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Janet Rosier, owner of Janet Rosier's Educational Resources in Woodbridge, works with a client, Amity Regional High School senior Jonathan Agin, on his college choices. Agin is considering nine colleges in his search for the right school.

PRICE OF ADMISSION



By Brenda Marks
Special to the Register

JANET ROSIER knows high school students face many obstacles: peer pressure, a lack of time, even indecision.

So when it comes to applying to colleges, many youngsters flounder along, miss deadlines and fail to find a good educational fit. She aims to step in before that happens, she said.

"The entire (college application) process has become so competitive," said Rosier, an independent admissions consultant who owns Janet Rosier's Educational Resources in Woodbridge. "Kids are under pressure and sometimes parents need a third party to do this."

There are between 4,000 and 5,000 independent admission counselors in the United States, said Mark Sklarow, executive director of the Virginia-based Independent Educational Consultants Association, a trade group. He believes the number has doubled in the past four years because there is a "pervasive anxiety" about the college application process. Independent counselors help students wade through the

college admission process, narrow down their college choices and even edit their admission essays.

A reputable counselor will not guarantee students admission to a particular college, he said. Rather, they aid students in finding a college that is best suited to them.

"The cost of college, other than buying a home, is the most expensive thing a family will do," Sklarow said. "Given that, parents are trying to find a way to ensure it's a good match between their student and the college."

When students switch colleges halfway through their educational career, it can add thousands of

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dollars to the college bill, he said.

The counselors themselves, however, do not come cheap. Some counselors charge by the hour, starting at about \$125, or \$3,400 or more to get students through the entire process. Independent counselors can start off with students early on in high school and help them pick their courses and summer activities, Sklarow said.

Pamela Sayre of Woodbridge has hired Rosier to help her daughter, a swimmer who is a senior, pick a college and make it through all the paperwork.

"For us, we were looking at two levels: the academic piece, and she's also a student athlete so there is that whole other piece to deal with," Sayre said of her daughter, who she declined to name. "We needed some assistance with someone taking care of looking at the academic piece, the deadlines. As parents we felt

completely overwhelmed, so it's nice to be able to call someone beyond the high school guidance counselor."

Sayre said she calls Rosier when she has questions, and she doesn't feel as if she is burdening her.

"The goal for my daughter is to have someone keeping her on tabs with deadlines," Sayre said. "There are also the benefits of having her see certain schools that may have not looked as good to her initially."

Her daughter, for example, is now considering the University of Rhode Island, a school she wasn't inclined to look at before talking with Rosier.

Joan Isaac-Mohr, dean of admissions at Quinnipiac University, said that her office is seeing more students using independent counselors. She said they actually are vital to the whole process.

"The ones we know that we deal with have proven to be very helpful, particularly to students

who need more one-on-one time who may not be able to get that from their high school counselor," she said.

Isaac-Mohr said that independent counselors help students select the types of institutions that are good matches and determine where in the country they want to go to school. They also help students think about what their major will be, she said.

She advises students to look for someone who has a good reputation in the field, and suggests that students and parents talk to others who have worked with independent counselors.

Throughout the country, the field of independent counselors is growing, said David Hawkins, director of public policy and research at the Virginia-based National Association for College Admission Counseling.

"They are supplementing high school counselors who are just overloaded with heavy case loads," he said. "They're a resource. Independents fill a need or a void. If they're good professionals they abide by our code of ethics and help get students into a college that is a good fit. A good counselor will broaden a student's perspective and leave no fingerprint on the admission process."

On average, 700 students are assigned to a single high school counselor, which is double the recommended number, according to Sklarow of the Independent Educational Consultants Association.

The association estimates that 85 percent of students who use an independent consultant graduate from the same school they first enroll in, he said.

Susan Wexler, an independent educational consultant based in Westport, said it's important for students to build confidence and to find a college culture that suits them.

"Kids have to be comfortable within themselves and I am a sounding board," she said. "I play the devil's advocate. I get them matched to the right school. It can be hard to convince students that their first choice might not be the right choice, that maybe they should be going smaller, looking beyond the Ivy League. But the final choice is theirs."