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## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE Your Teen Applies to College

By **Katherine Cohen**, CEO and Founder of IvyWise and ApplyWise.com,  
and author of *The Truth About Getting In* and *Rock Hard Apps*.

### 1.) STUDENTS MUST MAKE AN IMPACT.

Colleges are not looking for “jacks of all trades.” Applicants who are consistent in their commitment to a handful of activities or are specialists within a particular field have an advantage over serial club-joiners who show no leadership or dedication. Request a list of the extracurricular activities that are available to your child at their high school. If the school doesn't offer a program that matches your teen's interest, then help him or her research additional activities that may be available through your local community.

### 2.) RELATIONSHIPS WITH GUIDANCE COUNSELORS & TEACHERS COUNT.

Colleges usually require letters of recommendation from a student's guidance counselor and junior or senior year teachers in academic subjects. Encourage your child to make an effort to build relationships early on with these individuals.

### 3.) SUMMERS BEFORE COLLEGE SHOULD BE SPENT WISELY.

It's important for students to make the most out of their time both inside and outside of the classroom. Tanning on the beach all summer will not impress an admissions committee! Your teen should spend the summers pursuing his or her talents and interests. Your child can take college-level classes, participate in multi-week programs in an area of interest, join a community service organization, or get an internship or summer job. Check with your teen's guidance counselor to see if the high school has any partnerships or recommendations for summer opportunities.

### 4.) THERE IS MORE THAN ONE STANDARDIZED TEST OPTION.

Many colleges accept either the ACT or SAT. Your teen should meet with his or her high school guidance counselor to review the format and content of each exam and select the one that plays to his or her academic strengths. If your child isn't a good test taker, he or she may want to consider the more than 800 four-year colleges that are test-optional found at [www.FairTest.org](http://www.FairTest.org).

### 5.) FRESHMEN NEED A FOUR-YEAR PLAN.

If your child is a high school freshman, start by planning a visit with his or her school guidance counselor to chart out the academic programs your student will take over the next four years. Based on your child's abilities, your child should plan to take the most challenging courses available in every subject. (SEE THE TOP QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR)





**6.) CREATE A BALANCED LIST OF “GOOD FIT” COLLEGES.** Don't choose a school based solely on its reputation and prestige. Work with your child's high school guidance counselor to identify colleges that are a “good fit” for your teen academically, socially, and financially. Be sure to include colleges that are academic reach, target, and safety schools. Incorporate a mix of private schools, as well as more affordable schools like state schools and public universities.

**7.) STUDENTS MUST BE EXPERTS ON THE COLLEGES THEY ARE APPLYING TO.** Admissions officers and interviewers seek candidates who are good matches for their college. Applicants who know details about a college's academic and social culture are usually reviewed favorably. For example, students should know the names of specific courses and professors with whom they want to study. To aid in this, your teen can ask the guidance counselor to put him or her in touch with a former graduate from the high school who is now attending the college your student is considering.

**8.) TUITION ISN'T THE ONLY EXPENSE TO CONSIDER.** While many families budget for college tuition and other costs of attending college, they often forget to budget for applying to college. Even before the first application is submitted, you can expect to spend a lot on standardized test fees, standardized test preparation, independent counselors, books, visiting college campuses and application fees. A free application budget calculator is available to families at [www.ApplyWise.com/budget](http://www.ApplyWise.com/budget).

**“Take a step back and be sure to listen to your child's thoughts with an open mind as he or she researches colleges.”**

**9.) CAMPUS VISITS CAN BE TELLING.** Plan on visiting the colleges your child is seriously considering. A campus visit gives your teen the opportunity to learn more about the college, while connecting with current students and getting a better feel for the school's atmosphere. Visit as a family, with other students from your child's high school, or arrange an overnight for your child with a current college freshman. Be sure your child attends both the official information session and the campus tour, as this demonstrates your child's interest in the college and is the best way to make the most of the visit.

**10.) “WE” ARE NOT APPLYING.** Remember, the college admissions process is about your child. Take yourself out of it as much as possible, other than being your child's cheerleader and encouraging your teen every step of the way. Take a step back and be sure to listen to your child's thoughts with an open mind as he or she researches colleges. Don't fill out the applications or write the essays for your child. You may think you're being helpful, or doing him or her a favor, but your child needs to have his or her own voice shine through. <sup>SA</sup>