

Suspended From School? It's Not the End of Your College Dreams!

Teenagers think they are invincible. They believe they will never get caught breaking their parent's rules or even those of their high school. Needless to say, we were all teenagers once too, so we understand this mind set. "It can't happen to me. That's something that someone else might get caught doing. But not me!"

Sadly enough, even the best of kids, the ones you never thought would break a rule in high school often find themselves in less than desirable circumstances and not necessarily planned ones that end up with big-time consequences to pay. The range of infractions run from cheating on a test, drug use or in possession of such, underage drinking, or even having liquor in a car, and not necessarily one they are driving, but may only be a passenger in. Chances are, if it is against the policies of your high school, and they get wind of the infraction or catch you in the act, there are often serious consequences. One of the things that teenagers don't consider beyond what the school may impose as a consequence is how potential colleges will view them.

First, don't conclude that your life is over because you've made a mistake. However, don't conclude that you're off the hook if you take the consequences of your actions and think you're now home free. That would be another mistake because on the Common Application for the upcoming year, there are two questions related to disciplinary actions.

- 1). "Have you ever been found responsible for a disciplinary violation at any educational institution you have attended from 9th grade (or the international equivalent) forward, whether related to academic misconduct or behavioral misconduct that resulted in your probation, suspension, removal, dismissal, or expulsion from school?" Yes or no?
- 2). "Have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor, felony, or other crime?" Yes or no? "[Note that you are not required to answer "yes" to this question, or provide an explanation, if the criminal adjudication or conviction has been expunged, sealed, annulled, pardoned, destroyed, erased, impounded, or otherwise ordered by a court to be kept confidential.]"

The Common Application goes on to state:

"If you answered "yes" to either or both of these questions, please attach a separate sheet of paper that gives the approximate date of each incident, explains the circumstances, and reflects on what you learned from the experience."

- 3). Another new question on the Common Application for the upcoming 2010-11 school year: for the Guidance Letter of Recommendation, also known as the School Report is a question that asks about "observed problematic behaviors worthy of consideration." It's important for you to know what the school's policy is on reporting infractions for the first two questions and with the new wording; there are schools who are likely reviewing their own current policy. If the school plans to include a disciplinary action in their report,

it's a wise decision to include it in the information you disclose on your applications. It's better to hear it from both of you (the counselor and you) than for you to try and hide it, and then have the colleges find out when the school has disclosed it. Remember, there is no "one size fits all" for handling disciplinary actions at different schools. You need to find out how the incident in which you were involved affects you and ultimately, your college applications!

Not every college will react in the same way and not all colleges use the Common Application. However, they may have their own version of these questions on their applications, as colleges have become increasingly concerned about behaviors indicating a future problem on their own campuses. Some college admissions officers may think, "Who needs this trouble maker on our campus?" However, if you've genuinely learned something and haven't been a repeat offender, college admissions officers may see a certain maturity level that you've demonstrated by your confession of poor judgment. At any rate, don't think your chances for going to college are over because of a past lapse resulting in suspension or other punishment from the school. It really depends on what you do from then on as a result of that experience.

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