

New Trier Township High School  
Post-High School Counseling Office

*Finally, my daughter is a junior, halfway through New Trier. What should be happening in the postsecondary planning for her?*

Her assigned post-high school counselor has been routinely visiting her advisory for group guidance in postsecondary planning. In October of the junior year, the post-high school booklet, *Four Steps to the Future*, will be mailed to each parent and secondary guardian. Parents will be invited to an evening meeting at the high school in October or November to learn about the process, to receive the parental Naviance passcode, and to obtain the post-high school planning binder. The binder specifically will serve as a continuing resource for the student, and each student should bring it to subsequent post-high school planning meetings.

In January of the junior year, parents will call the office to arrange for the first individual meeting which can occur as early as February. A brochure outlining days to call will be distributed at the evening parent meeting, will be mailed to each junior home in December, and will be posted on the New Trier post-high school counseling webpage. The New Trier Parents Association devised the plan for calling to make the initial appointment to alleviate phone logjams.

The initial meeting kicks off the individualized process for postsecondary planning. Near the end of each meeting, the student will make an appointment to meet in the next two to three weeks, and these meetings will continue throughout the student's junior and senior school years. Counselors give students small tasks or assignments to complete between meetings to make sure the process does not become overwhelming.

Prior to the initial meeting, students complete two separate forms in advisory that give the counselors background information on the factors important to the individual student in planning for future options. Counselors complete appropriate planning or homework for the first meeting with the student information forms.

Counselors are also available by appointment in the summer, and provide free summer essay writing seminars (with the exact essay questions for your graduating class) and Common Application workshops throughout the summer before the senior year.

*My neighbors are talking about letters of recommendation for college. What's that all about?*

Most of our New Trier college candidates will need one teacher letter of recommendation for college applications. We have developed a list of the sixty-odd colleges that require a second teacher letter of recommendation and have it available on our webpage, in the post-high school binder, and along the hallway of the post-high school counseling department corridor. Letters of recommendation should ideally come from individuals who have taught your student in the high school classroom, preferably junior year as the most recent full year of intellectual experience. Your counselor will let your student know when and how to approach teachers in the spring of the junior year.

Rarely are letters from coaches or character references required; however, if you think a letter from a third party who knows your student well might enhance his admission consideration, one additional letter may be submitted, depending upon what individual colleges will consider.

Letters of recommendation are confidential and not released to the counselor or student for review. New Trier teachers will only write letters of recommendation for students for whom they can write positively.

Your student should be on his or her best behavior throughout high school, but particularly junior year. The teacher letter of recommendation puts the student in the context of learning and behaving in the educational setting of the classroom, so your student's engagement in his education, his disciplined study habit, respectfulness, and willingness to challenge himself are all considered in the recommendation. In short, classroom behavior counts, especially when asking a teacher to describe a student's approach to his education and its obligations.

Your student's adviser will write a brief note about your student's personal, academic and intellectual participation at New Trier. This note goes to your post-high school counselor who may refer to it, to a parent reference, and to his or her interactions with your student to write the school letter of recommendation. This letter puts the student in the context of the school community.

*Now, what about those admission tests?*

In the fall of the junior year, your student may take the PSAT. The PSAT is a *practice* SAT and may determine a student's eligibility for National Merit Scholarship programs.

The ACT, and the SAT since 2016, are both curriculum-based tests designed to assess a student's knowledge near the end of the junior year. Sometimes taking it this early without the benefit of the junior year coursework results in low scores that may demoralize your student. Beginning in the spring of 2017, the state of Illinois offers a free SAT to all public high school juniors. This SAT, redesigned in 2016, is no longer the SAT of your youth! It has moved from an aptitude test to an achievement test, and is quite similar to the ACT now.

If your student is very interested in taking an early ACT, you may wish to consider testing in December or February of the junior year. That leaves time for test preparation should you decide to use it. The ACT is offered each year in September, November, December, February, April, and June, so students have multiple chances to take the exam.

All American colleges and universities will accept results from either the ACT or the SAT Reasoning Test.

*Help! My son is not a great standardized-test taker! What should he do?*

Most colleges would rather have a student with a good record of classroom achievement and lower test scores than a student with superb scores and low classroom performance. If you have reviewed your student's PSAT scores and wish to enroll him in a test prep program, know that the folks who ring you the PSAT and SAT offer free test prep through Khan Academy online. Beyond that, there are many test prep options in the community you might wish to consider, however, for the post-high school counselors to recommend a specific test prep agency is unethical.

There is also an increasing number of colleges and universities that do not require standardized tests. This list is maintained at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org). Check to see if schools your student is investigating are test-optional.

*I have a son who has dabbled in a lot of activities, but hasn't really found one he likes. Is this a problem for college admission?*

This is fine and more typical than you would imagine. Unless a student is going to be a recruited athlete or a candidate for a fine arts program that requires an audition or portfolio, students are free to choose whatever activities they find rewarding. There is no prescription of certain activities to be admitted to colleges; most colleges just want to know that your son is spending his free time in productive pursuits (Back away from that xbox...!).

*My daughter is being contacted by college coaches already. How do we handle this?*

The NCAA rules have changed, and it is now legal for college coaches to contact students after the end of sophomore year – specifically June 1 of the junior year; however, this may vary by sport. We encourage you to check the *NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete*. However, the basic rules of college investigation for prospective student-athletes have not changed; your daughter must like the college, its athletic program, and her prospective teammates. The coach and his or her conduct must also be respectable.

*It seems like everyone around me has an ACT tutor and an independent college counselor. Do I need these resources, too?*

New Trier provides more in-depth counseling in the college admission process than any other high school, public or private, in the nation. So, although you may decide individually whether a testing prep agency is in your student's future, we certainly believe you don't need an independent college counselor. But the system only works if your student communicates with the counselor and with the parent about what specific progress is being made in the college search and application process. We recommend that beginning this year, you schedule a forty-five-minute meeting each week in order to talk college – and not to talk college during other times of the week. Trust us, by confining college talk to specific times, you will keep your relationship with your student strong as well as allow your child to decompress from the pressure of the process and focus on other aspects of life.

After your initial, individual meeting with your post-high school counselor in February, March, or April of the junior year, your student will continue to meet individually at least every three weeks with the counselor. Some students come in more, others less, but the better you let your counselor get to know your student, the more assistance he or she can provide.

New Trier's counselors help with college selection, investigation, the actual application process, essay writing, resume construction, and decision making. We make sure all the parts of the application are completed appropriately and we help students become and stay organized. We make sure they are in the right classes and that they are managing the tasks associated with college admission in a timely and appropriate fashion.

Additionally, New Trier's counselors provide a summer essay writing seminar with individualized follow-up, and a Common Application workshop to help students jump-start the work of the Common Application. The summer essay seminars provide the actual essay questions that New Trier's most popular colleges will be using in the following fall. We all like reviewing essay drafts in any condition!

The post-high school counseling office at New Trier also handles financial aid questions and provides a financial aid night in September now that the core document is available in October and should be submitted by Thanksgiving. The office also sends regular scholarship notices to students in advisery, and handles the many summer enrichment opportunities that are available. Much of this information has been loaded onto Naviance under the "colleges" tab – just scroll down.

Students with disabilities, students interested in participating in college athletics, international students, and students who wish to pursue majors or minors in the visual or performing arts can find specialized help with their assigned post-high school counselor as well. New Trier's post-high school counseling department co-sponsors CHOICES, a college fair for students with disabilities; an evening program for international students and parents; a program with the New Trier Fine Art department every other year, and; and evening for students interested in playing college athletics.

The office also sponsors a summer speaker series on special topics as well as a yearly college application night to kick-off the college process senior year.