



CINCOTTA

COLLEGE CONSULTING

College Admissions: Parent Guide

What Matters Most (and What Doesn't)

1



ACADEMICS: RIGOR OVER PERFECTION

- ✓ **Do students need perfect grades?**
No. Colleges prioritize challenging coursework, consistency, and growth over flawless transcripts.
- ✓ **How many AP classes are enough?**
There is no fixed number—students should pursue rigor without burnout.
- ✓ **Is test-optional truly optional?**
It depends. Strong scores can enhance an application; weaker ones are often better withheld.

2



ACTIVITIES: DEPTH OVER QUANTITY

- ✓ **Do sports help?**
Yes—especially with long-term commitment, leadership, or recruitment.
- ✓ **How many extracurriculars should my child do?**
Focus on 4–6 meaningful activities rather than spreading too thin.
- ✓ **What activities matter most?**
Depth, initiative, and impact—not participation alone.
- ✓ **What is a passion project?**
A self-driven, sustained effort that reflects genuine curiosity and ownership.

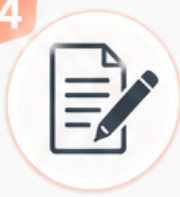
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REAL LIFE COUNTS

- ✓ **Do colleges care about volunteering?**
Yes—when it is authentic and sustained.
- ✓ **Does paid work count?**
Absolutely. It demonstrates responsibility and real-world skills.
- ✓ **Do family responsibilities count?**
Very much. They reflect maturity, reliability, and contribution.
- ✓ **Can shy students stand out?**
Yes. Thoughtfulness, creativity, and authenticity are equally powerful.

4



ESSAYS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ **How important are recommendation letters?**
Very. They provide insight into character and classroom impact.
- ✓ **When should students ask?**
Spring of junior year or early senior fall.
- ✓ **Should parents edit essays?**
Lightly—for clarity only. The student's voice should remain authentic.
- ✓ **What makes a strong essay?**
Reflection, growth, and self-awareness—not just storytelling.

5



STUDENT GROWTH & DIRECTION

- ✓ **What if my child changes interests?**
That's normal. Growth and exploration are valued.
- ✓ **Should students specialize early?**
Only when it's genuine—not forced.
- ✓ **Can ADHD/autism be framed positively?**
Yes—when paired with insight, strengths, and systems for success.

6



STRATEGY: WHAT REALLY MATTERS

- ✓ **Do summer programs help?**
Some do—but many are enrichment, not distinction.
- ✓ **Is research necessary?**
No.
- ✓ **Does legacy still matter?**
Less than before.
- ✓ **How involved should parents be?**
Supportive—but students should lead.

THE BOTTOM LINE

What colleges actually look for:



Authenticity



Initiative



Consistency
over time



Meaningful
contribution

“ Don't build a perfect applicant.
Build an interesting,
engaged human. ”



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