

Post Secondary Counseling in CR and Nationally

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) produced a report called *2010 State of College Admission* that showed some interesting statistics regarding the high school counselor's role in the college admission process. Citizens For Education sought to compare Council Rock's counseling with national trends from NACAC's 2010 report. While we were not afforded the opportunity to speak directly with CR's high school counseling department, our questions were forwarded by Mr. Klein to Ms. Christina Rabayda, Counseling Department Chairperson at Council Rock North.

Pennsylvania state standards include counseling and one piece of the job description of a Council Rock counselor is to, "Aid students in identifying options and making choices in vocational and academic educational planning." Counselors talk with each other frequently about college statistics, programs, application and transcript issues. Larger topics are discussed in bi-weekly meetings. CR requires counselors to participate in professional development on postsecondary education. According to Ms. Rabayda, counselors attend as many college counselor information meetings and professional development workshops as their schedule allows, within the local area. In the past five years, CR counselors attended the NACAC National Conference twice; in 2008 (Seattle) and 2009 (Baltimore). Recently, due to district budget constraints and cutbacks to the professional development budget, counselors have not been able to attend these conferences. NACAC recently has offered webinars but to date CR counselors have not participated.

Nationally, in 2008-09 the mean student to counselor ratio (including part time staff) was 261:1. In Council Rock the student to counselor ratio is approximately 300:1 at CR South and 290:1 at CR North (CR South has 7 counselors and CR North has 8). The NACAC report showed that high school counseling staffs spent on average 26% of their time on postsecondary admission counseling, with public high schools reporting only 22% compared to 54% in private high schools. Counselors at higher income schools spent more time than those at lower income high schools. Counselors where the counselor to student ratio was lower spent more time on postsecondary admissions counseling.

Nationally, public high school counselors reported they spend the largest amount of time on helping students with their academic achievement in high school, helping students plan and prepare for post secondary education, helping students with personal growth/development and helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school. Council Rock reports that counselors spend the largest amount of time on helping students plan and prepare for post secondary education followed by helping students with their academic achievement in high school, other non-guidance activities (including crisis counseling, meetings, data management, registration/withdrawals and document updates), helping student with personal growth/development and helping students prepare for their work roles after high school. This follows a national trend where there is more emphasis on post secondary counseling in higher income schools.

According to the NACAC study, 34% of public and 76% of private high schools have at least one dedicated full or part time college counselor. Council Rock does not have a dedicated college counselor and the amount of time spent on college counseling is dependent on the time of year. In the fall a counselor's time is spent with seniors, supporting them through the college application process. In February, counselors are primarily meeting with 9th, 10th and 11th grade students to determine course selection. Ms. Rabayda says that "often these conversations involve their goals for post secondary education and how their choice of classes can help them meet those goals." In the spring, counselors meet with 11th graders to advise them on college visits and the college process. During those months counselors may spend 80-90% of their day on those meetings.

Factors Considered in College Admissions

The NACAC survey of college admissions staff showed that the most important factors in college admissions are (in priority order):

- Grades in college prep courses

- Strength of curriculum
- Admission test scores
- Grades in all courses
- Essay (more important at private colleges than public)
- Teacher recommendation (more important at private colleges)
- Demonstrated interest (more important at private colleges)
- Counselor recommendation (more important at private colleges)
- Class rank (more important at public colleges)
- Interview (more important at private colleges)
- Subject tests (AP/IB) (more important at private colleges)
- Extracurricular activities (more important at private colleges)
- SAT II scores
- Portfolio (more important at private colleges)
- State graduation exam scores (more important at public colleges)
- Work

According to Ms. Rabayda, Council Rock counselors follow a similar pattern, advising students that the most important factor colleges consider is “the student’s transcript, specifically their grades and rigor of study. Depending on the school and program, they also consider standardized test scores, portfolios, interviews/auditions, teacher/counselor letters of recommendation, essays, honors/awards, leadership activities, extracurricular, community service, and employment.”

Early Decision/Early Action and Wait Lists

With the change in the economy and shifting college application patterns has come a difficult situation for high school counselors. Rules of thumb that previously applied to college admissions, specifically Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA) and wait lists have changed. Sixty-five percent of colleges with ED policies report an increase in ED acceptances. Nearly 75% of colleges offering EA reported an increase in applicants and acceptances via the EA program. Twenty percent report creating longer wait lists and 7% of colleges that previously did not have a wait list report that they will be creating one.

Citizens asked Ms. Rabayda some questions on these topics:

Q. What do counselors tell students about Early Decision?

A. Early Decision is a binding contract. If a student and parent apply under this plan, they agree to send the student even if they receive no financial aid. Counselor must sign off on this early decision contract. (Most schools will release a student from this binding contract if the financial aid award is not deemed acceptable.)

Q. What do counselors tell students about Early Action?

A. If a student is able to submit their materials under an early action plan, this is a great way of hearing a college’s admissions decision earlier in the year.

Q. What do counselors tell students about Wait Lists and how to improve their chances of being admitted from a Wait List?

A. This depends on the college. They vary with the length of their wait list from year to year, and the frequency they pull from their list. We research our latest wait list statistics and consult with each other. Occasionally, we will call the admissions office for more direction on the wait list process.

Counselor Focus on Post Secondary Planning

Post secondary counseling involves many activities to advise students appropriately throughout the college admission/planning process. We asked Ms. Rabayda to indicate the frequency with which counselors

engage in the following activities in Council Rock. The NACAC study results are below. Council Rock's responses are indicated in bold.

Activity	Frequency (% of high schools)			
	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Never
Individually meet with students to discuss postsecondary options	73%	21%	1%	
Host college representatives	67%	26%	5%	2%
Actively represent students to college admissions officers	38%	37%	20%	5%
Reviewing/proofing student applications for postsecondary admission	37%	36%	23%	3%
Group guidance/counseling sessions about postsecondary education	31%	51%	16%	3%
Electronic communications with students/parent about postsecondary admission	30%	33%	31%	6%
Work with school leadership to develop curricula aligned with college requirements	29%	34%	25%	12%
Postsecondary financial aid/scholarship counseling for students during meetings with students	28%	53%	18%	1%
Meetings with parents to discuss postsecondary options	25% (parent initiated)	55% (counselor initiated)	18%	1%
Advice and education with students and families on standardized testing	19%	46%	33%	2%
Organize tours of college campuses	8%	25%	37%	30%

Reviewing/proofing student applications for postsecondary admission, working with school leadership to develop curricula aligned with college requirements and organizing tours of college campuses are areas where Council Rock is not in line with the majority of high schools. These are areas of student assistance where a dedicated college counselor would be able to focus time.

For the most part, Council Rock is in line with national public high school trends. Citizens For Education would like to see the district increase focus on college counseling with the addition of a dedicated college counselor and allocate funds for counselors to regularly attend the NACAC conference where information is gleaned about the ever-changing landscape of college admissions.