

How to Get Into the High School of Your Choice

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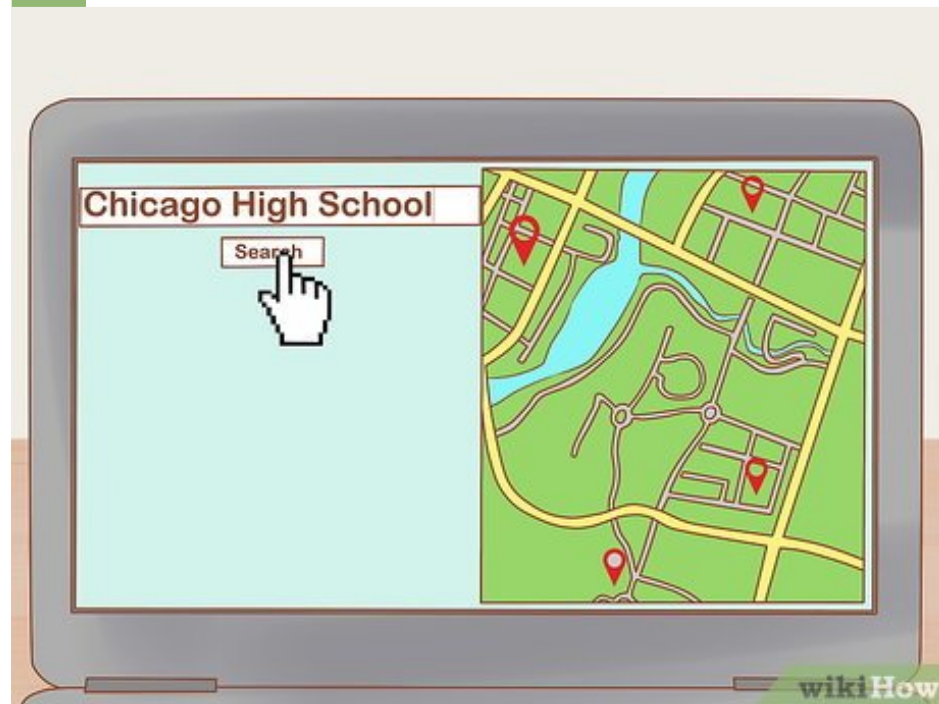
Co-authored by [Katie Styzek](#) and **31 contributors**

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If you're in 8th grade, you might be getting ready to apply to high schools. This is the first step to prepare yourself for your future career, so it's a pretty important decision. However, you can ensure that you have a good chance at getting into the school of your choice by picking schools that fit your goals, putting together a strong application, and doing well in school and on standardized tests.

Method 1

Method 1 of 3: Picking Your Potential Schools



1 **Check which schools you're able to attend based on where you live.** Some states require that every school accepts a certain number of students from the immediate surrounding area, like the town or borough. Try to prioritize applications to schools that are in your town, and apply to a few other schools outside of your town if you want to.^[1]

- Some schools are allowed to accept students outside of the surrounding area, while others aren't. Be sure to check the regulations in your area.



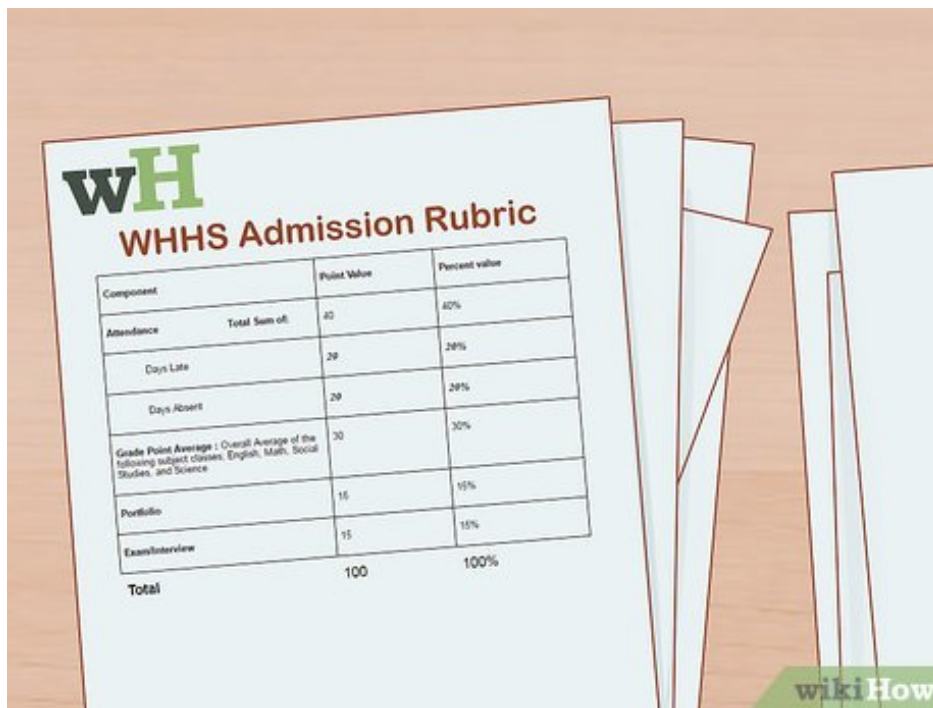
2 Attend a high school fair if there's one in your area. Bring a folder and a pen to the fair, and come with a list of 10-12 schools that you'd like to learn more about. While you're at the fair, talk to the admissions representatives at the schools where you're thinking about applying, and ask them questions about applying to the school and what life is like as a student.^[2]

- In some cities, like New York City, the Department of Education hosts a large fair with all of the high schools in the city. Some areas even have additional fairs for individual towns and boroughs.



3 Visit any schools that you're interested in attending. ^[3] Check the school's website and schedule a tour for potential students with the admissions office. Some schools might even have special days where they offer tours for all of the potential students at once.^[4]

- If you can't schedule a tour, try attending an event at the school, like a sports game or a musical, to get a better understanding of the school and students.
- Keep in mind that some schools consider whether or not you came for a tour in their admission decisions. If you think they might, it's best to play it safe and take a tour.



4 **Gather an admissions rubric from each school that you visit.** While you're on your tour, don't be afraid to ask questions. If a staff member is giving the tour, wait until the end, and then ask if they have an admissions rubric for potential students. This will outline how they decide who gets into the school and will tell you what they think are the most important parts of your application.^[5]

- In some states, each school can have their own admissions rubric. However, some states have one general rubric for all high schools.
- If you have any questions, don't be afraid to email the admissions counselor and ask.^[6]

Method 2 of 3: Filling out Your Applications



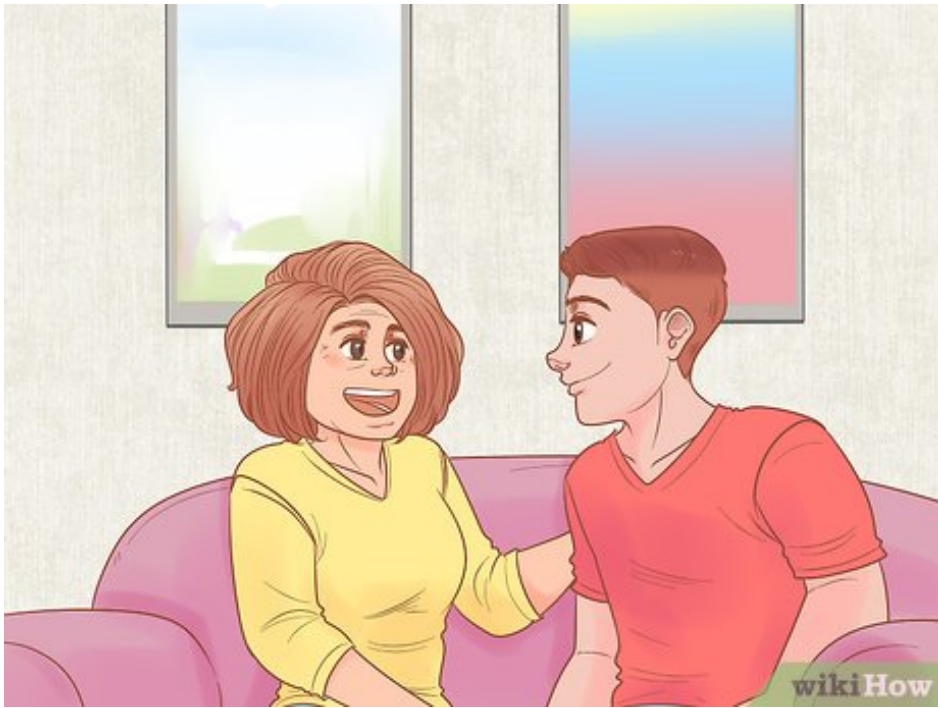
1 Apply to as many schools and programs as possible to increase your chances.

Depending on where you live, you might be able to apply to an unlimited number of schools, or you might only be able to pick a few. Try to apply to as many schools as possible to increase your chances of getting accepted. Pick a variety of schools, including competitive schools, local schools, and specialty programs.^[7]

- For example, in New York City, you can apply to up to 12 schools. Try to apply to your 12 top schools, even if you don't love all of them. Remember to rank them in order from your favorite to least favorite on your application.

2 Fill out the online or paper application for the school. Depending on where you live, there might be one online application for all of the schools in the area, or each school might have a different application. Make sure to answer all of the questions in the application and include all of the required materials for the application so the school doesn't disqualify you.^[8]

- Depending on your location, you might be required to submit test scores, do an interview, ask for recommendations, or answer written questions.
- If you aren't sure about how to access an online application or don't know how to find a paper application, ask your teacher, a parent, or a guidance counselor to help you.
- Be sure to write down your username and password for your online applications so that you can log in and work on the application when you need to.



3 Accept help from your parents or guardian to create a strong application. Your parents might have to help you create your profile for the applications, including questions about where they pay taxes and other information that you might not know. If you don't understand any part of the application, don't be afraid to ask a parent for help.^[9]

- Studies show that students have a better chance of getting into more competitive schools when their families are involved.^[10]
- If your parents aren't able to answer a question that you have, you can ask a teacher or guidance counselor to help you find an answer.



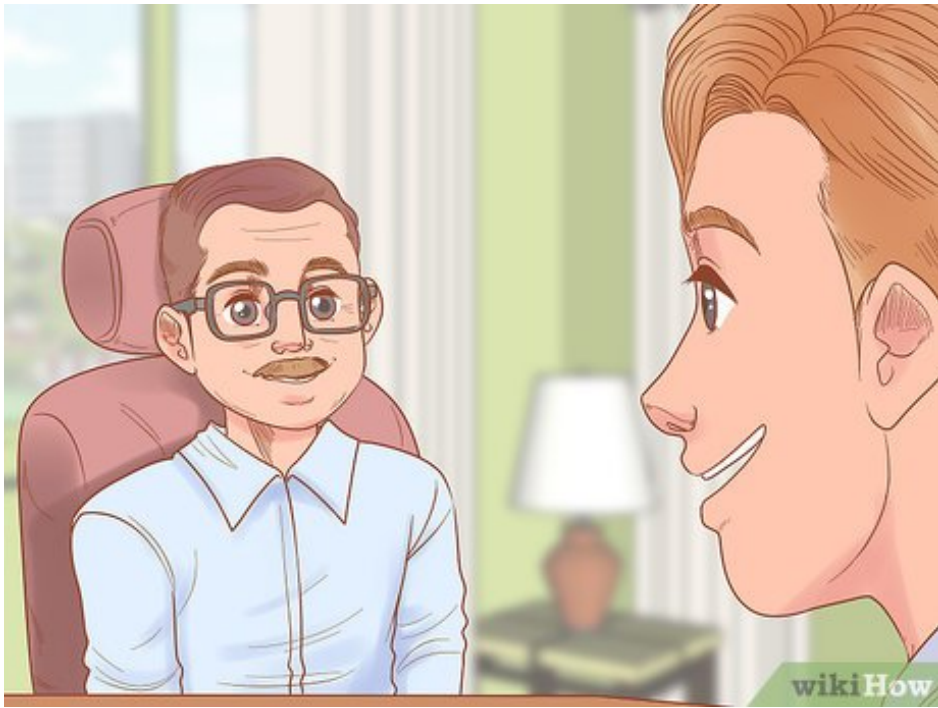
4 **Ask your teachers to write positive recommendation letters for you if needed.** Try to pick teachers and other staff members who you've had good experiences with or who you learned a lot from. About 1-2 months before your application is due, make an appointment to talk to them about your goals so they can write you the best recommendation possible.

- For example, you can approach your teacher say, "Hi, Mrs. Bradley. I'm going to be submitting my application to McKinley High School next month, and I was wondering if you would feel comfortable writing a positive recommendation letter for me? I really enjoyed your class and am proud of the fact that I got a good grade. Are you able to meet with me after school this week to talk about my application?"
- Some schools require that you have a recommendation from a teacher, an administrator, or both.
- Even if you weren't very talkative in class, if you did well and worked hard, your teacher will probably have nice things to say about you.



5 Submit your applications according to the school's deadline. Check the school's website to view the deadlines for different programs and students. To submit online, in most cases all you have to do is click "submit" or "confirm application". For a paper application, be sure to address and stamp the envelope and place it in the mail at least 1 day before the deadline.^[11]

- Some states have a general application deadline for all schools in the state. Most schools will have this deadline posted on their website.
- If you apply late, there's a chance your application won't be looked at.



6 Practice for the interview if you're applying to a private school. Ask a parent or teacher to hold a practice interview with you a few weeks before your real interview. Dress up in your interview clothes, shake their hand, and answer their questions as if it was your real interview. This will help to get rid of some of your nervousness before the actual interview.^[12]

- For example, you can have them ask you questions like “What’s your favorite subject and why?” “Why do you want to come to this school?” and “How do you plan to be a good student at our school?”
- After the interview, talk with your parent or teacher about what you did well and where you can improve for your real interview.



7 Stay positive while you wait for your results. It's easy to get nervous while you wait to hear back from your top schools. Try to stay busy by focusing on schoolwork or other hobbies. Remember that you can be successful no matter what school you go to, as long as you try your hardest and continue to get good grades.^[13]

- Once you're accepted into a school, try to let them know as soon as possible whether or not you'll be able to go.
- If you don't get into the school that you wanted, check to see if you can re-apply during a second round of admissions or appeal the school's decision. Otherwise, try to accept a place at the best school where you got accepted into.^[14]

Method 3 of 3: Meeting Academic Requirements



1 Get good grades in your classes in the 3-4 years before high school. ^[15] Most schools look at grades from 5th grade until 8th grade, so make sure you're trying your hardest in all of your classes. Try to aim for As and Bs in all of your classes to get into the best school possible.^[16]

- Use a planner and calendar to help you keep track of all your assignments.^[17]
- Some schools won't accept anyone with a grade of C or lower.
- If you do have a low grade, you can sometimes attach a short essay to your application explaining why you didn't do well in the class. Remember to be honest and talk about how it helped you grow as a student.



2 Take practice exams to score well on standardized tests. Download practice tests and study guides for your state exam from the Internet, or purchase a practice booklet at the bookstore. Work through the problems on the tests, and circle any that give you trouble. Then, go back and review those skills and figure out the problem.^[18]

- If you're having trouble with many of the problems, consider asking your parents to send you to a tutor or sign up for after-school tutoring.
- Most states require a standardized test or a school admissions test for students who are applying to high school.
- Sometimes these tests are given during class time, but other times you have to sign up to take them outside of class. Check your state's rules for more information.



3 Attend all of your class to show your commitment to learning. ^[19] Some schools look at how many classes you've missed throughout the last 3-4 years. Remember to go to all of your classes unless you're sick or have another valid excuse. If you have a valid excuse, talk to your teachers or principal about getting the absence removed or "exempted" from your attendance record.^[20]

- If the absence is "exempted," the high school will be able to see that you missed a day of school, but there will be a note that the absence was for an approved reason.



4 Get involved in activities outside of class. Competitive high schools look for students who have many different skills. Show them all of your talents by learning how to play an instrument, acting in a musical, playing on a sports team, or joining another type of club at your school. If you're really passionate about something, don't be afraid to talk to them about it in your application!^[21]

- For example, if you're really interested in computer science and want to go to a science high school, you can join, or even start, a robotics team at your school.
- If you play an instrument and want to go to a performing arts school, show them that you're interested in a variety of types of performance by performing in the school play or singing with the chorus.



Expert Q&A

Question

How do I know what I need to get into a high school?



Katie Styzek
Professional School Counselor
Expert Answer

I suggest you email a counselor from the high school you want to attend. They'll be able to answer any questions you have about admission requirements.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 2

Question

Do your sixth grade grades count toward high school admissions?



Community Answer

It depends on the school. Most usually look throughout your education years, but they tend to focus on 7th and 8th grade years. This includes grades, test scores, behavior, and extra curricular activities, such as clubs and sports.

Helpful 98 Not Helpful 8

Question

When do you do the interview?



Community Answer

Not all schools do interviews, but if the school does hold interviews, it will be some time during the application process. The school will notify you when you are scheduled to be interviewed.

Helpful 57 Not Helpful 11

Question

If one school accepts you, and then a month passes and the other school accepts you to, do you have to attend the first school?



Community Answer

You should get to to choose the school you would like to attend. Think about distance, costs, classes, curriculum, and activities. Pick the school that better suits your needs. Just make sure to write back to each school and tell them whether you will attend or not.

Helpful 58 Not Helpful 13

Question

My friend recently received an F in a class. Can she still get into a private high school?



Community Answer

This depends. Does your school offer course forgiveness? Does your current school hold you back for failure? Is this a core class? This bad grade may lower her chances of getting in. Hopefully she has better attributes and accolades to help her get in.

Helpful 49 Not Helpful 24

Question

What do you need to bring?



Samantha L. Campbell
Community Answer

When you're going to an interview, you can bring a general "resume" that lists your activities, your interests, and your GPA and test scores. Otherwise, you shouldn't need to bring anything else with you unless they request copies of your report cards.

Helpful 11 Not Helpful 4

Question

How do high schools check your 6th and 7th grade GPA and test scores?



Samantha L. Campbell
Community Answer

Your test scores are reported by the state or the testing service that provides the test. Depending on where you live, the school requests to access them when you submit your application, or you can send the score to the school so that they can see it. Your 6th and 7th grade school has files of your GPA and academic records that the new school can request or you can give to them.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 7

Question

Can I still get into a private high school with a 2.8 GPA in my first two trimesters of middle school but on my third I get a 3.7 GPA? Do admissions consider improvement?



Samantha L. Campbell
Community Answer

It will ultimately depend on the school that you're applying to. If you're worried about your grades, write a letter along with your application to explain the low grades. Focus on how you've become a better student and are continuing to work on improving your grades.

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 6



Tips

- If you're not sure about a school, try talking to some of the students who go there. Ask them how they like the school and if they feel like they're learning a lot.
- Always be honest in your application. If you lie, it's very likely that the school will find out at some point, and they can take back your acceptance.

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About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Katie Styzek**. Katie Styzek is a Professional School Counselor for Chicago Public Schools. Katie earned a BS in Elementary Education with a Concentration in Mathematics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She served as a middle school mathematics, science, and social studies teacher for three years prior to becoming a counselor. She holds a Master of Education (M.Ed.) in School Counseling from DePaul University and an MA in Educational Leadership from Northeastern Illinois University. Katie holds an Illinois School Counselor Endorsement License (Type 73 Service Personnel), an Illinois Principal License (formerly Type 75), and an Illinois Elementary Education Teaching License (Type 03, K – 9). She is also Nationally Board Certified in School Counseling from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This article has been viewed 177,287 times.

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