Based on a Survey of IECA member consultants

Top Ten Strengths and Experiences Colleges look for in High School Students

1. A rigorous high school curriculum that challenges the student and may include AP or IB classes.

2. Grades that represent strong effort and an upward trend. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all As in less challenging coursework.

3. Solid scores on standardized tests (SAT, ACT). These should be consistent with high school performance.

4. Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative. Depth, not breadth, of experience is most important.

5. Letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselor that give evidence of integrity, special skills, positive character traits, and an interest in learning.

6. A well-written essay that 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.

7. Special talents or experiences that will contribute to an interesting and well-rounded student body.

8. Demonstrated leadership in activities. Colleges want people who will arrive prepared and willing to take leadership of student activities and events.

9. Demonstrated intellectual curiosity through reading, school, leisure pursuits, and more.

10. Demonstrated enthusiasm to attend, often exhibited by campus visits and an interview, showing an interest toward attending the college.