

# ACCEPTED

Educational consultants work to put more acceptance letters in clients' mailboxes

BY SARAH J. DILLS



"It's not just my goal to get my clients admitted. I want to help with the transition from high school to college ..."

When **Meg McDermott**'s oldest son, **Jake**, entered his senior year of high school, the last thing McDermott wanted to do was hound him about his college admissions paperwork and deadlines.

**"I**t was my last year to enjoy having my son living at home, and I didn't want to have to nag him all the time," she explained.

Concerned about the high level of focus Jake's freshman high school guidance counselors were placing on college preparation, McDermott turned to her circle of friends for advice. Several people directed her to educational consultants who assist families with college advising.

One of the names on McDermott's list was **Jane Shropshire** of Lexington's Shropshire Educational Consulting.

"She offered two levels of service, and that was unique," McDermott said. "One of Jane's options allowed her to walk us through as many colleges as Jake applied.

"Jane created the deadlines for Jake, so I didn't have to be the bad guy. Jake had to turn everything in to Jane."

The process of educational consulting and college advising varies from firm to firm, but usually consists of a third party who is versed in the global college recruitment atmosphere and assists parents and students in the college selection and application process.

McDermott admitted how alarmed she and her husband were to learn how the college admission environment had changed since they'd applied.

"Jane was good about giving us a realistic picture of college admissions today," McDermott said. "My husband and I hadn't dealt with this since we applied 30 years ago. We were only competing against kids in the United States, but students today are competing with kids around the globe."

Shropshire began her career as an admissions officer at Tufts University and Brandeis University, and then served as assistant provost at Brandeis. She later served as associate dean of admissions at Washington University in St. Louis before setting up her own business.

"I wanted to help students on a more personal basis," Shropshire explained. "In college admissions, you get to know a little bit about a lot of students. In private practice, I get a chance to know students on a more personal level.

"It's not just my goal to get my clients admitted. I want to help with the transition from high school to college. My clients definitely get to know themselves better through this process."

Shropshire said the majority of her clients come to her as referrals from former clients. To keep the personal level of service, Shropshire takes on only 35 clients in the actively applying level at one time.

"The students with whom I work cover a very wide range. Some families might benefit from a two-hour consultation, while other families benefit from a full-on partnership," Shropshire said. "These clients want to know someone is looking out for their child's education from their sophomore year of high school through their college acceptance."

Shropshire stressed that her work does not replace the work of the school counselor, but becomes an additional layer.

She starts her work with each client by creating a list. She then begins moving different wants and needs around to create the perfect match.

Academics tops Shropshire's list. Some of the specific details she wants to know about her students are their field of study (if chosen), desired learning environment (challenging and fast-paced, or one-on-one access to faculty and staff), learning challenges (dyslexia, attention deficit disorder) and desired campus size.

Shropshire then wants to get to know a little about her clients' personalities, so she asks about their political views and whether they want to be surrounded by people like them or want diversity. Athletics, music and drama, Greek life and religious beliefs also are topics Shropshire discusses with her students.

Other serious discussion topics include campus location and financial aid. "I would not put location over academics," Shropshire said. "If a student thinks they want to be in the South, but their area of academic interest includes a great school out West, I will definitely open a conversation and bring it up as a possibility with my clients."

McDermott said Shropshire was a wonderful third-party negotiator when it came to Jake's desire to attend Indiana University.

"I don't think I would have been open to him applying to a big state school, but Jane was very good about opening our eyes," McDermott said.

"She asked us to just give it a chance. Once we got there, we loved it."

Indiana University met Jake's desire to attend a big school in a college town with lots of diversity.

"Most parents would say they know their children very well, but as parents, we think we know what's best for them," McDermott explained. "When your children are getting ready to go to college, they're at an age where they need to weigh in, too. Having a third party that's not emotionally invested helps keep everyone on an even playing field."

McDermott was so pleased with her family's experience

### Shropshire's Tips for Parents and Students

- The single most important piece of paper in the college admission paperwork is the high school transcript.
- Test scores, GPA and class rank should be equivalent with the mid-50th percent of the incoming freshman class.
- A student interested in college needs to start preparing in ninth grade by planning his or her high school course load.
- For many students, the junior year is the time to begin actively looking at campuses. This gives them two full years of high school to focus on studies and extracurricular activities.
- Colleges don't want to see students spread themselves too thin. They would rather see meaningful work in a small area of activities.
- Work to make a connection with the high school guidance office and find out what resources are available.
- Search carefully and broadly at multiple campuses. Don't get too hung up on schools you're familiar with.
- Schedule college visits. Not only is this great family time for students and their parents, but students also experience a school differently while on campus.

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### McDermott's Tips for Parents

- Don't rely on a high school guidance counselor to get your child into college. Counselors wear several hats so they don't have time to devote 100 percent to college prep.
- Start early.
- Have an open mind and listen to your child's wish list of schools. Don't rule out a school just because it's not what you envision.
- If you can make the investment, contact an educational consultant. You don't want your last year with your child at home to be a constant battle over essays and deadlines.

with Shropshire that she consulted with her again when her younger son, **Peter**, began preparing for college.

"Peter's college search was completely different from Jake's," McDermott explained. "Peter had 15 to 20 schools he was interested in considering. He wanted a medium-size school in a big city with a lot of school spirit and community service opportunities."

McDermott said Notre Dame was Peter's original first choice, but he ended up being drawn to Boston College, where he is currently a freshman.

"Peter utilized Jane's comprehensive advising a lot more than Jake did," McDermott said. "He'd call her with questions ... I can't even think of all the questions. Most of the schools he applied to required many supplemental essays, so he'd ask for Jane's input."

Shropshire explained that comprehensive advising begins when a student switches from search mode to application mode.

"My role shifts from search mentor to application mentor. Obviously, I can't write their submissions, but I can help mentor them and review their work."

"Jane knew how to get Peter to put his best foot forward," McDermott added.

Shropshire said the vast majority of her clients graduate from the college they've selected together.

"I love to hear back from my clients. I wait until the week after Thanksgiving to e-mail the families to hear how they're acclimating to college," Shropshire said. "It's an exciting time for them to see each other again after leaving for school, and it's an exciting time for me to hear all about it."



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