What's in a Top College?

College ranking website niche.com releases an annual list of the top colleges and universities in the U.S. based on data from the Dept. of Education, individual universities, and student reviews. Niche uses a proprietary formula and "rigorous analysis" to rank the best schools in the states. But what data make up a "top" university?

This visualization analyzes the cost, average SAT score, and acceptance rate of the top 250 schools on Niche's 2023 list.

2023 NICHE BEST COLLEGES

56
America's **Southeast** has the most top colleges of any region — 56 schools.
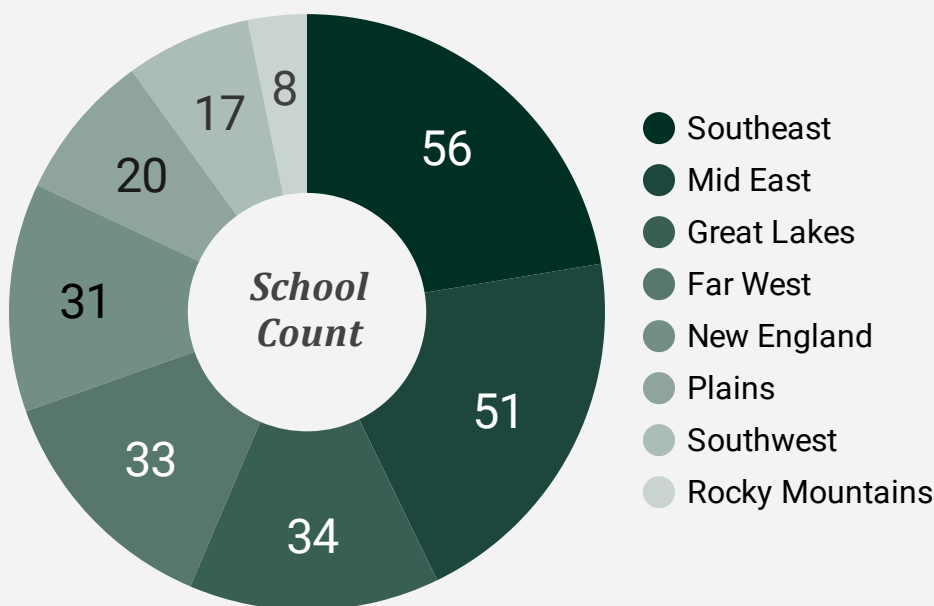
7.3%
The average **acceptance rate** of the top 10 schools in the nation.

25
California has 25 of the top 250 schools in the nation — 10% in one state, alone.

Regions in the US ranked by number of top schools

School Count

Southeast	56
Mid East	51
Great Lakes	34
Far West	33
New England	31
Plains	20
Southwest	17
Rocky Mountains	8

- **Elite colleges continue to dominate the top 10 spots** (e.g. MIT, Standford, Harvard).

- **California, New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania lead the pack** for number of schools in the top 250 ranked colleges.

- **SAT Scores remain a firm indicator of a school's ranking**, despite Niche's claim that standardized tests would weight less heavily into their 2023 algorithm.
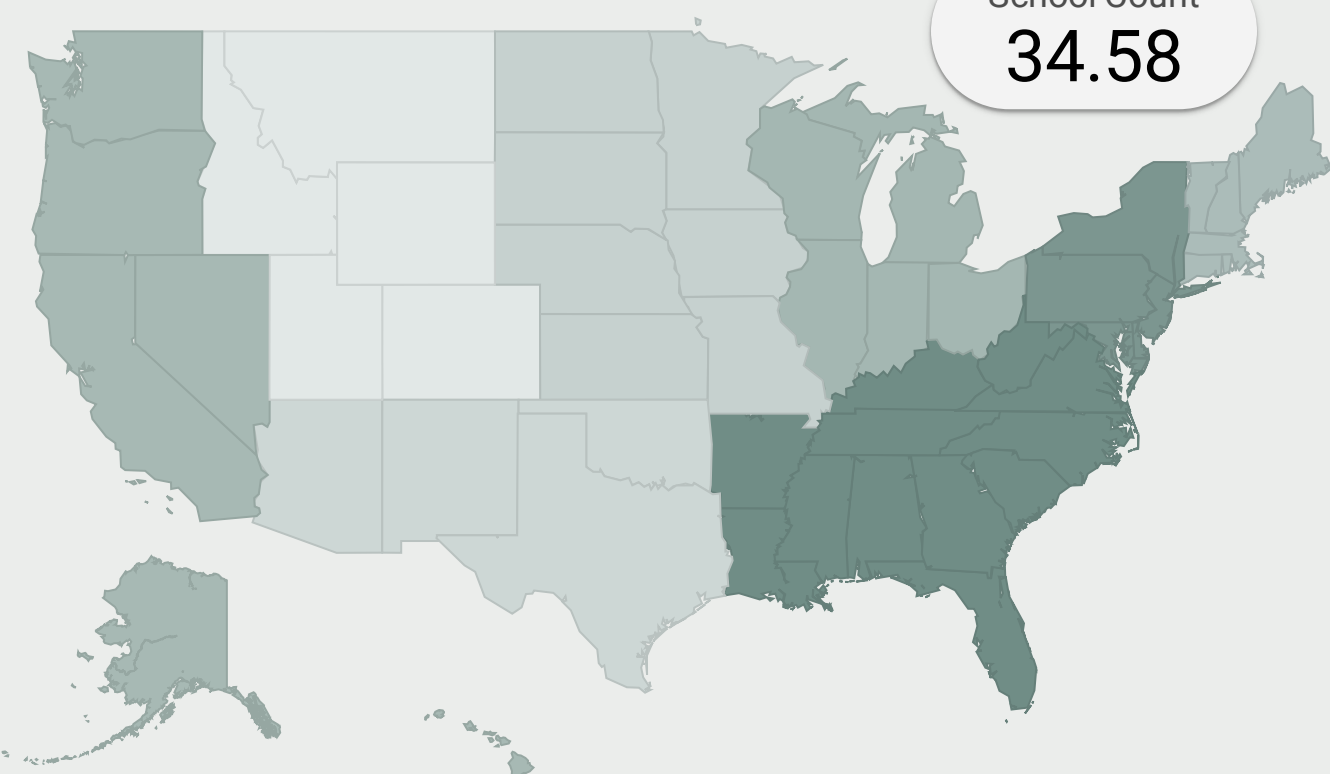

Top 250 Colleges *by Region*
[When no region is selected, the data represent the average values across all regions.]

Select a **Region** for Analysis
by clicking on the list below

- Far West
- Great Lakes
- Mid East
- New England
- Plains
- Rocky Mountains
- Southeast
- Southwest

School Count
34.58

Ave. Price (after aid)
$24,290.54

Ave. Ranking
129.17

Ave. SAT Score
1,295.84

Ave. Acceptance Rate [%]
51.7

Region ▲	States	School Count	Ave. Ranking	Ave. Acceptance [%]	Ave. SAT Score	Ave. Price (after aid)
Far West	AK, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA	33	115.1	43.3	1,327.8	$28,709.24
Great Lakes	IL, IN, MI, OH, WI	34	143.9	60	1,279.6	$26,822.15
Mid East	DE, DC, MD, NJ, NY, PA	51	117.7	40.2	1,343.6	$27,402.24
New England	CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT	31	78.8	28.1	1,407	$28,923.48
Plains	IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD	20	146.5	61.5	1,277.2	$23,458.95
Rocky Mountains	CO, ID, MT, UT, WY	8	148.8	68.1	1,222.9	$18,455.13
Southeast	AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV	56	140	53.1	1,262.5	$21,230.73
Southwest	AZ, NM, OK, TX	17	134.4	61.8	1,265.6	$21,587.88

Top 250 Colleges *by State*
[When no state is selected, the data represent the average values across all states.]

Select a **State** for Analysis
by clicking on the map, or by clicking on the table below
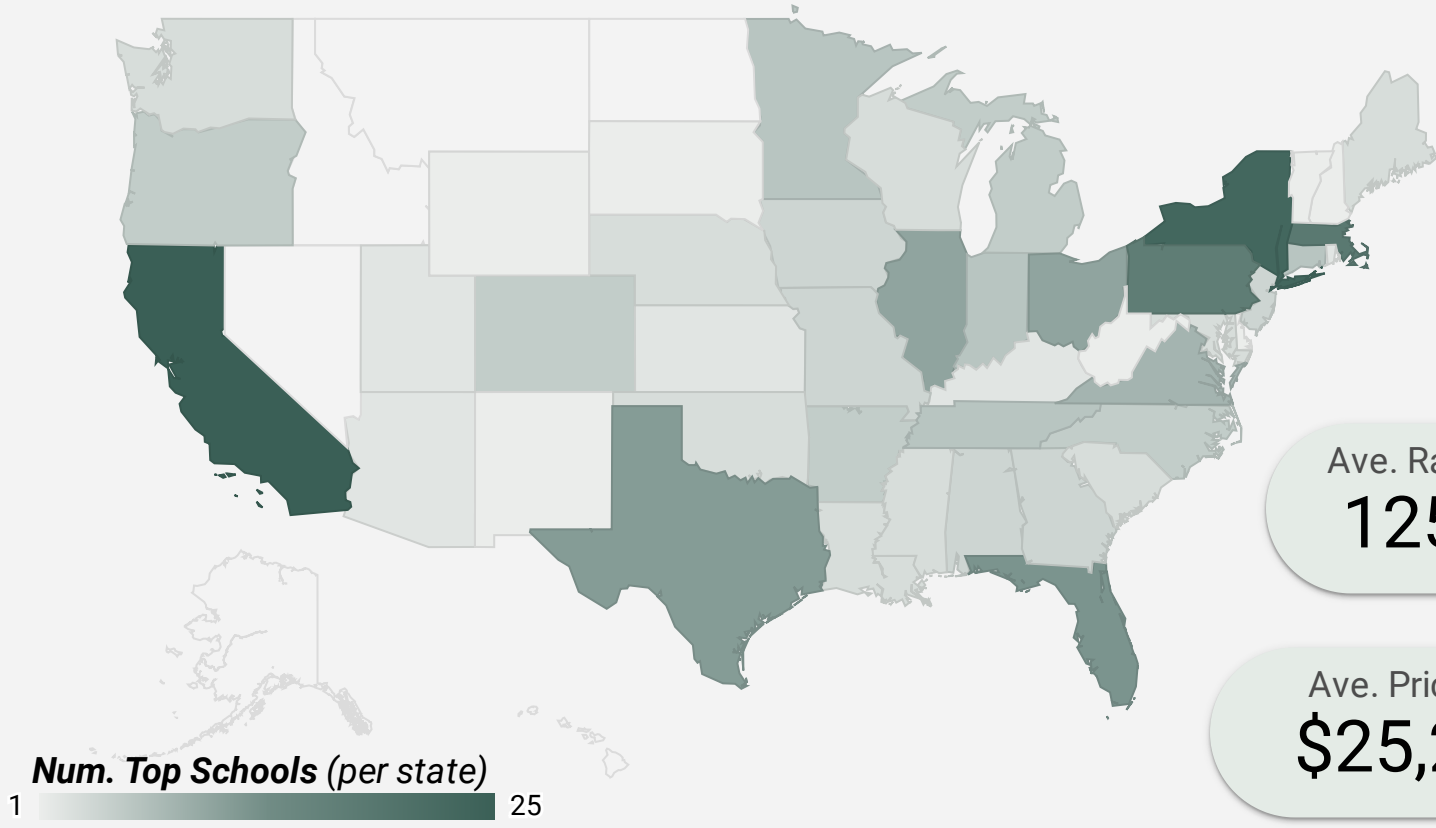
School Count
250

Ave. Ranking
125.5

Ave. Acceptance Rate [%]
48.75

Ave. Price (after aid)
**$25,296.52**

Ave. SAT Score
1,308.92

Num. Top Schools (per state)
1 ——— 25

State	Region	School Count ▼	Ave. Ranking	Ave. Acceptance Rate [%]	Ave. SAT Score	Ave. Price (after aid)
CA	Far West	25	96.4	34.9	1,349.38	$29,318.36
NY	Mid East	23	121.2	36.9	1,338.91	$25,595.09
MA	New England	18	75.9	30.9	1,406.11	$29,821.39
PA	Mid East	17	116.1	43.0	1,340.29	$30,455.53
FL	Southeast	12	140.9	47.3	1,240.83	$19,003.58
TX	Southwest	11	130.2	51.1	1,302	$23,632.27
IL	Great Lakes	10	159.8	59.3	1,263.5	$26,788.6
OH	Great Lakes	10	150.7	56.6	1,282	$31,003.1

Indicators *of a Top School*
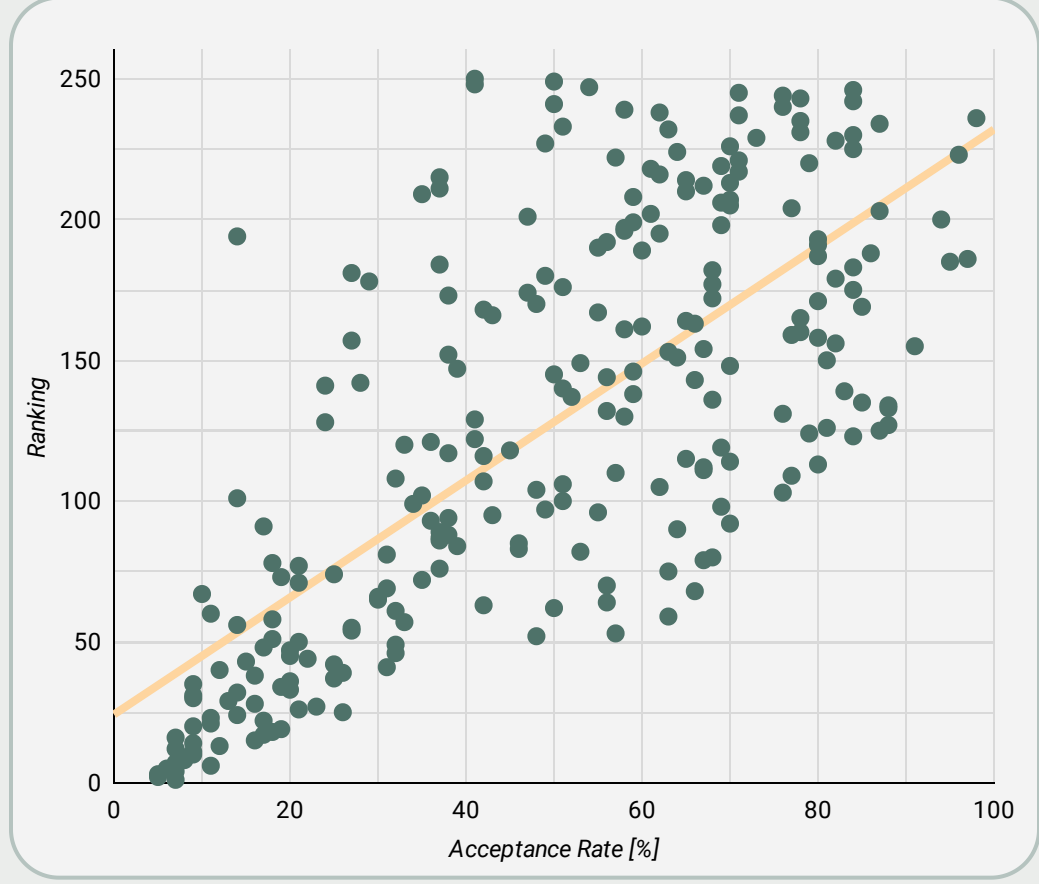
What metrics predict a high ranking school?

The best predictors for top schools on Niche's 2023 U.S. college ranking are **acceptance rate** and the **average SAT scores of admitted students**.

Use this slider to filter the data based on Niche's college ranking. If you want to view only the top 50 schools, drag the right circle to 50. If you want to see schools ranked 100-250, drag the left circle to 100. Tip: click on the number below the slider to type in a specific value.
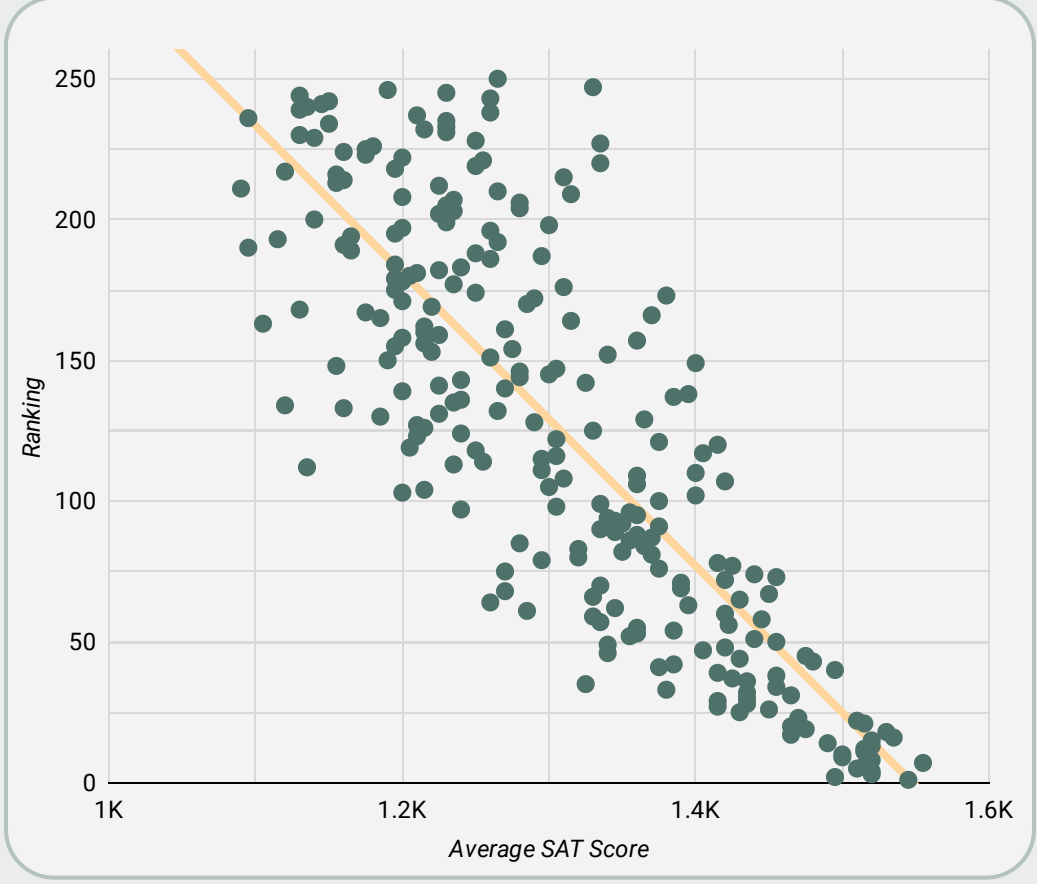
1 ———————— 250
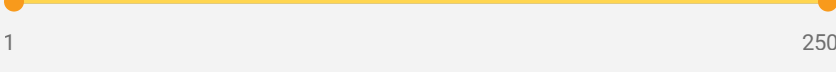
Lower acceptance rate is correlated with lower rank number.

In other words, more selective schools that **admit fewer students** tend to **rank better** on Niche's list.

Higher average SAT score is correlated with lower rank number.

In other words, schools that admit students with **higher SAT scores** tend to **rank better** on Niche's list.

(More information on Niche's ranking methodology can be found here.)

Created by Ethan Seylar