

DOINGWHATWORKS



Slideshow

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Using Checkpoints to Guide Students Toward College

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences, Tennessee
February 2010

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

Highlights

- Margaret Smith, the consultant for college and career development at Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences, implements a folder system that helps students manage their college applications.
- Students can monitor their steps and goals in the college and financial aid process through a computer software program. Staff access the program to provide support and resources to students and parents.
- A checklist is given to students to walk them through the college application and financial aid steps they need to complete during their senior year.
- Smith uses the expertise and resources of parents and community members in helping students prepare for postsecondary opportunities.

About the Site

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences
Chattanooga, TN

Demographics

52% White

42% Black

4% Asian

2% Hispanic

26% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences (CSAS) is a college-preparatory magnet school that supports all students in becoming college-bound.

- Students are required to complete preliminary college entrance exams in eighth (EXPLORE), tenth (PLAN), and eleventh grades (PSAT, ACT).
- Teachers use assessment results to align curriculum and enroll students in college-readiness skills classes.
- CSAS staff plan a weeklong college tour to kick off the college application process and expose students to a variety of colleges and universities.
- CSAS counselors manage and track students through the college and financial aid application process using systems that include checkpoints to make the process routine, predictable, and explicit.

Full Transcript

Title Slide: Using Checkpoints to Guide Students Toward College

CSAS students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have parents with professional degrees, while others will be the first in their family to attend college. Margaret Smith, consultant for college and career development, uses an explicit system to make the steps for college entry routine and predictable for all students.

Slide 1: Starting with clear expectations

CSAS students hear a singular message from staff: “You are college material.” The guidance process builds on this expectation and helps all students develop and fulfill their postsecondary goals. All students are exposed to the full array of options, not just the local community college, which include opportunities for out-of-state schooling and private universities. Students also have early exposure to key steps for exploring and navigating the college application and financial aid processes.

Slide 2: Creating a schoolwide application process

Smith helps students manage college applications using a folder system that teaches students to plan ahead, stay organized, and meet deadlines. The prompts on the folder guide students through the process of determining postmark deadlines, anticipating lead time for processing transcripts, and checking for the number of recommendations. Managing the applications in this way also helps the school stay on top of who has applied to college and who has not.

Slide 3: Tracking progress and communication

Students use a commercial software package to document individual goals and steps for college entry. The program helps Smith monitor and encourage students' progress through the college application and financial aid process. Additionally, she uses the school district's automated communication system to make sure families get important announcements and updates via email or phone. This way, parents as well as students are kept in the loop about new scholarship opportunities and upcoming deadlines.

Slide 4: Starting early: The Senior Profile

Because all seniors start the college application process early, many students make significant progress in the fall. The Making Your Summer Count checklist outlines simple steps students should get started on during the summer before senior year. Such tasks include the development of a Senior Profile that helps CSAS staff complete recommendations and coach students to write their personal essays.

Slide 5: Building in checkpoints

Smith sets deadlines along the way to keep students on track for application deadlines. For example, if a student has not submitted a request for transcript by February, a letter goes out asking for an update on future plans and offering support. Parents are required to sign the letter. The information helps Smith follow up with individual students in appropriate ways.

Slide 6: Leveraging community resources

As the college and career counselor, Smith works with students and families starting in tenth grade. In addition to creating schoolwide systems, she uses her relationship with families to build networks and personalize services. To help one student prepare for an interview with the Coast Guard Academy, for example, Smith matched her with a parent who attended West Point. Every year, Smith pairs financial aid

counselors from the community with families who need one-on-one support to complete the FAFSA.

Slide 7: The importance of family testimonials

Parents' fears and misconceptions can sometimes interfere with the school's outreach and communication efforts placed to support families with the college and financial aid process. To help dispel myths and surface fears, Smith brings together parents of recent alumni with current parents, as a way of sharing their own experiences and expectations. These testimonials help parents buy into the CSAS process.