

A new approach to the old college try



Kristen Bixby (left), worked with student Haley Frasca on applications.

By Wendy Killeen GLOBE

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When Kristen Bixby was attending high school in Seattle, her sights were set on college in New England. She didn't, however, get much guidance. Bixby ended up at the University of Maine in Orono (not a good fit), then the University of Southern Maine in Portland (a better fit). Always aspiring to be a teacher, she was drawn to guidance counseling. Bixby earned a master's degree in guidance from Boston University

and worked for years in the Newton school system. After having her children, now ages 5 and 2, she started Comprehensive College Advising in Wenham. We talked with Bixby, 37, of Wenham.

Q. The business?

A. I wanted time with my kids but missed guidance counseling and working with teenagers. I see clients in the afternoons, evenings, and weekends.

Q. Timing?

A. In the fall, I work with seniors on finishing essays, interviews, and applications. It's scramble time. In the spring, it's mostly juniors, making lists of college visits.

Q. Family stress?

A. It can be overwhelming for parents who try to micromanage the application process and deadlines. Get someone else to do it. Students are more likely to hear it and follow through when it comes from me.

Q. Applications?

A. I recommend eight schools: two safety schools, four targets, and two reach schools.

Q. Essays?

A. The most important thing is to be genuine. It might be about coming home every day after school and taking care of siblings because your parents work. It might be about playing chess. Some students don't realize what they do is amazing. If they do something just to put it on their resume, it looks fake.

Q. Financial aid?

A. I give the big picture on how to apply for aid and what a financial aid package looks like.

Q. Cost?

A. Fee is \$150 per meeting, which could be 1 to 2 hours, and that includes background work I do. And I take on pro bono cases for some first-generation college students.

Q. Parent expectations?

A. I'm not here to get their child in the best college [in the country], but the best college for him or her. I have been pleasantly surprised how families understand and support the best match for their child.

Kristen Bixby presents a workshop, The Inside Scoop on College Admissions, at 7 p.m. Sept. 29 at the Hamilton-Wenham Public Library, 14 Union St., South Hamilton.

Wendy Killeen can be reached at wdkilleen@gmail.com.

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