

Beyond the classroom: Activities to enrich and enhance  
Sophomore Parent Newsletter from New Trier's Post-High School Counseling Office

Just as no man is an island, no sophomore should be a study machine. A whole host of new activities is available to students on the Winnetka Campus, in addition to those that continue to speak to interests initiated at Northfield. Getting away from the academics for a bit is a sure-fire way to return to those challenges renewed and refreshed. Activity involvement also promotes problem-solving, organizational, social, and communication skills. It doesn't matter how smart people are unless they can impart information effectively to others; the human element is necessary for notable success and satisfaction. Extra-curricular activities enhance these skills.

Activities come in all shapes and sizes: some are based on talent, some on interests, and others on willingness to work. Having a job or helping out at home are also productive uses of your student's free time.....three hours of video games each night are not! Athletics, volunteer work, employment, student government leadership, and babysitting younger siblings are all ways to gain additional skills. It can be inferred that someone with a regular babysitting job is responsible, reliable, trustworthy, and has solid common sense and problem-solving abilities, for instance. That individual is probably also warm and personable, patient, approachable and considerate of others.

Students often feel lost if they don't have a "thing." They define themselves as athletes, musicians, artists, thespians, brains, or even geeks. Moving from a freshman no-cut sport to a competitive sport sophomore year brings anxiety and the very real possibility of not making the team. During their freshman year students were consumed with finding friends and getting their feet on the ground academically. In the sophomore year students worry about the competitive aspect of trying out for the play, orchestra, or athletic teams. Those who make the cut move on to continue their interest. Those who are cut from a team or program need to regroup and reassess where they might like to invest their time and talents.

Sophomore year brings a great deal of restructuring and redefining. Parents can help by encouraging their students to try new activities, to talk about their expectations for those activities, and to work through any rough times. By helping students determine how to respond to situations that challenge their identity, parents support their students'

socialization skills. There is a fine line between supporting your student and directing your student's behavior; most often, students indicate they want parents to listen without giving advice (unless asked) so the students can deliberate the potential consequences of their options before choosing their course of action.

Post-high school counselors are often asked about how a resume of activities influences college admission. There is no prescribed laundry list of activities that makes one candidate more desirable than the next, and spending four years in one activity that is unrewarding is a waste of a student's resources. If there were actually a prescribed list of activities that would get New Trier students into colleges, we would have it and distribute it to all of our New Trier students! Besides, such a prescription means that the uniqueness of our individual students would be lost. Unless a young person is being recruited to play athletics, for instance, college admission officers do not care if the student spends that fourth year on the team. College admission officers have repeatedly advised our candidates to participate in activities that speak to their hearts and bring them joy; the enthusiasm and happiness generated by genuinely engaging in meaningful activities come through the application to define the individual with authenticity. It is our hope that during the high school years your student will find activities that bring challenges, rewards, maturity, and friends.

If you or a friend misses one of these newsletters, they will be posted on the New Trier post-high school counseling website at <http://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/phsc/> and then "Sophomore Planning: The next two years." Sophomore parents who wish to have these sent directly should email [donleyd@newtrier.k12.il.us](mailto:donleyd@newtrier.k12.il.us) with the student name, and parental email(s) to join the list.