alia

SAMPLE ROADMAP



COLLEGE ROADMAP

Ella M.

Greenwich High School, Greenwich, CT · Class of 2027

PREPARED FOR THE M. FAMILY · JUNE 2026

Alia Education

Cover photo: Northwestern University, Joshua Sukoff, CC BY-SA 4.0.

01 — AT A GLANCE

Ella’s roadmap at a glance

The Connector · Greenwich High School, Greenwich, CT · Class of 2027 · Started the summer before senior year · Jun 2026

Ella has already done the work: four years of leadership, a program that serves 60 kids, and real advocacy. What's missing is a package. In five months we'll put numbers on everything, run one short study that turns “nice” into evidence, and aim her at Northwestern, where psychology and media meet.

12th	3.85	1450	Nov 1
Grade when we started	Unweighted GPA	SAT so far	Northwestern Early Decision

WHAT MATTERS MOST

1. No time to build new things. Package what she's done, with numbers.
2. Apply Early Decision to Northwestern: psychology plus Medill’s marketing certificate is her exact path.
3. One 2-week project turns “nice” into evidence.

THE FIRST THREE MOVES

Jun 2026	Count everything: kids served, hours, sessions
Jun 2026	Ask two teachers for recommendations before school ends
Jul 2026	Run the screen-time study

CONTENTS

Meet your counselor	3	Where things stand	4
The high school	5	Storyline & hook	6
Grades & rigor	7	Testing	8
Activities & project	9	Summers	10
Essays	11	College list & strategy	12
Application requirements	13	Financial aid & cost	14
If plans change	15	Timeline, year by year	16

02 — MEET YOUR COUNSELOR

Meet Rishi Narula



FOUNDER, CEO, AND LEAD COUNSELOR

Rishi has spent eight years in college admissions, guiding hundreds of students into the most selective schools in the world, including the world's top 50 universities. He holds a BS in Mathematics from Duke and has built tutoring and college counseling practices from the ground up, keeping pace with an admissions and development landscape that changes every year.

8 years
in college admissions

100s
of students admitted to the world's top 50 universities

Narrative first. Rishi builds one compelling story for each student, then designs a coherent application around it, so coursework, summer programs, internships, the activity list and every essay each prove a different part of the same story. He is a teacher at heart, too: he has tutored everything from 8th-grade executive functioning to master's-level linear algebra and computer science, so students know him first as someone who helps them learn. Rishi lives in Brooklyn with his wife and daughter.

INCLUDED IN YOUR CUSTOM PACKAGE

- **A dedicated counselor.** Rishi leads your plan from kickoff to decision day.
- **Regular meetings.** Scheduled around your student's year, and weekly or as needed during application season.
- **Unlimited communication.** Text and email Rishi between meetings, whenever a question comes up.
- **Essay review by former admissions officers.** From the first brainstorm to the final read. Every word stays the student's own.
- **Submission support.** Every application submitted on or ahead of its deadline, with every required piece in place.
- **A living roadmap.** We revisit and update this plan at every check-in, through the final decision.

03 — WHERE THINGS STAND

Where Ella stands today

An honest read on every part of the application, and what each one needs.

AREA	TODAY	WHAT WE SEE	STATUS
Academics	**A– average**	3.85 unweighted, steady for four years	Strength
Course rigor	**Strong**	6 APs by graduation, including Psych and Stats in 12th	Strength
Testing	**Mid-range**	1450. Slightly below the middle 50% at her top reaches.	One retake
Activities	**Deep, unquantified**	Real leadership, but no numbers on paper yet	Package now
Recommendations	**Strong**	Her AP Psych teacher and art teacher both know her well	Strength
Voice / essays	**Warm**	Warm but generic. Needs one sharp scene per essay.	Sharpen

IS ELLA COMPETITIVE?

Is Ella competitive for Northwestern? Yes, as a reach, and Early Decision is where her case is strongest. Her leadership file is deeper than most applicants', and ED lets readers weigh it fully against a slightly lower test score. The risk isn't her record. It's that she has five months and hasn't started writing.

STRENGTHS TO LEAD WITH

- **Built something real.** Directs Saturday Studio, a student-run art program serving about 60 kids at a local under-resourced elementary school.
- **A policy voice.** Sits on a teen advisory board for an online-safety nonprofit. Interned in the Greenwich First Selectman's office.
- **Everyone's favorite captain.** Varsity soccer captain. Coaches younger players. Works weekends at a bakery.

GAPS WE'LL CLOSE

- **"Nice" isn't a spike.** Warmth needs outcomes attached, or it reads as filler.
- **Major mismatch.** Psychology plus marketing confuses readers unless it's framed well.
- **Test-score edge.** Her 1450 is below the median at a few reaches.

04 — THE HIGH SCHOOL

The high school, and why it matters

Every application is read in the context of its school. Readers compare a student to their classmates, not to the whole country.

Greenwich High School · Greenwich, CT · Public

GRADE SIZE	GRADING	RIGOR OFFERED
~645 seniors	Weighted GPA (5.0 for AP and Honors), no rank	32 APs, plus UConn credit courses

COUNSELING	RECOGNITION	COURSE OPTIONS
Five houses, three counselors each	12 National Merit Semifinalists and 40 Commended in the Class of 2025	Honors Science Research and Quinnipiac-credit Broadcast Journalism

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ELLA

1. Each house counselor writes for about 40 seniors. Ella should meet hers before June, so the letter has real specifics before the fall rush.
2. Recommendation requests have to go out before school ends in June, or teachers' summers become our problem.
3. GHS offers 32 APs. Six, including AP Psychology and AP Statistics, reads as strong rigor here.
4. Many classmates will apply to the same selective schools. Her file must make the psychology-and-media fit unmistakable.

HOW WE READ THE SCHOOL

School profile. We read the official profile that goes to every college, so we know exactly how rigor and grades are described.

Teacher asks. We time and frame each recommendation request, and give each teacher the evidence to cite.

05 — STORYLINE

Storyline & hook

The #1 factor in application quality. Every piece of the file should tell the same story from a different angle.

THE HOOK

She studies why people do what they do, and makes them feel seen.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH, IN THREE SENTENCES

1. Ella directs Saturday Studio, a student-run art program that serves about 60 elementary kids every week.
2. She sits on a teen advisory board for an online-safety nonprofit, and she's starting to ask how screens shape behavior.
3. She wants psychology with a media lens. Northwestern's combination is built for exactly that.

01
The Teacher
Saturday Studio. Sixty kids, every week.

02
The Advocate
Online-safety advisory board and the First Selectman's office.

03
The Captain
Soccer. The person who makes the team feel like a team.

HOW EACH PART OF THE APPLICATION TELLS IT

Activity list	Saturday Studio first, with numbers. The study second. The advisory board third.
Personal statement	"The spare charger": being prepared versus really listening
Supplements	Why Northwestern: the psychology department and Medill's IMC certificate, by name
Recommenders	AP Psych teacher (curiosity) and art teacher (leadership)
Summer	Screen-time study with 20 families. Findings go to the PTA.

WHAT WE'RE NOT SAYING

× "I'm a people person."

× "I want to go into marketing." as the pitch

× A thank-you note to her teammates

HOW WE FRAME THE MAJOR

Psychology, with a focus on media and behavior. Marketing is where it might lead, not the major.

06 — GRADES & RIGOR

Grades, rigor & academic profile

Readers check two things on a transcript: the grades, and whether the student took the hardest courses available to them.

COURSE PLAN

SUBJECT	12TH
Math	AP Statistics
Science	AP Environmental Science
English	AP Literature
Social science	AP Psychology
Language	Spanish V
Art	AP Drawing

GPA PATH (UNWEIGHTED)

9th	10th	11th	12th (fall)
3.82	3.85	3.88	3.9 target

PLAN OF ATTACK

Senior fall load	Six courses plus applications. Front-load essays in July so October stays manageable.
AP Stats	Her hardest class. Weekly problem sets with a tutor through midterms.
Mid-year report	Northwestern sees her midyear grades. Keep A's through January.

We set per-class goals each semester and review report cards together. When a class slips, there's a plan within a week, not a conversation in June.

07 — TESTING

Standardized testing

SAT or ACT, when to test, what to aim for, and when to stop.

The choice: SAT. She's already at 1450, and switching tests five months out isn't worth it.

SAT #1, Mar 11th	SAT #2, Jun 11th	SAT #3, Oct 12th
1420	**1450 superscore**	**Target 1480+**

THE PLAN

- → Eight weeks of math-focused prep over the summer: 3 hours a week
- → October is the last sitting that counts for ED
- → Northwestern is test-optional: submit at 1480+, otherwise apply without scores
- → Cornell requires a score. Submit there, and at UNC and Michigan, where 1450 is in range

TESTING POLICIES ON THE LIST (2026–27 CYCLE)

SCHOOL	TESTING POLICY	SCHOOL	TESTING POLICY
Northwestern	Optional	**Michigan**	Optional
Duke	Optional	**UNC**	Optional
Cornell	Required	**Boston College**	Optional
USC	Optional		

Bottom line: Only Cornell requires a score. Everywhere else it’s a choice, and we decide school by school in October.

08 — ACTIVITIES

Activities & signature project

Ranked in the order they'll appear on the application. The first three lines carry the story.

ACTIVITY	TIME	WHAT IT SHOWS
Director, Saturday Studio art program	5 hrs/wk · 36 wks	A 6-person student board. ~60 kids weekly. Four years.
Screen-time and mood study (summer project)	12 hrs/wk · 2 wks	20 families. Findings presented to the PTA.
Teen advisory board, online-safety nonprofit	2 hrs/wk · 40 wks	One of a small national group. Helped review a teen-safety guide.
Intern, First Selectman's office	15 hrs/wk · 8 wks	Constituent research and youth-policy memos
Captain, varsity soccer	10 hrs/wk · 14 wks	Four years on varsity. Captain as a senior.
DECA: regional finalist, marketing	2 hrs/wk · 20 wks	Marketing event
Bakery job, weekends	10 hrs/wk · 40 wks	Opens on Saturdays at 5 a.m.

SIGNATURE PROJECT · 2 WEEKS

Screen-time, measured

A 2-week study with her art-program families

Days 1–3	Design a simple screen-time and mood log with her AP Psych teacher as adviser.
Days 4–11	Twenty families log daily. She runs one "phones-down art night."
Days 12–14	Write up her findings and present them to the school's PTA.

Real-world proof: The PTA adds a phones-down night to the school calendar. Her research changes a real policy, even a small one.

09 — SUMMERS

Summer strategy

Summers are where the story gets proven. We plan each one a year ahead and edit every program application.

THIS SUMMER (ONLY ONE LEFT)

Screen-time study, Saturday Studio's summer camp, bakery job

Everything here becomes evidence by August 1

Our rule: No new commitments. This summer is for finishing, measuring and writing.

RECOGNITION TARGET	PLAN
PTA adoption	Concrete proof of impact
DECA	Regional placement, listed once
Athletic honors	All-conference, listed once

December–January. Research programs, labs and jobs together.

February–March. Applications and essays go out, edited by our team.

May. Lock the plan, plus a backup if a program says no.

10 — ESSAYS

Essays

The personal statement, the stories we'll draw on, and how the supplements divide the work.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

“The spare charger”

OPEN
The spare phone charger she's carried since 8th grade, just in case.

TURN
Teaching art to eight-year-olds, she learns that being prepared isn't the same as listening.

CRISIS
A student who won't draw, and nothing in her bag can fix that.

LAND
She wants to study why people do what they do, so she can show up the right way.

STORY BANK

- Phones-down art night
- The 5 a.m. bakery crew
- Speaking on teen online safety at Town Meeting
- The soccer captain's hardest conversation
- The student who finally drew something

SUPPLEMENT THEMES

Northwestern · Why us	The psychology department and Medill's IMC certificate, by name
Duke · Community	Phones-down art night
Michigan · Community	The bakery's 5 a.m. crew

Avoid: Listing every person she's helped. One child, one scene.

Our process: brainstorm with the student survey, outline, three drafts, then a read by former admissions officers. Every word is the student's own.

11 — COLLEGE LIST

College list & application strategy

THE EARLY-ROUND CALL · OUR BEST FIT TODAY

Northwestern ED: Psychology, plus Medill's IMC certificate.

1. Psychology plus Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications certificate is exactly her path.
2. She visited twice and loves the breadth the quarter system gives her.
3. Early Decision gives the strength of her leadership file the most weight.

Reach Top choice + peers

Northwestern
Psychology plus Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications certificate

Duke
Psychology plus the Journalism & Media minor

Cornell
Psychology in Arts and Sciences, plus a strong communication department

USC
Psychology with access to its communication school

Target A step below

Michigan
A top psychology department and a big-school spirit

UNC
Psychology, plus a renowned media school

Boston College
Psychology with a service ethic

Safety Chosen with you

A thoughtful safety list depends on final grades, budget, distance and must-haves. We build it with the family once those are clear.

Demonstrated interest: She's already visited Northwestern twice. Attend virtual sessions for Duke and Cornell, and log every touchpoint.

This can change, and should. The early choice is our best fit with what we know today. We revisit it at every check-in as grades, scores, visits and interests evolve. Nothing locks until the student is sure.

12 — REQUIREMENTS

Application requirements

Every school on Ella's reach and target list: the round, the deadline, and the writing it takes.

SCHOOL	PLAN · DEADLINE	TESTING	ADMIT RATE	ESSAYS	WHAT'S ASKED
Northwestern	ED · Nov 1	Optional	7.0%	4	1 essay (300) + short answers
Duke	RD · Jan 4	Optional	~5%	2	Why Duke + community essay (250 each)
Cornell	RD · Jan 2	Required	8.4%	2	University essay + college-specific essay
USC	EA · Nov 1	Optional	10.4%	8	1 essay (250) + 7 short answers
Michigan	EA · Nov 1	Optional	16.4%	2	Community essay + why-major essay
UNC	EA · Oct 15	Optional	~8%†	2	2 short essays (250)
Boston College	RD · Jan 2	Optional	12.6%	1	One 400-word essay from 5 prompts

22
pieces of writing: 1 personal statement plus 21 supplements

7
applications, each with its own portal, checklist and deadline

3+
recommendations per school: counselor and two teachers, plus mid-year reports

How we keep it manageable: one strong story serves several prompts. Early applications finish first, regular supplements go in themed batches, and a former admissions officer reads every piece.

Source: Alia college database, 2026–27 cycle; admit rates are the latest published (Class of 2029). †Out-of-state rate. Requirements are re-checked each August. Safety schools add to these totals.

13 — FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid & cost

How cost factors into the list, which forms are due when, and how the early round affects aid.

What you told us	Need-based aid may matter. You want the true cost in hand before Early Decision.
Before ED	Run Northwestern's Net Price Calculator in August. ED is binding, so the number has to work.
Forms	The CSS Profile is due with ED materials in mid-November. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens.
Merit	UNC and Michigan merit is limited for out-of-state students. Boston College gives need-based aid only.
If the aid doesn't work	ED allows release if the aid offer is insufficient. We plan for that conversation, just in case.

JUNIOR SPRING
Run the Net Price Calculator for every school on the list

SENIOR FALL
File the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Early-round schools set their own aid deadlines.

SENIOR SPRING
Compare aid offers side by side, and appeal where it makes sense

Need-based vs. merit. Need-based aid depends on family finances and is calculated from the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Merit aid rewards the student's record and is often automatic. Most of the most selective schools offer need-based aid only, so merit opportunities usually sit in the Target column.

We're not financial advisors. We coordinate timing and strategy with the family and, where helpful, the family's financial advisor.

14 — IF PLANS CHANGE

If plans change

Deferrals, waitlists and surprises happen to strong applicants every year. The difference is having the next move ready.

If Northwestern defers	Send a January update with her midyear grades and the PTA outcome.
If ED doesn't happen	Early Action results from Michigan and UNC are already in hand, and the Cornell, Duke and BC regular-decision essays are drafted.
If October testing stalls	Go test-optional at Northwestern. Her leadership file carries it.
This is a late start	Five months is enough when the work already exists. The job is packaging, not building.

LATE START & RECOVERY

Starting later isn't a disadvantage we explain away. It's a constraint we plan around: triage what matters most, package what already exists, and protect every remaining deadline.

Deferred

A short update letter in January with real news. Mid-year grades do the heavy lifting.

Waitlisted

One letter of continued interest. A commitment line only for a true first choice.

Denied

The next round is already drafted. We move the same day.

Support runs through the final decision, including waitlist strategy and comparing offers.

15 — TIMELINE

Senior year

Summer 2026 – June 2027

Meeting weekly or as needed in application season

Jun 2026	**Kickoff. Inventory of everything she's done.**
Jun 2026	**Recommendation requests out.**
Jul 2026	**Screen-time study.**
Aug 2026	**Personal statement drafts 1–3.**
Aug 1, 2026	**Common App opens.**
Sep 2026	**Northwestern supplements.**
Oct 2026	**SAT.**
Oct 2026	**Early Action applications in.**
Nov 1, 2026	**Northwestern ED submitted.**
Dec 2026	Early decisions arrive. Regular supplements done in a batch.
Jun 1, 2027	Final waitlist decisions