

Helping your Child Get Into a Good (or GREAT) College

The Top 5 Things colleges look for in a student:

1. Selecting a challenging high school curriculum. *Students should try to take the most challenging courses in the 5 core academic subject areas: English, Social Studies, Science, Math and Foreign Language.*
2. Grades that show strong effort and an upward trend over the years. *Colleges are most forgiving of 9th grade grades. The course grades in 10th and 11th grades are the most important, but 12th grade grades count too!*
3. Strong scores on standardized tests (SAT and/or ACT). Test scores should be consistent with high school performance.
4. Passionate consistent involvement in several activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative is preferred to a long list of short-term involvement in many activities. *This means 2 or 3 significant activities that the student really enjoys doing and feels passion for. These can include sports, hobbies, music, etc. —there is no one "right" activity.*
5. Community service showing evidence of being a "contributor." These activities should demonstrate concern for other people.

The next most important things:

6. Work or out of school experience (including summer activities) that illustrates responsibility, dedication and development of areas of interest. Work or other meaningful use of free time can demonstrate maturity.
7. A well-written essay that provides insight into the student's unique personality, values and goals. The application essay should be thoughtful and highly personal, giving the reader more information about an aspect of the student that is not developed elsewhere in the application. The essay should be well-written and carefully thought out.
8. Letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselor that give evidence of integrity, special skill and positive character traits. Students should request recommendations from teachers who respect their work in an academic discipline.
9. Supplementary recommendations by adults who have had significant direct contact with the student. Letters from coaches or supervisors in long-term work or volunteer activities are valuable; however, recommendations from casual acquaintances or family friends are rarely given much weight.
10. Anything special that makes the student stand out from the rest of the applicants. Include honors, awards, evidence of unusual talent or experience or anything else that makes the student unique. Overall, colleges are seeking students who will add vitality to the campus and be active contributing members of the student body.
11. Demonstration of interest – many colleges are more likely to accept qualified students who actively show interest in the college. Examples can include visiting the campus, attending the campus information session, talking to the campus representative visiting the high school (or local area), or participating in the optional interview. By doing some or all of these things, students gain better information about a particular college to help make more informed decisions about applying. In turn, the college will have a sense that the student is really *interested* in that school and not just "window shopping".