

KIPP: Match Matters

COLLEGE COUNSELORS

FOUR KEYS TO FINDING *their* MATCH

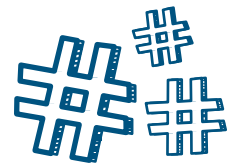
Deciding which college to attend is one of the most important decisions a KIPPster will make on the journey towards graduation. There are many factors for families to consider, and we know that which college a KIPPster chooses to attend has a huge impact on how successful his or her college experience will be.

Counseling students and families to select a smart college match is as much a science as it is an art. As a community, we've learned a lot about the keys to finding a college match from the experiences of our KIPPsters.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

A student's GPA is very important in the college admissions process. It impacts both their chances of admission and their chances of receiving merit-based financial aid. Colleges look at cumulative GPAs and overall GPA trends from all four years of high school. Making significant improvements to GPA late in students' high school careers can be very difficult. Their performance in the first two years of high school is as important as it is in their last two.

The ACT or SAT score is also a critical piece of a student's college profile and impacts his or her chance of admission. While some colleges don't require these scores, most schools do and factor them into admissions decisions. Preparing for the ACT and SAT is important and can give students an edge. There is a plethora of programs, books, and online resources to help students get ready to take the tests. Students can take the PSAT and the ACT prep test to ensure that they are ready to take the actual tests by junior year. Taking the actual tests more than once also gives students an advantage because they know what to expect, have a chance to improve their test results, and can send their best score to colleges.



BUILD A SMART WISH LIST

Finding a great college match relies on building a smart wish list. This takes time, and is not a one-and-done process. As students prepare to apply to college, the wish list will start out broad and get narrower as students and counselors work together to hone and refine the list of schools that students will actually apply to.

Information about schools' acceptance rates, average ACT/SAT scores and GPA, financial aid offerings, and graduation rates are all important inputs to creating a smart wish list. The more colleges a student applies to, the better the chance he or she will have of enrolling in a match school. We recommend students apply to a mix of nine schools: 3 likely, 3 target, and 3 reach. The type of colleges that could be categorized as likely, target, and reach schools is different for each student.



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PREPARE FOR THE COST OF COLLEGE

College is expensive, but the cost is worth it. It is an investment in a student's future. A college degree opens the door to more jobs, and jobs with higher earning potential. Students and families may be scared off by the sticker price. It's our job to make sure families understand the range of financial aid options, as well as the real cost of college. There are ways to make college affordable — scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study can all make the investment in college reasonable. Even some of the most expensive schools will offer packages that make college affordable.

College counselors can help students understand important details about financial aid — including what kind of financial aid a particular college has offered to other students in the past, what the total cost of attending will be, and how much of the package students might have to repay regardless of whether or not they graduate.

And like a lot of things in life, financial aid is given out on a first-come, first-served basis. Students should get their FAFSA applications in early to ensure that they get the aid and scholarships they are eligible for.



GET AN EARLY START

Writing and revising essays, requesting transcripts, collecting recommendations and submitting applications all take significant planning and coordination. KIPPsters who Get an Early Start ensure they will have time to address any obstacle that may come up in the application process.

Planning ahead allows KIPPsters to apply ahead of admission deadlines. It also gives them the option to discuss Early Decision and Early Action options with their counselors and decide if they're right for them. Colleges consider early commitment applications differently than regular decision applications, and applying early may be advantageous for some students.

