



COLLEGE PLANNING MINUTES



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‘Tis The Season to Apply

Flash back to my house, Christmas week of 1999. The dining room table, drafted into service as Application Central, is littered with papers –SAT score reports, transcripts, resumes, applications and half-written essays that flow over onto the floor. Days earlier, my daughter had been deferred from her first choice college and now has six other applications to complete. Our mutual fantasy of celebrating the end of college applications over Christmas has gone up in smoke, along with my individual fantasy of reclaiming the dining room for Christmas dinner.

My daughter is taking it surprisingly well. After a brief slump, her youthful spirits have rebounded and she’s stretched out in front of the family room TV, relaxing. That is, until I snap; march in and announce that she’s not watching any more TV—or doing anything else - until she finishes her applications and clears the dining room table so that the family can have some semblance of Christmas. What can you do to keep college applications from turning into the nightmare before Christmas?



Take Stock of Applications Early

If you haven’t already done so, now is the time to sit down with your senior and review her list of colleges. Make sure it includes an adequate number of reach and likely schools, along with at least one safety college she would be happy to attend. Once the list is complete, review the application deadlines so you can prioritize those that are due in early January and cajole, wheedle, or bribe her to work on them now.

Request Recommendations Before the Break

Since high schools are on winter break between Christmas and New Year, any recommendation forms that are due January 1 will need to be requested before the break. Further, since school counselors are swamped with requests for recommendation forms, they typically require students to turn them in a week to 10 days before the break. Have your senior ask his counselor about the deadline, and get all requests turned in on time. Similarly, he shouldn’t wait until the last minute to ask teachers for recommendations, as it is unreasonable to expect them to spend their holidays writing letters of recommendation.

Get Your Senior Working on Essays

Parents—and particularly students—often underestimate how long it takes to write good essays. Trust me; based on my experience with my own kids and others I’ve worked with—it takes several drafts, and several weeks, for most students to produce their best work. Bottom line: If at all possible, try to get your son or daughter to finish applications before Christmas, so *your* family can have some semblance of a holiday!

Good Luck to Early Applicants!

A few colleges have already sent out their early application decisions, and the others won't be far behind. For those who get good news—congratulations! For those who aren't so fortunate, here are a few tips.

If your child is deferred

If your daughter is deferred, the good news is that 1) the college considers her a strong enough applicant to re-evaluate in the spring and 2) her early application will probably improve her chances in the regular admissions cycle. Deferred early applicants often have a higher rate of spring acceptance than others, most likely because they've demonstrated a strong interest in the school. To improve your daughter's chances even more, encourage her to send a letter right away restating her interest, then continue to distinguish herself in the classroom and in her activities. If she has significant additional accomplishments to report at the end of first se-

mester, she can send a letter detailing them along with her midyear grade report. My daughter did all of those things and was eventually accepted by the college that had deferred her in the early pool. Having said that, I'd also encourage a deferred early applicant to face the possibility that she may ultimately not be accepted, and make sure she is applying to several other colleges she is excited about.

If your child is denied

This is the hardest news to deal with. Your son's realization that his dream of attending a certain school will not come true can be very painful. Be sympathetic and patient as he deals with his disappointment, and when the time seems appropriate, reassure him that there is more than one "right" school for him, and that as a result of learning his fate early, he has time to find and apply to those other choices.

After PSAT Scores, What's Next?

Wouldn't it be nice if the answer were a party? Unfortunately, it's more testing—or at least making plans for more testing. Now would be a good time for parents to consult the testing dates for both the [SAT](#) and [ACT](#) (click on links to do so) and discuss with their junior when he or she will take all necessary tests. Note that registration for a couple of test dates is in late December or early January.

Where to start?

Begin by writing down all major tests that your junior will be required to take in May and June. Remember to include any SOL tests, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate tests, and course finals. Further, if your son is planning to apply to any highly competitive colleges, he'll need two SAT subject tests, which are best taken at the end of the school year. Next check the date for the prom and any other major spring events. When you've completed this exercise, it will be clear why you need to figure out when he can fit in the SAT and/or ACT.



Should he add the ACT?

Given all the testing he's already facing, it's tempting to avoid adding another test that's optional. However, unless he got great PSAT scores, I recommend that he try the ACT some time during the winter. Some students score a lot higher on the ACT than the SAT, so taking it can actually save them a lot of time on test preparation. If he does take the ACT, have him take it with the Optional Writing, as some colleges require this. Finally, while I hate to be a total buzz-kill right before the holidays, I feel obligated to suggest that after you've settled on a test-taking schedule, you should discuss a test prep schedule—and then party!



Timely Tips

Application Deadlines For Special Programs:

For 8th Grade Students:

Hampton Magnet High School Program:

International Baccalaureate Program- December 16
Information: [Click here.](#)

Newport News Magnet High School Programs:

- International Baccalaureate Program– Applications due-
January 12. Info night January 4 at Warwick High School
Information at: <http://warwick.nn.k12.va.us/ib/index.html>
- Other Magnet High Schools-January 13
Information at: <http://www.nn.k12.va.us/magnet>

York County Magnet High School Programs:

- International Baccalaureate Program-January 11
Information at: <http://www.edline.net/pages/yhs/ib>
- School of the Arts
Information at: <http://edline.net/pages/BrutonHS/SOA>

For 8th and 9th Graders:

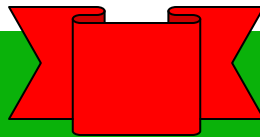
Governor's School for Science and Technology PreAdmission
Program: January 20.
Info and application: [click here.](#)

Governor's School for Science and Technology: February 1
Info at: <http://www.nhgs.tec.va.us/governorsschool>

For 10th and 11th Grade Girls:

UVA Engineering School High School Visitation Program on
February 25th for girls interested in engineering. Application
due January 20. For more information: [Click here](#)

Happy Holidays!



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Hampton Roads Educational Consulting, LLC
200 City Hall Avenue, Suite B
Poquoson, VA 23662

Phone: 757-868-6034
www.hredconsulting.com