

New Bedford High School

Young Alumni Association

*College and Career Readiness Subcommittee*

[**nbhsyoungalumni@gmail.com**](mailto:nbhsyoungalumni@gmail.com)

Applying to College:

Tips and Tricks

**New Bedford High School Young Alumni Association**

**Board of Directors, 2015-2016**

Justin Braga ’12, Co-chair

Melissa Isidor ’13, Co-chair

Alexandra Amaral-Medeiros ‘11

Jessica Barros ‘13

Shane Burgo ‘11

Raekwon Grace ‘15

Caitlin Hills ‘13

Zulay Holland ‘13

Rebecca Kanter ‘11

Nicholas Lawrence ‘12

Kerigan Medeiros ‘13

Christian Perez ‘13

Adam Vieira ‘14

Emma York ‘15

Heling Zhao ‘10

**The Application Essay**

The application essay is one of the most important parts of your college application. Use it to tell a story about yourself. People often fall into the trap of thinking that they don’t have anything “exciting enough to write about,” but that’s never the case! Your essay should introduce you to the admissions committee. Show them what makes you YOU. Here are some tips:

* Start early! You definitely don’t want to procrastinate this. It’s recommended to have at least a draft completed by the time you start your senior year.
* Proofread! Your essay is the biggest way to make your application stand out- you’ll want to make sure that it stands out for all the best reasons. Typos, run-on sentences, etc. will leave a bad impression and might hurt your chances of getting in.
* Have plenty of other people read it! Ask anyone you think will be willing to take a look at your essay. Ask family members, friends, your English teacher, your coach, one of the young alums, and anyone else you can think of. The more eyes, the better, but remember: you have the final say on all edits.

**Recommendation Letters**

Your letters of recommendation are a crucial part of your application. Make sure to ask the people who know you best to write you a letter. They can come from teachers, coaches, directors, guidance counselors, administrators, or anyone who knows you well in an academic or extracurricular context. Ask them well before your deadlines to make sure they have enough time to write a really strong, supportive letter. If you have an idea of what you want to major in, it is a good idea to ask a teacher you had in that field of study. Remember: you don’t need to have gotten an A+ from a teacher in order to ask them for a letter. As long as they can comment on your work ethic, your interests, and your strengths as a student, you should feel comfortable asking them. Sometimes, having a letter from a teacher who didn’t give you the best grade but watched you work hard in their class and improve can be a very powerful addition to your application. When you’re asking for a letter, make sure to give the teacher as much information about you as possible. It’s a good idea to give them a list of schools that you’re planning on applying to, as well as a list of your extracurricular activities and jobs. It’s also not a bad idea to give them a copy of your application essay.

**Financing your Education**

There can be a lot of confusion around figuring out how to pay for college. Here are a few pieces of advice for getting financial aid, scholarships, etc:

* The sticker price of many schools is quite shocking, but in reality, very few students pay the full price. Many schools offer a net price calculator that will provide you with an estimate of what you can actually expect to pay.
* Fill out your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form as early as possible in order to maximize the amount you could win.
* Check if your school uses the College Board CSS Profile, which is an online form to apply for nonfederal grants and aid.
* Apply to as many scholarships as possible. Take advantage of online scholarship matching tools. Many require an essay, but you can often reuse the essay, only making minor edits.
* Look for scholarships at both the local and national levels, but especially focus on the local ones. There is a ton of money available for students from the New Bedford area, and often nobody applies for it. Check out the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts for an extensive list of local scholarships.
* After you receive your financial aid package from your school, see if there is an appeal process, and ask if your award can be increased.
* Familiarize yourself with the terms of your financial aid package: do you need to maintain a certain GPA? Will you be required to do a work-study?
* If you have to take out loans, be sure to make sure you are very familiar with the terms of the loan: when will you need to begin payments? Do you qualify for loan forgiveness programs?

**College Entrance Exams**

***What do they ask about?***

College entrance examinations test a range of foundational knowledge. The SAT tests in math (algebra and geometry) as well as grammar, reading comprehension, and writing skills. The ACT tests similar material, but also contains a science section, which may contain questions in biology, chemistry, or physics.

***How are they scored?***

**SAT** sections are scored on a scale from 200-800, with an average score of approximately 500. The essay, which is optional, is scored by two graders on a scale from 2-8. You will be scored for reading, analysis, and writing. The SAT also provides “Test scores” and “Cross-Test Scores”, which range from 10-40. These scores are given in reading, writing and language, math, analysis in history/social studies, and analysis in science. The Cross-Test Scores are based on your answers in the Reading, Math, and Writing sections. **ACT** sections are scored on a scale from 1-36, with an average score of about 20. You will receive a score for Reading, Mathematics, English, and Science. You will also receive a composite score, which is the average of all section scores.

***Which test should I take?***

Check with the Admissions Departments of the colleges and universities to which you plan to apply. At many schools, the two are interchangeable. Some schools require the SAT, some require two SAT subject tests. Many accept the ACT in lieu of the two subject tests. It is important to note that though the ACT includes a science section, it is not only for science experts. Many of the questions rely on analyzing charts and graphs and thinking about experimental design. Recently, some schools have decided to go “test-optional,” and will only factor test scores into admissions decisions if you choose to send them.

***How should I prepare?***

The College Board offers a free SAT prep guide on their website. You can sign up to receive a daily practice question via email. There are also a number of test prep books and softwares available online, at the library, and at your local bookstore.

**Early Action vs. Early Decision**

***Early Action*** application programs are nonbinding; they simply expedite the application process. ***Early Decision*** programs are stricter. By filling out an early decision application, you are agreeing to go to the school if you are accepted.

**Suggested Timeline**

***Sophomore Year:***

* Start thinking about what type of school you might want to attend. Do you want a small liberal arts college, a large research university, a school in a big city? The College Board website has a great college search tool.
  + The library also has college guidebooks, that can provide an inside scoop on campus culture, student life, and other things that might not be available on an admission website.
* Visit a college fair and speak with admissions representatives

***Junior Year:***

* November: Take the PSAT
* Spring Semester: Take the SAT/ACT, Make a list of schools that you want to visit, and start going to see them, start thinking about which teachers you are going to ask to write you recommendation letters.

***Senior Year:***

* Fall Semester: take/retake any entrance exams, finalize your list of schools, apply for scholarships, submit applications, write thank you notes to your recommenders.
  + Take careful note of deadlines, as they are NOT flexible at most schools. Early Decision and Early Action programs have deadlines much earlier.
* Spring Semester: Fill out your FAFSA, attend accepted student days, pick a school, keep applying for scholarships, and enjoy your last semester!