

# WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION FOR YOUR STUDENTS

ACM Counselor Institute and Luncheon

October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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 students 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

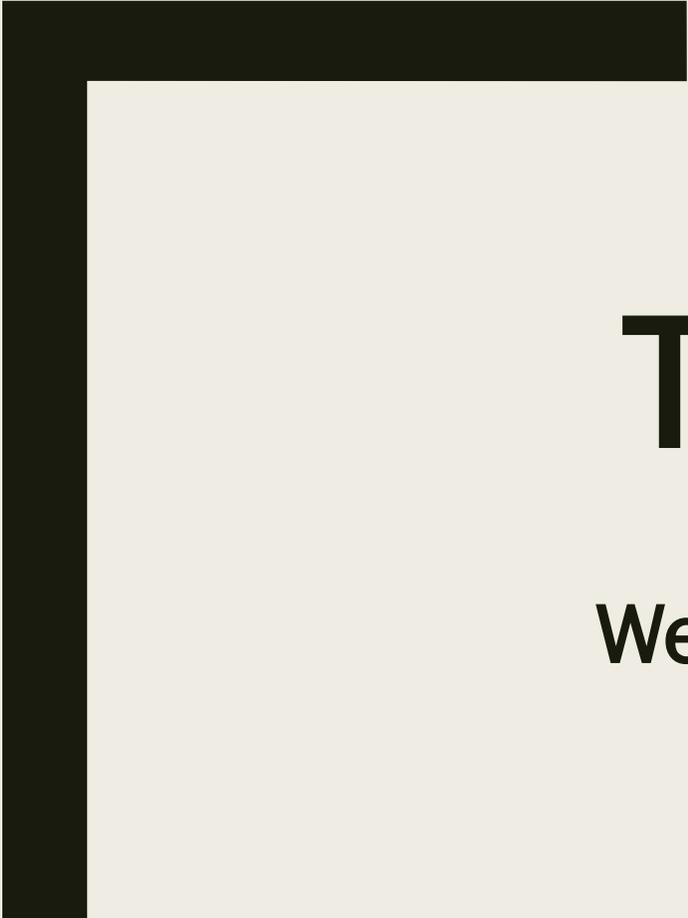
- *Don't tell us what we want to hear*
- *An honest recommendation that works to capture the character of a student is more meaningful than a falsely positive recommendation*

## 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!**

