



COLLEGE PLANNING ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER : September 2009

“Strategies For The New Academic Year How To Boost Every High School Student’s College Prospects”

Dear Parent,

With the month of September comes the realization that we are approaching the end of summer... and the start of a new school year. (This fact often tends to bring a sense of relief to the minds of the parents of bored teenagers everywhere!) We hope that this past summer provided a memorable time for the family to rejuvenate and relax, which tends to help everyone get a bit more invigorated to start the academic year. With all of the barbecues, family reunions and summer camps now in the past, it is time to use some of that invigoration to focus on preparations for the realities of the fall season. While most people tend to put thoughts of school off during the summer months, now is not too late for families to be thinking in earnest about getting your college-bound student fully prepared to gain admission to – and be able to afford to attend – the college or university of his or her choice.

Facing the details of college preparation can be a bit intimidating at best. At its worst, the entire process can actually become mentally (and even physically and emotionally) exhausting. When it comes to college preparation, you are literally dealing with important elements of your child’s future, and the stakes can feel immeasurably high! The tasks begin to mount over the course of the high school years, including mountains of paperwork, deadlines to keep organized, and activities and projects to complete... not to mention the actual schoolwork on top of it all! To many parents, dealing with the details of the financial aspects of college can often feel like one headache too many.

If this is your first time with a college-bound student in high school, you may be completely unfamiliar with the process – the fact is that the process has changed since most parents attended college. The admissions process has become significantly more competitive, and the costs of attendance have increased exponentially... sadly there does not seem to be a limit in sight.

Frankly, even with costs and competition increasing, there *are* still ways to approach this tremendous task that will allow you to send your child to an excellent school and all the while keep life quite comfortable at home. As anyone who has been through the process can likely attest, there are complexities to the college planning process that can make it difficult at times and downright frustrating. However, with the right college guidance, you can actually come out ahead of the game with your child will receiving his or her best possible education, to boot. In this month's newsletter, we are happy to provide some pertinent tips specific to each year of high school that will help you to assist your child in reaching his or her goal of college attendance.

FRESHMEN: improving their odds of attending a first-rate institution.

The freshman year of high school is exciting, scary, and fraught with all kinds of uncertainties. There is a new locker system to learn, new people to meet, new teachers to cope with... not to mention the adjustment to all kinds of course work. High school marks the beginning of some of the most memorable years of a student's life. However, it can be quite overwhelming to the average freshman to tackle the multiple issues associated with acclimating to a new environment. One of the most important things to remember about freshman year is that this the year that things start "to count." Your son or daughter may have earned straight A's all through middle school, but this information will not mean anything to a college admissions committee.

College admissions counselors will receive high school transcripts, and the grades that are recorded begin during the freshman year. For this reason, it is important to get off to the best start possible. Yes, there may be adjustments, but the smoother (and quicker) they are made, the better off a student will be in a couple of years when applying to college. This will entail making a good impression with teachers right off the bat. Creating a respectful and positive relationship with a teacher is not the same thing as being an annoying "apple-polisher." Rather, it is an opportunity for your child to create a good learning environment with mutual respect. If your child is consistently on time to class and prepared, the teacher receives the initial impression that s/he is both hardworking and responsible. An early positive relationship with teachers can go a long way in paving the road to college with letters of recommendation and other connections. In addition, letters from a teacher who can comment on a student's maturity and ability as a freshman could earn an extra glance.

Getting strong grades should also be a high priority because, as mentioned earlier, they will begin to "count" now. Try to create an atmosphere of study and learning in the home. If your child can work and study without distractions they are more likely to focus and have a positive result. Freshman students can also begin to learn about colleges and universities that might interest them – it is never too early! This can allow parents to begin to glean important information about costs of attendance, even a couple of years in advance. This is also a good time to consult with a College Planning Association Advisor, who can break down the options for families with as much advanced preparation as possible. As you begin to discuss these important issues with your freshman, please don't hesitate to bring our expertise into the conversation. We can be reached at (866) 997-0650.

SOPHOMORES: learning how to adjust “on the fly.”

The sophomore year of high school is often one of the smoothest and most carefree periods for many high school students! Sophomores have already completed any residual awkwardness and challenges of the freshman year, and many begin to feel that they know the “game plan,” so to speak. For some families, the rising sophomore may have absolutely excelled throughout his or her freshman year. If that is the case, then fantastic! Encourage them to keep up the good work, and remind them of their goals... the fact is that it doesn’t exactly get easier from here on out. However, if your incoming sophomore had some struggles in the freshman year (which is not atypical given its multiple challenges) then there are a number of things that parents and students can do to overcome any niggling issues that may have kept the student from standing out in the previous year.

It is important for any student to recognize that the past does not have to equal the future, especially when it comes to freshman grades. Parents and students are well advised to have a frank discussion about which areas were difficult. If there were struggles in a math or science or English class, consider looking into a tutor to help to get your child up to speed. Some schools or teachers will offer this kind of assistance as part of the educational process. It is a terrible feeling for any student to always feel like they are “catching up” all the time. The sophomore year offers a golden opportunity to help your child get “caught up” and feel like they can make great strides during this year in high school.

JUNIORS: learning to meet the challenges of the college application process.

Another important element for juniors (and many sophomores) to consider is extra-curricular activities. Did your student become involved in any clubs, teams, or activities as an underclassman? If not, now is the time to get your junior involved. Do not underestimate the importance of these after-school activities. They give a fuller picture of what your student is and can become. Colleges are not interested in robots that can spout random facts and figures. They are more interested in well-rounded individuals who have diverse interests – but interests that have been developed and thought-out. One semester of an activity during the senior year will not show any serious interest or application on the student’s part. In addition to academic achievement, it is vital to take part in activities that enhance personal development. Junior year is also the time for standardized tests and college applications, so things will get mighty busy over the course of the year!

This is also the time for families to seriously consider every element of the financial burden of college. It is the *junior year* of high school that directly affects college funding for the freshman year of college, and many families put this off until it is too late. For the best advice on your family’s specific financial circumstances, we urge you to give your College Planning Association Advisor or us a call at (866) 997-0650. We can show you the best ways to maximize your eligibility for federal and institutional financial aid, as well as how to plot your course for the future.

SENIORS: preparing for the immediate future...

The final year of high school is the time to prepare for the rigors of college – and not the time to completely let up! Most seniors will know where they are headed for college at some point during the year, and many feel the temptation to “slack off” a bit once things are settled. We do encourage seniors to celebrate their accomplishments, but also remind them that their final high school transcript will contain *all* of their grades, not just those from three and a half years! The fact is that showing strong work throughout the high school curriculum may work in a student’s favor when it comes to institutional financial aid and other potential benefits. The senior year has so many activities and other things going on that keeping organized can become a challenge, but by working together it is possible to make an overwhelmingly successful transition from high school to college.

This is also the year that will offer parents and students the opportunity to “bargain” a bit with colleges and universities. Different schools will offer different financial aid packages to your student, and a wise family takes all of these into consideration. With the right advice and foresight, this can provide a chance to make the schools compete against each other for your tuition dollar! We know the details about how to assist families in improving their financial aid offers, and would be happy to help you and your senior in this endeavor. Simply call your College Planning Advisor or us at (866) 997-0650 to discuss the options you have available. We can help make this last year of high school a marvelously productive one.

It’s true that the new school year comes with a blank slate for students in every grade, and this month is the prime opportunity for your student to make the most of the coming year. We are excited to assist in any way possible, and look forward to your call. We wish you and your students a happy and productive school year!

Until next month,

Edward Schramm
President, College Planning Association