

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Assisting Students With College Entry

May 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College
Practice: Assist With College Entry

Highlights

- Students, particularly those who are the first in their families to go to college, often need help with the college application process.
- This support includes preparing for and enrolling in placement tests, selecting colleges to apply to, developing application essays, and gathering recommendations.
- Students and their families also need assistance with navigating the financial aid process.
- High schools can help both students and their parents understand the true cost of college, prepare the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and other applications, and interpret the financial award packages that students receive.
- Though students will not begin many of these steps until eleventh or twelfth grade, it is important that conversations about college and financial aid applications begin early in their high school career to ensure that students stay on track to complete all the necessary steps.

Full Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome to the overview on Assisting Students With College Entry.

Slide 2: Need for assistance

Low-income students who are the first in their families to consider postsecondary education often need help with selecting and applying for college. High schools need to provide this support to both students and parents as early as possible.

Slide 3: Preparing students for entrance exams

Students aiming for both two- and four-year colleges need to know what tests to take before applying for college, how to prepare for them, and registration and exam dates.

High schools can offer exam preparation classes and workshops. These workshops should take place at the school so that students and families can easily attend.

Some students may also benefit from assistance in how to register for the exams, and some may need help with obtaining waivers for testing fees.

Slide 4: The college search

Finding the right college can be a daunting task for any student. Schools should provide students with the opportunity to meet one-on-one with staff to discuss their career interests and goals, and which colleges best fit their needs.

Staff can introduce students to Internet-based tools for comparing different colleges and encourage students to apply to multiple schools, in case they don't get their first choice.

Slide 5: College access programs

Schools can organize trips to colleges, giving students the opportunity to explore the campus, investigate the school's resources, and interact with college students. Meetings with campus personnel, such as admissions officers or college professors, can go a long way in helping students make informed choices about college selection. If possible, meetings with college students, faculty, or staff that share the high school students' backgrounds or culture can prove especially powerful. Colleges and alumni can assist in

underwriting the costs of such trips.

College access programs can be offered during the school year or over the summer. It may be necessary to work with individual families and colleges to plan alternate times to visit.

Slide 6: College application process

As students begin the college application process, high schools can help by giving guidance on how to write application essays, securing recommendation letters, and providing email accounts for students to use when communicating with colleges.

Slide 7: Educating about aid

Because students and their families often don't know what financial aid is available, they may overestimate how much college will cost them.

Schools can help educate families by offering a series of workshops.

- Ninth grade: Explore the costs of two- and four-year colleges and the various sources of aid, such as grants and work-study programs.
- Tenth grade: Focus more closely on school-specific scholarships as well as federal and state aid.
- Eleventh grade: Explain how to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (or FAFSA) and other financial aid forms.
- Twelfth grade: Provide step-by-step support for students and their families to ensure that students meet the deadlines and submit their applications and all financial aid forms.

It is critical that these workshops include parents. If there are large numbers of parents who do not speak English, having separate workshops in their native languages is essential.

Slide 8: Aiding with applications

Some families will need more extensive assistance in completing financial aid forms. High schools can coordinate with local colleges to have financial aid officers work with families in both completing applications and addressing more personal financial matters, as appropriate. Bilingual officers are ideal, but having translators available as needed is also an option.

Many forms are now available only online, so schools may need to provide computer support as well.

Regardless of the type of assistance provided, schools need to ensure that families begin the process early so that applications are turned in well before the final due date.

Slide 9: Outside aid

If school counselors lack the time or knowledge to work with students on the college entry process, the school may need to contact local college access programs or invite volunteers to come and work with the students.

Recent college graduates with fresh experience navigating the financial aid process and retired professionals are ideal volunteers and can also be used to provide professional development to school staff or be available as on-call resources.

Slide 10: Conclusion

There are many ways that high schools can help students with all aspects of the college entry process. The practices detailed in this overview are most likely to be successful when they are all implemented together and when incorporated with a school culture focused on college preparation and academic readiness.

Slide 11: Learn more

To learn more about Assisting Students With College Entry, please see the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.