

LEARNING

It's never too early to start thinking about college

Recently there has been a great deal of national press coverage on the increasing pressures surrounding college acceptances. In part this is due to the larger demographic pool of college applicants — there are more students applying to the same number of spots, so the competition goes up. On the other hand, the recent economic climate has made many families rethink what available income they have to invest in their child's higher education. When these factors are combined, the future looks confusing and uncertain, which can lead to more stress among families contemplating their child's future.

Here are some thoughts and pieces of advice from a professional immersed in the fight right along with your students.

- **Start early.** Start talking about college early on with your children. Whether they go to a four-year college or QVCC, college is an opportunity to acquire both the actual and the analytical skills that employers want in a new hire. A person's economic opportunities grow significantly with a college degree. Talking about it early on sets the stage for a child to see him or herself as a college bound student. Research has demonstrated that students who attend college knew by the fourth grade that they would pursue that path; their parents or other significant adults had encouraged that expectation, and it became a part of their own personal expectations.

In high school, students have choices — what classes to take, how much effort to put into school work, how they spend their non-academic time. The choices they make represent their decisions to use this time in their life as an opportunity to see what their "best" really is. I'm talking about effort here. When students work to their best, their grades reflect a road map for their guidance counselor or college advisor to help them find the kind of school that would best fit their talents and personality. Colleges want students who are engaged and eager to learn. Students who are encouraged to see their daily routine of high school as the "requisite job" that will prepare them for their future careers (and thus worthy of time well spent) will also find themselves seen as attractive candidates to colleges. The message from parents should be, "Are these grades your best effort?" Grades that reflect a student's



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grades that reflect a student's true academic potential, but also will lead to teacher recommendations that speak to a student who is that "engaged, active learner" a college seeks to recruit. In life, if we strive to be the best we can be, and seek to learn how to keep improving, we will find success. This is an important lesson to teach our children early on.

- **Be prepared.** While testing is becoming more and more the unfortunate consequence of federal mandates, the tests that will make or break a student's opportunities in many colleges are the SAT and ACT. These standardized tests are often the benchmark that will determine if a more selective college is willing to consider a student because data has shown that students who score within a certain range are more successful at their college. Some colleges refute that idea and will not review test scores in their application process, but when thinking about how a student confronts their college opportunities, it is best to be prepared to, again, give one's best effort.

There are many ways to prepare for these exams — some schools offer courses, private companies provide preparation services, and there are free online tutorials as well. The style of these tests and the time limits they impose, as well as the kinds of questions they ask, are usually very different from a student's daily studying routine. Practicing the format and style of questioning 20 minutes a day starting in 10th or 11th grade could make a significant difference. Bottom line: As un-fun as preparing for an SAT or ACT can be, at the end of the day, no one wants to regret not having done the preparation that would have led to a better opportunity.

Encouraging your children to "test" or push themselves toward a higher level of "play" means that you are promoting their innate curiosity to see what they can do.

What are they good at? What intimidates them because it makes them uncomfortable? If their attitude is one of "I will give it my best effort," students can tackle any potential challenge that comes their way. When they know they have put in their best effort and have not felt the expectation to "be" the best, they will have the confidence and eagerness to face any challenge. It is a life habit that engenders excitement for the future. This is the best state of mind for a college-bound kid.

Economic realities play a major role in the conversation parents and students have about college. Choosing to spend money on a college education may be the biggest investment a family will make other than their purchase of a house. Thus, it is important to see the process as one of an investment worth making. Recent changes have increased the amount of federal monies available to students through the Pell Grant and also in subsidized Stafford Loans. This will help many families looking to invest in a college education. Public state universities, often in partnership with community colleges, can offer a more affordable tuition; however, be thoughtful — a student who has prepared him or herself well, early on, can become such an attractive candidate that the college will be eager to encourage that student to attend with merit aid. In the end, when the financial aid packages come from the colleges, a private college could make a better offer than a public state university. The key to success is helping your students start seeing that their best efforts now will pay off years down the line. In an age of "instant gratification," this is a hard concept to teach — but it is well worth it.

There is a college, public or private, for every student. Only 3 percent of the world's population attends a college or university. However, there are more than 3,000 colleges or universities in the United States alone — and in the U.S., there is a college for anyone who wants to go. Starting early will make that possibility a greater reality.

Heather Cavalli, director of college counseling at Hyde School, is also an independent educational consultant for Best Fit Educational Planners in Woodstock. She can be contacted at info@bestfitplanners.com.



Woodstock Elementary School

- Monday, Sept. 14:** Grilled chicken patty on a wheat roll, oven fries, fruit, milk.
- Tuesday, Sept. 15:** Waffle sticks, sausage links, hash browns, fruit, milk.
- Wednesday, Sept. 16:** Mozzarella sticks with marinara sauce, tossed salad, fruit, milk.
- Thursday, Sept. 17:** Taco salad with lettuce and tomato, fruit, milk.
- Friday, Sept. 18:** Pizza, corn, fruit, milk.

Woodstock Middle School

- Monday, Sept. 14:** Buffalo chicken patty on a wheat roll, oven fries, fruit, milk.
- Tuesday, Sept. 15:** Beef and bean burrito, seasoned corn, fruit, milk.
- Wednesday, Sept. 16:** Breaded cheese dip-pers with sauce, salad, fruit, milk.
- Thursday, Sept. 17:** American chop suey, green beans, fruit, milk.
- Friday, Sept. 18:** Pizza, vegetable sticks with dip, fruit, milk.

Pomfret Community School

- Monday, Sept. 14:** Popcorn chicken, soup or salad, dinner roll, assorted fruit.
- Tuesday, Sept. 15:** Baked potato with assorted toppings, wheat bread and butter, vegetables, fruit.
- Wednesday, Sept. 16:** Tacos with cheese, lettuce, tomato and salsa; dinner roll; frozen fruit treat.
- Thursday, Sept. 17:** Cheese pizza, garden salad, Teddy Grahams, fresh fruit.
- Friday, Sept. 18:** Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes, corn, roll, fresh fruit.

Ellis Tech

- Monday, Sept. 14:** Turkey or beef hot dog in a bun (2), coleslaw, assorted fruit, milk.
- Tuesday, Sept. 15:** Chicken nuggets, rice, green beans, assorted fruit, milk.
- Wednesday, Sept. 16:** Pasta with meatballs, garden salad, assorted fruit, milk.
- Thursday, Sept. 17:** Turkey sloppy Joe, corn, assorted fruit, milk.
- Friday, Sept. 18:** Chicken or cheese quesadilla pizza, garden salad, assorted fruit, milk.

Spotlight on Woodstock Education

The Woodstock Board of Education (WBOE) welcomes our students and staff back to school for the start of the 2009-10 school year. The classrooms are again filled with energy, and the playing fields, school clubs and organizations are actively recruiting and engaging our students. *Spotlight on Woodstock Education* will again start publishing monthly as a forum to address questions from the community and to highlight particular initiatives and accomplishments of Woodstock's students. We encourage parents and citizens to send their questions and ideas to asktheboard@woodstockschoools.net. We will try to address as many topics as possible throughout the year.

Kicking off the new school year at its Aug. 27 meeting, the WBOE enthusiastically supported a proposal from



Woodstock's Green Team to move to 100 percent "clean renewable energy" for all of the district's energy requirements. By switching to Public Power Utility as our Generation Supplier, the district can save money and fund the purchase of clean renewable energy in the form of 80 percent hydro and 20 percent wind through the Connecticut Clean Energy Program and Sterling Planet. Woodstock Public Schools joins the town of Woodstock in this commitment to renewable energy, and the WBOE salutes the Green Team in its accomplishments in moving our community forward on this front.

Also at the August meeting, the WBOE reviewed, at a high level, a first look at the district's CMT scores. In general, aggregated scores have improved. District-wide performance of our regular education students advanced sufficiently to meet federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress targets. Specifically, in math, 95.9 percent of our total district students scored at or above proficient, vs. the No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") requirement of 82 percent. For reading, 90.2 percent of our students scored at or above proficient vs. a NCLB requirement of 79 percent. Our special education student progress improved but remains in "Safe Harbor." Our administrators are analyzing the scores and disaggregating the strands to better: (a) understand trends and performance, (b) identify which teaching strategies and classroom methodologies appear to be effective and (c) target which areas require greater focus. We will have more to share on that in the near future. The WBOE recognizes the effective efforts of our teachers and administrators, and the great support of parents, in achieving this continued student performance improvement.

Our schools are made stronger by the active involvement of our parents and citizens. Regular monthly meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. (except for November and December, which are the third Thursday) at Woodstock Middle School. All BOE meetings and subcommittee meetings are open to the public, and citizens' comments are always welcome. Meeting dates, agendas, packets and minutes are available on our Web site at www.woodstockschoools.net under the "District" and "Board of Education" tabs. Subcommittee meeting agendas and minutes can also be found there. Our superintendent, Dr. Baran, is readily available and can be reached at 928-7453 or by e-mail at wpsdist@mindspring.com. We look forward to a busy and productive year.

This column is submitted by the Woodstock Board of Education. Send your questions or comments to the WBOE at asktheboard@woodstockschoools.net.

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