

Parent Panel Notes 2024

Good Morning!

Mrs. Barnes, our college and career specialist, opened by saying the following:

We have four panelists whose students are current seniors and were in your seats last year at this time.

The Summer packet is not being discussed today. We will present the senior packet to current juniors at the end of next week and then send emails and information out to all junior parents. We will give you all this information in June.

College application workshop is taking place July 30 and August 1. We encourage all students to attend if possible. Sign up on MySchoolBucks. It is \$75 per student.

Juniors can be asking teachers verbally to teachers of interest to write recommendation letters now.

Intro of Parents:

Your Name -

Name of graduating senior -

Number of colleges your student applied to -

Which college will your child be attending -

Parent 1 - Two female senior students. Both are attending Virginia Tech. They applied to 12 schools.

Parent 2 - My son is attending College of Charleston. He applied to 14 schools.

Parent 3 - My son applied to 20 schools. Attending UPenn.

Parent 4 - My son applied to 7 schools. Attending JMU.

A year ago, what were you doing as you are thinking about the fall?

Parent 3 - It's kind of a blur now looking back. I had to ask my son what we were doing a year ago. For us, at this point last year, he was starting to narrow down his list of schools and doing research. We were starting to talk about the essays and themes for the essays.

Parent 2 - We were moving from my son thinking he was going to a school where he was going to play sports but that changed. Our list of schools changed based on that. We were looking at what schools were fits, reaches, and likely schools. He was enlisting my help doing that research. What was the right fit academically? I'm a closet nerd so we had spreadsheets and we spent evenings with data and admissions information. That helped us narrow things down.

We got our research from Naviance, College Niche, and tried to come up with an average SAT score, average GPA, etc. Looking at a bunch of different web sites was helpful. That allowed us to see the mean.

Parent 1 - We were getting started with the essays, thinking about themes. We also got a tutor to help with that process. It was hard to get started on the essays. There are more than one essay, lots of supplemental essays. We are also taking the SAT one more time, prepping for that over the summer. They took it again in August so they could superscore which worked out well for them. Narrowing down what colleges you are really thinking about. We had done most of our visits at this time. My daughter preferred a larger university. My one daughter wanted animal sciences so that helped us narrow it down for her.

Parent 4 - We are a little different. My son has three older sisters who stumbled through this process prior. He knew what kind of school he was looking for. He was preparing for the essays. In my opinion, junior year is the toughest because they feel this pressure because it's the last evaluation period they have. We tried to balance - these are your reach schools, these you can get in. We did get an SAT prep person. I don't know if that helped any. That's all we did in terms of outside help.

Parent 2 - We didn't get a tutor to help with the essay. But we had him brainstorm and outline his essay around the beginning of the summer. When he got it to the point where it was 80% there. He asked three friends who were a year older and had applied the year prior and he got their feedback. Those three kids gave the best advice on the essay than anyone else. They had a sense of what was speaking to admissions officers at that moment in time. If they have a couple of older friends who have gotten into college, share the draft essays with those friends and get feedback.

Parent 1 - The help we got was early in the process mainly with brainstorming. That was helpful to get feedback. Their original thought, being twins, was about how difficult it was being a twin while also trying to be unique. We found out it's too common of a theme so it should not be the focus of the entire essay. They can incorporate that, but they should not make the whole essay about that. They also asked friends who were older for feedback as well. They benefited from SAT prep with books and online reviews. They did the practice exams on their own and together. They took it three times and got better each time.

Talk about college visits. Did you just do the official visit and tour, or did you just tour around on your own for schools?

Parent 3 - We started college tours early on, when my son was first thinking about colleges. We would swing through colleges on family vacations etc. As time went on, during his junior year, we took dedicated tours of several schools. College tours started to all blend into one after a while and they sounded very similar. What my son got the most out of it was physically being there. That helped him really get the sense of the school and the vibe of the school. If you can

go during the week when classes are in session it's optimal. But going over the summer is good as well. We probably toured five or six schools officially, otherwise it was unofficial visits.

Parent 2 - It's hard to tell exactly where your kid is going to get into and we have limited time and resources. So we did a lot of research online. Almost every web site has a virtual tour. We did that first and then assessed, did he like it enough to really go see it and tour? Big school? Rural school? Middle of the city? Those things make the child feel different. We went to see a college in Florida while we were on a sports trip and we went on a tour. Went into the dorms. My child is 6'6" and the ceilings in the dorms were not even 8 feet tall. He walked in and said he can never live in a place like this - so we started looking at schools with larger dorm rooms.

Parent 4 - It's important to try and get a feel for the college. The tour is the tour. He didn't want to go to a city college because his older sister goes to one in Boston and he didn't like it. He likes sports so he wanted a school with sports. His other sister went to JMU so he immersed himself in that. He had two schools. I wanted him to visit a school like Ohio State. If your kids are hesitant, have the kid be exposed to it just with a visit.

You started touching on where to apply and how to apply. Can you talk about their acceptances and how they made a decision? Did they apply early decision (binding decision), early action, regular decision, etc.

Parent 1 - A lot of schools that used to offer ED didn't offer it this year, like Virginia Tech. They did a lot of early action applications, with November 1 deadlines. For my girls, we used the scattergram on Naviance to see where they fall with GPA and SAT scores with certain schools. Do we go ahead and put in the SAT scores or not? Sometimes you don't depending on the school. We didn't put their SAT score in for UVA, but we did for the other schools they applied. The scattergrams were really helpful with deciding to submit SAT scores. My girls got into all the schools they applied to except UVA (waitlisted). My one daughter did not get into NC State but the other daughter did.

Parent 2 - Son applied early action and rolling. He applied to College of Charleston early decision because he knew he wanted to go there. Out of the 15 schools, he got into 8, rejected to 1, rescinded other applications when he was accepted to Charleston so we don't know. I would advise getting everything in early if possible. He had a handful of acceptances by October. That made a HUGE difference. The whole atmosphere changed in our house at that point. One of my parent friends told me, "Encourage your child to not apply to all the same schools that everyone at McLean is applying to. Broaden your horizons, because not every single kid is a fit for VA Tech or UVA or the schools everyone else is applying to." We looked at other states and other names. That helped find the best fit for MY SON, that was the best advice we got!

Parent 4 - He got into five and he applied to seven. He had this "one school". Didn't matter about the scattergram and we were like, "Dude, it's gonna be a reach." He did not want to give up that one school. But it helped him get stronger through the process. He did not get into that

school. He pivoted quickly to JMU. He pivoted easier than me and my wife - I was so annoyed. LOL My son talked us off the ledge. He applied to University of Indiana. That was kind of cool. Being able to have enough opportunities with the schools you apply to and then be able to pivot if you don't get into that dream school.

Parent 3 - Our son did early decision. Aspects of that which were not apparent at the time. These early decisions are due beginning of November. Regular due in January. Make sure your child REALLY REALLY wants to go to that school if they do early decision. They are focused on this one school with early decision. It was hard to get him to look beyond that. He focused a lot of attention on that, and you don't hear that response until mid-December. In his head, he was FIXATED on that school for six weeks. He didn't get accepted to that early decision school. So he really didn't do much for six weeks. He lost six weeks of good time working on essays and getting other applications ready. Then it's mid-December and we are scrambling. We spent Christmas and holidays focused on his applications and essays. ED school can be great but I advise you that your child REALLY should want to go to that school

Parent 2 - My child did apply ED but I forced him to apply to other schools early action which are also due on November 1. Even though he was 100% in for early decision, he had other applications in so that it wasn't the only focus for him.

Mary - My point on fixating on certain schools and they get so razor focused that they don't do a good job on the rest of their applications and they take that possible rejection even harder. Important to have that balance.

Three of the four of you say you probably over-applied? Can you talk about that?

Parent 2 - In this climate, it's very hard to figure out where your child will get into college. There are random occurrences and times when kids don't get into where they "should have". Even though I said we over-applied but doing so gave us the comfort of a wide range of schools that are out there. I was confident that he would get into a number of them because of the wide range he applied to. Most of the schools fell in the middle of the range we calculated with GPA and SAT. He got into a couple of the reach schools.

Parent 1 - Hindsight is 20/20. For our peace of mind, we wanted at least three likely, three target. If you know you want to stay in state, that will limit things. We were open to out of state, like family in Ohio so we did Ohio State. For us, it came down to a couple of out of state versus Virginia Tech. Financially speaking, it made sense for the girls to stay in state because it was less expensive financially. There are some schools that require all their seniors to apply to 15 - 20 schools.

Parent 3 - It didn't start at 20 for us. As the months went on, more schools were being added. In hindsight, I don't know. It's much different now, with the common app it makes it easier to apply. Some of the supplemental essays are pretty similar. The burden wasn't too much in terms of the work. I will say I was a bit naive. These are \$85 a pop for these applications, I

didn't realize until I saw the credit card bill in January. It was the range of schools that was important - having a good set of likely schools, target schools and reach schools. The number didn't need to be as high as what we did.

Parent 4 - My son applied to 7. Having three older daughters, I know it's different for each kid. To throw money at a college where it wasn't what she wanted. She went to NOVA for two years and then applied. DON't get sucked into the swamp of expectations that this community can put on you. They don't have to go to UVA. You want to make sure to get that return. Apply to a blended portfolio of schools. If your kid isn't ready for that step

Question: If you could explain early decision versus early action?

Early decision(ED) is binding. You can only apply to one university ED. Because you are locked in, your financial aid is irrelevant. Consider that if your child applies ED. Can't wait for FAFSA or to hear about financial aid. You must rescind your other applications if you are accepted to the early decision schools. Early action(EA) just means you applied early and you get a decision earlier than regular decision. EA can be tied to merit scholarship deadlines and some colleges will tell you it's better to apply EA vs regular decision. (Examples: U of MD and VT). Scholarship deadlines can be under EA but also under Priority Deadline. To figure out the priority deadline for a particular college, look at

Not all schools have early decision versus early action.

Parent 2 - Some schools if you apply early action and you accept your child may get priority housing.

Question: My daughter will have to audition. So my question is about bonding/stress with your child. How did you navigate the stress?

Parent 2 - I have two sons who are very different. My son who is a senior now, I got advice. You can fall into the trap of constantly talking about college and pushing. Then it becomes less bonding and more pestering. We would sit down for an hour once a week and talk about it - what's your goal to finish this week? How are you going to do that? Set parameters. I tried REALLY hard not to bring it up until the end of the week. Sometimes I would have to bring it up but rarely. Trying to avoid the feeling of wanting to ask every single day about it becomes a "butting heads" situation. I let my child lead. I asked him what he needed help with and I listened to his feedback. That kept our relationship good.

Parent 3 - Something I didn't consider until later is that they hear about college applications every day at school with their friends etc. As a parent if you are also hounding them every day and every night, it hurts the relationship and adds stress. There were frantic nights at times. It depends on your child. How do they approach deadlines? WE had a lot of great talks about his interests going forward in life. What sorts of places he'd like to be and go, and what experience he would like to have. YOU learn a lot about your child going through this process.

If any of you have children who are procrastinators, what did you do?

Mary - Sign up for the college application workshop. We give them a spreadsheet, we will get so much done during those two days, they will be in good shape.

Parent 4 - It's a common theme, procrastination. Do I have a solution?? I don't. Leverage the resources here at McLean so you're not always the bad cop. Figure out, because they are overwhelmed, every day they hear someone got into Harvard ED. Find the fun in it. The art of the possibility. Who cares what school? Whatever school you get into is going to give you an opportunity. Find that button of motivation. That is a challenge. You can't avoid that head-butting sometimes, because you do have to kick them in the pants to get them going. Find things that are fun too.

Parent 1 - Have truthful conversations and tell them "It's on you now." You're almost an adult. You can't force them to do something they don't want to do. At a certain point you can only do so much. That's when we decided to get help with the essay brainstorming. In addition to all this, they are still taking hard classes in school and playing sports etc. You don't want to have this battle every night. Let them know whatever decision they make now, if they change their mind that's ok. You are gonna be there for them if that happens.

Parent 2 - I have a procrastinator. He's very aware that he has that problem. We set false deadlines way in advance. Yes, your essay doesn't have to be done by October. We told him he should have his essay done by July 1. Clearly that was not the actual deadline, but the artificial deadline helped. I don't know if your child is receptive to that or not, but it helped my son. He did know it was a false deadline.

You all have done so much. What are the students supposed to be doing now and over the summer?

Mary - Junior Unit in English classes next week. The counselors will go in and speak to juniors about what they should be doing.

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences! How do students choose their major? Do you choose a college first or a major first? My daughter's ideas about majors change all the time. How do you narrow down the major?

Parent 4 - Answer is kid-dependent. One of my daughters just graduated college last week. She knew she wanted to be a theater major. My wife took her to 15 auditions to get into a theater program. At the last minute she decided to go to JMU and NOT do theater. They are going to change their majors and plans. She knew what kind of school would motivate her and make her happy, in addition to Rutgers which she got into also. My son on the other hand thinks he knows what to do. If a student applies and applies to a certain major, that can make it harder to get in depending on the major. If you're going to some top business schools it's hard to get in and then pivot.

Parent 3 - In the old days, most of us were undeclared. By sophomore year you declare your major. I'm surprised that for these 16 and 17 year old there is this pressure to know what you want to do. My son has very clear thoughts about what he wants to major in and he has for some time. It was a combination of looking at schools and looking at what programs they have in that area. Do I like the school and do I also like that major.

Parent 2 - I think you can take that as a starting point. My son wants to do business. We looked at schools that had good business programs but also looked at what other programs they have. So if he changes his mind, are there other good programs in that school?

Parent 1 - My one daughter who wants to be a veterinarian, we looked at schools with veterinary science. My other daughter wants psychology. If you do change your mind, it's ok and common, and you are in a place with other options. Colleges that have good advisors and it's easy to transfer programs if you want to change your major.

Mary - over 40% of students change their major during college. It's common.