

Junior Parent Guide to the Post-High School Planning Process
at New Trier Township High School- September, 2017

Subtitled, Help! My Student Won't Talk to me about Post-High School Plans!!!!

If your student doesn't willingly engage in conversations about life after New Trier, don't panic. That's perfectly normal for this stage in the process. Students should be focused on their classroom obligations and their social lives and whatever activities bring them happiness.

The post-high school planning program at New Trier is designed to work within the context of the student's development and the student's timing. Resistance to the process is normal and when New Trier has enough information to begin individual meetings, you can blame *us* for initiating the process!

Remembering that some simple conflicts will occur can help you move more smoothly through the process. As your student moves toward becoming increasingly independent, he or she may not wish to spend as much time with you, preferring friends instead. You, on the other hand, recognize that time with your college-bound student is certainly limited, and so you want to have as much time together as possible. You know you have a limited amount of time to help your student become ready for the challenges of independent living, and you want to imprint your values on your child in preparation.

So make sure your student has enough time with friends; help them gather at your house as appropriate to make sure they have time to further develop those peer friendships. Relationships with their classmates are important. As students learn to manage interpersonal relationships now, with your guidance as they request it, they will be better prepared for developing friendships on their own in an independent living setting.

Setting up individual coffee, dinner or lunch "dates" with your student – no more than once every two weeks – can help both of you handle the transition to that time when your student moves out of the house. You might even set up "theme" coffees, with particular subjects that you plan to bring up during each meeting. You have much to discuss: even a topic such as finances includes such issues as setting up a checking/debit account, determining what the budget will be each month, what your student is expected to contribute, how to handle cell phone bills, expenditures in preparation for and during college, and what constitutes a financial "emergency." Even though you are the adult here, keep any discussions two-sided and use them as exploratory conversations to help your student figure out things for himself. If these meetings turn into lectures, by the end of the second one, your student won't attend any more!

Mentally prepare a group of gentle questions for your student and just *listen*. This is your chance to *receive* information, not offer it. If you tend to be a talker, bring six quarters with you. Put one on the table for every time you talk, and when they run out, so does your ability to make contributions to the conversation. Pretty soon, you will understand the rhythm of your comments and you will know which are truly valuable to

offer. Listening nonjudgmentally is one of the greatest challenges of parenting, especially listening to teenagers!

Because the nature of the teenager's behavior is to act like an emerging adult one minute and like your little girl or boy the next, you dance between treating your student like an (almost) equal, and nurturing him or her like a child. At this stage your role is to prepare your student for impending adulthood, to help your student become a responsible member of society.

What does all of this have to do with the process? You are setting the stage for the positive relationship you will need to get through postsecondary planning. You are developing an understanding of the fluid nature of your relationship with your child and balancing your need to impart your wisdom as opposed to letting your student continue to experience some aspects of life with autonomy. You are risking your child missing an ACT registration deadline by letting him be responsible to register himself as opposed to you simply registering him yourself. When you complete an application for your child, and your child's electronic signature confirms the application as his own true and original work, you are risking a denial or the rescinding of that admission at a later date.

Here are three behaviors for parents to use to help their juniors through the process:

1. *Listen* actively and *quietly*. Let your student finish his or her thoughts and sometimes, if you continue to wait a bit more, your child will actually answer the question or resolve the conflict without your intervention. You will be impressed by the maturity demonstrated and your student will be impressed that he or she resolved the issue independently. It's a win-win situation!
2. *Ask* positive questions. Make sure your student knows you are in his or her corner, but help your child resolve things individually. "What are you considering?" "How would you like this to play out?" "If you do that, what do you see as the possible outcomes?" "What is your end goal in this situation?" Then *listen* while your child figures things out.
3. *Support and encourage* your child, but resist the urge to fix things. Challenge yourself to try to show your student how to accomplish his goal, as opposed to taking over and doing the task at hand for your child.
4. *Set aside one, two-hour block of time each week* to talk about college concerns. Your student still has other obligations to maintain and knowing there is a designated college time will help him or her manage the other aspects of life without interruption.

The college planning process is stressful and full of challenges for everyone involved. Parents are the responsible, role model for the child; you clearly are in a supportive, advocacy position and how you approach the process will have a great deal to do with how your student approaches it.

Your post-high school counselor will guide you both throughout the next few months, first in group sessions and later individually. Your counselor wants to do what's best for your student and to promote your family's values. There will be choices for each student and family. We in the post-high school counseling department believe that, as our colleague Frank Sacks wrote, "College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won."