

Less Stress, More Success

As we write this note, our *seniors* are fine-tuning their post-high school plans and their parents are mailing deposit checks; our *juniors* and their families have been meeting with their counselors to begin the college application process in earnest; and we will soon be meeting with our *sophomores* in their English classes—and sophomore parents at this week's coffees—to start laying the groundwork for this journey. Around this long slog to adulthood, **one book stands out as a beacon of good advice for parents: Less Stress, More Success by Marilee Jones* (former dean of Admissions, MIT) and Dr. Kenneth R. Ginsburg.**

(One quick note: Some of you may remember that Jones gave a dynamic presentation to parents here at Staples in the spring of 2007. Since then, she was compelled to step down from her MIT position for having embellished her resume years earlier. Her indiscretion does nothing, in our view, to diminish the insight she gained during her tenure there or the wisdom and wit she brings to bear in delivering her message. It is invaluable and well worth repeating.)

When it comes to the college process, Jones, offers these observations:

- Colleges are looking to admit students who are the right match for their school's culture, motivated to succeed in college, who are socially competent and emotionally intelligent enough to participate in college life and contribute to its community, and who are resilient and can handle adversity well
- The number one thing that colleges look for in an application is authenticity. When parents get overly involved in their child's application, they can actually contaminate their child's authentic voice.
- By getting so involved, parents are overtly or covertly telling their children that their authentic self is not good enough, not valuable enough, less than. This message can be devastating to a teenager poised to leave home and ready to begin a great adventure.

Parental over-involvement sends the wrong messages to colleges and kids alike. When colleges only hear from parents, they assume that the child: a) is not actually interested in the school (not good); b) doesn't know how to prioritize or too busy for us (so not right for them); or c) or is too passive and connected to parents (not ready for college).

By stepping in to "help," parents also communicate a belief that their children are not competent enough or mature enough to apply to college on their own. This message undermines students' confidence just when they need to gather their strength to move through this difficult passage.

Worst of all, she says, "by taking actions that their children should be taking, parents train their kids to be passive when colleges are actually looking for whole healthy young people with intellectual curiosity, drive to answer questions, and inquisitiveness to ask previously unasked questions."

For some great advice on supporting your child through the college process, check out this short excerpt from one of [Jones' presentations for parents](#).

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.

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