. Please contact your School Counselor if you feel you qualify for a fee waiver.

SAT TEST DATES www.collegeboard.org	ACT TEST DATES www.act.org
Aug 22, 2026	Sept 19, 2026
Sept 12, 2026	Oct 17, 2026
Oct 3, 2026	Dec 12, 2026
Nov 7, 2026	Feb 27, 2027
Dec 5, 2026	April 10, 2027
March 6, 2027	June 12, 2027
May 1, 2027	July 10, 2027
June 5, 2027	

Updated March 12, 2026

College Admission Glossary

Bachelor's Degree

When you complete the required courses and earn enough credits, typically after four years in college, you will earn a BA or bachelor's degree. Depending upon your major, you may earn a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS), or Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA).

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

An agreement many colleges follow that gives applicants until May 1 to accept or decline offers of admission. This deadline gives students time to get responses from most of the colleges they have applied to before deciding on one.

Class Rank

A measurement of how your academic achievement in high school compares with that of other students in your grade. Your class ranking is primarily based on your GPA.

Coalition for College Application

A standard application form accepted by members of the Coalition for College. You can use this application (www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org) to apply to any of the more than 150 colleges and universities that are members of the Coalition.

College Application Essay

An essay that a college requires students to write and submit as part of their application. Some colleges offer applicants specific questions to answer, while others simply ask applicants to write about themselves. Colleges may refer to this as a "personal statement."

College Financial Aid Offer

An offer of financial assistance to those who receive acceptance to a college. The offer includes all the monetary assistance available to you to pay for college. Also called an award letter, a financial aid award letter, or simply an offer, your letter will include the need-based assistance you qualify to receive based on your FAFSA® (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and any other required forms such as the CSS Profile or an institutional form.

Common Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are members of the Common Application association. The definition of the Common Application is synonymous with college application. You can fill out the Common App once and submit it to any one or several of the nearly 1000 colleges that accept it. Go to the Common Application (www.commonapp.org).

Demonstrated Interest

An action that demonstrates you have a sincere interest in attending a particular college. Many admissions committees consider this factor in making their decisions. Some of the ways you can demonstrate an interest in attending include a campus visit or virtual tour participation, having an initial interview, conversations with admission representatives, and applying for early admission.

Early Action (EA)

An option to apply to your first-choice college before the regular deadline. These deadlines can be as early as October 15. When you apply early action, you get an admission decision earlier than usual. Early action plans are not binding. You may wait as long as you need before making your final decision.

Early Decision (ED)

An option to apply to your first-choice college before the regular deadline. When you apply early decision, you get an admission decision earlier than usual. Early decision plans are binding. You agree to enroll in the college immediately if admitted and offered a financial aid package that meets your needs. Some colleges have an early decision option called ED II, which has a later application deadline than their regular ED plan.

FAFSA

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Everyone planning to attend college should fill in and submit a FAFSA (<https://studentaid.gov/>) prior to their first year. It determines if you qualify for financial assistance with tuition so you can attend the school of your choice. Your college offer may be based on your FAFSA results.

Financial Aid

Money given or loaned to you to help pay for college. Financial aid can come from federal and state governments, colleges, and private organizations. It might also include work-study assistance.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

A number that shows overall academic performance. It's computed by assigning a point value to each grade you earn. It is also a key factor in determining your class rank.

Open Admission

A policy of accepting any high school graduate, no matter what his or her grades are, until all spaces in the incoming class are filled. Almost all two-year community colleges have an open-admission policy. However, a college with a general open-admission policy may have admission requirements for certain programs.

Placement Tests

Tests that measure the academic skills needed for college-level work. They cover reading, writing, math, and sometimes other subjects. Placement test results help determine what courses you are ready for and whether you would benefit from remedial classes. They can also determine whether you need to take a basic course.

Priority Date or Deadline

The date by which your application—whether it's for college admission, student housing, or financial aid—must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

Rolling Admission

An admission policy of considering each application as soon as all required information (such as high school records and test scores) has been received, rather than setting an application deadline and reviewing applications in a batch. Colleges that use a rolling admission policy usually notify applicants of admission decisions quickly.

Self-Reported Academic Record (SRAR)

An initiative to ultimately have all future undergraduate applicants to the University submit their high school record as part of the application process, rather than having the school counselors send transcripts for each applicant. It is important that students report grades exactly as they appear on your high school transcript. We suggest that you have a copy of your high school transcript on hand when completing this task.

Transcript

The official record of your coursework at a school or college. Your high school transcript is usually required for college admission, and for some financial aid packages or scholarship applications. Request an Official or Unofficial transcript from Naviance. Official transcripts are sent directly to the college/scholarship or given to the student in a sealed envelope. Unofficial transcripts can be handed directly to the student, emailed and copied as necessary.

Waiting List

The list of applicants who may be admitted to a college if space becomes available. Colleges wait to hear if all the students they accepted decide to attend. If students don't enroll and there are empty spots, a college may fill them with students who are on the waiting list.

Weighted Grade Point Average (GPA)

A grade point average that's calculated using a system that assigns a higher point value to grades in certain classes, typically more difficult ones. For example, some high schools assign the value of 5.0 (instead of the standard 4.0) for an A earned in an AP class.

Adapted from The CollegeBoard (www.collegeboard.org)

Updated May 17, 2024

Career Networking Tips: Career Networking Advice and good Career Networking Skills

With over **70% of job vacancies never advertised**, Career Networking is crucial for meeting recruiters and establishing a first line of enquiry when looking for jobs. Any person can be a possible job contact. The idea is to find out how associates can influence your career through introductions to possible contacts, providing information about potential job opportunities or providing leads when looking for jobs. Career networking can be an effective job search technique - we give a detailed guide...

Career Networking Tips: Building Contacts

What is career networking?

Networking is all about building up a **number of contacts** with people who can influence an individual's career within a particular company or industry sector. Useful contacts will be able to introduce **job seekers** (contact) to the people who can make a difference.

Contacts can be business people, friends, family, neighbors, recruitment consultants, former employers, work colleagues, careers advisors, university lecturers, **college professors, and college admission counselors** or contacts made through professional associations, meetings and recruitment fairs, etc. Basically, **anyone can be a contact**.

Career and personal networking websites such as LinkedIn.com or Facebook are very useful for establishing contacts and building networks. However, it is recommended you not disclose too much personal information for security and identity reasons.

Significance Of Career and College Networking

Networking is all about talking to people, learning and benefiting from their experiences, insights and contacts. **Successful networking** requires time, effort and background work. This can be a great tactic to put **job seekers and college recruits** ahead of the competition.

Networking happens more than people think, particularly in close-knit business communities or within the experienced business community. It should be deployed as an effective **job search technique** wherever people find themselves on their **career path**.

Networking can help to develop **company contacts** and possible job opportunities can result. At the very least people can benefit from gaining an additional insight into a particular industry or company. Alternatively, it can confirm any doubts for working for a particular employer or industry.

Winning Building up a credible network of contacts

There are several considerations for **effective networking** and can be applied throughout a person's working life. Contacts can be called on at any time in the future.

- 1) Remember that **you** are at the **center** of any network.
- 2) Define any contacts under specific headings - i.e. business contacts, family, friends, etc. Include name and other relevant details for each contact.
- 3) Identify what is required from each contact and how they can possibly help. At this stage, some contacts will be deleted as they do not currently **add value** to a network.
- 4) Make initial contacts through writing, telephoning, or emailing those identified. Arrange a face-to-face meeting if possible - this is more effective. It shows serious intent, and it is much easier to build a rapport when face-to-face.
- 5) Maintain a spreadsheet of all contacts, meetings, correspondences, and business cards. This can be used for future references and to avoid the overuse of contacts.
- 6) **Show courtesy towards contacts.** It is important to thank them and to maintain a **good relationship** as they can help in the future. Keep in touch and offer some indication of any **career progress** made. It makes sense never to 'over-use', neglect, or be rude to contacts (i.e. otherwise they will not remain contacts for very long!)

Source: <http://www.winningcv.co.uk/career-networking.html>

Campus Visit Checklist

Visiting a college campus helps you get a sense of what a college — and life at that college — is like. This can help you decide whether the college is right for you.

GATHER INFORMATION

Find out what you need to do to apply, and see if the college's class and major offerings are what you want:

- ☐ Take part in a group information session at the admission office.
- ☐ Interview with an admission officer.
- ☐ Pick up financial aid forms.
- ☐ Sit in on a class that interests you. If classes aren't in session, just see what the classrooms are like.
- ☐ Meet a professor who teaches a subject that interests you.
- ☐ Talk to students about what they think of their classes and professors.
- ☐ Get the names and business cards of the people you meet so you can contact them later if you have questions.

EXPLORE THE CAMPUS

Get a feel for student life, and see if this college is a place where you will do well:

- ☐ Take a campus tour.
- ☐ Visit the dining hall, fitness center, library, career center, bookstore, and other campus facilities.
- ☐ Talk to current students about the college and life on campus.
- ☐ Check out the freshman dorms, and stay overnight with a student, if possible.
- ☐ Talk to the coaches of sports that you may want to play.
- ☐ Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.

CHECK OUT CAMPUS MEDIA

Tune in to learn what's happening on campus and what's on students' minds:

- ☐ Listen to the college radio station.
- ☐ Read the student newspaper.
- ☐ Scan bulletin boards to see what daily student life is like.
- ☐ Go to the career center and learn what services it offers.
- ☐ Browse the school's website and any campus blogs.
- ☐ Read other student publications, such as department newsletters, alternative newspapers, and literary reviews.

GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAMPUS VISIT IN **6 STEPS**

1 DECIDE WHERE AND HOW

See if your school arranges group trips to colleges or if you could get a group of friends together and visit the campus. A family trip is another option and allows you to involve your family in the process.

2 PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Before you set out, get a map of the college campus and pick out places of interest. Call the college's admission office to schedule a guided tour of the campus.

3 TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR

Just wandering around the campus on your own or with friends can be the best way to get a feel for what a college is like.

4 EXPLORE THE FACILITIES

Find the spots on campus where students gather or ask a student where the best place to eat is to get a feel for the character of the college. Visit the library and check out the gym or theater. Ask an admission officer if you can tour a dorm and a classroom.

5 MAKE CONNECTIONS

Talk to current students. Ask the students at the next table or sitting nearby what they like best about the college.

6 TAKE NOTES

During your visit, write down some notes about your experience. What did you see that excited you? Are there aspects of the college that you don't like? If so, what are they?

Questions to Ask During Your Visit:

ASK TOUR GUIDES/STUDENTS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- What's it like to go from high school to college?
- What do you do in your free time? On the weekends?
- What do you love about this college?
- What do you wish you could change about this college?
- Why did you choose this college?
- What is it like to live here?
- What does the college do to promote student involvement in campus groups, extracurricular activities, or volunteerism?

ASK PROFESSORS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- Can a student be mentored by professors, graduate students, or upperclassmen?
- How are professors rated by the college? Does the college think mentoring and meetings for project guidance are important?
- How does the college help students have access to professors outside class? Do professors join students for lunch, help with community service groups, or guide student organizations?
- How many students do research or other kinds of projects for a semester or more?

ASK THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- How much has your total college cost for each student risen in the past year?
- How much do your students usually end up owing when they graduate?
- What is the average income of graduates who had the same major that interests me?
- Will my costs go up when your tuition goes up, or can we use the same tuition rate I started with so I'll know the costs for four years?
- How many students usually graduate in the major that interests me? How long do these students usually take to get their degree? In what ways does the college help students graduate in four years?

FACTORS IN THE ADMISSION DECISION

Your high school grades are the #1 factor in the college admission decision. Other factors count, but the body of work you develop in high school is what matters the most - as it should. Colleges do not choose students by the numbers only - they don't simply take the students with the highest grades and test scores. Colleges use many other factors to add depth to the numbers and to compare applications with each other to build a class that fits the college's mission. Students who meet or exceed the threshold for admission are, at selective colleges, evaluated based on all the attributes they bring to campus, including special talents, academic interests, and personal characteristics. Here's a breakdown of what colleges consider:



PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2023

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
High School Grades in College Prep courses	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Total High School Grades (all courses)	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of High School curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Positive Character attributes	184	28.3	37.5	18.5	15.8
Essay or writing sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's interest in attending	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor Recommendation	185	11.9	40.0	27.6	20.5
Teacher Recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Extracurricular activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4
High School Class Rank	183	5.5	22.4	43.2	29.0
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	185	4.9	25.4	38.9	30.8
Portfolio	185	4.9	10.8	24.3	60.0
Interview	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Work	185	2.2	30.8	40.0	27.0
State graduation exam scores	185	1.6	6.5	18.4	73.5
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	185	1.1	22.2	25.9	50.8



Tips for Writing an Effective Application Essay

A typical college application essay, also known as a personal statement, is 400-600 words. Although that may seem short, writing about yourself can be challenging. It's not something you want to rush or put off at the last moment. Think of it as a critical piece of the application process.

Your essay reveals something important about you that your grades and test scores can't - your personality. It can give admissions officers a sense of who you are and showcase your writing ability.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when writing.

1. Start Early.

Few people write well under pressure. Try to complete your first draft a few weeks before you have to turn it in. Many advisers recommend starting as early as the summer before your senior year in high school. That way, you have ample time to think about the prompt and craft the best personal statement possible.

You don't have to work on your essay every day, but you'll want to give yourself time to revise and edit. You may discover that you want to change your topic or think of a better way to frame it. Either way, the sooner you start, the better.

2. Understand the Prompt and Instructions.

Before you begin the writing process, take time to understand what the college wants from you. The worst thing you can do is skim through the instructions and submit a piece that doesn't even fit the bare minimum requirements or address the essay topic. Look at the prompt, consider the required word count, and note any unique details each school wants.

Admissions officers also want to see that the student can give a direct answer while sticking to a comprehensive narrative. When writing college essays, consider the point you want to make and develop a fleshed-out response that fits the prompt. Avoid force-fitting prewritten pieces. Approach every personal essay prompt as if it's your first.

3. Create a Strong Opener.

Spending more time working on your opener is always a promising idea. The opening sentence sets the stage for the rest of your piece. The introductory paragraph is what piques the interest of the reader, and it can immediately set your essay apart from the others. You want to make the admissions officer reading your essay curious about what you say next.

4. Stay on Topic.

One of the most important things to remember is to keep to the essay topic. If you're applying to 10 or more colleges, it's easy to veer off course with so many application essays.

A common mistake many students make is trying to fit previously written essays into the mold of another college's requirements. This seems like a time-saving way to avoid writing new pieces entirely, but it often backfires. The result is usually a final piece that's generic, unfocused, or confusing. Always write a new essay for every application, no matter how long it takes.

5. Think About Your Response.

Don't try to guess what the admissions officials want to read. Your essay will be easier to write - and more exciting to read - if you're genuinely enthusiastic about your subject. Here's an example: If all your friends are writing application essays about covid-19, it may be a good idea to avoid that topic, unless during the pandemic you had a vivid, life-changing experience you're burning to share. Whatever topic you choose, avoid canned responses. Be creative.

6. Focus on You.

Essay prompts typically give you plenty of latitude, but panel members expect you to focus on a subject that is personal (although not overly intimate) and particular to you. Admissions counselors say the best essays help them learn something about the candidate that they would never know from reading the rest of the application.

7. Stay True to Your Voice.

Use your usual vocabulary. Avoid fancy language you wouldn't use in real life. Imagine yourself reading this essay aloud to a classroom full of people who have never met you. Keep a confident tone. Be wary of words and phrases that undercut that tone.

Writing college essays isn't about using flowery or verbose prose. Avoid leaning too heavily on the thesaurus to sound impressive. Choose a natural writing style that's appropriate for the subject matter.

Stay true to your voice. Keep in mind that authenticity is more important than anything else.

8. Be Specific and Factual.

Capitalize on real-life experiences. Your essay may give you the time and space to explain why a particular achievement meant so much to you. But resist the urge to exaggerate and embellish. Admissions counselors read thousands of essays each year. They can easily spot a fake.

9. Show You Can Write.

Colleges want to see that you have a command of the basics of good writing, which is a key component of success in college.

10. Edit and Proofread.

When you finish the final draft, run it through the spell checker on your computer. Then don't read your essay for a few days. You'll be more apt to spot typos and awkward grammar when you reread it. After that, ask a teacher, parent, or college student (preferably an English or communications major) to give it a quick read.

11. Keep Track of Length.

Finally, admissions officers value succinctness. Remember to pay attention to the recommended essay length or word count.

*Adapted from www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org
updated on March 12, 2026*

College Application Essay Prompts for 2026-2027

➤ Common Application Essay Prompts: <https://www.commonapp.org/>

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

➤ Coalition for College Essay Prompts: <http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/>

1. Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
2. What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?
3. Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others. What were the challenges? What were the rewards?
4. Has there been a time when an idea or belief of yours was questioned? How did you respond? What did you learn?
5. What success have you achieved, or obstacle have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar experience?
6. Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

How the first-year Common App works

A quickstart guide for students using the first-year Common App



1 Add colleges

Get started by adding colleges to your list. You can find colleges to apply to under “college search” in your Common App account. College search also has information and links to help you research each college. More than 1,100 colleges use Common App!

Go to commonapp.org/explore to start exploring.

2 Stay organized

Each college has its own set of specific requirements and supplements. When it comes to tracking this information and staying organized, we’re here to help! Use the requirements grid and each college’s information page to find this information.

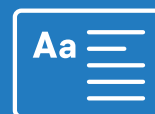
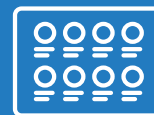
To start your college application checklist, check out our “My College Requirements” worksheet at commonapp.org/ready.

3 Complete and submit

Answering all the questions in My Common Application is a great way to start your applications. For each college you will:

- Answer college specific questions
- Invite and manage recommenders
- Complete other supplements (if applicable)

After all these sections are complete, you are ready to submit your application! Submission is simple: review, pay (if applicable), and submit.



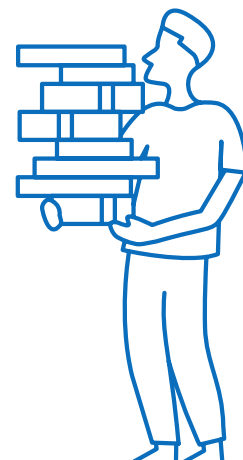
How does my application get there?

When you submit we combine your responses from the Common App and college specific questions, as well as any supplements, into one form. Your counselor, teachers, and other recommenders complete their reports and evaluations separately.

As recommenders submit their forms, they will be sent to the college to be added to your application.

Gather your materials

Use this checklist to help you gather the information you'll need as you fill out your Common App.



☐ High school information

You'll need to know things like your high school's CEEB code, GPA scale, and class rank reporting. Check in with your counselor for more details about this information. Ask them for the High School Details information sheet! (Download it at commonapp.org/ready)

☐ An unofficial copy of your high school transcript

You'll be asked to list the courses you're taking this academic year.

Some colleges ask applicants to self report their full academic record in the Courses & Grades section. If you have a college on your list that requires Courses & Grades, you'll need your transcript to complete this section.

☐ A copy of your test scores and dates

You have the option to enter scores for standardized exams like the ACT and SAT that you have taken and/or plan to take. Don't forget, you'll still need to send official score reports to colleges that require them.

☐ Citizenship information

Social Security Number, if you intend to apply for financial aid via FAFSA (For U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, U.S. dual citizens, U.S. permanent residents, U.S. refugees, and U.S. asylees).

For Permanent Residents: A copy of your green card.

For non-U.S. citizens: U.S. visa type, number, and date issued. If you do not yet have a U.S. visa but intend to apply for one, you can indicate that in the application.

☐ State of residence information

If you think you qualify for in-state tuition for a school you might be asked to share more information about your residence in that state.

☐ **Parent information**

You'll be asked to share some basic information about one or more parents, including your parent's occupation and job title, and the education level they received. If your parent attended college, you'll need to know the name and location of the college they attended, as well as what degree they received and when.

☐ **A list of academic honors**

You can include up to 5 academic honors you received during high school. You'll need to include the honor's title, when you received it, and the level of recognition you received (regional or national, for example).

☐ **A list of your activities**

You have the option to enter up to 10 activities you participated in during high school. These activities might include family responsibilities, jobs, volunteer work, clubs, sports, hobbies, and more.

For each activity you'll list: the years of participation, hours per week and weeks per year spent on the activity, position/leadership held, and a brief description.

Use this space to jot down a few activities you want to report in your application.



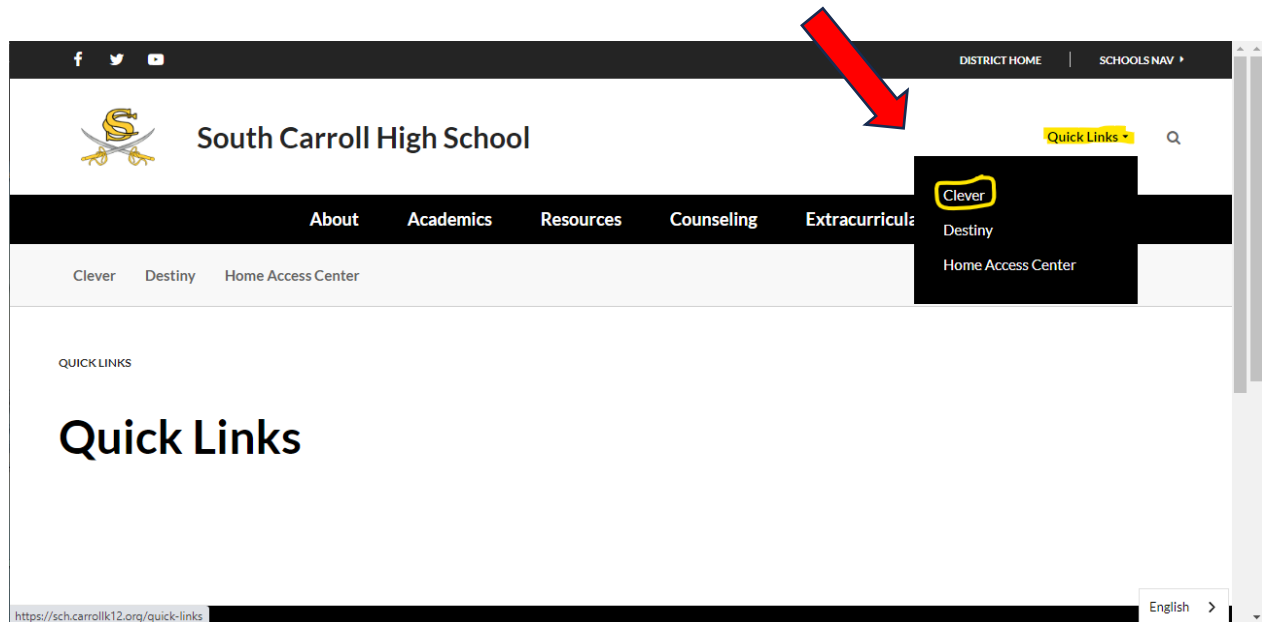
Parent information

- **Occupation**
- **Job title**
- **Education level**
- **Name of college(s) attended**
- **College location**
- **Degree earned**
- **Year degree earned**

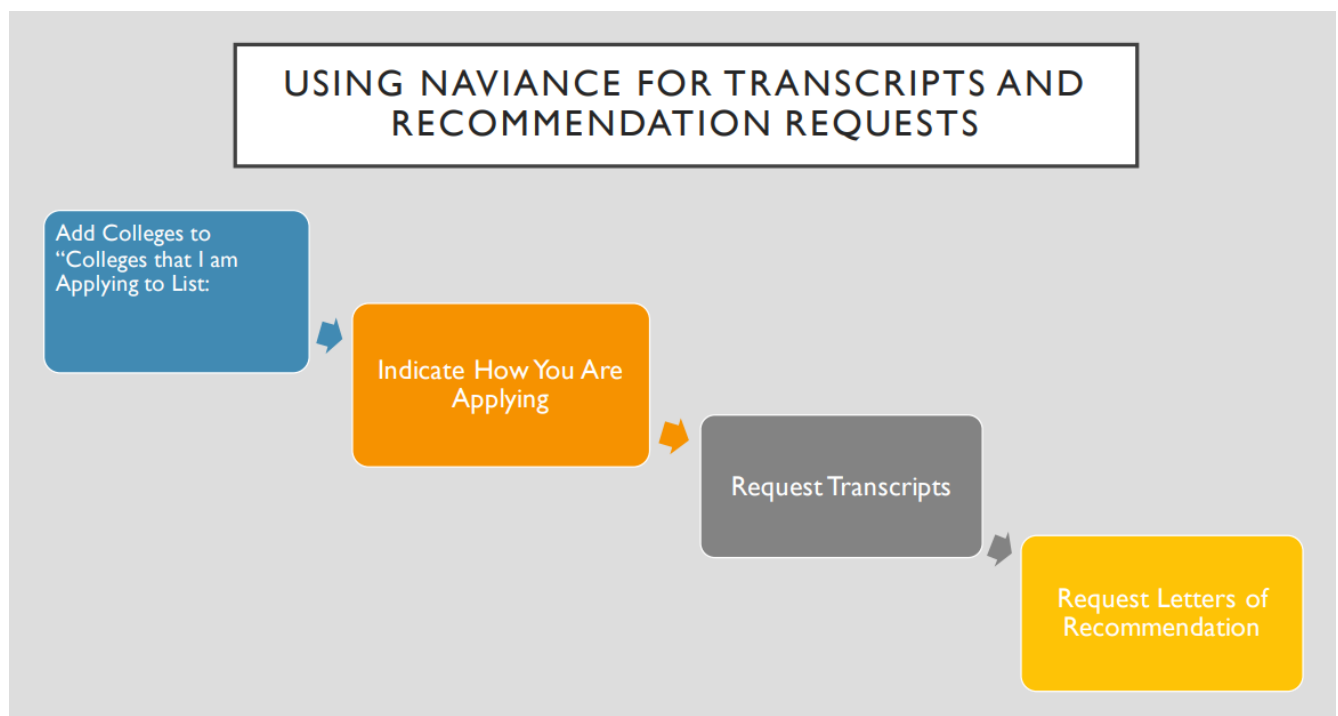
Using Naviance

All Carroll County High School students applying to college **must use Naviance** to request transcripts and letters of recommendation (regardless of the application type you are using).

- Access your account through the Clever Portal using your CCPS Active Directory with your Username and Password. [Access Clever Portal](#) from the Quick Links on the [SCHS website](#).



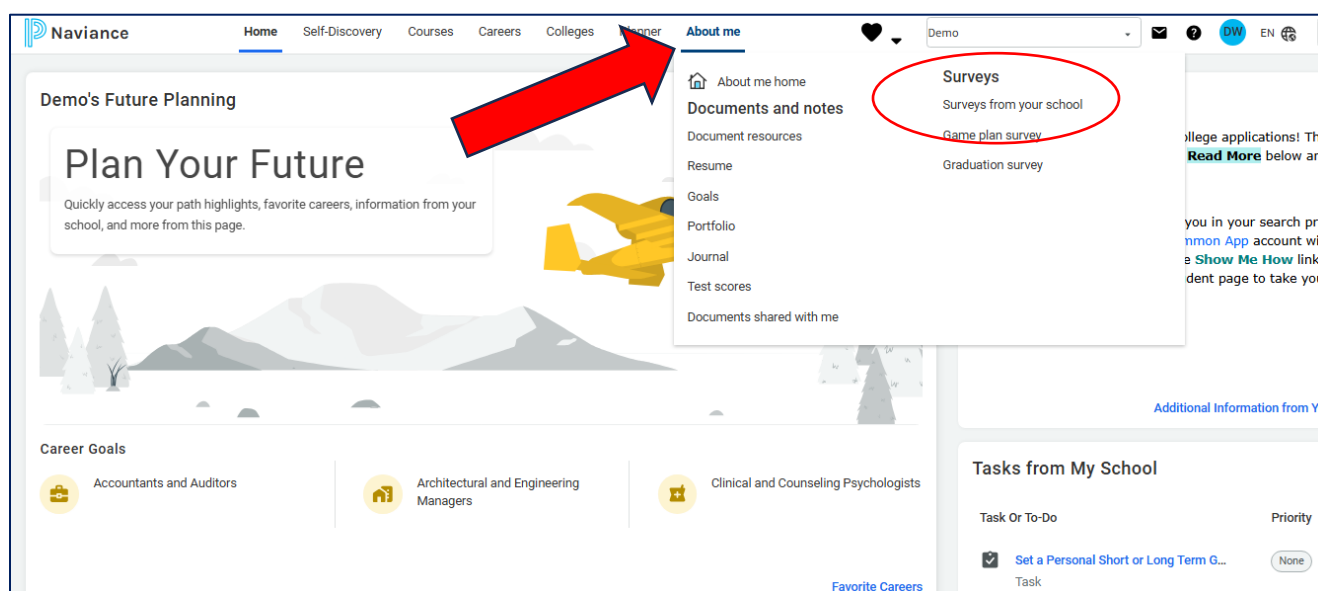
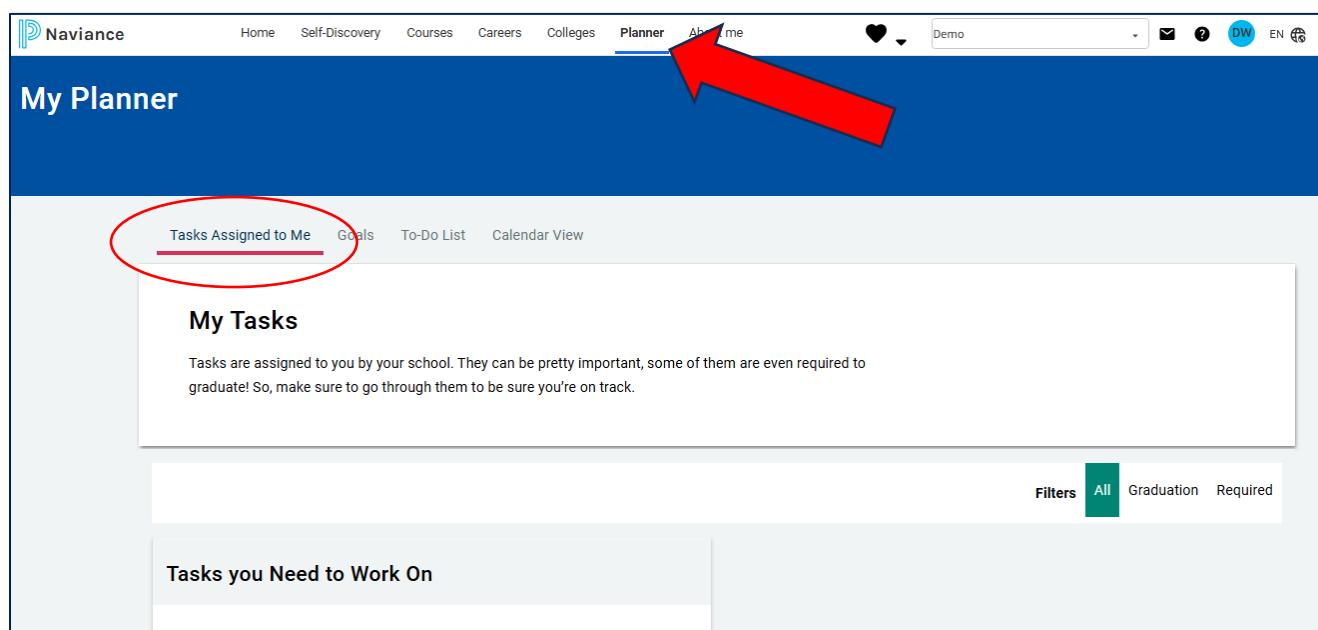
College Visits- see who is coming to visit or offering virtual information sessions! Look for information under the Welcome message on the main page of your Naviance account.



Check out the guide on [Using Naviance to Apply to College](https://sch.carrollk12.org/counseling/college-and-career-planning) (<https://sch.carrollk12.org/counseling/college-and-career-planning>) including tips on...

- Matching the Common App to your account - You will apply to a college using Common App, Coalition, or individual college applications available on their websites. **Only the Common App is integrated with Naviance, so you must match these two accounts.**
- Adding Colleges to “Colleges I am Applying to List”
- Requesting Transcripts
- Requesting Letters of Recommendation - For Letters of Recommendation, you will be asked to complete a Counselor Information Form to help teachers write you a better and more detailed letter. You should also have an updated resume in Naviance.

❖ **Counselor Information Form** for Letters of Recommendation in Naviance (*Find it 2 ways- under About Me or under Planner*)



6 Things Students Need Before They Fill Out the FAFSA®

1) Your StudentAid.gov Account

You'll need to [create a StudentAid.gov account](#) to access and fill out the 2027–28 FAFSA form.

As a student, you'll be required to enter your Social Security number (SSN) to create a StudentAid.gov account unless you're a citizen of the Freely Associated States. Your contributors who don't have an SSN can create a StudentAid.gov account to complete their section of your FAFSA form.

Tip: If you don't have access to your SSN or don't know where it is, you can [request a new or replacement Social Security card](#) from the Social Security Administration.

For guidance on how to create an account, watch [Create and Access Your StudentAid.gov Account](#).

2) Your Contributor Information

Your contributors will each need their own StudentAid.gov account too. "Contributor" is a term on the 2027–28 FAFSA form—it refers to anyone (you, your spouse, your biological or adoptive parent, or your parent's spouse) required to provide information on your FAFSA form.

When you fill out the FAFSA form, you'll answer questions that will determine who needs to be a contributor on your form. However, you may be able to identify your contributors now to get a head start on collecting the information you'll need to invite them to your form.

To find out if your parent(s) will be a contributor on your FAFSA form, check out the [Is My Parent a Contributor When I Fill Out My FAFSA® Form?](#) infographic.

If your parents are divorced the parent who provided more financial support over the past 12 months, they will be identified as a contributor on your FAFSA form. But if both parents provide equal amounts of financial support, or if your parents don't support you financially at all, the parent with the greater income and assets will be identified as a contributor. View the image table to get a better understanding of what happens if your parents are divorced and provide you with equal financial support.

Which Divorced Parent Will Be Identified as a Contributor on My FAFSA® Form?	
Lindsey is a sophomore in college. Lindsey's parents are divorced, and each parent provides \$1,000 of financial support every month. Lindsey isn't sure which parent will be identified as a contributor on the FAFSA form.	
Parent A	Parent B
Annual Income: \$60,000 Current Value of Assets: \$80,000	Annual Income: \$120,000 Current Value of Assets: \$100,000
The answer is... Parent B Because Parent B earns more income and has greater assets, they will be identified as a contributor on Lindsey's FAFSA form.	

To invite contributors to your FAFSA form, you'll be asked to provide their...

-first and last name -SSN (if they have one) -date of birth -email address

Note: Being identified as a contributor on the FAFSA form won't make your family member responsible for paying for your education costs.

3) Your Federal Income Tax Return

You and your contributors must provide consent and approval to have your federal tax information transferred directly from the IRS into your FAFSA form. Providing consent and approval is mandatory, even if you or your contributors don't have an SSN, didn't file a tax return, or filed a tax return outside the U.S.

If you or your contributors don't provide consent and approval to have your federal tax information transferred into the FAFSA® form, you won't be eligible for federal student aid.

4) Records of Your Untaxed Income

You and your contributors may need to answer FAFSA questions about untaxed income, such as child support and interest income.

5) Records of Your Assets

The FAFSA form will ask you and your contributors questions about your assets, so make sure you have records of your savings and checking account balances, as well as the value of any investment, such as stocks, bonds, and real estate (excluding your primary residence). Report the current amounts of your assets as of the date you sign the FAFSA form, rather than reporting the 2022 tax year amounts.

Share the [Gather Information Required To Complete the FAFSA® Form](#) video with your contributors to help them understand which records they may need on hand to complete their sections of the form.

6) List of Schools You're Interested in Attending

Be sure to add any colleges, career schools, or trade schools you're considering, even if you haven't applied or been accepted yet. You can list up to **20 schools**.

Even if there's only a slight chance you'll apply to a school, list it on your FAFSA form. You can always remove a school later if you decide not to apply, but if you wait to add a school, you could miss out on financial aid.

After your FAFSA form is processed, the schools you list on the form will receive your FAFSA results electronically. They'll use your FAFSA information to determine the types and amounts of financial aid you may receive. We'll send an email to let you know when your information has been shared with your schools.

If you add a school to your FAFSA form and later decide not to apply for admission, that's OK! The school likely won't offer you aid until you've been accepted anyway.

Tip: Several states require you to list schools in a particular order to be considered for state aid. For instance, you might need to **list a state school first**. Find out whether your state has a [requirement for the order you list schools](#) on your FAFSA form.

Ready to apply for federal student aid?

Once the 2027–28 FAFSA form becomes available, you can start your form at www.studentaid.gov. Learn more about filling out the FAFSA form on the “[How To Fill Out the FAFSA® Application](#)” page.

Additional Resources:

- [Steps for Parents Completing the FAFSA® Form – Federal Student Aid](#)
 - <https://studentaid.gov/articles/fafsa-for-parents/>
- [How To Evaluate Your Aid Offers – Federal Student Aid](#)
 - <https://studentaid.gov/articles/evaluating-financial-aid-offers/>
- [Financial Aid Dictionary: Top Terms Related to Grants, Work-study, and Student Loans – Federal Student Aid](#)
 - <https://studentaid.gov/articles/financial-aid-dictionary/>
- [CSS Profile Home – CSS Profile | College Board](#)
 - <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/>
- [State Financial Assistance Programs & Applications \(maryland.gov\)](#)
<https://mhec.maryland.gov/preparing/Pages/FinancialAid/descriptions.aspx>

Source: www.studentaid.gov
Updated March 12, 2026

FAFSA CHECKLIST

fastweb

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, is a financial aid form that students must fill out and submit if they hope to qualify for federal, state, and institutional aid. This form must be submitted every year you are enrolled in school to maintain aid eligibility.

When filling out the FAFSA, there are specific documents that everyone will need to complete the fields on the form. Below is the comprehensive list for first-time FAFSA filers:

IDENTIFICATION

Depending on your citizenship status, you will need one or some of the following:

- ☐ Social Security card
- ☐ Driver's License
- ☐ Alien registration card if you're not a U.S. citizen

FSA ID

You will need to create your FSA ID to begin working on the FAFSA. This will be used to sign and complete the form.

- ☐ FSA ID for the student

FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS

Financial documentation must come from both you and your parents or guardians. Note that submitting their financial information does not require your parents or guardians to contribute to your college costs financially. However, without their information, you will be unable to qualify for financial aid:

- ☐ Your [the student's] previous year's federal income tax returns, W-2s, and any other records of income earned, if applicable
- ☐ Your parents/guardians' previous-previous year's federal income tax returns, W-2s, and 1040s
- ☐ Records and documents of other nontaxable income: *Welfare benefits, Social Security income, child support, etc.*
- ☐ Additional applicable financial information: *Income earned from apprenticeships, fellowships, grants, scholarships, etc.*
- ☐ Current bank and brokerage statements
- ☐ Business or investment farm records
- ☐ Records relating to unusual financial information: *High dependent care costs, death, divorce, job loss, etc.*

FAFSA

CHECKLIST

fastweb

SCHOOL CODES

Finally, the form asks for school codes to ensure your financial information is sent to the correct colleges:

- ☐ Title IV Institution codes for each school you're applying to

FAFSA APPLICATION TIPS

- ☐ Complete your FAFSA as soon as possible. Many states distribute aid on a first-come, first-served basis.
- ☐ State deadlines differ from the national deadline, which is always June 30 of the following year that the FAFSA is released. Try to have your form submitted by the state deadline so that you can qualify for state financial aid.
- ☐ Remember to submit the form every year to remain eligible for financial aid. Resubmitting the form is easier and takes less time in the subsequent years.

HELP COMPLETING THE FAFSA

Completing the FAFSA can be a barrier to attending college and qualifying for financial aid for some students. Be sure that you're seeking help to complete the form. There are many resources available to both students and parents/guardians:

- ☐ You can call, email, or chat with the Federal Student Aid Information Center.
- ☐ Furthermore, you can request an Interpreter for your call to the Federal Student Information Center. The interpreters cover 10 different languages.
- ☐ The FAFSA is available in both English and Spanish.
- ☐ Many communities offer FAFSA Help Days, where students and parents can meet one-on-one with a financial aid expert who will walk them through filling out the form.
- ☐ Meet with your school counselor or a financial aid administrator for FAFSA help.

Helpful Websites for Seniors

updated March 12, 2026

Resource	On-Line Address	Description
ACT, Inc.	www.act.org	ACT registration, information. PLAN help. College Search. Financial Aid Estimator.
Carroll Community Foundations	www.wearecarroll.org	Carroll county and other local scholarship listings.
College Board	www.collegeboard.org	SAT registration, information, and practice questions. PSAT help. College planning and search. Scholarship Search
Campus Tours	www.campustours.com	Virtual campus tours. College planning. Financial aid. Scholarship search. Career exploration.
CSS Profile	https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/	The CSS Profile is an online application used by colleges and scholarship programs to award non-federal institutional aid.
Fastweb	www.fastweb.com	Free scholarship search service
Federal Student Aid	www.studentaid.gov	Start the FAFSA form; and more Financial Aid information
FinAid	www.finaid.org	Free guide to Federal financial aid, scholarships, student loans, and military aid
GoCollege	www.gocollege.com	College search. Scholarship search. Financial Aid. Distance learning opportunities. SAT & ACT help.
MD Higher Education Commission	www.mhec.state.md.us	MD college/university search. Scholarship search. College planning. Financial Aid. Online applications. Career Center. Career schools.
NCAA Clearinghouse	https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/	Division I & II college athletic eligibility rules. Registration for potential college student-athletes required.
Niche	www.niche.com	College and Scholarship searches
SallieMae	www.salliemae.com OR www.CollegeAnswer.com	Financial Aid, Scholarships, and student loan information
Scholarships.com	www.scholarships.com	Free scholarship search service
Unigo	www.unigo.com	Searchable reviews, videos, photos from college students