

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Overcoming Fears Around Paying for College

University Park Campus School, Massachusetts • March 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College
Practice: Assist With College Entry

Highlights

- The alumni coordinator at University Park Campus School discusses strategies for conducting activities to help students and their families prepare for the financial aspects of college.
- She discusses the ways that the school helps students and their families understand the process of paying for college and applying for financial aid, and the two financial aid nights that the school holds with students and families to help communicate these messages.

About the Site

University Park Campus School
Worcester, MA

Demographics

40% Hispanic
32% White
21% Asian

7% Black

78% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

10% English Language Learners

12% Special Education

University Park Campus School prepares all of its students, most of whom will be first-generation college-goers, to succeed in college by

- Offering a rigorous, all-honors academic curriculum that starts in grade 7 and focuses on deep thinking and active engagement;
- Collecting and reviewing a range of assessment data to make student- and school-level decisions;
- Implementing a college-going culture and providing supports to help students go to and succeed in college;
- Providing direct assistance to students and their families in applying, being accepted, and transitioning to college.

Full Transcript

My name is Nina Keough, and I am the college transition and alumni support coordinator.

It's very important that you start talking to students about the financial aid process very early on in their education. I don't believe that students need to understand every step of the process by the time they are in ninth, tenth, honestly or even eleventh grade. You don't really know how to do the process until you are doing it. But our students, and I imagine students across the country, have so much fear around applying for financial aid that they will start closing the door to college mentally themselves before they have even gotten to their junior or senior year because they will have this myth that they can't afford to go to college.

It's a complicated process that you have to be very detail oriented and very aware of every step, because if a financial aid form does not get in on the deadline, students could not qualify for any aid. Even though they qualify in terms of income and assets, if they miss a deadline or if they are missing a form or if they filled the form out incorrectly, they could lose a right to any scholarships. So we have to be really vigilant and careful with students to ensure that they are getting done everything they need to get done on time.

A big piece that we have to work on with students is that so much of paying for college is not transparent and the cost of college is not clear. And what I mean by that is that if students go on the College Board website or if they go on a website and look at the cost of an institution, they think they have to pay that amount, but once they fill out financial aid forms and once the school makes their financial aid decisions, they could pay anywhere between zero and \$40,000 or \$50,000 depending on what that school decides. So a student could look on a website and see a school where the price tag is \$52,000 for the year, and

after scholarships they could end up only owing around \$5,000 or \$6,000 in loans versus another school that may only have a price tag of \$24,000 or \$28,000 will not have a lot of financial aid available and our students could end up owing more like \$10,000 or \$15,000 a year to go to that school. And that process is not transparent for them to be able to figure that out on their own. We need to both explain it to them and really coach them through it so they know they can apply to that more expensive school that is very scary for them to apply to.

We do two financial aid nights for students. We do a financial aid night in the fall where we invite students and their families here into our building after school, and we provide an overview of the financial aid process and what they are going to encounter over the next couple of months. We know that we can't teach them everything about financial aid in an evening, so our goal really is that students and families will walk away from that night knowing that every single student can afford to go to college and that there is a process coming up that they are going to have to be very focused on that will lead to their student being able to afford to go to college.

In the spring we do a second financial aid night which is once students have received their award letter. This night is to help them compare and evaluate the award letters they have. So what we have done is we partnered with a local credit union where they bring in some staffers from the credit union, also some folks from their board that have financial background, and they sit down with students and they help them evaluate the award packages that they have received to help them understand what's the best deal for them.