

Postsecondary exploration and planning at New Trier Township High School Sophomore Parent Newsletter from New Trier's Post-High School Counseling Office

New Trier's approach to college and career guidance is developmental in nature. During the freshman and sophomore years, students are getting acclimated to the demands of high school and are determining how to be the most effective learners possible. They are also trying various activities to see how they want to spend their free time productively. They are finding friends and handling new social situations. In short, they are figuring out who they are, how they define themselves and what has meaning to them.

At this stage post-high school guidance is general in nature, relating to an individual's academic achievement and personal growth. The post-high school counselor who serves as the liaison to freshmen offers guidance to the freshman advisers and makes herself available during the day and evening at the Northfield campus during registration for questions from students and parents.

In the winter of the sophomore year, specific post-high school counselors are assigned to adviserries. The assigned counselors visit sophomore adviserries two to three times during the year to take questions and offer advice regarding activity involvement, class registration, and how to approach challenging studies. During the second semester of the sophomore year and after registration, sophomores will be given access to Naviance, the electronic vehicle New Trier uses for college information and guidance.

What is Naviance? It is a computer program that utilizes New Trier-specific information and tracks college and career information. It provides career and college search engines, and offers post-high school counselors a way to send monthly newsletters to juniors, seniors and their parents, as well as this newsletter to sophomore parents. It tracks New Trier transcripts sent to colleges and New Trier admission results with those colleges. It offers an easy method of creating a resume, corresponding with admission counselors, and confidentially tracks an individual's transcript submission. New Trier has used this program since 2004, and Naviance has earned positive reviews from students and parents alike.

Parents will obtain their own access to their student's Naviance account in the fall of their student's junior year. Until then, parents may use their student's log-in to explore the program.

Remember that right now your students only have one and a half years of high school grades under their respective belt. Statistics in Naviance are based on the final, eighth semester of high school work, which usually makes the listed, weighted grade point average significantly higher than a freshman could attain. You are therefore strongly cautioned against comparing your student's first semester, sophomore year GPA with that which is listed for college admission; it is way too early to make inferences about admission now!

What you can do is help your student use the program to investigate career options and begin to build a resume. The resume will help students assess their freshman and sophomore years in terms of their curricular and extra-curricular strengths. When post-high school counselors talk about the concept of fit between students and their future options, the first step is having students look at a resume of their academic background and accomplishments or interests to see what potential directions might be considered for the future. This provides parents with the chance to discuss what their student finds rewarding about activities, what the student might change if in a leadership position, and how involvement in various activities can help develop certain skills and attributes.

The parent role here is to help the student find balance and meaning in his or her life choices. It is to help determine rewarding ways to spend free time, and how to develop an appreciation for specific academic and extra-curricular talents. The parent role is not to use Naviance as a comparative tool for admissions yet; parents who restrain themselves from engaging in conversation about college admission as an end product of all of these decisions find their students make more genuine, authentic decisions and that they enjoy a less stressful relationship with their children.

Here are some specific discussion topics to use with your sophomore. When it comes to activity involvement, for instance:

What was it about this activity that you thought would be interesting to you?

How did participating in this activity meet or fail to meet your expectations?

If it did not meet your expectations, is there room to improve your experience that is under your ability to control? In other words, are there challenges that will stretch you in a positive, although maybe scary way; are there ways you can change your perspective to grow into this activity? Or, can you work with the leadership of the activity to make meaningful changes? What specifically would you change?

It's good to do these evaluations every six months or so, and remember that if your student does not want to continue in any activity, it's okay to change to something more meaningful or rewarding – colleges do not “rank” or judge students based on how many years they spend in any sport or activity!

When it comes to the classroom, typically the issues at hand may relate to developing organizational habits or more disciplined study habits. Conversations here are extremely delicate; your student needs to know that you are proud of the effort and the dedication put into studying. Too often students feel like they are not good enough in high school, so parental support, verbalized often, helps keep them balanced. In addition, in many cases we let the grade a student earns be the determination of what the student likes or dislikes, which may not be an accurate reading. So a conversation that considers the classroom might include questions like:

Does this subject seem to make sense to you easily? If so, what can you do to challenge yourself for the next year or level? If not, what structures or habits can you/we put into place to improve your efforts?

Knowing what you know now about the outcome of the way you approached that challenge, what would you do differently?

What do you like about this subject? Are there related areas of interest that we can continue to investigate?

What frustrates you about mastering this information? Let's look at this assignment together to see how it can be broken into manageable sections to make it easier to understand. After each section, are there questions you have about the topic?

Encourage your student to meet with teachers as appropriate; students don't often realize the partnership in learning that New Trier teachers like to have with their students, and how approachable they are for assistance.

As always, if you or a friend misses these newsletters, they are available on the New Trier post-high school website here: <http://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/phsc/>
And New Trier sophomore parents who wish to sign up for newsletters may do so by contacting donleyd@newtrier.k12.il.us with their email, and student name.