

## **The Road to College**

by Leah J. Matuson

I thought that teaching my daughter to drive was stressful. It was. So I had a professional teach her. When she got her license, I was proud of her though I was still a bit tense. But the more she drove, the more I relaxed. And before I knew it, we were on the road to college! Scary – yes! But don't panic! Your child got potty trained, learned how to ride a bike, and most likely knows how to drive by now. So stop worrying, you'll get through this and so will your kid.

### **You are Not Alone**

The first and, perhaps, most important thing you need to know is – **you are not alone**. From your child's guidance department to your friends and family, to the Internet – there are numerous resources to get you through unscathed. Within the confines of this article, I touch on a few that I used during my daughter's road to college.

### **High School Guidance Departments**

Your child's high school guidance department can be a significant resource for students and their parents embarking on this eye-opening journey. Many guidance departments hold workshops, events and meetings for students and parents -- from the beginning to the very end.

### **Naviance**

Our guidance department offered Naviance, a free website tool that lets students and parents research, track and plan for the college admission process.

### **Workshops, Seminars and Meetings**

Though it might seem early in the scheme of things, some high schools offer exploratory career workshops during sophomore year.

Erika Warren, a guidance counselor at Millis High School in Millis, MA, also teaches a career exploration class for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Says Warren, "In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, we hold sophomore seminars to introduce students to the college process. We talk about how important planning is, PSATs, finding schools that offer what they're interested in – everything from A to Z so that they have a good idea of what's to come."

### **Junior Year**

Generally, the first half of a student's junior year is when you'll find guidance departments holding college information workshops. Workshops can include criteria on selecting colleges, applications and financial aid. Some high schools bring in college admissions representatives to explain how the admissions process works.

Heather Mandosa is Guidance Content Specialist at Medfield High School in Medfield, MA, where their official college kick-off is in January of junior year. Says Mandosa, "We offer workshops for parents, and work with students in the classroom where we cover a variety of subjects including choosing colleges, deadlines, financial aid, and how to get the most out of campus visits and college fairs."

And while most students may require some assistance during this time, the amount they may need will vary. Says Warren, “Being a smaller school system, we can work more intensively with each student. Some students require a great deal of assistance and come in on a regular basis, others don’t need as much. It’s up to the student to decide how much help he or she needs.”

Mandosa agrees, “Different students need different things. Some kids may visit guidance everyday with questions on school choices, filling out applications, deadlines...Some kids will come in less. It all depends on the student.”

Although some parents may be reluctant to admit it, embarking on this maiden voyage with their son or daughter can be a bit overwhelming. Trust me on this. But don’t worry, help is close by.

“We encourage parents to come in and meet with us,” says Mandosa. “We have several parent coffees so that parents starting the process can talk to parents who have already been through it.” Mandosa continues, “Most parents have found this helpful...learning about the transition from high school to college, and what to expect over the summer before college and during freshman year.”

### **Big or Small, City or Suburbs? Take a Trip!**

Is your teen envisioning a school with rolling hills and long, gated drives leading to picturesque brick buildings, or is he or she imagining a bustling, fast-paced atmosphere found at a city school with nary a rolling hill to be found?

Both parents and guidance counselors agree: If you can, take trips to different size schools -- in the city, the suburbs and even more rural environs -- to see where your child feels most comfortable. Better to find out sooner rather than later.

### **Only One School? Not!**

It might not be the norm, but what if your student feels that there’s only one school he or she would be happy at? General wisdom from guidance counselors and parents -- apply to several schools -- because you never know.

Says Mandosa, “I don’t believe there’s just one perfect school for a student...and I don’t like seeing a student get hyperfocused on just one school too quickly because they’ll miss out on opportunities at other schools.”

### **College Fairs**

Going forward, you and your child may want to attend a college fair. Organizations that sponsor these events offer the convenience of having reps from many colleges under just one roof.

### **Friends and Family**

When I felt overwhelmed about the whole college thing (it got better as we went along), I’d pick up the phone and talk to a family member or one of my friends who had been through it all before. It was comforting to know that they had lived to tell about it.

**The Internet**

Though the Internet is an obvious resource, I began by talking to real people. From time to time though, I hopped on the Web and did what everyone in the world does – put in a search term of two or three words and came up with a staggering amount of information. Needless to say, I quickly learned to fine tune my searches and stay focused. It was a great way to supplement what I already had.

**The Public Library**

What about the public library? Yes, public libraries are still out there with knowledgeable and free resources. Kids and parents can read through college reference guides, study up on writing the perfect college essay and attend talks on related subjects.

**A Parting Tip**

Anytime we embark on something new, there can be some hesitation, even trepidation. At times like these, we need to jump in and just do it. Getting from high school to college is a long process, and it's essential to remember that it *is* a process, and you *will* get through it. Really.

Says Warren, “Don’t think of it as daunting...It’s a celebration of your child’s accomplishments, as well as a celebration of what’s to come.”

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