



# *The STEM Academy at Showalter*

*"Unlocking Young Minds for the Future"*

## **What Do Colleges Look For in Applicants?**

Colleges look at a variety of factors when making their admissions decisions. Most schools take a holistic approach to admissions and are interested in everything a student does. That said, students' courses, grades and test scores are the most important criteria to admissions officers. Great extracurricular activities or an excellent essay will not make up for week school performance. Outlined below is the different criteria admissions offices review when deciding to admit students.

### **A Rigorous High School Curriculum**

A transcript that reflects the student takes on challenges can put him or her a step ahead. Being able to show prospective colleges that you challenged yourself academically is important. Admissions officers look at the AP, honors, dual enrollment and other college prep classes you take in high school to see how well you handled the course load.

While it is important to challenge yourself, be careful not to overextend yourself. Colleges want to see you take rigorous classes, but they also want to see you succeed. Cs and Ds in AP classes are not beneficial. You should take the most challenging classes that you are able to manage.

### **Strong Grades and an Upward Trend**

Admissions officers value grades that represent strong effort. Grades should show an upward trend over the years. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all A's in less challenging coursework. Strong grades in challenging classes is the best indicator of how you will do in college.

### **Solid Scores on Standardized Tests**

Scores on the SATs and ACTs carry considerable weight in the college admissions process. Scores should ideally be consistent with high school performance.

### **Quality Involvement in Activities**

Colleges want to see students who stretch themselves beyond the limits of the classroom. The kinds of activities you choose say a lot about your personality and your values. Passionate involvement in a few activities — and a demonstration of leadership and initiative in those activities — can only help a student. Depth, not breadth, of experience is most important.

There is no one activity you should join. Participate in those things that interest you the most. Colleges value a wide array of different activities including athletics, art, drama and music, student government, community service and volunteer work, employment, summer

enrichment programs, church groups... The list goes on and on. If you babysit your siblings after school every day while your parents work, that counts! Colleges are simply interested in seeing that you spend your time outside of the classroom making a meaningful commitment to something.

### **A Well-Written Essay**

A strong college essay provides insight into the student's unique personality, values, and goals. The application essay should be thoughtful and highly personal. It should demonstrate careful and well-constructed writing.

### **Positive Recommendations from School Personnel**

Hopefully the student's letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors give evidence of integrity, special skills, and positive character traits. Students should request recommendations from teachers who know them well and respect their work in an academic discipline. Select junior year teachers in core subject areas (math, English, social studies, science).

### **Informed Interest**

Demonstrated interest has been a factor that has gained prominence in admissions over the last few years. With students applying to more colleges, it can sometimes be hard for colleges to predict how many admitted students will enroll. While some colleges track students' contact with the admissions office, through visits, interviews, and more, what colleges really look for is *informed* interest, or, more specifically, how much the applicants know about the school. Have they done enough research? Do they know why this school is good fit? Can they articulate that in their essays? This helps colleges weed out the applicants who might not be as serious about attending the institution, and reward those who have put together a thorough, thoughtful, and informed application.

Do your research! Learn everything you can about the colleges you're interested in to really determine why these colleges are a good fit for your needs and goals. Research programs, professors, courses, and activities that you might want to explore if admitted.