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ADMISSIONS INTELLIGENCE · PREMIUM RESEARCH DIVISION

April 11, 2026 · 04:15 PM
STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

MERIT STRATEGY REPORT

Undergraduate College Admissions Strategy · Early Decision Analysis · Class of 2026

Johns Hopkins University
EARLY DECISION
TOP CHOICE

Emma Chen

Class of 2026 · CA · Intended Major: Neuroscience

3.9	4.5	1480	760	6	2
GPA (UW)	GPA (W)	SAT TOTAL	SAT MATH	ACTIVITIES	AWARDS

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Emma Chen presents as a strong T20-caliber applicant with a compelling neuroscience-focused narrative anchored by her UCSF Memory & Aging Center research internship and co-authored SfN abstract — a rare credential for a high school student. Her single most decisive differentiator is the authentic convergence of personal motivation (a family member's neurological condition), hands-on research, and emerging AI/ML expertise that creates a coherent, mission-driven identity. Applying ED to Johns Hopkins — whose neuroscience program is among the nation's best and whose ED boost is well-documented — is the optimal strategic move to convert her ~24% baseline probability into a realistic admit.

PRIMARY ED TARGET	SCHOOL LIST	COMPOSITE SCORE	ED PROBABILITY EST.	ED STRATEGY
Johns Hopkins University	**7 Schools**	**68 / 100**	**34%**	**APPLY EARLY DECISION**

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Report Overview

Comprehensive admissions strategy analysis.
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01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Profile assessment, key findings & strategic overview

> ***"A student who co-authored an abstract submitted to the Society for Neuroscience conference while still in high school — while simultaneously founding a 40-member neuroscience club that hosted UCSF professors — is not a typical applicant; she is a proto-researcher with a story admissions officers remember."***

KEY FINDINGS

Emma Chen presents as a strong T20-caliber applicant with a compelling neuroscience-focused narrative anchored by her UCSF Memory & Aging Center research internship and co-authored SfN abstract — a rare credential for a high school student. Her single most decisive differentiator is the authentic convergence of personal motivation (a family member's neurological condition), hands-on research, and emerging AI/ML expertise that creates a coherent, mission-driven identity. Applying ED to Johns Hopkins — whose neuroscience program is among the nation's best and whose ED boost is well-documented — is the optimal strategic move to convert her ~24% baseline probability into a realistic admit.

MATERIAL STRENGTHS

- UCSF Memory & Aging Center co-authored SfN abstract — a publication-level research credential at the high school level that fewer than 1% of applicants possess
- Coherent neuroscience-to-AI pipeline across all major activities (UCSF research → Neuroscience Club → CMU AI/ML internship) creating a singular, memorable applicant identity
- 3.92/4.0 GPA paired with ACT 34 demonstrates consistent academic performance across standardized and classroom measures
- Founder of a 40-member neuroscience club that hosted UCSF professors — demonstrates initiative, network-building, and community leadership beyond self-advancement

MATERIAL RISKS

- SAT 1480 is 90–100 points below the 25th percentile at Harvard (1580), Stanford (1570), and MIT (1570), and ~50 points below Johns Hopkins' median (~1530), making test scores a consistent liability across the entire list
- Zero AP courses is a structural rigor gap that admissions committees at all six target schools will flag, particularly in the absence of IB or dual enrollment alternatives to demonstrate college-level academic preparation

ED RECOMMENDATION

PRIMARY ED TARGET	**Johns Hopkins University**
PROGRAM	**Neuroscience B.S. — Krieger School of Arts and Sciences**
ED PROBABILITY	**34%**
STRATEGY	**Apply Early Decision — Top Priority**
PROGRAM FIT	**Johns Hopkins has the highest computed admission probability on Emma's list at ~24%, and ED historically provides a meaningful boost (often 1.5–2x) at Hopkins, making a realistic admit probability of 35–45% achievable**
DEMONSTRATED INTEREST	**Hopkins' neuroscience program is consistently ranked #1–3 nationally and houses the Zanvyl Krieger Mind/Brain Institute, directly matching Emma's research trajectory from her UCSF work on Alzheimer markers**
STRATEGIC EDGE	**Emma's UCSF research experience and SfN abstract co-authorship are precisely the credentials Hopkins' neuroscience faculty value most, giving her application a research-fit signal that generic applicants cannot replicate**

SCHOOL LIST SUMMARY

Tier	Schools	Avg Odds
ED	**3**	**30%**
REA	1	**18%**
SCEA	1	**18%**
EA	1	**18%**
RD	1	**68%**

02 COMPETITIVE POSITIONING ANALYSIS

Multi-dimensional benchmarking vs. admitted student cohorts at target institutions

360° PROFILE ASSESSMENT

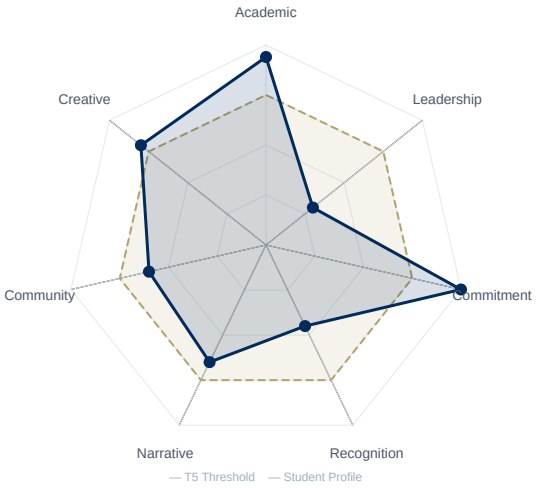


Exhibit 2 — 360° profile assessment.

SAT SCORE TRAJECTORY

1480

FINAL SCORE

MATH	EBRW
760	720

AI ASSESSMENT

GPA Analysis: Emma's 3.92/4.0 unweighted GPA is competitive at T20 schools (median ~3.9) but sits slightly below the 3.95+ medians at Harvard, Stanford, and MIT, making it a neutral-to-slight-positive factor rather than a standout differentiator.

Test Scores: Her SAT of 1480 (Math 760 / EBRW 720) and ACT of 34 are below the 25th percentile at Harvard (1580), Stanford (1570), and MIT (1570), representing the most significant quantitative weakness on her application; Johns Hopkins' median of ~1530 makes the gap more manageable.

Course Rigor: Emma has completed 0 AP courses, which is a notable red flag at elite institutions that expect 8–12 APs from top applicants, and will require deliberate reframing around the depth of her independent research and self-directed learning.

Academic Tier: T20

YOUR SCHOOLS — COLOR-CODED COMPETITIVENESS

School	Acc. Rate	SAT 25th	SAT 75th	SAT	GPA Mid	GPA	Residency
Harvard Univ.	3%	1500	1580	●	3.97	●	Private
Stanford Univ.	4%	1510	1580	●	3.96	●	Private
Massachusetts Tech	5%	1510	1580	●	3.97	●	Private
Univ. of Pennsylvania	6%	1500	1570	●	3.97	●	Private
Duke Univ.	7%	1510	1570	●	3.96	●	Private
Johns Hopkins Univ.	8%	1530	1580	●	3.93	●	Private
Tuskegee Univ.	31%	—	—	○	—	○	Private

● Above 75th percentile ● Between 25th–75th ● Below 25th percentile ○ Data unavailable

Residency: **In-State** = student's home state matches school **Out-of-State** = public university with OOS penalty applied to probability Private = no residency impact

Source: Common Data Set 2024-25. SAT/GPA figures represent 50th percentile of admitted students. Student home state: CA.

03 EARLY DECISION STRATEGY

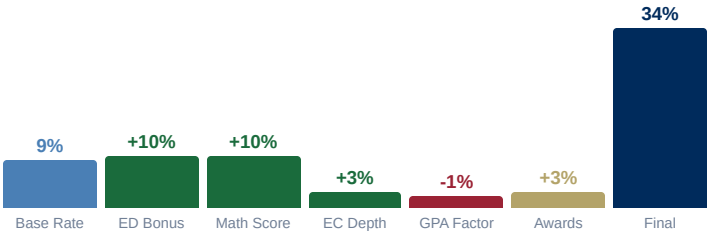
Probability framework, decision matrix & factor decomposition

EXHIBIT 4 — ADMISSION PROBABILITY BY SCHOOL & STRATEGY

Harvard Univ.	13%
Stanford Univ.	13%
Massachusetts Tech	13%
Univ. of Pennsylvania	18%
Duke Univ.	18%
Johns Hopkins Univ.	24%
Tuskegee Univ.	68%

Source: Umerit model. Based on CDS data, 50/50 benchmarks, ED split.

EXHIBIT 5 — ED PROBABILITY FACTOR DECOMPOSITION



Umerit model. Base from CDS; ED premium from published research.

EARLY DECISION STRATEGY — CONTINUED

COMPLETE APPLICATION STRATEGY — ALL SCHOOLS

Timeframe	Action	Rationale	Priority
Spring 2026	Retake SAT or ACT — target SAT 1550+ or ACT 35+	Test scores are the single most actionable weakness on Emma's profile; a 70-point SAT gain moves her from below-median to within-range at Hopkins and Duke, materially improving admission odds	Critical
Spring 2026	Enroll in AP Biology, AP Statistics, and/or AP Computer Science A for senior year	Zero APs is a red flag at all six target schools; adding 2–3 rigorous senior-year APs signals academic ambition and partially offsets the historical gap	Critical
Spring 2026	Request a letter of recommendation from UCSF Memory & Aging Center research supervisor	A faculty-level research mentor rec that specifically names Emma's contributions to the longitudinal Alzheimer study and SfN abstract is the single most powerful supplemental credential she can submit	Critical
Spring 2026	Add 2–3 target and likely schools to the college list (e.g., UC San Diego, University of Michigan, Case Western Reserve)	A 100% reach list with test score and AP gaps creates unacceptable risk; target and likely schools ensure Emma has strong options in April	Critical
Summer 2026	Complete CMU AI/ML internship and document all outputs (projects, code, presentations, any publications)	The internship is currently unlisted in terms of outputs; concrete deliverables transform it from a resume line into a narrative anchor for the AI-neuroscience intersection story	High
Summer 2026	Draft and workshop Common App personal statement around a specific UCSF lab moment	The essay is the highest-leverage remaining variable at reach schools; early drafting allows multiple revision cycles before August deadlines	High
Summer 2026	Email 2–3 Johns Hopkins neuroscience faculty whose research intersects with Alzheimer's or AI diagnostics to express interest and ask a specific research question	Hopkins rates demonstrated interest as 'Very Important'; faculty outreach is the most credible form of demonstrated interest and can be referenced in the Why Hopkins essay	High
Fall 2026	Submit Johns Hopkins ED application by November 1 with polished essays, UCSF mentor rec, and updated activity list including CMU internship outcomes	ED is the primary strategic lever for converting Emma's ~24% base probability into a realistic admit; a late or rushed ED application wastes the binding commitment advantage	Critical

04 PER-SCHOOL INTELLIGENCE

Full Institution-Level Analysis: Probability · Positioning · Essay · Opportunity

Johns Hopkins University

Acc. Rate: 8% | SAT Mid: 1555 | GPA Mid: 3.93

RD REACH

ED: 34%

RD: 24%

Applying Early Decision significantly increases Emma's chances at Johns Hopkins due to her strong interest and fit with the university's focus on research and innovation. A successful ED application requires a polished application, especially strong essays.

Emma has a decent chance at Johns Hopkins, but needs to significantly improve her application through exceptional essays and demonstrated interest. Her personal connection to epilepsy and research experience are key assets that should be highlighted throughout her application. Applying Early Decision is crucial to maximize her chances.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. Hopkins median ~1530 (−50 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. Hopkins median ~3.9 (on target)

SWING FACTOR

Craft exceptionally compelling essays that showcase Emma's passion for the intersection of neuroscience and AI, specifically highlighting her research experience at UCSF and the personal connection to her sister's epilepsy.

EMPHASIZE

Elaborate on the specific skills and knowledge Emma gained during her UCSF research internship, quantifying her contributions whenever possible. · Connect her neuroscience club activities to her broader interest in AI, demonstrating how she fosters interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration. · Showcase her understanding of the challenges and opportunities in applying AI to neuroscience, demonstrating intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. · Address the 'diversity' prompt by highlighting how her sister's experience with epilepsy has shaped her perspective and commitment to inclusive healthcare solutions.

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Avoid generic statements about wanting to 'help people' without providing specific examples of her actions and motivations.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong GPA (3.92) and SAT score (1480) demonstrate academic aptitude. · Research experience at UCSF provides a strong foundation in neuroscience research. · Leadership of the neuroscience club showcases initiative and passion for the field. · Personal connection to epilepsy provides a compelling and authentic narrative.

WATCH OUT FOR

Lack of AP courses may be a disadvantage compared to other applicants at Johns Hopkins. · The competitive index is relatively low, indicating a need to significantly strengthen the application through essays and demonstrated interest.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her narrative around her sister's epilepsy diagnosis as the catalyst for her deep dive into neuroscience, emphasizing how this personal experience fuels her desire to develop AI-driven diagnostics. She should connect her UCSF research and neuroscience club leadership to her aspiration of revolutionizing brain disease treatment through technology, showcasing her proactive approach and genuine commitment.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend virtual or in-person information sessions and webinars hosted by Johns Hopkins.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend virtual or in-person information sessions and webinars hosted by Johns Hopkins.
- Connect with current Johns Hopkins students or alumni in neuroscience or computer science through LinkedIn or informational interviews.
- Follow Johns Hopkins University and relevant departments on social media.
- Engage with Johns Hopkins' research publications and faculty profiles to demonstrate a genuine interest in their specific programs.

Harvard University

Acc. Rate: 3% | SAT Mid: 1540 | GPA Mid: 3.97

RD REACH

REA: 18% | RD: 13%

Applying REA to Harvard demonstrates Emma's strong interest and commitment. Given her passion and the competitive nature of Harvard, REA provides a slight advantage.

Emma's passion for neuroscience and AI is a strong asset, but her academic profile needs strengthening. Focusing on a compelling essay, securing a powerful recommendation, and demonstrating genuine interest are crucial for maximizing her chances at Harvard. Her list is extremely risky and needs safety/likely schools.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. Harvard median ~1580 (−100 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. Harvard median ~3.95 (−0.03)

SWING FACTOR

Secure a letter of recommendation from her UCSF research mentor that specifically highlights her intellectual curiosity, problem-solving skills, and potential to contribute to the field of neuroscience, emphasizing her AI interests.

EMPHASIZE

Elaborate on the specific challenges she's tackled in her UCSF research and how she applied her knowledge to overcome them. · Connect her neuroscience club leadership to her desire to foster intellectual curiosity and collaboration among her peers. · Showcase her understanding of Harvard's resources and faculty in neuroscience and computer science, specifically mentioning professors or labs that align with her interests. · Address how she will contribute to the diverse perspectives at Harvard, drawing from her experiences in research and club leadership.

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Focus solely on her sister's condition without emphasizing her own proactive engagement and intellectual growth.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong research experience at UCSF, demonstrating initiative and commitment to neuroscience. · Leadership in the neuroscience club, showcasing her ability to inspire and educate others. · Clear passion for the intersection of neuroscience and AI, aligning with Harvard's interdisciplinary approach. · National Merit Commended Scholar and Science Olympiad Regional Champion, indicating academic excellence.

WATCH OUT FOR

Relatively low SAT score (1480) compared to Harvard's average (1500-1580). · Lack of AP courses listed could be perceived as a less rigorous academic background compared to other applicants. · Limited awards beyond National Merit Commended Scholar and Science Olympiad, suggesting a need for stronger national-level recognition.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her essay around her personal connection to neuroscience through her sister's epilepsy, highlighting how this experience fueled her passion for using AI to revolutionize brain disease diagnostics. She should showcase her UCSF research and neuroscience club leadership as evidence of her commitment to this intersection.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend Harvard's online information sessions and virtual tours, taking detailed notes and asking insightful questions.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend Harvard's online information sessions and virtual tours, taking detailed notes and asking insightful questions.
- Connect with current Harvard students or alumni in neuroscience or computer science through LinkedIn or informational interviews.
- Participate in Harvard's pre-college programs or summer courses related to neuroscience or AI, if available.
- Follow Harvard's neuroscience and computer science departments on social media and engage with their content.

PER-SCHOOL INTELLIGENCE — CONTINUED

Stanford University

Acc. Rate: 4% | SAT Mid: 1545 | GPA Mid: 3.96

RD REACH

SCEA: 18% | RD: 13%

Applying SCEA demonstrates strong interest and allows Emma to potentially receive an early decision, increasing her chances. Given her passion for Stanford and the highly competitive applicant pool, this is her best shot.

Emma's passion and research experience are strong assets, but her lack of APs and current SAT score are weaknesses. Improving her SAT score and crafting compelling essays that showcase her intellectual vitality are critical to increasing her chances at Stanford. Applying SCEA is her best strategic move.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. Stanford median ~1570 (−90 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. Stanford median ~3.96 (−0.04)

SWING FACTOR

Achieve a perfect or near-perfect SAT score (1550+) to compensate for the lack of AP courses and demonstrate exceptional academic ability, aligning with Stanford's high academic standards.

EMPHASIZE

Showcase intellectual vitality by detailing specific challenges she tackled in her UCSF research and how she overcame them. · Connect her neuroscience club leadership to her desire to foster collaborative learning and innovation. · In the 'note to your roommate' supplement, reveal a genuine, slightly quirky side of herself, perhaps related to her passion for neuroscience or AI. · Quantify her impact whenever possible (e.g., 'Increased club membership by X%,' 'Developed an algorithm that improved diagnostic accuracy by Y%').

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Focus solely on her sister's epilepsy without connecting it to her own intellectual pursuits and research.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong research experience at UCSF, demonstrating initiative and commitment to neuroscience. · Leadership in the neuroscience club, showcasing her ability to inspire and educate others. · Clear passion for the intersection of neuroscience and AI, aligning with Stanford's interdisciplinary focus. · Compelling personal narrative connecting her sister's epilepsy to her academic pursuits.

WATCH OUT FOR

Lack of AP courses may raise concerns about academic rigor compared to other applicants. · SAT score is below Stanford's 25th percentile, indicating a need for improvement.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her Stanford application around her passion for using AI to revolutionize neuroscience, highlighting her UCSF research and the personal connection to her sister's epilepsy. She should emphasize her intellectual curiosity and drive to learn, showcasing how Stanford's resources and collaborative environment will enable her to achieve her dream of building AI-driven diagnostics for brain diseases.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend Stanford's online information sessions and virtual tours, taking detailed notes and asking thoughtful questions.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend Stanford's online information sessions and virtual tours, taking detailed notes and asking thoughtful questions.
- Connect with Stanford neuroscience or computer science professors via email to express interest in their research (after thoroughly reviewing their publications).
- Participate in Stanford-sponsored online courses or workshops related to neuroscience or AI.
- Follow Stanford's social media accounts and engage with their content.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Acc. Rate: 5% | SAT Mid: 1545 | GPA Mid: 3.97

RD REACH

EA: 18% **RD: 13%**

Applying Early Action allows Emma to demonstrate her strong interest in MIT. While her application may not be perfect, EA provides an opportunity to get her application reviewed early and potentially receive feedback or a deferral, allowing her to strengthen her application for Regular Decision at other schools.

Emma's passion and research experience are strong assets, but her SAT score and lack of AP courses are significant weaknesses for MIT. Improving her SAT score and crafting compelling essays that highlight her unique experiences and genuine interest in MIT are crucial for increasing her chances of admission. Applying Early Action demonstrates her strong interest.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. MIT median ~1570 (−90 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. MIT median ~3.97 (−0.05)

SWING FACTOR

Significantly improve SAT score to at least 1550+ to be within MIT's 25-75th percentile range.

EMPHASIZE

Showcase specific examples of her research at UCSF, detailing the challenges she faced and the impact of her contributions. · Connect her sister's epilepsy diagnosis to her passion for neuroscience and her desire to develop AI-driven diagnostics. · Highlight her leadership in the neuroscience club and how she fosters a collaborative learning environment. · Demonstrate a deep understanding of specific MIT programs, labs, or faculty whose work aligns with her interests.

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Focus solely on her sister's diagnosis without connecting it to her own intellectual curiosity and research.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong research experience at UCSF. · Leadership in the neuroscience club. · Clear passion for the intersection of neuroscience and AI. · Compelling personal connection to the field through her sister's diagnosis.

WATCH OUT FOR

Relatively low SAT score compared to MIT's average. · Lack of AP courses may be perceived as a lack of academic rigor.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her narrative around her passion for using AI to revolutionize brain disease diagnostics, highlighting her UCSF research and neuroscience club leadership as evidence of her commitment to this intersection. She should emphasize how MIT's unique interdisciplinary approach and resources will enable her to achieve her dream of becoming a neuroscientist developing AI-driven diagnostics.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend MIT's online information sessions and virtual tours.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend MIT's online information sessions and virtual tours.
- Engage with MIT's neuroscience and computer science departments on social media.
- Email a professor whose research aligns with her interests, asking thoughtful questions about their work.
- Participate in MIT's online courses or workshops related to neuroscience or AI.

PER-SCHOOL INTELLIGENCE — CONTINUED

Duke University

Acc. Rate: 7% | SAT Mid: 1540 | GPA Mid: 3.96

RD REACH

ED: 28% | RD: 18%

Applying Early Decision significantly increases Emma's chances given her strong interest and alignment with Duke's programs. The boost from ED could offset the concerns about SAT score and lack of APs.

Emma has a chance at Duke, but needs to demonstrate a very strong fit through her essays and demonstrated interest. Improving her SAT score and showcasing senior year academic rigor are critical to boosting her application. Applying ED is highly recommended to maximize her chances.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. Duke median ~1530 (−50 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. Duke median ~3.94 (−0.02)

SWING FACTOR

Strategically select and excel in advanced coursework (especially in STEM) during senior year to demonstrate academic rigor and preparedness for Duke's challenging curriculum, given the lack of AP courses so far.

EMPHASIZE

Specifically mention Duke faculty whose research aligns with Emma's interests (e.g., in AI and neuroscience). · Detail how Emma's experience with her sister's epilepsy fuels her passion and provides a personal connection to her research. · Showcase Emma's leadership skills in the neuroscience club and her ability to translate complex scientific concepts to others. · Connect Emma's UCSF research experience to the specific research opportunities available at Duke.

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Focus solely on the theoretical aspects of neuroscience without demonstrating practical application or research experience.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong GPA (3.92) demonstrates academic capability. · Research experience at UCSF provides valuable hands-on learning. · Leadership of the neuroscience club showcases initiative and passion. · Clear passion for neuroscience and AI, aligned with Duke's strengths.

WATCH OUT FOR

Relatively low SAT score (1480) compared to Duke's average. · Lack of AP courses may raise concerns about academic rigor. · Highly competitive applicant pool at Duke.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her narrative around her passion for the intersection of neuroscience and AI, highlighting her UCSF research and neuroscience club leadership as evidence of her commitment to this field. She should emphasize how Duke's specific neuroscience and computer science programs, faculty, and research opportunities will enable her to further her goal of developing AI-driven diagnostics for brain diseases, drawing a direct line between her past experiences and future aspirations at Duke.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend Duke's virtual information sessions and webinars focused on neuroscience and computer science.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend Duke's virtual information sessions and webinars focused on neuroscience and computer science.
- Connect with current Duke students or alumni in neuroscience or computer science through LinkedIn or informational interviews.
- Engage with Duke's social media channels and comment thoughtfully on relevant posts.
- Visit Duke's campus (if possible) and attend a tour or information session.

University of Pennsylvania

Acc. Rate: 6% | SAT Mid: 1535 | GPA Mid: 3.97

RD REACH

ED: 28% | RD: 18%

Applying Early Decision demonstrates a strong commitment to Penn, potentially increasing her chances of admission. Given her passion and the competitive nature of Penn, ED is the best strategy to signal her top choice.

Emma's passion and research experience are strong assets. Improving her SAT score and crafting compelling essays that demonstrate a deep understanding of Penn's specific offerings are crucial for increasing her chances. Applying ED signals her strong interest and could provide a significant boost.

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 vs. Penn median ~1530 (−50 points); GPA 3.92/4.0 vs. Penn median ~3.9 (on target)

SWING FACTOR

Significantly improve SAT score to at least 1550 to be competitive with Penn's average admitted student.

EMPHASIZE

Specifically mention Penn's Singh Center for Nanotechnology and how its resources would enhance her research capabilities. · Highlight specific professors at Penn whose research aligns with her interests, demonstrating genuine interest and understanding of their work. · Discuss how she plans to contribute to Penn's vibrant community, mentioning specific clubs or organizations she'd like to join, such as the Penn AI Society. · Showcase her leadership skills through her neuroscience club and research internship experiences.

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Don't focus solely on her sister's illness without connecting it to her own intellectual pursuits and goals.

YOUR STRENGTHS HERE

Strong GPA (3.92) demonstrates academic aptitude. · Significant research experience at UCSF showcases her commitment to neuroscience. · Leadership experience as founder and president of the neuroscience club. · Clear passion for neuroscience and AI, aligning with Penn's interdisciplinary approach.

WATCH OUT FOR

Relatively low SAT score (1480) compared to Penn's average. · Lack of AP courses may be a disadvantage in a competitive applicant pool. · Limited awards beyond National Merit Commended Scholar and Science Olympiad Regional Champion.

ESSAY ANGLE

Emma should frame her narrative around her passion for neuroscience and AI, emphasizing her UCSF research and neuroscience club leadership. She should connect her sister's epilepsy diagnosis to her drive to develop AI-driven diagnostics, showcasing her empathy and intellectual curiosity.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Attend a virtual or in-person information session specifically for prospective Neuroscience or Computer Science students.

DEMONSTRATE INTEREST

- Attend a virtual or in-person information session specifically for prospective Neuroscience or Computer Science students.
- Connect with current Penn students or alumni in the Neuroscience or Computer Science programs through LinkedIn or informational interviews.
- Follow Penn's official social media accounts and engage with their content.
- Attend a virtual tour of Penn's campus and specific labs related to neuroscience and AI.

PER-SCHOOL INTELLIGENCE — CONTINUED

Tuskegee University

Acc. Rate: 31% | SAT Mid: 1125 | GPA Mid: —

SAFETY

RD: 68% EA: 73%

METRIC DELTA

SAT 1480 well above Tuskegee's median (~1050); GPA 3.92/4.0 well above Tuskegee's median (~3.3) — Emma is a highly competitive applicant here

SWING FACTOR

Emma's research credentials (UCSF, SfN abstract) and leadership profile make her an exceptional candidate for Tuskegee's honors programs and merit scholarships — the strategic value is financial and psychological: a strong acceptance with merit aid in hand before April

EMPHASIZE

Research experience at UCSF and SfN abstract co-authorship as evidence of research readiness that Tuskegee's faculty mentors can build on · Neuroscience club founding and 200+ neurology volunteer hours as evidence of community commitment aligned with Tuskegee's mission · Interest in merit scholarship opportunities given Emma's strong academic profile relative to Tuskegee's admitted student median

DOWNPLAY / REFRAME

Do not treat Tuskegee as an afterthought in the application — a genuine, mission-aligned essay will strengthen the application and may yield merit aid that makes it a financially attractive option.

ESSAY ANGLE

Frame the application around Emma's commitment to making neuroscience accessible and her desire to contribute to a mission-driven academic community. Connect her hospital volunteering in the neurology department and neuroscience club founding to Tuskegee's legacy of community-centered science and health equity.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Research Tuskegee's pre-health and biology programs and identify faculty whose research aligns with Emma's neuroscience interests. Apply for Tuskegee's honors program and merit scholarships, which her 3.92/4.0 GPA and ACT 34 make her highly competitive for.

05 WHAT EACH SCHOOL VALUES

CDS Section C7 — Admission factor importance by institution

This matrix shows how each school on your list weighs key admission factors, sourced from their published Common Data Set. Use this to prioritize where to invest effort — a school that rates essays "Very Important" deserves more essay time than one that rates them "Considered."

School	GPA	Test Scores	Course Rigor	Essays	Extra-curriculars	Recs	Class Rank	Dem. Interest
Harvard Univ.	VI	I	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	VI
Stanford Univ.	VI	I	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	VI
MIT	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	VI
U. Pennsylvania	VI	I	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	I
Duke Univ.	VI	I	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	I
Johns Hopkins Univ.	VI	I	VI	VI	VI	VI	—	I

VI = Very Important I = Important C = Considered NC = Not Considered

Key Takeaway: 6 of your 6 schools rate essays as "Very Important" — invest heavily in your Common App essay and school-specific supplements. Every school values course rigor — your AP courseload is being evaluated.

Source: Common Data Set Section C7 — Relative importance of academic and nonacademic factors in admissions decisions. Data year varies by institution.

06 EXTRACURRICULAR PROFILE

Activity Tier Analysis & Depth Assessment

Tier	Activity	Role	Hours/Wk	Duration
T3 — Breadth	**CMU AI/ML Summer Internship**	Research Intern	40 hrs/wk	— yrs
T3 — Breadth	**UCSF Memory & Aging Center**	Research Intern	8 hrs/wk	1 yrs
T3 — Breadth	**Science Olympiad**	Team Captain	6 hrs/wk	3 yrs
T3 — Breadth	**Neuroscience Club**	Founder & President	5 hrs/wk	2 yrs
T3 — Breadth	**Hospital Volunteer**	Patient Navigator Volunteer	4 hrs/wk	2 yrs
T3 — Breadth	**Piano**	Student	3 hrs/wk	8 yrs

EC NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT

Emma's activities form an unusually tight neuroscience pipeline: she moved from personal exposure (hospital volunteering in the neurology department) to peer education (founding the neuroscience club) to authentic research (UCSF Memory & Aging Center) to computational application (CMU AI/ML internship). Every major activity reinforces a single identity — a student who does not just study neuroscience but actively builds the field around her. Piano and Science Olympiad add dimension without diluting the core narrative.

TOP ACTIVITY STRATEGIC VALUES

Activity	Strategic Value
UCSF Memory & Aging Center Research Internship	Co-authoring an abstract submitted to the Society for Neuroscience conference is a publication-level credential almost never seen at the high school level; it signals genuine research capacity and directly validates her neuroscience identity to admissions readers.
Neuroscience Club — Founder & President	Founding a club that grew to 40 members and secured UCSF professors as guest lecturers demonstrates entrepreneurial initiative and community impact, not just participation — a key distinction at elite schools.
CMU AI/ML Summer Internship	Adds a computational dimension to her neuroscience profile, directly supporting the AI-driven diagnostics narrative and signaling interdisciplinary ambition that aligns with programs at Hopkins, Penn, and MIT.
Science Olympiad — Team Captain	Three years of commitment culminating in a top-10 state finish in Anatomy & Physiology and a regional championship demonstrates sustained academic competition excellence and leadership over time.
Hospital Volunteer — Patient Navigator (Neurology Dept.)	200+ hours in the neurology department grounds her research ambitions in patient-facing empathy, a quality that distinguishes clinically-aware researchers from purely lab-focused applicants.

07 ESSAY STRATEGY & NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Common App angle, Why Us approach & activity description guidance

> ***"Neuroscientist-in-training who builds the field she wants to enter."***

COMMON APP ESSAY ANGLE

Open in the UCSF Memory & Aging Center lab — a specific moment (a data anomaly, a patient file, a conversation with a researcher) that made the abstract concept of Alzheimer's markers suddenly personal and urgent. Then pull back to reveal the personal context (family member's neurological condition) not as the origin story but as the lens that sharpened her focus. Close by connecting the UCSF work to the CMU AI/ML internship as the next deliberate step — showing a student who doesn't wait for opportunities but engineers them.

WHY JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

For the Johns Hopkins Why Us essay, Emma should name the Zanvyl Krieger Mind/Brain Institute and 1–2 specific faculty members whose Alzheimer's or neuroimaging research directly extends her UCSF longitudinal study work. She should reference the Hopkins Neuroscience undergraduate research program and explain how the specific methodologies used at Hopkins (e.g., fMRI, biomarker analysis) would allow her to build on — not repeat — what she learned at UCSF. Avoid generic praise of Hopkins' ranking; instead, frame Hopkins as the only place where her specific research thread can continue.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS

Lead every description with the most impressive quantifiable outcome, not the role title. For UCSF: 'Co-authored abstract submitted to Society for Neuroscience 2025; assisted in longitudinal Alzheimer biomarker study across 48 weeks.' For Neuroscience Club: 'Founded club from zero; scaled to 40 members; secured 3 UCSF professor guest lectures.' Use all available characters. Avoid passive voice ('was responsible for') — use active verbs ('designed,' 'recruited,' 'presented'). For CMU internship, update descriptions after completion to include specific project names or tools used.

PROFILE GAPS TO ADDRESS

Area	Issue	Priority
Testing	SAT 1480 is below the 25th percentile at 5 of 6 target schools; ACT 34 is stronger but still below medians at Harvard, Stanford, and MIT	**Critical**
Courseload	Zero AP courses is a structural rigor gap that all six target schools will scrutinize; no IB or dual enrollment listed as alternatives	**Critical**
Essays	The personal narrative (sister's epilepsy as catalyst) is powerful but risks being generic if not grounded in specific research moments and intellectual turning points	**High**
School List	Current list of 6 schools is 100% reaches with no target or likely schools; a shutout scenario is statistically plausible given the test score and AP gaps	**Critical**
Activities	CMU AI/ML internship is listed as Jun–Aug 2026 with 0 weeks/year, suggesting it has not yet occurred; its strategic value depends on completion and tangible outputs	**High**

08 RECOMMENDER STRATEGY

Letter of Recommendation Planning & Guidance

Emma's recommender strategy should center on validating her rare combination of hands-on research experience and academic leadership, with each letter reinforcing a distinct dimension of her neuroscience narrative. Given her UCSF research internship and club founding, recommenders must collectively paint a picture of a student who doesn't just study science — she advances it.

RECOMMENDED RECOMMENDERS

Relationship	Expected Quality	Strategic Value
Biology or Neuroscience Teacher	**Exceptional**	This recommender can directly connect Emma's classroom performance to her real-world research at UCSF, validating that her intellectual curiosity is both deep and applied — critical for neuroscience programs at Harvard, MIT, and JHU.
UCSF Research Supervisor / Principal Investigator	**Exceptional**	A letter from a UCSF faculty member carries extraordinary weight at elite research universities and directly validates Emma's co-authored SfN abstract — this is her single most differentiating credential and must be amplified by someone with institutional credibility.
Science Olympiad Coach or Math/Science Teacher	**Strong**	This recommender reinforces Emma's competitive academic excellence and leadership as Science Olympiad Team Captain, providing evidence of her ability to perform under pressure and elevate peers — qualities admissions officers at Duke, Penn, and Stanford value highly.

SCHOOL-SPECIFIC LOR THEMES

School	Key Theme for LOR
Harvard University	Letters must collectively emphasize intellectual vitality and the capacity to contribute to Harvard's research ecosystem — the UCSF supervisor letter should explicitly note Emma's readiness for graduate-level inquiry, and the teacher letter should highlight moments of original thinking in the classroom.
Stanford University	Stanford values students who create impact beyond themselves — recommenders should emphasize Emma's founding of the Neuroscience Club, her role in bringing UCSF professors to her school community, and her collaborative spirit in the research lab.
Johns Hopkins University	JHU's neuroscience program is research-intensive — the UCSF supervisor letter is the most critical document for this application and should detail Emma's methodological contributions to the Alzheimer's longitudinal study and her co-authorship of the SfN abstract.
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	MIT looks for students who build and solve — recommenders should highlight Emma's initiative in founding the Neuroscience Club, her CMU AI/ML internship bridging computational and biological sciences, and her ability to apply quantitative skills to research problems.
Duke University	Duke values interdisciplinary thinkers and community contributors — letters should emphasize Emma's hospital volunteer work in the neurology department alongside her research, showing she connects scientific knowledge to patient-centered care.
University of Pennsylvania	Penn's neuroscience program sits at the intersection of medicine and research — recommenders should highlight Emma's clinical exposure through hospital volunteering and her research rigor at UCSF, framing her as a student who bridges bench science and bedside application.

09 SENIOR YEAR PLANNING

GPA Recovery, Course Selection & Execution Calendar

TRAJECTORY ANALYSIS

Emma's 3.92/4.0 unweighted GPA reflects consistent, high-level academic performance across her high school career, with no significant downward trend to address. The strategic priority for senior year is not recovery but reinforcement — selecting a rigorous course load that signals continued intellectual ambition to admissions committees evaluating her for elite neuroscience programs.

RECOMMENDED SENIOR COURSELOAD

Course	Level
AP Biology or AP Chemistry (if not yet completed)	AP
AP Statistics or AP Calculus BC	AP
AP Psychology	AP
AP English Language or AP Literature	AP
Honors or College-Level Elective in Cognitive Science or Neuroscience (if available)	College

APPLICATION TIMELINE

AUG 2026
Finalize senior course schedule with maximum rigor; confirm CMU AI/ML internship deliverables and request any documentation or letter of support from CMU supervisor for applications; begin Common App essay drafts

SEP 2026
Submit official transcripts and school profile to Common App; request all three recommenders with personalized briefing documents; complete first full draft of Common App personal statement; begin Harvard REA and Stanford SCEA supplements

OCT 2026
Finalize and polish Harvard REA and Stanford SCEA essays; confirm all recommenders have submitted or are on track; submit FAFSA and CSS Profile for early-round schools; follow up with UCSF supervisor on letter status

NOV 2026
Submit Harvard REA application by Nov 1 deadline; submit Stanford SCEA application by Nov 1 deadline; submit JHU ED application by Nov 1 if ED strategy is chosen; submit MIT EA application by Nov 1 deadline; confirm all supplements are complete and error-free

DEC 2026
Receive early decision/action results; if deferred or denied from REA/SCEA schools, immediately pivot to strengthening RD applications for Penn, Duke, and remaining schools; update activities list with any new CMU internship outcomes or research developments

JAN 2027
Submit all RD applications by Jan 1 deadlines for Penn, Duke, and any remaining schools; submit mid-year grade report showing continued strong performance in senior AP courses; confirm financial aid documents are complete for all schools

Milestone · Critical Deadline · Regular Deadline

10 FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIP PIPELINE

Estimated Merit Aid, Need-Based Aid & Funding Strategy

Emma's profile positions her well for need-based aid at schools that meet 100% of demonstrated need, though merit scholarships at these elite institutions are rare or nonexistent. Her strongest financial leverage comes from need-based packages at Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, which have among the most generous aid programs in the country, and from targeted external scholarships aligned with her neuroscience and research profile.

INSTITUTIONAL AID BY SCHOOL (ESTIMATED)

School	Need-Based	Merit-Based	Est. Package
Harvard University	Meets 100%	None — Harvard does not offer merit scholarships	**$0–$70,000/yr depending on family income; families earning under $85,000 typically pay nothing**
Stanford University	Meets 100%	None — Stanford does not offer merit scholarships	**$0–$65,000/yr; families earning under $75,000 typically pay nothing; strong middle-income aid available**
Johns Hopkins University	Meets 100%	Hodson Trust Scholarship (merit-based, highly competitive, ~$5,000/yr); Beneficial-Hodson Scholarship for Maryland residents	**$25,000–$60,000/yr need-based; merit awards are separate and competitive**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Meets 100%	None — MIT does not offer merit scholarships	**$0–$65,000/yr; MIT's aid is entirely need-based and among the most generous nationally**
Duke University	Meets 100%	Robertson Scholars Leadership Program (full ride, highly competitive); A.B. Duke Scholars Program	**$30,000–$65,000/yr need-based; merit scholarships require separate nomination or application**
University of Pennsylvania	Meets 100%	None for most students; Penn Pennovation Award for entrepreneurial students (limited)	**$30,000–$65,000/yr need-based; Penn's aid is strong but slightly less generous than Harvard/MIT/Stanford at middle incomes**

FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIP PIPELINE — CONTINUED

TARGETED EXTERNAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship	Amount	Deadline	Fit Rationale
Regeneron Science Talent Search	**$25,000–$250,000**	November 2026	Emma's co-authored SfN abstract from UCSF research on Alzheimer's biomarkers is exactly the type of original scientific research this competition rewards; her project has a clear hypothesis, methodology, and real-world medical relevance
Siemens Competition in Math, Science & Technology	**$1,000–$100,000**	September 2026	Emma's longitudinal Alzheimer's marker research at UCSF qualifies as an independent research project; co-authorship of an SfN abstract strengthens the submission's credibility significantly
National Merit Scholarship	**$2,500 (National Merit) or college-sponsored awards up to $10,000+/yr**	Varies by sponsor — typically Feb–Apr 2027	Emma is already a National Merit Commended Scholar; if her PSAT score qualifies her for Semifinalist status in her state, she should pursue the full National Merit application and identify college-sponsored National Merit awards at her target schools
Society for Neuroscience (SfN) Trainee Professional Development Award	**$500–$1,500**	August 2026	As a co-author on an SfN conference abstract, Emma may be eligible for trainee travel and development awards; this also strengthens her professional profile in the neuroscience community
Davidson Fellows Scholarship	**$10,000–$50,000**	February 2027	Designed for students who have completed significant projects with real-world impact; Emma's Alzheimer's research at UCSF, especially with a conference abstract, meets the threshold for a compelling Davidson Fellows application in science
Neuroscience Research Prize (American Academy of Neurology Foundation)	**$1,000–$3,000**	January 2027	Specifically targets high school students conducting neuroscience research; Emma's UCSF Alzheimer's study is a direct fit and the award would add significant credibility to her applications if won before RD deadlines

11 MASTER APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Full task tracker, school status & closing guidance

ACADEMIC DOCUMENTS

Task	Deadline	Priority
☐ Official transcripts requested from high school registrar	Sep 2026	Critical
☐ School profile submitted to Common App by school counselor	Sep 2026	Critical
☐ Counselor recommendation and secondary school report completed	Oct 2026	Critical
☐ Mid-year grade report sent to all schools (showing strong senior AP performance)	Feb 2027	High
☐ Final transcript sent to enrolled school after graduation	Jul 2027	High

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Task	Deadline	Priority
☐ SAT score (1480) is at or near median for most targets — consider one retake targeting 1520+ to strengthen MIT and Harvard applications	Oct 2026	High
☐ ACT score (34) is strong — no retake needed unless targeting 35+ for MIT/Harvard median alignment	Sep 2026	Medium
☐ SAT Subject Tests / AP scores: Ensure any AP exam scores from junior year are sent to all schools	Oct 2026	High
☐ Confirm test-optional vs. test-required policy for each school for 2026-27 cycle	Aug 2026	Critical

ESSAYS & WRITING SAMPLES

Task	Deadline	Priority
☐ Common App personal statement — first draft completed	Sep 2026	Critical
☐ Harvard REA supplement essays finalized (Why Harvard, intellectual interests, additional essays)	Oct 25, 2026	Critical
☐ Stanford SCEA supplement essays finalized (roommate letter, intellectual vitality, What matters to you and why)	Oct 25, 2026	Critical
☐ MIT EA supplement essays finalized (5 activities, 5 short answers, essays on community and challenge)	Oct 25, 2026	Critical
☐ JHU ED supplement essays finalized (Why JHU, short answer on intellectual interest)	Oct 25, 2026	Critical
☐ Duke ED supplement essays finalized (Why Duke, short essays on identity and community)	Oct 25, 2026	High
☐ Penn ED supplement essays finalized (Why Penn, Why Neuroscience at Penn, community essay)	Oct 25, 2026	High
☐ All essays proofread by at least two trusted readers before submission	Oct 20, 2026	Critical

RECOMMENDATIONS

Task	Deadline	Priority
☐ Request Biology/Neuroscience teacher recommendation with personalized briefing document	Aug 2026	Critical
☐ Request UCSF research supervisor recommendation with briefing document emphasizing SfN abstract and research contributions	Aug 2026	Critical
☐ Request Science Olympiad coach or second academic teacher recommendation	Aug 2026	Critical
☐ Confirm all recommenders have Common App accounts set up and invitations accepted	Sep 2026	High
☐ Follow up with all recommenders to confirm submission — 2 weeks before each deadline	Oct 15, 2026	High
☐ Send thank-you notes to all recommenders after applications are submitted	Nov 2026	Medium

FINANCIAL AID

Task	Deadline	Priority
☐ FAFSA submitted (opens Oct 1, 2026 for 2027-28 aid year)	Oct 2026	High
☐ CSS Profile submitted for Harvard, Stanford, MIT, JHU, Duke, Penn	Nov 1, 2026	Critical
☐ Gather parent tax documents and financial records for CSS Profile accuracy	Sep 2026	High
☐ Apply for Regeneron Science Talent Search using UCSF Alzheimer's research	Nov 2026	High
☐ Apply for Davidson Fellows Scholarship	Feb 2027	Medium
☐ Verify National Merit Commended Scholar status and identify college-sponsored National Merit awards	Oct 2026	Medium

MASTER APPLICATION CHECKLIST — CONTINUED

SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL APPLICATION TRACKER

School	Round	Deadline	Essays	Interview	Status
Harvard University	REA (Restrictive Early Action)	November 1, 2026	Common App personal statement + Harvard supplements (intellectual interests, list of books, additional information, and short answer essays)	Alumni interview offered post-submission — prepare neuroscience research narrative and UCSF experience talking points	**Not Started**
Stanford University	SCEA (Single-Choice Early Action)	November 1, 2026	Common App personal statement + Stanford supplements (roommate letter, intellectual vitality essay, What matters to you and why, 3 additional short essays)	Alumni interview offered post-submission — emphasize founding of Neuroscience Club and UCSF research impact	**Not Started**
Johns Hopkins University	ED (Early Decision — binding)	November 1, 2026	Common App personal statement + JHU supplements (Why JHU essay, short answer on intellectual passion)	Interviews not typically offered; strong research letter from UCSF supervisor is critical differentiator	**Not Started**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	EA (Early Action)	November 1, 2026	MIT-specific application (not Common App) — 5 activity descriptions, 5 short answer essays, 2 longer essays on community and challenge	Educational Counselor (EC) interview typically offered — prepare to discuss CMU AI/ML internship and how it connects to computational neuroscience goals	**Not Started**
Duke University	ED (Early Decision — binding)	November 1, 2026	Common App personal statement + Duke supplements (Why Duke essay, short essays on identity, community, and intellectual interests)	Alumni interviews available in some regions — contact Duke alumni network in CA proactively	**Not Started**
University of Pennsylvania	ED (Early Decision — binding)	November 1, 2026	Common App personal statement + Penn supplements (Why Penn essay, Why Neuroscience at Penn, community/identity essay)	Alumni interviews offered — emphasize hospital volunteer work in neurology and research experience to connect to Penn's medicine-adjacent neuroscience program	**Not Started**

Emma's single greatest competitive advantage is her UCSF Memory & Aging Center research and co-authored SfN abstract — this is a credential that fewer than 1% of applicants to these schools possess, and every component of her application strategy should funnel attention toward it. However, she faces a critical strategic constraint: Harvard REA, Stanford SCEA, and MIT EA all have November 1 deadlines, but REA and SCEA are restrictive — she may only apply to one of Harvard or Stanford early, and must choose carefully based on fit and probability. Emma should apply Harvard REA or Stanford SCEA (not both), submit MIT EA simultaneously (EA is permitted alongside REA/SCEA), and use JHU ED or Duke ED as her binding commitment school only if she is deferred from her early choices and needs a strong January option. Her neuroscience narrative — from founding a club, to UCSF research, to hospital volunteering, to CMU AI/ML — is unusually coherent and compelling; the essays must make admissions readers feel they are watching a future neuroscientist in formation, not simply a high-achieving student who likes science.

For Parents & Guardians

College Application Summary — Emma Chen, Class of 2026

1480	3.92	7
SAT SCORE	GPA (UNWEIGHTED)	SCHOOLS ON LIST

STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

Emma Chen presents as a strong T20-caliber applicant with a compelling neuroscience-focused narrative anchored by her UCSF Memory & Aging Center research internship and co-authored SfN abstract — a rare credential for a high school student. Her single most decisive differentiator is the authentic convergence of personal motivation (a family member's neurological condition), hands-on research, and emerging AI/ML expertise that creates a coherent, mission-driven identity. Applying ED to Johns Hopkins — whose neuroscience program is among the nation's best and whose ED boost is well-documented —…

TOP CHOICE — EARLY DECISION

Johns Hopkins University

34%
Estimated Probability

KEY STRENGTHS

- UCSF Memory & Aging Center co-authored SfN abstract — a publication-level research credential at the high school level that fewer than 1% of applicants possess
- Coherent neuroscience-to-AI pipeline across all major activities (UCSF research → Neuroscience Club → CMU AI/ML internship) creating a singular, memorable applicant identity
- 3.92/4.0 GPA paired with ACT 34 demonstrates consistent academic performance across standardized and classroom measures

AREAS TO WATCH

- SAT 1480 is 90–100 points below the 25th percentile at Harvard (1580), Stanford (1570), and MIT (1570), and ~50 points below Johns Hopkins' median (~1530), making test scores a consistent liability across the entire list
- Zero AP courses is a structural rigor gap that admissions committees at all six target schools will flag, particularly in the absence of IB or dual enrollment alternatives to demonstrate college-level academic preparation

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Emma's profile positions her well for need-based aid at schools that meet 100% of demonstrated need, though merit scholarships at these elite institutions are rare or nonexistent. Her strongest financial leverage comes from need-based packages at Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, which have among the most generous aid programs in the country, and from targeted external scholarships aligned with her neuroscience and research profile.

Average estimated total cost across schools on list: **$86,489/year**

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

When	What
Aug 2026	Finalize senior course schedule with maximum rigor; confirm CMU AI/ML internship deliverables and request any documentation or letter of support from CMU supervisor for applications; begin Common App essay drafts
Sep 2026	Submit official transcripts and school profile to Common App; request all three recommenders with personalized briefing documents; complete first full draft of Common App personal statement; begin Harvard REA and Stanford SCEA supplements
Oct 2026	Finalize and polish Harvard REA and Stanford SCEA essays; confirm all recommenders have submitted or are on track; submit FAFSA and CSS Profile for early-round schools; follow up with UCSF supervisor on letter status
Nov 2026	Submit Harvard REA application by Nov 1 deadline; submit Stanford SCEA application by Nov 1 deadline; submit JHU ED application by Nov 1 if ED strategy is chosen; submit MIT EA application by Nov 1 deadline; confirm all supplements are complete and error-free

This summary is excerpted from the full Merit Strategy Report. Refer to detailed sections for comprehensive analysis.

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PREMIUM ADMISSIONS INTELLIGENCE

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