



Thinking Differently About College Counseling

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The ThroughCollege system offers a unique set of activities designed to help youth think critically about their future, college choice, and to help them start planning early for their postsecondary experiences. Written to support both individualized and guided lessons, our system focuses on self discovery; successful strategizing and college planning; college selection; and future career mapping. The goal of the system is to both help students feel inspired to plan for their college phase of life, and also to guide mentors and guidance counselors in thinking differently on what type of information and how the college experience and expectations are communicated to adolescents.

The current education climate has brought to the forefront the need for K-12 students to build 21st Century Skills and gain advanced degrees that will keep United States stay competitive in the global economy.¹ As businesses and educators alike have noted, students need to think beyond their high school diploma and think broadly about what it means to succeed in the new world, which in large part entails embracing lifelong learning, technology, teamwork, critical thinking skills, and innovation.² The recent education policies and practices such as early college high schools, middle college, comprehensive guidance counseling systems like AVID or GEAR UP, online learning classes, and out-of-school time programs have all contributed to thinking beyond the traditional school structure and expanding access to higher education information for *all* students.³ With the onset of new technological ways in which adolescents communicate, share experiences, and learn, as well as with the renewed emphasis on team projects and group collaborations, the traditional guidance counseling stands in front of a great opportunity to reframe how the services and support around college preparation are being delivered to middle and high school students.

Online community. Over 90 percent of all schools have Internet access and over 70 percent of public school districts offer online courses and after school programs.⁴ In addition to the structured online experiences offered in schools, many students utilize technology for homework assistance, research, and social networking. They access computers in schools, local libraries, community centers, and at home.⁵ Colleges and higher education organizations are also using these technologies to reach out to youth, including virtual campus tours, live chats with current students, webinars by recruitment officers, and interactive sites like the College Board, KnowHow2Go.

Guidance counselors, particularly in large high schools, could incorporate technology as a core medium in which students could receive college information. Guidance counselors could create a page on the school website that provides students with key links to college searches, scholarship databases, SAT/ACT prep courses, and timelines/deadlines. Counselors could also use these pages to offer online discussion (Q/A with the counselors), schedule group and individual appointments with students, and survey students on their needs, questions, and concerns around college. Since comprehensive higher education prep sites and survey tools already exist, the cost and time invested in these pages is fairly minimal. Online communication exemplifies how today's teens access information, how they think about their experiences, and how they plan for the future. Meeting students in a virtual space helps break down barriers

between counselors and students, offers wider opportunities for information dissemination, and helps counselors reach out to more students.

Peer sharing. Adolescents are often influenced by their peers. In fact, many secondary grade students make their postsecondary decisions based in part on their peers – are they friends planning to go to college, where are they going, how are they paying for it?⁶ Although peer group information sharing is a wonderful networking tool and one that brings sociological and emotional comfort to students, it is also one of caution. False information about college access, misconceptions about the college experiences, or a lack of postsecondary ambition by one's peers could deter teens from considering college or could put unnecessary pressure or confusion into the process. Thus, it is paramount that guidance counselors disseminate accurate information to students and provide group counseling as a way to address college myths, pass along vital information, and address any individual concerns students might have about higher education. Guidance counselors could also recruit former school alumni to speak to students about their journey to college and their experiences while in college to help students better relate to the process, challenges, and opportunities that lay ahead.⁷

Parental involvement. Recent studies find that over 90 percent of surveyed parents expect their children to go on to higher education post high school.⁸ Although there are demographic differences in college access and retention,⁹ the desire of parents to see their children succeed in life is universal. From tutoring and SAT preparation, relationships with teachers, checking in with their teens on their academic progress, to simple encouragements to forge ahead have all shown to be effective forms of parental involvement in adolescents' college preparation. Parental involvement has thus been associated with students' postsecondary plans, career aspirations, and application into four-year colleges.¹⁰

What research indicates is that parents continue to play an important influence in adolescents' lives during their middle and high school years and are a critical player in students' postsecondary considerations, particularly when it comes to college. Engaging parents in career workshops, college information sessions on financial aid, college experiences, and learning can be helpful to familiarize parents with current policies and practices in higher education. Support groups that mix parents with and without college degree can also serve as a great information tool for families, a networking opportunity, and a group counseling avenue to prepare parents for the steps ahead. Coordinating college visits or virtual tours with parents can also help involve parents with guidance counselors and help alleviate their fears around higher education, and in the process, help educate both parents and students on what it takes to enter and succeed in today's higher education.

Community partnerships. A mentor, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods, can be a lifeline for adolescents, an inspiration, and a role model.¹¹ Community volunteers are an important resource to students that can help adolescents think about their postsecondary paths, consider college options, and think critically about what it takes to access higher education. By providing personal attention, mentors and students can build trusting relationships that can help put students on the path to college. Community organizations can also serve as a resource by providing students with internship/apprenticeship opportunities, after school enrichment programs, tutoring, as well as with SAT/ACT preparation, financial planning, and college essay writing workshops.¹² Establishing lasting partnerships between schools and community organizations can help maximize existing resources to support students' college preparation and alleviate some of the burden guidance counselors in large schools might face.

ThroughCollege is currently developing webinars and web tools to help guidance counselors innovate and learn on how to integrate technology into their support systems; how to create relationships with families; and build partnerships with community organizations and

engage in volunteer recruitment. Going to college is not only a matter of GPA, SAT score, and FAFSA; it is about a broader consideration of future goals, career aspirations, and finding the best fit for students' needs. It is an intellectual, emotional, and developmental journal adolescents take throughout their middle and high school years.¹³ Critical examination of various college aspects, internal exploration, and continuous support from a variety of stakeholder can help students make the right postsecondary choice for themselves.¹⁴

¹ Malveaux, J. (2003, January). What's at stake: The social and economic benefits of higher education. The College Board, National Dialogue on Student Financial Aid; Pathways to College Network. (). High expectations: A key to success for all. Washington, DC: Author.

² Wimberly, G. L., & Noeth, R. J. (2004). School involving parents in early postsecondary planning: ACT policy report. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

³ Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2005). *The link between high school reform and college access and success for low-income and minority youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum and Pathways to College Network.

⁴ North American Council for Online Learning. (2007). *Fast facts about online learning*. Vienna, VA: Author. Available at http://www.nacol.org/media/nacol_fast_facts.pdf

⁵ Tucker, B. (2007, June). *Laboratories of reform: Virtual high schools and innovation in public education*. Washington, DC: Education Sector Reports. Available at http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/Virtual_Schools.pdf

⁶ Youth Development Institute. (2006, November). *College access and success for young adult learners: A research summary for schools and programs*. New York: New York City Partnership for College Access and Success.

⁷ National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. (2007, December). *Deciding on postsecondary education: Final report*. Jessup, MD: Author.

⁸ Catsambis, S., & Garland, J. E. (1997, December). *Parental involvement in students' education during middle school and high school*. Report No. 18. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR); Cunningham, A. F., Erisman, W., & Looney, S. M. (2007, December). *From aspiration to action: The role of middle school parents in making the dream of college a reality*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy; Lippman, L., Guzman, L., Keith, J. D., Kinukawa, A., & Shwalb, R. (2008, April). *Parent expectations and planning for college*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., Coca, V., Moeller, E. with Roddie, K., Gilliam, J., & Patton, D. (2008, March). *From high school to the future: Potholes on the road to college*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

⁹ Auerbach, S. (2002, October). Why do they give the good classes to some and not to others? Latino parent narratives of struggle in a college access program. *Teachers College Record*, 104(7), 1369-1392; Boocock, S. P. (1972). *An introduction to the sociology of learning*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage; Gibson, D. M., & Jefferson, R. N. (2006, Spring). The effect of perceived parental involvement and the use of growth-fostering relationships on self-concept in adolescents participating in Gear Up. *Adolescence*, 41(161), 115-125.

¹⁰ Hill, N. E., Ramirez, C., & Dumka, L. E. (2003). Early adolescents' career aspirations: A qualitative study of perceived career aspirations: A qualitative study of perceived barriers and family support among low income, ethnically diverse adolescents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 934-959; Trusty, J. & Pirtle, T. (1998). Parents' transmission of educational goals to their adolescent children. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 32, 53-65.

¹¹ McSwain, C., & Davis, R. (2007, July). *College access for the working poor: Overcoming burdens to succeed in higher education*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

¹² CommunicationWorks, LLC. (2002, November 15). *Capturing the college potential of students from underserved populations*. College Board; Consortium on Chicago School Research. (2008, March). *From high school to the future: Potholes on the road to college*. Chicago: Author, University of Chicago.

¹³ National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

¹⁴ Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2006, June) *Expanding access and opportunity*. Washington, DC: Author.