

College Advice from the MHS Guidance Department

-Dan Rosenberg

For high school seniors, the period starting for some as early as October 15th is the most stressful in their academic career. This, of course, is college season; when students are sending in their applications and discovering where their future in education lies. An integral part to the application process is the guidance office, which helps guide prospective college students navigate the murky waters of application season. Lead counselor Meredith Reardon heads the guidance office at Marblehead High School. I sat down and talked with her about guidance's involvement in the college application process.

For a lot of students, applying to college begins with early applications, where a student will apply to one college early, and if they get in will automatically commit to that school. For some students, this application goes out on October 15th, but most send it out on November 1st. The stress begins now. For those who don't do early application, they will not find out whether or not they got into their dream college until March or April. Thus begins the waiting game, which can be hard to deal with. Mrs. Reardon says that guidance does what they can to try and help relieve stress. She says that they talk to the students, and are realistic about their prospects, so that there are no major surprises. But even before the application process, there is a lot that goes in to choosing a school.

One major question that many juniors and seniors have to deal with is the SATs versus the ACTs. Reardon says that Marblehead is an SAT school, as is much of the east coast, but it's entirely up to the student which to take. They have minor differences; the ACT has science in it, for example, but there is not a major divide between the two. Interestingly enough, counselor Reardon tells me that for some schools, the standardized tests are losing their relevance. "A lot of colleges out there have shifted to a more holistic approach." This means they that are starting to focus more on the transcript and extra-curricular activities of their applicants than their SAT or ACT scores. But, she says, she expects that no matter what, the elite tier of colleges will always place a lot of importance on standardized tests.

Another way guidance helps with the preparation before applying to college is with the Naviance program. Naviance is a data driven web program that tracks a student's progress through high school. It also tracks success rates for students getting in to certain colleges, helping to lead students to choose the right schools to apply to. Guidance uses this to help deliberate what schools a student should apply to, and also incorporates a student's transcript, and a list of criteria that the student would like their college to meet. For instance, a student can tell guidance what size school they would like, what area of the country they'd like to live in, etc. Mrs. Reardon says that she recommends students apply to 8-10 colleges, but with the convenience of online applications many apply to 10-12 schools.

Finally, Mrs. Reardon has some advice for students who feel that college is so far away. It's not, she says, and it can be very hard to bring up that GPA after a bad freshman year, and it's a major let down to get into a college because of a poor first year in the high school. But, she says, don't take on courses that you can't succeed in. Take courses that challenge you, but still allow for success.