



Dear Counselors,

We are writing with an update to the message we sent you on September 28 about the formation of the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success. Since that time we have heard from many of you individually and we also had a chance to engage in valuable discussion at NACAC on October 3. We understand that our work to improve the college admission process will have a broad impact on something that matters deeply to all of us.

Our initial announcement was made before the details were fully resolved because we wanted an opportunity to get feedback from you and to incorporate that feedback into the design of our system. In retrospect, we could have improved our communication by offering detailed examples of how institutions are thinking of using the new platform. Since our announcement, many questions have arisen and a number of counselors have asked for more time to learn about and provide feedback into the system before it goes live. We are definitely listening to you and as a result, the Board decided yesterday to shift the release date to April for the Virtual College Locker tool (formerly referred to as "Portfolio") to allow for more time to engage and answer questions and for counselors to be closer to finishing their work with the current senior class. Once we are farther along in development, and prior to public launch, counselors will have the opportunity to review the system and provide us with feedback.

In light of your questions, we think it would be useful to communicate more clearly the values and beliefs of the Coalition:

We believe that students come first and that the platform we are developing will provide a supportive college exploration and application process that encourages reflection and self-discovery;

We believe that early engagement supports under-resourced students during the college preparation process;

We believe that our individual efforts to promote access can be significantly enhanced through the efforts of the Coalition and this free tool to schools and community-based organizations;

We believe that the college admission process needs ongoing innovation and improvement and that competition is a positive force for change;

We believe that we can leverage technology to level the playing field in college preparation.

And here are some equally important statements about what we do NOT believe:



We don't believe we have a corner on access—many institutions do great work to provide access. Our work is grounded in research about the outcomes for students who can be financially supported throughout their college careers;

We don't believe we have all the answers, but we are committed to working together to improve the admission process. The visibility and impact of this group of institutions confers a responsibility to act ethically and do our best work to bring about positive change;

We don't believe we will get it all right in the first iteration and are committed to a process of assessment and continuous improvement;

We don't believe we can make change overnight. It will take time, significant effort, listening to counselors and students and more.

Our efforts to improve the admission process are grounded in research that shows that many talented low-income and first-generation students do not aspire to college or get hung up in the complexity of the process. We want to get these students thinking about college earlier and create the expectation that college is FOR THEM. We want to send a strong message that college is affordable, that they can be successful, and that the top schools in the country want students like them. Here are two of the studies that inform our work:

Avery, Howell and Page (2014): <http://research.collegeboard.org/publications/review-role-college-applications-students-postsecondary-outcomes>

Hoxby and Avery (2013): <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2013/low-income-high-achieving-hoxby-avery>

We have a special obligation to communicate and connect with under-resourced schools and students, and we will be focused on that work over the next few months. We also understand the concern that our new system might add to the anxiety and frenzy that occurs among students, parents, and counselors. We certainly do not intend this to be the effect, and we will be looking for every opportunity to reinforce this message. There will be no admission preference for using the Coalition locker or application, just as our schools have no preference over students who submit the ACT or SAT.

We have been asked for more details about the Virtual College Locker, because it is the most novel piece of the platform. We hope this explanation will help you to answer questions from students and parents:

The locker is:

A completely optional free tool to help students, especially under-resourced students who do not have access to college counseling or costly college planning tools, prepare and organize for the college admissions process

A site for students to securely and privately store classwork, awards, journals, and notes



admissions offices will not have access to a student's Virtual College Locker unless the student asks for help and advice with specific elements

A platform (like Naviance) for students who use the system to share drafts of application materials and receive feedback from counselors and teachers

The Locker is NOT:

A college application

Required for admission to any Coalition school

A platform for colleges and universities to gauge demonstrated interest in a college's admissions offices cannot view the activities of students using the Locker

A source for Coalition schools to buy student contact information

Moving forward, we plan to engage our College Counseling Community and the broader world of counselors through immediate small-group discussions with our advisory group and more demonstration sessions (with Q&A) for a broader group of interested counselors and CBOs throughout November. We are making another presentation at the College Board Forum and have proposals in at all of the regional CB and ACAC meetings in 2016.

We welcome your questions, feedback, and ideas you have for how we might best engage counselors, students, and families. We also continue to update the FAQ and other information on our website at www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success Board of Directors

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