



Suffield High School

Monthly Counseling Office Newsletter

Seniors Take Note

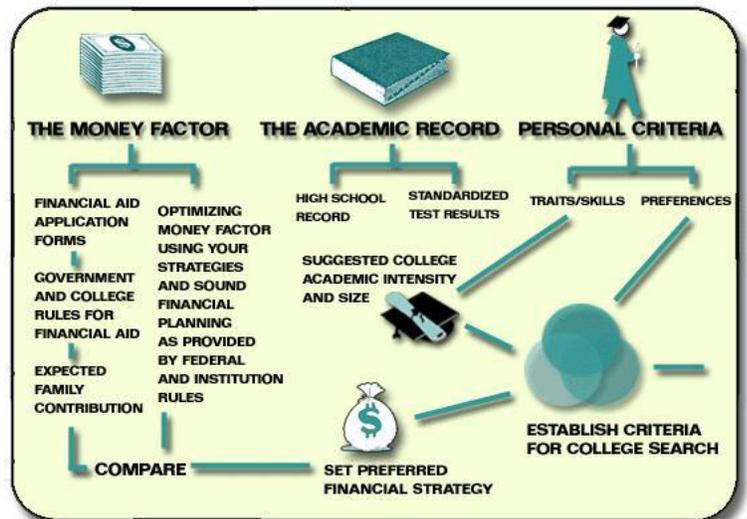
Seniors are reminded to stop in the school counseling office and let us know what they've decided to do in the fall. We have already heard from many seniors on where they will attend college next year or where they will be working, etc.; but others have yet to let us know. **It is particularly important that seniors notify those colleges that they have chosen not to attend so that space might be made available to others on a waiting list.**

Final Decision: College Choice

You've already narrowed your college choices. Here are some tips to help you make a final decision.

10 Questions to Ask Before Picking a College

1. What different financial aid packages does the school offer? Remember to factor in costs such as transportation home, long distance calls, etc.
2. Is the program you're interested in offered?
3. How many graduates find jobs in their field of study?
4. How does the school help graduates find jobs?
5. How easy is it to get the courses you want at the times that are convenient for you?
6. How much does housing cost, and is finding off-campus housing difficult?
7. What is the quality of academic resources (library, research facilities, computer labs, etc.)? Are they up-to-date and accessible?
8. What is the retention rate (how many students come back after their freshman year)?
9. What student organizations are on campus?
10. What sort of career planning or job placement services are available?



Financial Aid Award Letters

The college application process can be a bit like a rollercoaster ride for both students and their parents. The application phase is often one long period of stress punctuated by joy when the first acceptance letter arrives. Often this is followed by a period of calm, when the students realize that they do have some options. Then the financial aid award letters begin to arrive and a renewed sense of excitement returns with a combination of bewilderment and anxiety - especially for the parents. Most parents have trouble understanding award letters. It doesn't help that there isn't an "industry" standard for what information should be included in the award package. The following are some tips for parents to help them decipher their student's financial aid award.



- 1.) Most schools will list by semester, the amount the student will receive in grants and scholarships. This is considered "free" money that will not have to be repaid.
- 2.) If a student is eligible to participate in work-study, the maximum amount the student can earn will be listed, by semester, on the award letter. This is not guaranteed aid. The student will be responsible for seeking out and securing eligible campus employment.
- 3.) If the award letter includes a Stafford loan, check to see if the loan is identified as "subsidized" or "unsubsidized". If the loan is subsidized, the federal government will pay the interest on the loan while the student attends college. If the loan is unsubsidized, the student will be held responsible for the accrued interest while in school. The student will have the choice to pay the interest as it accrues or defer the interest payments while in school. Repayment of the principal for both types of loans begins six months after a student graduates, stops attending, or attends school less than half-time.
- 4.) If the student intends to accept a Stafford loan and the college he/she plans to attend participates in the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP), the student will be expected to choose a lender. Some colleges will provide students with a list of preferred lenders but the student is not obligated to choose from that list. Although the government sets the maximum interest rate for Stafford loans, many lenders offer students rate reductions and other borrower incentives so it pays to shop around before selecting a lender.
- 5.) Some schools participate in the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program. These students will borrow directly through the federal government and will not be given a choice of lender.
- 6.) If the award letter includes a Federal Perkins loan, the loan will be handled directly through the school. Repayment begins nine months after the student graduates, stops attending, or attends less than half-time.
- 7.) A few colleges will list a PLUS loan as part of the student's aid package. Understand that this is considered a parent loan and it is not the student's responsibility to repay. Parents' who accept a PLUS loan should be aware that the repayment schedule will begin while the student is still in school. Standard repayment begins within sixty days of final disbursement.

8.) Often colleges do not list their total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room and board) on their award letter. This is a critical piece of information. Parents or students may need to call the college's financial aid office for this information. When reviewing the award letter, add up all the grant, scholarship and loan aid and subtract it from the total budgeted cost of attendance. The amount that remains will have to be paid for by the family. Some families will pay this through savings while others may have to look at supplemental education loans.

Check out www.FAFSA4caster. This is an EFC estimator put out by the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid Division.

It's Haggling Time Over College Financial Aid

Dozens Of Calls A Day

Years ago, it was taboo for students and their parents to haggle over a financial aid award. Now, students and their families are often advised — sometimes by private coaches on financial aid and admissions — to call the college of their choice to negotiate.

At Quinnipiac University, Dominick Yoia, senior director of financial aid, said he is inundated with phone calls from parents — about 40 or 50 a day — asking whether they can get more financial aid for their child.

"I take the calls directly," he said. "I confirm that we have gone out with our strongest package up front."

When parents bring up scholarships offered elsewhere, Yoia said, "we don't try to one-up the other one in terms of who's giving how much. It's a dangerous practice that most schools don't want to engage in."

The calls can be overwhelming, Yoia said, but with tuition, room, board and fees close to \$50,000 next year, "it's a lot of money. I can't blame parents."

In cases where a family's financial circumstances have changed or weren't clear, or an emergency has come up, a package may be adjusted. However, he estimates that's true in only 5 percent of cases.

In the past decade, Quinnipiac has greatly increased the percentage of merit aid it gives out, Yoia said. Ten years ago, 80 percent of aid was need-based; 20 percent merit-based. Last year it was 55 percent need-based and 45 percent merit.

Yoia said that while targeting the brightest students is "not the worst thing in the world, the unfortunate part is, it does have to come from somewhere. It comes off the table for the needier students."

However, Joan Isaac Mohr, dean of admissions at Quinnipiac, pointed out that many of the students getting merit aid also have financial need. In some cases, she said, parents call to ask if a need-based grant can be replaced with a merit-based scholarship because the latter is more secure. The need-based grant might shift based on a family's income, but the merit-based scholarship will remain the same for a strong student for all four years, she said.

Larry Dowd, dean of admissions and financial aid at Trinity College, recently heard from a father whose daughter had received four merit awards from four other institutions but nothing from Trinity, where aid is almost entirely need-based. "He was appalled that Trinity was not willing to offer his daughter a merit award," Dowd said. Dowd said he also has heard from parents whose children hadn't even applied for financial aid but were offered merit aid by other schools to encourage them to attend.

"Would you be willing to match that? What do you say? No. We are basically committed to a need-based philosophy. We have a very limited merit program," Dow said. "What is tough is that families have to recognize that different institutions are going to adopt different policies for different reasons."

Competing For Students

At Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Jim Barquinero, vice president of enrollment, planning and student affairs, said that 55 percent of the institutional aid is based on merit; while 45 percent is based on need. A decade ago, he said, the ratios were probably reversed. Trying to attract students with stronger test scores, academic records and other talents is "the way of the world," Barquinero said. "Don't forget we are in a competition as institutions with each other. ... And competition in a free market typically allows a parent to get a better value, which often equates with price."

Barquinero said students and parents particularly like merit-based aid because it acknowledges a student's achievement. In a sense, it's a "vanity grant," he said. Often, he said students receiving merit aid also qualify for need-based grants. "The fact that another school might outbid us or out-package us — it's one of the frustrating parts of the business," Barquinero said. He said that sometimes families "convert to a decision-making mode not predicated on fit, but predicated on economics and that's real. We respect economics. We know sometimes they make 'fit' work if the price is right."

Taken from The Hartford Courant. Author: Kathleen Megan

Important Scholarship Information

The Common Application Form for Local Scholarships will be available beginning April 3rd in the Counseling Office. This is a common application for many local scholarships! **All Seniors are strongly encouraged to apply! Seniors are also reminded to check our Local Scholarship Board weekly, so as not to miss out on the many great scholarship opportunities available to them!**

College Acceptance/Rejection A Delicate Subject

It's the season of thick and thin – envelopes, that is, for college applicants.

For some there's elation, but it is often tempered by the disappointment of close friends. Sharing college tidings – whether you are parrying inquires or consoling or congratulating others – is delicate business, and the lack of codified etiquette for it leads to appalling gaffes.



"I used to work at a school {where} they'd announce every week where the seniors had got in," says JoAnne Carter, who specializes in college and prep-school placement at Education Solutions, a consultant in Essex. She advises high-school clients to discuss college details only with their closest friends. "You always have to look at your audience," Carter says. Large groups require special caution; not everyone sitting around your lunch table has necessarily gotten a thick envelope." Simple rejection isn't the only wound you might be salting when you ask too many questions. This year especially acceptances can prove just as devastating, because finances are a constraint for many students. "Sometimes kids get into really high-level schools but they can't go because they can't afford to go," Carter says. Carter has already begun encouraging current high-school

juniors to be discreet. “It’s a private thing and we don’t think you should be talking about it. It just puts pressure on everybody.”

It can be difficult to know how to deal with application results when the topic comes up, points out Webb Trenchard, director of college guidance at the Loomis Chafee school in Windsor, because students react in different ways. We definitely encourage our students to support one another but also respect each other’s privacy....Students want to handle their news in their own way,” says Trenchard.

The chief responsibility for guiding students through the coups and setbacks of college admissions, however, lies with parents. “You have to really help your teenager understand that although this looks like the biggest decision being made, it isn’t,” says Marcia Rubinstien, director of a West Hartford educational-counseling organization, Eudifax. Disappointed applicants need to remember that an admissions decision has far less importance that it appears to when you are in high school, she says. “I once had a boy who punched a hole in his wall and came to me crying,” after being rejected by his first choice, said Rubinstien. Later, having graduated from medical school, he wrote her a letter, telling her, “That was such a good thing that I didn’t get in there because I couldn’t have had a better experience in my life.”

Whatever role you’re playing in the college admissions passion play this year – applicant, parent, teacher or friend – you’re not required to talk about it at length, says manners expert Lizzie Post of Vermont’s Emily Post Institute. “If it’s something you really don’t want to share, you can simply brush it off with one of those, ‘Oh, you know the process is going, you know how it is.’ Say something about the process itself....You can be vague about it,” she says. “If you are a bit more forthcoming, if you want to say, ‘I’m not comfortable talking about it just yet,’ it’s really OK to say that.”

When talking to the disappointed, the best thing to say is the most obvious: I’m really sorry about that. Don’t try to buck up a friend by insisting that a rejection is for the better, or that the college didn’t deserve him or her. “What people hate is when they express an emotion that’s a sad one and they’re not validated,” says Post. “Apologies are a way to sympathize with someone.”

*Taken from: The Hartford Courant
Author: Nell Pach*

US Military Service Academy Night



A US Military Service Academy Night Program will be held on Wednesday evening, April 26th at 6:00 at the MG Maurice Rose Armed Forces Center in Middletown. Any current 9th, 10th, or 11th grader interested in learning more about the nation’s military academies is encouraged to attend along with a parent. Representatives from the ***US Military Academy at West Point, the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, the US Coast Guard Academy in New London, the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and the US Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point NY*** will be in attendance to provide information about the application and nomination process and answer questions. Interested students should pick up a flyer in the School Counseling Office.

Which Test(s) Should I Take?

When the time comes to decide on which tests to take for college admissions, there are two tests from which to choose: **ACT with Writing and the new SAT with essay**. Almost all four year colleges and universities accept both tests equally.



Both tests have the same goal - to help colleges predict your chances of success during the freshman year. These tests, along with your high school grades, are supposed to be accurate predictors of freshman success. You should be aware, however, that the ACT and SAT differ from each other, and many students earn higher scores on one test than on the other. The general pattern over the years is that about one third of students earn higher scores on ACT, one third earn higher scores on SAT, and one third earn similar scores on both tests.



We encourage students to take both tests! In most cases, when college applicants submit scores from both tests, colleges will use the higher of the two scores, ACT or SAT, for purposes of admission, scholarships, and athletic eligibility. So taking both tests can only increase your chances of getting into your first-choice college.

No matter which test (or tests) you choose, it is very important that you prepare. Use your PSAT and PreACT scores to review questions you got wrong when taking these practice tests and learn strategies to help you improve your scores on the “real thing”.

Making the Most of Your Campus Visit



As a student progresses in his or her college search, the campus visit becomes increasingly important. A campus visit goes beyond brochures and Web sites; visiting classes, observing student-teacher interactions, touring the campus, and meeting members of the community are great ways for a student to learn more about a college.

While on campus, students may want to attend other small seminar and large lecture classes, and they may want to see the different academic facilities, including both classrooms and laboratories. A visit to the Student Activities Office provides an opportunity to learn about student-run clubs and organizations, and a visit to the Athletic Department may be helpful if the student is interested in playing a sport in college. Students may also want to set up an appointment to speak with a faculty member while they're on campus. If the college offers a campus tour, this can be a nice way to see buildings, learn about campus life, and experience the campus atmosphere. If the tour guide is a student, it's also a great chance to ask questions of a current student. Additionally visiting students can learn what it's like to be a current student at the college by staying overnight in the residence halls, if this option is available.

Students may also want to explore the community off-campus if there is time. They can check out the transportation services and the shopping venues and dining establishments in the area. Many cities offer student discounts for professional sports games, musical concerts, and theater performances; visitors may want to take advantage of these off-campus entertainment options.

Above all, the campus visit gives students opportunities to experience college life first-hand. Throughout the visit, and through tours, information sessions, and meetings, students should ask themselves the all-important question: "Can I see myself here for four years?"

SHS Juniors are strongly encouraged to use the upcoming April Vacation (4/18-4/22) to visit colleges of interest while they are in session. A phone call to the college's admissions office to make the arrangements is recommended.

Source: Washington University in St. Louis, Counselor Newsletter.

Making a Good Impression

Advice from College Admissions Officers

From the time you enter high school, every course you take is recorded on your academic transcript. This transcript will eventually make its way in front of a college admissions officer. What do they look for?

Joan Kayser, Director of Admissions at St. Vincent's College, reports, ***"I look to see the quality of the courses they have taken and their performance. I am impressed when I see four years of math and science. I am not impressed with fluff courses and poor performance."***

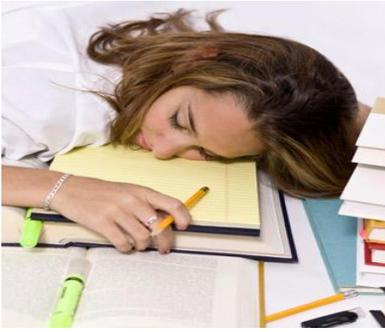


Besides making sure each student has taken the required courses, Kimberly Crone, Director of Admissions for Eastern Connecticut State University warns, ***"The admissions committee raises a questioning eyebrow when the seniors select less challenging courses. It sends a positive message when a senior continues to challenge him/herself by taking extra courses in math, science and language."***

Admissions counselors don't just look at your grades. What if you have trouble making it to school on time and have frequent absences? According to Ms. Crone, ECSU reviews all prospective students' attendance records.

Remember, the types of courses you take, your academic performance in those courses, your attendance and your after-school activities all come under review. Make every moment count.

Most Teens Don't Get Enough ZZZs



Adolescents are nocturnal creatures. They have a natural tendency to stay up late – 11 p.m. or later – and to awaken late in the morning. **But there's one problem with this arrangement: school.**

Classes usually begin between 7 and 8 a.m. As a result, only one-fourth of adolescents get the recommended 8 ½ to 9 ¼ hours of sleep each night. Twenty-six percent get 6 ½ hours or less each school night. Lack of sleep often translates into poor school performance, negative moods (anger, sadness, etc.) increased use of stimulants, and risk of unintentional injuries and death. One study found that young drivers age 25 or under (peak age was 20) cause more than half of fall-asleep car crashes.

The National Sleep Foundation has some practical advice for sleepy teens:

- **Get into bright light as soon as possible in the morning.**
- **On weekends and other mornings when you sleep in late, awaken within two hours of your regular schedule.**
- **Limit stimulating activities during the hours before bedtime.**
- **Remember that sleep is food for the brain. Lack of sleep can make you look tired and feel depressed. Sufficient sleep helps you think more clearly, complete complex tasks better and enjoy everyday life more fully.**

For more information about sleep for children and teens, go to www.kidtips.com.

Source: The Springfield Republican

Author: Tom McMahon

Study: Parents Underestimate Teen Drug Use

Many Not Aware of Drugs, Alcohol

WASHINGTON – Parents drastically underestimate their teenage children's exposure to and use of drugs and alcohol, according to survey results by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

Eighty percent of parents surveyed said they did not think alcohol and marijuana were available at the parties their teens attended, the study found. But 50 percent of teens said they attended parties where both substances were present.



Unlike past surveys that measured substance abuse itself, this is CASA's first report that looks at the role parent supervision can play in teen drinking and drug use. CASA President Joseph A. Califano Jr. said

substance abuse increases with drug availability and that parents, many of whom take the attitude of “not my child,” not only are unaware of the problem but are enabling it. “Parents, wake up and smell the pot and beer,” he said, adding that even parties with parents as chaperones often are brimming with drugs and alcohol. Ninety-nine percent of parents surveyed said they would not serve alcohol at a party, but 28 percent of teens said they had attended events where parents were home and the children were drinking. By age 17, 46 percent of teens said they had been to parties where drinking and the use of drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, Ecstasy and prescription medications, had occurred in the presence of parents.

Califano cited a variety of possible reasons for the discrepancy between what parents think is happening and what really is happening: kids sneaking in alcohol or raiding parents’ medicine cabinets; parents not fully honest in their survey answers; and parents being present but in a part of the house that is removed from the party. “You can just imagine the kids saying, ‘Please, Mom, please, Dad, don’t embarrass me,’” he said. The report findings showed almost no difference in drug exposure or abuse between males and females or among teens living in urban, suburban or rural areas

Source: Los Angeles Times

Author: Heather Gehlert

April Calendar of Events

- April 3rd** **National College Fair** at the Big E in West Springfield, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- April 5th** **All Juniors will take the SAT** during the school day here at SHS.
- April 6th** **National College Fair** at the CT Convention Center in Hartford, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- April 7th** Registration deadline for the **May 6th SAT administration**.
- April 8th** **ACT with Writing administration** – Juniors should take now or on June 10th.
- April 10th -14th** Spring Vacation – good opportunity for juniors to visit college campuses and talk with admissions reps. ***Call ahead to make arrangements.***
- April 18th** **All students taking AP Exam(s)** meet in the Commons during Advisory to complete exam pre-administration paperwork required by The College Board.

