

# The College Application Process: What to Expect

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**P**lanning for the college transition is overwhelming, which can often lead to anxiety for both caregivers and high school students. However, if preparation and planning begin early, the application and admissions process can be manageable and rewarding.

Gifted students typically begin thinking about college admissions soon after entering high school, which is not a lot of time to boost resumes and high school transcripts with items colleges find attractive for acceptance. Along with completing typical high school graduation requirements, sports, and clubs, gifted students are also seeking out honors program placement within college, college within high school courses, and scholarship opportunities to create a competitive resume for college application. This edition of *Parenting for High Potential* explores the many facets of the college applications and admissions process for gifted students and their parents. So, let's begin with a quick primer on what to expect!

## Getting Started

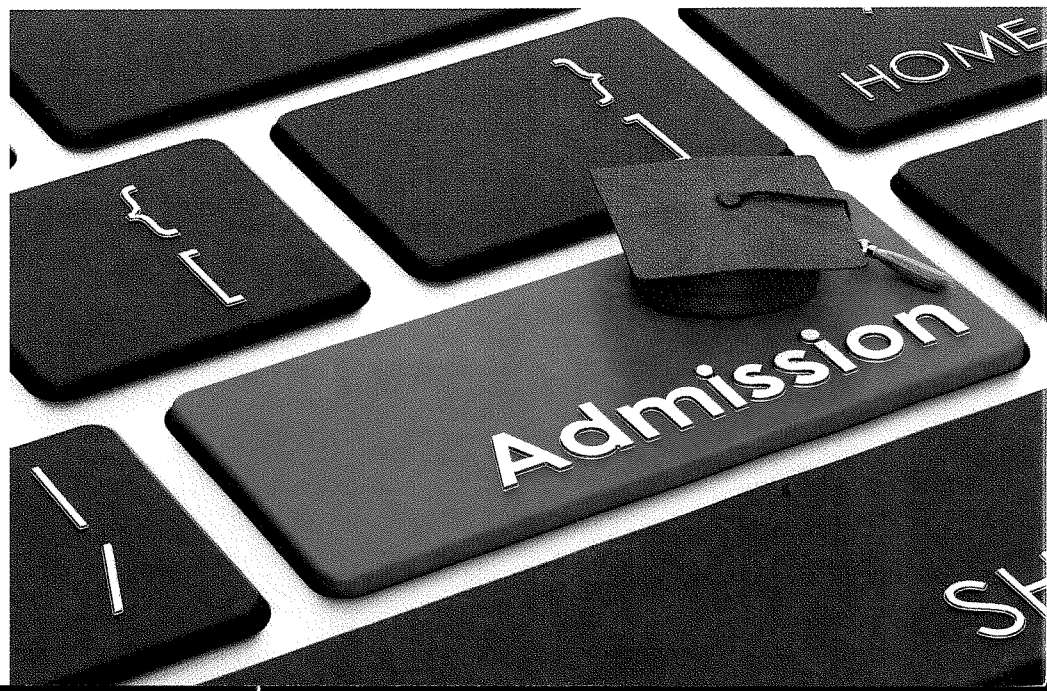
To begin the search, gifted students can explore colleges through the *College Simply* website (see Resources), where students can research and compare up to four colleges and peruse topics such as the school's overview, cost, admission, academics, diversity, students, and campus life. Gifted students can also explore

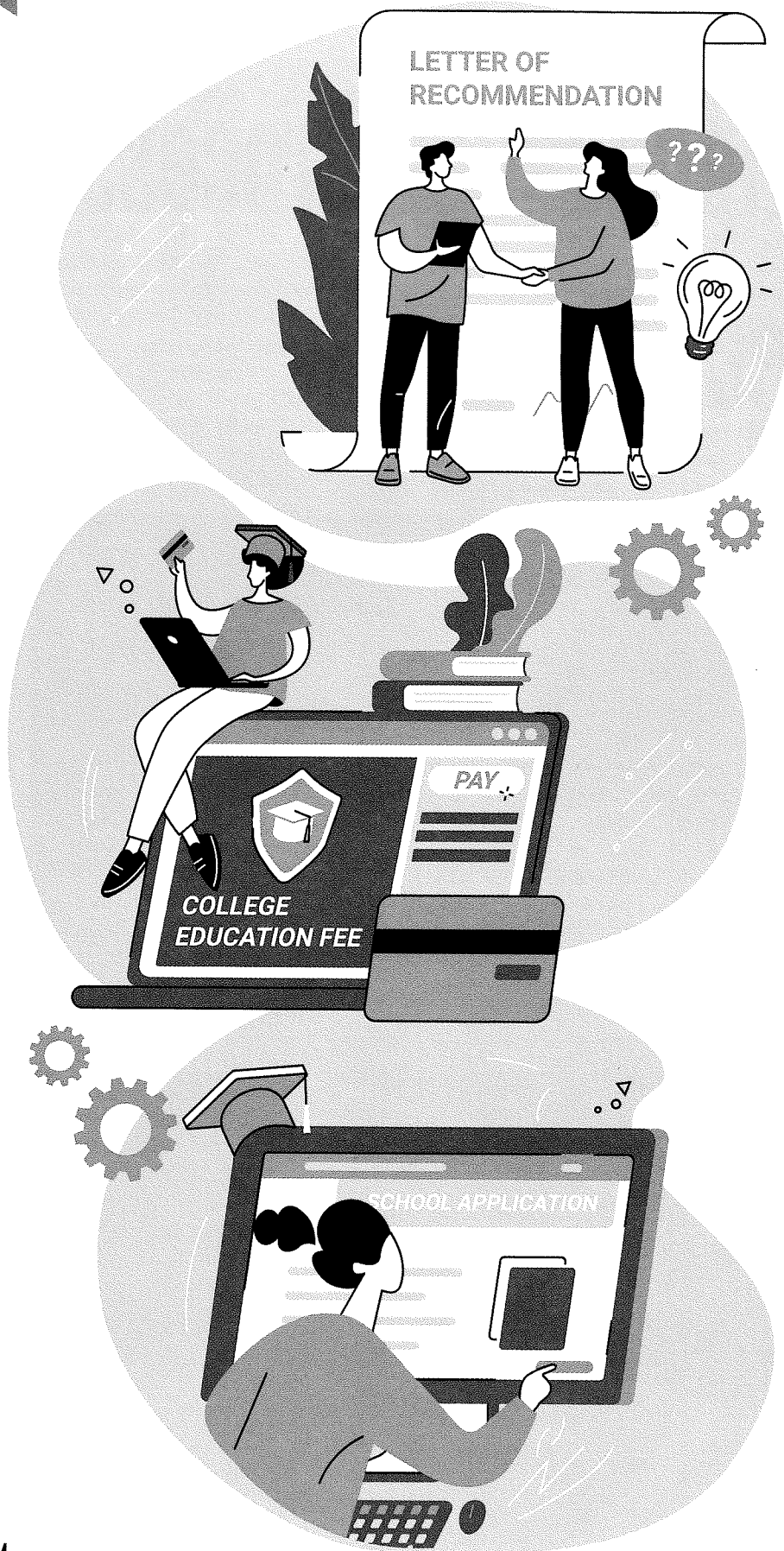
such online planners as *Xello*, *O\*Net*, or *Education Planner* to connect their interests with college majors and schools (see Resources). During their freshman and sophomore years of high school, gifted students often casually visit college campuses to determine if the school matches their academic preferences and lifestyles. Questions to be considered include, "Do I enjoy a rural setting?" or "Do I need a dining hall nearby?" During their junior and senior years of high school,

students should make connections with college admissions offices. Students could ask to sit in on classes, stay overnight or for a weekend, or find other ways to immerse themselves in the college experience. Students should take advantage of any experiential opportunities available.

## College During High School

In addition to finding the perfect college major and atmosphere, gifted students may want to spend their time





in high school wisely prior to officially applying to colleges. Many students begin taking advantage of college-level classes in ninth grade through college in high school coursework, dual credit enrollment, International Baccalaureate programs, or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Gifted students can search if AP courses or exam results are accepted for credit at colleges through the College Board website *Getting Credit Placement* (see Resources). By taking advantage of these classes in high school, gifted students can often begin college as a second semester freshman, or even a sophomore, allowing individuals to save on tuition expenses and take advantage of double majors, minors, travel abroad experiences, internships, or capstone projects. It is important to note that each university and major area of study are unique in their program course sequencing. Students should make sure to stay connected with a university faculty advisor within their program of study during their dual enrollment courses in high school to ensure they are on the proper track.

### Application Process Tips

Many highly regarded institutions are looking for students who stand out and have created an individualized path during high school. Student activities that may be of interest to college admission officers can include those in school and outside of school. Jeffrey Selingo<sup>1</sup> explains in his book, *Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions*, that the high school experience should be to position learners into making good choices in selecting which college or university is right for them. When considering applications from pools of thousands for their fixed number of spots, admission officers review a myriad of other factors, such as diversity, funding, and student commitment to attend if accepted. Leadership positions, initiative, and the visibility of commitment to community service are ways in which students can set themselves apart from their peers.

## Supporting Documentation

During the spring of one's high school junior year, individuals should ask former teachers and community members for letters of recommendation. In the fall, teachers are often inundated with letters to draft making it difficult, at times, to construct a detailed, quality letter. Students should also begin formulating a personal essay that defines what makes them stand out in comparison to all other applicants. Some students often reach out to former and current English teachers to assist in the essay revision process. Personal statements need to be succinct to create an impactful application; essays typically have certain word limit expectations.

By November of a student's senior year in high school, the college application process should be wrapping up, although students may apply to colleges that participate in rolling admissions. The rolling admissions process allows students to apply at any time during the calendar year. If students are applying to colleges through Common App, then personal statements, self-reported transcripts, and additional essays may be required. Common App is a hub that allows students to apply to many different colleges using one central registration platform. Each college's application may differ, but Common App does simplify certain items such as demographic information and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) information, which only need to be completed once. Additionally, if applying to more than a few colleges, this site allows students, colleges, guidance counselors, and recommenders to upload their information to one centralized, accessible site. Note that if individuals have personally toured college campuses, the registrar's office will often provide students with a code to waive the application fee. This could save students hundreds of dollars if applying to multiple schools.

## The Watchful Wait

Once initial application efforts are completed and submitted, students must



wait for letters of acceptance. Some colleges inform students right away, others in late fall, while some wait until late spring. Once all offers are in, students can then evaluate which is the right fit combined with potential financial aid packages, where applicable.

## Final Thoughts

The college application process can be overwhelming, but when caregivers and gifted students are prepared for the process and know how to plan for it, families can find success! Remember, there are individuals within the school system and community who can assist with navigating the college application if families stumble upon roadblocks. However, the process is worth the effort. ☀

## Resources

CollegeSimply, Compare colleges:

<https://www.collegesimply.com/colleges/compare/>

College Board, Getting credit placement:

<https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/getting-credit-placement/search-policies>

Common Application: <https://www.commonapp.org/>

Education Planner: <http://www.educationplanner.org/>

International Baccalaureate programs: <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/>

O\*Net: <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Xello: <https://xello.world/en/middle-and-high-school/>

## Authors' Notes

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Kali Fedor, Ed.D., has been teaching for more than 20 years. She is the chair-elect for NAGC's Parent Family & Community Network and serves as chair of the NAGC Public Policy and Advocacy Committee. She is a past president of the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education. She has taught in Maryland, Arizona, and Pennsylvania and is an assistant professor at Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Exceptionality Programs.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Selingo, J. J. (2020). *Who gets in and why: A year inside college admissions*. First Scribner.