

# IECA<sup>+</sup> INSIGHTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Summer 2022

## Helping Students with Mental Illness Transition to College

### INSIDE



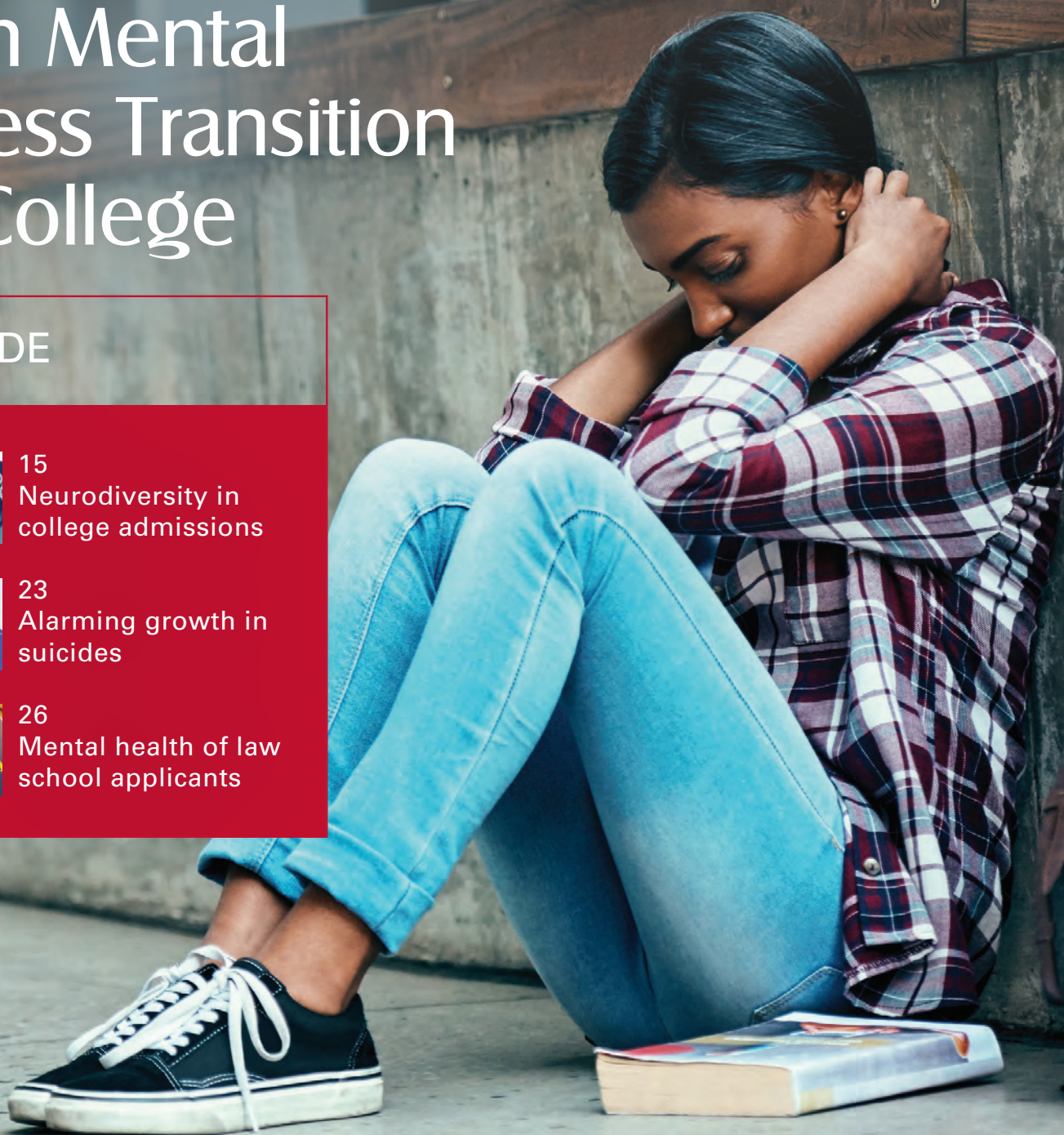
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IECA<sup>+</sup> INSIGHTS

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# President's Letter

## Let's Elevate IECA

2008. The height of the Great Recession: the housing market collapsed, the economy tanked, unemployment soared, inflation hit the highest levels at the time—and here I was starting my educational consulting business. Friends and family called me “Crazy!” But I had a plan laid out with vision, mission, goals, objectives, and operations while considering the external and internal opportunities and threats. A careful assessment and execution of a strategic plan is the way to navigate a business or a membership organization in good times and tough times.

2022. History repeats itself with the difficult economic climate, but this time, I’m tasked with navigating a mature, growing, global organization, IECA, through that climate instead of my newborn business. The Strategic Plan 2022-2027 is the guide by which we will **ELEVATE IECA** to the next level.

Timing of the IECA Strategic Plan 2022-2027 could not have been any better. Having already experienced one of the most tumultuous and uncertain times in our history, IECA has not only pivoted well but

emerged stronger than before with healthy membership growth, programming variety and innovation, continued engagement even in the most difficult of times, and most importantly, its members at the center of everything we do. In the midst of this innovation and pivoting came the IECA Strategic Plan 2022-2027 under the leadership of Jane Shropshire and Allison Matlack, along with their committee, who tirelessly spent nearly a year to assess the past, evaluate the current state, and plan the future of IECA.

Internal and external environmental scans, membership surveys, and a variety of assessments have resulted in four strategic initiatives and one common emphasis across all four to **ELEVATE IECA**:

- **Advocacy & Awareness:** Since the Varsity Blues scandal in 2019, our profession has continuously come under scrutiny in the media, popular culture, and local and state governments through various legislation. Thanks to the vital work of our Government Relations Committee, we have responded timely with effectiveness and tenacity. However, we have often



Ibrahim Firat

“chased” the news or the legislation reactively, rather than “getting ahead” of them proactively. It is time to **ELEVATE IECA’s** status and become an integral part of the conversations that take place behind closed doors. We need to influence change that impacts members, colleagues, and the clients we serve. This is the time to be proud to carry the IECA member logo on your website, printed materials, and in your offices!

- **Education:** Independent EDUCATIONal Consultants Association. Education is literally at the heart of IECA. It is the epitome, the pinnacle. So why change something that’s not broken? Because that’s what learning and growing organizations do. The COVID period has taught us unimaginable ways, formats, and delivery methods to engage our members, non-members, sponsors, advertisers, programs, schools, and

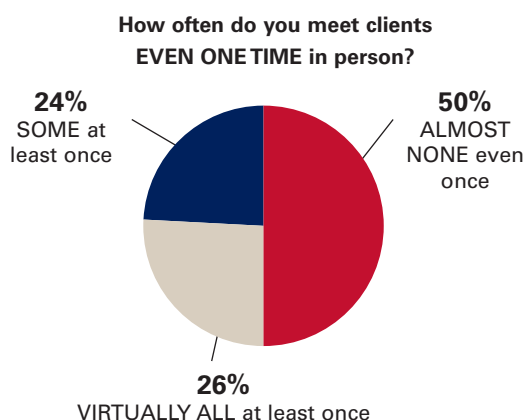
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## In Focus

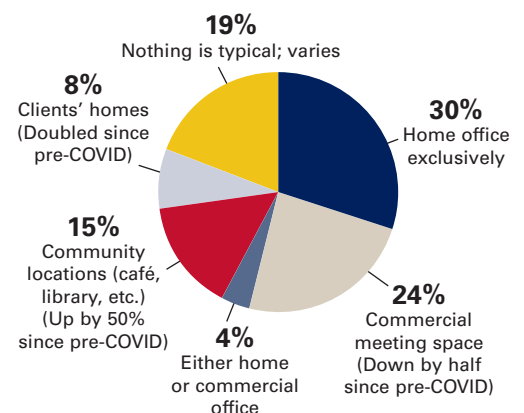
### Key Points from the 2022 State of the Profession Survey

#### How IECs are Meeting with Clients in this COVID World

It’s unsurprising that IECA members are seeing clients less regularly in person than they did 10 years ago, when almost 90% of all student meetings were held face-to-face.



#### Where are your in-person meetings taking place?





# Calendar

For the most up-to-date calendar of events and more details, visit the home page of the IECA Member Network: [network.IECAonline.com](https://network.IECAonline.com)

AUGUST	<b>03 </b> MBA Virtual Roundtable	<b>09 </b> New Jersey Regional Group Meeting	<b>10 </b> LatinX/Hispanic Affinity Group Meeting	<b>11 </b> Bimonthly New Member Welcome Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting
	<b>12 </b> Business Practices Roundtable Consultants with Young Children Affinity Group Meeting	<b>18 </b> Financial Aid & Affordability Roundtable Medical School Roundtable	<b>19 </b> Professional Members Roundtable	<b>24 </b> Homeschooling Affinity Group Roundtable IECA Town Hall Meeting
	<b>25 </b> Fall Conference Registration Opens New Jersey Regional Group Meeting	<b>26 </b> Associate & Student Members Roundtable	<b>31 </b> Global Gathering Open Forum Large IEC Business Affinity Group Meeting	
SEPTEMBER	<b>05 </b> Labor Day: IECA Office Closed	<b>07 </b> State of the Profession Webinar MBA Virtual Roundtable	<b>08 </b> Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	<b>09 </b> Business Practices Roundtable Fall Conference Early Bird Registration Ends Consultants with Young Children Affinity Group Meeting
	<b>13 </b> New Jersey Regional Group Meeting	<b>16 </b> Professional Members Roundtable	<b>21 </b> Medical School Roundtable	<b>23 </b> Associate & Student Members Roundtable
	<b>28 </b> Global Gathering Open Forum			
OCTOBER	<b>05 </b> MBA Roundtable Regional Group Leaders Virtual Meeting	<b>13 </b> Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	<b>14 </b> Business Practices Roundtable Consultants with Young Children Affinity Group Meeting	<b>19 </b> Medical School Roundtable
	<b>21 </b> Professional Members Roundtable	Global Gathering Open Forum	<b>28 </b> Associate & Student Members Roundtable	

## IECA Annual Town Hall

August 24, 2 p.m. ET

Join us live on Zoom on August 24 for the annual IECA Town Hall. You'll hear from CEO Mark Sklarow and Board President Ibrahim Firat on the state of the association, how we have come through the 2021-22 year, and what plans and new ideas are being implemented in the months ahead. A number of IECA officers will explore what IECA's committees, Affinity Groups, and Regional Groups have planned for the coming year. And you'll hear more on the new IECA strategic plan. For more information, visit the Member Network: [network.IECAonline.com](https://network.IECAonline.com)

# It Was Great to be Back In Person Together in Philly!



Roundtable discussions among IEC colleagues were fun and informative.



Conference Central was a bustling hub of networking between IECs, vendors, and service providers.





Dr. Nii Addy and our other ACE Speakers inspired and invigorated attendees.

Below: IECA friends enjoyed seeing each other in person for the first time in years!



Left: Whoops! Board President Kristina Dooley and CEO Mark Sklarow "forgot" this conference wasn't on Zoom!



The College and Postsecondary Fair, K-12 School Exchange, and Therapeutic Info Swap were great opportunities to learn and connect.



With over 1,400 attendees, this was one of the largest IECA conferences ever!



colleges. While most of this change was required and necessary, some, if not most, are here to stay for better efficiency and broader reach. Think about your live virtual conferences, online professional retreats, and the numerous College Conversations you have attended on Zoom. Can you imagine a life with them prior to COVID? And now...Can you imagine a life without them? We must find an optimum balance that ensures we meet all of our stakeholders where they are while guaranteeing quality of content and that needs are met, no matter how or where the content is delivered.

- **Membership & Engagement:** For more than 45 years, IECA membership meant that a single owner/IEC would pay annual dues and reap the benefits. Over the last 10 years, however, IEC demographics and experiences have been shifting dramatically: multi-person IEC practices have been emerging more than ever, which spurred the development of multi-location presence, including online; nonprofit organizations have been emerging to serve underserved and underrepresented groups in school, therapeutic, and college admissions landscapes; affiliated or support organizations for IECs have become more pervasive than ever, making our lives as IECs more streamlined and effective. In this ever-evolving environment, IECA will adapt and reimagine membership levels and categories to engage all of those who contribute to our profession with one purpose in mind: **ELEVATE IECA, IECs, and the profession.**

- **Professional Excellence:** Every time I speak with a new member or even a seasoned member, I get the same response as to why they joined IECA: IECA is the one-stop shop for all my professional needs as an IEC. This became even more evident in the last two years, when programming and engagement with and among members hit a new high—unlike many other organizations and businesses, which suffered during the same period. Nearly 10 percent membership growth year after year since COVID began is proof of why IECA continues to be the professional excellence standard of the industry. In the next five years, we will take the professional excellence and standards to the next level by engaging in original research, white papers, and collaboration with various educational institutions and organizations to **ELEVATE** your membership, your value, and those of IECA and the profession.

Now that you know the *what*, let's talk about the *how*. Each of the four major initiatives will be driven with **I-D-E-A** (inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility) in mind. As a learning and growing organization, IECA will not stay static to the evolving environment, propelled by the changing demographics and needs, in any of these four fronts. Think about some of these example questions:

- How would it look if IECA as an organization or you as an IEC did not **advocate**, raise **awareness**, or take action for underrepresented and underserved students in the admissions process?
- Can you imagine **educational** programming that doesn't include global perspectives or struggles our members, students, and partner organizations experience?

- How can we propel our **membership and engagement** without involving the ever-growing diversity within IECA to represent the leadership in our organization through committees and service?
- How can we remain the **professional excellence** standard without exploring the root causes of and proposed solutions for inequity and lack of access through original research or white papers?

Our Board of Directors and the entire staff are committed to uphold these strategic drivers through initiatives with specific timelines and metrics to measure performance. My promise to you is to **communicate** our progress on a regular basis and solicit your specific help in these initiatives.

This is the time to get involved in various committees, Regional Groups, Affinity Groups, conferences, webinars, tours, and events. All IECA committees and programming moving forward will include elements of the IECA Strategic Plan 2022-27, with specific timelines and goals.

How can you get involved? What expertise do you have that can help achieve our goals? We need YOU... **We need you NOW to ELEVATE IECA, IECs, and the profession to the next level.**



Ibrahim Firat, MBA  
IECA President

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# Join Us for IECA's Fall Conference

November 7-9, 2022 | San Diego, CA

We're excited to reconvene this November for our first in-person West Coast conference in five years! Join us in San Diego to connect with 1,300 fellow attendees—including hundreds of independent educational consultants, vendors, and admission leaders. You'll have the opportunity to participate in daily small roundtable sessions and learn from dynamic speakers in more than 60 educational sessions exploring school and college admissions, adolescent behavior, business management, and more topics impacting the educational consulting profession.

The conference will feature our College & Postsecondary Fair, K-12 School Exchange, and Therapeutic Info Swap as well as plenty of opportunities to network as you enjoy the beautiful San Diego waterfront.

## Pre-Conference Workshops

Pre-conference workshops on a variety of topics will be offered on the morning of Monday, November 7. More information will be posted on our conference website ([link.IECAonline.com/conference-info](https://link.IECAonline.com/conference-info)) in August.

## Pre-/Post-Conference Tours

College, university, and school tours will take both before and after the conference. Only conference registrants will be permitted to register for these special campus tours. For details, visit our website: [link.IECAonline.com/conference-tours](https://link.IECAonline.com/conference-tours)

These renowned thought leaders will kick off the day's program on Monday, November 7.

## ACE (Adolescence, Consulting, and Education) Speakers



### Julie Lythcott-Haims

Julie Lythcott-Haims believes in humans and is deeply interested in what gets in our way. The *New York Times* bestselling author of *How to Raise an Adult*, which gave rise to a popular TED Talk, Lythcott-Haims' work encompasses writing, speaking, teaching, mentoring, and activism. She currently serves on the boards of Common Sense Media, Black Women's Health Imperative, *Narrative Magazine*, and the California College of the Arts.



### Jonathan Mooney

Jonathan Mooney is a dyslexic writer, speaker, and do-gooder whose work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, HBO, NPR, and elsewhere. In recognition of his advocacy for those who learn differently, he has been awarded the Harry S. Truman Fellowship for Public Services, been a Finalist for a Roads Scholarship, and received an LA Achievement Award from The Lab School of Washington.

Conference registration opens August 25. Visit [link.IECAonline.com/conference-info](https://link.IECAonline.com/conference-info) for the most current information.

# Introducing The AXS Companion to Common App

## IECA's Largest-Ever Commitment to a Service Project

College enrollment continues to decline while barriers for under-resourced students grow—but The AXS Companion to Common App, a new initiative by IECA, in partnership with Oregon State University, aims to reverse this trend by supporting these students as they begin their college journey.

Applying to college can be a confusing, overwhelming, and often stressful process for students from families unfamiliar with US college admissions—particularly those from under-resourced backgrounds, including first-generation, lower-income, and/or underrepresented minorities. According to Common App, approximately one-third of their applicants are first-generation students.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated challenges facing under-resourced students: closed schools meant reduced or no access to counselors, as well as limited opportunities for support from fellow students and teachers. Last year, Common App reports, 700,000 high school seniors created accounts on their platform but never completed an application.



Seeing this disparity, a group of IECA members set out to make a change. Their goal: improve access to higher education and create clarity in the college application process. The result is The AXS Companion, a free online resource of 50-plus video and audio modules for each section of Common App, which aims to support hundreds of thousands of under-resourced students in their journeys to college.

Students using The AXS Companion may choose to either watch the videos as they complete each step of Common App from beginning to end, or to watch an individual section's video to better understand how to respond to that specific section based on their circumstance.

Those of you who attended the IECA 2022 Spring Conference in Philadelphia saw a “sneak peek” of The AXS Companion. The resource will be presented at the NACAC National Conference in Houston, September 22-24, and made available to students that same month.


For the most up-to-date information on the launch of The AXS Companion, visit our website ([IECAonline.com](http://IECAonline.com)) or follow us on social media.

### How the Project Came About

Several years ago, Maite Halley, an IECA member who has been a leader in the association in several capacities, envisioned this project as live workshops to support under-resourced communities. During COVID-19, Marilyn O'Toole, IECA member and liaison to Common App, asked Common App leadership if IECA members could pivot and develop step-by-step videos for the initiative instead.

With Common App's approval, O'Toole then engaged Jon Boeckstedt, vice provost at Oregon State University, to discuss solutions to store and organize the video resources. This evolved into the collaborative framework of Oregon State University Ecampus building the platform, with IECA providing the content.

Over the last nine months, many IECA members have worked tirelessly on this project, including: Ibrahim Firat, Louise Franklin, Carolyn Geldermann, Anne Holmdahl, Sylvia Jackman, Amy Jasper, Jennie Kent, Jeff Levy, Janae McCullough-Boyd, Marilyn O'Toole, Chantal Paiewonsky, Veena Rao, Pat Smith, and Juan-Camilo Tamayo. These dedicated members produced the project content, which included writing and editing curriculum and scripts, as well as recording audio and video for 50-plus modules for each section of Common App. Additionally, they called on experts in various fields to support their efforts, and created modules that provide financial aid guidance, essay suggestions, and admissions officers' advice. The project creators chose the name The AXS Companion because of the double entendre: improving student access through the collaborative axis of higher education and IECA.

IECA is grateful to the members of the Oregon State University Ecampus who trained our colleagues to record each section and then edited hours of their recordings, adding animation to make the directions and guidance clear. In addition, thank you to the engineers, graphic designers, animators, and project managers who have worked tirelessly to create this invaluable resource. 





# Helping Students With Mental Illness Transition to College

By Regina Gerrato, MA, IECA (CA); Julie Richie, MFA, IECA (TX); and Marci Schwartz, LCSW, PhD, IECA Associate (CA)

With teen depression and anxiety exacerbated by the pandemic, more high school students are undergoing treatment for mental illness. According to the National Institute of Mental Illness, one in eight US adolescents aged 12-17 (about 2.9 million) had at least one major depressive episode with severe impairment in 2020. A 2021 national poll by the CS Mott Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan (Mott Poll Report, March 15, 2021) revealed that up to 36 percent of parents noticed new or worsening anxiety in their teens. Often, mental illness is intensified during major life transitions—such as going to college.

Across the country, colleges are facing a huge increase in the number of students who need ongoing counseling and support services. Many schools are not prepared to handle the demand for on-campus mental health counseling, medication evaluations, and ongoing academic support programs. This is concerning since students with current mental health issues who do not receive services are at risk for failure. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 64 percent of students who drop out of college do so because of mental illness.

As students with mental illness prepare for college, it will be critical to place mental health at the center of their college search and create a proactive transition plan. Students should not rely on college counseling centers to take over their treatment; they are typically meant only for short-

term intervention rather than ongoing treatment. Below are important aspects to consider in working with the student on the college list, college decision, and transition away from home.

## College List Considerations

When creating the student's college list, it is important to identify the level of support that each college can offer by evaluating the medical services, counseling center, and office of accessibility services. Discussing support needs with the student's current therapist or other professionals working with the student can help independent educational consultants (IECs) ensure that the list of colleges offers appropriate access to resources. Parents will need to sign a consent form to allow an IEC to talk to these individuals.

**Will the student need to keep the current treatment team?** If so, colleges closer to home may be necessary, at least to start. Keeping with the current support professionals (academic and mental health) offers the student a sense of stability.

**Does the student's current therapist offer virtual sessions?** Licensing requirements differ from state to state so a family should discuss the therapist's ability and/or willingness to treat the student out of state. If virtual sessions are an option, and if the student feels comfortable with that, it may mean

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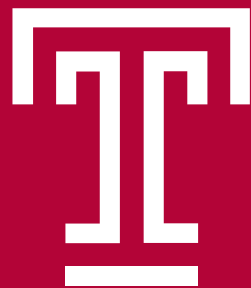
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that being close to home is not as important. Students also have the option to start with a new therapist in the community where a college is located.

**Will the student have a car to be able to drive to therapy appointments and pick up prescriptions? If not, is a car-ride service readily available or might public transportation be a practical option for the student?** If not, exploring colleges with resources within walking distance (or accessible with campus shuttles) may be critical.

### Important documents to discuss with a student before leaving for college:

1. **FERPA Release:** Having a student sign this form will allow parents access to academic and disciplinary information, which would otherwise not be available to them.
2. **HIPAA Authorization:** Having a student sign a HIPAA release allows parents to speak with health care providers and access medical records. This is critical in the case of a mental health or other health emergency.

These forms exist in various departments depending on the university. The best practice is to call the accessibility services office to learn next steps. For students who have significant mental health concerns, other forms may also be important. Families should consult the student's mental health professional for advice.

## The College Decision

As students consider their college options, it is important to explore the following questions:

**Is there access to mental health support that fits the student's needs?** Either the family or the therapist can contact the college counseling center to see if it offers referrals for nearby therapists. Finding out if there is a disability support coordinator with mental health experience can also be helpful for the transition process.

**How will the student refill prescriptions?** It will be important for the student to ensure they are taking their medications as prescribed, and access to a pharmacy can be a big part of making that happen.

**What is the climate of mental health support on campus?** What accommodations will the student be eligible to receive through the accessibility services office? Is there an Active Minds club or other mental wellness offerings? What resources does the counseling center at the college offer? Reaching out to these resources is a good way for students to understand the available support.

**What is the academic learning environment?** Some colleges offer a more collaborative and inclusive environment than others. The type of learning environment can have an impact on students when the fit for their personality is considered. Speaking with current students at a college and consulting other resources can help a student understand the student experiences at each college they are considering.


*Some colleges offer a more collaborative and inclusive environment than others. The type of learning environment can have an impact on students when the fit for their personality is considered.*

## Transition Considerations

It is important to ensure that the student's mental health is assessed for success in the transition to college through contacts with the therapists, the family, and other community-based resources. An IEC is in a unique position to support the student's mental health team by offering guidance on what makes a successful transition to college, including the following:

- The student understands their mental health diagnosis and can discuss their needs with the appropriate staff (counseling service, disability office, RA, professors, etc.).
- The student independently takes their medication and can manage their prescriptions.
- The student is building the skills to be able to identify when they need help and independently access available resources.
- The student understands the importance of attending classes regularly and is open to building the study skills they will need for success in college.
- The student has previously demonstrated success in being away from home.

## Conclusion

High school students who have mental health challenges often have assistance from one or more family members. If the family provided a significant amount of support during high school, it could be difficult for the student to take over this role all of a sudden. Families can help the student manage their mental health challenges if they begin allowing the student to take the lead in these areas, including refilling prescriptions, setting doctors' appointments, and learning how and when to ask for help. Every student will develop these skills at their own pace and working together as a team to determine the appropriate next steps is how IECs can guide each student through their unique situation. 



## MARIANAPOLIS PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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Marianapolis is a Catholic co-educational boarding and day school nestled in northeast Connecticut. Located in proximity to major cities such as Boston, New York City, Hartford, and Providence, Marianapolis serves over 300 students from around the globe. Experiential learning is the core of the Marianapolis pedagogy, featuring short-term explorations – offering everything from cranberry bogging to blacksmithing – and a week of travel-based study in the spring. The traditional college-prep curriculum, including 22 AP® courses, can be coupled with targeted tracks in Business & Entrepreneurship, Social Justice, or Innovation. With over 40 clubs and organizations, 12 extracurricular options, and 17 interscholastic programs, Marianapolis has opportunities for every student to make an impact.







# Neurodiversity in College Admissions

By Eric Endlich, PhD, IECA (CA)

I've noticed that when the topic of student diversity comes up during campus tours and information sessions, admissions officers usually focus on how many different states and countries are represented by the freshman class, and how many students of color will be attending. While these numbers matter, to be sure, there's rarely any mention of gender diversity, diversity of abilities, or *neurodiversity*.

Neurodiversity refers to the fact that our brains don't all work the same way, and that around 15-20 percent of us are neurodivergent, characterized by autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or other patterns outside the neurotypical mainstream. In contrast to the *medical model*, which views these diagnoses as forms of pathology to be prevented or treated, the *neurodiversity paradigm* suggests that *different* does not mean defective or inferior, but merely—well—different.

The neurodiversity paradigm is rooted in the *social model* of disability (Comberousse, 2019), which argues that disability is not inherent in the person, but rather a condition created by an environment

that is not sufficiently accommodating or supportive; wheelchair users, for example, may or may not be disabled from navigating a building, depending on the presence of ramps and elevators. One might argue that the very definition of an "ability" is in the eye of the beholder. Lack of eye contact, for instance, is often cited as a "symptom" of autism by neurotypical people who view eye contact as an essential component of nonverbal communication, but some cultures view eye contact quite differently (Uono & Hietanen, 2015).

Using the lens of neurodiversity, we can more easily appreciate the unique strengths of neurodivergent individuals and the benefits of neurodiversity inclusion. A few colleges have embraced this perspective, as evidenced by the Neurodiversity Center at Landmark College, the Stanford Neurodiversity Project, the Center for Neurodiversity at Rowan University, and the Neurodiversity Initiative at the College of William & Mary. A number of companies are also ahead of the curve, recognizing that great minds don't always

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think alike, and that diversity of thought is conducive to creativity and innovation. Companies with proactive neurodiversity hiring initiatives include Goldman Sachs, Ford, Microsoft, Dell, EY, JP Morgan, and Google.

Many people who are neurodivergent experience *intersectionality* because they belong to other minority groups as well. For example, there is a significant overlap between the autism community and the LGBTQ+ (especially trans and non-binary) community (George & Stokes, 2018). Students who belong to both identity groups sometimes feel doubly marginalized and are highly sensitive to issues of inclusion. They are often concerned about finding colleges where they'll feel safe and welcomed. If they also belong to a racial minority, these issues may be heightened further still.

As independent educational consultants (IECs), what role can we play in helping these students find a safe haven? First, I believe we need to convey to them that we not only respect, but celebrate, their differences. We can do this in many ways, including simple things like learning what pronouns and terminology they use. For example, most people on the spectrum prefer terms such as *autistic person*, known as “identity-first” language, to “person-first” terms such as *person with autism* (Organization for Autism Research, 2020).

Second, we can help students find inclusive schools using tools such as the College Equity Index (for Black students), the Campus Pride Index (for LGBTQ+ students) and the Top College Consultants list of neurodiversity-friendly colleges ([topcollegeconsultants.com/autism-in-college](http://topcollegeconsultants.com/autism-in-college)). We can encourage them to attend colleges that

have neurodiversity clubs and LD support programs—or to start their own clubs if they're interested. Every time a family (or IEC) inquires during a tour about such clubs and programs, they are communicating to colleges what matters to them. These “votes” can send a powerful cumulative message.

***Be advised, though, that the vast majority of students with learning differences who obtain special education services in high school do not register with disability services in college, and hence receive no special accommodations or services at all.***

We, too, can send a message to colleges that diversity and inclusion matter to our students. Minority students are not the only ones who voice these concerns; I've met many white students, for example, who seek racially diverse campuses. When we attend information sessions, we can ask admissions officers what percentage of students are neurodivergent or have disclosed disabilities. Be advised, though, that the vast majority of students with learning differences who obtain special education services in high school do not register with disability services in college, and hence receive no special accommodations or services at all (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017). Small wonder that their rate of graduation is markedly lower than that of their peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). By raising the visibility of neurodiversity, we have the potential to create more inclusive



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colleges that entice students not only to attend but also to be open or “out” about their differences in ways that allow them to get the social and academic support they need.

Jill Corbin, EdD, director of college and transition counseling at Denver Academy, agrees: “If I attend an information session or campus tour and the Office of Disability Services is not mentioned, I find a way to connect with the admissions staff to encourage them to highlight the ODS supports in future presentations. I am hopeful that by hearing this same suggestion from other counselors, the Office of Disability Services will be recognized and celebrated by the Office of Admissions in all of their messaging, further establishing an inclusive campus environment.”

There is a small but growing movement to establish identity-based campus *disability cultural centers* that create a sense of community, in contrast to traditional disability centers, which are staff-run and focused on providing accommodations and services (Herder, 2022). At the University of Washington, for example, The D Center, “one of a handful of centers run by and for university students with disabilities in North America...connects the UW community by providing both a physical space...to gather, study, relax, and meet one another and build community, while acting as a host for a number of events and programs which focus on issues pertaining to disability” (UW website). We can educate our students about this movement, which may even inspire them to persuade colleges to create more such centers.

Colleges are not fixed entities; they are constantly evolving, partly in response to “customer” demand. (Remember lazy rivers and

climbing walls?) We are in a unique position to empower students to find their voices, value their unique perspectives, and blaze a trail towards more inclusive college environments. 

## Resources

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Uono, S., & Hietanen, J.K. (2015). Eye contact in the West and East: A cross-cultural study. *PLOS ONE*. [link.IECAonline.com/plos-one](http://link.IECAonline.com/plos-one)



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# The New Digital SAT: How Will It Affect International Students?

By Jennie Kent, MEd, CEP, IECA (Colombia)

As someone who largely works with international students, I wasn't overjoyed when I heard that international SAT exams would be completely digital beginning in March 2023. My head filled with memories from when the international ACT exam went digital in late 2018 and there were technological glitches, canceled or rescheduled exams, and a reduction of test sites. I wondered what this College Board announcement would mean for the students that I work with.

While I won't really know until the first student cohort experiences the digital SAT, I have identified some pros and cons. Here are my thoughts on the relevant changes and what they mean:

- **More test dates** – international locations will get two additional test dates per year. I hope that this means an end to my students feeling disenfranchised by having fewer opportunities to take the exam. It could also result in less expenditures as students will likely stop traveling abroad to try 'one last time' for a better score on a more convenient date.
- **Test date flexibility** – a digital exam is easier to administer and allows for more flexibility. While this sounds like a good thing, if school-based test centers decide to hold the exam during school (as the College Board is encouraging them to do), it would make it harder for students who are homeschooled or attend schools that are *not* test centers to register for and take an exam. In the end, it may be more limiting.
- **Students can use their own devices** – laptops, tablets, or devices issued by the test center will also be allowed. I really want to like this. My reasoning is that allowing students to use their own devices seems easier than insisting that test centers provide them for everyone registered at their site. A student's own device will be familiar and, ideally, they will have used Khan Academy's free prep materials ([link.IECAonline.com/Khan-Academy-test-prep](https://link.IECAonline.com/Khan-Academy-test-prep)) to gain familiarity with the new format ahead of time. However, students don't always have access to a device and asking a test

*continued on page 21*



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center to provide one, as required by College Board, is often easier in theory than in practice.

- **A shorter exam** – the test will be shortened from three hours to two hours and there is more time per question. This seems less stressful and College Board reported that a majority of test students found this to be true. That being said, College Board's own research suggests that students who are stronger in a language other than English perform better on the reading sections of paper and pencil versions of the SAT ([link.IECAonline.com/college-board-research](http://link.IECAonline.com/college-board-research)). My non-native English-speakers might not benefit as much as others do with this change.
- **A section-adaptive test** – the better a student does on section one will determine the difficulty for section two. While this makes the exam dynamic and should limit cheating, it also means that the first section will decide how high a student can score. If a student is having an off day and doesn't excel at that first section, they might never achieve the score they were aiming for.

How am I advising current internationally based 10th graders?

- **Relax!** A largely test-optional admission climate ([fairtest.org/university/optional](http://fairtest.org/university/optional)) has given more control to students. Yes, a high score will almost certainly advantage a student, but if a student isn't a strong test-taker they can focus their efforts on other areas of their application.

- **Try it.** I encourage students to prep and do their best. If low scores come back or are at a place where I doubt a student will ever hit a useful number, they can stop testing and move on to more important things, like getting strong grades and participating in fulfilling activities.

*I work in a largely “last-minute” culture so while international students in other regions might be rushing to take a paper-based exam now, mine aren't. Should they be? There is something to be said for going with the devil you know. If you think a paper-based test makes more sense for your students, have them prep now and take a paper-based exam this autumn.*

- **When to start.** I work in a largely “last-minute” culture so while international students in other regions might be rushing to take a paper-based exam now, mine aren't. Should they be? There is something to be said for going with the devil you know. If you think a paper-based test makes more sense for your students, have them prep now and take a paper-based exam this autumn. As with anything, it's an individual decision.

College Board seems to have prepared for every eventuality during the international rollout of the digital SAT. With an 11-page “Digital SAT Irregularity Chart” ([link.IECAonline.com/digital-SAT](http://link.IECAonline.com/digital-SAT)), I hope that they—and our students—are ready for the new format. 🏹



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# Suicides among Young People an Alarming Trend

By Gail Curran, MS, MBA, CEP, IECA (AZ)

Few traumas in life create the wide-ranging and devastating repercussions that a suicide leaves in its wake. Parents, siblings, teachers, and therapists question how they might have “done more.”

Second-guessing, however, brings little comfort to those left behind. Judith E. Bessette (FL), EdD, a retired IECA therapeutic educational consultant and founder of Compass Educational Consulting, knows firsthand about the impact. During her active consultant years, she lost six clients, and her son, to suicide and accidental drug overdoses.

“I am certain that four of them, including my son's, were intentional,” she said in a recent phone interview. “The world is just too hard a place for some gentle souls. There is anger and palpable mistrust, almost hatred. We've lost civil discourse, which is very difficult for these kids, especially those with a genetic predisposition for addictions and other serious mental health problems.”

Her anecdotal evidence lines up with research-based numbers. Suicide is currently the second-leading

cause of death among those 10-34 years old, and the number of Americans 10-24 who took their own lives has increased by 60 percent between 2007 and 2018.

I personally have seen an uptick in the last few years of young people suffering from anxiety, depression, and the desire to hurt themselves or end their lives. I recently experienced my first suicide with a former client. You never think it could happen, but it can.

## Many Contributing Factors

With youth suicide rates increasing over time, experts point to several societal changes and influences as the cause. Since 2007, we've witnessed an economic recession, increasing concerns about climate change, and an ever-staggering number of school shootings. Such traumatic incidents leave emotional scars on all young people, not just those directly involved.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only made matters worse. While suicide rates did decline slightly

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among most Americans during the pandemic, the numbers for males aged 10-34 years went up. In addition, from February 21 to March 20, 2021, emergency room visits for girls aged 12-17 suspected of attempting suicide were 50.6 percent higher compared to statistics from 2019.

IECA Associate member Gabriela Deambrosio (IL), MEd, worked on-site at an international boarding school during the pandemic. "The pandemic did something to our kids," she says. "The impacts of lengthy tech-centric isolation, uncertainty, and virtual learning were visible; poor nutrition, self-harm, suicidality, and hopelessness were pervasive; they are suffering and desperate to be seen." One of her students killed himself on his 18th birthday, just hours before his parents were due to pick him up for a school break.

Deambrosio attributes social media as a contributing factor. "Social media is the cigarettes of the past; we still have yet to see its full effect," she says. "It's become a haven of despair, where misery loves company, and suicide 'how-to' manuals are just a search away."

I agree that the internet has heavily influenced the jump in suicides amongst children and young adults in recent years. Some websites tell you how to self-harm, starve yourself, and commit suicide. In addition, young people can access dealers and drugs like fentanyl online. Dealers drop drugs off at their homes without their parents even knowing.

IECA member Ruby Laufer (NJ), Dobson Educational Services, agrees with her peers, listing "increased social isolation, online bullying, and social media use" as likely causes for the uptick in suicide rates. "Social media can take a heavy toll on one's self-esteem. When things are not going well, and it looks like all of your peers on social media are having a great life, it can add to one's feelings of despair and the sense of 'being left out.'"

## Mental Health Problems Increased during the Same Period

The CDC says that in 2019, more than one in three high schoolers experienced sadness or hopelessness persistently. Compared to numbers in 2009, that's 40 percent higher. In addition, anxiety and depression are both skyrocketing among teens.

Like anxiety and depression, suicide is linked to poor mental health. The World Health Organization estimates that 90 percent of those who commit suicide have some form of mental health disorder.

The problem is even more significant among LGBTQ+ youth. Statistically, lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens are twice as likely to experience persistent sadness or hopelessness than their heterosexual peers. Furthermore, transgender youth are twice as likely to experience depression, contemplate suicide, or even attempt suicide than cisgender LGBTQ+ youth.

Along with this rise in mental health issues, academic pressures on American youths have increased. Pew Research Center cites academic

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pressure as a top concern facing teens today, with 61 percent reportedly feeling pressured to get good grades.

I believe excessive internet use plays a significant part in “school-related” mental health issues. I’m seeing school refusal and the inability to get out of bed because the students are online all night. As a result, they fall behind and lose interest or give up because it’s too overwhelming.

Despite the undeniable pressures of the modern world, there are ways to help these students tackle their mental health challenges effectively.

## Proper Treatment Helps

It’s essential to ensure that teens suffering from mental health issues get treatment. In addition, it’s vital to properly treat mental health issues *before* they get severe enough to cause suicidal ideations. Many treatment options are available, including talk therapy in individual and group settings, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), other therapeutic modalities, and psychiatric medications.

“I think there are schools and programs that can save many children,” Bessette says. “We’ve barely broken the barrier of societal acceptance of mental health issues.”

When is it time to seek professional help? First, IECs should advise parents to watch for significant changes in behavior, such as grades dropping and new, unhealthy friendships. Other signals may include a change in sleeping patterns, loss of interest in things that used to be important, isolation, secretive behavior, and abrupt weight changes, whether it be gain or loss.

“When you start seeing those things, it’s time to get professional help,” Bessette says. “The tricky part is approaching it and getting some buy-in from the child. If you ask them, ‘Is something wrong? No. Do you need help? No.’”

Enlisting a close relative, family friend, or IEC might help the child agree that they need help.

Deambrosio says giving kids space to fail forward in a safe and nurturing learning environment is essential. “Due to many factors, today’s children lack opportunities to ‘fail forward,’ so they struggle to demonstrate stamina when tasks become increasingly stressful and challenging,” she explains. “Enduring difficulties, a.k.a. failing, is a part of life, and we learn more through failure and struggle than we do when tasks are simpler. We learn that better days are ahead, and we must persevere.”

She feels schools need to de-emphasize grades and assessments and instead focus on “pragmatic learning.”


“We must reassess how we teach our children, from top to bottom, and get back to the basics. We need to focus on skills and train teachers more in psychology,” she says. “It starts at the policy and administrative level. Although valuing teachers in our society is fundamental, parents and teachers are the first line of defense to identify signs and implement early interventions.”

Suppose a teen is experiencing issues with their mental health. In that case, getting them in to see a psychologist or psychiatrist for an evaluation is essential. Mental health professionals can recommend an individualized treatment plan and get them on the right path before their despair becomes a suicide attempt.

Laufer believes, “Good testing helps us better understand what is happening with our clients. And solid therapeutic support can help get kids back on the right track, emotionally, socially, and academically.”

## Education and Mental Health Treatment Working Hand in Hand

Students often benefit from education and mental health treatment when they operate in the same facility, in tandem with one another. Whether a student is receiving therapy at their school or getting an education at a mental health treatment facility, the joined forces of personalized instruction and mental health programs have proven very effective. Many students can also benefit significantly from a wilderness therapy program, where they spend several weeks living in nature as a treatment technique.

Many educational options incorporate mental health treatment, prevent suicide ideation, and can ultimately help children, teens, or young adults achieve their full potential. Therapeutic educational consultants can use their vast knowledge and understanding of available accredited programs to find the best option for each young person. 

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# LSAT

## Supporting the Mental Health of Students Seeking to Attend Law School

By Sydney Montgomery, JD, IECA (MD) and Alice Foley, JD, IECA Associate (WV)

Making the decision to pursue law school is not one that many students make lightly. With the rising costs of law school and increasing competitiveness of the applicant pool, even students who have been dreaming of law school since they were eight often find themselves intimidated by the road to securing their place as a future attorney.

There are a few things that we can do as independent educational consultants (IECs) to ease some of our students' worries about the law school application process, whether they are still in high school, in college, or a working professional.

### Combat the Myth That They Are Behind

For most schools, law school admissions operate on a rolling basis. What this means is that some law schools begin sending out acceptances as early as October or November, even before many applicants have even applied. This creates an interesting and often confusing timeline for the application process. Some students start working on their application materials as early as the beginning of their junior year of college, while other students start planning in the fall that they plan to apply. Both groups think they are behind in the process, and while there are the benefits to applying early, both groups are in okay shape. As IECs, it's our job to help them understand the timeline of the law school

application process, and to reassure them that they are exactly where they need to be.

There are some students that start trying to plan for law school in freshman or sophomore year of college (or even in high school!), and for those students there really isn't a whole lot for them to do. The goal in those two years should be to make sure they are in a major that they enjoy (and it's really okay to take a semester or so to figure that out!), and to make sure that they are working on getting excellent grades in those early classes. It's also important to remind them to enjoy their time as a college student (just don't get into trouble). Law school doesn't need to consume their entire college career. There's no need to force a major or an extracurricular activity or student organization simply because it will "look good on a law school application." Having the reassurance that they're on the right track, as long as they are figuring out what they want to study and they're choosing activities that speak to them, goes a long way.

By junior year, students should be doing two major things: starting to plan an LSAT schedule and starting (or continuing) to build relationships with professors that may make good recommendation writers. Typical advice on the LSAT is to plan to take it during the summer after junior year. As for professor relationships, it's a lot easier to start building these earlier, especially once the major area is chosen.



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## Ensure Proper LSAT Planning

While the landscape of law school admissions testing is still, admittedly, in flux, having a good plan for the LSAT can relieve lots of the stress and anxiety that often accompanies the test. Students should begin to prepare early, but there is such a thing as starting to prep too early. There is rarely a situation where a student should begin LSAT prep more than 9-12 months before they plan to take the exam. There is so much value in starting any preparation with a diagnostic test. Knowing where they are starting from not only allows students to track their progress, but it also helps them set reasonable score expectations, and gauge if the current prep plan is continuing to help them improve. It also helps to reassure them that they are making progress when you can point back to where they started.

In addition to starting LSAT preparation early, taking the test early (usually June of the year they plan to apply) gives applicants opportunities to take the test again if they aren't happy with the score while still allowing them to apply early in the application cycle! Law schools typically look at the highest test score taken, so you should reassure your students that it is okay to take the test more than once.

## Encourage Positive Self-Talk and Mindfulness

When talking about the LSAT exam, it is important to note to your students that they are more than a test score. While law school admissions aren't quite as holistic as undergraduate admissions, and numbers are still very much a large factor in admissions, students do benefit from knowing that their work experience, their essays, their GPA, and their letters of recommendation do count

in the law school admissions process. Often, stress over the LSAT exam is one of the top triggers for student anxiety attacks and emotional damage during their law school admissions process. We see this especially with students who are already Type-A Achievers. Obsessing over getting the highest LSAT score can become an unhealthy cycle and can demoralize, discourage, and otherwise thwart the dreams of students who would make fantastic attorneys.

While we would not begin to suggest that students "don't worry" about their LSAT score, encouraging students to increase their self-care during their LSAT preparation through intentionally planned breaks or a system of rewards can help counterbalance their stress levels. We have seen students benefit tremendously from incorporating mindfulness and meditation into their LSAT prep journey and have recommended Headspace, the Mindfulness for Academic Achievement® course, breathing exercises, and other spirituality practices (if they have them). Anxiety and stress can actually cause your student's LSAT score to decrease while remaining calm and confident during the test can drastically improve a student's score. More importantly, we want students to be happy, healthy, and whole people at the end of the law school admissions process so they can succeed in their first year of law school.

## Create School Lists Based on Realistic Career Necessities

Law school rankings can be a helpful tool but choosing law schools solely on the school rank isn't always a good plan. Similar to

*continued on page 28*

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the stress surrounding the LSAT exam, focusing on prestige for prestige's sake can create an unhealthy equation of self-worth to school acceptance. While the notion of "fit" is not the same in law school admissions as it is in undergraduate admissions (where your student attends law school has more of a direct impact on employment opportunities than undergrad), a T14 law school may not be the best career or financial fit for every applicant, and we can encourage students to examine the factors that may be more important in choosing law schools. Building the school list with things like realistic career necessities in mind can help alleviate some of the stress that often comes with applying to extremely competitive schools.


If your student is interested in joining or starting a small firm in their hometown (and that hometown isn't NYC or Cambridge or Stanford), they could likely be better served by a local or regional law school. Regardless of ranking, if a local school has good employment and bar passage statistics, it could be a better option than even a higher ranked school that's far away.

## Focus on the Parts of the Application They Can Control

It's really easy for applicants to feel like most of the application is out of their control. By the time applications are being put together, it's hard to change a GPA much, there's no promise that recommenders are going to write as strong a letter as students

hope, the LSAT is what it is, there's no telling how long the admissions committee will take to render a decision, and the list could go on. Of course, there are some things that are beyond their control, but being able to show our students that they do, in fact, still have quite a lot of control in the process can often take some of the pressure off.

First, our students can set their own timelines (with advice from us), and they can build them in a way that will allow them time to continue living their lives while also still submitting applications early in the cycle. Our guidance in creating a timeline that will take their specific considerations into account and allow them time for activities, applications, work, LSAT study, and—most importantly—self-care can be the difference between a total meltdown and just taking a day (or week) to regroup.

Our students also have complete control over their writing. Personal statements, optional or supplemental essays, addenda, resumes, and more are all chances to showcase how well an applicant writes. Understanding what each piece of writing is supposed to do will also remove some of the stress of the application process. Overall, breaking the process up into bite-sized pieces that feel manageable, having structure and a good timeline for completion of each application component, and having a plan and understanding of the nuances of the law school admissions process will go a long way in making your students feel more in control of their applications and ultimately less stressed about the process (and less likely to spiral on Reddit!). 

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# The Impact of Early Internships on Career Readiness

By Robin Clebnik, Founder and Chief Internship Officer of InternWorks

For many young adults, their first few years of college can be stressful. While the US economy boasts a low unemployment rate of 3.8 percent (despite two years of the COVID-19 pandemic), it is important for high school and college students to begin exploring careers they are interested in and gaining professional work readiness skills. To better stand out during their future internships and/or job searches, students should focus on choosing an area of study, exploring a potential career industry, and understanding what qualities employers are looking for in an ideal candidate.

## Advantages of Early Career Exploration

High school and early college students should seize the opportunity to “test drive” a career in an area for which they feel they are suited. In addition to providing professional work experience, internships can also provide valuable insight. A student who is a straight-A math student may think they will someday be an investment banker—another in a long line of finance professionals in their family. A finance internship may prove that true—or it may turn out to not be at all what the student expected, which in turn could affect the student's college or major choice. College students who have chosen a major may discover, through an internship, that they

are on the right track, or they may need to make some adjustments.

## The Value of Experience-Based Work

The majority of college internships for juniors and seniors are recruitment focused. Companies providing summer internship opportunities are looking for the best candidates to fill their entry-level positions and, typically, will extend employment offers to a handful of interns at the conclusion of their internship.

Where does that leave students who are seeking a learning and informative work experience and not an extended job interview? The answer is an early, experience-based internship. Students who participate in these kinds of internships get a glimpse into a career area in a workplace setting while gaining the career readiness skills that will prepare them for college and post-college experiences. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) defines career readiness as “...a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college-educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.” NACE identifies eight career-readiness competencies.

*continued on page 30*



Robin Clebnik can be reached at [robin@internworks.com](mailto:robin@internworks.com)



Students who participate in a career-exploration internship that is experience-based will build on skills in each of these areas, preparing them for success in future internships or careers.

## Internships in a Virtual and Hybrid Workforce

In the last two years, working remotely has become a new normal for many organizations. While some organizations have returned to their fully on-site, pre-pandemic structure, others remain fully remote, and a number have created a hybrid workforce. What does this mean for internships?

In response to the needs of both employers and students, more and more companies are supporting virtual internships. Companies have adapted to the changing workplace and are still able to provide a valuable educational experience by engaging students using a variety of tools necessary in the virtual workspace: using virtual conference and meeting applications (such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, WebEx, etc.), online document collaboration, project management software, cloud calendar and scheduling, and more. Virtual internships offer the opportunity for students to develop some career-readiness skills that might have been used infrequently or not at all in an onsite internship.

With flexible hours and project work, interning virtually provides an opportunity for students to improve their organizational skills and become more independent. Without the option to immediately walk over to a supervisor to ask a question, interns can use the opportunity to work through an issue separately before seeking help. Additionally, students can hone their digital communication skills, which have rapidly become the predominant mode of communication in the workplace. Regularly participating in audio or video calls familiarizes students with the work culture of the organization and gives students an opportunity to practice their verbal communication skills, which results in increased confidence when speaking in an online group setting.

For employers, the advantages of virtual internships include requiring less direct supervision, allowing flexible work hours, and capitalizing on the fact that today's intern is very comfortable with virtual tools and technology. Internships that continue to adapt to a



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changing workplace will give students the ability to adapt to change as well—a vital skill necessary to elevate a student's candidacy for future employment, internships, and other life experiences.


## Likelihood of Future Internship or Employment Success

One of the most common roadblocks many college graduates face in their job search is a lack of previous work experience. In the last decade or so, the number of entry-level positions requiring previous work experience has grown. According to NACE's Job Outlook 2021, employers responded that when choosing a job candidate, students who have had internship experience have an edge over those with otherwise equal credentials. Candidates who have interned with the hiring organization have an even greater advantage to be considered for a full-time job. Respondents also stated that other key factors in decision-making included the candidate's major, leadership roles held, and general work experience.

In recent years, a variety of college graduate surveys have shown that internships directly affect the number of job offers college graduates receive. According to results from NACE's Class of 2019 Student Survey, 53.2 percent of all graduating seniors who applied for full-time jobs received at least one job offer. However, of this group, 57.5 percent were students who had completed an internship. Other surveys have shown students who have internship experience receive 1.17 job offers after graduation, while those who had not completed internships received 0.98 job offers, a 16 percent decrease.

## The Power of Building Connections Early

Today, more than 85 percent of open positions are filled by networking. Internships provide high school students and first- and second-year college students with the opportunity to build connections within a potential industry, increasing their likelihood of future employment. Interns are encouraged to build a professional online presence, including starting networking on LinkedIn. Additionally, career readiness skills acquired during an internship will contribute to a student's confidence and ability to network at in-person events as well as online forums. One of the many reasons that networking is an essential aspect of employability is the fact that upwards of 70 percent of all open positions are not advertised. Through internships, students can connect with industry professionals, establish relationships early on, and eventually increase their likelihood of being considered for many of these positions.

As the workforce continues to adapt to a changing climate, students who participate in an internship early on will build on their career readiness skills and readily adapt to future workforce changes and challenges—a vital skill necessary to elevate a student's potential for success in a future job, internship, career, or other life experiences. 

## Sources

Unemployment rate: [tradingeconomics.com/United-States/unemployment-rate](https://tradingeconomics.com/United-States/unemployment-rate)

NACE Job Outlook 2021: [link.IECAonline.com/NACE-job-outlook-2021](https://link.IECAonline.com/NACE-job-outlook-2021)

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## In the News


**Katherine Stievater** (MA) was quoted in “Seeking College-Admissions Edge, More Students Take Gap Year” in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 28, 2022.

**IECA** was referenced in “One little firm’s bizarre mix of college counseling and deep research” in the *Washington Post* on April 17, 2022.




**Rebecca Grappo's** (CO) article, “Getting a Degree Overseas: An Option Worth Considering?” was published in the June 2022 issue of *Foreign Service Journal*.

**Hanna Stotland** (IL) was interviewed on the Real Talk podcast “Educational Crisis Management: Making Higher Educational Dreams a Reality” on March 30, 2022.

**Arron Marlowe-Rogers** (Associate, NC) was interviewed for a segment about considerations for choosing a college on WXII TV on April 29, 2022. 

IECA members: Send us your media appearances to share in a future issue of *Insights* and on the IECA website. Email details to [Insights@IECAonline.com](mailto:Insights@IECAonline.com).

## Initiatives

On April 19, 2022 **Carolyn Mulligan** (NJ) presented a workshop entitled “Writing the College Essay” to the Summit YMCA Achiever's Group. The Achievers/Destination College Program is a career and college preparation program that motivates and encourages young adults by giving them the inspiration, support, direction, and opportunities to pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals. 

## Connect with Your Colleagues in an IECA Affinity Group

An IECA Affinity Group is run by members with similar interests in a specific topic. These member-led groups provide an opportunity to network with your IEC colleagues to share knowledge, ideas, and goals.

To join an existing group or establish a new one, visit: [link.IECAonline.com/affinity](http://link.IECAonline.com/affinity)

You can also join Affinity Group discussions on the Member Network: [network.IECAonline.com/communities/affinitygroups](http://network.IECAonline.com/communities/affinitygroups)

### New IECA Affinity Groups include:

#### Jewish IECs

This group is a forum for IECA members who are of Jewish heritage and identify as Jewish—either culturally or religiously—to exchange ideas, engage in meaningful conversations, and find mentorship and support. For more information about this group, contact Beth Silverstein ([beth.silverstein@gmail.com](mailto:beth.silverstein@gmail.com)) and Alison Merzel ([amerzel@ahmadvising.com](mailto:amerzel@ahmadvising.com)).

#### Large IEC Businesses

The purpose of this group is to facilitate conversation and peer collaboration for college consultants who operate larger businesses. Criteria for joining: 1) Gross revenue of \$500k per year or more; and 2) Three or more employees or contractors; and 3) Five or more years' experience. For more information about this group, contact Brooke Daly ([brooke@advcp.com](mailto:brooke@advcp.com)) and Jenny Buyens ([jenny@collegeconnectors.com](mailto:jenny@collegeconnectors.com)).



The LatinX Affinity Group enjoyed an in-person get-together during the IECA Spring Conference in Philadelphia.



# Campus Visits



Many IECA members have been excited to begin touring campuses in person again!

IECA members visited Bryn Mawr College (left) while in Philadelphia for the IECA Spring Conference.



College, schools, and programs: If you would like to invite IECA members to participate in announced in-person or virtual campus tours, contact IECA's Member Experience Manager Tanesha Norman ([Tanesha@IECAonline.com](mailto:Tanesha@IECAonline.com)).



IECA members also explored Lycoming College and Bucknell University (right) together following the conference.

IECA members were greeted by Temple University's marching band during their campus tour on May 16—such a fun welcome!







## 2022 Micro-Grant Recipients

The IECA Foundation supports the purpose of every independent educational consultant's (IEC's) work: to help children and young adults find the best possible choices for their education. For 25 years, the foundation, the philanthropic arm of IECA, has been funding worthy programs that help children and young adults find great educational opportunities.

Each year, the foundation seeks to highlight the work that IECA members do by awarding \$1,000 micro-grants to five organizations that align with our mission—organizations where IECs have had an ongoing relationship serving young people as they move forward in their education.

The following organizations are near and dear to the hearts of the IECA members who support them through volunteer work and will receive \$1,000 each from the foundation. These organizations and the IECA members who nominated them were announced on May 18, 2022 at the IECA Spring Conference in Philadelphia by IECA Foundation Grants Committee Chair Phil Cocchiola.

**CollegeCommunityCareer | Stafford, TX (Nominated by Kathy Rose)**  
[collegecommunitycareer.org](http://collegecommunitycareer.org)

CollegeCommunityCareer fosters a college-going culture with low-income, first-generation high school students and families to create and build equity in education. Students are prepared for admission to and graduation from a four-year university based on these four pillars: College Success, Leadership Development, Civic Engagement, and Career Discovery.

**Connor's Climb Foundation | Exeter, NH (Nominated by Elizabeth Hall)**  
[connorsclimb.org](http://connorsclimb.org)

Connor's Climb Foundation's mission is to provide suicide prevention education to New Hampshire youth and the community. Through the implementation of suicide education programs in New Hampshire schools, they collaborate with teachers, schools, the public, and the mental health system to ensure that the young people of New Hampshire have the life-saving resources needed to prevent suicide.

**Hampshire Country School | Rindge, NH (Nominated by Lucy Pritzker)**  
[hampshirecountryschool.org](http://hampshirecountryschool.org)

HCS is a junior boarding school for boys of high ability who struggle in traditional schools. The goal at HCS is to provide a calming, understanding, and lighthearted space where boys can build resilience and perseverance, experience a sense of belonging, and find ways to value themselves that will last their whole lives.

**Northwest Education Access | Seattle, WA (Nominated by Deanna Fuehne)**

[nweducationaccess.org](http://nweducationaccess.org)

Northwest Education Access provides comprehensive and individualized support to help low-income young people, ages 16-29, build their own paths to higher education and beyond.

**Reading Results | Portland, OR (Nominated by Lisa Wendland)**  
[readingresultspdx.org](http://readingresultspdx.org)

Reading Results works with Portland public schools by helping underserved kids get to reading level before third grade. When participating in Reading Results, students make an average of 1.6 years gain in reading skills and an average gain of 32 words per minute in reading fluency.



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[www.IECAfoundation.org](http://www.IECAfoundation.org).



# Introductions

## Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



**Amy Christie** (MA) has been an IEC for four years and was an Associate member. She has more than 10 years of experience in college counseling and teaching English at independent

schools in the US and England. Now the chair of college counseling at McMillan Education, Christie enjoys providing pro bono service to Beacon Academy students.

Christie holds an MA in English from Middlebury College and a BA from Washington and Lee University. She is a member of NACAC and NEACAC.

*Amy Christie, MA  
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mcmillaneducation.com  
Specialty: C*



**Meredith Goodman** (NJ) has been an IEC for eight years. As a high school counselor in a large public district over the last 16 years, she has guided more than 1,000 students through

the college application process.

Goodman holds a BS in psychology from Penn State University, an MA in psychological counseling from Monmouth University, and a College Advising Certificate from Columbia University's TC-CAP program. She is a member of NACAC.

*Meredith Goodman, MA  
Ivy College Advising  
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ivycollegeadvising.com  
Specialty: C*



**Wanning Ding** (China) has been an IEC for eight years and was an Associate member.

As the co-founder and chief educational consultant at Everwood

Learning, she directs educational advising programs and leads curriculum development for Everwood's enrichment programs.

Ding earned an EdM from Harvard, attended the 2015 IECA Summer Training Institute, and has headed the Beijing Regional Group since 2018.

*Wanning Ding, EdM  
Everwood Learning  
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wanningding.beijing@gmail.com  
everwoodlearning.com  
Specialty: C+I*



**Marissa Guijarro** (NY) has been a public high school counselor for 24 years, including eight years as an IEC working in a pro bono capacity. She was an Associate member and has

been an adjunct instructor at Long Island University Hudson for 10 years.

Guijarro earned a BA from Harvard University, an MEd from Fordham University, and a Certificate in Educational Leadership from LIU Hudson. She received an Alumni Service Award from EVKids in 2018 and was an NEH Summer Scholar in 2017 and 2018. Guijarro is a member of NACAC and ASCA.

*Marissa Guijarro, MEd  
New City, NY 10956  
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Specialty: C*



**Youwu (Bill) Gao** (CA), founder and CEO of A Dream Student Services, has more than eight years of experience working with Chinese-speaking students both locally

and internationally and previously was an Associate member. He earned a Certificate in College Counseling from UCLA Extension and is a member of NACAC. Gao has helped many Chinese students to enter their right-fit and dream schools. Gao holds a master's of management.

*Youwu (Bill) Gao, MA  
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youmengliuxue.com  
Specialty: C+I, G+I*



**Lauren Joyce** (CA) has been an IEC for four years, and an Associate member, following a 25-year career in marketing for both major corporations and marketing agencies.

She completed the UC Irvine Extension IEC Certificate program in 2018 and attended the 2020 IECA Summer Training Institute. A member of WACAC and co-founder of the IECA Bay Area Regional Group, Joyce holds a BA in sociology from California State University, East Bay.

*Lauren Joyce  
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joycecollegeconsulting.com  
Specialty: C*





**Yunxia Liu** (China), founder and CEO of Beijing PMC (Poly Minds of China) Educational Co., Ltd, has been an IEC for seven years. She holds an MS in entrepreneurship

and innovative ventures from Rochester Institute of Technology and an IEC Certificate from UC Irvine Extension. Liu is a member of NACAC and the global career development facilitator of the Center for Credentialing & Education Inc. One of the first expert committee members of the Beijing Overseas-Study Service Association (BOSSA), Liu volunteers for special schools for autistic children.

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hezhixing.com.cn  
Specialty: C, S, G*



**Archana Sudame** (CA) has helped students since 2004, working closely with public high school counselors and reading applications for a private university. She enjoys advising

students interested in business, STEM, and social sciences. As a full-time IEC since 2010, Sudame has helped hundreds of students get into their top-choice colleges.

Archana holds a Certificate in College Admission Counseling from UC Berkeley Extension and is a member of WACAC.

*Archana Sudame, PhD  
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admissioncrew.com  
Specialty: C*



**Matthew Lu** (China) has been an IEC for six years and was an Associate member. Prior to founding Maize Education in 2021, he worked as a senior strategic consultant for

HEC Education in Guangdong Province and as a freelance admissions/essay support consultant in St. Louis, MI. Lu holds a BS in business from Washington University.

Lu helps international students improve their spoken English through a combination of linguistic and oral muscle training exercises. He enjoys leveraging his bilingual and bicultural background to help others.

*Matthew Lu  
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Specialty: C+I*



**Yvonne Sudarshan** (TX), a retired board-certified physician, enjoys advising college students seeking advanced degrees as physicians, dentists, and physician assistants.

She was formerly an Associate member.

Sudarshan holds a BS in biology from University of Oregon, an MD from Oregon Health Sciences University, and a Certificate in College and Career Counseling from UC Riverside Extension. Sudarshan attended the 2014 IECA Summer Training Institute. She is a member of NACAC, TACAC, and TMA (Texas Medical Association).

*Yvonne Sudarshan, MD  
My Med School Dream  
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mymedschooldream.com  
Specialty: G*



**Hildie Steiner** (NJ) has been an IEC for five years and was an Associate member. She has a corporate and psychological background in marketing, advertising, pharmaceutical sales, and

entrepreneurial businesses. Her IEC practice focuses on a student's authentic self and building a student's self-worth.

A member of NJACAC and co-coordinator of the IECA NJ Regional Group for the past three years, Steiner earned a BA in business administration from George Washington University. She enjoys volunteering in a variety of capacities in her local community.

*Hildie Steiner  
High Five College Prep  
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973-985-9298  
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highfivecollegeprep.com  
Specialty: C*



**Laura Villamil** (WI) has been an IEC and an Associate member for six years following a 20-year career as an archaeologist. She has held faculty positions at the University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Albion College.

Villamil earned an MA and PhD in anthropology from the University of Michigan, a BA from the University of California, Berkeley, and a College Counseling Certificate from UCLA Extension. Villamil attended the 2016 IECA Summer Training Institute and is a member of NACAC.

*Laura Villamil, PhD  
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sacbecc.com  
Specialty: C*

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# Regional Groups

Connect with fellow IECA members living in your geographic area! Member-led Regional Groups share a common desire for collegiality, communication, and personal interaction among local professionals. We currently have more than 40 Regional Groups and new members are always welcome.

To join an existing group, visit the Member Network: [network.IECAonline.com/communities/regionalgroups](http://network.IECAonline.com/communities/regionalgroups)

If your region is not represented, consider starting a new group! Contact Tanesha Norman, IECA's member experience manager, at [Tanesha@IECAonline.com](mailto:Tanesha@IECAonline.com).

## Regional Group Updates

### Broward/Palm Beach

In May, the Broward/Palm Beach IECA Regional Group hosted a get-together with members of the Florida Regional Admissions Counselors (FRAC) group, representatives of 29 out-of-state colleges and universities who live and work in Florida. Members attending included University of Maryland, University of Alabama, George Mason University, Indiana University, Seton Hall University, The Ohio State University, University of Alabama-Birmingham, Berry College, University of Tennessee, Temple University, Valparaiso University, and Bucknell University. We learned a lot about their colleges, and they were very interested in IECs, asking us lots of questions about our practices, and appreciated us hosting them. There are regional college admissions groups around the country. Information on these groups is on the National Association of Regional Admissions Counselors website ([www.narac.net](http://www.narac.net)).



For more information about the Broward/Palm Beach Regional Group, contact Susan Groden ([sgrodenccs@gmail.com](mailto:sgrodenccs@gmail.com)).

### Ohio/Michigan/Western Pennsylvania


In June, members of the OH/MI/Western PA Regional Group, including Kristina Dooley, Christina Korsvik, Heather Massaro, and Belle Liu met for tours of Duquesne and Chatham. For more information about this group, contact Jason Vazzolli ([jason@campustocareercrossroads.com](mailto:jason@campustocareercrossroads.com)).



### Philadelphia

On March 28, members of the Philadelphia Regional Group met in with Olivia Foderaro, assistant director of admissions at Emmanuel College. Pictured are Cigus Vanni, Elizabeth Trupkovich, Belle Lui, and Carol Tunstall with Olivia Foderaro (seated).



For more information about this group, contact Fran Manning-Smith ([fran@steplanners.com](mailto:fran@steplanners.com)). 

## For Schools, Colleges, and Program Representatives

If you are interested in meeting with IECA members, either virtually or in person, we encourage you to reach out to our Regional Groups. You can find the full list of groups on our website: [link.IECAonline.com/regional](http://link.IECAonline.com/regional)

## Follow IECA on Social Media!



Connect with IECA on LinkedIn (@IECA Independent Educational Consultants Association), Twitter (@IECA), Facebook (@IECA--Independent Educational Consultants Association) and Instagram (@iecaheadquarters).

### Have you checked out the IECA blog lately?

Recent posts include:

- Establishing an Inclusive Practice, Supporting Our LGBTQIA+ Students
- IECA Advocates for School Safety in Wake of Texas School Shooting
- How the New Digital SAT May Impact Students with Learning Disabilities

Visit [link.IECAonline.com/blog](http://link.IECAonline.com/blog) to see these and other posts.

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## DIFFERENT FACES, SIMILAR NEEDS.

### Top reasons why Educational Consultants should encourage clients to seek assistance from an insurance advocate.

- > Explain to your client their insurance benefits quickly and in understandable terms.
- > Help navigate the authorization process and if necessary the appeals process.
- > Ease the stress and time it takes to work with health insurance.
- > Ensure accurate and timely reimbursement.
- > Have a trusted advocate who is aligned with your client to see them succeed.
- > Allow your client to focus on their health!

Educational Consultants play a vital role in helping families find treatment programs and facilities that best meet their client's needs. For some individuals, accessing the best behavioral health treatment is more about costs than what treatment works best. In turn, Educational Consultants then have to make decisions that may sacrifice treatment due to the financial constraints of their client.

### This is where our team can help!

**Our mission in working with the Educational Consultant community is to make your client's placement a reality.**

SJ Health Insurance Advocates is led by a team of professionals with over 30 years of behavioral health and health insurance experience. We will take the time to educate your clients about their insurance plan and provide solutions to make treatment cost effective.

### Our firm has extensive experience in working with the following types of programs:

- Acute Inpatient
- Detoxification
- Residential Treatment Programs
- Partial Hospitalization Programs
- Intensive Outpatient Programs
- Wilderness Programs
- Therapeutic Boarding Schools

### Our services include the following:

- Verification of Benefits
- Pre-Authorization of Services
- Concurrent Utilization Reviews
- Conduct Peer to Peer Reviews
- Appeals (all three levels of appeal)
- Claim generation, submission and tracking to ensure accurate and timely reimbursement



HEALTH INSURANCE CLAIMS MANAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

Visit us online or give us a call to learn more about our Educational Consultant partnerships.

**[www.SJHealthInsuranceAdvocates.com](http://www.SJHealthInsuranceAdvocates.com) (973) 740-0023**





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