

Why it might make sense to shell out for help with those college application.



Prospective students tour Georgetown University's campus in Washington.

Gaining an edge in the fierce competition of college applications now comes with a price some parents are willing to pay — even if it's \$20,000. With school counselors spending [an average of 42 minutes per student](#) on college planning, parents are turning to professionals who help with college strategy and essay prep.

The nationwide average student-to-school-counselor ratio is 482 to 1, [according to recent data from the American School Counselor Association](#). And, with dwindling school resources forcing budget cuts, guidance counselors frequently find themselves performing tasks such as disciplining and proctoring exams, leaving them with less time to spend with students to plan for college.

Parents and their children soon learn the college application process is complicated, daunting and shouldn't be rushed.

“Contrary to what those unfamiliar with the process may believe, **applying to college cannot be completed, even by the most ambitious family, in a weekend,**” said Lia Jill Levitt, a college admissions consultant.

Adding to the administrative and organization challenges, requirements vary from college to college.

“Some colleges require subject test scores, while others are test optional; some require interviews; and others offer great institutional scholarships. **Having an expert adviser ensures that students know what colleges are looking for and what they offer,** so that students don’t miss out on opportunities,” said Adler.

Additionally, bringing a third party on board can mean a layer of conflict resolution, especially for families with unrealistic expectations regarding school selections.

“Most teens and their parents are at odds over this process,” Levitt told NBC News. “When I speak with parents...I often focus on mitigating familial conflict.”

Reputable college admissions counselors will not make promises about college acceptances, noted Jodi Rosenshein Atkin, an independent college admissions consultant in Rochester, New York. “Such ‘guarantees’ are actually in violation of the ethical codes and best practices of most, if not all, major organizations for higher education professionals,” she told NBC News.

Most importantly, perhaps, the services of college counseling professionals are not just for students seeking admission to the most selective colleges in the country or the most gifted students in a community.

“Every student, in my opinion, can benefit from guidance and support in a process that can be overwhelming, personally challenging, By Erica Lamberg

Tags college admission College consultant College College- bound students