

Your High School Student's **Final Semester**





Welcome!

What you need to know to support your high school senior.

If you have a high school senior in their last semester, it's the final countdown. Big choices — and big changes — are on the horizon for your senior and your entire family.

Whether your student was admitted to college early, sent in their applications moments before the January 1st deadline, or is taking a break before pursuing the college path, you may be ready for some moral support — not to mention a playbook for the next few weeks and months.

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Understanding the Big Picture

“What should my senior be doing, and what’s my role?”

1 Stay grounded.

First and foremost, you can help your senior stay calm and grounded in the weeks ahead. When you talk about college, remind them (and yourself) that what matters isn't the prestige of the school they may or may not get into, but having options they feel good about.

It'll hurt if your student doesn't get into their top choice school. As their parent, you can acknowledge their disappointment and help them move on.

“I won't sugarcoat this: rejection hurts. However, I guarantee that in the not-too-distant future, perhaps when you're hanging out with new friends at your second or third choice school, you will barely remember that other place you thought was the only place you could be happy. I know this because I'm the parent of a student who got dinged by his Early Decision college and, after choosing a school he applied to as an afterthought, is living happily ever after. He learned, as you will, that what you do in college — the academic and social experiences you make for yourself there — matters much more than which school you attend.”

— Marlene Kern Fischer, “Dear High School Senior”

2 Check email regularly.

After receiving applications, colleges and universities contact applicants by email. They may email the parent, too, with information about financial aid, honors opportunities, etc. This doesn't mean your student is "in," but they should definitely open all emails from the school. If their application is incomplete, they'll need to take care of this ASAP.

3 Maximize financial aid.

Be sure your family has submitted all required financial aid application materials. This may just mean filling out the **FAFSA** but some schools also ask for the CSS Profile and copies of tax returns. Even if priority financial aid deadlines have passed, it's still worth applying so your student can be considered for both need-based aid from the government and/or merit aid from the school. There's also still time for your student to research and apply for outside scholarships. [Learn more about paying for college >>](#)



4 Keep the month of April open.

Unless your student's choice is crystal clear, you may want to visit or revisit a few colleges as time and money allow. April is when most schools host day or overnight admitted student programs on campus.

In 2022 because of the pandemic, it's likely that many of these events will be held virtually, but some schools may offer in-person visits.

5 Submit one more application.

Should your student consider submitting another application? Only if they're unsure they'll have good choices (for example, if they've already received No's from schools with early or rolling admissions). **Many universities** — mostly public, but a few privates, too — have rolling/late deadlines, some as late as May.

A spring timeline for your senior:

February

- Follow up with schools to make sure applications are complete.
- Send fall semester grade reports.
- Submit applications to colleges with late deadlines.
- Considering a **gap year**? Research options.
- Stay engaged with high school classes and activities.
- Plan something relaxing for spring break.
- Apply for **scholarships**.

March/April

- Celebrate your offers of admission!
- Compare **financial aid awards**.
- Attend “admitted student” events at colleges you’re considering.
- Decide whether to **accept waitlist spots** (if offered).
- Think about what you want to do this summer.
- Order graduation announcements and make plans to celebrate with friends and family.
- Choose your college and make a deposit by May 1st!

May/June

- Take AP tests (your college may accept scores for course credit).
- Write thank-you notes to people who wrote recommendations for you.
- Research **first-year housing options** and connect with potential roommates.
- Keep grades up — your college will require a final transcript.
- Congratulations! You’re a high school graduate!





Finding Cures For “Senioritis”

How to support your student, and keep the peace at home.

To-do lists are helpful for getting your student ready for college. But what about dealing with a moody, emotional teen in the meantime?

Not every student displays symptoms of senioritis. But during the second half of the school year, senioritis can be common.



Potential reasons for this are:

- Burned out on school and just plain tired after all the work they put into their applications.
- Anxious about not yet knowing where they'll be next year or what they'll be doing.
- Sad or scared about leaving the world they grew up in, including friends and boyfriends/girlfriends.

Every student responds to these stresses in different ways. Some get caught up in painful comparisons with their peers (who did or didn't get in to which schools). Others test their limits — a little or a lot.

While your student still needs to attend class and turn in their work, they should also be allowed (and encouraged) to have fun during their final months of high school.

Other things that will boost their health, balance and mood:

- Talking to their guidance counselor. There's nothing going on with your student that the counselor hasn't seen many times before, and they might share wisdom your student will actually listen to.
- Trying a fun, new non-school-related activity like guitar lessons or an art class.
- Getting enough sleep and exercise.

Remember not to take it too personally if they take out their frustrations on you. Stay tuned for those fleeting moments when they unexpectedly share their feelings. Love them unconditionally.





Making the Final College Choice

The news is in! Now the fun starts.

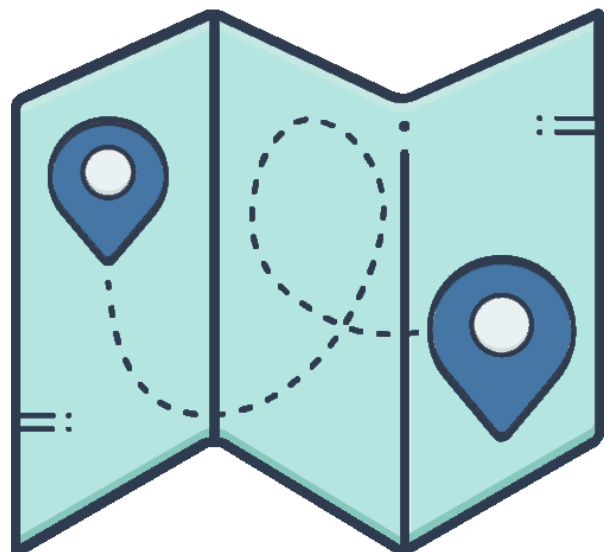
After tours, interviews, essays and applications, it's finally time to sift through the impressions, photos and facts. Your student could be happy and successful at any of the schools they're admitted to, but naturally you want to help them settle on the one that will **truly be the "best fit."**

Map it out.

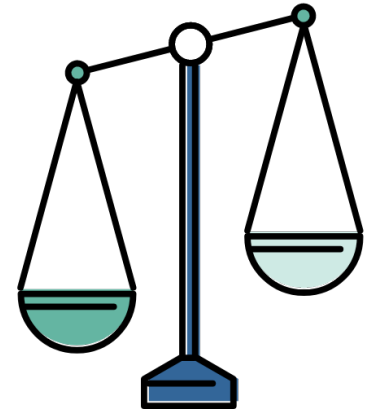
Create a chart to compare and contrast the options. You can make an Excel or Google spreadsheet or put everything on a whiteboard or big piece of paper.

Families who've done this say it's not only practical but also helps relieve angst by removing some of the emotion from the process. You can list criteria that are important to your student and then weight them to come up with a score for each school.

Some factors are straightforward (city vs. small town) while others are more subjective (comfort level with how far the campus is from home).



Choose from and add to this list to customize your student's comparison chart:



- Size of campus and student body
- Location (urban, suburban, rural)
- Desired academic programs (including study abroad)
- Price tag: Total cost of attendance (tuition, room & board, fees, travel, books, etc.) minus financial aid/scholarships equals your family's actual cost. [Tips on comparing financial aid award letters >>](#)
- Access to public transportation and airport
- Quality of on-campus housing — is housing guaranteed all four years?
- Average class size, ratio of students to faculty
- Female/male ratio
- Quarter vs. semester system
- Is course credit given for AP/IB classes taken in high school?
- Are there graduate programs?
- Social and Greek Life options
- Volunteer and service learning opportunities
- Freshman retention rate and four-year graduation rate
- Climate and weather of the region
- Amenities on campus and in the nearest town

Finally, there is that *feeling* — this school is the one. Your student can see themselves there. Spreadsheets and data are important, but your student also needs to listen to their heart.

This is why a few last in-person or virtual visits (or attending a [regional admitted student event](#)) is a terrific idea. Your student will have a chance to connect with current students,

faculty and administrators, and get all their questions answered.

Get ready to be surprised. Sometimes a school comes from behind and overtakes the previous top choice. The most important thing is that your student is excited to be college-bound. They're sure to thrive wherever they land.

What to Do If Your Student Is Waitlisted

The silver lining: they have choices.

Your student finally heard from their dream school, but the answer wasn't yes OR no. They've been **offered a place on the waitlist.**

Students are waitlisted for a number of reasons. Admissions staffs must make difficult decisions. They consider many things when assembling a freshman class. It's impossible to say with certainty what, if anything, an applicant could have done differently.

Here are the steps your high school senior should take if they're offered the waitlist at one or more schools they'd like to attend.

1 RSVP!

Your student has to accept a university's invitation to be put on the waitlist. If they don't respond by the deadline (online or by mail), this is considered a "No, thank you."





2 Gather information and keep in touch.

Check the school's website for further instructions about the waitlist process. Your student can call or email the admissions representative who is their contact at the college to ask if submitting more information or scheduling an interview would help.

Be sure to mention any new awards or recognitions and/or improvements in your student's GPA. If the school is your student's first choice, they should make sure the college knows it.

Some schools welcome periodic emails to check in and ask questions, and are happy to answer parent questions, too. But remember that most communication should come from your student and should be limited to legitimate questions or something of substance to add to their application. Don't hound the admissions staff!

Your student should also stay in touch with their high school counselor, who may have contacts and be able to put in a good word.

3 Ask about financial aid and housing.

At some institutions, the financial aid pot is split up first come, first served. Merit aid may not be an option for students accepted off the waitlist. How soon after an acceptance does the school offer an aid package? Can your family afford the school without aid?

If campus housing isn't guaranteed for all incoming students, how fast does it fill up and what are the other options?

While you're waiting...

4 If practical (and possible), visit the campus.

Due to COVID-19, some campuses may be closed to outside visitors so before taking a walk around the grounds, make sure it's permitted. If your student doesn't know anyone currently attending the school, the admissions office may be able to connect them with someone they can talk to.

A visit may confirm for your student that they do indeed love this school but if they've changed their mind, they can take their name off the waitlist.

5 Calculate the odds.

Look at the school's waitlist FAQs. How many students are on the waitlist? Is the list ranked? How many students were accepted off the waitlist in prior years? (This statistic may vary greatly from year to year.)

Try not to get your hopes up. Many highly selective schools accept very few students off the waitlist. Just in case, your student should consider how they'll respond if they are offered a spot at the waitlist school. They may have to commit right away.

6 Choose — and get excited about — another college.

In most cases, students aren't accepted off the waitlist until after the May 1st deadline for making a deposit to hold a spot at another school. (This is a deposit you'll forfeit if your student gets into and wants to attend the waitlist school.)

Some schools are still working through their waitlists up until the start of fall semester. Your student may decide to opt out of waitlists so they don't have to go through the suspense and uncertainty.

When they choose another school, celebrate with them! Most likely this is the college they'll move to in the fall.





If College Isn't the Right Path Right Now

There are many options to explore.

What if your student has always marched to their own beat and isn't interested in going straight to college like most of their classmates?

Now more than ever, we're coming to understand that higher education doesn't have to be traditional. It's perfectly acceptable for your student to explore other paths.

Gap year

Whether working and traveling abroad, doing an internship or apprenticeship, or volunteering, a year off between high school and college can provide countless opportunities for personal growth.

If your student accepted a college spot but wants to do a gap year, it's usually possible (with approval from the school) to defer admission and enter as a freshman the following year, often with financial aid intact.

Make sure your student pays attention to deadlines and completes all paperwork.

Planning is key to making the most of a gap year. And because the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact life in the U.S. and abroad through 2022, your student may need to be flexible about the options they consider and ready to pivot if plans change.

Jobs and internships

Paid and unpaid internships can help students uncover interests and explore potential careers while learning what training or education those careers might require. Many employers offer paid education benefits to their interns and often hire interns as full-time employees after completion of the internship.

[Learn more about internships and how they can help your student >>](#)



Your student could also consider working for a year or two before deciding on a college path. An entry-level position in almost any field will teach valuable lessons like showing up on time, staying late if necessary, showing initiative and treating customers and co-workers with respect.

Community college, trade and technical schools, apprenticeships

If your student isn't sure a bachelor's degree is their ultimate goal, **community college** is a way to wade in, explore areas of academic interest, and get some basic credits out of the way. If they decide to transfer to a four-year college, you'll save on tuition.

Many community colleges offer associate degrees in technical and skilled trade fields, and evening and online classes mean your student can hold down a job at the same time.

Trade and **technical schools** provide instruction for a variety of skilled, in-demand careers most of which require two years or less of training.

Choices range from welding, automotive and HVAC programs to degrees/certificates in medical specialties, business (accounting, HR), web design and more. Make sure the school is accredited by the U.S. Department of Education.

Apprenticeships combine classroom instruction with hands-on training and are a great option for students ready to get straight into real-world work.

Online classes

Online education is here to stay and many students have found they prefer it. **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** are open to anyone and are often free (check out the offerings on **EdX**). MOOCs deliver quality educational experiences and provide an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills and explore career-related subjects.

[Discover more alternatives to a four-year college for your high school senior >>](#)

Volunteer

Volunteering for a year or two is a good way to build character and learn the value of service. Your student may choose to work with a local non-profit or volunteer in a different part of the country or the world through programs like

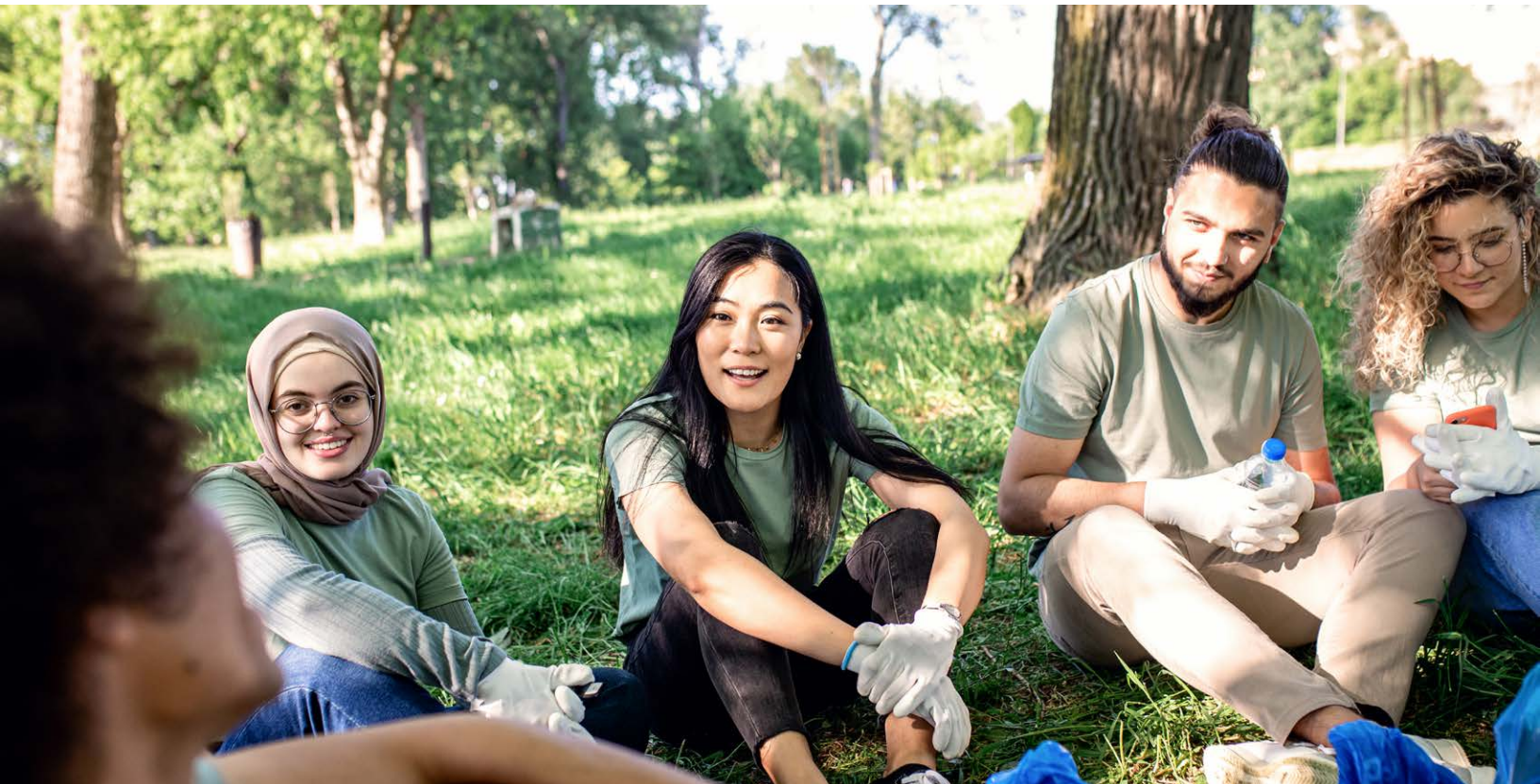
AmeriCorps NCCC, American Conservation Experience, Catholic Volunteer Network, and Global Routes.

Military

With its diverse branches and areas of service, the military presents a good option for many high school grads. Benefits include a salary, room and board, paid college tuition through the GI Bill, and retirement after 20 years.

Bonus: The military will often train your student for a career after the years of service, and your student can enter the workforce with experience.

To learn more, visit these helpful websites: military.com and todaysmilitary.com.





Enjoy What's Left of the Ride

Make it count! Graduation is right around the corner.

Senior year of high school brings ups and downs. All the while, you're there supporting your student's choices, cheering their triumphs, easing their pain, and loving them as fiercely as you always have.

During this time of transition and "lasts," continue to encourage your student's independence and work on honing the life skills they'll need when they leave. Laundry, money management, food shopping and cleaning are things you can help them learn or improve in the coming months.

Remind your student that it's not too late to try something new this semester or over the summer. There's no time like the present to branch out and spread their wings — it's a great warm-up for starting all over in college.

The finish line is in sight. Your high school senior will get there, and so will you. Don't hesitate to slow down a bit. Graduation will be here soon enough.

It can be overwhelming trying to keep track of all there is to do before May. Check out our comprehensive high school senior year timeline so you and your student don't miss a beat.

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