



COLLEGE PLANNING ASSOCIATION

PO Box 1437,
Trout Creek, MT 59874

(866) 997-0650 Office

(866) 997-0649 Fax

NEWSLETTER : October 2009

"Making the Most of the School Year: Tips for Improving College Prep 'On The Fly' Semester by Semester"

Dear Parent,

Happy Fall! It is official – we are now well into the first semester of the new school year. Of course, with the academic year now officially in full swing, it is about time to catch a breath and try to ascertain where things stand with your student/s. From time to time throughout the year, we recommend a quick review of all the necessary plans that will help to get them to be best prepared for their college or university studies once the gauntlet of high school is over. Of course, for some parents that day is going to be coming sooner than for others! Parents of seniors are helping their kid/s through the final year of college preparation, while freshman families are often just learning the ropes at this point. The fact is, however, that there are things that can be done at all stages throughout the academic year to help kids (and their families) to get ready for college.

Parents are encouraged annually to focus on the *preparation* for each high school year (you have probably notice that we do this, ourselves!). The whole “Back To School” preparation is absolutely important, and it does make a difference. However, once things are underway and the school year has begun, there may often seem to be precious little information about how to maintain the course as the school year progresses. Most parents are certainly aware that things do not always stay exactly the same throughout the academic year, and change can be a frequent challenge! For example, teachers and courses can change from one semester to the next – not only from year to year. In addition, new subjects that are covered in a class may prove easier or more difficult for a student than the subjects that immediately preceded them. New extracurricular activities may crop up that change the time management dynamic for a family or for a student. There can be a wide variety of different situations that arise during the course of a school year, and each one will require a unique sort of response in order to keep things progressing towards the ultimate goals of college attendance.

Parents are guilty of the same types of things at times, of course. We often see parents who wait until the very end of their child’s high school experience to concentrate on how to pay for college, which makes this an incredibly challenging (not to mention painful and expensive) problem! Other parents see the value in reviewing this issue “on the fly” while their student is still in the earlier years, and we find that their adjustments are significantly

easier – not to mention infinitely more productive. If you would like more information about your personalized options in college funding for your child, please don't hesitate to give us a call at (866) 997-0650. We will be pleased to help you stay ahead of the curve on this important issue!

The bottom line is that it is not an uncommon occurrence that students (and parents!) will face adjustments of some sort during the four years of high school, and there can be no question that the speed and determination with which they are able to regroup and excel once again can be what makes the difference in the long run. With this in mind, this month we are glad to bring you a few suggestions for “fixing things on the fly” during the school year. Yes, there are minor issues that may arise at the end of a year that can be managed somewhat easily over the summer vacation. And certainly, there are things that can be handled during the break between semesters. However, in the event that something unexpected crops up in the middle of everything – like now, for example – we have gleaned some important insights into how parents and students can work together to manage things and keep moving in a positive direction.

I. CORRECTING OVEREXTENSION

You may remember from past newsletters the emphasis on making sure that your child is a well-rounded applicant. What we mean by that is that college admissions counselors are no longer looking as favorably at the straight-A student who has no outside activities of any sort on his or her application. Far from it! The best colleges and universities are now seeking individuals who are adept in many areas of academics *and* outside activities. This is not a bad thing, of course. In principle, additional activities help to enhance the learning experience, improve social skills and societal contributions, and can even increase overall knowledge of different disciplines. This would include any extra-curricular activity. It could be the chess club, a theater group, a community volunteer position, or any sport or athletic activity. Even an interesting job may qualify.

Now, the caveat... while these activities are necessary and are definitely seen as enhancing your child's chances at getting into a good university, there is always the possibility of having too much of a good thing. There are times when we have seen parents take this advice to mean that they must enroll their children in every available extra-curricular activity in which they have ever shown a degree of interest! Other times, a student may load up on additional activities as an escape from schoolwork. Either way, this is not a wise decision. Most often, an overabundance of activities will start to inhibit your child's ability to perform optimally in his or her academic classes. Once this starts to happen, the activities are no longer a benefit for college applications... rather, they are actually getting in the way of admission to the best school possible! If your child's grades are slipping due to being over-scheduled then this is a red flag to stop – and stop **early** – and reassess the situation to make some changes.

It could be time to explain to your student that, while activities are a good thing, too many activities can get in the way of academic excellence. Sometimes, if a child's grades are slipping due these activities and the obligations associated with them, it can be a simple matter of time management. Kids need to learn to allocate their time wisely, and this could be the time to do it. That alone may actually do the trick! However, if there are so many outside obligations

that it is hard to even determine a time when homework can be completed, then it is time to pare down. This would be the time to sit down with your child and have a serious discussion about the types of programs and activities are the most important to them. There may be one particular area that might be more interesting to your child. Ask questions that might lead to a conclusion about which activities should deserve the most attention, and which activities can be dropped in order to make room for better academic performance.

This can be difficult, especially for an active and involved student! However, if there is a program or club that your student especially looks forward to during the week, then that could be an indicator of the most valued activity. Once you and your student have determined whether some activities should be removed from the schedule – and which should remain – you can move forward and help your child refocus his or her efforts on school work and academics. Life is hectic and busy and the tendency to put too many things on our plate at one time is just the sign of the times we are currently living in. However, by helping your child assess which things are most important and which things can be put aside for another time you are actually doing a great service. This is a time management tool that will be able to serve young people throughout their lives, and it is far better to learn it at a younger age!

There is some important overlap for parents in this regard, as well. If the college funding issue is managed optimally – and preferably early on – then there is no need for parents to overextend themselves when the time comes for higher education. Remaining on top of the situation, especially with the assistance of a knowledgeable advisor, allows for parents to perform better at work, at home, and in all phases of life. We can help with this. A simple call to (866) 997-0650 will help you to manage the college funding question without feeling overwhelmed.

II. TACKLING ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

In the midst of the flurry of activities with life, work and a child's school and outside activities, parents may or may not immediately notice if there are certain areas in which a student's academic performance is slipping a bit. In some cases, this can happen so incrementally that there is barely any attention paid to it until the end of a semester, when the performance becomes part of the academic record! Certainly, report cards are useful in this regard, although many times kids might not feel overly excited about this. Each term or semester, the report card provides an assessment of where your child is currently in his or her academic progress. If there is slippage, then obviously the grades will indicate this. When parents receive the report card and notice that their child's grades are not where they had anticipated they would be... then it is indicator that it is certainly time to make some positive changes.

Now, while report cards are useful in this regard, it is far better to find ways to adjust to academic changes "on the fly." This is because fixing an academic challenge in mid-term allows the student to positively affect the actual grade that is reported onto his or her transcript, rather than waiting until the damage is done and then fixing things for the next semester or term. Naturally, staying abreast of the academic climate during the school year – and not only on vacation – requires a little bit more effort and communication, both on the part of the parent and the student.

Fortunately, this may be easier than most people think. There are several things that a parent and student can do. First and foremost, it is vital to maintain communication with your student, as well as with the high school teachers or administration. You can schedule a meeting with parent, student, and teacher. By having all three parties present, there is less room for misunderstandings or misinformation. We do recommend asking the teacher directly what his or her recommendations are, because in many cases this alone can remedy the situation. History has shown that if grade performance is quickly assessed and addressed, the problem can often fix itself.

However, if more intervention is needed then it might be time to enlist some reinforcements. Tutors and instructors may be willing to advise and help in just about any subject. Some schools even offer peer-to-peer tutoring. There might be an arrangement that can be made directly with the teacher of the class or classes that are in need of attention. If the teacher is willing, your child could schedule regular appointments to go over areas of the subject that he or she has been struggling with. All in all, if you tackle this issue in the middle of the semester then the long-term results are generally far more positive!

III. MANAGING ACCEPTANCES AND REJECTIONS

Most college-bound senior students – even excellent applicants – will experience the disappointment of being rejected by at least one of their favorite schools. For some, this can be a terribly disappointing let-down which affects their performance in the latter stages of their high school years. This is understandable, of course, after so much effort and hope is put into an application. However, other students are able to bounce back and thrive.

One of the best ways to manage the application process for students is to come up with application lists that maximize the possibility of success. This does not mean that students should not apply to some “reach” schools, but that it is a good idea to become familiar with (and fond of!) a number of possibilities. Having a “one and only” favorite school is great if a student is accepted there, but it can also lead to dreadful consequences if not. The earlier a student becomes acquainted with a large number of excellent colleges and universities, the better. It is far more fun for everyone in the family when a student is able to be excited about his/her acceptances and deciding between possibilities, rather than depressed about a rejection!

We also see an even more distressing situation in our professional work. There are families with bright children who *are* accepted to their dream school, but who are unable to attend due to finances. This is, in our estimation, even more tragic than being rejected, because all of the hard work that was put in goes for naught. Avoiding this can be as simple as preparing in advance, and by giving us a call at (866) 997-0650.

It is true that staying abreast of the intricacies of the school year requires a little extra effort, but the payoff can be enormous!

Until Next Month...

Edward Schramm
President, College Planning Association