

Preparing Your Students for College

September 27, 2010

9:30am-11:30am

Meeting Minutes

Introduction

Announcements

- **Kicking off Students Talking About Relationships (STAR)**—flyers for teens, accepting any teen youth in Philly HS to apply and become member—meet at Rotunda every Thurs-OCT-MAY, retreat, reward. It is a peer leadership group that meets to discuss preventing relationship violence and abuse
- **Call to Order**—College office-phillygoes2college.com—will have college application workshop on October 20th, and programs for adults, teens on college all that week
- College fair at Penn Convention Center—register online—registers for whole fair
- College Prep Roundtable—meets tomorrow, 9 am-11 am, at School District Building room 1080, College Fair representatives will be there. The Roundtable is the college parallel to OST Peer Networking events and meets monthly. In conjunction with mayor's office. NACAC—runs fairs around country—colleges from around the country—workshops on variety of college issues and needs—free, open all day—www.nacacnet.org October 17—students are recommended to register beforehand, but not required to. College Prep Roundtable (Google)
- College Fair for Chester County students at Exton Mall. Similar fair to NACAC's on October 18.
- Cheryl—training on Financial Aid October 9th at Community College Northwest Campus, also November 16th at same campus. 215-735-2877. Participants receive a manual on financial aid and upcoming changes to the financial aid application process.
- OSTRC Resource Fair at the Philadelphia Free Library in October—registration available online later this week. **There will not be an OST meeting that month, but will be two peer networking meetings in October during the evening on the same topic for those who cannot come to day-time. Info: <http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/ostrc/resources/resourcefair.html>.
- United Way—Training Calendar now available online.
 - Access training calendar on United Way website. To see trainings, you need to set up a user account. Link is <http://uwsepa.org/training>.
 - Once at the website, it automatically redirects to a new page. Click the “click here” hyperlink and go to log on page.
 - If you have no account, go to the top of the page and “click here.” Type in part of the name of your agency that has already registered. List of organizations will come up. If someone has registered the organization, it will show up. You can enter your own contact information and set up an account for yourself with own password under that group.
 - If not part of an agency, you can register yourself to access it as well. The site asks for personal info, and allows you to create a username/password.
 - Hard copies of directions and training calendar are available from United Way. Register as early as possible beforehand so people know how many to expect. United Way's number and email address that can help guide through the website.

Panelists

Whitney L. Blunden
Executive Director of Operation
Restoration Enterprises
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Organized in 2006 and Incorporated in Oct. 2009, Restoration Enterprises is a non-profit moving alliance of empowered persons dedicated to promote spiritual, cultural, revival and renaissance in the urban sector of the Philadelphia community. The overall mission of Restoration Enterprises is to educate, empower and encourage youth by creating platforms for opportunities for artistic expression and advancement through awards and paid internships

- Formed Operation Restoration to aid youth, beginning with foster care agencies. Built alliances with organizations that have a youth focus.
- Developed programs “Bring our Brothers to Work Day” held each April, placing students in an office setting with minority professionals to see and understand what they do.
- Men work from pictures, and they can see the alternative to the negative pictures they see.
- Students can plan for the future and see how they should plan. Begin process to engage students in college exploration and preparation.
- Restoration does college expos out of town yearly, taking them out of their comfort zone. Helps get parents and children involved.
- Use those motivations to facilitate learning. It is important for students to know how to do the right thing at the right time. “Preparing the unprepared” and creating sustainable program, at the same place, same time every week with same resources every Friday.

Susan Kozloff Bilsky
Educational Consultant
JEVS Career Strategies
Sue.Bilsky@jevs.org

Susan Kozloff Bilsky, an educational consultant at JEVS since 2005, has over 25 years experience in higher education including management level positions in career advising, admissions, and human resources. In addition to her experience as a college admissions counselor, Susan has served as Chair of the University of Pennsylvania Alumni Council on Admissions for the Main Line. She also has experience as a public school teacher and SAT tutor.

- Focus on what colleges want, how to prep students, and family involvement
- Grades are typically most important factor in admissions, but strength of curriculum is second-most significant. Encourage students to meet with counselors and teachers. There is a delicate balance between taking challenging courses and having the ability to make good grades. Taking right courses in high school is essential to success in college.
- ACT/SAT standardized testing is also important. Almost all colleges will accept either. Many students may be eligible for fee waiver, but need to go to counselors to receive one. If they are eligible for those, they are likely also eligible for up to four college application waivers (applications cost anywhere between \$25 and \$100).

- After school activities are important! Having a long list of extracurricular activities is not as significant as being passionate and involved in one or two particular activities.
- Example: Choosing between two students, one has a high SAT score and other has lower SAT score. Extracurriculars might be the determining factor for each student's admission.
- Colleges are admitting a *class*, not just *individuals*. Out-of-school activities that they are passionate about are most important. Volunteering, clubs, sports, arts, etc. Activities from junior year and prior are most significant (especially those that are in high school or long-term). Encourage kids to become part of something early on.
- Colleges want to see students who are very interested in their school. Early Decision, Early Action, visiting the school, requesting an interview, etc. are all important.
- Has a list of websites which all have a wealth of info: CollegeBoard.com has college prep resources, links to financial aid resources.
- Guide books on colleges are helpful, but don't need to be purchased (available at libraries, college access center, book store, etc.). Talk to students about what type of school they would really like to attend. Sometimes discussing what they don't like is also helpful, especially when they haven't given much thought to college. Timelines for college preparation are key. Visiting schools helps students engage in the process and visualize where they could be.
- Fastweb online for scholarships. Never let students pay for a scholarship! Help them avoid scams.

Cheryl S. Browning
Regional Director
PHEAA powered by AES
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Cheryl S. Browning has an intensive background in financial aid, having worked as a Financial Aid Counselor, Assistant Director of Financial Aid Consultant and Director of Financial Aid at numerous institutions of higher education in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois. Browning is the Regional Director of the Philadelphia Regional Office of the American Educational Services/Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency; she has served in this position for the past nine years, twelve years with PHEAA.

- From PHEAA, a state grant agency. Mostly involved in grants rather than loans. Created in 1963 as loan agency. Went into Philly to provide services to students on college. They are invited to various schools and help students work online to think about schools. Let students consider not just four-year institutions, but also community colleges and technical schools.
- Also talk about inexpensive alternatives, i.e. community college for one or two years then transferring into a four-year school. Employers look at Bachelor's degree, not Associate's (it's where you finish, not where you start). Discussing all options is the best plan.
- FASFA helps students apply for Pell grant, campus-based financial aid, PA state grants, and work-study. There are fewer items to fill out this year than in the past. Students can start sending it in in January of their senior year.
- Partnered with School District of Philadelphia. Help students print out and send in their information for financial aid. Students can receive information on the spot about what they are eligible for. When they go into schools, they do career development and preparation/planning.
- Focus on the graduation/retention rate so students know how likely it is they will graduate.

- Starting earlier is key. Some students start in 7th/8th grade. Use EducationPlanner, a free website. Can start doing their profile in middle school. Can order guides for agencies and offices.

Group Discussion

AM: When it comes to scholarships, we get a long list of those that children can access. However, they are never given feedback on why they weren't approved. Many don't know until right before college how much money they're getting. How can system be improved?

Cheryl: Philly has Scholarship Clearinghouse with local scholarships. Contact the actual agency about why they haven't heard back, and start as early as possible. Apply to variety of scholarships in multiple areas. Smaller scholarships add up! Office of High School Reform, Office of College and Career Awareness are good resources. Phillygoestocollege online has a list of resources.

AM: Your organization goes to schools and gives workshops, but what resources do the schools need to provide?

Cheryl: We try to work with students and parents, but need printer and internet-connected computer for FAFSA workshop. Bring own computer for many other workshops.

AM: Reading, writing and math are the fundamental skills (perspective of someone who teaches at a community college).

Cheryl: That's why we start early and work on fundamental skills to become independent learners.

AM: I work a lot with kids who have dropped out. They realize their poor choice and try to get back in the education system; they use College Access Center. Any other programs that can help them get back in the swing?

Cheryl: Re-engagement Centers help students identify their status, UPenn and Penn State have Educational Opportunity Centers. Penn State recruitment is at 1625 JFK Suite 425, Penn at 40th St. Focus on over-age of high school students, help students prepare for GED and help adult learners go to college. Penn also has program with veterans.

AM: How can you motivate students who are still in school to recognize their potential, especially those whose families have never been to college? What motivation factors can we use?

Cheryl: Student Success Centers are in many schools. "The more you learn, the more you earn"—go to programs in the high schools, many students are unaware of them at Public High Schools and charter schools

Susan: Knowing that they can access financial aid and money to go to college is really important. Many people see it as not an option since colleges are expensive. They need to see financial aid opportunities.

Whitney: Fa support network for those students. Parents often tell them that they are not college material, and they need to encourage the power of right decisions and potential.

AM2: Bring students to campuses and they will try to set them up with student who comes from similar background.

AM3: Be as imaginative with kids as much as possible. Think of special characteristics, talents, family member information because there are many scholarships that are for a very particular, small demographic (e.g., one recipient's grandfather was a firefighter).

AM4: Technical information is what colleges are attracted to, but there are also other important concepts for students: how to talk to professors, work with alumni, participate in study groups and develop study habits.

(Break into small groups for more in-depth conversations with panelists)