6 BEST COLLEGE PLANNING JOBS FOR PARENTS

Adapted from Collegedata.com

Some parents feel like they are on the sidelines while their child struggles through their college admissions journey. But there are many ways parents, guardians and other caring adults can help, even from those sidelines! Here are six key roles they can play.

1. CHEERLEADER-IN-CHIEF

Encourage commitment. Colleges value students who stick to an interest over the years, while showing initiative and leadership. Whether it's contributing to bake sales that support student activities, driving to and from practices, or cheering from the bleachers, parents can help by supporting their child's commitment to an interest or activity.

Be there for the ups and downs. Applying to college comes with both thrills and disappointments. Parents can provide support and reassurance when “the chips are down” and can be ready with high-fives when good news rolls in – so can counselors, teachers and friends.

2. CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Know what the family can afford to pay for college. Parents should take a hard look at family finances and figure out what they can afford or are willing to pay out of pocket for college and what they expect their student to pay. They should keep these amounts in mind as their student considers where to apply, and later where to attend.

Learn how to apply for financial aid. You won't know what financial aid you might get until you apply. Most students who apply for financial aid will qualify for a student loan. However, students with the greatest financial need may qualify for subsidized student loans with better terms as well as grants and scholarships. Get to know the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the CSS Profile.

Understand net price. Many colleges post heart-stopping "sticker prices," which are the total costs of college for one academic year. But the actual cost to the family is the "net price," which is the amount left after grants and scholarships are deducted.

Understand college loans. If your family will need loans to help pay for college, parents can learn about federal student loans and their interest rates and fees, and help the student see the future impact of any debt they may take on.

3. TRAVEL AGENT

Visit colleges. No brochure or website can really show what college is like. Helping the student visit college campuses is one of the best things a parent can do in this process. Support final campus visits. Many students see a college in a whole new light once they have been admitted. Such a visit can make all the difference in a successful college choice, especially when choosing between colleges.

4. DATABASE ADMINISTRATOR

Learn how to research key college data. Parents can help their students by looking up important facts about colleges, such as whether a college has been generous with financial aid or has admitted students with GPAs and test scores similar to the student's. Use CollegeData's College Search to search over 2,000+ college profiles for this information and more.

Help the student stay organized. From tracking deadlines to maintaining college lists, parents can make a major contribution to application sanity.

5. COPY EDITOR

Take a look at the admissions essay. A well-written and evocative essay impresses admission officers. A parent's editorial eye can be helpful to check for coherence, proper grammar, and errors, as well as to confirm that the essay is in the student's voice.

6. COLLEGE PARENT

Tackle college freshman paperwork. Soon after admissions decisions arrive, forms arrive from the college. These usually include forms needed to enroll the student and make the first housing and tuition payments.

Help furnish the dorm room. Granted, the last thing some students want is mom or dad involved in decorating their dorm room. But parents may want to offer practical advice, help with shopping, and plan the move-in. Help set up the student's personal finance. Allowances, budgets, bank accounts, and credit card use all need to be discussed and implemented.