You've applied. You've updated colleges on how you're doing, and let them know that you remain interested. You've had alumni interviews with the colleges that offer that opportunity. You've made sure that your applications at each college are complete. Now what? Well, you need to let the process take its course. If you have presented yourself well, and taken the steps we've discussed in recent months, then it's time to be a high school senior and wait for admissions results.

Most colleges send regular decision notifications between the middle and end of March. That is true if you applied regular decision, or were deferred from an early application plan. Exceptions to this rule include those colleges that utilize a Rolling Admissions plan, or applications made under a second round Early Decision plan. In the former case, you would hear anytime, once your application is complete and the college has had one or up to ten to twelve weeks to review your application. An EDII notification usually occurs in mid- to late-February.

College acceptances come in many forms these days, including emails, alerts posted on password-protected college websites, phone calls, and, of course, the old-fashioned "fat envelopes". Some colleges send early notification of an upcoming admissions offer to some of their candidates in the form of "likely letters/emails". One discussion you should have as a family is who gets to open what emails and letters, and under what circumstances. Parents should be aware that each student prefers different levels of privacy and independence here. Some will openly share the moment of truth at the kitchen table, while others prefer opening an email or envelope in the privacy of their own room. Students, make it clear to your parents what you prefer. We have had students at boarding school who have allowed parents to open envelopes for them, sometimes while they were on the phone together. In other cases, students are quite adamant about being able to handle this on their own.

As you await college results, begin to plan out prospective re-visits, or in some cases, first visits to colleges that might admit you. You can continue your research into each college's programs and consider questions you have, preferences among different schools, and which you would likely visit over others. Examine colleges costs and begin to set up a decision process for comparing financial aid and scholarship offers. Make sure you apply for aid if you need it (it's not too late!) and check that current aid applications are complete. If you need to explain any extenuating circumstances regarding your family's ability to pay for college, now is the time to write a letter directly to the financial aid offices of each college to which you applied.

From the above, it should be clear that we strongly advocate visiting colleges that have

admitted you in order to best inform your final decision. That includes a situation where you have been admitted to only one college, or to a college that has long been your "dream school". Now is when you should take the extra time and make a careful, comparative decision. Get on campus, either during one of the college's special revisiting days, or on your own schedule. Thus, you should plan to keep one or more weeks in April free from commitments in order to plan revisits accordingly. Yes, that might mean giving up some or all of your spring vacation, but you will be happy you did when it comes to making a confident and considered decision prior to the May 1 common reply date.

Finally, we'd advise you to enjoy your senior winter and spring. Work hard, since grades do matter, especially if you are put on a waiting list (more to come in a future column on that subject). But spend some time thinking about how you'll make the most out of the remainder of your high school experience. There might be opportunities for you to take on leadership roles, mentor younger students, take on an independent study or special senior project, or try something you've never done. You might go out for a new sport, try out for a role in a theater production, perform in a talent show, or participate in a community service project. Not only will this make your final semester of high school more rewarding, but you'll also find yourself less stressed out about waiting for the conclusion of the college admissions process.