

Newton North High School

Navigating Through the College Application Process

The purpose of this document is to provide students and parents with information about the many steps and expectations in the college application process. Included in the document are 9 overall sections that are designed to help students and parents more easily navigate the complexity of the college application process.

The nine sections are:

Section 1: Getting to know the College and Career Center

Section 2: What materials are sent to colleges?

Section 3: More on the College Application Process

Section 4: Naviance

Section 5: Visiting Colleges

Section 6: Working Together

Section 7: Special Students – Special Circumstances

Section 8: Testing

Section 9: Financial Issues

This document was developed by Brad McGowan, EdD, Director of the NNHS Career and College Counseling Center along with Michele Kennedy, NNHS Guidance Counselor, Elisse Ghittelman, NNHS teacher, Fred Gross, Parent and Co-Chair of the NNHS School Council and Marion Golin, Parent and Member of the NNHS School Council. In 2012, a group of NNHS Guidance Interns made appropriate and supervised changes to this document.

Section 1: Getting to know the College and Career Center

The College and Career Center at Newton North High School provides expertise in

the college application process and other post-high school opportunities, such as work opportunities, enlistment in the military, etc. What follows are frequently asked questions about the role the College and Career center plays in the college application process.

Q: What is the role of the College and Career Center in the college application process at NNHS?

The College and Career Center is a part of the Guidance Department and is staffed by specialized counselors who provide career and college counseling. Students can make College and Career Center appointments beginning at the start of the third term (late January) of junior year, and meet as needed throughout senior year. The student's counselor and/or parents may also participate in the College and Career Center meetings. These meetings focus on specific post-secondary educational plans and how they fit with career and life objectives.

The counselors in the College and Career Center help students identify the college characteristics that are important to them, develop strategies for exploring colleges at an in depth level and create a list of colleges to consider, estimate the students' chances of acceptance, and develop a final list for application. They also offer advice and counseling on all aspects of the college application process. Copies of all lists, etc. generated in College and Career Center meetings are sent to the student's guidance counselor who uses them in individual follow-up meetings.

Q: What is the contact information for the College and Career Center?

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Q: What are the hours for the College and Career Center?

The College and Career Center is almost always open during the regular school day, before and after school, and during all 3 lunches. Anyone wanting to visit the College and Career Center is advised to call ahead.

Q: How does a student sign up for an appointment?

A student signs up for a block to meet with a College and Career Counselor. To make an appointment, the student goes enters his or her name in one of the 2 schedule books that are located in the College and Career Center. Appointments should be made during one of the student's free blocks. Students will ***not*** receive a reminder, so they are encouraged to fill out a reminder slip and take it with them.

During busy times of the year, students may have to wait 2 to 3 weeks for an appointment. Students with specific questions should see their own counselors or touch base with a College and Career Center counselor before school, after school, during third lunch, or during homeroom.

Q: Can parents join the 55-minute meeting with the student?

Yes. The student's parents may also participate in the College and Career Center meetings. We suggest that you consult with your student first and determine if attending is agreeable to all.

Q: How can parents follow-up with the student's meeting in the College and Career Center?

After a meeting in the College and Career Center, students are given copies of the worksheets and lists generated during the meeting, including the college planning interview, the list of colleges to consider, and the college planning worksheet (assessing chances of acceptance). Copies of these are also sent to the student's counselor and are kept on file by the College and Career Center counselor.

Section 2: What materials are sent to colleges?

The Guidance Department at Newton North High School is responsible for preparing and sending some materials to prospective college admission offices. These materials fall under the heading of the *Senior Packet* and are addressed to colleges selected by students. What follows are frequently asked questions about the *Senior Packet*.

Q: What is the NNHS packet?

The *Senior Packet* is a special collection of documents that is sent electronically or mailed by Newton North High School to the colleges requested by students.

The *Senior Packet* contains:

Transcript: A list of all the classes the student attended at NNHS including freshman year courses, the final course grades and the credits awarded for Freshman, Sophomore and Junior classes and first and second quarter grades during the students' Senior Year.

Counselor Statement: A single document produced by the guidance counselor that incorporate comments provided by two teachers of the student's choice. Although junior students are given information about requesting teacher comments, it is the student's responsibility to initiate this process. Information about requesting teacher

comments is given out in homeroom during the spring of students' sophomore and junior year.

The counselor statement provides a comprehensive picture of the student's academic, social, and extracurricular contributions to the school community. Guidance counselors are in the best position to collaborate with staff, communicate with student, and review the student's record to provide colleges a broad and unique perspective of the individual student. It may also include an explanation any special circumstances in the student's background that affected academic achievement or attendance and clarification is needed (e.g., non-native speaker of English, extended illness).

NNHS School Profile -A four-page document compiled by the Counseling Department. It gives an overview of Newton North High School.

Grade Point Average -There is no perfect GPA system. The NNHS weighted GPA reduces all of a student's letter grades in leveled courses (Honors/AP, Curriculum I, Curriculum II) to a number on a zero to five scale based on the letter grade and the curriculum level. All of the numbers are added up and divided by the number of courses. An un-weighted GPA is scaled from 0 to 4 and only takes into account the letter grade and does not take into account the curriculum level. All NNHS students have the weighted GPA reported in the senior packet. Students can choose to report or not report the un-weighted GPA.

GPA (Grade Point Average) Histogram -A histogram (bar chart) showing the weighted GPA distribution for the graduating class. In every *Senior Packet*, colleges receive a histogram with intervals of GPA showing what percentage of the class falls within each one on the intervals. This gives colleges a way of knowing where a student's GPA is in relation to the rest of the class without giving a specific rank that might be determined by a very small fraction of a point. NNHS does not provide a class rank, which is a numerical rank based on Grade Point Average (GPA).

Q: How do you interpret GPA statements from the college guides and is there a tool for calculating a weighted and un-weighted GPA?

College guides often report GPA on a **4-point un-weighted scale** (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0). You can compute an un-weighted GPA by looking at your grades and assigning the correct number for each letter grade received **without regard to curriculum level**. For a "plus" grade, add .3 to the number (e.g., a B+ would be a 3.3), and for a "minus" grade subtract .3 (e.g., a B-would be a 2.7). Add up all of the numbers and divide by the total number of courses. This is an un-weighted GPA.

Example –

English 11 Curr. I	B+	3.3
U.S. History Honors	B	3.0

Math 11 Curr. II	B-	2.7
Spanish 3 Curr. I	C	2.0
Biology Curr. I	A	4.0

15.0 total / 5 courses = 3.0 GPA

Q: Do freshman grades count?

Yes. Freshman grades do “count” as the courses and final grades from freshman year appear on the student’s transcript and are seen by the colleges. Freshman grades do not get factored in to the student’s NNHS GPA; however, many colleges recalculate GPA using their own systems, which do include freshman grades, and use this GPA in addition to the GPA provided by NNHS.

Section 3: More on the College Application Process

There are many important facets to the college application process. What follows are some frequently asked questions about this process.

Q: What role does my guidance counselor play in the college application process?

Your guidance counselor plays a crucial role throughout the college search and application process.

Students should meet regularly with their NNHS counselor throughout the search and application process. Seniors should schedule an appointment with their guidance counselor early in the senior year, especially those applying Early Decision/Early Action. Students discuss and review the components of the Senior Packet before it is to be sent out to colleges.

Copies of all lists, etc. generated in Career Center meetings are sent to the student’s guidance counselor who uses them in individual follow-up meetings.

As part of the college application process, students are introduced to Naviance by their counselors during the Sophomore Seminar in late February. Students also attend Junior Seminars and Senior Seminars with their counselors, which focus on college planning.

Q: What should I do if my counselor changes?

NNHS makes every effort to keep every student with the same counselor for all four years. If there is a counselor change, the new counselor will reach out to students in a number of ways. Students are also encouraged to introduce themselves to the new counselor early on.

Q: How and when do I go about checking the components of my application file after it is sent to colleges?

It takes 2 to 4 weeks for colleges to process an application and other materials (e.g., Transcript,, Teacher Recommendations) once they are received. If a student is notified that a component of his or her application is missing after the deadline, he/she should first call the college's office of admission to verify that the information has not been received, prior to inquiring about it at the NNHS Records Office.

Q: What should I do if my recommendations have not been completed by the school staff?

Check with the teacher or teachers who have agreed to write your recommendations. You should also check to see when the recommendation was sent. It often takes 2 to 4 weeks for colleges to process a Teacher Recommendations once it has been received. First, check with the college. If it seems as though it should have been received and wasn't, your teacher might have to resend it. Colleges will often accept faxes in this situation.

Q: What is a "good" match for my son or daughter?

A good match is a place where her or she will get the most out of the overall college experience. If students and parents are looking at rankings of colleges, they are not looking at what is a good match, either socially or academically. During the college search and application process, students should look at themselves and their own needs and wants, learn about the many great colleges out there, and try to find the colleges that are best for them.

Some of the things to consider:

- . • Career goals.
- . • Major.
- . • Region or regions of the country.
- . • Consider climate and distance from home.
- . • Location (urban, suburban, rural).
- . • Commute from home or live on campus.
- . • Size of the student body.
- . • Student body characteristics (e.g., ethnic mix, diversity, HBCUs, women's colleges).
- . • Activities (e.g., music, sports, clubs).
- . • Public vs. private colleges.
- . • Religious affiliation.

Q: What is a gap year?

A gap year is a year between high school and college. Study abroad, volunteer, work, or even go sightseeing around the country or the world are just some of the many things high school graduates do before going to college.

Students considering a gap year are encouraged to apply to college, deposit at the top choice college where the student was accepted, then ask the college to defer admission for a year.

For some students, a gap is a great decision. Most colleges see it as a positive choice, as typically students are much more mature and better adjusted when starting college after a gap year.

Section 4: Naviance – A Tool for Collecting Information on the College Application Process

Newton North High School has turned to a web-based system to help students, guidance counselors and parents collect information about colleges and store information on the student's profile. What follows are some frequently asked questions about Naviance.

Q: What is Naviance?

Naviance is a web-based tool with dozens of features for post-high school planning. This program contains data on colleges throughout the country and keeps track of recent NNHS college applications, student statistics, and admissions decisions.

Naviance also contains a career interest inventory called the "Career Interest Profiler," the "Do What You Are Self-Discovery Personality Type" assessment, which helps students learn about careers and college majors that might interest them, and access useful information on a wide variety of careers.

Many web pages containing important information are available in Naviance on the left menu under "Pages" and "Links." Announcements with pertinent and timely information, such as when college fairs may occur or testing dates are posted regularly on the Naviance welcome page for each class.

Most NNHS teachers are using Naviance to send Teacher Recommendations electronically to hundreds of colleges that accept them using this method.

Q: How do I use it?

Students get their own personal account in Naviance, which they can sign on to from any computer with web access. In late February during the Sophomore Seminar, students are introduced to Naviance by their guidance counselors. Naviance is very user-friendly, and students are encouraged to explore its many features on their own. Counselors and College and Career Center counselors can answer any Naviance-related question.

Q: If my child is working with someone outside of NNHS, how can I work collaboratively with the school?

All of the NNHS resources are available to students working with outside, private

counselors. Many private counselors encourage their clients to make appointments with the counselors in the College and Career Center for another perspective and opinion. Students must also meet regularly with their own NNHS counselor throughout the search and application process.

Since Naviance is a web-based tool, all the information in Naviance can be reviewed and discussed with an outside counselor

Section 5: Visiting Colleges

Visiting Colleges is one potential component for the application process. What follows are frequently asked questions about this process.

Q: Is there an advantage to visiting prospective colleges?

A recent survey of college admission personnel asked about the importance of a student's "demonstrated interest" as a factor in admissions decisions. Twenty two percent of respondents said it was of considerable importance, 30.3% said it was of moderate importance, 23.9 said it was of limited importance, and 23.9 said it was of no importance.

There are ways to show demonstrated interest other than visiting a college. Students can email colleges to request information, attend information sessions in the area, and meet college representatives and fill out information cards at our two School & College Nights as examples.

Additional advantages to visiting colleges include:

- Familiarity with school climate and culture
- Gaining a sense of the student demographic and whether or not your son/daughter feels happy and comfortable on the campus
- The opportunity to sit in on a class, take a campus tour, and speak with current students and faculty
- Engaging in an admissions interview (if offered)
- Gaining a "real" and hands-on perspective of the college

Q: How do I manage to visit colleges with such a busy schedule?

It is difficult, if not impossible, for most students to visit all of the colleges that he or she is interested in sending an application. Be sure to visit the colleges that are close-by for which the student is applying to in the Fall. For colleges that are more difficult to visit, make sure you are on the school's mailing list and they will notify you about information sessions they will host in the area. Also, definitely plan to attend the NNHS School & College Nights in October to speak with representatives of many of the colleges on your list.

If you are planning on visiting colleges, make sure you book your appointment in advance. School vacation times tend to be very busy times of year for college touring and many colleges require an advance reservation.

Be in contact with the colleges and ask if there are any alumni living in the area, for whom you can talk to about their experience at the college or university.

As the Greater Boston area is teeming with a variety of colleges and universities, we often advise families to explore the local campuses to develop a sense of what different types of colleges “feel like”. This is especially helpful if it is difficult for your family to travel and see every nationwide college your student is interested in.

Q: What about the cost of that visit?

Admissions officers at colleges realize that students cannot visit every college that they are applying to in the Fall. Visit the ones that you can within your budget.

Admissions personnel travel widely at certain times of the year. Some colleges even have regional representatives in areas distant from the college. This is because colleges are seeking qualified students from underrepresented regions across the country.

For colleges where visiting is not an option, make sure you are on the school’s mailing list and they will notify you about information sessions they will host in the area. Be sure to attend the information sessions and plan to attend the NNHS School & College Nights in October.

Because of financial hardships, many families wait to see if the student is admitted prior to visit a college that is far away.

Q: Should I visit with my child alone or with other students and parents?

Either way can be a good way to see more colleges. Other parents might be willing to bring their child’s friend who is interested in the same college or colleges, and you might be able to bring your child’s friend along with you. This can be a great time-saver and cost-cutter. The student might want to write some notes and even take some pictures to help with discussions with parents who were not along on the visits.

Q: What are the alternatives to a college visit?

Alternatives to a visit might include emailing colleges to request information, attending information sessions in the area, and meeting college representatives and filling out information cards at our two School & College Nights as examples. As mentioned above, NNHS counselors also encourage families to visit Boston-area schools to develop a sense of the school culture and demographic that their student is interested in.

Be in contact with the colleges and ask if there are any alumni living in the area, for whom you can talk to about their experience at the college or university.

Section 6: Working Together

The college application process can be a very stressful time for parents and their son or daughter. Working together to reduce stress is important during this difficult time. What follows are some frequently asked questions regarding parent-child interactions around the college process.

Q: My student is not taking active steps or appears disinterested. What should I do?

This can be a difficult time for many students and there might be a number of reasons why a student might seem to be avoiding the process. Let them know that you are there to help when needed. Check with the student's counselor to see where the student should be in the process and to see if the counselor has had any contact with the student around the process.

Help the student to see that the whole process is made up of smaller manageable steps. Look at these steps one at a time and bring them up with the student at appropriate times. For example, you could say, "let's visit a nearby college that you are interested in this weekend." See when there is a convenient tour and information session available and attend them.

Q: What if I can't talk to my adult friends and relatives about college?

The college search and application process can be stressful for adults as well as students. It is important to remember that the process is dependent upon the individual. It is often very different for each student in the same family or extended family. There is no right or wrong approach to the process. If sharing information with friends is helpful, great, if not then it is totally appropriate to keep information private and look to other resources for help.

Sometimes outside advice can be counterproductive and you may not want to share some of the more private matters, such as GPAs, test scores, and where a student is applying Early Decision.

This is an area where people can be easily overwhelmed by conflicting stories and advice. Remember, your primary focus is to help your student/child locate and attend a comfortable college and be successful. Try and filter out the comments focused on competition or about what worked for someone else that will not work for all. Stay positive. For support and direction, we encourage you to talk to your child's counselor as another adult who knows your child's strengths and needs.

Q: My parents are driving me nuts! What do I do?

Let them know what you *are* doing. If you are getting things done, let them know about them. Also, let them know that you understand the timeline and what you need to do and when you need to do it. In the absence of information, they might be assuming the worst. They are anxious about this process too and they realize that the deadlines are absolute. Ask them for help when you need it and reassure them when you don't.

Section 7: Special Students – Special Circumstances

There are situations where students are applying colleges and have special circumstances. What follows are frequently asked questions about applying to college under these special circumstances.

Q: What role should Special Ed. services play in my college search process?

When searching for a college, it is important to gather information about the student services and disability services that are offered. Some schools offer a wider variety of services, or more individualized services to students.

Q: Under what circumstances should I consider sending my testing, IEP or 504 documents to an admissions office as part of my application?

In general, Admissions Offices do not accept IEPs or 504s as documents to consider with applications. In our interactions with admissions officers, we are being told more often that admissions boards prefer to not have any knowledge about the specifics of a Special Education Plan (please feel free to call a particular admissions office to determine the school's stance on this issue).

If a student and a family feels strongly that their disability or their specific barrier has significantly shaped their high school experience (positively or negatively), there are some appropriate methods to communicate this with an admissions office. Students may choose to: write about their disability in the college essay, ask their guidance counselor to include the information in the counselor statement, or possibly discuss it during an admissions interview. Again, we **strongly** suggest that you speak to your guidance counselor before making this decision and that you do some of your own research around the college's stance on this issue.

Once you have been accepted to a college, you can contact the Disability Services Office (or its equivalent) on campus and see what documentation they will need for you to send in order to receive accommodations (in almost every instance, you will be asked to send the actual **testing, not the Ed. Plan**). Even if you decide that you will not require support services at the college-level, it still may be a good idea to provide the college with your testing in case you decide to utilize services at some point in the future.

*The best advice we can offer around this topic is to educate yourself about the colleges you are interested in and collaborate with your guidance counselor in making these decisions. The link below is also a very helpful resource for parents and students regarding the college process for students with the IEPs and 504s:

<http://www.ldag.org/documents/10%20tips%20for%20college%20aspiration.pdf>

Q: How do counselors reach out to first-generation college applicants?

Counselors identify and reach out to first-generation college students throughout the

process. First generation college students and their parents are encouraged to work extensively with their counselors. In addition, the College and Career Center Counselors are an important resource for first generation college students and their parents.

Q: What are the internal resources for ELL students in the college application process?

Counselors identify and reach out to ELL students throughout the process. ELL students are encouraged to work extensively with their counselors. In addition, the College and Career Center Counselors have a great deal of experience working with ELL students and are an important resource for them.

International Students

Q: Where can I connect with parents of other students or similar students?

The application process for international students can be very complex. It is also very different for each student and family. There are many key factors that must be considered such as status in the U.S. (e.g., visa type, “green card,” in process for “green card”). Parents of international students should contact the student’s counselor, Career Center Counselor, and the colleges that the student is applying to.

Q: What are the resources available at NNHS?

It is important that international students **inform** their counselor, College and Career Center Counselors, and colleges that they are applying **know** about their status in the U.S. Their status has critical implications for the application process and the awarding of financial aid.

Q: What is the TOEFL?

TOEFL stands for “Test of English as a Foreign Language.” There is no single rule about which students should or should not take the TOEFL. A student who was born in the U.S. did not speak English as a first language speaks a different language at home might need to take it. While another student who has only been in the U.S. a few years might not. Students whose first language was not English should talk to their counselor and a Career Center counselor about whether and when to take the TOEFL.

Section 8: Testing

Preparing and taking tests for college admissions has been a “way of life” for decades. In the past few years, there have been some changes to the tests and expectations from college admission directors. What follows are some frequently asked questions about tests and testing.

Q: What is the ACT and how is it different from the SAT?

Like the SAT, the ACT is a standardized college admission test. Historically, the ACT

has been more popular in the Midwest and the South, while the SAT has been more popular on the East and West coast. Now, both tests are common and well-regarded throughout the country. The number of ACT test takers in historically SAT states has risen in recent years.

At some colleges, the ACT can replace the SAT Subject Tests requirement.

While there are a lot of similarities and the two tests have high statistical correlation with each other, some students will do significantly better on one or the other.

Students on IEPs can request appropriate accommodations for the SAT and ACT. Testing companies allow for accommodations based on information provided about the student. Students and parents should speak to their guidance counselor about testing accommodations at least 2-3 months before a testing date, as specific paperwork must be filled out and filed in order to get approval for an accommodation from the testing board.

Q: Do colleges accept both?

Every college and university that requires standardized test scores will accept either the SAT or the ACT.

Q: What is the difference between the SAT vs. the SAT Subject Tests?

The SAT is a 3 hour and 45 minute test with three sections yielding three scores: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. In the past, there were only two sections of the SAT: Reasoning Test.

The SAT Subject Tests are each one-hour long and cover a specific academic area. Only 45 colleges require SAT Subject Tests, and all but 2 of these colleges want 2 scores. The other two three colleges “recommend” 3 scores. Sometimes specific majors or program require specific tests (e.g., an engineering major might require a math and a science Subject Test).

Q: When are they given?

The SATs are given in October, November, December, January, March, May, and June. More information about the SAT is available at <http://collegeboard.com>

The ACTs are given in October, December, February, April, and June. NNHS is a test center for the ACTs in October, December, February, and April (every ACT test date except June). More information about the ACT is available at <http://www.actstudent.org/>

Q: When should I take them?

The NNHS Counseling Department recommends that college-bound students take the PLAN Test (a pre-ACT) sophomore year, and the PSAT (a pre-SAT) junior year. Both

tests are offered at NNHS on a Saturday in October.

- Many students wait until March or May of junior year to take their first SAT, and/or until February, April, or June of junior year to take their first ACT.
- Most students wait until May or June of junior year to take SAT Subject Tests and only then if they plan to apply to one or more colleges that require them.
- Students can take one, two, or three SAT Subject Tests on one test day, and cannot take SATs and any SAT Subject Tests on the same day.

Things to consider about testing

It might be helpful to develop a tentative testing schedule in December of junior year, when juniors receive their PSAT results. This schedule can be modified, but a tentative plan will help students see what tests are given on what dates and get an idea of which ones should be taken and when they are offered.

Keep in mind that [Advanced Placement Tests \(APs\)](#) always occur during the month of May.

Students typically want to take the SAT Subject Tests at the end of the academic year, immediately after they have completed the particular course when the material is fresh in their minds. SAT Subject Tests are typically taken in May and/or June.

The SATs and SAT Subject Tests cannot be taken on the same day, so if your child is taking SAT Subject Tests in May or June, you might want to consider taking the SAT earlier in the year.

While ACTs and SATs are offered many times during the year, they are not offered every month or over the summer, so make sure to check the schedules when planning your testing.

If you plan to do some test prep this can take weeks so you want to know your tests dates to be able to plan and schedule your test prep accordingly.

Registration

Registering for the SATs and the SAT Subject Tests is done online through collegeboard.com

Registration for ACTs is done online through actstudent.org

Registration for APs is done through the Main Office at NNHS in February.

Test sites fill up so it is advisable to register early.

Section 9: Financial Issues

Q: Is there financial help with the college application fees?

Yes. NNHS counselors generally use the National Association for College Admission Counseling's (NACAC) "Request for Application Fee Waiver" form. Eligibility for the fee waiver is based primarily on income guidelines; however, special circumstances involving financial hardship can be taken into account. Students who receive free or reduced lunch will be eligible. It is important to note that the form is a "request" for an application fee waiver, and the college makes the decision on whether to grant the waiver.

Q: Which schools have fee waivers?

All colleges will waive the application fee for eligible students. While there are general guidelines, the college ultimately determines eligibility.

Q: What is FAFSA? How do I apply?

The FAFSA stands for "Free Application for Federal Student Aid" and can be accessed online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. The FAFSA should be submitted online during the month of January of the student's senior year, and **not before January 1**. NNHS has a financial aid night for parents of seniors in early November. This evening program is a great way to learn about the FAFSA and the financial aid process.

Q: What is meant by "need blind" applications?

If a college is "need blind," it means that students are admitted or denied without regard to financial need or ability to pay. A college is "need aware" if financial need is a factor considered in admission. Most colleges are "need blind" for as many applicants as possible and very few colleges are 100% need blind.

Q: How should I answer when a college asks me if I will be requesting financial aid? Will it affect my chance of admissions?

If a college is a "need blind" institution, applying for financial aid will not affect admission. If a college is a "need aware" institution, applying for financial aid **could** affect admission **in some cases**. Not applying for aid at a need aware institution in order to better chances of admission could be financially risky