<u>Talking points from Who Gets In and Why</u>

1. **College admissions is not about you, it's about the college.** It's not about being "worthy," per se, it's more about fitting into a college's agenda, whatever that might be. Every school has different needs that change over time, sometimes even from year to year. Goals for the admitted class are set by university leaders and then left to the admissions staff to carry out. In a given year, that might mean more full payers, humanities majors, and students from the Dakotas. Sometimes the goals are narrower: a pitcher for the baseball team, a goalie for the soccer team, or an oboist for the orchestra.

2. **Holistic admission is about the whole student, but also they need to know why you want them.** This approach attempts to measure qualities that aren't quantifiable and are usually gleaned from an applicant's extracurricular activities, essays, and recommendations. What a school is looking for in the file is the entirety of a teenager's story. This detail is what I found most high school students miss in their rush to finish six or eight or ten applications in the fall of their senior year. To save time, they cut and paste from massive Google docs full of essays and short answer. They work on multiple applications at a time, instead of compiling them in sequence to better make the case of why they are the right fit for that college.

3. **Application volume is way up and yield is down.** In 2023, 13.1 million applications were filed, a jump from 11.5 million in 2019, and way up from 4.4 million in 2001. To put those numbers in context, the number of high school graduates in the U.S. has remained relatively constant over that time, rising by just 800,000 since 2001. Another challenge with application inflation is yield management. Yield rates—the percentages of accepted applicants who actually enroll—have plummeted at all but the super-selective schools.

4. **Nothing matters more than the transcript in admissions.** At many schools, the courses you take and the grades you earn in them will get you more than halfway to an acceptance. Colleges are looking for grades that are either consistently good throughout high school or on a steady rise from the start. What concerns them is a downward trend or one where the grades are all over the place.

5. **Widen your list of schools and make sure you have "buyers" on it.** The "buyers and sellers" is a concept developed while researching and writing *Who Gets In and Why.* The sellers are the "haves" of admissions. They are overwhelmed with applications, many from top students. They don't need to buy students with tuition discounts to fill their classrooms. Most sellers offer financial assistance only to students who really need it or are truly exceptional. The buyers are the "have-nots" in terms of admissions—although they might provide a superior undergraduate education. Rather than "select" a class, their admissions officers must work hard to recruit students and they must discount tuition through merit aid to fill classroom seats and beds in dorm rooms. It's best to consider this a rough sort of colleges when it comes to how they deploy financial aid, either as a discount (buyers) or for financial need (sellers).

<u>Advice for the Class of 2025</u>

1. **Take the test. Take the ACT or SAT and have a score.** That helps you determine where you stand compared to other applicants when looking at schools and then you get to decide if you want to apply with a test score or not.

2. **Have a balanced list.** Put together a list of ten to twelve schools overall, with three to four colleges in each of three categories: *likely* or *safety* schools, where you are above the school's ranges for GPA and test scores; *target* or *foundational* schools, where you are solidly in the middle; and *reach* or *dream* schools, which would be a stretch.

3. **Visit campus for the first time (or again) but be sure to visit.** Touring campuses is difficult and expensive during senior year, and so students often wait until they're accepted and making a final decision. While we tend to think the tours happen at the beginning of the college search, about a quarter of them occur at the end—in the month of April. During those visits, about half the families are setting foot on campus for the first time. Bottom line: don't rule schools out before you visit, and never enroll in one sight unseen.

4. **Figure out a budget and have the money talk**. Dashing a kid's college dreams because of the price tag is tough, but determining—as a family—how much you can afford on an annual basis for four years makes for a smoother process. College pricing works like almost nothing else we buy. Essentially your personal price is hidden until after you're accepted. But you can get a sense of what you might pay by using something called the Net Price Calculator, which the federal government requires colleges to display on their websites. You can also find a college's Common Data Set (CDS) on its website to see how generous the school is with merit-aid discounts.

5. **Take your own "College 101" course.** Don't assume—even if this is your second or third go-around—that your kid understands anything about college. When I'm in the car with my own kids and the subject of college comes up, we'll talk for a few minutes about questions they might not think to ask: What does it mean to major in something? How do you use office hours with professors? What's a liberal arts college? What is the schedule like in a typical week?