WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR YOUR STUDENTS

ACM Counselor Institute and Luncheon
October 3rd, 2016
Maggiano’s Little Italy – Denver South
PRESENTERS

Lauren Keller
Has read approximately 3,156 letters of recommendation

Sarah Colangelo
Has read approximately 3,375 letters of recommendation
HOW ABOUT YOU?

■ How many Letters of Recommendation do you write each year?

■ How many Letters of Recommendation have you written in your career?

■ Do you like writing Letters of Recommendation? Why or why not?
WHY ADMISSION COUNSELORS APPRECIATE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- Turns a set of data into a person
- Places the student in the context of the school
- Provides stage lighting vs. spotlight
- Brings the classroom experience to life
- Defines relationships between teachers and students at the school
- Reinforces and confirms details on the application
- Helps the reader understand trends in academic performance
- Brings new perspective to a student’s background
- Can impact a student’s admission
- Allow the counselor to better connect with a student’s story
- Often shared with colleague admission counselors as inspiration during busy application reading times
WHEN ARE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION MOST IMPORTANT

■ Weak or inconsistent academic performance
  – *Upward or downward trend in grades or in rigor of coursework*

■ Personal trauma, loss, illness, etc.

■ Individualized Education Plans

■ Students may also choose to self-advocate via supplemental essays, interviews with admission counselors, or the Additional Information section of the Common Application
- How comfortable are you detailing the items on the previous slide in a written Letter of Recommendation?

- How have you advocated for students in the past?

- What has been the easiest Letter of Recommendation you’ve had to write? Why was it easy?

- What has been the most difficult Letter of Recommendation you’ve had to write? Why was it challenging?
TIPS FROM THE ADMISSION SIDE

Tell Stories

Much like a student’s essay, these flashbulb moments can animate a set of data

- Have they done some important academic, service, or outside work? What are they proud of?
- Are they quotable?
- When has this students overcome an obstacle?
- What kinds of questions do they ask? Are they inquisitive?
- How has this student impacted their community?
- How does this student make others feel?
- How have the choices this student has made defined their character? The character of the school?
- Where do you see this student 20 years in the future? 1,000 years in the past?

Avoid Hyperbole and Overuse of Adjectives

- Showing is more impactful than telling
TIPS FROM THE ADMISSION SIDE

Consider Interviews
- Interview the student, teachers, club leaders, family, or friends to better understand the student's place in the school

Consider Bullet Points
- Lists are easy to digest; paired with a descriptive story or two, these can give Admission Counselors a snapshot of a student’s place at your school

Be Honest
- Don’t tell us what we want to hear
- An honest recommendation that works to capture the character of a student is more meaningful than a falsely positive recommendation

Don’t Hesitate to Call
- Should a situation be too challenging to write about in a Letter of Recommendation, please don’t hesitate to call your local Admission Counselor for a conversation
TIPS FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL SIDE
QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION
THANK YOU!

We appreciate every Letter of Recommendation!