

Creating a School Profile: Why and How FAQs for School Leaders

**Based on research conducted by Dr. Tara P. Nicola
Summarized and distributed by Making Caring Common**

This resource is part of Making Caring Common's School Profile Project, an initiative aimed at providing school counselors with tools for effective and equitable college admission practices. You can find additional school profile materials [here](#), including templates, examples, best practices, and insights from school counselors. If you have recommendations for improving these resources, we welcome your comments or suggestions via our anonymous [feedback form](#).

What is a school profile?

A school profile shares easily digestible, important information about your school such as policies, curriculum, information about the community, and your grading system.

Why is a profile used by colleges?

Colleges need profiles because admission officers simply don't know everything about the thousands of high schools from which their applicants apply. Your school profile will tell colleges much of what they need to know about your students' school experience in one place.

How will colleges use this information?

Colleges use the information in the profile as part of their holistic review process where they review each student in terms of the individual academic, nonacademic, and contextual information provided. Knowing more about students' school and related educational opportunities helps admission officers understand the "full picture" for every applicant. This is especially important for schools that admission officers may be less familiar with, and for students who may have non-traditional educational experiences. It is also important for increasing equity in the admissions process (see below). In selective admissions especially, information about students' academic achievement and the rigor of the students' curriculum are central to admission decisions.

How can a profile increase equity in the admission process?

Applicants apply to colleges from very different high school settings, and it is well-documented that there are clear disparities between high schools in terms of resources, course offerings, and grade allocations. It is important that admission officers can better understand students' academic achievements in the context of their school offerings and experiences. For example, a student whose SAT scores or grades are slightly below their dream college's average may look like a more viable candidate if it is revealed that that student scored in the top 5% of students in their school.

Similarly, a student might initially be considered less qualified because they took no AP courses in high school. A profile can help an admission officer learn that the students' high school didn't offer AP courses and/or offered another form of rigorous courses. Research has shown that limited information about students' educational context negatively affects admission decisions for high achieving and underrepresented applicants, while additional context promotes more equitable admission outcomes.

We already have a profile. How do I know if it has everything it needs?

While there is no standard profile form, one recent study of diverse school profiles across the country found that 99% of all reviewed profiles did not include all of the components frequently cited by admission officers as most helpful (Nicola, 2022). Below is a list of components often cited by admission officers as most important as they make their decisions.

What do college admission officers say is important to them in a profile?

Recent research conducted with admission officers suggested that profiles include 14 elements organized into 4 key areas (Nicola, 2022):

Academic Curriculum	Grading Systems	Postsecondary Outcomes	School Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course listings • Graduation requirements • Curriculum overview • Institutional policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grading policies • Class rank • GPA distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College-going rate • College destinations • Standardized testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community overview • Neighborhood • Student demographics • Enrollment

*See MCC's additional profile templates, samples, and supporting documents to learn more about the specifics of these elements [here](#).

Is a profile only useful for admissions?

The profile is intended specifically for use by colleges. However, at many schools, the profile can serve as a foundation for separate documents that share basic information about the school with families, community members, or students in an easy-to-access format. Related documents might also be created for school recruitment and marketing purposes.

How much time does it take to create a school profile?

This will depend on how much information you need to gather. Once all relevant information is collected, it will likely take several hours to develop and format a high-quality profile. Feel free to draw from our [examples and templates](#). Because information changes, it is crucial to allocate time to update this document every year.

How do I learn more?

To learn more about Dr. Nicola's work on school profiles, please visit her original research:

Nicola, T. P. (2022). Assessing applicants in context? School profiles and their implications for equity in the selective college admission process. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 15(6), 700–715. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000318>