



## *BYHS College Planning and Placement*

# **What Are They Looking For?**

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What are they looking for in your application? What criteria do colleges use to decide who gets in and who doesn't? The items in your admissions file are fairly standard, but some carry more weight than others, and each school's admission office has its own ranking system. Here are some general observations, roughly in order from most important to least:

**1. Your Transcript:** Most schools rank the transcript as the most important element of your application. Admissions officers will evaluate the difficulty of the courses you took as well as the grades you received in those courses. Advanced courses are obviously given more weight than introductory ones. Admissions officers are sympathetic to the fact that a rigorous course load can result in a grade of "B" or even the dreaded "C" from time to time. Just because you have trouble with a difficult course does not mean you have blown your chances!

**2. Teacher and School Recommendations:** Recommendations from your teachers and administrators carry a great deal of weight with admissions officers. This is another way for schools to find out about the "real you". When teachers write letters of recommendation they include examples of your character, dedication, humor, wit and other positive attributes. A well written letter is an opportunity for a college to get a sense of your uniqueness, so be careful about who you have write your letters! Pick instructors you trust and respect, who feel the same way about you, and who express themselves well in writing!

**3. Your Essay:** By the time admissions people get to your essay, they already have a general idea of who you are. They know about your activities, your grades, your family and a variety of other things. They have clues about your character and values based on letters of recommendation, and the "real you" is beginning to come into focus. The essay is your opportunity to sharpen that image! A well written essay, with a unique, genuine quality, will help solidify the perception the admissions officer is developing!

**4. Test Scores:** Admissions officers do not assign as much importance to test scores as students and parents do! Questions have been raised over the last few years about how reliable the SAT or ACT scores are in measuring student aptitude and chances of success in college, and the huge increase in SAT I and II preparation courses may have made the scores even less meaningful. The SAT I and II are still important factors, but many schools are looking past raw test scores and focusing more on the essays and other portions of the application to really see what a student may be capable of!

**5. Extracurricular Activities:** Outside activities are very important indicators of your interests and levels of commitment. Admissions officers generally are most impressed by students who choose a few extracurricular activities and then participate in them throughout their high school career. It is to your advantage to show evidence of progressively responsible leadership positions in organizations. Don't try to impress by listing twenty different organizations, and if you wait until the fall of your senior year to participate in activities, you are too late!

**6. The Interview:** Many schools simply use the interview as a recruiting tool. Most interviewers are expected to make you feel comfortable and to provide a good impression of their school. Meaningful interviews take too much time, and it is hard for a school to get a really solid read about you in only half an hour. On the other hand, it is sometimes possible to change the decision of an admissions committee with either an outstanding interview or a disastrous one.