



COUNSELING DEPARTMENT - Junior Handbook

Beginning the College Process

As a junior, you have reached the time to begin thinking about college. You may have the impression that you are in for a stressful time – frantically adding activities to your schedule in order to look better on paper, taking and retaking standardized tests to eke out a few more points in your score.

As best you can, try to avoid that pressure. Your high school years can be as important as any in your life. Use this time to explore areas that interest you. Begin to think more closely about which classes engage you most in school. Outside of class, think about what you enjoy most, whether it is an after-school job, a particular hobby, a club, a sport or another activity. These are all equally valid ways to spend your time. Be true to yourself and then when the time comes to apply to college, telling your story will be easy.

This packet is written for you, our junior students, but we encourage you to share it with your parent/guardian. Below you will find timelines, descriptions of the application process and a list of resources. We suggest you read through the packet carefully now and also save it to review as the year goes on. As you move through junior year and have questions or concerns, please stop in our office to speak with your counselor. We are here to help!

TIMELINE FOR JUNIOR YEAR

<i>FALL</i>	<i>WINTER</i>	<i>SPRING</i>
<p>...think about the type of college or university that appeals to you ...plan how and when you will visit some colleges over the next 12 months ...consider when you might take the standardized tests needed for college applications</p> <p>CONTINUE TO: ...study and do well in school ...commit time and energy to your involvements in and outside of school ...be responsible about your use of social media and protecting your online identity</p>	<p>...visit some colleges ... register for the standardized tests needed for college applications ... think about teachers you might ask to write a letter of recommendation ... meet with your counselor and your parent/guardian</p> <p>CONTINUE TO: ...study and do well in school ...commit time and energy to your involvements in and outside of school ...be responsible about your use of social media and protecting your online identity</p>	<p>... take standardized tests ... ask teachers to write a letter of recommendation ...use Naviance to update your resume and make a list of colleges you like ...save a graded paper from 11th grade in case you will need it ...fill out your counselor’s questionnaire and ensure your parent/guardian has completed a brag sheet about you</p> <p>CONTINUE TO: ...visit colleges ...study and do well in school ...commit time and energy to your involvements in and outside of school ...be responsible about your use of social media to protect your online presence</p>

MAKE GOOD USE OF THE SUMMER

The summer between junior and senior year provides an opportunity to get a jumpstart on what is sure to be a busy fall. There is a myth around junior year – the work, the pressure – but senior year can be even busier. Many leadership positions fall to seniors, so you may be captain of a sports team, president of a club, or in a more responsible position in your job. Add in the college application process and a demanding course load, and your time will be booked. One of the best gifts you can give yourself is to **make progress on your college applications during the summer.**

By the end of August, if you can **decide which colleges will be on your application list**, you will be in a great position to organize the entire college process. Not everyone will be ready to do this, but if you have a firm list by the time school starts, you will be able to plan and organize tasks early in the fall, and gradually work through the application process without a last minute rush.

Writing **drafts of your application essays** by the end of August is also an excellent goal. You may not feel ready to finish your essays by late August, but if you have completed good drafts, it will be much easier to revise and finalize them in the fall when you have a few hours to spare. Allowing yourself to return to the essays occasionally over several months is likely to strengthen your writing and enhance your perspective on what you want to convey.

<i>THE SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR</i>	
TASK	GOAL – BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS
Research and visit colleges as necessary	Finalize the list of colleges to which you will apply
Spend time on Naviance to research colleges and update your resume	Be sure your Naviance account is accurate and updated
Create an account on The Common Application website after August 1; explore other online application forms as well	Fill in the basic parts of The Common Application or other online/paper application forms
Contemplate topics for your various application essays	Decide on application essay topics and write first drafts
Communicate with the people writing your letters of recommendation to see what their process and timing is	Know what your role is for your letters of recommendation
Consider your standardized test results, and decide whether you will take any tests in the fall	Register for any remaining standardized tests in the fall

THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Your counselor will assist you throughout the college application process. You will have an individual meeting in the winter or spring of junior year to begin a conversation about colleges that might be right for you. We recommend that a parent/guardian attends this meeting as well. In your senior year, your counselor will be the school's point person who oversees your applications, submits transcripts and other materials, and writes the required counselor letter for your applications. Your counselor is available at any time to provide advice and answer questions.

As in 9th and 10th grade, counselors will continue to conduct **GATE** programs (Guidance and Transition Experience) periodically in your English and History classes. Now GATE will focus on the college process, walking you through various aspects of college admission.

The **College Access Counselor**, Becky Bowlby, plans the district's college programs for students and families. She also organizes visits by college representatives for small group meetings and for the two high schools' college fairs. She is available to meet individually with students and their parents/guardians who need additional assistance after the junior meeting with their counselor.

Naviance is the district's online program used to manage the college process. Students register for a Naviance account beginning in middle school, and use the program with their counselors to, among other things, explore careers, do a personality inventory, and create a resume. Beginning in junior year, students use Naviance for the college process, to research and compare colleges and then organize applications. Read more about Naviance below, in the *Application Tools* section.

MAKING YOUR LIST OF COLLEGES

Researching colleges

This is one of the most time-consuming aspects of the process. If you can afford the time and money required to **visit the specific colleges** you are interested in, that is ideal. However, many local colleges are only a short drive or train ride away, and you can visit them to get a feel for large universities versus small liberal arts colleges; rural versus urban settings; active social and athletic programs versus quieter environments; mostly on-campus living versus a large commuting population.

You will learn quite a bit about your preferences by visiting **a variety of different campuses**. You will also see the range of academic programs and extracurricular offerings. Think about how these align with your interests. Think too about personal preferences such as being near or far from home, and the cost involved, and considerations like warm or cold weather.

Whether or not you visit a college's campus, you should spend time **researching online**. Colleges have websites full of useful information. Many have videos of students speaking about their experiences; some have virtual tours of the campus. If you are interested in a particular college, **join its mailing list**. You'll learn even more through emails and brochures that the college will send you. The Naviance and College Board websites are other good resources for conducting research and comparing colleges.

Other valuable resources are the visits we receive locally from **college representatives**. We host a **College Fair** in each of our high schools in September and October. All sophomores, juniors and seniors are excused from classes during the fairs and encouraged to attend. Also in the fall, college representatives visit Harriton and Lower Merion for small group discussions during the school day, and a few colleges come each year to present evening programs for students and families. Finally, a national college fair is held in the fall at the Convention Center in Philadelphia and a regional fair is held in the spring at Villanova University. All of these visits offer the opportunity for students to speak with college representatives, ask questions, and get a better feel for colleges they are considering.

Determining where to apply

The time you spend researching online, visiting colleges, and reflecting on your interests is all geared toward one goal: **Creating the list of colleges to which you will apply in the fall of senior year.**

You will need to balance your preferences and goals against the realities of the admissions process. We recommend building a list of colleges over the course of junior year. These should be a good match for both your personal preferences and your academic qualifications.

Look at colleges' recent acceptance statistics to assess your likelihood of admission. In Naviance, you can use the scatter gram feature under the *College Research* tab to see where you fall in the colleges' admission ranges for LMSD students. You will want to populate your list with colleges that have a range of selectivity. We advise students to divide their list into three parts:

- **Reach:** your academic qualifications are below the college's median acceptance numbers and/or the college's acceptance rate is so low that it is statistically a reach for any applicant
- **Realistic:** your academic qualifications are at or above median acceptance numbers
- **Probable:** your academic qualifications are well above the median acceptance numbers

As you move toward senior year, we suggest that you shorten your list to **about 6 to 10 colleges** that you like the best, and that fall about equally in the three categories of reach, realistic and probable.

APPLICATION TOOLS

The type of application you fill out will depend upon the college. A total of 549 colleges now use **The Common Application**, a universal online form. If you apply to a college that accepts The Common Application, you will fill it out on the commonapp.org website.

Other colleges have their own online forms and a few still use paper applications. Note that some popular colleges for LMSD students – such as Penn State and the University of Pittsburgh – have their own online application forms and do not use The Common Application.

Regardless of the type of application you fill out, you will use an online program called **Naviance** to manage your applications. The **Family Connection** section of Naviance acts as a file system for you and your counselor to gather and store some of your application materials, such as the transcript, school profile, etc. It also acts as the mailing system for you to send these materials electronically to colleges. Finally, it is a database that stores information about our district as a whole, so that you may see the number of applications that LMSD students submitted to a particular college, and the admission decision results. The scatter gram feature in Naviance can be a very helpful tool as you research colleges and try to gauge your chances of admission.

Note that every LMSD senior will use Naviance when submitting college applications, even if submitting paper forms through the mail. Naviance will be the way that you and your counselor monitor the status of your applications, and whether transcripts and other materials have been sent.

If you apply to colleges that require test scores as part of your application, you must submit ACT, SAT and/or Subject Test scores by visiting the **The College Board** and the **ACT** websites. Test scores must be submitted directly from the testing agency, and are **not** transmitted through Naviance or included on the transcript.

BREAKING DOWN THE COLLEGE APPLICATION

1. THE TRANSCRIPT AND ACTIVITIES

College admission representatives will say that your transcript (that is, the courses you have taken and the grades you have earned) is the **most important part of your application**. That is true regardless of what type of college you apply to. It reveals your academic interests through what you have chosen to study; it reveals the rigor of your course work through the designations of College Prep, Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB); and it shows how well you have performed and mastered the material through your grades.

Our advice is to take as many challenging courses as you can while maintaining a balance between school, activities, work, family obligations, free time and sleep. For example, if adding an extra AP class is going to push your workload to the extreme, it is probably not a wise choice.

Take a sincere approach to course selection and outside activities. If you take a class or engage in an activity simply because it will look good on your resume, you are forgoing the opportunity that high school offers to explore and discover your interests. Pursuing genuine academic and extracurricular interests will serve you well not only in high school, but in college and throughout your life.

2. TESTING

Standardized tests are required for application to most colleges, but exact requirements vary, so you will need to confirm this when you apply. Most colleges require either the SAT, administered by The College Board, or the ACT, issued by the ACT Corporation. Both tests have sections that cover reading, writing and math skills. Note that:

- The ACT offers an option to be taken *with Writing*, which includes an additional essay-writing section. Since some colleges only accept the **ACT with Writing**, we suggest you take that version of the test.

- If you take the SAT or ACT more than once, most colleges will break apart the combined scores and take the **highest score you received for each section** of the test. Colleges have been doing this for a long time, but The College Board will call this your *super score*.
- In addition to the SAT, The College Board administers **Subject Tests**. The Subject Tests are offered in a range of subjects, from math and the sciences to history and languages.
- Some colleges require that you take and report scores for the SAT and two Subject Tests or the ACT with Writing. On the other hand, some colleges require no standardized tests at all. You will need to **look at the specific requirements for each college** on your list.
- Note that PSAT scores are never reported to colleges and are used only for the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST). Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams are not required for college applications, but these test scores can be submitted optionally as supporting materials.

We advise students to **sign up on the CollegeBoard.org and ACTstudent.org** websites early in junior year. These websites are a resource to research colleges and the place to find test schedules; register for a test date and choose a location; and see your score results and be able to study the questions you missed.

Which tests to take? The SAT focuses more on logical reasoning, and how you think, while the ACT focuses more on content, and how much you know. On the SAT and ACT websites, look at sample questions and see which come more naturally to you. We often recommend that you take both the SAT and the ACT with Writing, because it can be hard to predict which will be better suited to your skills. For Subject Tests, some of the most popular among our students are Biology, Chemistry, History and Math 2.

When? Many counselors and college professionals advise waiting to take the SAT and ACT until the spring of the junior year. By waiting, you gain more knowledge and maturity, but you do not want to wait so long that you limit options for retaking the test if you are unsatisfied with the results. The challenge is to balance these two factors, along with the College Board and ACT testing schedules and your own schedule for travel, sports and activities. A fairly common choice for our students is to take the SAT for the first time in January or March, and the ACT in February or April. Then, if you want to retake the test, you will still have time before applications are due. For Subject Tests, look at The College Board website to see test dates, and discuss options with your counselor and teachers. Our students often take Subject Tests in June of the junior year.

How to prepare for the tests? Whether or not to take a test preparation class, hire a tutor or use Prep Me, a free service on Naviance, is a personal decision and depends on your academic knowledge, test-taking ability, and financial concerns. Research has shown the most effective thing you can do to improve your standardized test results is to **take practice tests**. Regardless of whether you pay for some form of test preparation, taking a number of practice tests, in conditions that simulate the actual test, is the best way to prepare. Visit the College Board website and Prep Me on Naviance to see and answer practice questions.

Since decisions around testing are so individualized, there is **no universal advice** we can offer. It is a good idea to talk with your counselor and parent/guardian about testing options during the fall or winter of your junior year.

3. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

As part of your application, many colleges will require that you submit **two letters of recommendation** from academic teachers in addition to the letter from your counselor. Plan to ask junior or senior year academic teachers. It is sometimes acceptable to submit a third letter from a coach, club advisor, or employer. In thinking about whom to ask, you should consider which teachers know you best and think highly of you. Our teachers do not write negative letters about students; if a teacher cannot write a positive letter on your behalf, he or she will not agree to write one at all.

Teachers handle letter-writing in their own way. Some will want to write letters over the summer, some will ask you to fill out a simple form with some information, and some will submit letters electronically while others will submit paper copies. By the end of junior year, have a conversation with the two teachers you have chosen so you know what to expect and how to help them in the process. You will also need to reconnect with teachers in the fall of senior year just to solidify the process and timing.

4. ESSAYS

Writing the essays for your college applications can and should be something that takes you some time. Many colleges require at least one essay as part of your application. The topics and lengths will vary. For the essay on The Common Application, the required minimum is 250 words and the maximum is 650 words. Many admission professionals comment that when they are reading applications which can be hundreds or thousands over just a few months, they especially appreciate essays that are **meaningful but brief**.

In your essays, you will want to be straightforward and honest about the person you are and the things you have done. This is the time to tell *your* story. No matter what you choose to write about, focus on conveying the characteristics and qualities that make you the individual you are. What you write about matters much less than why it is significant to you, and what you learned from it. You do need to remember to answer the question though—that is important.

5. DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Colleges use the term *demonstrated interest* to describe the level of interest you have shown in them. **Some** colleges place weight on your level of interest as they evaluate your application; others may not focus on it at all. For colleges you are seriously considering, you will naturally demonstrate your interest by asking to join their mailing lists, visiting their campuses, emailing the admission representative for the area, or perhaps going to see the college representatives who visit LMSD.

6. INTERVIEWS

Some colleges will encourage applicants to interview on campus when visiting, others will schedule an interview with a local alumnus after applications have been received, and others do not offer interviews at all. Look at the websites for specific colleges to learn about their interviewing practice.

If you do have an interview as part of your application, you should prepare a little in advance. What would you like to share about yourself that might not be fully conveyed in your written application? What questions would you like to ask the interviewer? Interviews are typically informal and conversational, but being prepared will ensure that you represent

yourself well and get the answers you need. For questions about how to prepare for an interview, see your counselor or the college access counselor.

7. ART, MUSIC, ATHLETICS OR OTHER SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

You may need to follow special application procedures if applying for programs in art, music, or theater which might require an audition or a portfolio. If you plan to play sports in college, you must visit the NCAA Eligibility Center website as there is a form you *must* complete in order to play college athletics. Speak with your counselor during your junior year if you are interested in pursuing the arts, athletics, or a special academic or other program in college.

ADMISSION PROCESSES, DEADLINES AND DECISIONS

As you move toward the fall of senior year, you will need to think about when to apply to the colleges on your list. There are different types of admission processes:

Rolling Admission: Colleges read completed applications and make decisions in the order that applications are received on a rolling basis over several months. If applying to a college that uses Rolling Admission, your chances of acceptance are highest if you submit your application as early as possible in the cycle.

Regular Decision: Students submit applications by the college's deadline and are notified of the admission decision several months later, usually in March or early April.

Early Decision: Students submit applications earlier in senior year, typically around November 1 or 15, and receive an admission decision about six weeks later. When submitting the application, the student, parent/guardian and counselor sign a form stating that if the student is accepted, he or she is bound to attend. Some colleges offer a second deadline, called Early Decision II, in January or February. Consider Early Decision if the college is one you know well; it is your strong and clear favorite and has been for some time; and you are willing to forego **having a choice of college and financial aid options.**

Early Action: Students submit applications earlier in senior year, typically around November 1, and receive an admission decision about six weeks later. With Early Action, the student receives an admission decision early but is not bound to attend if accepted.

Restrictive Early Action: Students can only apply to **one** college under that plan and cannot apply to any school Early Decision. However, some schools will allow students to apply Early Action to a public university only. It is best to check the college websites to discover the particulars about this plan.

The different admission processes and deadline options can be confusing. Look at the chart below to see more details and the range of admission decisions. Also speak with your counselor as you have specific questions and begin to plan how and when you will apply to colleges on your list.

<i>TYPE OF ADMISSION</i>	<i>DETAILS & TIMING</i>	<i>POSSIBLE DECISIONS</i>
Rolling Admission	<p>Application window usually opens in August or September. Applications are reviewed as they are received. Best to apply as early as possible.</p> <p><i>No restrictions on other applications.</i></p>	<p>Accepted Hold Denied</p> <p><i>Notified within a few weeks of submission.</i></p>
Regular Decision	<p>Deadline typically around January 1. Decision typically in March or April.</p> <p><i>No restrictions on other applications.</i></p>	<p>Accepted Denied Waitlisted *</p>
Early Decision I Early Decision II	<p>Deadline typically around November 1. Deadline typically around January 15.</p> <p>Decision about six weeks after deadline.</p> <p><i>May only apply Early Decision to one college.</i></p>	<p>Accepted Denied Deferred **</p> <p><i>Binding commitment to attend if accepted.</i></p>
Early Action	<p>Deadline typically around November 1.</p> <p>Decision about six weeks after deadline.</p> <p><i>No restrictions on other applications.</i></p>	<p>Accepted Denied Deferred **</p> <p><i>If accepted, the student is not bound to attend.</i></p>
Restrictive Early Action	<p>Deadline typically around November 1.</p> <p>Decision about six weeks after deadline.</p> <p><i>Restrictions on other early applications.</i></p>	<p>Accepted Denied Deferred **</p> <p><i>If accepted, the student is not bound to attend.</i></p>

* If **waitlisted**, applicants must confirm if they want to be placed on a wait list and considered for admission over the summer, once accepted students have responded and the college knows if it has openings in the incoming freshman class.

** If **deferred**, the application converts to Regular Decision. The student will be notified of a decision in the spring and is not bound to attend if accepted.

FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

During junior year, you should have a discussion with your parent/guardian about **paying for college**. All college websites have a **Net Price Calculator** that gives a quick estimate of your financial responsibility for tuition and room and board, given your family's income, assets and other financial obligations. It also includes an estimate of scholarship possibilities. If applying for financial aid during your senior year, you will most commonly complete a form called the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Some colleges require a form called the CSS Profile, a form through The College Board, while others have their own forms. If you have questions or want to learn more about financial aid, be sure to attend the school district's evening overview of financial aid or FAFSA completion night in January and February as well as speak with your counselor or the college access counselor.

Scholarships are another way to offset the cost of attending college. The Lower Merion Township Scholarship Fund awards scholarships to LMSD seniors each year based on need. Naviance has a scholarship database which can be searched based on key words, academic interests or other details. Some colleges offer merit scholarships to admitted students. Speak with your counselor to learn more about scholarship opportunities.

CLOSING ADVICE

Embarking on the college process can be both exciting and daunting. A few last recommendations:

- Be sure you and your parent/guardian are **registered on Naviance**, and are receiving emails from the Counseling Department. This will be an important avenue of communication.
- **Keep up the good work.** Your grades and academic record in junior and senior year are important. Continue to study hard so that your grades reflect your ability.
- **Be organized.** Keep a box or basket for college materials that come in the mail; set up a checklist for things you need to do in the short-term; plan out college visits well in advance.
- **Communicate with your parent/guardian.** Have honest conversations about your college options in terms of location, cost, etc. Be open to their input but also be clear about the things that are most important to you. You might want to set aside time every few weeks for a college talk to discuss your latest thinking, review what you have learned through research, and plan your next steps.
- **Manage the stress.** You, your peers, and your family may all become stressed about the college process. It is a natural reaction but try to keep it in check. Step back and appreciate the opportunities you have in our school district as well as the privilege of being able to attend college. Remember that all colleges offer an excellent education, and your challenge is to apply to colleges that are a good fit for you!

- **Character counts.** Competitive situations can sometimes bring out the worst in people; they can also bring out the best. Be truthful and behave ethically throughout the college process. Be a good friend to your classmates, especially when they are anxious; be appreciative to your parent/guardian and others who help you along the way.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

District Programs:

College Admission Select A Session:

November 19, 2014 – 7:00 pm HHS AUD and other rooms

Colleges that Change Lives:

December 9, 2014 7:30 am HHS /AUD.

December 9, 2014 9:30 am LMHS/AUD.

December 9, 2014 7:00 pm LMHS/LGI

Financial Aid Overview:

January 8, 2015 – 7:00 pm HHS AUD

FAFSA Completion Night:

January 14, 2015 7:00 pm LMHS LGI

You took the PSAT, Now What?:

January 21, 2015 – 7:00 pm HHS AUD

FAFSA Completion Night:

February 4, 2015 – 7:00 pm HHS LGI

College Planning for Students with Special Needs:

March 12, 2015- 7:00 pm LM LGI

Special Interests Select A Session:

March 24, 2015 – 7:00 pm HHS AUD and other rooms

College Fairs:

*At Harriton and Lower Merion
September and October, during the day*

At Villanova University

April 28, 2015, 6:30-9:00 pm

Your counselor is always available to answer questions and offer advice!

OTHER RESOURCES

Books:

College Admission: From Application to Acceptance, Step by Step, Mamlet & VandeVelde
Peterson's Teens Guide to College and Career Planning

Each College's Website:

Virtual tours & interviews with students

Admissions statistics

Application information

College Admission Representatives:

Visits to LMSD announced widely to students

WEBSITE RESOURCES

COLLEGE SEARCH/APPLICATIONS

*<http://connection.naviance.com/> Harriton and Lower Merion

**Naviance is good for searching for colleges. Careers, scholarship information and test prep.*

www.collegeboard.org

www.collegenavigator.gov

www.cappex.com

www.zinch.com

www.petersons.com

www.nacacnet.org

www.pacac.org

www.youniversitytv.com

www.educationplanner.org

www.commonapp.org

<http://admissions.psu.edu/apply> For Penn State University only

Every college/university website

TESTING

www.collegeboard.org

www.act.org

www.princetonreview.com

www.kaplan.com

www.testprep.com

FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

www.fafsa.gov for Free Application for Federal Student Aid

www.collegeboard.com for CSS Profile

www.finaid.org

www.fastweb.com

www.pheaa.org

www.college.scholarships.com

Every college/university website

FOR SPECIALIZED SCHOOLS/SCHOLARSHIPS

www.ncaa.com for athletes

www.cbsa.com for athletes

www.scoutusa.com for athletes

www.naacp.org for African American students

www.blackcollegesearch.com for African American students

www.uncf.org for scholarships for African American students

www.hacu.org for Hispanic students

www.aspira.org for scholarships for Hispanic and Puerto Rican students

www.hillel.org for Jewish students

www.ccu.org for Christian students

www.catholiccollegesonline.org for Catholic students

www.nclld.org for students with learning differences