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Lamorinda Schools

The Downside of Early Testing for College Admission

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

These days I frequently hear the question: "Is it my imagination or is the college admission process starting earlier and earlier?" I can assure you, it is not your imagination. Parts of the college admission process are starting earlier each year. One unfortunate consequence is that some students are taking the official SAT or ACT before they are ready. In January of last year I provided an article on "The Big Tests" which addressed the basics of testing and the value of preparation (http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0224/College-Admissions-The-Big-Tests.html). This issue's article addresses the importance of proper timing for the big tests—when is the best time to take standardized tests like the SAT and the ACT?

at a fast pace. By taking the SAT or ACT in the fall, 11th graders deprive themselves of months of classroom education. Students can feel deflated by low test scores and think poorly of themselves. In fact, low test scores are often due to the fact that the student has not completed related coursework.

There is a strong link between greater maturity and better testing results. Younger students are frequently not interested in college because it seems such a long way off. Early testing can lead them to tune out or burn out. Trust me, neither one is a desirable outcome. All too often I see students suffering from burn out. Many times this is linked to early pressure to excel on standardized testing for college.

If a student has completed relevant coursework and really wants to test, an excellent option is to take a full length practice exam. Students can do so without these scores appearing on their permanent record. Some test preparation professionals offer this service in the hope you will return to their company for further preparation. That's a good way for students to get practice without some of the downsides of early testing. Just avoid getting drawn into early test prep. Use the practice to get a feel for the test(s) and learn strengths and areas to focus on for improvement. Use high school coursework as a means to improve math skills, writing ability and critical reading.

More formal test preparation can take place during the winter and early spring of 11th grade. A good rule of thumb is for 11th graders to plan to complete a first round of testing by the end of spring semester. There are many opportunities to retake tests in senior year, if necessary.

There are several very appropriate ways to prepare early for the path to college. Here are my top picks:

- Students should focus on doing their best work in high school and take challenging courses over time—particularly in subjects they do well in and enjoy.
- Students should engage in systematic and meaningful extracurricular activities such as sports, music, employment or volunteerism. Students who do a few things they are passionate about are better prepared for college admission than those who cram their schedules with many random activities. In this case less is more.
- Use family vacations and school breaks to explore college campuses in relaxed, informal ways. It doesn't matter if the student plans to apply to these schools—the goal is to simply get a general feel for the variety of colleges that exist. Over the course of a year or so, try to include in the mix a two-year community college, a large public university (one in your state and/or one out-of-state), a small liberal arts college as well as

a technical or specialty school. Students can benefit greatly from these informal opportunities to become familiar with college admission terminology as well as the size and feel of college environments.

The journey to college can and should be longer and more relaxed, rather than forced and pressured. As a community we would do well to support this objective so that by the time students get to their freshman year in higher education, they will be primed to learn, grow and thrive over the course of four happy, productive years.



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an educational consultant and certified college admission advisor. Her goal is to help freshman applicants as well as transfer students and their families understand the process, research college and career options, create a balanced college list and submit strong and cohesive applications. She is familiar with local high schools and has guided three daughters through the college admission process in addition to more than 400 clients. Dr. LaScala is an active member of NACAC, WACAC, and HECA and earned a certification in College Admission and Career Planning from University of California at Berkeley. Contact her at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Acalanes Union High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, November 3, at 7:30pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, November 15, at 4pm

Lafayette School District
LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, November 17, at 7pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, November 9, at 7:30pm

Bulldog Theater Company presents

Snow White

and The Seven Dwarfs

A fairytale play based on the story of the Brothers Grimm by Jessie Braham White

Orinda Intermediate School
80 Ivy Drive, Orinda

Six performances:
Wed, Nov 3, at 4:30 | Thurs, Nov 4, at 4:30
Fri, Nov 5, at 5:00 and 8:00 | Sat, Nov 6, at 3:00 and 7:00

Tickets available at www.ShowTix4U.com. Student admission \$1 at door for Wed/Thu performances only. All other shows reserved seating only.

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Students Recognized for Academic Excellence

Submitted by Julie Lekki



From left: Ashley Lok, Austen Li, Ivan Gomez Siu, David Gomez Siu, Spencer Lekki Photo provided

Several Lamorinda students were recently honored at a statewide awards ceremony for gifted children held by The Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY).

The awards are based on an exceptional performance on a rigorous, above-grade-level test given to second through eighth grade Talent Search participants. Seventh and eighth graders took the SAT or

ACT—the same tests used for college admissions. Second through sixth graders took the SCAT, an above-level test scaled for younger students.

Johns Hopkins honorees from Moraga and Lafayette included:

Burton Valley Elementary – David Yoo

Camino Pablo Elementary – David Gomez Siu

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate – Ivan Gomez Siu, Spencer Lekki, Austin Li, and Ashley Lok

Stanley Middle – Rishabh Bhatnagar, Jordan Hodder, Alexander Lee, and Hope Leng

Seven Hills School – Alexander Glavin

Girl Scout Garage Sale for "Peaceful Playgrounds"

Submitted by Suzanne Tom



(Pictured from left): Karina, Julia, Lynnette, Megan, Ivy, Lynn, Sarah and Serena Photo Suzanne Tom

The 5th grade Girl Scout troop, #30622, from Glorietta Elementary School hosted a garage sale on October 10th. The girls are working on their Bronze Award - which is purchasing a school recess program called "Peaceful Playgrounds." It in-

cludes colorful and inviting activities that are painted onto the blacktop that children can play. They are non-competitive and require no standing in line. The troop hopes to reduce the number of kids who just wander around during recess, and who

may not be comfortable joining organized games or groups of other kids. This program costs \$4,000 – the garage sale raised \$400 in just a few hours. For more information on this project please email Suzanne Tom, haleyrun@aol.com.

Lamorinda Weekly

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