

What to look for in a test-prep program

Remember that exciting and heartbreaking day when you dropped your 5-year-old off at kindergarten for the first time? Maybe you had a social little butterfly that ran right off to make friends without a second look back, and you were left alone, waiting for a kiss goodbye. Or even worse, you had to trick a timid, tearful child into entering the classroom and you quickly snuck away when they turned their back. You might have felt guilty, as if you betrayed your child's trust. But you appeased these feelings knowing that they were in safe, capable hands and that they'd soon be playing, learning, and making their very first friends.

Thankfully, it's gotten easier since then...at least in some ways. Hopefully you don't have to hoodwink your child every time you drop them off at school anymore, or wipe away tears every time they go out with friends. On the contrary, over the years those tears have gradually turned into sighs of relief at finally getting some time for yourself!

Other feelings persist, however. You still want your child to be happy, to be making good friends, and to learn and develop into a mature, successful adult. You still entrust others with their education and their future, making grand investments and sacrifices to get them closer to their dreams. And the height of these investments generally occur during--you guessed it!--the college admissions process!

With countless hours spent on test prep, essays, researching universities, visiting universities, online applications, interviews, and more, it's not just a financial investment. Once your child is in college, then it's turn for the finances-- hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of tuition, fees, and board drained from your account within a span of 4 years.

So how do you appease these feelings? The stress on your time and wallet, coupled with concern for your child's future...it's enough to make anyone cry again! So believe us when we say that your solace lies in preparation. The worst thing you could do right now is to underestimate the power of preparation--for standardized tests, for financial planning, and for choosing the right college. Knowing your options is key to making smart, viable decisions that will affect you and your child for many years to come. Because as you begin thinking of retirement, and your student begins thinking of starting a family, buying a car, starting a travel blog, or whatever will float this generation's boat...the investment you make now will continue to influence all these decisions.

So, instead of jumping the gun and visiting Ivy Leagues before your student has taken any sort of standardized test, start small! Talk to your student about their goals and dreams, and find a college preparation program that can help your student meet them. In the interests of preserving time, money, and dreams, this means a test prep program that is 1. Flexible , 2. Holistic , and 3. Strategic.

1. Flexible

You know it, your student knows it, and we know it. With homework, sports practices, social commitments, family time, it's hard to add more to that plate. In these years, flexibility won't be your strong suit. So, it should be theirs! For example, if you need to find a test prep program that your student can stick to long enough to get actual results, you need to find a program that offers a variety of options. Having an online option, for example, means your student can get in some valuable test prep time wherever they are--in between classes in the library, waiting for sports practice, or sitting in the dentist office. Online programs are accessible and convenient, and can help make the most of dead time so your student can still meet friends on the weekends. On the other hand, it's hard to stay motivated and engaged with a 100% online platform. Having a tutor to check in with to measure progress, express concerns, or get extra help on a topic is immensely helpful for all students. A good test prep program knows how valuable you and your student's time is, and is flexible enough to create a personalized plan that makes the most of every minute.

2. Holistic

The college planning process doesn't end after taking the SAT and ACTs. Far from it! It's the time to take those scores and get your money's worth for them. A good test prep program will have a holistic outlook and be able to relate your student's scantrons to your wallet. This means each step of the test prep process is done meaningfully with a target score in mind. The target score should reflect the scholarship dollars your student is eligible for, as well as the schools that will offer the most bang for your buck, whether public state schools or private Ivy leagues! Being able to see the whole picture is central in making wise college decisions, and in keeping your student motivated to keep at it with the test prep. If you're feeling blunt, you may also tell them that the money they make mowing the neighbor's lawn will hardly pay for a college textbook...while each hour they spend on test prep could amount to thousands of dollars of FREE MONEY for college. So, find a test prep program that is realistic enough to bridge this whole process together and make it a meaningful, effective use of your time!

3. Strategic

Speaking of realistic, if your student has lofty dreams accompanied by lofty price tags, you're going to need a sound strategic plan. There's a whole science behind how colleges look at applications and choose scholarship-worthy applicants. Knowing the inner workings of college admissions boards is critical in drafting an effective plan of action. You must also know your student's strengths and weaknesses so that you can present them to the college board in a way that makes them think that your student was made for that school. A good test prep program will work with you to draft a long-term strategy, which short-term achievable goals.

So, as you get ready to drop your child off at school and wave goodbye for the last time, remember how much it took to trust that kindergarten with your child. Find a test prep program that will help you say goodbye, and walk away knowing that they're in the best hands.

When you're ready to make the leap, head over to www.testpreproadmap.com and purchase a diagnostic test for your student. When your student has completed the test, we'll meet to go over the score report and discuss where to begin their test prep plan.