

Council Rock College Counseling: How Do We Compare?

The counseling centers at the two high schools in Council Rock are busy places. The guidance counselors wear many different hats: course advisor, sounding board, personal advisor, and college counselor, to name just a few. Citizens chose, for this article, to look specifically at Council Rock's college counseling process and compare it to like school districts in the area and, in some cases, elsewhere in the country. In addition, Superintendent Mark Klein was contacted to see what districts he communicates with when he is looking for information from "like" school districts, and those districts are part of the list. Finally, a few nationally recognized high schools were also reviewed for comparison purposes.

The school districts we looked at are listed in the chart that follows this article. These school districts were selected based on their similarity to Council Rock in size and community. All high schools include students in grades 9 through 12. The smallest school (New Hope/Solebury High School) had 475 students; the largest, Cherry Creek High School in Colorado had 3,600 students. Citizen's goal in doing the first part of this counseling overview is to determine in what ways Council Rock is similar to, and different from, other high schools, thus ensuring the strongest opportunities for graduating seniors to get into and succeed at the college of their choice.

In 2003, when ninth grade was incorporated into the high schools, Council Rock implemented a ninth grade parent/counselor/student meeting. The purpose was for parents and students to make a general plan for course selections through 12th grade, based on their freshman year and college goals. This program has changed somewhat in the past five year. In the 2008-09 year, some counselors ran group, instead of individual, sessions with students. In researching other districts, Citizens learned that In addition to a ninth grade meeting, many high schools also run an 11th grade meeting that includes parents, though Council Rock does not. This is a chance for parents, students and counselors to talk and plan, prior to the start of the college admissions process. Citizens believes that Council Rock should implement 11th grade meetings with all students and parents.

Most schools, along with Council Rock, utilize computer programs such as Naviance (formerly called TCCi) for access to college information, as well as statistical data concerning admissions from the high schools themselves. Council Rock implemented this system over 5 years ago. All tenth grade students are given an overview of the program and instructions on how to use the system. At the last two Back-to-School nights at CR North, high school counselors have had mini sessions to explain this program to interested parents. This is just one of many tools at students' and parents' disposal as they navigate through the college admissions process.

Along with all the school districts we studied, North and South have individual visitations, where college representatives visit the high school, and students sign up in advance to meet with them. In 2008, CR North had 99 schools visit, and CR South had 102 visits. Additionally, each school studied alerted their students to regional college fairs, or ran them on-site, as Council Rock did.

Council Rock also has a "Focus on the Future" series, which includes:

- › The PTO's at North and South host Peter Van Buskirk's program: "Winning The College Admission Game"
- › A Financial Aid Night
- › Two college information nights, one for students with special needs and one for students planning on a career in the arts

We found that in many of the school districts we studied, over 83% of graduates pursue four-year colleges, with some, locally, as high as 93%. CR North and South trend lower, around 75% to four-year colleges. Close to 20% of our students go to two year colleges or technical schools, with Bucks County Community College the most attended school for our graduates (see "Council Rock By the Numbers" on page ??).

We also found that the student to counselor ratio is far better at the other high schools we studied than at Council Rock. It is evident from the chart on page ?? that a lower student to counselor ratio has a positive effect on a school's graduates, including the percentage of graduates that move on to four year colleges. Council Rock has eight counselors at CR North and seven at CR South, and the number of students per

counselor is close to or over three hundred. Locally there are only a few districts with numbers as high, or higher, than Council Rock.

Citizens has advocated for many years for a dedicated college counselor, someone who would be available to students and parents for consultation regarding the post high school planning process. The role would exist, as it does at other nationally ranked high schools, as an additional layer of support for students, parents, and counselors, beginning in 11th grade. In addition the College Counselor would serve as the district's contact with colleges and universities, a very important function in today's ever changing world of college admissions.

Citizens For Education feels that a dedicated College Counselor, or at the very least one additional counselor at each high school, would lower our ratio of students per counselor, and afford students better assistance in the college admissions process. Citizen's also strongly encourages the district to actively, and financially, support current counselors in their endeavors to develop relationships with college admissions officers (see NACAC article on page ???).

The Council Rock Strategic Plan states a goal of being "recognized among the top 5% of districts in the USA," which is only possible when all aspects of our educational system, including post secondary education, receive the attention, and support that is necessary.

Comparison of Student to Counselor Ratios and College Attendance

School	District	State	Number of Students	Number of Counselors	Ratio Students/ Counselor	Percent to 4 Yr College	Percent to 2 Yr College
Conestoga	Tredyfrin/ Easttown	PA	1976	9	220	93%	3%
Northern Valley Regional	Northern Valley	NJ	2500	14	179	91%	n/a
Lake Forest Community High School	Lake Forest	IL	1765	8*	221	91%	6%
Radnor	Radnor	PA	1300	5	260	89%	7%
Mt. Lebanon	Mt. Lebanon	PA	1805	7	258	87%	7%
Cherry Creek	Cherry Creek	CO	3600	14**	257	86%	9%
Hew Hope/ Solebury	New Hope/ Solebury	PA	475	2	238	83%	16%
Lower Merion High School	Lower Merion	PA	1475	8	184	83%	12%
Council Rock North	Council Rock	PA	2251	8	281	75%	16%
Council Rock South	Council Rock	PA	2137	7	305	75%	20%
Pennsbury	Pennsbury	PA	3415	11	310	60%	33%
Tennent	Centennial	PA	2100	6	350	57%	31%
Hempfield	Hempfield	PA	2366	8	296	55%	12%

* This school also has a college counselor who is not reflected in this number

** Includes 3 Post Graduate Specialists who are included in this number