

4 things to watch out for when applying to a top school

Posted: 2015-08-05

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Do you dream of sending your child to an Ivy League or other highly selective school? If so, you both have your work cut out for you. The country's most prestigious colleges and universities typically only admit around 25% of applicants, so to get in your child has to really stand out. But even if you've been diligently building their profile, there are some common mistakes you need to watch out for that can cost your child an acceptance letter.

1. Being careless with social media

Times sure have changed. Back when we were applying to colleges we didn't have to worry about admissions officers finding out what we did over the weekend. But because of social media, the private lives of today's students are much more public. According to a recent survey from [Kaplan Test Prep](#), 35% of admissions officers have looked at student's social media pages to learn more about them, and negative posts or tweets are being considered in some acceptance decisions.



Using social media as part of the admissions process has become much more common since Kaplan first began tracking it in 2008, when only one in 10 admissions officers said they checked students' pages. But it seems students are also becoming smarter about how they use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In fact, at least 18% of students plan to use social media as a way to promote themselves and improve their chances of getting in to college.

According to a press release from Kaplan, "even as this practice becomes more commonplace, college

2. Relying on grades and test scores alone

Of course, grades are still a very important part of a student's college application. Most students today realize that a B average is often the minimum requirement to get into a college, and more selective schools want to see As. But because of this, most students who are applying to top schools will have As, so your child needs to find another way to stand out.

Stef Mauler, an independent education consultant and owner of The Mauler Institute, reminds parents that even if every student who applies to Harvard are valedictorians, the school's acceptance rate would still only be 10%.

"Kids need to get involved in something about which they are passionate". Mauler says. "They need to leverage their summers to pursue academic and extra-curricular interests beyond what their schools offer. They need to lead their own learning and go beyond the four corners of the classroom."

3. Being too well-rounded

Huh? In the past, parents were told to encourage their children to get involved with a variety of activities so that their profile reflected an all-around gifted applicant. Yet today's top colleges are more interested in forming a well-rounded student body. That means they're looking for applicants who excel in a specific area. So instead of spreading your student's time among dance, community service and basketball, try to focus on an area they truly enjoy and care about. This will give them an opportunity to really shine.

Colleen Ganjian, founder of DC College Counseling, also recommends students go "full force" into their passions, and should avoid wasting time in other areas.

"At highly selective colleges, the collective whole of individually passionate students c

4. Only taking the SAT or the ACT (not both)

Experts recommend students take a full-length practice test of each exam about four months before they begin actual test preparation. That way, they can find out if one is more suitable by evaluating their scores and deciding which exam they felt more comfortable taking. The ACT and SAT are scored differently, but your child can compare his or her score using an [ACT/SAT comparison chart](#) to get a better idea of where they stand.

Jocelyn Pearson, founder and author of The Scholarship System says this was a mistake she made when applying for college:

"Many people take the SAT a few times, get the score they are looking for and stop, which is what I did. I highly suggest taking both the SAT and ACT because though they may test very similar skills, the SAT leans more on vocabulary whereas the ACT has more complex math and analytical problems. I was always stronger in math, therefore, I probably would have done better on the ACT."

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