

Navigating the College Process

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More and more high school students are planning to pursue college degrees than ever before. Surveys show that the higher paying careers often require some form of post-secondary education and that on average, obtaining a bachelor's degree from a traditional 4-year college increases an individual's yearly income by approximately \$20,000. With a career span of 30 years this equates to more than an extra half million dollars earned! So congratulations on deciding to pursue college, but how do we get from here to there?

With the start of a new school year, senior students and parents will once again be busy navigating their way through the entire college process from making college visits to finally making a decision by May 1. Considering the myriad of college possibilities, looking for financial aid, completing the admissions processes, adhering to deadlines, and getting prepared to leave home, the task can be at times overwhelming. Preparing to go to college should be a rewarding experience and a great time of discovery for both student and parents. Selecting a college is a very personal experience and an important life altering decision for the student. It should begin with self-reflection through examining goals, interests, personal preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. In addition, open communication between students and their parents is imperative. Though parents should not be filling out applications for their child, parents should offer listening ears, gentle reminders about deadlines, and their loving guidance. Parents often have a more complete understanding of the financial obligation of attending college and should make certain they know the bottom line cost of each institution. They need to be honest with their child about any financial limitations and expectations and they will need to work with their child through the financial aid and scholarship process.

In the end, the chosen college should be a good fit so that the four year investment is enjoyable and productive. College should be the experience that allows a child to grow into the best adult they can be. There are many resources available to help both parents and students successfully get through this process. My website, <http://www.shelbyed.k12.al.us/studentresources/GRC/homepage.html>, has links to a plethora of information about timelines, colleges, the common application, admission requirements, ACT and SAT, scholarship and financial aid, how to visit a college, and even a great list of additional web resources. Also, visit my blog which I keep very current with the latest college information and even more links, <http://podcasts.shelbyed.k12.al.us/kleaver>. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance to you or your child. I can help with the college short list, getting started or proofing college or scholarship essays, financial aid, and I would even like to practice with any student that will be having an interview. Contact me at kleaver@shelbyed.k12.al.us or 682-5978.