

Early Decision, Early Action, Early Decision 2, Early Action 2, Rolling Admissions

When Should you Apply????

There is no question that COVID has shifted the paradigm of the university admissions process right along with the waiving of standardized testing requirements. Almost every parent asks me if their child should take the SAT/ACT and if their child should apply Early Decision (ED) which is a binding decision. The stress and worry are palpable. Unfortunately, there are no black and white answers. This article will discuss the question of when you should apply.

Many parents and educators will state that every child should apply ED. They will cite statistics saying 50% of the freshman class was accepted ED so the chances are better. Unfortunately, this just indicates that they do not understand statistics, nor college admissions. Even though the chances may be higher, you have to be a strong candidate for that specific school. If you are in the top 25% of the applicant pool, you do have a better chance but I have seen many children rejected in the ED round when they would have had a much better chance had they waited for the regular round or ED2 if offered.

The easy answer is that a child should apply ED when they are at their strongest for that particular university and only if that university is truly their first choice or at least a top choice. The more competitive the admissions for a particular university, the more strategic you need to be. If you need financial aid, you are adding an additional layer of strategy that is required. The answer for each child is dependent on that child's complete high school story and each child needs to evaluate this question for themselves with their parents, college counselor or educational consultant. Admissions is an art, not a science or a math equation, and there are many factors to consider.

The first step to answering this question is to holistically and realistically evaluate your child for the college in question. How does the child "fit" in their particular admissions pool based on the information available from the college's last two admissions cycles? You must consider the child's high school academic history, test scores (yes – still a big factor even if optional), and the child's high school story. Ask yourself, is there anything that will make my child a stronger candidate in January compared to November? Will another SAT/ACT make a difference? Is there anything my child will complete before January that will add a strong dimension to the story? Would senior first semester grades be an added plus? Is my child positive they want to attend that university if accepted? Is there a round two of ED at that school? How does my child compare to other students from the school who are also applying ED? Each of these factors needs to be carefully weighed and considered as you develop a strategy per college.

Early Action (EA) is not as big of an advantage but it is also not binding, and it should be used very differently. It is always a relief to be accepted to a university and to know that you have a home for next year. I strongly encourage each child to apply EA to a few schools especially if their safety schools offer this option. It can also help as you approach the regular round as a child can eliminate schools that fall below any EA acceptances on their list.

Bottom line? Each child brings unique characteristics to the college admissions process and each college's admissions statistics are different. Delicate strategy sessions as well as research are required to make the best decision to give your child the biggest advantage in reaching their goals and dreams. There is no "one size fits all". Consider the big picture and realistically evaluate your specific child for each university to which they are applying.

Stay tuned for an article on what exactly test optional admissions means for your child.