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“Hot Topics” Summary of Responses from ACT Conference Counselor Roundtable Session

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At the Counselor Roundtable Session, held on Tuesday, January 24th in Meeting Room 20 at the Columbus Renaissance Hotel, attendees were presented, in no particular order, with the following list of “Hot Topics” to discuss. In the interest of time, attendees voted for the five topics they were most interested in discussing and those are listed below the master list, in order of interest level. Each topic was discussed for only 10 minutes with participants suggesting strategies/solutions. When possible, the person providing the idea/resource is listed by name and school.

- The Dual Enrollment (versus AP) Quandry
- Counselor Evaluation Tools in a Value-Added Climate
- The Challenges of Providing a College-Career Ready Curriculum FOR ALL
- Innovative Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Students
- Innovative Freshman Transition Programs
- College Advising in the Current Economic Climate
- New Approaches to Letters of Recommendation
- New Approaches to Admission Representatives School Visits
- Innovative Uses of Social Media and Technology in College Admissions
- The Counselor’s Role in Creating a College-Going Culture

#1 – Innovative Approaches to Letters of Recommendation (25 votes)

- Using brag sheets – give to parents, teachers to complete to collect information for rec. letters
- Give specific writing prompts to students to learn about their unique experiences/perspectives. Keep in file in guidance office so that teachers and counselors can both access them.
- Stephanie Krosnosky (Bexley HS) – colleges like to see examples of “growth” over the four years, so ask them what advice they would give to their freshman “self” four years earlier.
- Question/concern posed? How to help teachers write strong letters of recommendation.
- Responses – Mark Davis (Upper Arlington High School) – give them examples of good letters, also access MIT recommendation writing website. St. Joseph HS counselor – have someone from an admissions office come in and provide PD to your teachers about what they’re looking for in the letter. With greater counseling loads, really encourage teachers (who have a close connection to a particular student) to provide the letter of reference, rather than the counselor.
#2- The Counselor Role in Creating a College-Going Culture (24 votes)

- Erin – Southwest City Schools (in Franklin County) – has developed a team to meet on this topic. Ex. Members wear a college t-shirt to their meetings, etc.
- Help support the college/career readiness CLASS that might be offered in your school (Lebanon HS example given) – serve as a guest speaker, help create curriculum or teach the class.
- Develop college (HS-IHE) partnerships – to focus on early awareness or use a “near-peer” model (ex. Painesville City Schools and Lake Erie College).
- Have alumni reception at Christmas break to talk about their experiences.
- Betty Caw (John Glenn HS) – co-host large college night with Scholarship Central. Have a mini-session there with a parent panel to talk to “new” parents about the process.
- Danny Straub (Olentangy Orange HS) – create visibility, not just in counseling office but throughout high school – college posters, pennants, etc.
- Stephanie Krosnosky (Bexley HS) – added a question to their new student enrollment form to collect 1st generation college student information. Then had a luncheon where they had First Gen. teachers come in and talk to those student (tell their story)

#3- College Advising in the Current Economic Climate (21 votes)

- “Destigmatize” attendance at the community college. Talk more openly at parent meetings about finances, financial aid opportunities. HAS to be part of the presentation.
- More explicit conversation about financial aid. Stephanie (Fairfield Career Center-Eastland-Fairfield JVSD) had a PIN day and set up 5 laptops at lunch in front of the cafeteria to allow students to get their PIN numbers immediately. Give them really easy step by step instructions. Got other kids asking questions – raising visibility.
- Cari Schultz (Columbus School for Girls) – emphasizing to parents to use the Net Price Calculator
- Stephanie Krosnosky (Bexley HS) – having financial aid literacy/investment/etc. parent programs for elementary age students.
- Seneca Big (Columbus Alternative High School) I Know I Can runs the “Blueprint College” program for Middle School parents and students (four session series). IKIC also helps with FAFSA completion and tax completion.
- OASFAA.ORG – direct link to request a financial aid night speaker.
- OCIS Financial Aid tab – very helpful
#4 Innovative Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Students. (21 votes)

- Shawnee High School in Lima is going to use the Career Choices program for the first time next year – implementing it in their English department with Math department input. Heard very good feedback on it when investigating different programs. No one else in the room had used it yet or had any input on it.
- Danny Straub (Olentangy Schools) are developing their own alternative school (online) called OASIS. 90+ students, 26 graduated last year. They use two different online—Pass Key (for credit recovery) and Apex (for enrichment/accelerated program). Betty Caw (John Glenn HS) said they use Apex for both types of coursework.
- Lebanon HS provides intervention services, with tiered levels of services ranging from tutoring to OGT remediation to credit recovery through E20/20 (used Apex last year) offered period by period. Funded by stimulus money originally, now school keeps a certified teacher to run it, to reduce drop-out prevention or keep kids from withdrawing to other online or charter schools (more cost effective).

#5 Innovative Approaches to College Representative School Visits (20 votes)

- Someone mentioned seeing a poster sent out by the college that the student could scan (with their smartphone) to sign up for the visit.
- Naviance also provides a college visit sign-up tool.

#6 Counselor Evaluation Tools in a Value-Added Climate (16 votes)

- Concern expressed about seeing staff cut immediately after being asked “Can you give me a list of all your tasks?”
- West Geauga is using the ASCA Model – principal specifically told them to NOT attach any student growth factors. However, as a Race to the Top school which is required to develop an instrument based on student growth, what is the appropriate response?
- Ashland School counselors were going to use the ASCA evaluation model but put the brakes on because of HB bill (number ?) that speaks to NOT RIFing based on seniority but on “comparative evaluations”