

Parent Update
The Inside Scoop on the Junior Experience
Letters to Parents Speak from the Heart

Stress ramps up significantly starting in second semester junior year, as students try to balance schoolwork, studying for SATS, plus looking into colleges or other post-BHS options, which come with a lot of internal and external judgement. The limitations and forced isolation of COVID makes these pressures feel more intense.

The recent Junior Parent PTO meeting invited BHS student Peer Leaders to share their experiences of how preparing for college or post high school plans feeds into the stresses of junior and senior year, *AND* what parents can do to be understanding and supportive through these challenging years. The goal was to give parents a richer understanding of what juniors and seniors at BHS may be feeling and experiencing, and the letters expressed the views of a broad range of students, serving as a voice for many who may be struggling but not able to articulate what they are experiencing.

Students wrote to parents...

* Instead of asking me questions, why don't you do some research of your own? That way you can offer guidance when I am confused about a step of the process or want clarification and affirmation. If you don't know why I'm interested in a college or have never heard of it, learn a little bit about it. I want to know that I'm not in this alone. Please don't ask me where my friends are applying. I feel compared to them and their achievements. College does not determine my worth, and neither do my grades. I appreciate it when you help me put this in perspective. Remind me that everything will work out no matter where I end up and any college would be so lucky to have me.

** It was harder to know what I wanted and what I didn't when it came to college...to be completely honest, I still don't. So many college students describe the moment they knew they wanted to attend their current school with that "aha" moment when they visited the campus. It is really hard to have that "aha" moment [if you can't visit in person], especially when so many college websites present the same type of information. Listen to what the student wants and what will make them happy, and try your very best to be supportive of that, even if it may not align with your own version of success.*

* This is hard! I feel so much pressure on my shoulders to do this college process right, so much is riding on it, my future. Sometimes I don't want to talk about college at all and I will tell you. When I do bring it up, compliment me on the work I've completed, on my focus or my positive attitude. I feel proud when you validate my progress. I understand that you gave me time alone in order to aid my productivity, but college applications don't have to take over my whole life. If I get upset over something little, that's a clear sign that I'm mentally exhausted or irritated and I haven't worked through it. Don't be scared of conflict! We are all so isolated now, and I probably just want to cry or be hugged or talk about how I'm feeling.

** I'm hoping to go on a gap year, and I want your support. It takes a lot of planning and I don't know where to start. Please be honest if something is too expensive or not an option for me. Not knowing makes me feel worse and I fall into a spiral of wonder. Even if you can't pay for something, I still greatly value any other help you can offer – listening, researching, checking in with me emotionally - not just asking what I've completed.*

* It has been really stressful thinking about how we're going to pay for college. I see that it stresses you out as well, and I hate I can't do anything to help. Trying to think about where I should apply to college gives me a panic attack because I don't know what is realistic. Being an international applicant has been really tough, and I feel like I am ten steps behind everyone else. It scares me that I'll get into college but wouldn't be able to afford it. So you see, telling me not to worry about it doesn't help -- I need more information.

** I am sorry I am not a better student. You always criticize me for not working hard enough, but I am always working hard. It really upsets me when I try really hard on a paper and get back a bad grade. I don't need you reminding me that I will never get into a good college if I don't get better grades. You get mad at me for not getting my homework done, but sometimes I sit down to do it, and I just can't get started, or I get stuck on a problem and get discouraged. Then I am embarrassed in class when it isn't done, which feels bad enough without you getting on my case. You might not be able to see the stress I'm going through, but the stress is still there. Sometimes it feels crushing. I get criticism from teachers, coaches, and friends, I don't need it from you too. My friends are talking about what college they are applying to, and it scares me. I don't want to think about it, but it is everywhere. I'm not ready...*

* Getting into schools is a lot more competitive than when you were my age. When you brought up Northeastern and said that I should go because it's a good school, I responded that I can't go because it's too competitive for me to get in to. You completely disregarded what I said and made it sound like I can just go anywhere I want or anywhere you want. That isn't how it works. I know you were trying to be supportive, but Brookline High is ultra-competitive with so many high achievers, and I don't think you understand the stress we go through on a daily basis. I am afraid you will be critical of me because I won't get into a school as good as the ones you both went to.

** This last year of school has been really hard and I know my grades aren't good, so I don't know where I could even get in. You tell me that everyone is going through the same thing, and I just need to focus more, but it still sucks. I worry that I am going to disappoint you... I don't mean to shut you out, but you don't seem to understand how hard it is to get into college these days, not like when you went to school.*

* Thinking about applying to colleges makes my head spin. It seems like there are some many things to think about -- dates to remember, and things I need to do. My guidance counselor assures me I am at the right level with my classes but my best friends are all taking AP's. With my ADHD, school has always been more of a struggle, but I can't help comparing myself to my friends. Some of them seem to do even better with zoom classes, but I can't seem to stay focused. I am also not sure about the SAT or the ACT tests, which one I should take, or if I should take a prep course.

** Thinking about college worries me so much because I have no idea what I want to do with my life or where I want to go. I try to motivate myself by saying my hard work will pay off and that I will*

eventually end up somewhere where I will be happy and thrive. However, often that vision gets blurred or seems so far out of my grasp that it's hard to want to do school work. On top of being an athlete and having long hours, all my school work, other extracurriculars, and dealing with friend drama, it feels so completely overwhelming. All I ask is for you guys to be patient when I don't want to talk or am just exhausted.

Senior students advice to parents...

- Despite the pressures, senior year can also be fun. Look forward to it! Planning for life after high school can be exciting. Hopefully next year will be more normal, with sports and social activities. Seniors have worked so hard to get to that final year, and they should be proud of themselves.
- There are many helpful resources at school -- guidance counselors, career counselors, social workers, and teachers can give advice or just to listen to students about their stress and concerns.
- Ask family members, relatives, and friends not to talk about what we are doing after high school or what school we are applying to. That feeds our anxiety.
- Looking into colleges is just more work and added time on our computer screens. We also need down time to relax. Encourage us to go outside, be with friends, watch TV, or do other activities.
- Cut us some slack over household chores -- it's hard for us to shift gears from homework to doing laundry.
- Don't take it personally when we are grouchy and snap at you or if we hide up in our room and need space.
- We may not let you know, but underneath we may be scared to leave home. There are a lot of mixed emotions around leaving for college -- a combination of excitement and being scared for what will come in the future. Stay positive but also make sure to give us permission to have a range of emotions and acknowledge being nervous.
- Small gestures can make a big difference -- when you bring me snack, give me a ride somewhere, or help me print something out, I feel loved and cared for, and a little less stressed out.
- Parents are our role models of how to deal with stress -- you create the climate in the home, and when you are stressing, we feel it!
- Because COVID has made this year so tricky, ask how you can be supportive regarding standardized testing, test prep, college research/applications, etc. Consider setting up a time to check in once a week on this, and don't bring it up at other times.

- Help us keep things in perspective, to remember the big picture, that whatever the outcome we'll be fine. Try not to feed into our anxiety about grades or where we will get into school, but be frank about limiting factors, like finances. At BHS, the competitive culture values prestige schools. Encourage exploring schools that might interest for other reasons.
- The nuts and bolts of applying to college can be tricky. Be a partner in the process, but let us take the lead. You may be able to help us:
 - Define what we are looking for in a post-high school experience.
 - Make a varied list of possible schools with lots of options for different interests. (Naviance can help students scan through a range of colleges. Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers" is helpful.) Keep in mind transferring after a year or two is always an option.
 - Set realistic goals and expectations, keeping financial limitations in mind.
 - Set up a spread sheet laying out cost, location, acceptance rates, deadlines/important dates, pros and cons, etc.
 - Attend virtual info sessions and tours (encourage us to take notes, ask questions).
 - Get started early with filling out the Common App --resumé page, activities section, essay ideas, etc.
- Please don't burden us with your dreams -- let us find our own path.

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