

## **Junior Week FAQ (2025)**

This year's Junior Class asked some of the most thoughtful & practical questions on our Junior Week Exit Survey. We've compiled all of the questions asked, and created the document below (separated by category) to address some of the most frequently asked questions.

#### Sections include:

- Activities in College
- <u>Career Decisions</u>
- College Admissions
- College Applications
- College Athletics
- College of DuPage
- College Planning

- College Visits
- Financial Aid / Scholarships
- First-Gen College Students
- Gap Year Programs
- International Students
- Letters of Recommendation
- Military

- School Counselor Meetings
- Senior Year Classes
- Standardized Testing
- Studying Abroad
- Tracking Service Hours
- Trades / Apprenticeships
- Unsure of Postsecondary Plans

The sections are in alphabetical order, and identified as larger, bold orange headings. Feel free to skip to the section relevant to you using the links above. If you can't find the answer you're looking for here, make sure you also check out our <u>Junior Week FlowDoc</u> and <u>NCompass</u>, our Postsecondary Planning Guide. You can also schedule an appointment with your School Counselor, or with Mr. La Porte, our College & Career Counselor.

## **Activities in College (return to top)**

### Do students participate in undergraduate activities and sports?

Absolutely! One of the best things a student can do during their freshmen year of college is to get involved. It helps give you a better sense of community, and connect with students outside of your intended major. However, you need to make sure that academics are your priority, because just like high school, you can lose eligibility in activities & athletics in college. Start small, and get involved in things you enjoy. As you adjust to the rigors of college, you'll better know how to manage your time, and what additional extra-curriculars you can take on.

## Career Decisions (return to top)

#### How do I decide what career I want?

This can be a tough question to answer because there is an endless list of careers – most that we would never know existed! If you're unsure what you want to do for a career, we strongly recommend taking a career interest inventory. These are quizzes that look at your likes & dislikes, and helps find careers that might be a good match for you. There are two career interest inventories built into <a href="SchooLinks">SchooLinks</a> – Find Your Path and Would You Rather. If you'd like to look at another option, we'd recommend the <a href="O\*NET">O\*NET</a> Interest Profiler – this is what most other career interest inventories are based on. After completing one of these, consider scheduling an appointment with your School Counselor or Mr. La Porte, to discuss any questions you might have.





## College Admissions (return to top)

## What are the other two application deadline types not discussed in the video?

While we did not go over all application deadline types in the video, you can view & read more about all of the <u>deadline types here</u>. The two not referenced in the video were Restrictive Early Action & Regular Decision.

**Restrictive Early Action** usually is employed by highly selective private universities. It has the same benefits as Early Action, but prevents a student from applying to other schools using Early Action or Early Decision. The restrictions usually apply to other private institutions, or to select other schools.

**Regular Decision** is the last possible date to submit a college application. If you do not submit your application by the regular decision deadline, you will not be considered for admission for that upcoming school year. There are no exceptions to this rule, even if the cause is a technical error. Do not wait until the last minute to submit an application.

## When is the earliest/latest I can apply? When is the Early Action window typically open?

Typically, college applications won't open until the summer after Junior year; the Common App, which is utilized by more than 1,000 colleges & universities doesn't update their application until August 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Many students will work on college applications between August 2<sup>nd</sup> & November 1<sup>st</sup> (this is typically the widow for Early Action (EA) as well as scholarships from a college/university). The latest you can apply is a school's regular decision deadline.

Does applying for an early decision significantly help with receiving scholarships or getting accepted? It can help, but it depends entirely on the institution you're applying to. There are some schools that like to see a student apply Early Decision (ED), but ultimately defer ED students to the regular decision pool (this removes the binding part of the contract). There are other schools that pull heavily from the ED pool, basically "locking-in" a portion of their incoming freshmen class. Early Decision should not be viewed as a way to game the system. Students applying ED to a school should fully intend to attend that institution if accepted, regardless of financial aid offered. For more information about the difference between ED/EA admissions rates vs. Regular Decision (ED) admissions rates, check out this post from College Transitions.

### Does going to NNHS increase my chances at getting picked for a school?

While Naperville North is known for academic excellence, merely attending NNHS doesn't give you an advantage over other students. Schools will want to see what you did with the opportunities available to you. Did you take advantage of the courses available to you? Were you involved at NNHS or in the Naperville community? What did you do with your time outside of the classroom? Did you have a part-time job? While NNHS is a recognizable name, colleges/universities want to see involvement both in & outside of the school when making their admissions decisions.

#### How can I know which colleges are realistic goals to attend after high school graduation?

This is a great question! In SchooLinks, students have access to <u>scattergrams</u> for colleges & universities. These can give you a better idea, based on your GPA and/or Test Scores, which schools might be a good academic fit. If you're still unsure after checking out the scattergrams, consider scheduling an appointment with your School Counselor or Mr. La Porte, to discuss your postsecondary options.





## When should I know for sure which college I am going to?

While you will receive college acceptances throughout your Senior Year, you aren't required to make a decision on where you'll attend until May 1<sup>st</sup> of your Senior Year. Some colleges & universities may have incentives if your commit to their institution earlier (dorm perks, earlier class selection, etc.), but your spot is safe until you turn down an offer, or until May 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **College Applications** (return to top)

## How soon should I start the application process?

While you can start gathering information to help complete your applications (we recommend updating your <u>Student Profile</u> in SchooLinks, to keep track of everything in one spot), we recommend waiting to start working on actual college applications until August 2<sup>nd</sup> of Senior Year. Occasionally, students will also work on their college essay over the summer; the 2025-26 Common App Essay Prompts will be located on the <u>Summer To-Do Checklist</u> (from the <u>Junior Week FlowDoc</u>) when they become available.

## When are typical deadlines for applications?

Typically, deadlines are on the 1<sup>st</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> of the month (i.e. – Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup>, Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup>, etc.). There are some schools that have atypical deadlines, but the ones previously listed are the most common.

What do you put on your application? How can I make my application/essays look good to colleges? When filling out your college applications, there's a lot of information you can prepare in advance of Senior year. Keeping track of your involvement, both inside & outside of school, can help a lot! Also, knowing your parents' educational background will be needed at some point throughout the application. We'll cover more of what you need to add to your college applications during Senior Week (Fall 2025).

As for making your application/essays look good to colleges, the best advice all colleges & universities give us is to be yourself. Schools see hundreds of essays & activities that weren't genuine, but done to improve a student's chances of getting into a school (or writing essays about what you think a college wants to see). These essays & entries get glossed over easily. Writing about you and your life, and being genuine about who you are is what helps you stand out the most in the college application process. Don't try to be like everyone else – being yourself will help you stand out to colleges more than you realize!

### Do you have to pay to apply to schools?

Unfortunately, yes. While some schools may waive application fees, they can also vary from \$20 - \$75+.

### How do I navigate college applications? When do I start submitting my applications?

As eager as you may be to get started on your college applications, you have a lot of time. Most students won't start working on applications until August or September of their Senior year. We will also have a Senior Week presentation toward the end of August, where you'll receive more information to help you through the college application process.

## When do I start writing my college essays? And where do I submit them?

Common App typically re-uses the essay prompts from the previous application cycle. You can find these essay prompts on the <u>Summer To-Do Checklist</u> (from the <u>Junior Week FlowDoc</u>) when they are confirmed by the Common App. When it comes to submitting college essays, we will be covering these steps during Senior Week presentations this fall.





## College Athletics (return to top)

## How does wanting to participate in sports affect the college application process?

In addition to applying to colleges, prospective college athletes much also work through the NCAA or NAIA eligibility process. Many prospective college athletes focus on the recruitment process, and miss out of the eligibility & college application process (**both are required** in order to play college athletics). There is additional helpful information in the **Unique Considerations** section of **NCompass**.

## College of DuPage (return to top)

## Can I go to any school I want after completing 2 years at College of DuPage?

Essentially, yes! While each college or university you apply to after College of DuPage may have different transfer policies (some may look at individual classes you take at COD, while others might accept an Associate's degree as fulfilling all general education requirements), you can essentially take credits from COD anywhere. You can read more about College of DuPage's transfer opportunities on their website, which include 3+1 programs, 2+2 programs, as well as college transfer guides.

# What are some reasons to graduate from a 2-year college in contrast to graduating from a 4 year college?

There are many reasons why a student might start off at College of DuPage. The most obvious is cost – a full year at College of DuPage costs roughly \$5,000. There are also some careers that do not require a 4-year college degree, so completing a certification program or Associate's Degree at College of DuPage could be more than enough education to begin your career. Some students also like easing into college, as this will probably be the most drastic educational transition you will ever experience. And while some students think that College of DuPage might not be a popular option, let us reassure you – more graduates attend College of DuPage every year (100+) than any other college or university!

## Are there any cons to starting at a two year for gen ed and then transferring to a 4 year?

Overall, no. However, every person is different. While there is a definite cost savings when attending College of DuPage, and the rigor of the courses you'd take is the same as a 4 year college or university, for some students College of DuPage just might not be the right fit. That's okay! But you won't be at a disadvantage starting your college education at College of DuPage, and then transferring later.

### Do I need to go to COD for two years before transferring?

Two years is not required before transferring. However, many students will stay for 2 years, because at many 4 year colleges & universities, a 2 year Associate's Degree fulfills the General Education requirements (meaning you can start in your major courses right after transferring).

Do you need to get straight A's on your COD transcript to transfer to a school like Urbana Champaign? Unfortunately, there's no overarching answer for this – it really depends on the college/university you're planning to transfer to, as well as the major. That being said, College of DuPage has sent students off to the Big 10, the Ivy League, as well as other highly selective institutions. The schools that you ultimately apply to transfer to will look at how you challenged yourself at College of DuPage, as well as your involvement.





## College Planning (return to top)

## How do I go about making a list of possible colleges?

The best tool you have available is SchooLinks – specifically, the <u>School Search Tool</u>. There, you can search for schools by location, major, size, etc. Knowing what you want in a school can be difficult – that's where college visits can help (more on those in the next section). As you research schools in SchooLinks, make sure you <u>Favorite those schools</u>. This will help you quickly find those schools when you come back to SchooLinks, and get you notifications when those institutions comes to visit NNHS in the fall of each year.

## How can I tell if a school is a safety, target, or reach?

SchooLinks has data graphs for nearly every college & university called <u>Scattergrams</u>. These allow students to see data from NNHS alumni, who were accepted or denied from a particular university based on the GPA (or GPA & Test Scores). If you're still not sure if a school is a safety, target or reach, chat with your school counselor & Mr. La Porte in the College & Career Center.

## How many schools should I apply to?

This answer can vary widely. Some students know where they want to go, and it's a safety school, so they may only apply to 1 college or university. Other students apply to 20+ colleges & universities – we **do not recommend** this option. Most students will apply to anywhere from 4-10 colleges/universities, with a couple reach schools, and the rest of their list comprised of safety & target schools.

## What can I do now, so that I'm ahead of the game in postsecondary planning?

Great question! Honestly, follow the steps in our <u>Junior Week FlowDoc</u>, <u>visit college campuses</u> (if possible), and work on the <u>Summer To-Do Checklist</u>. Working on these steps will put you in a great position for the start of Senior year!

#### What is the best college for a major in (fill in the blank)?

We cannot stress this enough – there is no 'best' school for any major. Unfortunately, lists such as U.S. News & World Reports is viewed as a reputable news source, when in reality it is a marketing firm. While these lists may be the quick & easy way to gather college information, the data is not authenticated & overseen, meaning most of the numbers are altered in some way to improve a school's "ranking." Colleges & universities realize this as well, and are <u>withdrawing their data</u> from these publications.

Instead, students should focus on finding a good fit. This is why visiting college campuses is one of the most important steps a student can take in the college search process! We'll have more information about this in our next FAQ section.

## College Visits (return to top)

### When is the best time to go on college visits?

Right now! Just kidding – kinda. There's never a perfect time to visit college campuses, but if you can start visiting them this school year (spring break is a great time), it will help you narrow down the list of schools you will apply to this fall. Visiting college campuses can also help you figure out what you like (and dislike) in a college campus, which can help you adjust the list of schools you're considering. When you do decide to start visiting college campuses, check out the **College Visits & Fairs** section in **NCompass**.





## When do the in-school college visits take place at NNHS?

Every fall, roughly 200 colleges & universities from around the world visit NNHS to meet with our students. These visits typically occur between Labor Day & the 1<sup>st</sup> week of November. We'll be sending out information about these visits toward the start of the school year. For information on how to sign-up for these visits in Schoolinks, check out our College Visit Sign-up handout.

## Financial Aid & Scholarships (return to top)

## Can everyone get FAFSA aid?

Unfortunately, not everyone can qualify to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The main requirement that could exclude a student is you must be a U.S. Citizen or eligible noncitizen with a valid Social Security number. More information about FAFSA Eligibility can be <u>found here</u>.

However, if a student is not a citizen, but has attended at least 3 years of school in Illinois, they can apply for the **Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid**. More information about this and the FAFSA will be released in the Fall of Junior year.

## How do I find scholarships? What scholarships am I eligible to apply for?

There is great information in <u>Step 6: Financial Aid & Scholarships</u> in the <u>Junior Week FlowDoc</u>. While scholarships typically don't become available until the start of Senior year, students can use the information from the FlowDoc to know where scholarship information will be posted. In terms of eligibility, each individual scholarship has its own eligibility requirements. Make sure to read any eligibility requirements carefully. Most scholarship searches (including the one in SchooLinks) has a student profile survey. Completing this thoroughly & accurately can make sure that you are only recommended for scholarships in which you are eligible to apply. More information will come with the Senior Week FlowDoc this fall.

### How many scholarships am I eligible for?

Technically, there's no limit to the number of scholarships you're eligible to receive – other than you cannot make money from scholarships. Typically, the limiting factor for scholarships is time. Legitimate scholarships require a lot of time & effort, so this is usually what prevents students from maximizing the scholarship potential. We encourage students to fight off senioritis as long as possible, in order to focus their time & energy on finishing senior year strong & applying for potential scholarships!

#### How financial aid works with early decision?

When a student is applying to a college/university utilizing Early Decision, they should do so assuming they won't receive any financial aid. Most schools that offer Early Decision are highly selective institutions, who do not typically offer merit-based aid, but need-based aid. There is a provision that the school must provide an adequate financial aid package – but what a school believes is adequate financial aid, may not be actually adequate for a student/family. As always, if you're considering applying to a school using Early Decision, you must have a conversation with your school counselor.

#### What is considered too much debt?

This answer really depends on you, your family, and your intended career. Students who want to become a doctor or lawyer will be in school much longer, and typically acquire a lot more debt. They also tend to earn more, making it possible to pay their higher amount of debt. A great resource to utilize is the **College** 





<u>Scorecard website</u>, which helps break down the cost & ROI (Return on Investment) for different colleges/universities, and their majors.

## First-Gen College Students (return to top)

## What resources are there in college for first generation students?

This can vary from school to school; however, most institutions have student centers & resources available specifically for first generation college students! This can also include exclusive scholarships for first gen students, as well as additional seminar courses to help first gen students navigate the transition to college. Some example of First Gen programs & resources at college campuses include <u>Cardinal First</u> (North Central College), the <u>Achieving College Excellence (ACE) Center</u> (Loyola Univ. Chicago), and the <u>First-Generation Student supports</u> at College of DuPage.

## Gap Year Programs (return to top)

## What are Gap Year programs? Why would it be a good idea to take a Gap Year?

<u>Gap Year Programs</u> are when students take time off between high school and college to gain real-life experiences through travel, language immersion, community and conservation service programs, outdoor adventure, and professional internships. While it's not the right option for everyone, a Gap Year might be the right fit for a student looking to work & save-up money for the postsecondary education – or a time to explore a hobby or passion before committing to continuing your education. Some students may struggle with the gap in their educational learning, so please reach out to your school counselor or the College & Career Center for additional information.

## What are some options during a gap year?

There are lots of options you could consider: working full time, exploring a passion or hobby, participating in a <u>structured Gap Year Program</u>, volunteering, or more. If you're planning on continuing your education after a gap year, please make sure you have a plan for what you'll be doing & stick to that plan!

### What if I don't really want a segmented "Program" for my gap year?

That's absolutely fine! A Gap Year is taking time to grow personally and/or professionally. The only thing that could make your Gap Year look less than enticing is by not doing anything at all during that time. As long as you are doing something to advance your growth personally and/or professionally, and stick to your plan, your options are endless.

## What's the process like for applying for college after a gap year? Is it different?

If you wait until after a Gap Year to apply to college, it can be a little different, especially since you won't have the resources of NNHS. However, most students considering a Gap Year will apply to college during their Senior year. After receiving their acceptances, and deciding if a Gap Year is the right option for them, students can actually ask a college that they plan to attend to hold their spot for a year. Many colleges & universities will honor this request, allowing you to apply while having access to school resources, and also allowing you the opportunity to take a Gap Year without the risk of losing your acceptance. Not every school offers this option, so if you're considering this, make sure you reach out to the college/university directly, to see what this policy is on holding admit spots for a Gap Year program.





## International Students (return to top)

### If I am here on a visa, would I count as an international student?

For most colleges & universities, yes. Depending on the institution, international status may vary. Students who are here on a visa (or whose parents are here on a work visa) typically must apply as an international student. Students who are a part of our English Learners (EL) program may have to apply as an international student. And some students who were born abroad, but lived here for the majority of their lives would still have to apply as an international student. If any of the above scenarios might apply to you, we strongly recommend that you reach out to the Office of Admissions at the schools you plan to apply. Those offices can give you the most accurate information for their particular institutions, as international students have a lot more testing & documentation needed in order to apply to a domestic U.S. college or university. We also have information for International Students available in the <a href="Unique Considerations">Unique Considerations</a> section of NCompass.

## **Letters of Recommendation** (return to top)

## Can I start asking letter to the teacher for college?

Yes, but **only if the colleges you plan to apply to require letters of recommendation**. Make sure you check this before requesting letters. There's nothing more frustrating than a student asking for a letter of recommendation, only to find out that the teacher wrote one – but no college/university will accept it. Sadly, this happens multiple times every year. Check with your schools before requesting a letter!

## When should I start asking for letters of recommendation?

You can start asking teachers now – assuming you know your schools need a letter. If so we have a great **Letter of Recommendation Resource** in our **Junior Week FlowDoc** with everything you need to know. For now, you'll only be requesting letters from your teacher. During Senior Week this fall, we'll go through the steps of adding in digital requests in SchooLinks. This will allow your teacher to upload your letters digitally, and connect them directly with your college applications. This feature won't be enabled until Senior Week this fall.

## How many letters of recommendation would we need for college apps?

No more than two letters of recommendation. There are some colleges & universities that might say they'll accept up to 10 letters of recommendation – do not send this many! Doing so looks like you're trying to overcompensate for a shortcoming in your application. If any of your schools require a teacher recommendation, the maximum number you'll need is two (2).

### Which teacher(s) should I ask to write my letter of recommendation?

That's entirely up to you! Unless a college/university specifically asks for a teacher in a certain subject (not common), you can choose the teacher you have the best relationship with, and knows your work ethic/potential in the classroom setting.

### Where do my teachers submit their recommendations written for me?

Teachers will submit your letters of recommendation through SchooLinks. We'll go over this process during Senior Week this fall.





## Military (return to top)

## Will the military pay for my college education?

Possibly, yes. If you choose to enlist right out of high school, you may qualify for the <u>GI Bill</u>, depending on your service commitment. Some colleges & universities also have a <u>Reserve Officers' Training Program</u> (<u>ROTC</u>), which can provide financial assistance for college.

## School Counselor Meetings (return to top)

## How often do we meet with our counselor during senior year?

That's entirely up to you! You'll have your Senior Week presentation at the start of Senior Year. At that time, you can choose to schedule a Senior Conference – a one-on-one meeting with your school counselor to discuss your postsecondary plans. Outside of that, you are welcome to schedule additional meetings with your school counselor, or Mr. La Porte (College & Career Counselor) regarding any postsecondary questions you might have.

## Senior Year Classes (return to top)

## How late can you wait to change a class for senior year?

If you're considering a class change for Senior year, specifically to meet a college admissions requirement, please contact your school counselor ASAP. Spots in courses are limited, and changes cannot be guaranteed. Contacting your counselor ASAP about changes is **highly advisable**.

## Standardized Testing (return to top)

#### **Are most schools becoming Test Optional?**

While the number of schools adopting a test-optional policy isn't necessarily growing, since the start of the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of all colleges & universities in the U.S. are test optional (nearly 2,000 institutions). Some schools are reevaluating their test-optional policy, but there are many schools maintaining this option for students. To see the most up-to-date list of test-optional schools, visit FairTest.org.

### **How should I prepare for the SAT?**

There are a number of ways to prepare for the SAT: from free test prep on <u>Khan Academy</u> to test prep agencies. There's not one test prep we would recommend over another, as each type might benefit a different type of student. Our Testing Coordinator has compiled a list of <u>Test Prep Resources</u> that you might want to start with.

## How many times should I take the SAT?

This answer can vary widely. If you achieve the score you hoped for (or plan to apply to a school using a <u>test optional policy</u>) than taking the State Test in April would be fine. Other students may want to take the SAT a second or third time. Based on testing statistics, **we would not recommend taking any standardized test more than 3 times**.





## Does my SAT score matter?

Yes and no. Due to the pandemic, many colleges & universities moved to a <u>test optional admissions policy</u>. While many schools have maintained those policies, we've noticed during the 2025-26 application cycle that some institutions are moving back to requiring standardized test scores. So for those institutions, your test score carries pretty significant weight. There are also some colleges & universities, while test optional, do give a higher consideration for merit-based scholarships to students who submit test scores. So trying your best on the SAT, at least on the State SAT in April, could have some admission and/or scholarship benefits.

## Are high SAT/ACT scores able to make up for a below-average GPA?

This depends entirely on the school you're applying to. However, colleges do typically place more significance on your academic accomplishments on your transcript – mostly, because it's a representation of 4 years of academic work, versus a 4 hour standardized test. That shouldn't belittle the value of a good test score, but having a significant gap between your GPA and an SAT/ACT score could raise some eyebrows, especially regarding work ethic in class.

## Studying Abroad (return to top)

### Where would information be about schools overseas? How do I get into a foreign college?

As schools in each country have varying admissions requirements and program offerings, there is no clearing house for international schools. That being said, Google is your friend. Something as simple a searching for "universities in Canada" can get you started in the right direction. As you start gathering information, if you find that you can't find what you're looking for, please reach out to your school counselor, or the College & Career Counselor, who are both happy to help.

## Tracking Service Hours (return to top)

## Are service hours a graduation requirement? If so, how many?

At this time, service hours are not a graduation requirement. However, if you would like to earn the Service Cord, there is a 100 hour requirement – 50 hours must be in service of NNHS, while 50 hours must be in service of our surrounding community. More information will be released about this requirement during your Senior year.

### How do I log my volunteer hours into SchooLinks?

We've created this interactive quide on how to track your service hours in SchooLinks.

## Trades/Apprenticeships (return to top)

#### What is trade school?

A trade school is any institution who will train you in a hands-on career, typically not requiring a college degree. These can be high-paying and fulfilling careers, in a variety of fields (construction, HVAC, electricity,





plumbing, cosmetology, etc.). There is also a wonderful joint option at College of DuPage, called <u>Project</u> <u>Hire-Ed</u>. Click the link for more information about this awesome program!

## How many credits do I need in order to join a trade school?

In order to qualify for the trades, you must have your high school diploma. Most trade programs are heavily STEM focused, so working diligently in your Math & Science courses (in addition to all other courses) will help prepare you for an education in the trades.

## **Unsure of Postsecondary Plans (return to top)**

## Is it okay to not know what you want to do?

Absolutely! While it seems like everyone has their life planned out, the reality is many individuals (including adults) are changing careers every day. Not knowing exactly what you want to do right now is completely normal! The best advice is to be open to learning new things, and trying to find connections between your skills & hobbies, and a potential career path.

### What if I have zero idea of what to do?

No worries - we got you! If you're unsure what you want to do, we strongly recommend taking a career interest inventory. These are quizzes that look at your likes & dislikes, and helps find careers that might be a good match for you. There are two career interest inventories built into Schoolinks - Find Your Path and Would You Rather. If you'd like to look at another option, we'd recommend the O\*NET Interest Profiler - this is what most other career interest inventories are based on. After completing one of these, consider scheduling an appointment with your School Counselor or Mr. La Porte, to discuss any questions you might have.

