PARENT ARTICLE

Before You Apply:
Up Close with College Applications

After years of preparing and contemplating this moment, it is here—the moment of truth—your student's college application. Be careful not to consider it your application and check yourself as you instinctively say, "*We* are applying to. . . ." Although the college selection process is typically a family decision, be mindful to remember that it is not your application. Allow your student to take the lead, but know that it is okay to help your child understand all of the requirements involved in applying to college.

Time to Apply: Most applications are available to submit sometime between September and January of senior year. It is typically advantageous to apply earlier rather than later, and students should become familiar with the different deadline options available at each school.

What is Required: Students need access to their Social Security number, high school CEEB code, student ID number, SAT /ACT scores, AP/IB scores, family contact, schooling and job information, recent transcript(s), and résumés.

Types of Applications: Not all applications are created equal. Colleges may offer one or several types of applications. Colleges may have a proprietary offering, or they may participate in a state-consortium application, the Common Application, The Coalition Application, or the Universal Application — or they may offer more than one of these. You can help your teen by exploring the pros and cons of these choices.

Application deadline choices:

Early Decision (ED): A binding decision assures the college that if the student is accepted, he will enroll. Encourage your student to only apply with this type of application if the school is clearly the #1 choice, and he has had an opportunity to visit and explore the school in-depth.

Early Action (EA): Not nearly as restrictive as the Early Decision type of application, this action allows a student to apply to as many schools as she would like in an Early Action mode. Students are not bound to attend a school if accepted but have the advantage of knowing early if they are accepted to their top-choice schools. If it is Restrictive Early Action or Single-Choice Early Action, the student can apply to only one EA school and no ED schools.

Regular Decision (RD): Regular Decision (sometimes called Regular Admission) is the most common type of application. Colleges provide a deadline to submit applications, and the admissions board reviews them to make decisions prior to sending out acceptance or rejection letters by April 1.

Rolling Admission: Many large universities offer Rolling Admissions. Colleges allow students to apply any time between September and July. Applications are evaluated as they arrive, and admission decisions are sent as soon as they are available. Often schools operate on a first-come-first-served basis, so it makes sense for your teen to get her application in early.

Application Requirements: Senior year can get very hectic. Help your student prepare for college applications in the summer prior to senior year. Personal Statement essays can be written, extracurricular activities listed, and letters of recommendation requested to ensure a speedy online application in the fall. Here is a list of top tips to ensure an expeditious application:

1. Have a copy of your student's high school transcript on hand —official transcripts are the best option unless you are certain the unofficial transcript is accurate. Also request any community college transcripts or transcripts from other schools the student has attended.
2. Review transcripts for accuracy prior to senior year. It can often take some time to petition for an error to be corrected and to get a change implemented.
3. Keep all personal data such as social security number (it's a great time to memorize this number as a better way to protect it) and school CEEB codes handy.
4. Review financial aid applications to make sure you understand the required data. Completing your tax return in early October can make for a more expedient financial aid package. You will be asked for data from your prior-prior year tax return; for example, students starting college in 2020 will be required to submit 2018 tax data with their FAFSA application.

Thin or Thick Envelope: The day of waiting at the mail box may be coming to a close. Most admission decisions are now posted online prior to (or instead of) a mailed response. Most colleges now require that students set up an online portal to track the application process. *Encourage your son or daughter to check this portal regularly for requests or missing items. The final decision will likely be posted here first.* Decisions can come in many forms:

- **Wait List:** Many schools are using the Waitlist to manage their enrollment numbers. If your student is waitlisted to his first choice school, accept the waitlist option, but move on to ensure a back-up option. It is worth sending any new, compelling student information such as awards or honors, along with an essay if requested, that offers how he would contribute to the campus if enrolled.

- **Denial:** If your student is denied admission to her number one choice, work to encourage research on back-up options. The only time a decision appeal makes sense is when there is NEW and very compelling information to communicate to the admissions office. In almost all cases, it is best to move on to other great options.

- **Acceptance:** Congratulations! You are in the homestretch. Remind your teen that all acceptances are contingent upon acceptable grades second semester of senior year and a validation of all data on the initial application. Watch for senioritis—it is real and very contagious!

The Big Decision: Your student may be accepted at several schools. She may want to consider taking a final college tour before making the big decision. Schools are required to give students an admission decision by April 1, and students must submit a Statement of Intent to Register by May 1. This is not the time to procrastinate. Some schools have a shortage of housing on campus and are on a first-come-first-served basis, so it makes sense to make an admissions decision as soon as possible and then submit a housing deposit right away. Additionally, be sure to review and compare financial aid packages and be certain your family can handle the investment before your student makes a final decision. Once a final decision is made, your student should complete any required documentation and submit her application and housing deposits to reserve her space.

If your child is having diffculty making a final decision, suggest that she revisit her **Key College Criteria** to see which school matches the criteria that she developed.

Remember: It's not where you attend college that is most important, but what you *accomplish* when you arrive.

The author, Lynette Mathews, is a freelance writer and member of the Education Writers Association. She is the director of The College Planning Center, a resource for students and parents.