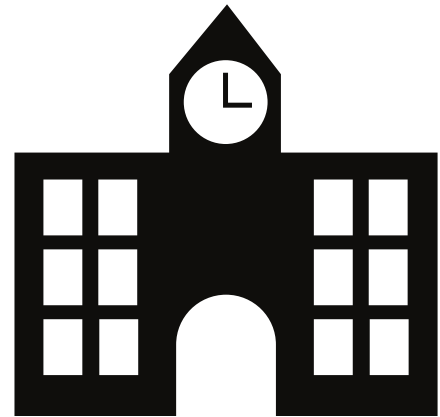


SCHOOL-FAMILY COMPACT

Use this resource to create an agreement with families to reduce achievement pressure in the college admissions process.

This resource is designed for school communities where students experience excessive achievement pressure in the college admissions process. When this pressure gets too great, students often suffer anxiety and depression and other mental health troubles. This pressure can also undermine meaningful learning and students' ability to focus on and care for others.

This template is intended to be adapted collaboratively between schools and parents based on each school community's specific needs and culture.



“Many parents fail to focus on what really matters in the college admissions process. In an effort to give their kids everything, these parents often end up robbing them of what really counts.”

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

SCHOOL-FAMILY COMPACT

We, the families, caregivers, and educators of _____ [SCHOOL NAME], share the common goal of raising curious, healthy, caring, balanced, and engaged students with the strong academic and social foundation to be successful in high school and beyond. Together, we seek to nurture and inspire confident young people who are competent and prepared for a life of learning and growth. As we consider college and other post-secondary pathways for our students, we agree to the following:

FAMILIES

- We will not start regular conversations about college admission until junior year of high school. We will follow the school's recommended timeline for the college search.
- We will work to disentangle our own wishes from our teen's wishes in the college admissions process. We will listen carefully to what our teen wants from a college education, ask questions, and consider how we might most effectively both follow and lead our teen in this process. We will periodically get input from our teen about whether we are helpful in the process.
- We will not ask teachers to change or inflate grades based on the pressure of a college admissions outcome.
- We will not compare our children (test scores, grades, accomplishments) to other students or ask high schools to do so.
- We will not ask counselors to share where other students are applying to college.
- We will commit to sources other than commercial rankings and admission selectivity to judge the quality of a college.
- We will not label colleges as "good" or "bad" schools without concrete evidence.
- We will create daily schedules at home that allow for sufficient sleep and downtime and consult with a doctor or other specialist if our child is not sleeping or eating well.
- We will put enjoyment and personal development first—not resume building for college—in guiding our teen in selecting summer and extracurricular experiences.
- We will talk to our teen about the experiences they hope to have in college when helping them determine where to apply.
- We will not approach "community service" as a checklist. We will listen to what our child is interested in and be a resource for them in selecting community service that is meaningful to them. We will encourage our teens to consider engaging in service that enables them to work together with those from diverse backgrounds on common problems, like an unsafe park in our neighborhood.
- We will avoid "competitive parenting," such as telling our child not to share information in their college search with others or hiding helpful resources from other families.
- We will take our child to see less selective colleges where they are more likely to be admitted early on in the search. By focusing first on visiting "reach" schools we realize we might allow our children to fall in love with unattainable schools.
- We will expect our teen to manage the college process rather than managing it ourselves. Students should be able to sign themselves up for tests, make appointments with their counselors and colleges, and be given the space and time to practice and learn these skills as they move through the process. When parents do so much that their student doesn't know the details of their own application process, it removes student agency but also their capacity to solve problems on their own.
- We will not over-edit or rewrite our child's college essay.
- We will resist the idea that a successful future is dependent on a degree from any one college or "tier" of colleges. Instead, we will start the whole process from this point: My child could be happy and successful at any number of colleges and what they do in college and beyond matters much more than where they go.
- We will look for opportunities to share information and resources about colleges with other students and families who may not have the same access and will encourage our child to do the same.

SCHOOL-FAMILY COMPACT

- We will always treat school counselors, teachers, and staff respectfully.
- We will emphasize gratitude and expect our teen to thank the people who are helpful to them in their pathway to learning and in the college admissions experience. We will thank these people ourselves.
- We will discuss the potential ethical issues (cheating, misrepresentation, etc.) the college application experience raises and emphasize the importance of never cheating or misrepresenting yourself in this process.
- We will not push to override the school's recommendation on the number of advanced courses our student should take.

SCHOOLS

- We will set a tone of opportunity, reinforcing many different pathways to a college degree at a range of schools rather than focus on selectivity and competition in our college counseling and messaging to students and families.
- We will keep families informed in a timely manner of all deadlines and details of the college admission process.
- We will contact the family if a teen is regularly falling asleep in class, not eating, or displaying other symptoms that suggest achievement-related distress.
- We will not compare students' grades, college lists, or extracurricular involvement to those of other students.
- We will develop and provide admissions-related activities that benefit a broad range of students.
- We will expose students to a wide range of colleges in meaningful ways.
- We will not just focus on students logging hours of service, but rather on meaningful civic engagement where students feel like they are making an impact on the lives of others and/or the community. We will provide students with various opportunities to contribute to the school community or other communities and enable them to choose an opportunity that is meaningful to them.
- We will create opportunities for students to share resources about college with their classmates.
- We will celebrate all college acceptances in the same manner.
- We will not print newspaper ads, list college destinations in graduation programs, or publicly display acceptances in ways that will make some students feel left out or like failures.
- We will make college planning one part of a larger advising program that identifies individual student pathways.
- We will be mindful about the unique backgrounds and experiences of families and acknowledge that parents from different demographics and populations need different counsel and have varying familiarity with the admission process.
- We will use the college admissions process as an opportunity for ethical education and directly address issues of equity, authenticity, honesty, etc.
- We will guide students in reporting substantial family contributions and challenges in their college applications.
- We will educate families about tuition rates and/or scholarships available at a wide range of colleges, and about the costs and benefits of alternative pathways to careers.
- We will not allow students to overload on extracurricular activities and will create limits on the number of in-school commitments a student may choose.
- We will create healthy limits on advanced courses based on our school's specific curriculum, homework policy, and other unique demands.
- We will get to know your child, listen to them carefully, and thus be better able to follow and lead them in the college admissions process.

SIGNED

[SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE]

[PARENT REPRESENTATIVE]