



UPPER SCHOOL

Dear 9th and 10th grade Parents,

Many of you may be wondering what your son or daughter should be doing in their first and second years of high school with respect to the college admissions process. Many think 9th and 10th grade students should just focus on being teenagers and enjoy their high school experience. This is only partially correct. Below, freshman and sophomores families will learn what colleges consider when evaluating a prospective applicant.

When your child applies to college early in their senior year, the admissions committee will most likely look at their *entire* high school experience, including the 9th and 10th grade years. There are several things to keep in mind during these early years of high school exploration.

It's important to know the two essential questions admissions officers ask when assessing an applicant.

- **Can this student succeed academically at our institution?**
- **What will this student bring to our community?**

There are three dimensions by which students can effectively answer these questions:

- **Academic ability**
- **Personal character**
- **Extracurricular involvement and leadership potential**

All three will be measured and questioned by college admissions personnel. Academic achievement in the classroom is important, but how students interact with classmates and teachers (both in the classroom and beyond) is just as important. College representatives also look at the following when making admissions decisions:

- How a student participates in class discussions
- How a student communicates with other students in the hallway in between classes and lunch
- How a student spends his or her free time on the weekends and in the summer
- What the student chooses to discuss with the people in his or her life



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The 9th and 10th grade years are vital because they are the starting point, the launching point for the rest of their high school career. Students should be encouraged to explore various academic disciplines and social and extracurricular activities early on, as they will set the tone for the rest of their high school years.

Keep in mind that postsecondary institutions will consider at least three criteria:

- A student's motivation
- A student's initiative
- A student's leadership

Motivation is evident through continuity. For a high school student, the three main criteria by which they can demonstrate continuity are through:

- A student's extracurricular involvement
- The "five" core subjects
- A student's character

Exactly *what* students explore, whether it's a new hobby, sport, or skill doesn't really matter. What *does* matter is that students find something they love so much that they stick with it! Why is this important? For students to become leaders, they must fully commit to the activity. And in order to become a leader, students must grow into these positions over time. Meaningful leadership doesn't just happen overnight.

Above, I mentioned the five core subjects. These are:

- English
- Math
- Science
- Social Science
- Foreign Language

If a student is going to be a competitive applicant at any school, ideally he or she needs to take all five of these subjects for all four years. Does this mean that every student does or will? No. But students should at least plan to take the five core classes for four years, but be open to adjusting their schedules if it doesn't work over time.

For students who aspire to attend highly selective institutions, it's important to note that these schools value students who have developed their own voice, and are not afraid to use it often. Remember, colleges will be asking, "What will this student bring to our community?"



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The term “community” implies three areas:

- The classroom
- The residence halls
- Everywhere else on campus (dining halls, athletic facilities, dance studio, etc.)

Colleges realize students do much more than study together, so they actively seek students who would fit well in their community.

So what should 9th and 10th grade students do?

Students should be active participants in class. They should be sharing their thoughts and ideas. They should *respectfully* challenge the class during discussions. They should risk being wrong from time to time. Why? Because this helps to build a stronger academic community. Spirited class discussions force students out of their comfort zones, and can give students a different perspective on life.

Students should also participate in class because at some point, he or she will be asking teachers for one of the most important documents sent to colleges and universities—recommendation letters. To be honest, the most difficult letters or teachers to write are for those students who never shared their voice in class.

In review:

- Freshman year matters in the college application process
- Sophomore year matters in the college application process
- Students will be evaluated based on their academic passions, their social intelligence, and the depth of their extracurricular activities
- Colleges don’t really care *what* passions students pursue. They care about *why* the student chose this particular activity, and the *level* at which it was pursued
- A student’s conduct on the high school campus reflects his or her character. Character is evident in the college application as well as from teacher and counselor letters of recommendation

We look forward to guiding your family over the next few years! Please do not hesitate to contact the Student Services Office if the counselors can be of further assistance.

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