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College Admissions

Middle School

In general, you don't need to worry too much about college when you are in middle school. Parents who aggressively try to mold their 13-year-olds into Harvard material may do more harm than good.

Nevertheless, although your middle school grades and activities won't appear on your college application, you can use seventh and eighth grades to set yourself up to have the strongest record possible in high school. This list outlines some possible strategies.

1. Work on Good Study Habits

Middle school grades don't matter for college admissions, so this is a low-risk time to work on good time-management and study skills. Think about it -- if you don't learn how to be a good student until your junior year, you'll be haunted by those freshman and sophomore grades when you apply to college.

2. Explore Several Extracurricular Activities

When you apply to college, you should be able to demonstrate depth and leadership in one or two extracurricular areas. Use middle school to figure out what you most enjoy -- is it music, drama, government, church, juggling, business, athletics? By figuring out your true passions in middle school, you can better focus on developing leadership skills and expertise in high school.

3. Read a Lot

This advice is important for 7th through 12th grades. The more you read, the stronger your verbal, writing and critical thinking abilities will be. Reading beyond your homework will help you do well in high school, on the ACT and SAT, and in college. Whether you're reading *Harry Potter* or *Moby Dick*, you'll be improving your vocabulary, training your ear to recognize strong language, and introducing yourself to new ideas.

4. Work on Foreign Language Skills

Most competitive colleges want to see strength in a foreign language. The earlier you build those skills, the better. Also, the more years of a language you take, the better.

5. Take Challenging Courses

If you have options such as a math track that will eventually end in calculus, choose the ambitious route. When senior year rolls around, you will want to have taken the most challenging courses available at your school. The tracking for those courses often begins in middle school (or earlier). Position yourself so that you can take full advantage of whatever AP courses and upper-level math, science, and language courses your school offers.

6. Get Up to Speed

If you find that your skills in an area such as math or science aren't what they should be, middle school is a wise time to seek out extra help and tutoring. If you can improve your academic strengths in middle school, you'll be positioned to earn better grades when it really begins to matter -- in 9th grade.

7. Explore and Enjoy

Always keep in mind that your middle school record doesn't appear on your college application. You shouldn't stress about college in 7th or 8th grade. Your parents shouldn't stress about college either. This is not the time to be calling the admissions office at Yale. Instead, use these years to explore new things, discover what subjects and activities really excite you, and figure out any bad study habits you may have developed.

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