

# **College Terms Glossary for Grade 12**

**WCHS Families & Scholars from Your**

**Parent Coordinator Ms. Pink**

**Essential Definitions for Grade 12 Scholars and Parents**





## COLLEGE APPLICATION TERMS

**Common Application** An online application platform used by over 900 colleges that allows students to apply to multiple schools using one standardized application. Students complete basic information, essays, and activities once, then can submit to multiple participating colleges. Website: [commonapp.org](http://commonapp.org)

**Early Action (EA)** A non-binding admission plan where students apply by an earlier deadline (typically November 1-15) and receive admission decisions earlier than regular decision applicants. Students are NOT required to attend if accepted and can compare financial aid offers from multiple schools.

**Early Decision (ED)** A binding admission plan where students commit to attending a specific college if admitted. Applications are typically due November 1-15, with decisions released in December. Students must withdraw applications from other schools if accepted. Only apply Early Decision to your absolute top choice school.

**Regular Admissions** The standard admission process with applications typically due January 1-15 and decisions released in March-April. This gives students the most time to prepare applications and compare offers from multiple schools.

**Rolling Admissions** An admission process where colleges review applications as they are received throughout the application period and make decisions on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting for a specific deadline. Apply early for the best chance of admission and housing.

**Prospective Student** A high school student who is interested in and considering applying to a particular college or university.

**Waitlist** A list of qualified applicants who may be offered admission if space becomes available after accepted students decline their offers. Being waitlisted means you weren't initially accepted or denied, but could still potentially be admitted later.

**Standardized Tests** Tests like the SAT or ACT that use the same format and are administered under the same conditions to all test-takers. Many colleges use these scores as part of their admission decisions, though some schools are now test-optional.

**Grade Point Average (GPA)** A numerical representation of your academic performance, typically calculated on a 4.0 scale where A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, etc. Colleges use GPA as a key factor in admission decisions.

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## FINANCIAL AID TERMS

**FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)** The official form that students must complete to be considered for federal financial aid, including grants, loans, and work-study programs. Must be completed every year you're in college. Available starting October 1 each year for the following academic year.

**FAFSA ID (FSA ID)** A username and password combination that serves as your legal signature on federal financial aid documents. Both students and parents need their own FSA ID. Create yours at [studentaid.gov/fsa-id](https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id)

**Award Letter** A document from a college that shows the types and amounts of financial aid they are offering you, including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study opportunities. Compare award letters carefully when making your college decision.

**Cost of Attendance (COA)** The total estimated cost of attending a college for one academic year, including tuition, fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and personal expenses.

**Demonstrated Financial Need** The difference between a college's cost of attendance and your family's ability to pay, as calculated from your FAFSA and sometimes additional forms like the CSS Profile.

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC) NOTE:** This term was replaced by Student Aid Index (SAI) starting with the 2024-25 academic year, but some schools and materials may still reference EFC.

**Financial Aid** Money provided to help students pay for college, including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study programs. Can be need-based or merit-based.

**Grants** Financial aid that does not need to be repaid. Usually awarded based on financial need. Examples include Pell Grants and state grants like TAP.


**Loans** Money borrowed to pay for college that must be repaid with interest. Federal loans typically have better terms than private loans. Types include subsidized, unsubsidized, and PLUS loans.

**Merit-Based Aid** Financial assistance awarded based on academic achievement, special talents, leadership, or other accomplishments, regardless of financial need.

**Need-Based Aid** Financial assistance awarded based on your family's demonstrated financial need as calculated from the FAFSA and other financial aid forms.

**Scholarships** Financial awards that do not need to be repaid, typically awarded based on merit, achievements, or specific criteria set by the organization offering the scholarship.

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FINANCIAL AID TERMS TO  
KNOW

# **NEW 2026-2027 FAFSA TERMINOLOGY**

**Student Aid Index (SAI)** The Student Aid Index (SAI) replaced the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) when calculating financial aid needs for families paying for college. This is the key formula that can help unlock scholarships, grants, federal student loans and other financial aid. The SAI represents your family's financial strength and ability to contribute to college costs. Unlike the EFC, the SAI can be negative (as low as -1500), which may increase Pell Grant eligibility.

**Data Release Number (DRN)** A Data Release Number (DRN) is a four-digit number generated when you submit your FAFSA. This number allows colleges, state agencies, and scholarship organizations to electronically access your FAFSA information. You may need to provide this number to schools or organizations that request it.

**Estimated Student Aid Index** The preliminary SAI calculation shown during the FAFSA completion process, giving families an early indication of their expected contribution before final processing is complete.

**Estimated Pell Grant Eligibility** An estimate of your potential Federal Pell Grant award amount based on your SAI and other factors. For 2026-27, the SAI must be

less than twice the maximum Pell Grant award amount to be eligible. The maximum Pell Grant changes annually.

**DRN Number (According to FAFSA)** The same as Data Release Number - this four-digit identifier allows authorized parties to access your FAFSA information electronically. Keep this number secure and provide it only to legitimate colleges and scholarship organizations when requested.

## **NEW YORK STATE SPECIFIC PROGRAMS**

**TAP (Tuition Assistance Program)** The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) provides financial support to eligible New York State residents, helping to reduce tuition costs at approved colleges and universities across the state. TAP is a grant—not a loan—so it never has to be repaid. Eligible students can receive up to \$5,665 annually. You must file a separate TAP application in addition to FAFSA.

**SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge)** SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) was started in 1966 in the four year colleges of The City University of New York (CUNY). This program provides academic support, counseling, and financial assistance to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds attending CUNY four-year colleges.

**College Now** A dual enrollment program offered by CUNY that allows high school students to take college courses and earn both high school and college credit simultaneously. Courses are often offered at reduced or no cost.

**EOP (Educational Opportunity Program)** A SUNY (State University of New York) program that provides academic support services and financial assistance to students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who show potential for success in college.

**HEOP (Higher Education Opportunity Program)** The Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) provides a broad range of services to New York State residents who, because of educational and economic circumstances, would otherwise be unable to attend a postsecondary educational institution. This program is available at private colleges and universities in New York State.

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# IMPORTANT REMINDERS FOR NYC FAMILIES

## Key Deadlines

- **FAFSA:** Available October 1, submit as early as possible
- **TAP:** Submit by June 30 (earlier recommended)
- **College Applications:** Vary by school and admission plan
- **Scholarship Applications:** Deadlines vary widely, start early

## Essential Actions

- Create FSA IDs for both student and parent early in senior year
- Gather tax documents and financial information before FAFSA opens
- Research and apply for multiple scholarships
- Compare net costs, not just sticker prices, when choosing colleges
- Apply for TAP if you're a New York State resident
- Consider CUNY and SUNY schools for excellent value

# Resources for Families

- CUNY Office of Undergraduate Admissions: [cuny.edu](http://cuny.edu)
- SUNY: [suny.edu](http://suny.edu)
- New York State Higher Education Services Corporation: [hesc.ny.gov](http://hesc.ny.gov)
- Federal Student Aid: [studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov)

## Red Flags to Avoid

- Missing FAFSA and TAP deadlines
  - Not comparing net costs between schools
  - Borrowing more in loans than necessary
  - Ignoring scholarship opportunities
  - Not understanding the difference between grants and loans
  - Failing to submit required verification documents promptly
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**Remember:** The college application and financial aid process can seem overwhelming, but breaking it down into manageable steps makes it easier. Don't hesitate to ask your school counselor, college financial aid offices, or contact the organizations listed above if you have questions.