

**DREAM STRATEGY  
COLLEGE NEWSLETTER**

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***SIX STEPS TO TAKE TODAY (...OR EVEN YESTERDAY!)  
IN ORDER TO FUND YOUR CHILD'S COLLEGE EDUCATION***

Dear Parent,

With the end of the calendar year comes the striking reality that high school seniors are only *one semester* away from graduation! It is an exciting time for students and their families, as the final year of high school can be filled with enormous events and advantages... but the immediate future is fraught with many important decisions, which can make the current good times pale in comparison if you are not prepared for them!

Of course, most parents are more-than-vaguely aware that college (and the rising college costs that go along with it) are looming just around the corner. The wise and savvy parents are those who make the time to be well-prepared for this next step in the lives of their children. If your student is a senior this year, I sincerely hope that you have made some college funding preparations already. Whether you feel prepared or not, I am pleased to provide you with this month's "Six Steps To Take TODAY" – if you are feeling ready for college, this action list will give you a fairly good idea as to where you stand in your college preparations.

However, in the event that, for whatever reason, you have put off these all-important arrangements, then please try not to panic... but at the same time, don't wait another minute! While it is not entirely too late to get cracking on gathering what your student will need for college, these tips will provide you with the knowledge you need for getting started right here and right now. Remember that your child's academic and professional future – and your own hard-earned money – are very much at stake in this endeavor!

Regardless of your personal circumstances, I urge you to follow closely along as I present the following six steps, which are designed to ensure that your student will receive what is needed for their individual pursuit of higher education... and dramatically assist in clarifying the process

for you as a parent at the same time.

### **Step #1 – MAKE THE FUTURE A CURRENT PRIORITY!**

No matter how diligently your child has worked for the grades and accomplishments required to receive the right amount of college funding, it can all be for nothing if they fall too far behind in the process of searching for the right college and solidifying their financial assistance package from that school! Parents and students alike can sometimes find themselves guilty of ignoring this all-important process, due to a variety of factors – most often, it falls victim to the very day-to-day activities that always keep your family so busy to begin with! Well, busy or not, it is now time to “make some time” for this crucial decision process.

At this point, if you have not done so already, be sure to sit down with your child and review the various colleges and universities that are available to them. Divide them into three categories: top colleges which are the “Goal Schools” for your student, somewhat less exciting institutions that would be considered “Acceptable Schools” for your child, and finally those “Safety Schools” that would be reliable options in the end if nothing else pans out as planned. Most importantly, always consider how your child will fit in academically at each respective school. Colleges and universities are most likely to offer more money to the applicants who, by their specific admissions standards, would be considered “outstanding” students.

Additionally, within the framework of these three types of schools, it is vital to find and select two *types* of schools. First, find the institutions that may have the most to offer for your child. Then, equally as important, search for the schools where your child has the most to offer the college! Some of these schools can offer surprising benefits for your child, and may make extremely competitive offers to lure them into the incoming freshman class. Remember, the schools need students every bit as much as (or more than) the students need the schools... if you are able to find the right one you may discover unforeseen financial and academic benefits for your child! Again, the key here is to do the research as early as possible in order to discover the best possible schools – and the best possible deals – for your student.

### **Step #2 – DON’T JUST MAKE THE DEADLINES... BEAT THEM!**

Some people imagine that colleges and universities will patiently wait until they have all of the applications in their files, until the final deadline has passed, and until they are absolutely certain which applicants are best and most worthy of money, before they make any decisions about distributing their finite amounts of aid. This would be nice, but in the real world it just doesn’t work that way – not even close. Colleges are in very real competition with each other, and they simply don’t have time to waste in waiting to painstakingly review each and every applicant who gets their paperwork in just days (or hours) ahead of deadline.

Rather, the schools will begin to make their aid decisions early, and they will make these decisions based solely on the applications they have on-hand. Cut-throat? Well, yes, in a way, but it is also truly a case of the proverbial early bird getting the worm! The schools that matter the most to you and your student should be placed on a short list, and I always recommend highlighting the deadline dates for every one of your potential schools. The earlier you hit them up with your information, the better chance you have of receiving money from the school. That dream college may even want your child to attend, but they simply cannot wait for your application to begin awarding money... and there is only so much of it to go around.

### **Step #3 – ARRANGE YOUR FUTURE, DON'T LET THE FUTURE ARRANGE YOU!**

Let's be frank – colleges are decidedly *not* in the business of worrying a whole lot about what a potential student's parents have in mind for a contribution amount. You obviously have an idea of what you think your family can afford (and you would know best, in this regard), but that doesn't necessarily amount to much in the world of college funding and financial aid. In fact, the federal government will have one idea about your expected family contribution, and the schools themselves may have yet another. I hate to bear bad news, but both of these estimations are likely to be significantly more than you think that your family can reasonably afford.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, the final tally will be tabulated. The best way for you to ascertain that the number will come closest to what you are looking for is to specifically organize your finances *before* you take the time to apply for the aid. Strategizing in this regard does not mean simply saving and saving and hoping for the best... nor does it refer to the erroneous assumption that a family friend or "tax guy" automatically knows how to set up your finances optimally to pay for college. Simply put, planning these things without speaking to a college funding expert will not optimize your education dollar, and could cost you thousands in the long run. In fact, there are a number of ways to arrange your finances at this critical stage that you may not know exist!

For example, one of the most successful methods that I've come across is a strategy called the "special mortgage concept." It is most effective for families with higher incomes (or higher net worth in particular) and can offer a fantastic solution to paying for college. In fact, this concept can even allow these families to arrange payment of their college costs on a "tax-favored" basis. For more information about this special college funding plan, and how it could possibly work for you, please call my office at 603-226-8665.

### **Step #4 – DOT YOUR "I'S" AND CROSS YOUR "T'S!"**

Unfortunately, there is no financial aid "mind-meld" which allows college financial aid officers to determine what you intended to write, in the event that there are errors on your application forms. Every question on these forms should be treated as important, bearing in mind that all of your answers should be double-checked for accuracy. One error on even a seemingly small question could lead to a huge headache with the aid advisor. You and your family must be thorough and fill out every question on all of the forms. The information you offer must be provided accurately, to the best of your knowledge, as this will speed the process along considerably.

Taking the time to do it right (and do it right the first time) can make a huge difference overall. At the very least, answers that conflict with each other will cost you time, while the financial aid office clarifies the information. Again, remember that when you are dealing with college funding, time is money. In the worst case, providing wrong or incomplete answers could actually wind up excluding your child from some forms of aid consideration!

### **Step #5 – DON'T ELIMINATE A SCHOOL BASED ON REPUTATION... PUBLIC OR PRIVATE.**

Some families refuse to even look at a public college or university, assuming that they are of lower quality and simply not worth a second look. Other families will simply dismiss private schools out of hand, certain that their high tuition and fees will be far too expensive for them to afford. Well, the truth actually lies somewhere in the middle.

Many public schools may offer your student some outstanding academic programs at a reasonable tuition, and should never be completely overlooked. On the other hand, expensive private schools could actually ride to the rescue of a family with financial concerns! The schools themselves may not readily advertise what they have to offer, but some diligent research may reveal that a private school could have money in their substantial coffers to help a worthy and deserving student on their pathway to college.

The simple fact of the matter is this – while a private school may give inquiring families a quick dose of sticker shock, they also may have more financial support to offer due to the generosity of their successful and wealthy alumni. If this turns out to be the case for your family, you could discover that a costly private school actually turns out to be the very best bargain for your child’s education, after all! Look at all of your options before you decide.

**Step #6 – KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND BE FLEXIBLE.**

The facts are the facts... your student (and you!) could do everything right regarding your college financial aid applications, and still face challenges in making ends meet. I urge you not to give up on your child’s college dreams, and please do not take the so-called “easy” way out by signing for an outrageous loan that will take decades to repay. There are other, far more desirable options available, so I urge you to talk with a college funding expert!

Even in the event that your child finds him/herself without all of the financial aid needed to attend their dream school, we could very well be able to offer some other creative financial strategies to make it happen. We have a number of strategies for nearly every financial reality, so I urge you to call us for a no-obligation consultation. The reality is that every system simply can’t work for every family, but we are committed to finding the methods to allow parents to pay for college without sacrificing their standard of living or their retirement funds.

If you would like to learn which exciting method could be beneficial for your family’s college funding needs, I invite you to call my office at 603-226-8665 today. We are always happy to schedule an appointment for you to consult with one of our professional college funding consultants.

Also, feel free to call my office at 603-226-8665 for the upcoming schedule of the FREE college funding workshops in your area.

Have a Wonderful Holiday Season,

David Hodgkins, Jr.