START HERE

Tesla STEM Applying to College Toolkit

A practical companion for getting from “What do I do?” to the correct next action.

DO THIS FIRST
Finalize your college list. Record each college's requirements. Start the required application. Then work one college at a time.

1. Your Application Game Plan

☐ Finalize a thoughtful college list you would genuinely consider.
☐ Record each college’s platform, application plan, deadline, and requirements.
☐ Start the required application and identify every essay or supplement.
☐ Check whether the college needs recommendations or school documents.
☐ Complete your pieces, submit, then monitor the applicant portal.
Still building your list? **BigFuture: Find Your Fit**

2. Keep Your Requirements in One Place

For every college, track: platform • plan (EA/ED/REA/RD) • application deadline • essays • recommendations • transcript/school-document requirement • testing policy • financial-aid deadline • submitted? • portal complete?

APPLICATION PLATFORMS YOU MAY SEE
Common App, the UC application, Cal State Apply, ApplyTexas, a college’s own application, or another platform. Use the platform specified by each college.

Common App: First-Year Application Guide

NEED TSHS-SPECIFIC HELP?
Senior Meeting, transcripts, recommendations, or Common App questions: **TSHS Senior Application Procedures**

3. Who Does What?

TASK	WHO OWNS IT?
College list, deadlines, applications, essays	STUDENT
Check each college’s current requirements	STUDENT
Request teacher/counselor recommendations	STUDENT
TSHS School Report/Profile + Common App transcript	TESLA STEM COUNSELOR
Teacher recommendation	TEACHER, after student requests it
SAT/ACT reporting	STUDENT - follow college instructions
Financial-aid forms	STUDENT + FAMILY/CONTRIBUTORS as applicable
Scholarship search	STUDENT - use SchooLinks + college scholarship pages
Applicant portals after submission	STUDENT

THE APPLICATION BELONGS TO THE STUDENT.
Students should manage deadlines, communication, applications, essays, and applicant portals. Families are most helpful with affordability, logistics, and support.

DOCUMENTS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Transcripts, Recommendations + Your Senior Meeting

Know what the college requires - then follow the Tesla STEM process.

1. All Seniors: Book a Senior Meeting

Every senior should book a Senior Meeting. Use the current TSHS Senior Application Procedures for this year's form, required materials, meeting windows, and counselor booking links.

TSHS Senior Application Procedures

2. If You Need a Counselor Recommendation

First check the college. A counselor letter is completed only when a college requires or accepts one.

☐ Complete your TSHS Reference Form, resume, and college list.
☐ Book your Senior Meeting at least 2 weeks before your earliest deadline that requires a counselor letter.
☐ Submit required materials at least 24 hours before your meeting.
☐ Complete the Common App FERPA Release Authorization and add your counselor in Common App.

LATE REQUESTS
Your counselor will still support you, but missing the TSHS timeline may result in a less robust recommendation because there is less time to prepare it.

3. Teacher Recommendations

Check the college first. One teacher recommendation is the norm. Request a second only when a college requires two.

☐ Ask the teacher personally first when possible.
☐ Give at least 6 weeks of notice.
☐ Provide your TSHS Reference Form and resume; provide a college/deadline list if the teacher requests it.
☐ After the teacher agrees, add them in Common App through the Recommenders tab and assign them where required.

ASK FIRST - THEN THANK YOUR RECOMMENDERS!
Ask: "Would you feel comfortable writing me a strong college recommendation?" After the letter is submitted, send a genuine thank-you. Let them know where you decide to enroll, too.

4. FERPA: What Should I Do?

Tesla STEM recommends waiving your right to review recommendation letters. Waiving tells colleges that you do not plan to read the recommendations and supports the expectation that letters are candid. Complete FERPA before requesting recommendation letters.

Common App: FERPA & Your Application

5. Transcripts + School Documents

Do not assume a college needs an official transcript at application. Check the college's current requirements.

- Common App: when required, your Tesla STEM counselor uploads your official TSHS transcript as part of the School Report, along with the TSHS School Profile.
- Non-Common-App college: follow that college's transcript instructions. If it accepts an unofficial transcript, you may upload the copy from Skyward yourself.
- Midyear reports: for Common App colleges that require them, Tesla STEM counselors submit them automatically after first-semester grades are available. No student request is needed.
- Final transcript: before graduation, follow the current TSHS final-transcript request process. The registrar sends the final transcript.
- NCAA or another special transcript situation: work with your Tesla STEM counselor.

NEED AN UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT?
In Skyward Student Access, open Portfolio and download/view your Unofficial Transcript.

COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION

Complete Your Application

Tell your story clearly - and let each college's current instructions control the details.

1. Activities

Activities are more than clubs. Jobs, family responsibilities, athletics, volunteering, internships, hobbies, creative work, research, and independent projects can all matter.

- Prioritize the experiences that are most meaningful to you.
- Be specific about what you did, contributed, led, learned, or changed.
- You do not need to fill every available activity slot.

Common App: Approaching the Activities Section

2. Personal Statement + Supplements

Personal statement: help the reader understand something about you that is not already obvious elsewhere. Use your own voice, be specific, revise, and proofread.

Common App: 2026-27 Essay Prompts

Supplements: check every college for college-specific questions and separate writing supplements. Answer the question actually being asked and proofread college names carefully.

Need another set of eyes? Tesla STEM counselors and English teachers can help with essay review.

3. Choose the Right Application Plan

PLAN	BASIC IDEA
EA - Early Action	Earlier application/decision; generally nonbinding.
ED - Early Decision	Binding if admitted under the college's terms.
REA / SCEA	Usually nonbinding, but may restrict other early applications.
RD - Regular Decision	Apply on the regular timeline.

BEFORE APPLYING ED

Talk with your family and Tesla STEM counselor before submitting a binding Early Decision application. Understand the commitment and affordability first. **BigFuture: Early Decision and Early Action**

4. Testing

There is no single SAT/ACT rule. For each college, check whether scores are required, optional, or not considered; whether you may self-report; whether official scores are required; and whether scores matter separately for scholarships, honors, or placement. Tesla STEM does not send SAT/ACT scores.

5. If This Applies to You

- **Portfolio / audition:** Follow the program's exact format and deadline.
- **Self-reported academic record:** Complete the college's required system exactly as instructed.
- **Outside / online course:** Check whether the course provider must send its own transcript. TSHS sends only the Tesla STEM transcript.
- **Honors / scholarship / special program:** Check for a separate application or earlier deadline.

6. Using AI

Your application must represent your own experiences, ideas, judgment, and voice. Colleges have different AI policies. Using AI for brainstorming or proofreading may be allowed in some settings, but submitting AI-generated writing as your own may violate a college's integrity policy. Check each college's policy and keep ownership of your writing.

BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

☐ Correct college + application plan/deadline ☐ All required essays/supplements ☐ Recommendation requirements checked
☐ Testing choice correct ☐ Preview and proofread the full application ☐ The STUDENT submits

PAYING + WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Paying for College + After You Submit

Complete the right aid forms, then keep watching the process after you press Submit.

1. Financial Aid: Use the Right Form

IF THIS APPLIES...	DO THIS
Most students seeking financial aid	Complete FAFSA for the academic year you will attend college.
You cannot or choose not to file FAFSA in Washington	Use WSAC guidance to determine whether WASFA is right for you.
A college requires CSS Profile	Complete CSS Profile by that college's financial-aid deadline.
Looking for scholarships	Search SchooLinks and each college's own scholarship/financial-aid pages.

Federal Student Aid: FAFSA • WSAC: FAFSA or WASFA • College Board: CSS Profile

WANT A DEEPER PAYING-FOR-COLLEGE GUIDE?
The College Essay Guy guide covers scholarships, affordability, FAFSA/CSS Profile, and understanding aid offers in one place. College Essay Guy: Paying for College in Four Steps

2. Compare Offers - Not Just Scholarships

Compare your actual net price, not just the sticker price or scholarship amount. Look separately at grants/scholarships, loans, work-study, total cost of attendance, and remaining out-of-pocket cost.

Federal Student Aid: How to Evaluate Your Aid Offers

3. After You Submit: Confirm You're Complete

☐ **Submitting is not the same as being complete.** Activate the applicant portal when the college sends access instructions.
☐ Check the portal for application status, required tasks, financial-aid items, and decisions.
☐ Keep monitoring the email address you used on your applications.
☐ Keep doing well in your classes.

PORTAL SAYS A SCHOOL DOCUMENT IS "MISSING"?
Do not panic. College portals can take weeks to update after Tesla STEM submits documents. Allow the college's stated processing time. Follow up only after that window has passed or if the college specifically says school action is needed.

4. When Decisions Arrive

- **Accepted:** Compare the full academic, personal, and financial picture before committing.
- **Deferred:** Read and follow the college's instructions. Send updates only when permitted or requested.
- **Waitlisted:** Opt in if interested, follow the college's instructions, and keep moving forward with another option while you wait. Tesla STEM can help with a Letter of Continued Interest if appropriate.
- **Denied:** Focus on the options still available to you. One admission decision does not determine your future.

5. Make Your Final Decision

☐ Compare financial-aid offers and understand your actual cost.
☐ Choose one college and complete its enrollment/deposit steps by its stated deadline.
☐ Decline other offers when appropriate.
☐ Complete the current TSHS final-transcript request process before graduation.
☐ Tell your Tesla STEM counselor where you are headed - and update your recommenders, too!

FOR FAMILIES
The application belongs to the student. Application questions should generally come from the student, not a family member. Families are most helpful with affordability, required financial-aid contributor information, visits/logistics, comparing offers, perspective, and encouragement. More applications are not automatically better - help your student build a thoughtful, manageable list.