

COLLEGE PLANNING MINUTES

Volume 2, Issue 9

May 21, 2010

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Almost Summer!

The school year marathon, ending with a series of standardized testing hurdles, is almost over. The finish line beckons, along with two months of freedom from the daily routine of school. I heartily endorse using some of the newfound time for worthwhile structured activities like standardized test prep, sports practices and band camp, but I hope all families also find time to catch up on a few equally important pastimes that often get displaced by the more pressing tasks of the school year.

Read

In last month's issue of College Planning Minutes I extolled the virtues of leisure reading and promised to provide more suggestions for summer books. See the sidebar on the next page for this month's recommendations.

Reflect

Summer also provides an opportunity for students to engage in another disappearing pleasure, leisure thinking—time spent in the relaxed, solitary pursuit of pondering the past and imagining the future. When the final bell at school is followed by a mad rush to soccer practice, followed by dinner and homework,



all accompanied by non-stop texting, there's precious little time left for reflection. The capacity to profit from past missteps requires time to examine where you went wrong and deduce the lessons learned. Similarly, making thoughtful choices about the future involves spinning a variety of futuristic fantasies in which you occupy the starring role. Great deeds, inventions, and works of art all begin with dreams. In the words of Carl Sandburg,

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Almost Summer Cont'd

“Nothing happens unless first we dream.” So be sure to leave time in your son or daughter’s summer for daydreaming.

Reconnect

I selected the picture to the right for this article because it reminds me of the lake in Maine where my family vacationed when our older kids were teenagers. The six of us stayed in a small three bedroom cabin with one television and no computers, Internet, or even telephones—this was in the days before cell phones became a mandatory bionic appendage for civilized beings. Granted, there was a phone for emergencies at the resort—we weren’t vacationing on the set of *The Shining* - but still, it felt pretty remote.

Our family was one of approximately twenty staying on the premises, which consisted of a small lodge and about fifteen cabins, but we kept pretty much to ourselves. For one week we did nothing but read or nap in the lounge chairs on the lawn, undertake brief forays on the lake by canoe or kayak, and make occasional unsuccessful attempts to water-ski. We ate three



meals a day together in the lodge dining room and spent the evening hours playing board games, engaging in heated debates on a range of topics, and sharing the single small-screen TV in our living room, all the while cut off from the outside world. I think we would all agree it was the best week of the year.

I hope you have a chance this summer to spend some quality time with your spouse and kids, to reconnect and rediscover the simple, unsurpassable joy of being a family.

Books for the Break

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, by Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows

A Hope in the Unseen, by Ron Suskind

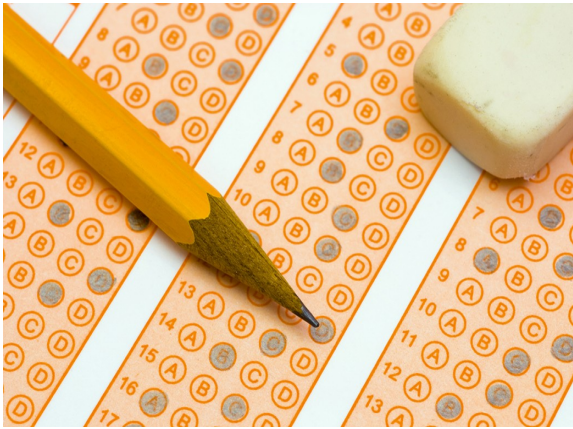
Outliers: The Story of Success, by Malcolm Gladwell

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, by Daniel Goleman

I'm out of room! For a description of these books and more suggestions, go to www.hredconsulting.com and click on College Planning Minutes on the left.

Q & A on Summer Test Prep

Summer is an ideal time for rising juniors and seniors to prepare for the PSAT, SAT, and ACT. Indeed, for many students, it's the *only* time they can possibly squeeze test prep into their schedules. Options range from individual study with workbooks or online courses to classroom-based courses and individual tutoring. Which is best? That depends on the student, but here are some questions to help your teenager decide.



Can you work independently, or do you need to be guided by a teacher or tutor?

Working through SAT prep workbooks or online courses individually can be a highly effective and cost-efficient approach to test prep. You can work at your own pace and apportion your attention to the areas you most need to improve. However, the success of this method hinges on the extent to which you actually do it. As many a parent has aptly observed, simply purchasing an SAT workbook does not constitute test prep. So

if a teenager typically requires prodding to complete assignments, independent study may not be the technique of choice. Similarly, a student with a weak or uneven background in a content area, say math, may benefit from having a teacher or tutor to redress deficiencies.

Are you starting out with a fairly high score or a mediocre to low score?

Most classroom courses strive to completely cover test content, and to do so at a pace that is appropriate for the average student. Strong students who are trying to raise a good score to an even better one may find that such courses spend a lot of time on material they've already mastered or move at too slow a pace. Such teens might benefit most from a class geared to good students, an online course, independent study, or tutoring.

Are your Writing, Math, and Critical Reading scores fairly equal, or do you have a very uneven profile of scores?

Complete prep classes that devote equal amounts of time to each section are best suited to students with an even profile of scores. A student who has scored a 770 in Math, a 620 in Critical Reading and a 590 in Writing may be better served by individual study or tutoring.

Whatever method your teenager chooses, the key to success is persisting until his scores on his practice tests approach the scores he is aiming for on the real thing. Best of luck!

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