



Christ School College Guidance Handbook

2025-2026

Introduction

Our goal in the College Guidance Office at Christ School is to help each student identify and gain acceptance into his ideal school. This process begins in the freshman year and continues through the senior year with individual counseling sessions and workshops. The College Guidance Curriculum is purposely designed to prepare students for the transition from Christ School to college.

Taking the first steps toward the college search and application process is not easy. The programs we offer, combined with the individualized attention your son receives here, will prepare him in a manner that will leave him feeling confident and well prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

We encourage you to feel comfortable in reaching out to either one of us should you have any comments, observations, or questions, and we thank you for the opportunity to be a part of your son's life at this important stage in his academic career.

Sincerely,

Kirk Blackard
Director of College Guidance
kblackard@christschool.org
(828) 684-6232 (ext. 110)

Tracy Weldon
Associate Director of College Guidance
ACT and SAT Coordinator
tweldon@christschool.org
(828) 684-6232 (ext. 112)

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to these individuals and organizations who have assisted us with input and resources toward the creation of the Christ School College Guidance Handbook:

- Suffield Academy College Counseling Office
- Pam Baughman, Centre College
- Thomas H. Griffin, North Carolina State University
- Brad Pochard, Furman University
- Lyn Tillett, Charlotte Country Day School

Who's Who:

- Kirk Blackard, Director of College Guidance
 - B.A.: Psychology, Wake Forest University - 1989
 - M.S.: Mass Communication, Virginia Commonwealth University - 1995
 - Arrived at Christ School in 2004
- Tracy Weldon, Associate Director of College Guidance
 - B.A.: Psychology, University of North Carolina Wilmington - 1993
 - M.F.A.: Creative Writing, University of North Carolina Wilmington - 2000
 - Ed. M.: Higher Education, Harvard University - 2005
 - Arrived at Christ School in 2022
- Also working with us...
 - Lisbeth Harrison, College Guidance Office Manager
 - Jack Peterson, Director of Learning Resources/Testing Accommodations
 - Steve Stay, Registrar, Assistant to the Headmaster and NCAA Eligibility Assistance
 - Patrick Haley, Assistant Athletic Director

Our Office's Policies

- **NACAC Statement of Principles and Good Practice:** As members of NACAC (National Association of College Admission Counseling), Christ School college counselors adhere to these principles and expect students, parents, and teachers to abide by them as well. More information on these principles may be found on NACAC's website (www.nacacnet.org).
- **School Materials:** College Guidance will send official transcripts, letters of recommendation, the school profile, and senior year courses to all colleges that receive a completed application from a student. We will also send first semester transcripts to each school and a final transcript to the school where a student has made an enrollment deposit. Student applications should be submitted in-person with their college guidance counselor.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** These letters are written on behalf of the student by Christ School faculty and administration and are sent directly from the College Guidance Office to the colleges and universities to which a student applies and to scholarship foundations as requested. It is common practice and in your child's best interest that students waive any rights to view, edit, or otherwise access these recommendations at any time.
- **Discipline Reporting:** It is official school policy that Christ School's College Guidance Office will, when requested on a college or university's application, report student conduct records and notify said institutions of any significant changes in the student's academic or personal status between the time of application and graduation which results in suspension or expulsion while at Christ School. It is the expectation of Christ School's College Guidance Office that students will notify colleges and universities *directly* of *any* significant and/or pertinent changes in their academic, leadership, or enrollment status between the time of application and graduation as well.

- **Score Reporting:** Christ School does not report any standardized test scores for the SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), PSAT, Pre ACT or TOEFL. Students and parents are responsible for sending official scores directly from the testing agency to the colleges which require them and to the NCAA, if required, and in a timely manner. We advise these scores be sent at least two weeks in advance of a school deadline.
- **Learning Differences:** Christ School does not disclose a student's learning differences to colleges without the permission of the student and parents.
- **SCOIR:** This college counseling platform is an intuitive tool that integrates college searches, college list building, learning about *fit*, and career assessments while enabling us to send the required documents to colleges. The College Guidance Office requires students and highly encourages parents to take advantage of Scoir, as it is an excellent tool for staying up to date with your son's application plan.

Our Office's Commitments

- We will treat your son as the unique young man he is, and we will encourage you to refrain from comparing his process to the process of his peers.
- We will give advice to your students about how to present themselves in their applications.
- We will remind you that this process is unpredictable, that none of us has any real control, and that nothing is guaranteed.
- We will work to find a good fit for your son. *College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won.*
- We will help you and your student with your journeys through the college admissions process.
- We will maintain a thorough repository of resources for students and their families to inform the college application and admissions process in [OnCampus -> College Guidance Office -> Topics](#). We also regularly update our calendar with webinars and information sessions.

Responsibilities of Parents

- Parents should support an ethical approach to the college admission process.
- Parents should encourage and support their son in leading his college application process.
- Parents should utilize SCOIR and complete all questionnaires as thoroughly as possible.
- Parents should submit all required application materials that require detailed financial information, including the CSS profile (which is required at many private colleges as early as October 1) and the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).
- Parents should evaluate their family's financial situation regarding the ability to pay college tuition fees using a "Net Price Calculator" on college websites and SCOIR and consult with individual college

Financial Aid offices.

- Parents should schedule college visits with their son, when possible.
- Parents should be open to new options and suggestions (even "unknown" colleges) and be encouraging and supportive, offering advice and guidance when appropriate.
- Parents should help their son understand that there is *more* than *one* college that is appropriate for him and where he can be happy.
- Parents should share their credit card information with their son so that he can pay for application fees and test score reports.
- Parents should make sure their student is checking and responding to emails from colleges and universities and their counselor.

In many ways, the college application process is a test of the skills students will need in college, including assignment preparation, time management, and follow-through. With these in mind, when you are cc'd on e-mails we send your son, please give him an additional nudge to ensure he is following through with our requests and his college assignments. Reading and responding to e-mails is necessary if we are to work as efficiently as possible, not only with him but with all students in their efforts to meet deadlines. Advisors will also be included in our communication if students do not respond to our initial efforts either by e-mail or in-person.

Responsibilities Of Students

- Students should communicate and act ethically, honestly, and respectfully at all times.
- Students should attend and participate fully in all required college guidance programming.
- Students should keep their parents, advisor, and college counselor informed of their college search and the application process frequently, including any new developments.
- Students should read and respond as necessary to all communications from their counselor and the college guidance office.
- Students should apply to at least one college where they know you can be happy in each of the categories we use (Good Bet, Middle of the Road, Reach).
- Students should register for standardized testing, share their test admissions tickets with Ms. Weldon, and send their official scores to institutions that require them (our CEEB code for all testing is **340095**).
- Students should be aware of all college deadlines and special requirements.
- Students should thoroughly proof all their college application materials well in advance of submitting applications.

- Students should use the Common Application whenever possible unless a fee waiver is offered for using a college's specific institutional application.
- Students should submit all applications and application materials during meetings with your college counselor.
- Students should read emails from colleges they apply to, and check the status of their application using the college's student portal to make sure all materials have been submitted and received (giving schools at least two weeks to process materials and consult with College Guidance)
- Students should thank their parents and their teachers!

General Responsibilities for Underclassmen

Freshmen:

- Attend and participate fully in all required college guidance programming
- Work hard in all classes and adjust to new academic expectations and workloads
- Explore your academic, athletic, and community service interests at Christ School and at home
- Learn how to become a strong self-advocate (with the help of your teachers and advisor)
- Fill the summer between the end of Freshman Year and the beginning of Sophomore Year with rewarding work, study, travel, and/or volunteer opportunities
- Take the PSAT – Fall
- Complete the career assessment in SCOIR

Sophomores:

- Attend and participate fully in all required college guidance programming and college rep visits
- Challenge yourself with an academic schedule that is appropriate for you
- Delve deeper into your extracurricular activities and consider assuming leadership positions
- Fill the summer between the end of Sophomore Year and the beginning of Junior Year with college visits, rewarding work, study, travel, and/or volunteer opportunities
- Prioritize attending college rep visits at Christ School
- If applicable, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center to be considered for varsity sports in college
- Take the ACT – Spring

- Complete the career assessment in SCOIR

Juniors:

- Attend and participate fully in all required college guidance programming
- Continue to challenge yourself with an academic schedule that is appropriate for you
- Delve deeper into your extracurricular activities and consider assuming leadership positions
- Consider using school breaks to visit colleges of interest
- Prioritize attending college rep visits at Christ School
- Meet with your college counselor to discuss your testing plan and prep needs, your academic schedule, and your initial list of schools that reflects your academic profile and interests – beginning in January
- Be intentional about researching colleges, their scholarships, their requirements, and their deadlines
- Fill the summer between the end of Sophomore Year and the beginning of Junior Year with college visits, rewarding work, study, travel, and/or volunteer opportunities
- Take the SAT – Fall
- Take additional ACT and SAT tests (depending on which test you prefer) throughout your junior year to secure your best score to submit to universities before your senior year.
- Request letters of recommendation from two core academic teachers from junior year – Spring
- Complete the career assessment in SCOIR
- Complete a preliminary college list in SCOIR with your college guidance counselor - Spring

Timeline for Seniors

August and September

- Complete all application “application form work” - and all essays
- Finalize your college list with your college counselor and parents
- Establish a timeline with your college counselor for completing the application process (when you will submit your applications)
- (Kindly) thank and remind your two teachers to complete their letters of recommendation by the beginning of September
- Register for and retake standardized tests (only if recommended)

- Send your official test scores to schools on your list (it can take about a month for scores to be received and processed by colleges), if recommended or required
- Prioritize attending college rep visits at Christ School, especially those of colleges that will receive your application
- Following the Add/Drop period, notify our office of any changes to your transcript
- Meet regularly with your college counselor to submit your college applications
 - You must meet with your counselor so that the proper school materials are sent along with your application; school materials will not be sent without the student present
 - Schedule your meetings early and often

October

- Continue to meet with your college counselor
- Confirm that all NCAA registration paperwork is complete if you intend to play a varsity sport in college
- Register for and retake standardized tests (only if recommended)
- Send your official test scores to schools on your list (it takes about a month for scores to be received and processed by colleges), if required or recommended
- Prioritize attending college rep visits at Christ School, especially those of colleges that will receive your application
- Apply for scholarships, as applicable

November

- Write handwritten thank-you notes to teacher recommenders. (See Ms. Harrison for help and stationary.)
- Wrap up college application work so you can enjoy Thanksgiving Break
- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions, being sure to keep your teachers up to date as well
- Apply for scholarships, as applicable

December

- Complete the FAFSA (and CSS Profile form, if required) as soon as it becomes available in December
- **Submit all applications by Friday, December 5 (last Friday before fall semester exams)**
- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions, being sure to keep your teachers up to date as well

- Apply for scholarships, as applicable
- Notify the College Guidance Office and every school on your college list regarding any changes to your official transcript

January and February

- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions, being sure to also keep your teachers up to date
- Apply for scholarships, as applicable

March

- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions, being sure to also keep your teachers up-to-date
- Apply for scholarships, as applicable
- Consider revisiting a few of your top college options so that you are able to make an informed decision / attend Admitted Student Days

April

- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions
- Review college options with your college counselor and make your final decision
- Notify all colleges you applied to of your final decision no later than April 30

May

- Notify the College Guidance Office of all application decisions and immediately update your list in SCOIR to reflect these decisions
- Deposit at one school only by May 1
 - Double depositing is strictly forbidden by NACAC Statement of Good Principles and Good Practice. You are agreeing to this when you submit your applications to colleges. With this in mind, Christ School will send an official final transcript to one school only as designated by the student. Final transcripts are released by the Business Office at Christ School after all accounts have been settled.
- Confirm the destination of your final transcript with the College Guidance Office, which will be sent in early June
- Participate in College Spirit Day and the Alumni Roundtable Meeting
- Thank your parents, your recommendation letter writers, and your counselor

Standardized Testing

Standardized testing can be anxiety-producing, confusing, and controversial. Students and parents are faced with questions related to the preparation for testing as well as the interpretation and use of such tests as criteria for college admission. While it is important to remember that standardized test scores are not the only, or the most important, credential in your college application, they do provide colleges with a means of comparing your abilities to those of other students throughout the country. Some colleges have downplayed the importance of testing and others have completely eliminated the use of standardized tests. For an updated list of test-optional schools, please visit fairtest.org.

We feel that it is important for both students and parents to have a clear understanding of testing requirements and to be as prepared as possible to take these exams. Based on this belief, we recommend that you take both the SAT and the ACT (practice or actual tests) to see which test you prefer. **Both the SAT and the ACT are accepted and valued equally at most colleges and universities.** In addition, it is important to note that colleges and universities do not see PSAT or Pre ACT scores and students can choose which SAT and ACT scores that they send to universities.

PSAT (Fall of Freshmen Year)

The content and format of the PSAT follows the SAT but is adjusted to the difficulty of your grade level. For instance, on the PSAT the reading passages require more straight-forward comprehension, while the SAT will require more inferences. Both PSAT 8/9 and PSAT NMSQT offered now are taken digitally and include sections on reading, writing, and language and math tests, and take about two hours to complete. The junior year PSAT also serves as the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (nationalmerit.org). Just like the paper PSAT, the new digital PSAT total score range is 320–1520, with individual sections scored between 160–760. For further detailed information please refer to collegeboard.org/psat.

SAT (Junior Year and/or early fall of Senior Year)

The SAT includes four sections: reading, writing and language, math with calculator, and math without calculator. The total testing time for the new digital SAT is about 2 hours and as compared to the paper test, which is about 3 hours. The test is scored on a 1600-point scale (800 points per section). Most Christ School students will take the SAT for the first time during the winter or spring of junior year. For further detailed information, please refer to collegeboard.org/sat.

ACT (Junior Year and/or early fall of Senior Year)

The ACT is similar in content and style to the SAT but is made up of tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science. There is an optional essay section, currently required by 27 colleges. Each section is scored on a 1-36 scale and a composite score is the average of the four main sections on the same scale. The total testing time is three hours, three and a half including the essay. For further detailed information, please refer to act.org.

Important Note:

College Board (SAT & AP) and ACT accounts are student owned and follow students school to school if they transfer. While the College Guidance Office will gladly assist students once they are logged into their individual accounts, Christ School cannot create or access student accounts or change important information such as official name, birthdate, or email if those are entered incorrectly when creating an account. Changes can only be made through the testing organization and sometimes can take hours on the phone or weeks to resolve. Please only create these official individual student owned accounts during a school led instruction session or after consulting Tracy Weldon to follow the steps recommended by the school to avoid any issues.

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

The TOEFL is required by most colleges for those students whose native language is not English. Even when students have near perfect scores in English on the ACT and/or SAT, the TOEFL may be required. Thus, students who first learned another language, or who grew up in a different country where English is not the primary spoken or instructional language, should take the TOEFL to demonstrate competency in the English language at the college-certifying level. For more information about TOEFL testing, please refer to ets.org/toefl.

Test Prep Requirement

All students must prepare for college admission standardized tests by completing some form of test prep. Beyond the required PSAT, ACT, and SAT tests that will be administered by Christ School, there is also the opportunity to purchase an ACT and SAT test prep with outside test prep experts in students' sophomore and/or junior years, as well as opportunities to take group timed practice tests.

There are numerous other options to prepare for the SAT and ACT. Options to fulfill this requirement include but are not necessarily limited to: private tutoring; enrollment in a one-time test prep course; enrollment in a formal test prep program, either in-person or online; or self-study using test prep study guides. Christ School does not advocate one test prep tutor or company over another. We recognize that this is a highly personal choice. Check the OnCampus College Guidance Office Community Groups Topics section for some test-prep options.

Although test preparation may be done at any time, students are encouraged to use the summer months whenever possible. Students should consult with their college counselor about which preparation approach may be best for them.

Testing with Extended Time

Some students can qualify to receive extended time by applying through College Board (SAT and AP) and the ACT. This must be completed through the individual testing agencies (not Christ School).

Considerations include but are not limited to:

- Documentation (including both cognitive and achievement assessments) through psychoeducational evaluation indicating he qualifies for extended time
- An evaluation that has been updated within the past 3 years
- All evaluation materials being on file at Christ School
- Your student must have also been receiving accommodations from Christ School based on this evaluation

This application process, reviewed and decided by the testing agencies, can take some time, so you should be proactive and early in determining whether or not extended time testing will be necessary or possible for your student. Please contact Jack Peterson, Director of Learning Resources/Testing Accommodations for more information. Information is also in OnCampus under College Guidance Office Topics.

Connecting with Colleges

College Admissions Representatives

College visits at Christ School are an excellent opportunity for students to engage and get to know college admissions officers, learn more about the college admissions process, and practice their interviewing skills. Meeting with admissions representatives will give students a good sense of specific degree programs for which the

colleges are known and it will allow students to connect with the regional officer who is often responsible for making admissions decisions. Many colleges and universities factor in “demonstrated interest” into a student’s admission decision. College Guidance *strongly* encourages students to join these college visits whenever possible.

- The vast majority of college visits, at Christ School, occur in the fall during lunch blocks. Students should get permission from their teachers, if the visit occurs during a class, to sit in on a college visit at least 24 hours in advance. Meetings last approximately 30-45 minutes.
- Students should plan on attending college rep visits for all schools to which they plan on applying.
- If your student is not able to see a college representative when they visit CS, the College Guidance Office can assist the student in crafting a note or an email to introduce themselves.

University Campus Visits

There is no substitute for an in person visit to colleges. The College Guidance Office encourages school visits and asks students and parents to please utilize school vacations for visits whenever possible. In the event that a student must miss a school day, please keep these reminders in mind:

- Students must complete a Green Leave form (found in Ms. Murphy’s office) at least 3 days in advance with proper signatures if they will be off campus visiting schools.
- You and your student are responsible for arranging all campus visits. Typically, this should include an information session, a tour, and an interview, if available. See college admissions websites for visit information.
- In order to ensure that college visits are productive and useful for students, families should consult with their college guidance counselor on any anticipated trips.

Interviews

The College Guidance Office, with help from Mrs. Mahoney, offers mock interviews. We encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities to prepare ahead of official college interviews.

- Some colleges offer individual in person or Zoom interviews. Some colleges have alumni interviews available in Asheville. Your student should interview whenever possible.
- Information about how best to prepare for campus visits can be found in OnCampus

Frequently Asked Questions

When do I have to do my college applications?

Students should begin working on their applications their junior year. Applications should be submitted at least two weeks in advance of their deadline, and all applications are required by our office to be submitted by early December (before exams).

What do colleges mean when they say they look at admission files ‘holistically’?

For most schools, a “holistic” approach includes non-GPA and non-test score factors when considering an application. These include but are not limited to character evaluations, extracurricular involvements, leadership positions, community service commitments, family situations, and other potential personal components that a school may want to evaluate when considering whether an applicant would be a positive addition to the class that they are attempting to shape.

What does test optional mean?

Test optional schools do not **require** the SAT or ACT for an application to be considered complete and ready for review. Each college, however, has their own definition of test-optional and it is the student's responsibility to check admissions requirements with each school they apply to their senior year.

Test optional does not mean test blind. We advise you to prep and take the SAT or ACT so that you are not locked out of schools or scholarship opportunities that require them. Talk with your counselor about your scores and testing plan to determine if it makes strategic sense for you to send scores to colleges.

When given a choice of majors I may be interested in, should I choose an easier major that might allow me a better chance of admission?

Students should always apply to the program that interests them the most. In other words: be honest! Most schools will offer the opportunity to select more than one program, but students should think intentionally about which program they would like to study, not which program may grant them the highest chance of admission to the school. In general, your admissions chances for specific majors, even for competitive programs, is highest as an incoming freshman.

Which grades will appear on a Christ School transcript, and how do colleges treat them?

Cumulative year-end grades from 9th-11th grades, unweighted GPA, weighted GPA, and first-semester senior year courses are included on the transcript that colleges receive in the fall. Grades from previous high schools are not a part of a student’s Christ School cumulative GPA but will be sent to colleges. When a college or university receives a transcript from Christ School, they will usually recalculate GPA according to their own institution’s standards and based on the course offerings of Christ School. Colleges are looking to see that a student has maximized rigor available to him at Christ School.

I want to work with an independent consultant/agent. How does that process work at Christ School?

We discourage the use of outside consultants/agents. As members of this community, the Christ School college guidance counselors are your best resource for the college application process. If you choose to work with a consultant, please let us know so that our work is not duplicated. It is the student’s responsibility to inform his college counselor when applications are submitted so that supporting documents (transcripts, letters of recommendation) can be sent from Christ School to the college(s).

It seems like there are more than one application type, including Early Action (EA), Early Decision (ED, ED1 and ED2), and Regular. What's the difference between these plans?

Early Action simply means that you will apply earlier and hear back earlier from a school earlier if you submit a completed application before that early deadline. It is not binding. Early Decision is different in that it is binding. A student may only apply to one school ED, and the application requires the approval of the student, parent(s), and their college counselor. Families are strongly encouraged to speak with the college's financial aid office to determine whether matriculation is feasible for the student because an ED application is read as a commitment to enroll and matriculate. A few colleges and universities have an ED2 option. Students may only apply ED2 if they have not applied ED or if they have been denied or deferred from their ED school. For more information about these application plans and which one might be right for you, please talk with your Guidance counselor.

Regular Decision is also not binding and typically has a later application deadline, and, therefore, admissions decision. College Guidance will advise students on which type of application to complete when applying to different schools.

I want to play a varsity sport in college. What are the important steps I should do or know if I want to pursue this?

Students must register with the NCAA Eligibility Center at www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org, ideally in sophomore year. College Guidance will work with our Athletic Dept. and Registrar to communicate with college coaches and admissions reps and will send transcripts to college coaches when requested. Students are responsible for sending test scores and transfer school transcripts directly to the NCAA Eligibility Center.

What additional support services are available?

The Writing Center: Ms. Morrison is well equipped to assist with college essays given her ten plus years of experience assisting the College Guidance Office. She is available in the Media Center for additional support should you be unable to meet with your counselor or simply need another set of eyes on your essays.

When do final transcripts get sent?

Final transcripts are sent only to the one college that a graduating senior will be attending in June. All student accounts must be settled before the College Guidance Office is authorized to send a final transcript.

Acknowledgement of College Guidance Handbook

As a student and member of the Christ School community, I acknowledge that I have received the College Guidance Handbook. The school has the right to modify, amend, or terminate any policies at any time. In the event the school does make changes, you will be notified.

By signing below, I agree it is my responsibility to understand and adhere to all standards and policies as stated in the College Guidance Handbook.

Student:

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Acknowledgement of College Guidance Handbook

As a parent/guardian of the Christ School community, I acknowledge that I have received the College Guidance Handbook. The school has the right to modify, amend, or terminate any policies at any time. In the event the school does make changes, you will be notified.

By signing below, I agree it is my responsibility to partner with Christ School to understand and adhere to all rules and policies as stated in the College Guidance Handbook.

Parent/Guardian:

Print Name _____

Signature _____



Christ School
500 Christ School Road, Arden, NC 28704