



# VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

SCHOLARSHIP | COMMUNITY | GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

## A GUIDE TO THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

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Vermont Commons School is committed to finding colleges and universities that best match each student's academic, social, athletic, geographic, personal and individual needs as they move on to higher education. Beginning in the winter of their junior year, students work with their college counselor to understand their academic profile, extracurricular activities, and interests. We also assist students in identifying their individual strengths and the qualities they are looking for in a school and work together to create a 'best fit' list of colleges.

### THE VCS APPROACH TO COLLEGE COUNSELING

The College Counseling Office, in conjunction with the mission of the school, aims to create a good match between students and colleges. Students and parents provide input throughout the process, students participate in weekly and bi-weekly College Counseling Meetings ("CoCo") starting in the winter of their junior year, and students have many opportunities to meet with college representatives when they visit Vermont Commons. The college counselor's role is guided by the process of getting to know the student, developing an understanding of their strengths and interests, providing information, and making recommendations to help them build their college list and apply to schools. In guiding students through the process, we facilitate students in identifying school qualities to focus their search. These include: location, size, academic environment, curriculum, campus culture, type of institution, and special considerations that may be of interest to the student. The primary goal for each student is to find a school where they will thrive in the next step of their educational process. Not all schools are a good match for students, and we work with students to help them research and learn about schools that are likely to be the best match. To aid students in building a balanced list for college applications, we encourage students to be active participants in the process, open to learning about a variety of schools, and realistic in their self-assessment, creating a balanced college list.

The CoCo process at VCS includes research and reflection, as well as active engagement in the college search and preparation process. We see this more broadly than just finding a college to attend, but also as an opportunity for students to begin to transition to their first real adult experience. As students move through the process they have opportunities

to prepare for college by building their college readiness, taking on tasks to develop their independence, nurturing a deeper understanding of themselves as a learner, and beginning to define their individual educational goals and aspirations.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

To best serve students and assist families in smoothly navigating the college admissions journey, it can be helpful to look at student, parent, and counselor responsibilities.

### **THE COLLEGE COUNSELOR’S TASKS INCLUDE:**

- Getting to know each student and their college aspirations to provide guidance and advising on all steps of the college admissions process. Counselors work with every Vermont Commons School junior and senior and their parents as they create a balanced list (usually six to ten schools) of colleges and universities that reflect the student’s academic profile, interests, abilities. A balanced list includes a list of schools that include “reach”, “target”, and “likely” in terms of admission.
- Teaching and facilitating weekly CoCo meetings, admissions workshops, and individual student sessions to assist students in understanding and completing the various steps in the admissions process.
- Introducing each Vermont Commons junior and senior to Naviance and working with them as they utilize this school online college application tool.
- Coordinating and hosting college admission rep visitors for students to meet with and learn more about a variety of colleges and universities right on campus.
- Providing information and resources and sharing updates about colleges and universities with students.
- Writing the counselor letter of recommendation for each student, with a focus on student strengths, academic preparation, and extracurricular activities. That letter, our school profile, the student’s academic transcript, and the recommendations written by teachers are sent via Naviance by our registrar, Katherine Bailey, to the colleges and universities where students are applying.
- Communicating with college admission offices as appropriate and in accordance with the statement of principles of good practice that follow the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) standards.
- As decisions come in, the college counselor is available to meet with students and their parents to help them consider their options for higher education.
- The college counselor is also versed in gap year and summer program options for students seeking them.

### **THE STUDENT TASKS INCLUDE:**

- Doing your best work at school and in your extracurricular activities.

- Engaging in the CoCo and individual meetings with your college counselor, independent research, and self-assessment with an open mind. Completing activities and reflection exercises to identify individual strengths, goals and aspirations, and apply this information to your individual college search process.
- Entering the process of searching for colleges and universities with an open mind. Considering institutions that may be unknown to you and your family as you formulate your list of potential colleges and universities.
- Researching institutions carefully and thoughtfully. Actively working to understand admission criteria at those colleges and universities where you are applying, tracking and knowing all deadlines and application requirements (i.e., supplements, portfolios, interviews, testing requirements).
- Taking a leadership role in signing up for colleges and university tours and information sessions, and scheduling interviews.
- Meeting with admissions representatives that come to visit our school or through virtual visit options, attending the NACAC Virtual College Fairs offerings starting in the spring of Junior year. Visiting campuses, scheduling interviews, and attending Virtual Open House and Student Panel programs to learn more about potential ‘match’ schools.
- **Checking email with regularity**, as your college counselor and colleges use email as a method of communication to keep you informed of upcoming events such as open houses, special programs and interview opportunities.
- Making every effort to start the Common Application and your personal essays during the summer, before the start of the 2023-2024 academic year. **The Common Application will “go live” on August 1, 2023.** While the main essay stays fairly consistent from year to year and our goal is to have you write your college essay in the summer, the supplemental essays can change and are released at this time. With this in mind, August and September are used to write supplemental essays for Early Action, and for Regular Decision you can complete them through November.
- Staying in close touch with your college counselor regarding your college visits, plans, progress and asking questions as they arise.
- Signing up for and taking the appropriate standardized tests and submitting your standardized test scores to the colleges and universities you are applying to (and paying for the fees associated with the College Board and the ACT). **It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the scores arrive on time at the colleges and universities.** Vermont Commons School does **NOT** send standardized test scores on behalf of the student.
- Assuming responsibility for submitting their own applications, supplements and, if required, portfolio, to the colleges and universities to which they are applying.
- Assuming responsibility for paying the application fees to the colleges and universities. Waivers are available if needed.
- Completing ALL transcript requests at least two weeks prior to the college/university deadline via Naviance.
- Identifying and asking teachers who will write their letter of recommendations by the end of the junior year (May/June), and formally reminding faculty about their

letters of recommendation and providing summer update information with an email to faculty by **Monday, August 28th, 2023**. Each student is to request two letters of recommendation, one from an English/Social Studies teacher and one from a Math/Science teacher (ideally). Colleges require that you select teachers you have had in your junior or senior year. A thank you note should be sent in the fall!

- If the college or university to which a student is applying has individual forms that need to be filled out, assuming the responsibility of giving the forms to the college counselor **at least two weeks prior to the specified admission deadline. This timeline holds true for any updates that the counselor needs to provide.**
- Keeping the college counselor informed of acceptances, deferrals, wait lists and denials from the colleges to which they have applied.
- Once a student has received news from all of the institutions and a final decision has been made about where they will attend, providing the important common courtesy of notifying the other institutions they are no longer interested. **For Early Decision applicants who have been admitted to their school of choice, this means withdrawing applications from all other schools to which they applied.**

#### **THE PARENT/GUARDIAN TASKS INCLUDE:**

- Supporting their children through each step of the admissions process as they begin to contemplate the next step in their educational journey after Vermont Commons School.
- Listening to your children's ideas and concerns as they enter the college counseling process.
- Encouraging your children to engage in and take an active role in all steps of the Admissions process, including financial awareness. This includes registering online or making the call to set up the campus visits, tours, and interviews. If they hesitate, please feel free to assist them, but it is a good time for students to take the initiative, begin to build college readiness and gain practice handling administrative tasks they will have to do independently when they are on college campuses.
- Reviewing Naviance with regularity with your children and keeping up to date on the colleges and universities that they are considering. To access, use your child's email and password.
- Virtually or in person visiting campuses with your children and attending college fairs.
- Being mindful of our deadlines at Vermont Commons. For example, for Early Action, students should be done with essay writing and any transcript requests by mid-October. For Regular Decision, students submit applications before winter break in advance of college and university deadlines to ensure applications are submitted smoothly. **Please make all transcript requests at least two weeks in advance of the college/university deadline, so we can process your request in a timely manner. We cannot ensure the timely delivery of last-minute**

**requests of transcripts or for essay review when it is less than two weeks before deadlines as we have administrative tasks that need to occur in this period to ensure the applications are ready (for RD dates, the school is closed).**

- Being aware of your children's applications and standardized testing registration deadlines, submitting scores, and ensuring requirements and due dates are met for the schools on your child's list.
- Ensuring that your children are responsible for sending their official standardized test scores to the colleges and universities. Vermont Commons School does not send official standardized test scores to colleges and universities; **this is the responsibility of each student/parent.**
- If you will be seeking financial aid, make sure to attend the VSAC information evening and/or information sessions VSAC offers regularly. VSAC is a great local resource for Financial Aid, and they have open info sessions on Fridays, but will also schedule an appointment with you. Please regularly access VSAC's website for updates: [www.vvac.org](http://www.vvac.org) and keep in touch with the financial aid offices at the colleges to which your child is applying. We will be offering two "paying for college" events this spring through VCS.
- Actively, with your child, pursuing scholarship opportunities. Suggested websites: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) [www.goingmerry.com](http://www.goingmerry.com)

### **THE REGISTRAR'S TASKS INCLUDE:**

- Updating each student's transcript and academic record.
- Answering parents' and students' questions regarding GPA and transcripts.
- Sending out, via Naviance, each senior's official Vermont Commons transcript, school report form, and letters of recommendation to meet the college or university's stated deadline. The submission can be tracked on Naviance.
- Sending out the mid-year report to each college our students apply to at the conclusion of the first semester (usually done by college counselor).
- Sending an official final transcript to the colleges into which each member of the graduating class will matriculate, after they have successfully graduated from our school.
- At the conclusion of the first semester of the senior year, the official school report is sent out with mid-year grades along with a mid-year report.

### **RESEARCHING COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

When researching colleges and universities there are a number of school qualities to consider. A good starting place is to think about the following areas: academic program offerings, size, type of institution, admission selectivity, location, public vs. private, academic requirements, religious affiliation, student life, and community atmosphere.

Vermont is home to one of the smallest colleges in the country, Sterling College, with just 125 students. One of the largest universities in the country is Ohio State in Columbus with 64,000 enrolled, so there are a wide range of institutions of every size. With almost 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States, students can be assured that there are multiple institutions that will be a good fit for them. An important component of the college search process is research! This section of the handbook will highlight some resources and general guidelines in conducting research. **Please keep in mind that selectivity and admissions rates to many of the well-known and popular colleges and universities have dramatically changed in recent years.** Schools that were once in reach for many students may have admissions rates that have changed from 40% to 15%: that is significant, and means most students will not be able to gain admission. We encourage you to keep an open mind and work with your student and counselor to support and understand the importance of fit/match and building a balanced college list with a range of admissions selectivity. **In general, any school that accepts less than 25% is a reach for all students.**

While physically visiting campuses has been a rite of passage for juniors and their families, during the pandemic, admissions offices had to pivot like everyone else in delivering their services. This has resulted in a plethora of new options that you can do from home, which is a good thing for many reasons. Students and parents can now tour, visit, sit on panels, and interview remotely. While being physically on the campus was always important as it provided students with a concrete experience of visiting a college campus and getting a sense of the type of school they would like to attend, and how the location, size, and student culture felt to them once they were on the campus, virtual visits are also a great option, and a much more affordable way to tour schools. We encourage students and families to use the virtual offerings that now exist to learn about potential schools and to engage with them to show demonstrated interest.

## NAVIANCE

Vermont Commons makes use of Naviance, the standard secondary school online college application tool. Each junior and senior has an account and is registered with the site by our registrar. Students will get their Naviance ID issued by the registrar during the winter of their Junior Year. They are introduced to Naviance during their CoCo sessions. Juniors officially begin working individually with the college counselor in earnest in mid-winter, after the onset of second semester.

Once on Naviance, there are links to numerous college counseling search engines and related websites that are associated with admissions and higher education. The comprehensive nature of Naviance makes it possible for students and parents to link to specific college and university websites as well as other helpful resources.

Naviance provides each student with their own personal (private) account that includes individualized information such as standardized test scores and a current grade point

average. This information is then available to compare a student's data to past Vermont Commons applicants who have applied to the same colleges and universities via scattergrams. There is also a listing on Naviance of upcoming college and university visits to our school. Our students utilize Naviance to create, update, and navigate their college lists and request transcripts, which the registrar then transmits electronically to the colleges and universities to which they are applying.

## **Transcripts**

Naviance is also used as a tool that links information together for the application process. Students match their Common App and Naviance accounts, which allows us to attach letters of recommendation and transcript information through Naviance. Students are responsible for letting us know when they plan to submit their application to a college, so our registrar can then send along their transcript. The transcript reflects all grades earned at VCS through their Junior Year when students apply to colleges their senior year. A mid-year report is sent senior year once the first semester is completed and grades are processed. Students should be mindful that senior year grades are important and are looked at by colleges and universities.

If a student takes a class outside of Vermont Commons through the Dual Enrollment program or another alternative, it is the student's responsibility to get that information to our registrar, who can load up an official transcript to the student's file in Naviance.

## **COLLEGE GUIDEBOOK RECOMMENDATIONS**

For those who prefer having an old-fashioned book or guidebook in hand, here are a few popular books on admissions and college research.

- ***The College Finder*, by Stephen Antonoff**, lists colleges by major, region, etc. Very helpful in guiding students to find colleges that are the right fit in all ways!
- ***The Fiske Guide to Colleges (2023)*, by Edmund Fiske**, is a comprehensive listing of colleges, from the highly competitive to those that admit more than 50% of their applicants. Fiske gives thoughtful commentary in a most insightful way.
- ***The College Handbook***, College Board
- ***Peterson's Annual Guide to Undergraduate Study***, Peterson's Guides
- ***Admission Matters*, by Sally Springer** is full of pertinent admissions information and is very timely for juniors, seniors, and their parents.
- ***Colleges That Change Lives* by Loren Pope** is set on the premise that the institution does not have to be a big name to make a true difference in the life of the student.
- ***Harvard Schmarvard* by Jay Matthews** is an interesting take on the world of college admissions.

- ***Guide to Majors by the Princeton Review*** includes complete information on majors with salary guidelines. It is helpful as students consider different careers and programs.
- ***The Portable Guidance Counselor by the Princeton Review*** includes tips, suggestions and guidelines as you navigate the road to college.
- ***The Price You Pay for College***, by Ron Lieber
- ***Who Gets In and Why***, by Jeffrey Selingo

## INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet provides valuable, timely guides to colleges. Some of the most popular sites are:

<https://collegesearch.collegeboard.org/>  
<https://www.unigo.com/college-match>  
<http://www.commonapp.org>  
<http://www.collegeconfidential.org>  
<http://www.princetonreview.org>  
<http://www.finaid.org>  
<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>  
<http://www.student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>  
[www.niche.com](http://www.niche.com)  
<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

## COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES VISITING VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

Each year we have approximately 30 college representatives visit Vermont Commons School to talk with juniors and seniors. The majority of these visits occur between September and November. Seniors may ask to be excused from class to attend these meetings, and juniors are also welcome to attend these sessions. Students must make up work missed in class.

Meeting with college representatives is a great way to learn about a particular institution and hear up-to-date information, admissions policies, and to establish a relationship with the admission rep who will likely be reading your application. The interest you demonstrate in a particular college can play a role in your candidacy, so if you are interested in a school, or just would like to learn about a school you may not be familiar with, we encourage you to attend the meeting. If you are unable to visit a college's campus, meeting with the representative from that institution will be particularly helpful.

Throughout the junior and senior years, the College Counseling Office keeps students and families informed regarding events related to the college admission process through a variety of resources. I also strongly encourage both juniors and seniors to attend the



Virtual College Fair or in-person fair hosted by NACAC. The virtual events are pre-recorded and live sessions, and the live sessions may be admissions reps or student panels or university representatives from academic departments. Meeting with college reps that are hosted at VCS is a tremendous opportunity, as the size of our school allows you to connect with a rep that will likely be reading your application, and can function as an informal interview. Please take advantage of this wonderful opportunity!

## **BUILDING YOUR COLLEGE LIST**

In beginning the college process, one of the first tasks will be building an exploratory list of schools to research and visit. You will work with your College Counselor in CoCo Sessions who will guide you through a process to begin to understand different school qualities that will help you to focus on the types of institutions that meet the qualities you are looking for and are a good match for you. Once you are introduced to the process, it is up to you to engage in the research and learn more about schools. Here are some factors to consider when researching colleges.

### **Selectivity/Admissions Rates**

This really is the starting point for understanding what schools will be a good fit or match in terms of matching your academic record to the requirements at different colleges and universities. Understanding a college's selectivity relative to your own qualifications is important in making a realistic assessment if that college is a good fit for you and in building a balanced list. It is equally important to do the research beyond a brand and the statistics to determine if a school really is an overall fit for you and matches what you identified in terms of College Qualities you are seeking. For example, if discussion-based classes are important to you with access to professors then a large research university with 40,000 students may not be a good fit, even though it is a well-regarded school. Rankings do not tell you everything about the quality of either a college or an applicant, and often are not reflective of varying aspects individual schools offer. As a student develops a balanced list, they will make a realistic assessment of what schools on their list are aspirational schools, and their list will reflect a balance between aspirational, target, and likely schools.

By the fall, we recommend each student have approximately nine (9) schools on their balanced list with three schools in each category of reach, target, and likely. This is based on admit rates and academic record and a number of other factors that your counselor is skilled at assessing. Some students may have as few as five or six schools, and others may have up to 12. We recommend students apply to no more than 12 schools as there are distinct diminishing returns in trying to put forth quality applications when you try to apply to too many schools, as each school has a variety of requirements you will have to complete. Please note: this is a recommendation, not a requirement, and is ultimately up to families.

### **Academic Programs**

An important starting place is identifying whether or not a college has the academic program you seek. The next step in your research is determining the strength of the program, and the department (courses, faculty, placement of graduates, facilities, research and internship opportunities etc.). You should also learn core requirements for all graduates and any other programs that might relate to your goals and interests.

**It's also okay to be undecided about a college major!** Many students entering liberal arts programs have not yet decided on their program of study, and many more change their mind during the first two years of college. A good place to start to identify a good possible major would be to consider your academic strengths and interests, your aptitudes, and your ideas about what you might like to do after college. If you are undecided, liberal arts programs offer a wide range of academic possibilities and opportunities to take different courses before deciding on a major.

### **Type of Institution**

Public or private, large or small, rural or urban, research institution or liberal arts, coeducational or single gender? Students will spend time in CoCo learning more information about these differences.

### **Public or Private**

Although tuition is *generally* lower at public institutions than at private institutions, financial aid may equalize this difference. The size, diversity of students and offerings, campus culture, residential programs, graduation rates, how you learn best, research and internship opportunities, and admission criteria are all important factors you will want to look at when deciding between a public or private college.

### **Size of Institution**

There are colleges with fewer than 1,000 students and others with 50,000 students. While the quality of the college is not determined by the size, your enjoyment, and academic fit may be impacted by the size of the institution. Here are some examples of items that may be impacted by the size of the institution that can be used to assist you in thinking about the size of college/university.

- Faculty/Student Ratio
- Class size, particularly in introductory courses
- Dependence on graduate teaching assistants
- Direct access to Professors
- Number of course and program offerings

- Diversity of student body and faculty
- Availability and accessibility of facilities
- Degree of personal discipline, independence, and initiative required by a student
- Classroom interaction and opportunity of discussion based classes/seminars
- Range of residential options
- Academic Support options

## **Location**

This is frequently the first thing students think about when considering a college; while this is understandable, we encourage students to consider this as one of the factors in their selection process to ensure they are not overlooking a school that may be a match in all other areas. We encourage students to consider location, and then make sure in the process that they don't overlook an outstanding college that may offer you wonderful scholarship opportunities because it's not in New England. A few things to think about in this category in addition to geography are what setting fits you best, urban, suburban, or rural, but with a traditional campus feel? What location may offer you the best opportunities for your major? How do you plan to get back and forth from campus?

## **Facilities**

The availability and condition of campus facilities is easiest to observe when you are on college visits. The quality of the facilities in a particular academic area may reflect the strength of the program offerings and a college's commitment to that discipline. Looking at the libraries, information technology resources, STEM facilities, dorms and classrooms, and even the grounds can often tell you much about a school's resources, priorities, and management.

## **THE COLLEGE VISIT**

A campus visit for a tour, information session, and an interview is one of the most helpful ways of learning about a college. It allows a student to see and feel the vibe of the campus, observe the facilities, students and the campus culture, and get a sense of the campus. It also provides a student with opportunities to learn more about specific academic programs, and admission criteria, as well as demonstrating their own interest in a particular school.

Spring Break of the junior year is a common time for families to begin to tour colleges if possible, but virtual tours are also an excellent way to tour! In-person tours provide students with the opportunity to visit a college when school is in session. While this is an ideal time to tour, it's difficult to see all schools during the break, and it's typical that students will continue to visit college campuses over the summer months. This can be a more relaxed time to tour and there may be more opportunities to interview if such opportunities are available. Fall visits and open house programs should be used for more in-depth exploration of a particular college. The fall is a very busy time for seniors as

they are working on their college applications, so ideally, campus visits will have happened in the spring of junior year and over the summer. The visit process also helps students to clarify their preferences, which will come in handy as they develop an application strategy and decide if they want to apply to any schools using Early Decision or Early Action options.

### **Tips for College Visits:**

- Plan ahead! Most admissions offices offer online registration for campus tours and information sessions. These sessions can fill up well in advance, so plan ahead, and register at the earliest possible date. You will need to call or email for interviews. Information will be provided on their website under ‘ADMISSIONS’ that will guide you through the process.
- Most campuses offer options to visit classes and sometimes students can also stay in the dorms. You will need to reach out to the Admissions Office for visit opportunities beyond the standard information session and campus tour. If you are interested in doing this, you will want to contact the Admissions Office 3-6 weeks in advance.
- When visiting, pay special attention to the library, campus bookstore, housing facilities, dining halls, and any other areas that are of particular interest to you.
- Read a student newspaper or publication to get a sense of student life on campus.
- Eat a meal in the cafeteria if possible.
- Think about doing separate tours from your parents or child! You can learn quite different things depending on the tour guide.
- Visit the student center and talk to as many people as possible to learn their impressions of student life at this college/university.
- Take NOTES! It is very easy to forget details after tours, and students will find it very helpful to remember valuable details to use for supplemental essays next fall and when narrowing down schools.

### **The Admissions Interview:**

The Admissions Interview can improve your chances at a particular school by personalizing your application and conveying your interest in that college. Small liberal arts colleges frequently not only offer, but recommend, interviews for candidates. Many colleges/universities are overwhelmed with applicants and do not offer interviews; it is important that you find out the interview policy at each of your colleges. Naviance, the college website, and your college counselor are all good resources for learning this information. Whenever possible, you should take advantage of any opportunities to interview. When college representatives come to Vermont Commons you should meet with them if you are considering the college, even if you have already visited the campus. Some colleges will also offer the option to meet with an area alumnus/a for an interview if you can't travel to campus.

The interview provides the opportunity to:

- Ask questions and learn about the college's academic programs, study abroad, internships, and special programs, etc.
- Share more about yourself and your interests, passions, accomplishments with the college rep
- Provide context for decisions you have made about your education (i.e., switching schools, focusing on one extracurricular activity)
- Make a positive impression, and help the college get to know you beyond what is on paper.
- **Etiquette Tip: Always write a follow-up thank you note after interviewing!**

During the Spring CoCo Workshop, Juniors will have the opportunity to practice interviewing in preparation for campus visits.

### **STANDARDIZED TESTING:**

\*COVID NOTE: Standardized testing is another area that has changed during the pandemic. Many/most schools have changed their requirements to be test optional. This began in 2020 and will continue in most cases throughout 2023. We still encourage students to take baseline tests as soon as they can in their junior year as it will assist you with determining schools that are a good match and give you a baseline for test prep for future tests. I believe all students should at least get a feel for the SAT and the ACT so they can choose which test to take.

While standardized testing is not the most important part of the college counseling process, it is certainly still an important aspect of admissions for a number of colleges and universities. College Admission Officers do utilize the scores as a benchmark to compare students on a national level. The SAT is the Scholastic Assessment Test and the ACT is administered by the American College Testing program. These tests are administered across the country and are the only common factor among applicants to a college. How high schools grade, the rigor of their programs, and offerings vary greatly. The extent to which colleges weigh standardized test scores also varies, but most consider test scores as *one* aspect of their admissions decisions. The more selective the college, the more important the scores become as a way to sort out a large pool of qualified applicants.

The SAT is composed of an evidence-based reading and writing test and a mathematics test. Each part is scored on a scale of 200-800. There is also an optional essay, which you should sign up for when registering. The ACT is a four-part test which aims to assess a student's knowledge of, and skill in, English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning that they have developed through their high school curriculum. **Students must register themselves for standardized tests: they are not registered through the school.**

It is common for college-bound students to take both the ACT and SAT the Winter/Spring of their Junior year. Going forward, students then decide if they want to improve their scores, and they then focus on the test that best reflects their abilities. It's common for college-bound students to take the test two times, as scores generally improve in the second round. There is no need to take both tests more than once in the process.

### **School Code:**

- **VCS's CEEB school code: 460417**
- Our school code is used for registering for the SAT and ACT

The school code must be placed on all application forms. Your name should be consistently spelled each time you take a test and when you fill out the Common Application because if there are differences in spelling, there will be multiple records created, which can make record tracking difficult. For further information on the SAT and ACT, please use the following websites:

<http://sat.collegeboard.org>

<http://www.actstudent.org/>

When a student takes the test, they have the option to send their scores directly to five schools for no charge. Some students wait to do this until they have the scores (at this point, there will be fees associated with submitting scores). **I strongly advise NOT doing this until all scores are seen and we decide which ones to send to which schools, or if we will send them at all.**

Tips for Test Registration: Students are responsible for registering themselves for standardized tests. Please use your full, legal name (full first name, middle initial, last name), with consistent spelling, when registering for all testing, or you will run into problems when you need to send your scores to colleges.

Print out your registration ticket when you register, and check to make sure you've signed up for the correct date, and location. Keep your ticket in a safe place until test day. You will need an ID when you take the test.

You will need to login to test sites frequently over the course of your junior and senior years. Once you set-up your account, keep your login information (userid/pw) in a safe place, so it is readily accessible when needed.

Waiver of Test Registration Fees: Both the College Board and the American College Testing Program provide test registration fee waivers for low-income students who meet specified eligibility guidelines. For more information on fee waivers, please see

<http://media.act.org/documents/feewaiver.pdf>  
<http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers>.

or

Getting your Test Results: Your SAT scores will generally be available to view online in your College Board account two or three weeks from the date of the test. For a table showing when you can view your score after each test date, go to <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/scores.html>. ACT scores are available online at your student account page within the same timeframe.

Sending Your Scores to Colleges: It is the student's responsibility to submit test scores to colleges they are applying to. Make sure to keep track of your College Board and ACT login information, and be ready to do this during the fall of senior year when you are applying to colleges. The school does not submit test scores. It is helpful to us if students update Naviance and notify Katherine Bailey (Registrar) and the College Counselor when they have their test score results, as we do use this information in the search process, and it is helpful for the student to have the data in the Naviance System to do accurate searches.

**One last tip:** Read as much as you can in your spare time. Reading is one of the best ways to improve your test scores!

### **Recommended timetable for standardized testing for Juniors and Seniors:**

I recommend that students choose one time to take the SAT or ACT throughout the Junior Winter/Spring. Ideally, the student can take a second round in the summer and have completed standardized testing by the start of senior year. (They can also choose to take another round of tests in the fall of senior year if necessary.)

## **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

The majority of colleges and universities (selective) are interested in learning more information about a student beyond the grades reflected on their transcript or in their test scores and request one or two confidential teacher recommendations. When two are required (the standard) one letter should be from an English or Social Studies teacher, and one letter should be from a Math or Science teacher. Teachers provide information on a student's mastery of individual subjects, work habits, leadership abilities, or other characteristics that reflect the students contributions in the classroom and to their school community. We ask our students to select and ask their teacher at the end of their Junior Year in person. Students should then follow-up with their recommenders in the Fall and let them know when you will need their letters by. **If a student is applying for Early Action (EA) or Early Decision (ED), we recommend having their letters completed by October 15th.** Please keep in mind it takes a great deal of time for your teachers to write a thoughtful and meaningful letter, so early notification is helpful for teachers to plan accordingly and balance this task with their other responsibilities. We encourage

students to write a thank you note to teachers that have taken this extra time for them and to extend the courtesy of keeping them informed of college decisions as they are received.

The student's college counselor also writes an individualized letter of recommendation for each college advisee. This letter reflects the student's strengths and accomplishments and provides a comprehensive picture of the assets they will bring to the school/s they are hoping to attend. Your college counselor is genuinely interested in getting to know you and advocating for you, so please take the time to meet with them, keep them up to date on your activities, and complete the tasks that allow them to write a strong letter of recommendation for you.

## **THE COMMON APPLICATION**

The Common Application is used by a large number of US Colleges and Universities and is the predominant way students apply to college across the US ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)). Seniors are expected to have their Common Application started over the summer and completed in September of their senior year. The new Common App is released each year on August 1st.

The Common Application is divided into sections:

- Profile - Basic information about you
- Family - Basic information about your family
- Education - You will need to search for Vermont Commons and add school information. If you attended another school in high school, you will need to add this school as well, and add a brief statement about why you transferred high schools.
- Testing - Self-reported SAT and/or ACT Scores (if you are applying for Test Optional Schools, see your counselor)
- Activities - Completing this section can be time-consuming, you will complete an activities form in CoCo to aid in this process to make filling out this section easier.
- Writing - In this section you will include your Common App Essay. A draft of The Common App Essay will be written over the summer of your Senior Year, you will continue to edit and review your essay in the Fall, and review a Final Version with your College Counselor prior to loading it into the Common Application. Please keep in mind that many schools require supplemental essays, so it is a good idea to complete your Common App Essay earlier in the process.
- There is also a Discipline History section. If relevant, this is where you will need to report any events that involve probation or suspension and complete a statement.
- Additional Information Section - this is a catch all section of the application where students may include special circumstances or considerations.



Once you and your counselor have met in the early fall of senior year and finalized your college list, you can add the colleges that utilize the Common App to your account (after you have matched Naviance to Common App). Supplemental Questions required by a particular school will now be available for you to review and complete on the Colleges Tab.

## **TYPES OF APPLICATIONS**

### **REGULAR DECISION**

This is the application round that most students use to apply to colleges. While most regular decision deadlines range from January 1st to February 15th, application dates may vary. We have found that it does not benefit students to wait until the last minute to apply. At VCS, we work with students to have their applications submitted prior to going on the December break. This ensures that they have all the support of their College Counselor available to them during the application process in the event that something arises when they try to submit their applications.

### **EARLY DECISION**

Early Decision (ED): Is the option to apply to college via a binding Early Decision plan. Early Decision is a good option if you have a single first choice school. If accepted to a school under ED I or ED II, ***you must enroll***. When you apply ED to a school, you, your parents/guardian, and your College Counselor have to sign off on an agreement that you understand the requirements of ED, and that you will attend the school if granted admission. As such, you may only apply to one school under ED I, but if you are deferred or rejected you may apply to another school under ED II if your second choice school offers that option.. If you are deferred under ED 1, your application will be reconsidered in the regular application pool at a later date and you are released from the binding agreement to enroll if you are subsequently accepted. You may apply to other colleges under Early Action or Regular Decision while your ED application is pending, but once admitted under ED, you must withdraw all applications immediately. Most ED deadlines fall between November 1st and 15th, and colleges notify candidates by mid-December. Most ED II Deadlines are in early or mid-January, and you are notified in mid-February.

### **EARLY ACTION**

Early Action (EA) is similar to Early Decision with one big difference -- **it is not a binding commitment to enroll if accepted**. EA application deadlines are similar to ED, but students have until May 1st to make a decision about enrolling. Early Action is a great way to test the waters with your application process, students might apply to a couple of first choice schools, or apply to a school that is on their likely list to know they

have an acceptance and give them confidence through the process. **We encourage students to apply to UVM under Early Action, as it's free to Vermont students.**

There are a few highly selective institutions that have implemented Single Early Action or Restricted Early Action: this plan limits you to submitting one early action application. If you apply to one school under EA with this policy, you are indicating a strong interest in attending that school, even though the decision is not binding.

## **ROLLING ADMISSION**

This means that students are notified on a rolling basis shortly after submitting their application (4-6 weeks). The rolling dates may extend beyond the typical college application dates, but it is advantageous for a student to apply earlier in the event that a particular program is in demand. Since students are admitted on a rolling basis, once a program is full, the school will no longer admit more students.. Depending on a student's junior year grades, students wishing to apply to colleges with rolling admission may be best served by either applying immediately in the Fall of Senior Year. Students applying to rolling admissions schools will often be notified of their admission decision more quickly, and do not have to wait until the end of March for a decision. Students still have time to make their decision based on the same timeline of traditional admit programs (May 1st).

## **COLLEGE COSTS & FINANCIAL AID**

What is Financial Aid? Financial Aid is assistance given to you to pay for college costs, in the form of grants, loans, or work-study. Financial Aid can be offered based on your family's financial need, based on your academic or other achievements (merit aid/scholarship), or both. **Parents should not automatically assume that they won't qualify for financial aid! Incomes up to \$300,000/yr may qualify for some form of financial aid.**

Families that apply for need-based financial aid need to complete a standard need analysis form called the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Assistance, and often, the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile is also required. The family's assets, liabilities, income, and other factors are used to calculate the expected financial contribution to college costs. Aid is awarded to fill the gap between the family's expected financial contribution and the total cost of attendance.

Merit-based aid, or merit scholarships, are offered regardless of financial need, to students who have achieved academic excellence, or who excel in other areas, such as the arts or athletics. Merit Aid is essentially a tuition discount and is often offered to entice applicants to enroll at a particular school that the school would like to recruit. Your College Counselors assist students in building balanced college lists and introducing schools to the student/families where merit aid may be more likely. If you are a candidate where financial aid is one of the priorities in college attendance, it is important

to have financial aid ‘likely’ schools on your list. This may include a state school in your home state, or an institution where you would be a highly desirable candidate. It may be a school outside of some of your top geographic locations. We encourage students to keep an open mind here as there are some wonderful merit possibilities at great schools that could dramatically change your cost of attendance.

The Financial Aid application process is separate from the admission application process, and has its own forms to be completed and deadlines to be met. The Financial Aid application process is up to the family to complete. We have a wonderful resource in the Burlington area, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), that offers free workshops and assistance with completing the forms.

There are links on Naviance to Vermont Student Assistance Corporation [www.vsac.org](http://www.vsac.org) that will lead you to further information about the financial aid application process. Each fall, VSAC hosts information sessions throughout northern Vermont, and parents and students are strongly encouraged to attend. Vermont Commons also will host a FAFSA Information Session each Spring, and will publicize the times and locations of these programs.

## **SCHOLARSHIPS**

Each Vermont Commons student is encouraged to apply for scholarships to help offset the costs of attending college. There are links on Naviance where students can search for scholarships for which they may be qualified. Check out: <http://www.schoolsoup.com/>, <http://www.fastweb.com/> and [www.goingmerry.com](http://www.goingmerry.com)

## **IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES FOR THE CLASS OF 2024:**

Once each student has a Naviance account (late February), please check the list on the Naviance “home welcome page” for important dates. These dates are posted to the Vermont Commons Community Calendar and will be updated on the CoCo Google classroom. You are encouraged to post them in your personal calendar! They will also be on your “welcome page” on Naviance.

Students and parents, you are always welcome to schedule a time to meet with the college counselor to discuss college counseling questions and the application process. Family meetings will be in March, with plans for a second optional meeting in late August.

Juniors, your planning process begins in earnest in early Winter 2023! **Please read this handbook and engage fully in each step of the college process. Most of the answers for what you are looking for are in this guide!** I am here to support you!