



FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS & CBO STAFF

Counselor Toolkit.

Everything you need to know about Thrive Scholars, our application process, and resources to support your students.



Welcome!

This toolkit is designed for school counselors, CBO staff, and anyone working directly with students who could benefit from Thrive Scholars. Inside, you'll find everything you need to know about Thrive Scholars, how to identify eligible students, understand the recommendation process, and resources to support you and your students in the application process.

If you can't find what you are looking for, reach out to our team directly (contact information in Section 06 — Contact Support).

In community,

Thrive Admissions

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Section 01

Thrive Scholars Overview

Thrive Scholars is a **free**, six-year college and career success program built for exceptional students too often overlooked: high-achieving, first-generation, and limited-income Scholars who have the drive to lead and just need the door held open. We support them from high school, to top colleges, and into meaningful careers.

Three pillars carry that work forward:

College Readiness

Career Development

Economic Mobility

What we provide

College Access Support

College exploration and best fit list creation, application and scholarship guidance, essay support, financial aid navigation with the support of our College Access Managers

— **80% of Scholars graduate with little to no debt**

Academic Enrichment

Two summer academies with 200+ hours in writing and calculus instruction, college app advising and transitioning to college support

— **99% College Graduation Rate**

College Counseling

Dedicated point of contact for all four years of college through our College Success Managers and Career Coaches

— **88% attend a Top College (37% attend Ivy+)**

Career Preparation

Internship placement support, resume/interview prep, personalized career coaching

— **90% of Scholars complete an internship before graduation**

Community

A lifelong network of Scholars and alumni

— **Alumni network 25+ years and counting!**

Section 02

Inside the Program

Our 6-Year Program Overview

12TH GRADE

Year 1

Summer Academy 1
College Access
Career Exploration

COLLEGE

Year 2

Summer Academy 2
College Success
Specialized Career
Exposure

COLLEGE

Years 3–5

Career Preparation,
Development, &
Mentorship

CAREER

Year 6

Thrive Alumni Network
First Destination
Support

Summer Academies

The program provides rigorous academic preparation and enrichment to prepare top students to excel academically in top colleges. It includes classes taught by college level instructors, college admissions guidance, and various activities hosted on college campus settings.

Summer Academy I

For rising high school seniors. Takes place from the end of June–early August for five weeks on a college campus.

Focus: Academic preparation, campus experience, college admissions counseling, career exploration & development.

Summer Academy II

For rising first-year college students. Prepares and supports their academic and social transition to college. Length and location for the upcoming cycle is TBD, but will include both virtual and in-person components.

Focus on SA2: Transitioning to college, career exploration, and day-on -the-job visits with corporate partners.

Summer Academy I Locations

Students living in Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York City commute daily (Monday–Friday) to a local university in their metro area. Past hosts include University of Southern California, Northwestern, University of Chicago, and Mercy University–Manhattan.

Students outside those cities attend a residential academy at a Thrive Partner University Campus. Past hosts include Amherst College (Massachusetts) and Washington University in St. Louis (Missouri).

Costs are covered. For students attending our residential location, all transportation, food, and housing costs will be covered. For students attending our commuter sites, public transportation and lunch costs will be covered.

Final locations for the upcoming cycle are confirmed later in the fall. Updated host campuses will be posted on [our website](#). Encourage students and families to check back rather than assume a past host university will repeat.

Top Colleges

Thrive supports Scholars in applying to colleges that will prepare them for top careers and economic mobility. Top colleges are well-positioned to help Scholars graduate — largely because they're able to meet a Scholar's financial need gaps, removing a major barrier to completion — and to provide meaningful economic opportunity after graduation through strong salary outcomes, access to significant career opportunities, and powerful alumni and professional networks.

Here is our [current top college list](#) for your review.

Although the top colleges are highly recommended, we support Scholars' applications to colleges that best meet their career, social, and economic goals, even if they aren't on this list, so that they can attend the best colleges for their individual needs.

Career Pathways

We have 9 career pathways students can select from when applying to our program. They can select whichever interests them the most, and they have the chance to change it later in the program.

[Business & Management](#)[Consulting](#)[Engineering and Technology](#)[Public Service](#)[Finance](#)[Law](#)[Life Sciences & Healthcare](#)[Exploration](#)[Media, Entertainment & Creative Arts](#)

Throughout the Thrive experience, Scholars discover their strengths, explore industries, build professional skills, and gain real-world experience. Working alongside mentors, employers, and alumni, students graduate with more than a degree. They leave with the confidence, experience, and professional network to launch successful careers.

You can learn more about our career pathways [here](#).

WHY REFER A STUDENT

A 25-year track record.

When you refer a student to Thrive Scholars, you're connecting them to a program with a 25-year track record: 88% of Scholars attend top colleges (37% at Ivy+), and 99% graduate — far above national averages for first-generation and low-income students. Support continues well past admission, too: 90% complete an internship before graduating, and almost 80% land a meaningful job or graduate program right after — leading to an average starting salary of \$74,000, while 80% graduate with little to no debt. For counselors and CBOs, that means knowing your students will have sustained support all the way through graduation and into their careers.

Data note: College attendance figures reflect current Scholars; graduation, internship, and career placement outcomes reflect the 2022–2025 graduating classes.

Section 03

Applying to Thrive

Who is Eligible to Apply?

A current high school junior who is:

Currently enrolled in high school in the US

Minimum **unweighted GPA of 3.6**

Household income not exceeding **\$125,000** annually

Strong Thrive applicants typically:

- Have taken advantage of the most rigorous courses available at their school (e.g., AP and IB) and earn mostly As in their classes
- Are involved in extracurricular leadership, family responsibilities, and/or part-time work
- Demonstrate integrity and motivation to succeed
- Are open to ongoing expert coaching
- Are interested in attending a highly-selective college
- Commit to attending two Summer Academies their junior and senior years
- Come from low-income, limited-resource, and/or first-generation backgrounds

What is expected from admitted students. A six year commitment: To be present at two Summer Academies before college, participate in coaching and mentorship guidance through college graduation, and into their first career.

Application Components

Counselors can [preview the application here](#) to see it without having to create an account.

01 One essay and short answer

02 One response activity about top colleges

03 One letter of recommendation from a teacher

04 One letter of recommendation from a counselor

05 High school transcript (freshmen–sophomore year grades)

06 Financial documents to confirm family adjusted gross income of \$125,000 or less

Key Dates

APPLICATION OPENS Sep 8, 2026 Tuesday	APPLICATION DEADLINE Dec 20, 2026 Sunday at 11:59 PT	RECOMMENDATION LETTER DEADLINE Jan 18, 2027 Monday at 11:59 PT	APPLICATION DECISIONS Mid-March 2027
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Acceptance Timeline

March–May

Accepting Admissions Offers

Students will receive an email confirming their admittance to our program. Students get a week to accept our invitation to join Thrive Scholars via an acceptance agreement form. They must accept their spot via the form.

Failure to submit the acceptance agreement by the deadline will result in them forfeiting their spot to our program, and it will be offered to a student in our waitpool.

Waitpool Offers

Thrive Scholars conducts rolling waitpool offers between March and May as space becomes available in our program.

Admitted Scholar Info Sessions

These take place the week between decision release and the acceptance agreement due date. Students and families can join our virtual Zoom sessions to get a quick recap about the program, next steps, and get any questions answered before they accept their spot. If someone signs up for a session but cannot attend, they will receive a recording of the session. If a student joins from the waitpool, they will receive access to recorded enrollment info sessions and be connected to a Thrive Staff member for next steps.

End of June

Students start their journey with us at Summer Academy I.

Section 04

How You Can Help

1 Scholar Referrals

You can refer students to Thrive utilizing our [referral form](#).

Process: If you refer a student, we will follow up with the student directly to let them know that you think they should look into our program. Depending on their grade and the time of year, we will inform them of the relevant application deadlines and provide details and resources on how to apply. Please note that we do not require referrals. Any eligible student may start an application, even without a referral. Referrals do not guarantee admission.

Referrals are optional and do not guarantee admission; but they do put Thrive Scholars in touch with a student who might not otherwise hear about us.

2 Virtual Sessions

Invite interested students and their families to attend one of our [virtual info sessions](#). They will be able to get any questions they have answered by our team.

Sessions We Conduct: Thrive Overview, Application Overview & Tips, Scholar Voices, Counselor Sessions, and Office Hours.

Access OnDemand session recordings [here](#).

3 Outreach Resources

PDF

[Share our flyer →](#)

Program flyer to share with students and families.

[Click to open](#)

CANVA

[Student application toolkit →](#)

A guide students can use while completing their application.

[Click to open](#)

Section 05

Recommendation Form Guidance

RECOMMENDATION DEADLINE **Monday, January 18, 2027**

Students are required to obtain two recommendations for their application: one from a counselor, another from a core academic subject teacher (English, History/Social Sciences, Math, Science, Foreign Language).

We ask counselors to complete a **short online recommendation form** covering your student's academic performance, course rigor, and personal qualities, with space to add additional comments. Please also upload their **transcript** (an unofficial copy), their **most recent report card**, and your **school profile**.

Here are some tips for writing your recommendations.

PURPOSE

A great reference response helps us see the student behind the application; the qualities, context, and moments that an application may not catch or a student might miss.

Do

- Focus entirely on the student — not on your own credentials, role, or school
- Use concrete specific anecdotes over general praise — elaborate on a moment or story beyond stating a trait
- Highlight the student's impact on their community, classroom, and peers
- Show what makes this student their unique self within the school/organization

Don't

- Rely on generic or AI sounding language ("hardworking", "great student", "team player" with no example attached)
- Worry about length — specificity matters more than word count
- Over-focus on extracurriculars at the expense of academic/intellectual content.
- Provide a resume recap (we'd rather hear you advocate over listing accomplishments)

IF YOU'RE THE COUNSELOR

Your unique value: You can provide context an outside reader can't. You know the school and community environment the student is navigating, and how they've grown within their setting relative to their peers.

WHAT YOU CAN ADDRESS

- 1 **Academic trajectory:** the student's course rigor relative to what your school actually offers. If there's context behind their grades, feel free to share it
- 2 **Personal context:** family situation student has or is navigating, socioeconomic factors, responsibilities (work, caregiving), or barriers that shape their day to day and affect school and/or extracurricular presence or participation
- 3 **Social-emotional qualities:** maturity, empathy, community engagement and involvement
- 4 **Standout factor:** how does this student stand out among their peers at their school? How will you and the school remember them?

IF YOU'RE THE TEACHER

Your unique value: You've observed this student's academic performance and classroom presence firsthand, so your feedback should stay close to what you've personally witnessed.

WHAT YOU CAN ADDRESS

- **Intellectual curiosity and engagement:** classroom participation and growth over time in your course(s)
- **Academic habits:** concrete examples of curiosity, critical thinking, perseverance, goal setting, follow through, executive functioning
- **Contribution to the learning environment:** how the student affects the classroom for others, not just their own performance
- **Context behind grades:** if there's a story behind a grade, an improvement, or struggle, explain it
- **Passion or potential:** any project or subject where you've seen a spark of what this student could become
- **Standout factor:** how will you and their classmates remember them?

Section 06

Contact Support

These are the [representatives](#) for each region.

NAME	REGIONS	EMAIL
Liz Beal	Massachusetts, Boston, Northeast	ebeal@thrivescholars.org
Paloma Figueroa	Los Angeles, North Carolina, Southeast	pfigueroa@thrivescholars.org
Leo Martinez	New York City, Mid-Atlantic	lmartinez@thrivescholars.org
Karla Bonilla-Herrera	Chicago, Detroit, Midwest	kbonillaherrera@thrivescholars.org
Randy Winston	Los Angeles, West	rwinston@thrivescholars.org
Lisa Rooney	Southwest, U.S Territories	lrooney@thrivescholars.org
Pedro Ramirez	National, CBO partnerships	pramirez@thrivescholars.org

If you have any questions, concerns, or technical difficulties regarding the application please fill out our [inquiry form](#). Your question will automatically be directed to the appropriate Recruitment Manager. Our staff work from Monday to Friday during regular business hours.

Section 07

Frequently Asked Questions

Summer Academy FAQ

Can students be exempt from Summer Academy I?

No, Scholars are required to attend all five weeks of Summer Academy I and all four weeks of Summer Academy II.

For Summer Academy I, exemptions to attend other programs are not provided. For Summer Academy II, exceptions can be made for college and leadership development experiences (ex: College Summer Bridge Program, Scholarship trip, Internships...)

Can students work while attending Summer Academy I?

Yes, as long as it does not interfere with their attendance at Summer Academy.

Are travel costs covered by Thrive Scholars?

For students attending our residential location, all transportation, food, and housing costs will be covered. For students attending our commuter sites, public transportation and lunch costs will be covered.

Can students earn college credit for the writing and math classes completed at Summer Academies?

No. Scholars are not able to earn college credit for their coursework completed during the summer programming. However, many top colleges and universities are familiar with Thrive Scholars and know that Thrive Scholar participants are well-prepared for college-level academic rigor.

Timeline FAQ

Can Thrive Scholars provide insight on who will be admitted before decisions are released?

No. Decision information is not shared before the release date.

Do students in the waitpool have to submit any additional paperwork or recommendations?

No. Students do not have to submit anything during the waitpool period. If selected for admission, they will receive an email from Thrive with a link to the acceptance agreement.

Recommendation Letters FAQ

How does Thrive Scholars know who to email?

Students list recommenders by providing their contact information in their application. Once a student submits this, recommenders will be sent a unique link to access the recommendation form.

A student put me down as a recommender but I have not received the form. What should I do?

- Check your junk or spam folder as some school email systems filter or block automated emails.
- Confirm with your student that they spelled your email address correctly when listing you as a recommender.
- Please [submit an inquiry form](#) with your student's full name and high school so that we can resend the recommendation form.

I experienced technical difficulties submitting the form successfully. What should I do?

- Copy the link and try using a different web browser, such as Chrome, Firefox, Edge.
- Try submitting the form via a different device or WiFi network.
- [Submit an inquiry form](#) so we can assist.

Do you let students know if we submitted their recommendation?

Yes. Students see a notification in their application portal when recommendations are received.

Other FAQ

I have student(s) interested in applying to various programs, what advice would you provide to guide them?

Students are encouraged to apply to as many programs as they'd like, and if admitted to multiple, it's ultimately their decision which to pursue based on their goals. That said, we often see students take on more than they can realistically manage. Juggling several intensive programs with overlapping timelines can lead to burnout rather than benefit.

How you can help: Rather than discouraging students from applying broadly, help them think critically about which programs actually align with their goals, and whether the timelines and commitments realistically work together. A student doesn't need to do everything; they need the right combination for their capacity and priorities. If a student commits to Thrive Scholars, our programming should not be displaced by another program's schedule.

Do students need a certain legal status to apply?

No. Students don't need to be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident to apply to Thrive Scholars. Citizenship status may affect eligibility for federal and state financial aid and, later, certain employment opportunities, but students aren't disqualified from the program because of it. Our college access managers and career coaches work directly with Scholars to navigate both of these issues when they arise.

If a student or family raises concerns about this, you can reassure them that Thrive Scholars supports students through these questions.

Questions we didn't answer here?

Let us know using [our inquiry form](#) and a member of our team will assist you.

