SENIORS – DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

Julie Sitko, College and Career Counselor
jsitko@moonarea.net
412-264-9440, ext. 2038

My name is Julie Sitko and I am the College and Career Counselor. My role is to advise and support students and families in the college search and to help identify "best fit" colleges and universities, and to assist students in realizing their post-secondary goals. This monthly newsletter will keep you on track for post-secondary planning. Please reach out to me with any questions.

Here are some things to think about as we go through your child's senior year:

WINTER - Post-Secondary Timeline for seniors

• A copy of your child's transcript was uploaded into the Portfolio section of Skyward at the beginning of the school year. I encourage you to look over the transcript and save a copy for your records. If there are any questions or concerns about the transcript, please reach out to your child's school counselor.

• Transcripts will be updated with grades at the end of the first semester. The reason we don't update transcripts at the end of the first quarter is because credits are earned when a class is complete. The GPA will only update after the completion of a class, either a semester or full year course. Unofficial copies of the transcript can be downloaded from Skyward at any time.

• When your child is thinking about where to apply, encourage them to apply to schools they actually want to attend. They're going to be offered free applications, but why are they applying to a school they don't want to attend? When thinking about what schools to apply to, they should apply to schools where their GPA fits into the middle 50% of accepted students, and schools that have academic programs and extracurriculars that are important to them.

• Check with the colleges your child wants to apply to determine if they need SAT or ACT test scores. 2/3 of all colleges in the US are not requiring board scores this year for admission or scholarships. If students don't need to test, don't. Even if they do test, they don't have to apply with test scores – look at the scores normally accepted at a school and determine if they should apply with or without test scores. For test optional/test flexible schools, students should only apply with test scores if the test scores are going to enhance the application.

• If your child does take ACT/SAT tests, utilize the opportunity to send their scores to four schools for free. Requesting scores to be sent before testing will ensure the scores get to the schools faster. If scores are lower than previous tests, colleges will usually look at the highest test scores and usually won't penalize students for the lower test scores. BUT, check to see how your schools are operating test optional. Some schools, even if you apply test optional, will look at the scores if they are sent. Check with the schools!

• Have your child talk to teachers about writing recommendation letters. Students should first have a conversation with a teacher about a recommendation letter, then request it in Naviance.

• Apply to college. My recommendation is to submit all applications no later than Christmas. **Be cognizant of individual college deadlines. All deadlines are found on the school's websites.**

• Your child will request transcripts and teacher recommendation letters through Naviance. Guides on how to request both are in the Seniors 2024 Teams page. Students normally need to request transcripts 2 weeks prior to any deadlines, but with Keystone testing in December, the school counselors will need more time and transcripts must be requested by December 1 to ensure they will be submitted by the holiday break.

• Complete the Moon Records Release form. This form was sent to the class Teams page on September 12. It can also be found on the class of 2024 Teams page, along the top (in APPS), look for Fill/Moon Area High. The form must be completed before any transcripts will be sent.

• It's still a requirement that male students, when they reach the age of 18, register for the Selective Service. More information can be found here: http://www.sss.gov

FINANCIAL AID AWARENESS

The FAFSA is being revamped this year and the Department of Education is saying it will be available 'before December 31.' Historically, when the FAFSA becomes available, there are always kinks and the system doesn't work great. It's been highly recommended (by people who work in financial aid) to wait a few weeks after it's released to complete the FAFSA – when hopefully, it will work without issues.

As you wait for the FAFSA to become available, there are a few things you can do. To complete the FAFSA, both the parent and student continuing their education will need to create a FSA ID. You can do that now:
https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch
You can also complete a Net Price Calculator – found on the financial aid page of every college in the US. This online tool will give families and idea of the cost of education – it is not exact, but an estimate. Here are two good resources for paying for college and understanding financial aid:
www.mysmartborrowing.com
www.collegecosts.ed.gov

IN-PERSON FAFSA Completion workshop
Wednesday, January 17, 2024
6:30 PM
This is an opportunity for families to complete the FAFSA with the help of Amy Sawdey, our partner at PHEAA. Families need to sign up prior to the workshop. Here is the registration link: https://forms.office.com/r/JbEy5zSK8f
it is HIGHLY recommended that both the student and the parent are at the workshop. You will need both parties present to complete the FAFSA.

Scholarships:
All scholarships that come through our office are listed in Naviance. To find the scholarships, log in to your Naviance account, go to the colleges>scholarships and money>Scholarship list. The scholarships we get in the counseling center are listed on the 'scholarship list' page. That site is updated regularly, so be sure to check back regularly as new scholarships are posted. You should be checking this site regularly. My favorite scholarship search sites are: www.fastweb.com, www.goingmerry.com, and www.pittsburghfoundation.org/scholarship_search#hs. The last site is local (Pittsburgh) scholarships. You do have to search through the site, but there is a lot of money available to students.

The Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling (PACAC) sponsors a scholarship for PA high school seniors. This is a short application with three short answer questions. Students must have a 3.0 GPA to qualify. Deadline is **February 1, 2024**. There are four scholarships – one worth $1500 and three scholarships worth $1000. It's a quick and easy scholarship application – apply!

APIA Scholars – offers scholarships to qualified students of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage. Application deadline **January 9, 2024**.

The Jackie Robinson Foundation – scholarships and leadership development to minority students. Application deadline **January 10, 2024**.

Transcripts and recommendation letters from counselors:
As I told the students, they have to give the school counselors at least two weeks to send any transcripts (and they can check the progress of the transcripts in the **manage transcripts** section of Naviance). If the students also asks for a counselor recommendation letter, it might take longer, because it is time consuming to craft well-written letters which advocate for your child. If a student requests transcripts today and three days later, asks their school counselor to write a recommendation letter, the transcript and letter will then be sent two weeks after the school counselor receives any documentation to help them with the letter. It's the student's responsibility to understand which colleges require a letter from a school counselor and ask their counselor in an appropriate time frame.

ACT and SAT testing:
If your child wants to test, go to the testing websites for information about testing and open test sites. **(SAT: www.collegeboard.org** and **ACT: www.act.org**). A schedule of tests dates is in the class of 2024 Teams (under Post-Secondary Planning, then files). The same list is also on the High School Counseling Center webpage. For the current seniors, many colleges in the United States are test optional for both admission and scholarships. Before deciding if your child wants to test, check with the schools they are interested in and determine if they need to test. When students apply without test scores, schools are often examining the transcript much closer. For example, if your child is interested in studying business, colleges will look closely at the math classes they took and the grades earned in those math classes.

Even if your children do test, they don't have to apply with test scores – look at the scores normally accepted at a school and determine if they should apply with or without test scores. For test optional/test flexible schools, students should only apply with test scores if the test scores are going to enhance the application.

--Students on free/reduced lunch are eligible for a fee waiver. Have your child see their school counselor or Ms. Sitko

--Every college accepts either the SAT or ACT. There is no preference.

-- When registering for the ACT, I do not recommend taking the writing portion of the exam. It is not necessary for admission.

--Check out this site to see if schools your child is interested in have determined their testing policies https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional.

ACT/SAT Prep:

Students taking ACT and SAT tests should do some sort of preparation prior to taking the tests. There are many resources available for test prep. All students have FREE access to Khan Academy – an online program that partners with College Board (owners of the SAT) to provide test prep to students. https://www.khanacademy.org/sat. ACT also has online test prep here. These are both fantastic resources.

----Penn State, Beaver, is offering live, virtual SAT prep classes. The course starts January 20. More information is here: https://beaver.psu.edu/ce/youth/sat

Visiting schools:

If you have a chance to visit schools, here are things to think about when you're on campus:

--Talk to people in the department of anticipated study. If your child is totally undecided, talk to the schools about what they do to help pick a major. Colleges have robust career centers and advising programs which help students pick a major, find internships and eventually jobs and graduate schools.

–Ask what is the four-year graduation rate? Colleges report a six-year graduation rate, due to financial aid. Ask about the four-year rate– schools should try to get students in and out in four years – make sure the school is going to help your child make the best use of their time and get the classes needed to get out in time.

--Ask what is the retention rate for returning sophomores? This number can tell you a lot about what schools are doing to make students happy and keep them enrolled. If a number is low, ask why students are leaving – what's going on? If the number is high, it's safe to assume students are generally happy and the college is doing a good job of educating students and keeping them happy.

--College is not just about getting a degree. It's about so much more. Is your child going to be challenged at each school? Are they going to have to put in more effort than they ever have? That's a good thing!

--Learn the middle 50% SAT/ACT scores and GPA of admitted students at the schools that interest you. This can serve as a guide to schools that will be a good academic fit for you. Also – remember if board scores are lower than the middle 50%, but the GPA fits in the middle 50%, in most cases, students do not need to submit test scores, if they could potentially hurt an application. Keep in mind, with most schools being test optional, the students who are submitting test scores generally have higher scores, so the middle 50% are going to be skewed to the higher end.

NCAA:

If your child is an athlete considering playing sports at a division I or II school, make sure to visit the NCAA Eligibility Center website www.eligibilitycenter.org. Student athletes need to submit an official high school transcript (requested through Naviance) and official test scores, if they are available. These scores must be sent directly from ACT or College Board. If your child hasn't tested, they can still gain eligibility without test scores. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they are taking the appropriate classes to qualify for NCAA Eligibility. A list of NCAA approved courses are on page 6 of the Program of Studies. *This registration does not apply to students attending division III or NAIA schools*

Wishing you and your family a happy and healthy holiday season.