

FINDING RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT A SCHOOL'S OFFERINGS

HIGH SAT SCORES ALONE DO NOT PREPARE STUDENTS FOR ADMISSION TO TOP UNIVERSITIES

The SAT score is only part of what top universities consider in the admissions process. Top schools want students who are UNIQUE, demonstrate outstanding leadership abilities, understand how to work in groups, have strong academic skills, understand the importance of helping others, and have shown an ability to persevere. As a result, it is wise to ask how a school encourages students to develop UNIQUE perspectives, lead UNIQUE projects, and develop UNIQUE passions. Specifically does the school encourage students to pursue extra-curricular activities beyond the standard clubs, music groups, sports, etc. that are common in schools around the U.S.? Also, does the school offer academic courses like cross-disciplinary creativity classes that are uncommon at other schools?

AFTER SCHOOL ACADEMIC COACHING MAY BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

Sometimes SAT scores and advanced placement test performance has little to do with the school. In some communities parents hire tutors and kids spend many after school hours reviewing academic material. Although this tutoring may increase SAT, advance placement, and other test scores, it also takes valuable time that could be used for honing leadership skills, building a successful business, creating a new musical genre, etc. As a result, it is important to ask how much after school time students spend on academic activities. The majority of the academic learning should occur during school hours, so students have plenty of after school hours for non-academic pursuits.

SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT HOME IS NOT ENOUGH

It is no longer uncommon for applicants to top universities to speak more than one language. However, it is still uncommon for applicants to have excellent speaking, reading, and writing skills and even more uncommon for applicants to have science and math proficiency in two languages. As a result, it is a good idea to ask questions about the foreign language programs offered at a school. Are the classes taught by immersion (only the foreign language is used in the classroom)? What levels of reading and writing proficiency do the students

achieve? Are the teachers native speakers of the language? Are there options for students to become bilingual in math and science?

CREATIVITY AND CURIOSITY ARE CRITICAL FOR ADMISSION TO TOP UNIVERSITIES AND HIGH QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

It is imperative that students learn to “think outside the box” and interact with people outside of school social groups. Students need the opportunity to participate in hands-on laboratory experiments and ongoing training in cross-disciplinary, open-ended problem solving. In addition, they should be encouraged to participate in projects and activities that are beyond the scope of what the school offers. This training and exposure helps students hone critical creativity and curiosity skills that are in demand at top universities and in high quality employment.

ART AND MUSIC CLASSES ARE NOT NECESSARILY CREATIVE

Like science, art and music classes are often process oriented – the teacher provides an end product and the students figure out how to create something similar. Although these copying skills are important, they do little to encourage creativity and innovation.

GRADES ARE DECEPTIVE

Over the past several decades there has been tremendous grade inflation. As a result, an “A” no longer means a child has outstanding mastery of the material.

http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-201_162-538000.html

LOOK BEYOND STATE RATINGS

Sometimes schools tout state testing, school recognition, or graduation rates that are not correlated to national standards or international testing levels. For example, in California there are many distinguished middle and high schools, yet graduates often struggle to gain admission to their top school choices. In these cases, it is a good idea to ask questions about what the school will do to help your child reach his/her post high school goals.

ADVANCED PROGRAMS MAY NOT BE ADVANCED

If a school is offering a program like IB, AICE, etc., it is wise to ask questions. What percentage of the graduating class took the end of program tests? What

was the average score? How do the school scores compare to the international averages?

THE GAP BETWEEN US STUDENTS AND FOREIGNERS INCREASES THE LONGER KIDS ARE IN SCHOOL

It is not uncommon for US kids to track ahead of foreign students in the early grades, since top international programs build material differently. Top international educational systems substantially outperform US schools by grade eight and are orders of magnitude ahead by age 15 and are many grade levels ahead by the time the students graduate from high school. (age 15 [PISA test data](#), grade 8 [TIMSS math data](#), grade 8 [TIMSS science test data](#))

COLLEGE CLASSES MAY NOT BE COLLEGE LEVEL

To handle the influx of students with skills deficiencies many colleges have added remedial classes. These classes are not true college level courses, but classes that cover material that should have been mastered in middle or high school. As a general rule, if the class is offered in secondary school in Singapore it is middle school or high school level material.

TEACHER TURNOVER MAY BE A GOOD THING

Good schools have a systematic, data-driven way of evaluating teachers quarterly, based on student performance.. Since student learning is at stake, teachers who are not effectively delivering the material should be removed as quickly as possible.