

How College Admission Committees Evaluate Candidates

Though there are over 3600 colleges in the United States, virtually all of them consider the same things when evaluating candidates for admission. Some consider candidates through very thorough and personal reviews; some focus on numbers and make decisions employing elaborate formulas that factor in students' prior academic performance and test scores; others use a combination of the two. All focus on several standard elements:

College Admission Criteria

- **High School Course Selection**
This is the most important element colleges consider. Again, their focus is on English, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and foreign languages. They expect to see a full academic schedule of the toughest courses that were available to you in which you could do well every term of high school. Courses outside of the “five solids” mentioned above are rarely considered in the process.
- **Grades**
Many colleges re-compute your grade point average counting only the “five solid” subjects listed above. Review of your transcript starts with the first half of senior year and works backwards, noting grade trends. If your grades are not consistent and solid throughout high school, the next best thing is to show an upward trend in courses where you've had difficulty. Downward trends or failures are red flags that require your explanation.
- **Class Rank**
The Colorado Springs School does not rank its students, because we feel that doing so would put them at a disadvantage when compared to students from much larger high schools. However, this policy does not penalize them in any way. Furthermore, under no circumstances is rank considered more important than courses and grades.
- **Standardized Test Scores**
The SAT and other test scores are used to help admission officers compare you to others in the applicant pool—they are the only statistical measure in your app that is consistent nationwide. Weak scores can sometimes be overcome by solid transcripts, strong essays, supportive recommendations, and good matchmaking.
- **Essays/Personal Statements**
Your written statements on the application are the only opportunity that you have to speak directly to the admissions committee. They evaluate structure and grammar closely, but are also very interested in what you have to say for yourself.
- **Recommendations**
Teacher recommendations are supporting credentials—they are not directly responsible for your admission or denial. Admission officers hope to get a glimpse of how capable you are academically, what kind of person you are, and what it's like to have you in class every day. In addition to these considerations, counselor recommendations provide context regarding your school and program.

- **Personal/Extracurricular Background**

Many admission committees satisfy their campuses' needs for newspaper editors, athletes, community volunteers, special scholarship winners and the like by taking a close look at your listing of activities outside the classroom. Details about your most important extracurricular involvements can also help them to assess what kind of person you are. Don't underestimate the value of holding a job or jobs—they carry just as much weight.