



A2 Achieve Early Application Strategy Guide for Gann and His Parents

Early application decisions should **not** begin with, “Where might applying early help?”

They should begin with:

Where would Gann genuinely choose to attend, what can the family comfortably afford, and what other opportunities would he give up by applying there early?

Gann has strong academic numbers, including a reported 3.9 unweighted GPA, 4.3 weighted GPA, and 34 ACT. However, every college on his original list should still be treated as a reach, and his financial parameters, preferred campus environment, tolerance for academic pressure, and final career direction remain unresolved.

Early Decision or restrictive early action should not be used to solve an unbalanced college list. Gann still needs match, likely, and confirmed financial-fit schools regardless of which early strategy he selects.

1. Understand the Commitment

Early Decision: Binding

The following schools on Gann’s list offer binding Early Decision:

- Columbia
- Johns Hopkins
- Boston University
- Boston College
- Brown
- Colgate

If Gann is admitted through ED I or ED II, he is expected to enroll and withdraw his other applications. Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Boston University, Boston College, Brown, and Colgate all describe their ED programs as binding.

ED should mean:

Gann would choose this school over every other school on his list, even if he were later admitted everywhere else.

It should not mean:

- This is the most prestigious school he might get into.
- This school appears to admit more students through ED.
- He likes the school but has not researched the cost.
- He hopes ED will compensate for an unfinished application.
- The family plans to compare several scholarship offers later.

Harvard Restrictive Early Action: Nonbinding but Restrictive

Harvard REA does not require Gann to attend if admitted. However, he may not simultaneously apply through another private college's EA or ED program. He may apply through nonbinding early programs at public universities and may submit Regular Decision applications elsewhere. After Harvard releases its early decision, he may apply through another school's ED II program.

Yale Single-Choice Early Action: Nonbinding but Restrictive

Yale SCEA is also nonbinding, but Gann generally may not apply through another college's EA or ED program at the same time. Yale permits limited exceptions, including nonbinding public-university early programs, rolling admission, certain international applications, and later ED II programs that notify after January 1. Yale also states that it does not give applicants an admissions advantage based on the application round they select.

Harvard and Yale do not require enrollment, but each uses up Gann's primary private early opportunity.

2. Use the Five-Question Test

Before choosing any ED, REA, or SCEA option, Gann and his family should answer these five questions separately.

Question 1: Is this honestly Gann's first choice?

Would he choose this school over every other college on the list?

Would he still choose it if another school offered:

- A stronger scholarship?
- An honors-college opportunity?
- Better access to undergraduate research?
- A less stressful environment?
- A lower total cost?
- A more flexible curriculum?

If the answer changes depending on another offer, the school is probably not ready for ED.

Question 2: Is the expected cost acceptable?

The family should run the official net price calculator before considering ED.

They should know:

- The estimated annual family contribution
- Whether aid is likely to be need-based or merit-based
- How much the family can contribute without relying on unrealistic borrowing
- Whether medical school or graduate school costs should affect the undergraduate budget
- Whether the family needs to compare several offers

Gann's current assessment does not include a confirmed budget, aid expectation, merit requirement, or maximum acceptable cost. That financial conversation must occur before an ED decision is made.

Question 3: Does Gann understand the actual college?

He should be able to explain:

- Why the curriculum fits how he learns
- What he would study

- What he would do outside class
- What kind of campus and community he would enter
- What he likes beyond the name and location
- What concerns him
- Why he would choose that school over the others

A college should not receive an ED application simply because it is famous or connected to medicine.

Question 4: Is the application ready?

An early application should represent Gann at his best.

Before submitting, he should have:

- A verified transcript and course-rigor review
- A final activities and honors list
- Strong recommendations
- A polished personal statement
- School-specific supplemental essays
- A clear explanation of his intellectual interests
- Better evidence supporting his interest in medicine, psychology, health, or related fields

Submitting an incomplete or underdeveloped application early is not strategic.

Question 5: Is the family comfortable giving up the alternatives?

For ED, the family gives up the opportunity to compare acceptances and financial offers.

For Harvard REA or Yale SCEA, Gann gives up the opportunity to use ED I or private EA elsewhere.

That opportunity cost must be worth it.

3. Weighted Early-Application Scorecard

Gann and his family should score each possible early school separately.

Use a score of 1–5 for every category:

- 1 — Serious concern or mostly unknown**
- 2 — More concerns than strengths**
- 3 — Mixed or still being researched**
- 4 — Strong, with only minor questions**
- 5 — Clear, confident, and fully supported**

First-Choice Certainty — 25 Points

Questions to consider:

- Would Gann attend over every other option?
- Is the choice based on fit rather than prestige?
- Has the preference remained consistent after research?

Multiply the 1–5 rating by 5.

Financial Certainty — 20 Points

Questions to consider:

- Has the family completed the net price calculator?
- Is the estimated cost manageable?
- Can the family commit without comparing other offers?
- Is the plan realistic without excessive debt?

Multiply the rating by 4.

Academic and Career Fit — 20 Points

Questions to consider:

- Does the curriculum fit Gann’s interests in science, psychology, systems, medicine, and broad learning?
- Can he explore more than one possible career direction?
- Are research and health-related opportunities accessible to undergraduates?
- Does the academic environment fit his preferred level of pressure?

Multiply the rating by 4.

Personal and Campus Fit — 15 Points

Questions to consider:

- Does he like the campus setting?
- Would he feel comfortable in the community?
- Does the size fit?
- Does the religious, cultural, residential, or urban environment fit?
- Can he continue music, running, creative interests, and community involvement?

Multiply the rating by 3.

Application Readiness — 10 Points

Questions to consider:

- Are the essays ready?
- Are recommendations strong?
- Is his academic record fully verified?
- Can he clearly explain why this school fits?

- Is his application stronger now than it may be after first-semester senior grades or additional experiences?

Multiply the rating by 2.

Strategic Value — 10 Points

Questions to consider:

- Is using the early option worth giving up other early plans?
- Would another early application offer greater value?
- Does this plan preserve public EA, scholarship, and honors opportunities?
- Would waiting improve the application?

Multiply the rating by 2.

Score Interpretation

85–100: Strong early candidate

The school may be appropriate for ED, REA, or SCEA, provided there are no unresolved financial concerns.

70–84: Possible, but not ready

The family should identify and resolve the unanswered questions before making a commitment.

55–69: Prefer Regular Decision

The school may remain on the list, but the current evidence does not justify using Gann's primary early opportunity.

Below 55: Do not apply early

The school requires substantially more research or may not belong on the final list.

A high total score does not turn a reach into a match. It only indicates that the school may be worth using as Gann's early choice.

4. Preliminary School-by-School Risk Review

These are starting assessments, not final recommendations. Gann's answers, campus research, cost estimates, and family priorities should determine the final decision.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Plan: Binding ED

Preliminary fit potential: Strong

Primary risk: Financial commitment and certainty that Gann wants Brown itself, not simply an Ivy or a pathway connected to medicine. Brown's Open Curriculum gives students significant freedom to build an individualized course of study, which may fit Gann's interest in science, psychology, systems, ethics, art, and broad learning.

Brown should be considered for ED only if:

- Gann prefers Brown over every other school.
- He can explain how he would use curricular freedom purposefully.
- The family is comfortable with the calculated cost.
- He would attend Brown even if his exact career direction changes.

Special PLME warning: If Gann applies to Brown's Program in Liberal Medical Education, he must decide whether he would still attend Brown if admitted to Brown but not PLME. Brown specifically advises students who would not want that outcome to apply Regular Decision rather than bind themselves through ED.

Preliminary strategy: Potential ED candidate, but only after a complete cost and curriculum review.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Plan: Binding ED

Preliminary fit potential: Strong location and opportunity fit

Primary risk: Choosing New York or prestige without confirming academic-structure fit

Columbia College's Core Curriculum requires a shared sequence of courses across literature, philosophy, writing, science, art, music, and global study.

Columbia should be considered for ED only if:

- Gann wants Columbia's structured Core, not merely New York City.
- He prefers a city-integrated experience.
- He has specific academic, research, and community reasons for applying.
- The family accepts the expected cost.
- He would choose Columbia over Brown, Yale, Harvard, Hopkins, and every other option.

Preliminary strategy: Research more before considering ED.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Plan: Binding ED I or ED II

Preliminary fit potential: Strong science and health alignment

Primary risk: Committing to an intense health and research environment before Gann has fully tested his interest in medicine. Gann's current assessment identifies medicine as a direction rather than a fully developed career narrative. He still needs firsthand exposure and a more specific explanation of why medicine fits him.

Hopkins should be considered for ED only if:

- He is drawn to the university beyond its medical reputation.
- He understands the academic culture and workload.
- He can identify interests outside a generic pre-med path.
- He would remain happy there if he later chose neuroscience, psychology, public health, research, or another field.

- The cost works for the family.

Preliminary strategy: More appropriate as a possible ED II decision after additional career and campus research than as an automatic ED I choice.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Plan: Binding ED I or ED II

Preliminary fit potential: Moderate to strong

Primary risk: High-cost commitment without comparing other offers

BU should be considered for ED only if:

- Gann strongly prefers a large, city-integrated university.
- He can identify specific academic and research opportunities.
- He prefers BU to the other Boston-area and Northeast options.
- The family can accept the price without comparing merit or aid offers.
- He would choose BU over a lower-cost honors or scholarship opportunity.

Preliminary strategy: Possible ED II option, but not until financial and campus-fit questions are resolved.

BOSTON COLLEGE

Plan: Binding ED I or ED II

Preliminary fit potential: Uncertain

Primary risk: Religious, curricular, and cultural fit. Boston College's Core Curriculum includes 15 requirements and is grounded in its Jesuit and Catholic educational mission.

Boston College should be considered for ED only if:

- Gann understands and values the Jesuit educational approach.
- He is comfortable with the theology, philosophy, and Core requirements.
- He prefers its campus-centered environment to a more city-integrated university.
- The family is comfortable with the expected cost.
- His interest extends beyond being near Boston.

Preliminary strategy: Do not use ED until the religious, curricular, and campus questions are fully answered.

COLGATE UNIVERSITY

Plan: Binding ED I or ED II

Preliminary fit potential: Uncertain

Primary risk: Small, residential setting may conflict with Gann's stated interest in urban access and a wider city environment. Colgate describes itself as a small, residential university, and students generally live on campus throughout their undergraduate experience.

Colgate should be considered for ED only if:

- Gann visits or studies the setting closely and genuinely likes it.
- He prefers close faculty relationships and a residential community.
- He would be happy without a major city serving as the center of daily life.
- He has strong academic reasons for choosing Colgate.
- The family accepts the expected cost.

Preliminary strategy: Regular Decision unless a visit or deeper research changes his current preference.

YALE UNIVERSITY

Plan: Nonbinding SCEA

Preliminary fit potential: Strong but still underdeveloped

Primary risk: Using the only private early opportunity without a proven advantage or specific Yale priority
Yale states that it does not advantage students based on whether they apply SCEA or Regular Decision.

Yale SCEA makes sense only if:

- Yale is Gann's clear first early priority.
- He does not want to use ED I at Brown, Columbia, Hopkins, BU, Boston College, or Colgate.
- His application is fully ready by November 1.
- He has specific Yale academic and community reasons.
- He understands that SCEA does not make Yale a likely admission.

Preliminary strategy: Use SCEA only if Yale becomes his clear top choice after research—not because it feels safer than binding ED.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Plan: Nonbinding REA

Preliminary fit potential: Strong opportunity, but personal fit argument remains unclear

Primary risk: Giving up private ED I and EA options for an extraordinarily unpredictable result

Harvard REA makes sense only if:

- Harvard is Gann's highest early priority.
- He is comfortable giving up ED I elsewhere.
- He can explain why Harvard fits beyond reputation, research, or access to medicine.
- His application is fully ready.
- The family understands that nonbinding does not mean strategically cost-free.

After Harvard releases its REA decision, including a deferral, Gann may consider an ED II application elsewhere.

Preliminary strategy: Use REA only if Harvard clearly outranks every available ED I strategy.

5. The Three Most Realistic Strategy Paths**Strategy A: One True First Choice**

Use this path when Gann has a school he would choose over every other option and the family has confirmed affordability.

The plan:

- Apply ED I to the clear first-choice school.
- Apply to allowed public universities through nonbinding EA or rolling plans.
- Complete the remaining Regular Decision applications while waiting.
- Withdraw all other applications if admitted ED.

This is the correct strategy only when both fit and cost are settled.

Strategy B: Harvard or Yale Is the Clear Early Priority

Use this path when Gann prefers Harvard or Yale but does not want to make a binding commitment.

The plan:

- Choose either Harvard REA or Yale SCEA, not both.
- Apply to permitted public universities through nonbinding early plans.
- Prepare all private Regular Decision applications.
- After the early decision is released, evaluate whether an ED II application makes sense.

This strategy sacrifices the opportunity to use ED I elsewhere.

Strategy C: No Clear First Choice or Cost Must Be Compared

This may be the strongest strategy if the family has unresolved financial questions or Gann remains uncertain about fit.

The plan:

- Skip binding ED.
- Use unrestricted public EA, scholarship, honors, and rolling-admission opportunities.
- Submit strong Regular Decision applications to the selective private colleges.
- Compare admission, financial aid, scholarships, honors opportunities, and campus fit in the spring.

Skipping ED is not a missed opportunity when the student is not ready to make the commitment.

6. A2 Achieve Preliminary Recommendation

Gann should not select an ED, REA, or SCEA school until he and his family have completed three steps:

1. **Establish the family's annual budget and run the official net price calculator for every serious early option.**
2. **Rank the eight schools based on actual fit (not reputation), including curriculum, location, campus culture, academic pressure, flexibility, and cost.**
3. **Answer one final question:**

If Gann received an acceptance from every school on the list at the same time, which one would he choose?

If there is one immediate and financially realistic answer, that school may deserve ED consideration.

If the answer is Harvard or Yale but Gann is not ready to bind himself, REA or SCEA may be appropriate.

If there is hesitation, debate, or a need to compare costs, the strongest strategy is to keep the options open.