

REACH for Senior Year

Go for It!

The time has come to pull everything together and get into the college that will best meet your needs and career goals. Senior year offers a final opportunity to extend yourself by taking some of the more challenging Honors and Advanced Placement courses that college admissions officers seek on students' transcripts. These classes will help you stand out among all the other applicants who are competing for the shrinking ratio of spaces available.

It is critical that, by now, you have developed a list of colleges that fit into three different admissions categories as they apply to you, your grades, SAT scores, and the extent to which you have prepared to meet individual college requirements and recommendations. You should choose at least one school – preferably more than one – in each of the following categories: SAFE (a school where your GPA, SAT scores and preparatory coursework exceed the requirements for acceptance); MATCH (a school where your GPA, SAT scores and preparatory coursework generally match the requirements for acceptance; and, of course, REACH (a school where you may not meet the GPA and/or SAT score requirements for acceptance but intend to use other factors such as essays, interviews, recommendations and achievements to impress the admissions officers). You also need to decide if you will be applying “early” to any of the colleges on your list and are willing and able to abide by the requirements inherent in the “early” process.

Try to relax and realize that while the college admissions process can be stressful, countless others have gone through it before you. In fact, you may wish to ask for support from someone you know who has already been there. The more prepared and organized you are, the less likely you will be to encounter surprises and glitches and the more likely it is you will get what you want.

September

- Schedule a semi-annual conference with your guidance counselor;
- Re-read “Procedures and Resources for Post High School Planning,” which you received at College Night during junior year, or request a copy from Guidance;
- Finalize the list of colleges you intend to apply to and determine the admissions deadline for each choice...estimates suggest that the average student will apply to between four and six colleges and that some students will apply to many more.
- Line up all the applications you will need – many schools will accept the common application which you will only need to fill out once - and familiarize yourself

with the information and documentation the schools require as well as each school's application deadline;

- Review your four-year high school education plan, making sure that you have taken or are taking all the courses required for admission to the colleges on your list – try to take more difficult courses and to avoid study halls when there are electives available;
- Step up (if you haven't already done so) and assume a leadership position in one or more of your activities, organizations or sports – college admissions officers are extremely interested in seeing leadership potential;
- Identify Dunellen High School staff members who will help you with the college application process – complete a “Senior Uniqueness Form” and request letters of recommendation from teachers and your guidance counselor;
- Brainstorm college essay ideas – begin writing if you will be applying “early” to any colleges;
- Register and begin preparation to re-take or take the SAT general and/or subject tests and/or the ACT (if a college on your list requires it) in October – these tests should be taken at least six weeks before a college's application deadline.

October

- Take the October SAT if you have signed up for it, or, depending on the application deadlines at your schools, sign up for the November or December SAT if you still need to take or re-take it – if you haven't already done so, arrange to have all SAT scores sent to colleges where you will apply;
- Attend Financial Aid Night and the College Fair at Dunellen High School – attend scheduled meetings in the guidance office with representatives from colleges that interest you and open houses by college alumnae in the area when they are announced;
- Begin working on drafts of your college essays and start working on college applications – if you are applying “early” deadlines generally fall between mid-October and early November;
- Pick up a transcript request form at the Guidance Office – each transcript sent to a college, employer or scholarship agency must be requested in writing and signed by a parent if the student is under 18.

November

- Finalize drafts of your college essays, but only after edits, rewrites and reviews by people you trust (family, friends, teachers, and counselors);
- Complete college applications and get all information and supporting documents – including addressed envelopes and stamps and any required checks – to the Guidance Office by the last week of November/first week of December...make sure any teachers who will be sending recommendation letters send them out during this period and that your guidance counselor is aware of your final list of colleges, as well as your preferences;
- Request financial aid and scholarship information from your list of colleges.

December

- If you applied for early admission to a college, expect notification to begin this month;
- Continue to file college applications if you have not already finished (watch the deadlines);
- Begin a detailed financial aid search, including outside sources for scholarships and grants – try your place of worship, your parents’ employers and free websites like fastweb.com and others;
- Obtain, and begin working with your parents on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) – information is available in Guidance and online.

January

- File your FAFSA as soon after Jan. 1 as you can;
- Stay focused and don’t give in to “senioritis” – your application is contingent upon your mid-year and final grades;
- Rolling admissions college decisions will begin to come in this month – notify your guidance counselor when you receive a letter;
- Continue searching and applying for scholarships and grants.

February

- Complete and file the FAFSA if you haven’t already done so;

- Keep track of your college applications – make sure all schools have received all your materials;
- Continue searching and applying for scholarships and grants.

March

- College decision letters begin arriving this month – celebrate your acceptances, decide about your wait lists, and deal positively with your rejections;
- Continue searching and applying for scholarships and grants.

April

- Evaluate financial aid offers and decide on your preferred college among the colleges that have accepted you;
- Keep your guidance counselor informed of your decisions;
- Notify all colleges that have accepted you of your final choice;
- Submit a tuition deposit to your college of choice by May 1;
- Continue searching and applying for scholarships and grants.

May

- Prepare for and take your AP exams – high scores on APs can be used at some colleges to receive credit and at others as prerequisites for advanced courses;
- Be sure to submit paperwork for college room and board;
- Continue searching and applying for scholarships and grants.

June

- Celebrate your success;
- Send thank you notes (if you haven't already) to everyone who helped you;
- Graduate from high school and get ready for college in the fall.