

H&C

NEW YORK EDITION

EXCEPTIONAL ISN'T ENOUGH

The New York Parent's Playbook for Top College Admissions

H&C EDUCATION

PREMIER COLLEGE ADMISSIONS CONSULTING

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Few places set a higher bar for college admissions than NYC.

New York families are rarely short on ambition, resources or good advice. What's harder to find is a clear picture of what actually moves the needle at the most selective schools, and when to act on it.

This guide is that picture. It's written for parents of students in 7th through 12th grade, drawn from years of successfully guiding students into the Ivy League and the country's top universities.

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THE NEW YORK REALITY

When every applicant is exceptional, what earns the admission?

Walk into any classroom at Dalton, Horace Mann, Trinity or Stuyvesant, and you'll find students who would stand out almost anywhere else. Top grades, strong scores, a full calendar of activities. Here, that's the starting line.

New York is one of the most competitive places in the country to apply from. Many selective colleges assign admissions officers by region. That officer usually gives your child's file its first read, knows their school well and sees it beside other applicants from the same school and area. Your child competes nationally for a seat, but is read first beside classmates and other New York applicants with similar records. With so many strong applicants coming from a small number of schools, that's where the real competition happens.

So the question shifts. When an admissions officer has already seen a dozen excellent transcripts from the same school, what makes them stop on one file?

The answer is almost never another A or another club. It's evidence of who a student is when no one is grading them.

That evidence can't be assembled in the fall of senior year. It's built over time, with intention, and the families who understand this early give their children the most room to grow into it.

Leaders, not followers with good grades

The most selective universities are building classes of people who will shape their fields. Grades and scores show a student is ready for the work. Initiative, depth and coherence show they will do something with it.

Initiative

Top universities are looking for students who will make an impact on campus and beyond. The strongest evidence is a history of turning interests into results: a question researched, an organization founded, a product launched, a cause advanced. That record of creating and leading tells admissions officers far more than a disjointed list of activities.

Depth

Two or three commitments pursued seriously, over years, with real results. Admissions officers can tell the difference between a long list and a meaningful one in seconds.

Coherence

Courses, summers, activities and essays that tell one clear story. When every piece points in the same direction, the application reads as a person, not a résumé.

OUR APPROACH

We teach students to think like entrepreneurs

For us, entrepreneurship has little to do with business. It's a way of seeing: spotting a problem, taking ownership of it and building something that didn't exist before. Whether a student's passion is astrophysics, poetry or public health, that mindset turns interest into impact. It's also what gives students the confidence to speak about their work with conviction, in an essay, an interview and everywhere after.

New York is the greatest classroom in the country. Use it.

Few students anywhere live this close to world-class labs, museums, hospitals, companies and civic institutions. The opportunity is right here. The difference lies in how intentionally a student uses it.

Science and research

Selective programs like the American Museum of Natural History's Science Research Mentoring Program and Rockefeller University's Summer Science Research Program put high school students in real labs. Stony Brook's Simons Summer Research Program is a short train ride away.

Writing and the arts

The city has its own Youth Poet Laureate program, and its galleries, theaters and publishers make it one of the best places in the world to build a creative portfolio worth recognizing.

Medicine and health

Some of the country's leading hospitals and medical schools are a subway ride away, along with the researchers, physicians and public health leaders who make ideal mentors.

Business and technology

Finance, media, fashion and a fast-growing startup scene mean that a student with a serious idea can find an expert willing to take their call.

Civic life

In New York City, 16- and 17-year-olds can be appointed to their local community board. Few places offer teenagers a real seat at the table this early.

Culture and heritage

Museums, archives and cultural organizations from every corner of the world make New York an extraordinary setting for projects in history, language and identity.

> **Participation isn't the same as distinction**
>
> Enrichment courses can be valuable ways to explore an interest and build knowledge. But in admissions, programs that select a small cohort through a competitive process generally provide stronger evidence of distinction than programs primarily designed for enrichment.

Every year has a purpose

For New York students, the bar is higher. Earning a place at a top university takes more here than almost anywhere else in the country, and the work begins years before the application opens. Each grade carries its own purpose, and wherever your child starts, a clear plan makes every year count.

HIGH SCHOOL ROADMAP

7th and 8th grade

Explore widely, notice what sticks

- Explore the fields worth pursuing in college and beyond.
- Build the reading, writing and time-management habits that carry through high school.
- Grow the confidence to share ideas, ask questions and take on new challenges.

In New York: many students arrive at high school with years of enrichment behind them. Direction matters more than volume.

HIGH SCHOOL ROADMAP

9th grade

Choose depth and plant the first seed

- Narrow activities to the few that matter most and take on real responsibility in each. Colleges value years of commitment and growing leadership over a long list of memberships.
- Turn a real interest into an idea worth pursuing. For many students, this is where a capstone begins.
- Make grades a priority. 9th grade is the first year on the transcript most selective colleges review, and it often decides who qualifies for honors and AP courses later.

In New York: the jump to high school at the city's most rigorous schools is steep, and 9th grade sets the academic pace for the years ahead. From this year on, every summer should include a selective program, an internship or a research placement.

HIGH SCHOOL ROADMAP

10TH GRADE

Build something real

- Grow the capstone, or launch one, and give it room to develop.
- Choose a clear academic focus and start defining the caliber of universities to aim for.
- Apply to selective summer programs, internships and competitions that fit that focus.

In New York: the most selective programs and internships draw applicants from across the city's top schools. Being chosen takes proven interest and initiative in the field, not just strong grades.

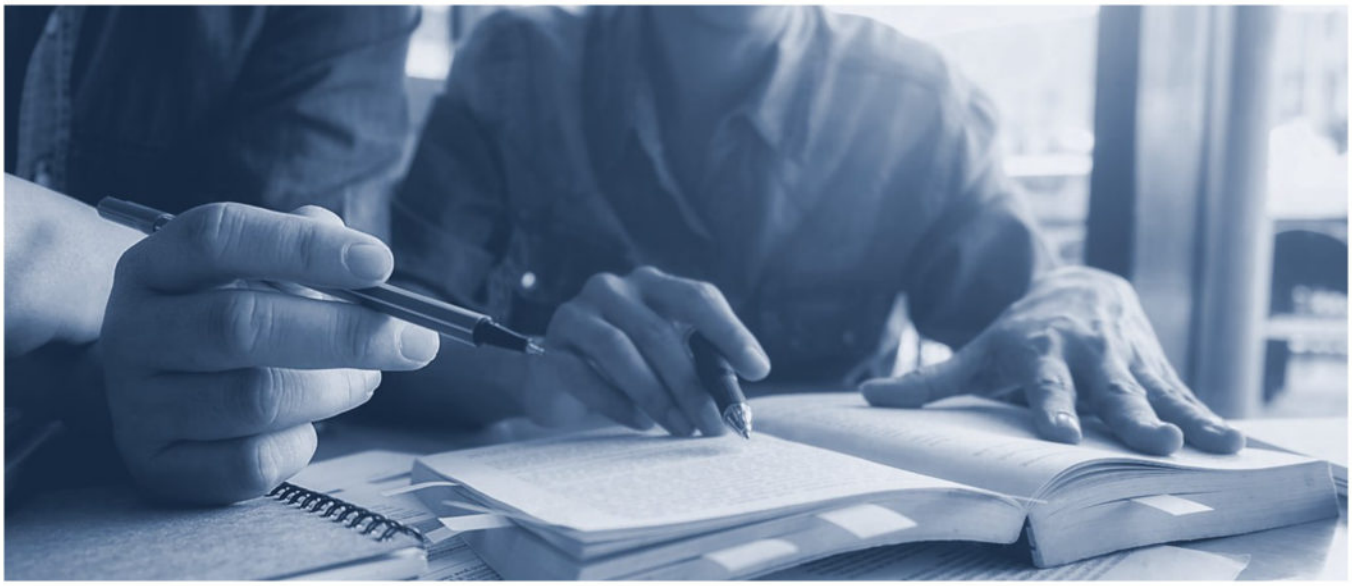
HIGH SCHOOL ROADMAP

11TH GRADE

Show impact and sharpen the story

- Show impact through measurable results, recognition and growing responsibility.
- Take full-length SAT or ACT practice tests to set a baseline, and where there's room to improve, commit to a focused plan for reaching a target score.
- Finalize a balanced college list by the end of junior year, anchored in the student's academic focus and pairing ambitious reaches with schools where admission is realistic.

In New York: dozens of top universities are within a few hours' drive. Junior year is an especially useful time to visit and see which ones fit best.



COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

12TH GRADE

Bring it all together

- Develop a narrative that reveals who the student is: what drives them, how they think and what they'll bring to campus. In a pool of strong applicants, a distinct personal voice is what admissions officers remember.
- Present every activity through the lens of contribution, leadership and impact.
- Build a strategic plan for early and regular rounds. Where to apply early is one of the most consequential decisions in the entire process.

In New York: the city's extraordinary concentration of university alumni means students may have access to alumni interviewers who aren't equally available everywhere. Students who can speak about their work with confidence are prepared to make the most of that opportunity.

Starting later than you'd hoped?

It's not too late. Students who begin in 11th grade can still launch a capstone and build a powerful application. Those starting in 12th grade can still present their story with clarity and strength. With less time, every decision carries more weight, and that's where expert guidance makes the difference.



THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

Grades show what a student has learned. A capstone shows what they have created.

A capstone is a signature initiative that grows from your child's own interests: research, advocacy, a venture, a prototype or a creative work. It's the clearest evidence of originality, initiative and impact an admissions officer will see, and it sits at the heart of every High School Roadmap we build.

The best capstones bring students into conversation with leaders in their field. Professors, physicians, researchers, CEOs and nonprofit founders become advisors and collaborators, and those relationships often open doors to internships, research positions and letters of recommendation.

CASE STUDY

Cultural Heritage Nonprofit

A student built a nonprofit platform for cultural preservation, with Ivy League professors on its board. The handbook he created was adopted by a national museum and several high schools.

Admitted to seven Ivy League universities and now at Harvard.

CASE STUDY

Humanitarian Technology Initiative

A student is developing a solar-powered, offline-ready EMDR wristband and companion app to provide early trauma stabilization in crisis zones. The project is now in prototype refinement, clinician validation and pilot preparation. Partnership pathways are in development with UNICEF, the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders and the World Health Organization.

Outcome so far: Advanced to Phase 2 of the Conrad Challenge 2025. The project is still in progress.

Explore all capstone case studies →

What makes a capstone memorable

It starts with a real interest, never a trend. It solves a problem the student genuinely cares about. And it has time to grow, which is why the strongest projects begin in 9th or 10th grade.

Ten weeks that can change the story

Summer gives students the time to go deep. Every summer plan should answer one question: what will they have built, learned or contributed by September?

Build

Dedicated time to advance the capstone: run the study, launch the initiative, finish the prototype or complete the body of work.

Be selected

Competitive programs, research placements and contests that admit a small number of students and signal real achievement.

Work

Internships and jobs that offer responsibility. A summer behind a counter or in an office can say a great deal about maturity and character.

The most impressive summers rarely come from a catalog. They come from a plan that fits the student.

> **A note on timing**
>
> Many of the most selective summer programs close applications in winter and early spring. Start planning in the fall to keep every option open.



Good intentions, wrong moves

None of these are mistakes of effort. They're natural instincts in a competitive city, and each one is easy to correct with a little perspective.

1 **Doing everything**

A long list of activities can blur a student's identity. Admissions officers remember the student who went deep on a few things and made a difference.

2 **Choosing activities to impress**

Admissions officers can spot a packaged applicant immediately. The most compelling profiles grow from who a student genuinely is.

3 **Following the class**

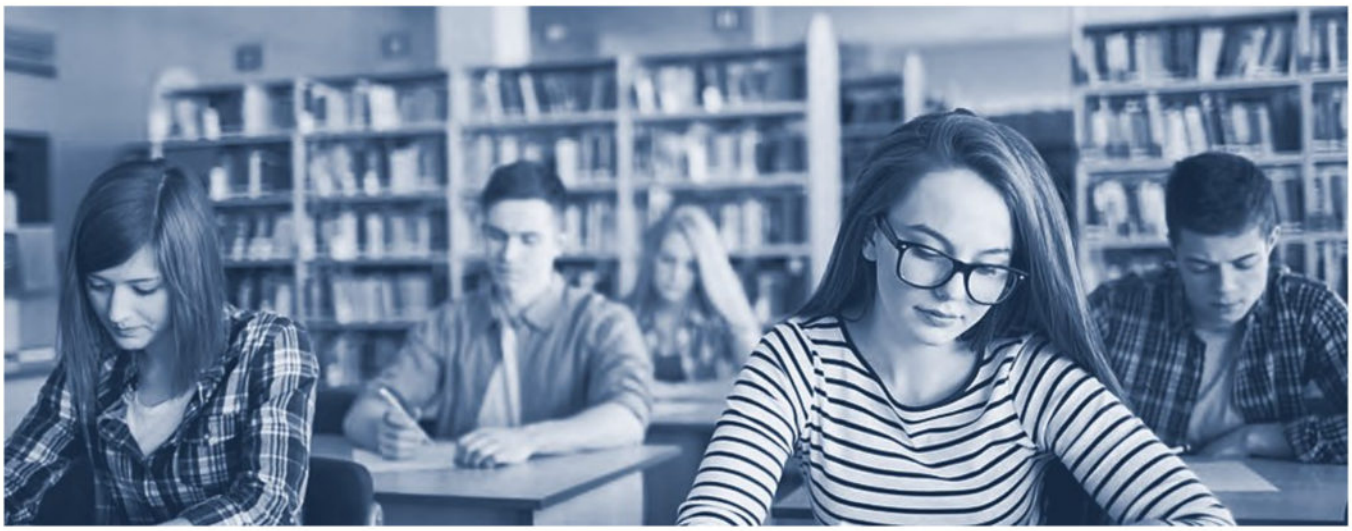
When classmates take the same courses, programs and early decision paths, it's tempting to follow. But a plan copied from classmates makes a student blend in. A strategy built around your child is what makes them stand out.

4 **Waiting for senior year to find the story**

A compelling application is lived before it's written. By senior fall, the story should already be there to tell.

5 **Writing essays that sound like a résumé**

The essay is the one place an admissions officer hears your child's voice. It should reveal how they think, not repeat what they've done.



HOW WE WORK WITH NEW YORK FAMILIES

Every consultant an Ivy League graduate. Every plan designed from scratch for your child. No two are ever the same.

H&C Education was founded by Ivy League Ph.D. graduates to help students turn potential into a record of achievement. Every consultant on our team is a working expert in their own field. Our consultants take on just 5 to 20 students at a time, compared with an industry average of 50 to 100 or more. This focus means your child's consultant comes to know them deeply: their goals, how they think and how they learn best.

Our High School Roadmap guides students from 7th through 11th grade with a multi-year strategy anchored by a signature capstone. Our College Applications program guides seniors through every element of the application.

OUR STUDENTS' 2026 RESULTS

100%

accepted to one of their top three best-fit schools

65%

accepted to the Ivy League or a top 20 school

100%

of our consultants are Ivy League graduates

GETTING STARTED

1. **Discovery Call**
   A complimentary conversation to understand your child, your goals and whether we're the right fit.

2. **Initial Consultation**
   An in-depth review of your child's transcripts, academic and extracurricular profile and goals, identifying their strengths and the opportunities ahead. This session sets the foundation for a tailored strategy and lets your family experience our approach firsthand, ensuring the right match between your child and their consultant before committing to a package.

3. **Your child's plan**
   A bespoke Roadmap or application strategy, with their consultant beside them at every step.

MEET OUR CONSULTANTS

THE TEAM BEHIND EVERY PLAN



FOUNDER & CEO

Pierre Huguet, Ph.D.

A leading college admissions expert and Yale Ph.D., Pierre founded H&C Education and built it into one of the country's premier admissions consulting firms. His advice has been featured in The New York Times, TIME, Forbes.com, U.S. News, CNN Business and Business Insider.

A selection of our consultants.

View full consultant bios →



John Klich, Ph.D.

SENIOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Yale BS and Stanford PhD in bioengineering, Silicon Valley founder and inventor on three patents. Students admitted to Yale, Stanford, Harvard, Penn, Dartmouth and Duke.



Jay Wong

SENIOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Based in New York City. Yale graduate who studied in Michigan's MD-MBA program, holds an MFA from Columbia and is a college adviser at Yale. Students admitted to all eight Ivies, Stanford and MIT.



Melissa Lucía Sarmiento

SENIOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Cornell graduate with a Master of Arts in Teaching from Brown, and a former Cornell alumni interviewer. Students admitted to Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, UChicago and NYU.



Colm Dubhrosa

SENIOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Harvard graduate with multiple credentials in AI, machine learning and business intelligence, and a specialist in guiding STEM and technology capstones. Twelve years of students admitted to all eight Ivies, MIT, Stanford and Oxbridge.



Adrianne Owings

SENIOR ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Yale graduate in theater and performance studies, and a former Yale admissions tour guide and alumni interviewer. Students admitted to Yale, Columbia, Brown, NYU and UCLA.



Sophie Huttner

MASTER ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Rhodes Scholar and summa cum laude Yale graduate with two master's degrees from Oxford. More than ten years of students admitted to Yale, Columbia, Penn, Oxford, Williams and Amherst.



Marianna Sierra

MASTER ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Yale graduate in the history of art and a Fulbright Fellow. Ten years of students admitted to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown and Penn.



Rachel Kulchar

PRINCIPAL ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Princeton chemistry graduate, NIH predoctoral fellow and author of more than 20 peer-reviewed papers. Students admitted to Rice, Johns Hopkins, West Point and the University of California.



Clio Gervitz

PRINCIPAL ADMISSIONS CONSULTANT

Columbia graduate in film studies. Students admitted to UC Berkeley, UCLA, Wesleyan, Bard and Sarah Lawrence.

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YOUR NEXT STEP

The strongest applications are built years before they're written.

That work starts with a clear plan. A complimentary Discovery Call is the first step: an unhurried conversation about your child, your goals and where to begin.

Book a Complimentary Discovery Call

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