

Is Your School Putting Too Much Pressure on Students during the College Admissions Process?

Red Flags for Educators

Research indicates that intense achievement pressure is generating high levels of stress and depression in many students, especially in affluent communities. As educators and school staff, our words and actions can powerfully affect students' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. Here are some red flags to watch out for.

- During conversations with students, do you only talk about grades, upcoming papers and projects, or college applications, forgetting to ask about your students' hopes, dreams, and interests?
- When you meet with or contact your students' parents, do you only talk about grades, projects, or test scores? Do you ever share information about students' character, social skills, and/or how the student positively contributes to the school community?
- Do you communicate with parents of your students about assignments or grades more than once a month, even when a majority of students are not having any problems?
- Do you worry that your students are not sleeping or eating well because they are worried about not performing at a high level in school or about not getting work done that will result in high academic performance?
- Do you ever press students to take certain courses when you know those courses will cause extraordinary stress and/or you know the student has limited interest? Do you ever press students to participate in extracurricular activities or do certain community service projects specifically for the sake of college applications?
- Do you expose your students only to "elite" colleges instead of encouraging them to consider a wide range of schools, including those that accept a large percentage of applicants? Do you ever share information about student satisfaction at those schools and /or alumni success stories?
- Do you encourage students to apply to selective colleges based primarily on prestige, without considering whether the school is a good fit for students' personality and interests?

- Do you encourage parents to hire SAT/ACT tutors or enroll their children in an SAT/ACT preparatory course before junior year of high school?
- When you talk about colleges to students or parents, or when you invite schools to visit campus, do you tend to focus attention on the most elite or high status institutions?
- If a large number of students in your school were not accepted at selective schools this year, would your school be embarrassed or worried? Would your school publicize or celebrate these acceptances in a different way?
- If your students received lower-than-expected standardized test scores, would you feel like a failure?
- Do you find yourself thinking frequently about whether your students are performing at a high level or will be accepted at high status colleges?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, it may be time to take a serious look at the messages your school may be inadvertently sending students. Visit MakingCaringCommon.org to learn more about our Turning the Tide Initiative and for tips for de-elevating achievement pressure and raising caring kids in schools.