

# Grand Saline High School Counseling Handbook



# Grand Saline High School

Grand Saline High School Parents:

In Grand Saline ISD, we expect our students not only to graduate from high school, but also to pursue an education beyond their high school years. We see great promise in each of our students and believe that helping each of you find a successful course for your future is part of our charge. There are many choices to consider. Along with your family, we can help you find the path that is the best fit for you.

This resource handbook was compiled to help you make those decisions that will best assist you in pursuing the great promise your future holds. Whatever your destination – four-year college, two-year college, technical school or other training opportunities – this book can help begin the process. If you're not sure which opportunity is the best for you, start here? Of course, your counselor is available to offer assistance as well.

Take full advantage of the information within this handbook. Read it, note deadlines, take notes and jot down questions. Take advantage of your access to the online College Board program, My College QuickStart. In addition, valuable information is posted on the Counselors Corner of the GSHS website.

Our goal is to make sure that you have all the necessary tools to make a wise decision about your next educational step. Good luck in your quest and remember that we are here to assist you.

*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.  
....Nelson Mandela*

# 9<sup>th</sup> Grade...Gathering the Pieces

## Prepare for the Work Ahead

- Graduation Requirements

Endorsement	Endorsement plus Distinguished Achievement**
4 credits of English, Math and Science	4 credits of English, Math and Science
3 credits of Social Studies	3 credits of Social Studies
1 credit of physical education and fine arts	1 credit of physical education and fine arts
2 credits of a foreign language	2 credits of a foreign language
7 credits of other electives	7 credits of other electives
26 TOTAL CREDITS	26 TOTAL CREDITS

\*\* Four advanced measures required

- By the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade year 6 credits must be earned to become a 10<sup>th</sup> grader.
- Program of Study
  - Meet annually with counselor to review and update
  - Follow a sequential program of study for depth of instruction
- Become Involved
  - Extracurricular
  - Community Service
  - Leadership
  - Summer academic programs
  - Athletics
    - become familiar with NCAA eligibility requirements
- Prepare Document Organizer/Portfolio
  - Academics
    - report cards
    - transcripts
  - Activities
    - record dates and hours
  - Awards
- College and Career Readiness
  - Maintain good grades
  - GPA and Rank determine college entrance requirements
  - Consider Dual Credit courses for sophomore year

*"Begin with the end in mind!"*

*Mychal Wynn*

# 10<sup>th</sup> Grade...Framing the Pieces

## Prepare for Expanding Your Experiences

- Graduation Requirements

Recommended Plan	Distinguished Achievement**
4 credits of English, Math, Science and Social Studies	4 credits of English, Math, Science and Social Studies
.5 credits of health and speech	.5 credits of health and speech
1 credit of physical education, technology and fine arts	1 credit of physical education, technology and fine arts
2 credits of a foreign language	3 credits of a foreign language
4 credits of other electives	3 credits of other electives
26 TOTAL CREDITS	26 TOTAL CREDITS

\*\* Four advanced measures required

- By the end of the 10th grade year 12 credits must be earned to become an 11th grader
- Program of Study
  - Meet annually with counselor to review and update
    - Follow a sequential program of study for depth of instruction
- Stay Involved
  - Extracurricular
  - Community Service
  - Leadership
  - Summer academic programs
  - Athletics
- Update Document Organizer/Portfolio
  - Academics
    - Report cards
    - Transcripts
  - Activities
    - Record dates and hours
  - Awards
  - College and Career Readiness
- Maintain good grades
  - GPA and Rank determine college entrance requirements
  - Consider Dual Credit courses for junior year
- Take the PSAT
  - Upon receiving results from PSAT, use tools provided by College Board for exploring careers and colleges

*“Every accomplishment begins with the decision to try”*  
 Author Unknown

# 11<sup>th</sup> Grade...Placing the Final Pieces

## Prepare for Graduation and Beyond

- Graduation Requirements

Recommended Plan	Distinguished Achievement**
4 credits of English, Math, Science and Social Studies	4 credits of English, Math, Science and Social Studies
.5 credits of health and speech	.5 credits of health and speech
1 credit of physical education, technology and fine arts	1 credit of physical education, technology and fine arts
2 credits of a foreign language	3 credits of a foreign language
4 credits of other electives	3 credits of other electives
26 TOTAL CREDITS	26 TOTAL CREDITS

\*\* Four advanced measures required

- By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade year 19 credits must be earned to become a 12<sup>th</sup> grader
- Program of Study
  - Meet with counselor to review and update
  - Make a plan to enroll in capstone/practicum classes in program of study
- Finish Strong
  - Extracurricular
  - Community Service
  - Leadership
  - Summer academic programs
  - Athletics
- Register with NCAA Eligibility Center
- Update Document Organizer/Portfolio
  - Academics
    - Report cards
    - Transcripts
  - Activities
    - Record dates and hours
  - Awards
  - Leadership positions
- College and Career Readiness
  - Maintain good grades **all** the way through junior and senior year
  - GPA and Rank determine college entrance requirements
  - Cumulative GPA from junior year will be used for college applications for admissions
  - Consider Dual Credit courses for senior year

*“So now it is time...to piece the parts of the puzzle together, for I find that having come to the end,...my life is just beginning”.*

# Your Junior Year...Piece By Piece

## FALL

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT
- Start Your College Search
- Attend College Fair & College Night
- Update your portfolio
- Use the Financial Aid Calculator
  - <https://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/estimate>

## WINTER

- Have your junior conference to discuss ways to improve your college preparation and selection process.
- Register for the SAT and/or ACT
- Review your PSAT score.
  - Use it to improve your skills and prepare for the SAT. Practice at [www.collegeboard.com/psatextra](http://www.collegeboard.com/psatextra).
- Look on universities' websites for Spring Open House/Preview days

## SPRING

- Study for the SAT and ACT. Consider taking a SAT/ACT Prep Class
- Visit colleges
- Attend Open House/Preview days at universities
- Scan local newspapers to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.
- Begin Organizing, Planning, and Writing College Application Essays.
- Student Athletes Register with NCAA Clearinghouse
- Plan for summer activities.
  - Enrich yourself by volunteering, getting an interesting job or internship.

## SUMMER

- Continue to update your portfolio.
- Keep Your Momentum Up
- Visit colleges, take campus tours and schedule interviews with admissions counselors.
- Determine application deadlines for university applications.
- Begin Scholarship Search

# SENIOR ACTION PLAN

## FALL

### SEPTEMBER

- Narrow your list of colleges to 3 to 5.
- Create a master list or calendar that includes:
  - Tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines.
  - College application due dates.
  - Financial aid application forms required and their deadlines.
  - Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
- Apply for FAFSA PIN (Personal identification number).
- If interested in military service, consult with the military recruiters.
- If you can't afford application or test fees, consult your counselor to determine if you qualify for a fee waiver.

### OCTOBER

- Meet with your counselor regarding your post high school plans.
- Prepare Early Decision, Early Action, or rolling admission applications as soon as possible.
- Ask for counselor or teacher recommendations.
- If you're submitting essays, write first drafts and ask others to read them. If you're applying for Early Decision, finish the essays for that application now.

### NOVEMBER

- November 1-15: for Early Decision admissions, colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates.
- Complete at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Request your transcripts be sent to the colleges of your choice.

## WINTER

### DECEMBER

- As you finish and send your applications, be sure to keep copies.
- If your college requires a mid-year report, be sure to give the form to your counselor.

### JANUARY

- If you apply to colleges online, be sure to have your high school send a transcript.
- Complete the FAFSA on line.

### FEBRUARY

- No senioritis, please! Your final transcript reflects your work ethic. Keep your grades up!

## **SPRING**

### **MARCH**

- Wait-listed by a college? If you will enroll if accepted, tell the admissions director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application.
- Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if accepted. Be persistent.
- Register to take TSI test for your two year or four year Texas school. (Exemptions may be available based on other test scores.)

### **APRIL**

- You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April.
- If you have not yet done so, visit your final college before accepting.
- Notify the high school of your college choice decision.
- If you have questions about housing offers, contact the college.

### **MAY**

- May 1: Colleges cannot require (unless admitted as an Early Decision) a deposit or commitment to attend before May 1. By that postmarked date, you must inform every college of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid.
- Send your deposit to one college only.
- Work with financial aid offices at colleges to resolve any financial aid problems.
- Schedule orientation, CLEP exams or other requirements prior to the beginning of your studies at colleges or universities.
- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college.

## **SUMMER**

### **JUNE**

- Enjoy your summer!

# PLANNING YOUR FUTURE

There are two very important reasons for finishing high school and getting additional education. First, many careers demand more education and second, the potential to earn more money over a lifetime is greatly enhanced by additional education.

There are many different types of educational training available when you graduate from high school. Besides four-year colleges, there are two-year colleges, technical school(s), and military and apprenticeship programs. One type of training is not better than the other; it simply educates for different types of careers. Choosing a technical school simply means that a four-year college does not offer the type of exclusive training required for a specific career. In fact, depending on the type of program you choose you may find it easier to get a job with an education from technical school than a four-year college due to the high-tech society we live in.

The type of institution you attend depends on the career you select.

## WHO AM I?

Understanding yourself-your interests, abilities, values, and attitudes-is essential to making good decisions about your future.

The first step toward career satisfaction is to ask yourself, "What type of work do I really want to do?" Respect your personality when choosing a career. For example, do you take orders well or do you feel the need to be in charge? Do you enjoy working with people or prefer to work alone? Would you do well in an outside sales position where you have to organize your time and motivate yourself? Or do you operate better in a more structured environment?

One way to better understand yourself is to assess what is important to you. There are several websites that will assist you in completing this assessment.

"My College Quickstart" is just one of them. (use the access code provided with your PSAT scores)

# ANALYZE YOUR OPTIONS

The following are terms you need to be familiar with when analyzing your options.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Anticipated Length of Study</b>	<b>Transfer of Credit</b>
On Job Training	Specific training offered by an employer; includes military service	Usually less than 6 months	*
High School Diploma	Allows students to finish with entry-level job skills	4 years	*
Vocational Technical Certificate	Allows students to finish with entry-level job skills; offered at primarily at vocational-technical centers and at comprehensive high schools	1-3 years	*
Private Trade School	Specific skill training after high school for a particular occupation	3 months-2 years	*
Associate Degree (Academic & Vocational)	Offered at community/junior colleges, some 4 year colleges; provides training after high school in specific vocations or for transfer to a senior college	2 years	Institution granting baccalaureate degree will determine applicability of courses from A.D. program toward higher degree.
Apprenticeship	Formal training program between employee and employer; involves work experience and classroom instruction.	2-5 years (usually 4 years)	Only credits earned in college may be transferable
Bachelor's Degree	Formal 4 year program leading to a degree from a college or university	4 years (can be longer)	Credits may transfer among college and universities
Master's Degree	Advanced degree; may be required for entry into certain careers	1-2+ years beyond bachelor's degree	Credits may transfer among colleges and universities upon approval of receiving school
Doctorate or Professional Degree	Research/professional degree in preparation for such careers as medicine, dentistry, law education or science	3-5 years beyond bachelor's degree	Transfer is difficult

# NOT PLANNING ON FOUR YEARS OF COLLEGE?

***Should you go immediately to full-time work after you graduate?***

**Not if. . .**

- You are just working until you make up your mind what to do. Some careful planning and preparation now will make temporary stop-gap jobs unnecessary after you graduate.
- You are just working until you earn enough money for college. local college tuition remains inexpensive enough for nearly everyone who wants to go. Consider working part-time and continuing to live at home. Grants, loans and scholarships are available.
- You know that you will do better in the long run by getting additional training or schooling now. Schooling only becomes more difficult with added responsibilities.

**Yes. . .**

- If you are already employed part-time and know that you want to continue with that company.
- If you have a clear idea of the career you want to follow and know that you can succeed without further training or education.
- You should get some work experience to make you more desirable to a future employer and to give you some ideas about the work you might, or might not, want to do.

**Consider...**

- Part-time jobs after school hours
- A career and technology program that combines school and work.
  - Cosmetology
  - Auto Tech/Collision
- A cooperative work program at school
- Summer employment
- Job shadowing

## ***Should you go for further training right after you graduate?***



### **Not if. . .**

- You are still “fumbling around” looking for a career. Technical schools are very specialized and offer training in very specific jobs.
- You haven’t carefully studied the credentials of the vocational/technical school. Do not sign a contract with a school until you have verified that the school and its program are legitimate.

### **Yes. . .**

If you are sure what career you want to pursue, what training you must have, and where that training is available.

Getting training after high school will increase your opportunities in seeking employment. Additional job skills will raise the beginning salaries, improve working conditions, and allow for more opportunity for advancement.

Technical schools offer two-year programs designed to update technical competence and professional levels. Some technology curriculum may lead to an associate degree. Most technical schools will require an entrance examination in math, reading, English, and perhaps a technical aptitude.

Examples of vocational/technical schools include:

Art institutes	Electronics schools
Allied health schools	Junior colleges
Business schools	Community colleges
Fashion schools	Culinary Institutes

Examples of various Associate of Applied Science Degree Programs include:

Automotive Technology	Nursing
Childcare and Development	Office Administration
Cosmetology	Real Estate
Criminal Justice	Veterinary Technology
Welding	Land Surveying

Examples of various Certificate of Competency Programs include:

Dental Assistant	Legal Secretary
Microcomputer Applications	Records Technician
Respiratory Care Technician	Vocational Nursing

## ***Should you go to a junior/community college after graduation?***

### **Yes. . .**

- If you feel you want to get some coursework completed before going to a four year college or university.
- If your target four-year university offers transfer and/or guaranteed admissions agreements
- If the cost of attending a four year institution is a challenge.

Community colleges generally have an “open admission” policy. Students who have graduated from high school can usually be admitted, although on-campus testing may be required. Low testing scores may necessitate some remedial or noncredit work before starting college credit courses.

Community colleges generally offer two major types of programs. One is the “transfer program” for those who later plan to attend a four-year college. The other is a “terminal program” that may lead to an Associate Degree or some kind of certification.

Junior colleges are similar to community colleges. They generally offer the same open admissions, but a junior college’s purpose is to prepare a student for transfer to a 4-year degree program. Junior colleges typically offer housing, more extensive food services, intramurals, and other campus activities.

Meeting with community college or junior college representatives will help you choose what types of programs and services fit your future needs.

Popular Texas community and junior college options for students include:

Tyler Junior College  
1415 South Baxter Ave.  
Tyler, TX 75711  
800-687-5680  
[www.tjc.edu](http://www.tjc.edu)

Austin Community College  
5930 Middle Fiskville Road  
Austin, TX 78752  
512-223-7000  
[www.austincc.edu](http://www.austincc.edu)

Blinn College  
902 College Avenue  
Branham, TX 77833  
979-830-4000  
[www.blinn.edu](http://www.blinn.edu)

Lone Star College System  
3200 Highway 242 West  
Conroe, Tx 77384  
[www.lonestar.edu/montgomery.html](http://www.lonestar.edu/montgomery.html)

# SELECTING A COLLEGE

To select a college, you need to consider your abilities, values, and goals. Remember, however, that there is no *one perfect college* for you. Rather, there are many colleges that would be an “excellent fit.”

**STEP ONE:** Assess your abilities and identify your goals and interests.

- What aspects of your high school years have you enjoyed the most? If you could live them over again, would you do anything differently? What values are most important to you?
- How do you define success? Are you satisfied with your accomplishments to date?
- What kind of person would you like to become? Which of your unique talents and strengths would you like to develop?
- If you had a year to go anywhere and do whatever you wanted, where would you go and what would you do?
- What event/experiences have shaped your growth and way of thinking?
- How do you learn best?
- How would you describe your high school? Has the environment encouraged you to develop? What has been your most stimulating intellectual experience in recent years?

**STEP TWO:** Familiarize yourself with the different types of schools and find out what characteristics to look for when selecting a school.

- What type of geographic surroundings am I looking for in a school? Small town or big city? Close to home or far away? Mountains? Sunshine?
- What type of school am I looking for? Large or small? Public or private? Junior college or four-year school? Liberal arts, technical, or all-inclusive?
- What type of philosophical base does the college and its student body in general has? Progressive? Politically active? Religious? Conservative? Liberal?
- Does it matter to me how many and what type of extracurricular activities are available at a given school? Leadership opportunities? Intramural sports? Music, theatre arts? Greek system (fraternities and sororities)? Attending athletic events?
- Am I willing to take on financial debt to be able to attend one school over another, less expensive one? Loans? Part-time employment? Does it matter if I know anyone, or if any of my friends attend the college I choose?

- What areas of study does the school provide? If I should change my major, are there other majors available that I would be interested in? What are the retention and graduation rates?
- Before leaving the campus, stop and reflect. Can you imagine attending this college for four years?

**STEP THREE:** Choose the characteristics that are important to you.

Make a list of the five to ten characteristics that you consider very important.

**STEP FOUR:** Gather information to identify a short list of schools that have these characteristics and that meet your personal goals and needs.

Use the following resources:

- College Guidebooks
- Computer Resources
  - [www.collegefortexans.com](http://www.collegefortexans.com)
  - [www.collegeanswer.com](http://www.collegeanswer.com)
  - [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)
- College Night
- Visits with College Recruiters
- Visits to College Campuses

**STEP FIVE:** Apply to the three to five schools that top your list.

As you narrow your college list, select one or two institutions that present an admission challenge. These schools are called “reaches”. Make sure your final list also includes one or more “mid-range” colleges, where your qualifications closely match those of the average student. Finally, be sure to apply to at least one “safe” school where your statistics equal or exceed those of most of the students admitted.

- Determine if the school accepts either the Texas Common Application or the National Common Application.
- Begin the “College Application Worksheet” located in the Addendum.

# COLLEGE VISITS

There is no better way to learn about a college or university than to visit the campus *when the college is in session*. The best time to visit a college environment is during the spring and summer of your junior year or in the fall of your senior year.

## Preparing for the Visit

- Arrange for the visit in advance. Ask for a campus tour.
- Check to see if the college has special recruiting weekend events and tours.
- Allow sufficient time for a visit. Preferably a full day but not less than a half day.
- Familiarize yourself with the college before you visit.
- Inform the college about your areas of interest.
- Take a copy of your high school's profile with you.
- Take a copy of your resume with you.
- Take an unofficial copy of your transcript with you.
- Give careful attention to your appearance, grooming, and conduct. This will be your first contact with the school and first impressions do count. Follow up the visit with a thank-you note.

## The Visit

- Visit several classes.
- Talk with students. If possible, stay overnight in the dorm to see what living at college is really like.
- Ask to meet a faculty member from the department in which you are interested.
- Eat in a dining hall.
- Pick up a copy of the student newspaper.
- Take notes.

## Questions to Ask

- What is the average class size for freshmen? Upperclassmen?
- Who will teach freshmen courses-graduate assistants or faculty?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the faculty advising system? How accessible is the faculty?
- What is the availability of the courses in the field you are interested in? Special opportunities? (Study abroad, Co-op, Internships?) Any new programs scheduled for the next four years?
- What are the college's top three programs or majors?
- How would you characterize the academic pressure and workload?
- What are the housing opportunities? What do I need to know about housing?
- What percentage of students live on campus? What percentages of students remain on campus during the weekend? What do students do on the weekends?
- How will the college be evaluating the student? What criteria is used?
- What are the application deadlines and procedures?
- What are the school's basic costs (tuition, room, board, fees, books)?
- What kinds of financial aid are available?
- Are there merit or no-need scholarships or grants available? Athletic or talent awards? Scholarships for upperclassmen?
- What percentage of entering freshmen graduate in 4 years?
- What percentages of freshmen return the second year?
- Is there a career planning or placement program for students?

# FACTORS CONSIDERED IN COLLEGE ADMISSION

## GRADUATION PLAN

State law requires that in order for a student to be admitted to a public four year university the student must complete the Recommended High School Graduation Plan. For students entering high school in 2014-2015, state law requires students to complete one endorsement in order to be admitted to a public four year university. In addition, universities may have additional requirements to the endorsement.

## RANK IN CLASS

Class rank is based on semester grades earned in all credit courses earned while in grades 9-12 on the high school campus.

## AUTOMATIC TOP 10% ADMISSION\*

**House Bill 588** states that students who are in the top 10% of their graduating class and have completed the Recommended High School Graduation Plan are eligible for automatic admission to any public university in Texas. To be eligible for automatic admission, a student must:

- Graduate in the top 10 percent of his/her class at a public or private high school in Texas,
- Enroll in college no more than two years after graduating from high school, and
- Submit a complete application to a Texas public university by the institution's deadline.

You should be aware that students who **are not** in the top 10 percent of their class are considered for college admission under other criteria.

\*Based on the 2014 state legislative session, the University of Texas will revise the automatic admission policy for top 10% graduates. The cut off for automatic admission will be announced in the fall of the year preceding the student's high school graduation.

## ADMISSION TESTS

Colleges want an official score report sent directly to them from the testing agencies. It is your responsibility as an applicant to report your SAT Reasoning Test, ACT, and SAT Subject Tests by indicating colleges as score recipients on the registration form or by completing and mailing an Additional Score Report. Scores must be received by the institution's deadline in order for an application to be complete.

Contact colleges to determine if they will only accept "best day" scores or whether they will combine scores from different test days.

## ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Colleges will be looking at the quality of course selection, as well as grades. Colleges want to make sure a student is academically prepared for the rigors of college curriculum. “Academic intensity and quality is far and away the most powerful predictor of bachelor’s degree completion.” (College Board)

It is important that your grades represent your best efforts academically. Improved grades over past performance may perhaps indicate a greater seriousness of purpose about education. A decline of grades over past performance may be seen as a slackening of effort or less ability for more advanced work. *A decline of grades may cause an admissions committee to reject what might have seemed an otherwise acceptable candidate for admission.*

Both the Recommended High School Program and the Distinguished Achievement Program graduation plans help ensure that Texas high school students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed. These graduation plans require challenging academic courses which better prepare students for attending technical schools, community colleges, or four-year universities.

## RESUME

Colleges and universities want to see student involvement and leadership. In order to judge this the amount of involvement and leadership, some colleges will require a resume as part of an application. This resume should be a concise summary of your education, accomplishments, experience, and skills. The overall purpose of a college application essay should be to generate interest in you by highlighting your achievements and strengths. Tips to follow when developing your essay:

- Be brief. Limit your resume to two pages.
- Be neat and accurate. Proofread carefully. Remember this resume is a reflection of you.
- Emphasize your *most significant* achievements. Put your “best stuff” first.
- Be specific, offering examples when appropriate.
- Be honest.

## ESSAY

Some colleges may require an essay. An essay gives the applicant the opportunity to set themselves apart from other applicants with their unique personality and/or experiences. If the essay is an optional part of the application, it is in the applicant’s best interest to complete the essay.

### Writing the College Essay

While the final product and final “voice” should be yours, they may be able to offer helpful suggestions for technical or other improvements.

Within this general outline for actually writing the essay, there are some “do’s” and “don’ts” which should be highlighted:

#### Do’s

- Do think “small” and write about something that you know about.
- Do reveal yourself in your writing.
- Do show rather than tell. By giving examples and illustrating your topic, you help bring it to life.
- Do write in your own “voice” and style.

## Don'ts

- Don't write what you think others want to read.
- Don't exaggerate or write to impress.
- Don't use a flowery, inflated, or pretentious style.
- Don't neglect the technical part of your essay (grammar, spelling, sentence structure).
- Don't ramble – say what you have to say and conclude.

Your college essay, along with your high school record, standardized test scores, and extracurricular involvement, will provide the basis upon which the college makes its admissions decision. A thoughtful well-written essay can affect that final decision in a very positive way... Keep this in mind and take full advantage of the opportunity which the college essay affords you.

You do not have to get it right the first time! Instead, write the first draft of your essay with the main focus on content - communicating your thoughts. Then set it aside for a day or two, reread it with a fresh perspective, and make any necessary changes. This is also the point at which you should consider matters of organization, style, grammar, spelling, and tone. Once you have rewritten your first draft, you may wish to try it out on your family, friends, or English teacher.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Some colleges will require recommendations. A recommendation describes an applicant's personal characteristics and academic abilities. The recommendation usually gives a more detailed analysis of your qualifications than the information received from the high school.

Before asking someone to write a recommendation, you need to consider:

- Waiving your rights to see the materials in your file. This will allow the person writing the recommendation to give a more accurate picture of the applicant. Most authorities recommend students sign these waivers.
- Deciding who should write your recommendation. It is important to choose teachers who know you well, like you, and will write a strong recommendation for you.
- Writing a letter of recommendation is time-consuming. Be sure you give the person writing the letter a **minimum of three weeks** before the letter is due. Request recommendations only for those schools to which you are definitely applying.

***Contact your high school Guidance Office to determine the proper procedure for requesting recommendations.***

## OTHER ADMISSIONS CONSIDERATIONS

In addition factors considered in admission already listed, in the more highly competitive colleges, academically qualified candidates outnumber the spaces available. It becomes a question of **which** of the academically qualified applicants are admitted. A number of other admission factors then become important. Some of these factors might be:

- Special talents such as musical, artistic, or athletic ability
- Geographic location
- Exceptional academic talent such as independent research, a science fair project or National Merit recognition
- Background or culture
- A demonstrated interest in the college

# AFTER THE APPLICATION PROCESS

## COMMON ADMISSION DECISIONS DEFINITIONS

### Early Decision

Early Decision requires you to commit to a college or university at the time of application that, if admitted, you will enroll. Once admitted under Early Decision, a nonrefundable deposit will be required well before May 1. You may apply to other colleges but may have only one Early Decision application pending at any time.

### Early Action

Early Action permits you to apply to a college or university of your choice and receive a decision early in the senior year, well in advance of the normal spring response dates. You are not committed to attend and may apply to other colleges. You are not required to make a commitment before May 1.

### Regular Decision

Regular Decision is a plan in which institutions review most of their applications before notifying the majority of candidates of their admission. In this process, colleges set a deadline for completing applications and will respond to completed applications by a specified date. You will not be required to make a decision regarding enrolling before May 1.

### Rolling Admission

Rolling admission is a term used to describe the application process in which an institution reviews applications as they are received and offers decisions to students soon after they are made. You may apply to other colleges and will not be required to make a decision regarding enrollment before May 1.

### Wait List

Wait List is a term used by institutions to describe a process in which they may initially delay offering or denying you admission, but rather extends to you the possibility of admission in the future. Colleges offer admission to wait list candidates if insufficient numbers of regularly admitted candidates accept their offers of admission. Please refer to the *Statement of Students' Rights and Responsibilities* for the rights, which you are assured if placed on a wait list.

# Should you apply under an Early Decision Program?

Ideal candidates for Early Decision should fit both of these profiles:

- You have researched colleges extensively (visited at least 3 or 4) and are absolutely sure that College X is your first choice. If you are accepted under an Early Decision program, you have committed yourself to attending that college and must withdraw all other applications.
- You meet or exceed the admissions profile of students at College X (i.e., you SAT scores, GPA, and class rank should be comparable to students at College X.) You should have completed one round of the SAT Reasoning Test and SAT Subject Tests by October of your senior year. Some colleges, however, will accept November test scores if the scores are rushed to the admissions office. You have an academic record that has been consistently solid over time.

## What are the advantages of Early Decision programs?

- Your application is reviewed early and you receive notification of your admission status by December 15.
- If you are accepted, you avoid having to complete other applications.
- Your application is reviewed against a smaller applicant pool. (However, it is usually a much stronger pool than the group of candidate for regular admissions.)

## What are the disadvantages of Early Decision programs?

- You could be rejected early.
- In April, when other students receive their acceptances, you may end up wondering, "Could I have been accepted to Y University?"
- You might change your mind, but you are bound by contract to attend College X.

## What are some of the mistakes students make in choosing to apply for Early Decision?

- Applying to a college for Early Decision when they have not researched/visited any other colleges
- Applying early to a college just to avoid the paperwork and stress.
- Applying early because a friend is doing so.

# PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Obviously, the cost of attending college is high and going higher each year. However, there are various ways you can cut the cost of college. While in high school, students can and should do the following:

- **Be well prepared for the college curriculum.** Even after a student gains acceptance at a college or university, the school can require the student take developmental or remedial courses. In order to take these courses, the student must pay regular tuition but the courses do not count toward their degree program.
- **Take advanced placement courses and exams.** A student can earn credit while in high school and avoid paying tuition and other fees and living costs. Information regarding the AP credit policy at various colleges and institutions can be found at:  
<http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp>
- **Explore career options.** Most college students change majors several times during their college career. Oftentimes, coursework taken will not count in the new major.
- **Enroll in dual credit classes.** Dual credit classes count for both college and high school credit. Oftentimes, the student does not have to pay full tuition and fees at the college for the dual credit class. Students should be aware there are test requirements that students must either take or be exempted from before college courses may be taken.
- **Consider financial aid options.** Most financial aid is based on financial need. However, more than \$3,010,000,000 (including student loans) is awarded to students each year. The TEXAS Grant program is just one of these financial aid programs. The middle of your junior year in high school is the best time to start asking about financial aid. Your best source of information is the financial aid officer at the college you wish to attend.

# FINANCIAL AID

## *Applying starts with one form.*

To obtain financial aid, there are three very important things to understand.

1. **You only have to complete one form (the FAFSA) to start the financial aid process.**
2. The financial aid office at the college you plan to attend will be in charge of awarding your financial aid.
3. Deadlines matter. The earlier you submit your forms, the more likely you are to get a good financial aid package.

### **What is FAFSA?**

FAFSA stands for "Free Application for Federal Student Aid." As the name indicates, the application is **free** and there is no charge for the processing of your application. No matter how many schools you are applying to, you only need to complete one FAFSA per academic year. Once your application is processed, you and the schools you have selected will be notified of the results and the school can then start the process of determining the funding for which you are eligible.

### **Who should complete the FAFSA?**

All students should complete the FAFSA. Many merit scholarships will require FAFSA information. Students who are not United States citizens may be eligible for financial aid. Check with the Financial Aid office at the college of your interest.

### **Where Can You Find the FAFSA?**

The best practice is to complete the application electronically at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

NOTE: Completing the FAFSA online is the fastest way to apply. The processing time for forms submitted on-line is about two weeks. The processing time for paper applications is six to eight weeks. This is a free application. A student should never pay to file a FAFSA.

### **When Should You Complete the FAFSA?**

The FAFSA should be completed and processed as soon as possible after January 1 for students expecting to enroll in college in the following fall.

Remember, the financial aid for which you are applying has limits, so the sooner you complete your forms, the better your chances of getting a good financial aid package. There is not enough money to meet the financial need of all college students in the United States.

### **How Should You Complete the FAFSA?**

To complete the form, you and your parents will need to share information on your financial condition (income, assets, savings, etc.). This is the same information you would be required to share with a bank or other lender when requesting a loan for a new car or home, or that you are required to put on your tax return each year.

### **What's Next?**

Once you have completed the FAFSA, your next step is to contact the financial aid office to determine if there is any other information you need to provide. Some colleges will require that you complete additional forms. Remember, you must have been admitted to the college before you will be considered for financial aid awards, so be certain to send in your application for admission.

# TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

There are many different types of financial aid available to students and their families. Some are need-based, some are based on academic performance, and others are tied to a student's or family's ability to borrow. Not all colleges and universities participate in all programs.

## Exemptions

- Exemptions are a type of financial assistance allowing some Texas residents to attend a public college or university in Texas without paying tuition or, in some cases, tuition and fees.
- Examples of exemptions include:
  - Exemption for Highest Ranking High School Graduate,
  - Exemption for Peace Officers Disabled in the Line of Duty
  - Exemption for children of disabled veterans
  - Adopted Students Formerly in Foster or Other Residential Care,
  - Foster Care Students, and many others.

Additional programs and information are available at [www.collegefortexans.com](http://www.collegefortexans.com).

## State and Federal Grants and Scholarships

- State and federal grants and scholarships provide financial aid that does not have to be repaid. Some grants and scholarships require the student to maintain a certain grade point average (GPA) to take certain courses.
- Most grants are awarded on the basis of financial need.
- Examples of state, federal grants, and scholarships include:
  - TEXAS Grant (must graduate on the Recommended Program)
  - Federal PELL Grant
  - Robert C. Byrd Scholarship
  - Vocational Nursing Scholarships, and many others.

## Private and Corporate Grants and Scholarships

- Private and Corporate Grants and Scholarships provide financial aid that does not have to be repaid. Some grants and scholarships require the student to maintain a certain grade point average or take certain courses.
- Most grants are awarded on basis of financial need.
- Examples of Private and Corporate Grants and Scholarships available to students at Texas colleges and universities include:
  - Best Buy Scholarship
  - Ag Day Essay Contest
  - Microsoft College Scholarships
  - Talbot's Women's Scholarship Fund, and many others.

## **Institutional Grants and Scholarships**

- Institutional Grants and Scholarships provide financial aid that does not have to be repaid. Some grants and scholarships require the student to maintain a certain grade point average or take certain courses.
- Most grants are awarded on the basis of financial need.
- Examples of Institutional Grants and Scholarships programs available to students at Texas colleges and universities include:
  - Texas A&M University Honored Service Scholarships
  - License Plate Insignia Scholarship
  - Midwestern State University Tuition Grant for First-Generation Students
  - Texas Tech University Grant, and many others.

## **Loans**

- Loans refer to financial aid that must be repaid.
- Examples of loans include:
  - Consolidation Loans
  - Perkins Loan
  - Federal Family Education Loan Program: Subsidized Stafford Loan
  - Federal Family Education Loan Program: Unsubsidized Stafford Loan

## **Loan Forgiveness Programs**

- Financial aid for individuals who agree to perform certain work or services after completing college.
- Examples of Loan Forgiveness include:
  - Texas B-On-Time Student Loan Program
  - Federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program for Federal Family Education

## **Loan Repayment Programs**

- Repayment of college loans for individuals employed in certain fields.
- Examples of Loan Repayments include:
  - Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Assistance Program
  - BHPR: Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program

## **Tax Credits and Other Programs**

- Federal income tax credits and deductions for college students.
- Examples include:
  - Capital IDEA!
  - Americorps
  - Texas Scholars
  - Lifetime Learning Tax Credit

## **Work-Study Programs**

- Jobs (usually on campus) that are offered by the college to help students pay for tuition or other college costs.
- Work-study jobs are awarded based on financial need.

# Myths about Paying for College

There is a lot of misinformation about what type of aid is available and who is eligible.

## **College is just too expensive for our family.**

A college education is more affordable than people think, especially when you consider that college graduates earn an average of \$1 million more over the span of their careers than high school graduates. There are some expensive schools, but high tuition is not a requirement for a good education.

## **There's less aid available than there used to be.**

Financial aid has risen to record levels. Most students receive some form of aid. Less of this aid now comes in the form of grants, however; **most aid is awarded through low-interest loans or institutional and other grants.**

## **My family's income is too high to qualify for aid.**

Aid is intended to make a college education available for students of families in many financial situations. College financial aid administrators often take into account not only income but also other family members in college, home mortgage costs, and other factors.

## **My parents saved for college, so we won't qualify for aid.**

Saving for college is always a good idea. Since most financial aid comes in the form of loans, the aid you are likely to receive will need to be repaid. Tucking away money could mean that you have fewer loans to repay, and it won't make you ineligible for aid if you need it. A family's share of college costs is based mostly on income, not assets such as savings.

## **I'm not a straight-A student, so I won't get aid.**

It's true that many scholarships reward merit, but most federal aid is based on financial need and does not even consider grades.

## **Millions of dollars in scholarships go unused every year.**

Professional scholarship search services often tout this statistic. In fact, most unclaimed money is slated for a few eligible candidates, such as employees of a specific corporation or members of a certain organization.

## **Private schools are out of reach for my family.**

Experts recommend deferring cost considerations until late in the college-selection process. Your most important consideration is to find a school that meets your academic, career, and personal needs. In fact, you might have a better chance of receiving aid from a private school. Private colleges often offer more financial aid to attract students from every income level. Higher college expenses also mean a better chance of demonstrating financial need.

# Avoiding Scholarship Scams

Scholarship scans have been around for years. According to the Federal Trade Commission, if you hear these lines from a scholarship service, you may be getting duped:

- **“The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back.”**  
No one can guarantee that they will get you a scholarship.
- **“You can’t get this information anywhere else.”**  
There are many free lists of scholarships. Spend the time, not the money.
- **“May I have your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship?”**  
You should not have to pay anything to get a scholarship.
- **“We do all the work.”**  
Don’t be fooled. You still must apply for scholarships and grants yourself.
- **“There is a small application fee.”**  
Never invest more than the cost of a letter to get information.
- **“You’ve been selected by a “national foundation” to receive a scholarship or “You’re a finalist” in a contest you never entered.”**  
This is simply a ploy for more information in order to sell a program.
- **“Come to our free seminar.”**  
Free financial aid seminars or “interviews” may provide some useful information, but often they are disguised sale pitches for professional scholarship searches.

# Financial Aid Glossary

**Award Letter:** A means of notifying students of the assistance the college/university has offered. The letter describes the type(s) and amount(s) of aid, and lists specific information on the student's responsibilities and the conditions that govern the award.

**Cost of Attendance** (also known as the **cost of education** or **budget**): The student's cost of attendance, covering not only tuition and fees (including loan fees), books, and supplies, but also the student's living expenses while attending school. The cost of attendance is estimated by the school, within guidelines established by federal regulations. The difference between the cost of attendance and the student's expected family contribution determines the student's need for financial aid.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC):** The total amount students and their families are expected to pay toward college costs, from their income and assets, for one academic year. The amount is derived from a need analysis of the family's financial circumstances. The Federal Methodology is used to determine a student's eligibility for federal and state student aid. Colleges and private aid programs may use a different method to determine eligibility for nonfederal financial aid.

**FAFSA on the WEB:** An electronic option for completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid** at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Avoid similar websites who require a fee for this service.

**Financial Need:** The amount by which your family's contribution falls short of covering your expenses. Assessments of need may differ, depending on the need-analysis method used. The Federal Methodology is used to determine the student's eligibility for federal and state financial aid.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** A form completed by all applicants for federal aid. The FAFSA is available on the Web at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). There is no charge to students for completing the FAFSA. Forms may be filed any time after January 1 of the year for which the student is seeking aid.

**Need-Analysis Form:** The starting point in applying for financial aid. Students must file the FAFSA to apply for federal financial aid programs. For many colleges, FAFSA may be the only need-analysis form a student must file. For other school, particularly private colleges, additional forms may be required.

**Need-Based Financial Aid:** Financial aid (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study opportunities) given to students who have demonstrated financial need, calculated by subtracting the student's expected family contribution from a college's total cost.

**Need-Blind Admissions:** The policy of determining college admissions without regard to a student's financial need or financial aid status.

**Need-Conscious Admissions:** A policy that considers financial aid status for at least some of its applicants in making admission decisions.

**Parent's Contribution (EFC):** The amount the student's family is expected to pay toward college costs from its income and assets. The parents' contribution and the student's contribution together constitute the total family contribution, which, when subtracted from the college expense budget, equals financial need.

**Student Aid Report (SAR):** A report produced by the Department of Education and sent to students who have filed the FAFSA. The SAR contains information the student provided on the FAFSA as well as the federally calculated result, which the financial aid office will use in determining the student's eligibility for a Pell Grant and other federal student aid programs.

**Work-Study:** An arrangement by which a student combines employment and college study. The employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education or internships) or simply a means of paying for college.

# TESTING

## TEST REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION

### **STAAR**

**STAAR EOC** is for every student that is enrolled in a public Texas high school grade 9 starting 2011-2012. Subject areas tested are English 1, English 2, Algebra 1, Biology and US History. Tests are administered in December, April/May and June.

[www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us)

## COLLEGE READINESS EXAMS

### **PSAT**

Preliminary SAT Test is a condensed version of the SAT Reasoning Test. All juniors and sophomores should test. A personal study plan is provided by Collegeboard with the results of the PSAT. Also, PSAT is the **ONLY** way to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Program as a junior. The PSAT is offered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday in October.

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

- Registration costs \$10 - \$20 per person
- Fee waivers are available for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students with financial need. Contact your counselor for more information.
- GSHS currently pays for all 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> graders to test.
- Test results are returned in January with a detailed student report which contains many suggestions from College Board on areas for individual improvement.
- Gain access to My College Quickstart - a personalized tool to help improve SAT scores, research careers and match colleges to interests and needs.

### **SAT**

#### **Reasoning Test**

**SAT** is approximately a 4 hour multiple choice test of critical reading, mathematical reasoning, and writing abilities. A writing section is available and recommended by most colleges and universities. SAT is administrated by the College Board and is used by scholarship committees and most colleges that require a minimum score entry requirement. The SAT is usually taken in the spring of the junior or fall of the senior year.

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

#### **Subject Tests**

Subject tests are a one hour subject specific tests given by the College Board. Students have the option to take up to 3 subject test in one day. Selective universities often require subject tests, but many don't require any SAT subject tests. Please check with each school on individual requirements. Students usually take subject tests in the spring of the junior or fall of the senior year.

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

- Determine if the colleges you are interested in will require the SAT Subject Tests. You can take the SAT Reasoning Test -or- up to three SAT Subject Tests on one test date.

Plan your testing schedule carefully if you want to take both types of SAT. See the SAT schedule of test dates and register online for the SAT.

- Fee waivers are available for students with financial need. Contact your counselor for more information.
- Score reports must be sent directly to universities from Collegeboard. Students receive 4 free score reports at the time of registration.
- Eligibility for limited accommodations are determined by the College Board. Application for accommodations can be found at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)
- Grand Saline High School Code: 442-935

## **ACT**

**ACT** is a 3 hour curriculum based test in English Usage, Mathematics, Reading Comprehension and Science Reasoning. A writing section is available and recommended by most colleges and universities. The ACT is used by scholarship committees and most colleges that require a minimum score entry requirement. The ACT is usually taken in the spring of the junior or fall of the senior year.

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

- Always opt in to take the writing section of the test.
- Fee waivers are available for students with financial need. Contact your counselor for more information.
- Score reports must be sent directly to universities from ACT. Students receive 4 free score reports at the time of registration.
- Eligibility for limited accommodations are determined by the College Board. Application for accommodations can be found at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)
- By the end of your junior year, you should have taken the SAT and/or ACT.
- Grand Saline High School Code: 442-935

## **TSI Assessment**

The **Texas Success Initiative Assessment** is a test designed to determine at what level a student can perform in college level work. Exemptions and developmental courses are available during the junior and senior year of high school. All students who will attend a state college in Texas or enroll in Dual Credit courses must meet TSI requirements. Exemptions include a score of equal to or higher than 23 on ACT, 1070 on SAT or 2200 on TAKS.

[www.accuplacer.org](http://www.accuplacer.org)

- GSHS is a testing site. Students may sign up to test in the spring or summer of each school year.
- GSISD will pay for each student to test 1 time.
- Retest costs range from \$5 to \$22 based on which sections must be retested.

## **APTITUDE/MILITARY EXAM**

### **ASVAB**

**Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery** was originally designed to predict future academic and occupational success in military occupations. Students who want to get a good sense of their verbal, math, science and technical skills should take the ASVAB. The ASVAB Summary Results sheet provides students with explanations of the scores, as well as suggestions for their use.

[asvabprogram.com](http://asvabprogram.com)