

## Milton Academy Upper School Parents' Association

### Meeting Notes - Special Q&A Event - College

November 11, 2019, 8:00 a.m.

#### **Featured Speaker:**

Rod Skinner - Director of College Counseling

#### **President's Welcome - Leah Goldberg, President**

Meeting was called to order at 8:01am

#### **I. Opening Remarks on College Counseling Trends**

- In recent years, college and university STEM programs are robust and attracting students. Meanwhile Humanities programs are seeing fewer applicants. So, many colleges have a keen interest in students with an interest in the Humanities.
- About 95% of the Milton class of '20 applied early decision or early action to at least one school. College Counseling (CC) does not see this trend changing. Twenty years ago about 60% of students applied early; in 2008 this increased to 80%; the rate has been at 95% for the past 3-5 years. In most cases, students applied to one school they like a lot and a few others early action to position themselves for some good news in December. They are encouraging students to also apply in the regular round to a balanced range of schools, not just long shots.
- From attending the College Board annual conference, CC sees the world of college admissions is in more flux than usual.
  - The notion of testing is up for discussion. More and more schools dropping subject tests.
  - The national association of college admissions counselors (a governing body) has long had standards; some of the standards are now changing. For example, colleges will now be allowed to offer incentives to students to apply early decision. Also, the May 1st universal national reply date is also now in question with a vote taken. We don't know yet what this will mean for students, but it looks like less protection for the students.
- The recent college admissions scandal in the news has led to "Varsity Blues". Schools now have heightened scrutiny around the athletic recruitment process; some schools have already made policy changes. NESCAC schools have shown a definite change. As a result, student athletes will have less clarity on their admissions standing in early stages.
- With December exams this year, College Counseling is encouraging students to get a lot of work done now and over Thanksgiving break on regular round applications. This will position them with a strong start on regular round applications after December exams and hearing results from their early round applications.

## **II. Questions & Answers**

- Q: When should students take the SAT?
  - A: CC recommends taking the tests when they are ready - often the spring of Junior year and Fall of Senior year.
- Q: With less focus on standardized tests, what is the impact on the college admissions process?
  - A: Less focus on testing means more focus on transcript and other ways to assess kids (non-cognitive). For example, Wellesley College used to have two readers of an application. Now they have one reader for academics only; a second focused on non-cognitive only. A related piece is something called an Adversity score. This is a college board system which allows schools to determine what kind of an environment did a student come from. Schools are trying to understand what a student is up against. Overall we will see a more nuanced assessment of kids.
- Q: With no Math honors tracking in 9th and possibly also in 10th grade, how can a Milton student distinguish themselves in this subject, especially given less focus on test scores?
  - A: First of all, the decision on 10th grade math tracking is still open and in discussion. Milton is looking to balance what is best for teaching methods in the classroom to create a robust learning environment while still “playing in the college marketplace”. CC will focus on clearly articulating the academic profile of Milton students to schools.
- Q: What does the college counseling conversation look like for non-honors students at Milton?
  - A: This conversation happens in January of Junior year. The conversation for all students is focused on “Who are you? Where do you want to be? And, Are you exploring your possible areas of excellence?”
- Q: How does financial aid fit into this trend of early applications?
  - A: Financial aid is a challenge. Some schools are evolving from admissions to “enrollment management” (goals set on revenue target). Now CC is talking early and directly with kids and parents about the application process and which schools they both like and can afford.
- Q: What anxieties do parents have and which should we have, or not?
  - A: Our job as adults is to be the calm, wise, unflappable presence. Parents are a pressure and kids don’t want to disappoint us. We need to be a presence of unconditional love. Ask “How can I help you?” (or listen and don’t say anything). Waiting and listening is ideal for parents. Also, check in with where you are as a parent in the process. Silence is great. And humor - lots of humor.
- Q: What do CC calls with colleges involve?
  - A: We make three rounds of calls - early, mid, late. The early calls give a lay of the land with that college. CC will review students and ensure colleges are reading profiles as Milton intended. Some calls have shifted in content. More and more schools are not

doing the calls - either they don't have bandwidth or have found that they are not fair since they cannot do calls with all high schools.

- Q: Has the common application changed?
  - A: In the next 5 years, we can expect to see a significant review of the application.
- Q: Essays - are they read by humans or AI?
  - A: Yes and yes - schools use both. A software used by many schools is called SLATE. It can measure how much time a student has spent on a school website. A real dividing line for many colleges is how students answer: "Why do you want to attend our school?"
- Q: How many colleges should students visit?
  - A: About 5-10 schools to learn about the types of schools, not only the specific school itself. Visiting the schools you really like - mid-August before Senior year is a great time.
- Q: How do our kids (without class rank etc) perform or show up at large public universities that rely on those stats to screen students?
  - A: Public universities present a particular challenge. 1. They are focused on in-state kids. 2. Their budget can determine their level of interest in out-of-state applicants. CC can request to weight Milton classes like an AP class, which universities are used to using. CC also spends time helping universities understand the Milton curriculum and student profile.
- Q: With no grades for 9th, how do schools see that?
  - A: Most schools are not surprised and many already weight 10th-12th grades more heavily - shown to be a better predictor of college performance. CC expects we will see kids coming out of 9th grade with more confidence and it will play through in later years.
- Q: Does the College Counseling office advise students on course selection?
  - A: Yes, CC advises on course selection from 10th grade and on. Most important advice is to do well in classes and challenge themselves in areas of strength and interest.
- Q: Has the ACT test changed?
  - A: ACT is still a very good test for Milton students. It fits many students better. The challenge is getting through the test - pace is something to get used to. Often have 10th graders take practice ACT in March.

### **III. Closing Comments and Upcoming PA Events - Leah Goldberg**

- Information on upcoming PA events and meetings are available on the [PA webpage](#) and the [Milton Academy calendar](#)
- Next PA meeting: Tuesday November 19th, 7-9 p.m. in the CSG conference room. Speakers include: Julie Seplaky, Science Department Chair and Gregg Reilly, Mathematics Chair