

To test or not to test? That is the question

This week several Ivy League universities have announced that they will remain test optional for another year. While this news had many grade 11 students jumping for joy, this does not mean that they should not prepare for the college admissions tests nor does it mean they should not take the tests. There is not a black and white answer to this question. This question needs to be evaluated individually for each child and for each university to which they are applying.

For a moment, please make yourself a Director of Enrollment Management at a university. Imagine that you are evaluating your child for admissions along with many other applicants. If you are not going to receive any testing information, how are you going to compare applicants? What would you want to consider? If you have 10,000 applicants for 100 spots, how are you going to eliminate students in a fair and equitable manner? How much time can you take per applicant to make a good decision?

While almost everyone will agree that the SAT and ACT are not great predictors of college success, and that they are glad to see them eliminated, there is much more pressure on the applicants to demonstrate they should be selected to attend a specific university. There are good reasons to take either or both an SAT and an ACT. You, along with your child, and the college counselor or educational consultant, can determine which strategy is best for your child based on the list of colleges to which they are applying. However, unless there is a really good reason not to, all students should prepare to take the tests. This allows you to make an informed decision for each school and for your child. Advanced Placement (AP) tests can also play an important role in this decision.

A strong comparative score on standardized tests, for a specific university pool, can help demonstrate that a child is academically appropriate for that school along with the child's academic and extracurricular profile. The test score is a piece of the puzzle. To be honest, I have not had a single client accepted to a competitive university without standardized tests even with a high GPA and rank with one exception and that was a child with 7 AP scores of 5 each by the end of her junior year. Additionally, I believe several of my clients were accepted to colleges because they had a solid test score for that college as part of their profile.

My personal philosophy is to keep all options open until you have to close an option. Standardized test scores can help keep options open and help position an applicant in the admissions pool regardless of the university, unless they have a policy that indicates they will NOT consider a test score. There are a few universities with that policy. You can determine, for your child's college list, whether or not to use the scores but if you do not have them, there is no choice.