

H-B Woodlawn

The College Application Process

For Parents of the Class of 2026

March 4, 2026

PROGRAM:

✓ **Deciding where your student will apply**

- 2 year or 4 year?
- In-state or out-of-state?
- Early Action? Early Decision? Regular Decision?
- Available Tools
 - Naviance, hard-copy guides (Opportunities Handbook)

✓ **Standardized Testing**

- SAT or ACT
- Test optional

✓ **Transcripts**

- Removing middle school classes
- Teacher Advisor sends in advance of deadlines

✓ **Letters of Recommendation**

- Make the request before June 18, 2025
- Complete any paperwork requested by the teacher

✓ **Personal Essays**

- Essay writing support
- Common app personal statement prompts available now

✓ **Visiting Colleges**

✓ **Naviance/Family Connection**

✓ **Points of Contact**

- **Teacher/Advisors** - For a staff directory go to:
<https://hbwoodlawn.apsva.us/staff-pages/staff-directory/>
- **Fatima** - fatima.posadabellaz@apsva.us
- **Kate** - kate.seche@apsva.us
- **Casey** - casey.robinson@apsva.us

✓ **Questions and Answers**

H-B Woodlawn College Page: <https://hbwoodlawn.apsva.us/college-corner/>

FAFSA—official site <https://studentaid.gov/>

Most financial aid begins with the FREE Application for Federal Student Aid. This is the official site.

*****Junior parents start here:** <https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>

Federal Student Aid www.studentaid.gov

Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, provides information on a variety of college related information.

Financial Aid info www.finaid.org

This site provides information on scholarships, loans, and saving for college. It also has calculators and a free scholarship search.

Family Connection (Naviance) <https://student.naviance.com/hbwoodlawn>

Students use this site to track applications and get information about colleges and careers.

Common Application www.commonapp.org

Over 900 colleges accept the common application. The College of William and Mary, University of Mary Washington, University of Virginia and several other Virginia colleges use the Common App.

Coalition Application <http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/>

A newer application portal, the Coalition Application has over 150 colleges and universities that are currently using it.

NCAA – sports www.ncaa.org

If the student is thinking of playing sports at a Division I or II school, check out this site.

ACT—ACT testing and prep <http://www.actstudent.org/>

Particularly popular with colleges in the middle states, the ACT has been growing in use in the Atlantic coast states. This site has information on both the test and test prep. Virginia colleges and universities accept the ACT.

College Board/CSS/Profile www.collegeboard.org

<https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/prf/index.jsp>

College Board has information on the SAT, PSAT, AP, and financial aid, including financial aid information for the CSS/Profile used by many private colleges.

Khan Academy www.khanacademy.org

College Board and Khan Academy have teamed up to provide free, personalized SAT resources for all students.

Timeline for the College Application Process

Class of 2026

January 2025

- ✓ Continue to do well in classes.
- ✓ **Log in to your Naviance account through your MyAccess dashboard and begin to use it in the college application process.**
- ✓ If interested in a service academy, immediately apply for summer seminar.
- ✓ Meet with TA to discuss senior year courses; continue to challenge yourself academically and be realistic.
- ✓ Meet with your TA to plan standardized testing. Visit <https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional> to see if your college choices are test optional.
- ✓ ACT on April 5, June 14 and July 12 (all these tests are Saturday tests).
- ✓ SAT on May 3, and June 7 (all these tests are Saturday tests).
- ✓ Prepare for the ACT or SAT. Practice tests can be found on the ACT and SAT websites.

February 2025

- ✓ Continue research on colleges by talking with teachers, your TA, Fatima and by using Naviance, book and web resources.
- ✓ Make use of HBW's College Corner. <https://hbwoodlawn.apsva.us/college-corner/>
- ✓ Plan a volunteer/intern/job/camp/class option for the summer of 2024.

March 2025

- ✓ Arrange visits to colleges over Spring Break if possible or check out their websites for virtual tours.
- ✓ Review with parents the family resources available for meeting the costs of college.
- ✓ Get an early estimate of eligibility for federal student aid.
- ✓ Go to <https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>
- ✓ Continue to research colleges, taking into account family finances.

April 2025

- ✓ **If you have not already done so, meet with your TA to discuss the college application process.**
- ✓ Continue researching colleges.
- ✓ Visit colleges during Spring Break if possible. Also, check out <https://artofcollege.org/> for videos of college tours created by a HS counselor.
- ✓ Sign up to take the SAT or ACT in May or June.

May 2025

- ✓ **Meet with your parents and your TA to be sure your college plans are appropriate for your academic and personal goals.**
- ✓ Ensure that you are doing your best in your current courses.
- ✓ If not already done, create a list of colleges that interest you.
- ✓ If you are interested in a campus in another country, pay special attention to deadlines as they are often earlier than US universities.

June 2025

- ✓ **Ask your teacher recommender if they will write for you before school is out.**
- ✓ Finish your current courses with strong grades.
- ✓ Visit college campuses-include interviews when possible-during the summer.
- ✓ Continue to refine your list of colleges.
- ✓ Provide teachers that are writing a letter of recommendation for you with a resume and/or brag sheet.

July/August 2025

- ✓ Enjoy your summer internship/job/volunteer activity/camp/class.
- ✓ Draft at least one college essay.
- ✓ Assemble portfolios or audition materials if a visual or performing artist.
- ✓ Complete NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse Form if you hope to play Division I or II sports.
- ✓ Identify an Early Action College to apply to.
- ✓ If considering a Common Application college, create a Common App account after August 1.
- ✓ Register for September ACT or August-October SAT if necessary.
- ✓ Keep your list of colleges up to date in Naviance.

August 2025/ September 2025

- ✓ Be sure you have a “high percentage” school that you would be pleased to attend. This means you are likely to be admitted and can afford to attend.
- ✓ Get your parent(s)’ advice and guidance as you make decisions. Parents can fill out the **Federal Student Aid Estimator** (<https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>) to **anticipate possible financial aid contributions**. Also check out <http://www.finaid.org/>. (You cannot officially fill out the FAFSA until fall 2025.) Ask your parent(s) to be honest about preferences for your decision (location, type of school, etc.) and about financial parameters. (Parents should tell students “We can write a check for \$_____” so they can consider scholarship opportunities and potential acquisition of debt.)
- ✓ Consider creating a **new email address** to use specifically for applications (like “johnsmithcollege@gmail.com”). You will have to check it frequently, if that's what you use to communicate with colleges and the Common App.
- ✓ Getting an **early start on the Common App and its essays** (one long, one an explanation of an extracurricular activity you've been involved in) is a good idea. The Common App has its own essays, and many schools have supplements that they ask you to fill out. **Agree to "FERPA"** which authorizes HBW to release data about you.
- ✓ After filling out the FERPA waiver, log in to Naviance and link your Common App to Naviance. This allows us to send your transcripts and letters of recommendation electronically (we will do this at school).
- ✓ **Check the websites of colleges** you're interested in to see if they have a list of suggested / required courses (e.g. William & Mary requires 4 years of a foreign language, even though the state of Virginia only requires 3).
- ✓ Investigate if schools have **early applications** and consider whether or not you want to apply early to any school. Some colleges (like William & Mary and UVA) have **Early Decision**, where if you apply and get in, you are required to attend the school. Others (like JMU and UVA) have **Early Action**, where you can apply early and find out whether you were accepted, but you are free to apply to and attend other schools. Typically, if you apply early, you will find out whether you got in by December. Regular decision applicants usually find out in March or April, and you typically commit to a college by May 1.

October 2025

- ✓ Plan weekly to provide enough time for schoolwork, college applications, and ongoing extracurricular activities. If you plan to apply early to college, your application most will be **due November 1**.
- ✓ **Create a FSAID so you and your parents can electronically sign your FAFSA** (<https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch>)
- ✓ **Begin filling out the FAFSA with your parents.**
- ✓ **Take the SAT or ACT if you wish to improve your scores.**
- ✓ Check your college choices for other **required financial aid forms** (e.g., CSS Profile).

November 2025

- ✓ If you apply early to college, your application is typically **due November 1**. Submit applications in time to reach the colleges by the November deadlines. Continue to monitor the status of your applications.
- ✓ Plan weekly to provide enough time for schoolwork, college applications, and extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Check your college choices for other **required financial aid forms** (e.g., CSS Profile).
- ✓ **Search for scholarships.**

December 2025

- ✓ **Early decision candidates should have a response by early December** from some colleges. If accepted, follow the instructions accordingly. If deferred or denied, submit applications to other colleges.
- ✓ If deferred, consult with your TA for next steps to increase the likelihood of a regular decision acceptance.
- ✓ **Submit applications** in time to reach the colleges **by the December/January deadlines**. Continue to monitor the status of your applications.
- ✓ **Check** to be sure colleges on your list **have received official test scores**.
- ✓ **Search for scholarships.**
- ✓ Maintain your effort in every class. Admissions staff frequently reviews progress reports for signs of slacking!
- ✓ Most colleges will request a **midyear transcript and report**. The colleges’ deadlines for this report are often earlier than what is possible. A google form will be emailed to you by Fatima so she knows where to send your midyear reports in late January-early February.

January 2026

- ✓ The **Student Aid Report (SAR)** should be **checked for accuracy**.

February 2026

- ✓ **Monitor your applications** to be sure that all materials are sent and received on time and that they are complete. Use the colleges' websites when possible, but do not hesitate to call if there is a concern.
- ✓ If SAR has not been received, contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800-433-3243.

March 2026/ April 2025

- ✓ Review your acceptances and financial aid awards. Compare financial aid packages in making your decisions.
- ✓ **Notify colleges if you eliminate** them from your consideration.
- ✓ Decide on the one college that you will attend and **send in your tuition deposit (usually by May 1)**.
- ✓ Discuss with your TA steps to take to be taken from a wait list.

May 2026

- ✓ Fill out the 2026 APS Senior Survey.
- ✓ **Wait-list candidates** may still hear positively, but they should have (and be acting on) **backup plans**.
- ✓ **Continue to do well in classes**.
- ✓ Write **thank-you notes** to all who helped you apply to college.

June 2026

- ✓ If necessary, **request a final transcript** be sent to the college where you will attend.
- ✓ **Notify the college** of any **private scholarships or grants** you will be receiving.
- ✓ **Fill out the 2026 APS Senior Survey and notify Fatima of all scholarships you have been awarded!**
- ✓ Determine when payments for tuition, room, board and meal plans are due.

Application Options - Pros/Cons

Check college websites as these may change by the time that you apply.

Early Decision (for example: W&M/VTECH/CNU/UMW/UVA) Usually on or **before** November 1st

Pros	If successful, application process is over by mid-December
Cons	BINDING - Must go to the school if accepted Doesn't allow for stellar grades of first semester to boost gpa Commits to a college regardless of financial aid package Cannot apply to any other schools May produce an early case of "senioritis"
Good idea for:	Student with a clear vision as to college choice Student who is a good match for the school Family that has the financial resources

Early Action** (for ex. JMU/VTECH/CNU/ODU/UMW/UVA/Radford/GMU) On or **before** November 1st

Pros	Nonbinding - Doesn't prohibit other applications Application process can start and end early
Cons	Doesn't allow for stellar grades of first semester to boost gpa/rank Shortens the time available for the application process
Good idea for:	Student who is a good match for the school, JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY

Regular Decision (all) Usually on or **after** January 1

Pros	Allows for stellar grades of first semester to boost gpa/rank Allows review of financial aid package before committing
Cons	Extends the anxiety created by the process If multiple acceptances, more stress
Good idea for:	Student who needs more time to consider possibilities Student who needs more time to improve academic record Family that wants to see the financial aid package before committing

Deferred enrollment (A student is accepted but elects to defer attendance for a semester/year)

Deadline	As soon as a student is accepted, the student can request a deferment
Pros	Allows for another year of maturity before college Gives time for special opportunity—travel, work, study
Cons	Cost of college will rise May not be used profitably
Good idea for:	Student with a clear purpose for the time before enrollment

COLLEGE FINANCES SIMPLIFIED

1. Family submits FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).
2. Analysis of FAFSA results in EFC (Expected Family Contribution).
3. Colleges receive data from FAFSA, CSS, and institutional forms.
4. College computes COA (Cost of Attendance).
5. Colleges re-calculate EFC from all data.
6. College Financial Aid Office subtracts EFC from COA to determine Financial Need.
7. College “**meets**” financial need with FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE.

TWO HYPOTHETICALS

STATE U		PRIVATE U
\$35,744	COA	\$72,460
\$10,000	EFC	\$10,000
\$25,744	NEED	\$62,460

FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE

STATE U		PRIVATE U
\$ 0	GRANT	\$10,000
\$ 2,500	WORK/STUDY	\$ 7,500
\$ 1,500	STUDENT LOANS	\$ 7,500
\$ 2,000	PARENT LOAN	\$10,000

Sources: *Big Future bigfuture.collegeboard.org

FINDING THE RIGHT FITS

Comments by Mark Dodge

Too often, students (and their parents) put great pressure on themselves to gain admission to elite, highly selective colleges and universities, under the mistaken impression that only admission to those schools will lead to success in career and life. Many students (and parents) also have a strong emotional need for the validation that comes with acceptance into an elite school - “yes, I truly am as smart and talented and wonderful and better than others as I think I am.” When approached this way, the college search becomes a competition, an effort to out-do other students and demonstrate superiority. A whole industry has sprung up to take advantage of this situation - we have college application coaches, college board exam preparation courses, essay reviewers, and others geared towards “helping you get into the college you need.” Certainly these services have their place, but too often the college application process has become filled with anxiety and dread. To be blunt, getting into the “best” college is not important – getting into the “right” college is.

A famous inscription at the temple of Apollo in ancient Delphi read, “**γνθι σεαυτόν**” - that is, “Know Thyself”. This ancient Greek wisdom should be our guide as we enter the college selection process. As a student assesses their personal strengths, weaknesses, and preferences, a picture should begin to appear of the sort of college best suited to that student. As this picture emerges, you can then look for actual colleges which most closely match the picture. Below are a set of questions that a student may use to begin thinking about the best learning environment for him or her:

1) What size school is best for me? The tradeoff here is between relationship and opportunity. At a small school (say 2000 students or fewer), you will be well known by your professors and other students. Class sizes will be small and you will have more opportunities for discussion with classmates and professors. Many small schools make a special effort to include and integrate students. For example, it is not uncommon for professors to host students for dinners in their homes. There is usually a sense of “family” - everyone is looked after and supported.

A large school (say 12,000 or more) will have big time sports events, concerts, and other performances. If you love being part of a big crowd cheering at football games, watching your team (and sometimes yourself) on TV, and being around celebrities and award-winning professors, a larger school is your choice. There are more events and opportunities and activities going on at a big school – but your classes (particularly the first two years) will be larger and more lecture oriented, and you will have much less academic and emotional support from the school.

Medium-sized schools offer a compromise between these two – they may have significant athletic programs, for example, but probably won't have big TV appearances. And you will be a little more anonymous than in the smallest schools, but there will still be a significant degree of support.

Generally, students who are more assertive and independent, and who like a high energy and activity level, can handle a large school, while those who want a more comfortable and secure situation should look for a smaller school.

2) What is the best setting for me? The atmosphere of a college is greatly affected by the community it resides in. Generally, settings are categorized as urban, suburban, college town, or rural. Schools inside big cities often promote the activities and opportunities available within the city as an adjunct feature of their education. They don't usually talk as much about the noise, pollution etc. Suburban schools can provide some of the opportunities of a city school in a more secure environment. Watch out, though – many suburban schools are predominantly commuter schools, so there may be less on-campus life than you think.

College towns tend to exist to support the college they are nearby, so most of the shops and activities in the town are geared toward the college. This can be cozy, but not nearly as lively as an urban school. Truly rural schools focus almost all their energy and activities on the college itself – these are largely self-contained communities. At best, this brings a strong sense of community – at worst, a real sense of isolation.

3) What kind of weather do I like? Yes, you are going to be living there for four years, and if you hate snow and ice, that is a legitimate concern when selecting a college! On the other hand, it doesn't make much sense to apply to Florida schools if your favorite hobby is snowboarding.

4) Does it matter how far away the school is? How often do you want to be able to come home during school holidays? For most students, consider applying to schools at least 50 miles away, but no more than 500 miles. Most students want to be far enough away that they are independent from their families, but not so far that it is more than a one-day drive away. On the other hand, if you have extended family living in a particular area, or you just want the adventure of an international school, don't automatically rule out more distant schools. Still, if you pick a more distant school, it should be for a specific reason, and you need to be aware of what you are giving up.

5) Should expense of the school affect my decision? Absolutely! It is during the junior year that students need to have a heart-to-heart talk with their parents about finances. Most private schools run about \$70,000 a year, and most in-state public schools run about \$30,000. Yes, private schools will provide some financial aid, but they generally assume you can pay more than you think you can! Outside scholarships can help with incidental expenses, but rarely are they large enough to really put a big dent in the overall cost of college. Students and parents need to take a cool, clear approach to finances before choosing which schools to apply to. And when looking at costs always focus on the *Cost of Attendance*.

6) How highly should I consider academic ratings? Here, you truly need to match your strengths to the school profile. Most colleges publish the GPA range and SAT (or ACT) scores of their median students. If your GPA and scores are significantly below these, then you probably won't get in and if you do, you'll likely struggle. Ask your TA or the school college counselor for help if you can't find this information. Naviance's Family Connection makes this information easy to find.

7) What if I don't know what to major in? Join the crowd! Most high school seniors don't know exactly what they want to study. Generally, the first two years of college give you a chance to try a number of different courses, and then you make your decision in the junior year. Some majors (particularly engineering majors) do require an earlier choice, though. But bear in mind that larger schools generally offer more majors, which means more choices. Naviance's Family Connection connects majors to colleges and has an interest survey that can help you think about careers and majors.

8) What if I do know what I want to major in? Great! By all means, look for schools that have that major, and it is fair to consider the rankings for those schools. But bear in mind that a lot of students change their major at some point in college (often two or three times), so don't focus on a particular major too narrowly.

9) How important is it to visit the schools before I apply? Perhaps surprisingly, first impressions are a pretty good indicator of how comfortable a student will be at a school. The first impression is certainly more important than a published rating. Go to the school and take a look, particularly at the students, attend classes, talk to professors, and read school newspapers. Do these look like people you want to spend much of the next four years with? Can you see yourself fitting in with them?

10) Should I pick a college or a university? What's the difference, anyway? A university normally has a post-graduate program, and thus has a strong focus on academic research. This has pros and cons – a professor who is a good researcher is by no means automatically a good teacher. On the other hand, you might have opportunities to do undergraduate research at a university, where those might be limited at a college.

To summarize – the factors that need to be considered when selecting a college are the size of school, geographical location, school setting, cost, distance from home, and a good match for your academic credentials. After that, you should look for particular majors or programs if you know what you want. If possible, confirm your choices with a visit so you can get a first impression.

After going through this process of self-evaluation, the next step is to begin finding schools that match your criteria. Here again, the TA or college adviser can be helpful in making suggestions. Which leads to the final question:

11) How many schools should I choose? Around five. It is helpful if at least one of those schools is either a rolling decision or early action school – that means you can apply and get an answer back early. If this is, say, your third choice, and you get accepted, then you need only apply to the two schools that you'd prefer above it. In general, applying to more than five schools is costly and time-consuming, and maybe an indication that you are pushing too hard to get into elite schools. Or it means that you are not carefully analyzing the differences in colleges. And, it is actually better to apply early to a school that is not the most selective on your list – the goal is to get accepted early so you can shorten your list.



Student role vs. TA role

Student role:

~**Fill out the FERPA waiver.** By doing this, it links Naviance to their Common Application. NOTE: This is very important. If the student does NOT fill this out, then the TA is unable to send documents via Naviance to common app schools. Non common app schools are not affected. The FERPA waiver can be found on your Common App account. Juniors will do this September 2024

~**Add colleges to the “colleges I’m applying to” tab.** Doing this lets the TA and teacher recommenders know where you are planning on applying to college.

~**Fill out requests to teachers for letters of recommendation.** Doing this invites the teacher recommender and enables them to upload letters for the student.

~**Go to the CollegeBoard or ACT website to submit your SAT or ACT scores electronically.** THIS IS NOT DONE AUTOMATICALLY THROUGH NAVIANCE. This is a step that the student must do on their own.

~**After hearing back from colleges with their decisions, update Naviance with their acceptances, denials, withdrawal of applications, etc.** This helps keep our statistics current on Naviance.

TA role:

~Upload TA letters of recommendation.

~Complete Common Application and/or NACAC counselor forms.

~After uploading these forms, they send the forms electronically to the schools.

~Forms that are sent by the TA are:

- TA letters of recommendation
- Common Application and/or NACAC Counselor Forms
- The student transcript
- The H-B Woodlawn Profile

~TAs can check to see whether colleges received electronic forms