

# AUDIT: COLLEGE ADMISSIONS CULTURE AND CLIMATE

This tool is intended to help high school educators reflect on whether—and to what extent—they are creating a healthy college admissions culture and climate.

## A healthy college admissions culture and climate:

1. Promotes ethical character, including caring for others;
2. Reduces excessive achievement pressure; and
3. Helps level the playing field for students who are disadvantaged in the college admissions process.

## This audit can help you start to answer these questions:

- Are we doing what is needed to promote a healthy, ethical culture around the college admission process?
- What more could we do?

Total time: 45-60 minutes



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## OVERVIEW

Please answer each of the following questions about your school by checking “yes,” “no,” or “I’m not sure.” Please also reflect on the “evidence” for your answer—how you know the answer or what the answer looks like in your school.

## Once you have completed the audit, we recommend the following steps:

1. Discuss what you have learned with the leadership team at your school
2. Identify your school’s priorities
3. Make a plan for intentional change

# AUDIT

## IDENTITY AND ETHICAL CHARACTER

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
<p>Does your school explore with students the many ethical questions that the admissions process raises?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why does the admissions process often advantage certain students (e.g., athletes and children of donors)?</li> <li>• Why do large inequities in the process exist and what can be done to remedy them?</li> <li>• Why do well-intentioned people participate in unfair systems?</li> <li>• How can students both express themselves authentically and “play the game” (making themselves attractive to colleges) without misrepresenting themselves?</li> </ul>				
<p>Does the college counseling process at your school encourage students to think about their identity and what they value?</p>				

# AUDIT

## IDENTITY AND ETHICAL CHARACTER

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does the college counseling process at your school help students articulate their family's narrative (e.g., caring for a younger sibling or contributing to family finances) in the greater context of the story that they want to tell about themselves in their applications?				
Does your school provide a wide array of "community service" opportunities and enable students to select opportunities that are meaningful to them?				
Does your school provide students opportunities to reflect on the purpose of service and on the benefits and challenges of one's service experiences?				
Are students able to work together with other teens from diverse backgrounds from their school or other schools—in carefully constructed and facilitated groups—on shared problems?				

# AUDIT

## IDENTITY AND ETHICAL CHARACTER

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school share with your community the National Association for College Admission Counseling’s Code of Ethical Practice and discuss the implications on school policy?				
Does your school talk to students about cheating, integrity, and representing oneself accurately on college applications (e.g., not exaggerating about one’s achievements or service or not letting parents write application essays)?				
Does your school provide guidelines or education during the college admissions process for parents about what it means to be a member of a caring, ethical community (e.g., sharing the Turning the Tide reports and parent guideposts)?				
Do you have a “compact” or agreement with parents that spells out parents’ role and the school’s role in creating a healthy, ethical admissions process?				

# AUDIT

## IDENTITY AND ETHICAL CHARACTER

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school provide guidelines to school counselors and teachers that both help them assess students' ethical capacities (e.g., empathy, gratitude, and responsibility to community), and that guide them in describing these capacities in recommendations?				

# AUDIT

## REDUCING EXCESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT PRESSURE

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school set expectations that parents will contact the school if their teen shows symptoms that suggest achievement-related distress, including not eating or sleeping well? Were these expectations developed collaboratively with educators, students, and families?				
Does your school limit the number of AP/IB/Advanced courses a student can take? If so, how is this communicated to colleges?				
Does your school limit the number of school clubs, organizations, or activities a student can join? If so, how is this communicated to colleges?				
Does your school provide parent/caregiver education workshops related to achievement pressure, anxiety, and/or stress?				
Does your school offer mindfulness programs or other stress-relieving strategies for students?				

# AUDIT

## REDUCING EXCESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT PRESSURE

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school provide information about a wide range of colleges and universities of varying selectivity? If so, how?				
Does your school regularly survey students and parents/caregivers about stress and achievement pressure?				
Does your school have a way of publicly acknowledging students' post-secondary plans? If so, do you include the students' names? Do you do so in a manner that equally celebrates all opportunities?				

# AUDIT

## LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school provide free standardized test preparation that is accessible to all students?				
Do adults at your school discuss with students whether the college admission system is equitable and fair for all students in the country?				
Does your school facilitate the sharing of information and resources about the college search and application process between students and families (e.g., an online forum, workshops where parents can share experiences, etc.)?				
Does your school provide information about college affordability and debt?				
Does your school offer workshops about financial aid and scholarships?				



# AUDIT

## LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school provide assistance for students and families in filling out financial aid paperwork?				
Does your school hold college fairs or provide transportation to local fairs?				
Does your school offer free opportunities for all students to visit colleges?				
Does your school publicize college “fly-in” programs for underrepresented students?				
Does your school readily provide information about test fee and application fee waivers?				
Does your school partner with Community Based Organizations or other college access programs to provide support for students?				

# AUDIT

## LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Evidence/Reflection If not, why not? What would it take to make this happen? If yes, what does it look like? How do you know the answer is yes?
Does your school provide direct support to underrepresented students and help them access special application opportunities?				

“Schools need to have comprehensive and mission-driven conversations about what is a healthy and balanced academic load for their students.”

*From Turning the Tide II: How Parents and High Schools Can Cultivate Ethical Character and Reduce Distress in The College Admissions Process*