

An Inside Look at Educational Consultants

*Educational consultants play a vital role in matching families with the right independent schools. The Yield contacted **Antonio Aponte**, Director of Educational Services at The Boys' Club of New York, **Drew Carlson**, Educational Consultant at McMillan, Howland & Spence (MA), and **Fontaine Draper** and **Barbara Levy**, Co-Directors of Education Connection (GA), to inquire about their roles in assisting families during the application process.*

How do you develop lists of schools for your families to consider?

AA: We identify the key character strengths that best serve as indicators for success. In addition, the synergy between the personalities of both the school and the applicant play a big role. This is what The Boys' Club of New York (est. 1816) has built its mission around—being a youth development and pioneering independent school placement program (est. 1987).

DC: From a qualitative perspective, we ask questions like, “Is it a good time in the life of that school?” We seek feedback from current and prospective families, as we follow clients through high school and into college planning. We see many schools at several conferences throughout the year and ask about leadership transitions and new facilities. We seek to find out if the student will “fit” in three key areas: academic, extracurricular, and social/community. From a quantitative perspective, we ask, “What is the likelihood that the student will finish in the top third or quarter of his or her class?”

FD/BL: Our process begins with a parent meeting, during which we discuss goals, passions, interests, and the family's educational philosophy. From that meeting, we refer them to five or six schools we'd recommend they visit/interview. Our second meeting is with the child at which we collect the commensurate student records. After school visits, the family culls its list, and we take them through a step-by-step checklist to guide them through the application process. It can be stressful, so it's important that we are realistic with families as they develop their expectations.



Antonio Aponte



Drew Carlson



Fontaine Draper and Barbara Levy

Which aspects of the admission process do you find especially daunting for families?

AA: Understanding the opportunity that their child may attain by attending an independent school—not looking only at the tuition. They are also daunted by the extensive application process. Parents need to leave work early and travel to school visits, whether it is during the week or on a weekend, which becomes challenging as families attempt to maintain some sanity and control with home/life responsibilities.

DC: Since we work with both high schools and colleges, we see a glaring contrast between the two levels. The Common App for colleges is easily understandable, yet for younger kids, the process is less so. Independent educational consultants strive to demystify and simplify the process. The Standard Application Online (SAO) has continually improved year over year and made the process of applying easier, and we utilize it as much as we can. Our goal is to spend more time with kids to find the best match and less time managing complicated systems.

International families have two main concerns: the prestige of the school and the ease of travel. We spend time expanding their universe about schools beyond what they perceive to be the “top” schools.

FD/BL: The number of schools Atlanta families must consider can be overwhelming, and arranging to visit all the schools on their lists can be a full time job! Families often worry about how their children will “measure up” on assessments, and preparing for the SSAT, for example, requires a bit of counseling (for parents as well as their children!). In addition, the sheer volume of pieces that families must track and submit to each of the schools also causes them a fair amount of anxiety. There’s a need for reassurance, and we work with them to develop the mantra, “let go and trust the process.”

What do you wish admission offices knew about your work with families?

AA: That we serve many roles, especially for children from an inner-city setting. We talk about first-generation college students, but this also holds true for first-generation independent school applicants. We have to be mediators, instructors, motivators, and advocates to keep them balanced between the process and everyday life. The independent school opportunity not only affects the child; it also affects the family and their communities as a whole. As a placement agency, we have to be the conduit and enthusiast throughout (and even after) placement to support the entire family during their journey.

DC: We aren’t about collecting fees and delivering a list. We spend many, many hours on Skype with students, parents, and tutors, educating them about the independent school landscape and stressing the importance of attending a school where the student will be able to thrive academically, socially, and extracurricularly. We also spend a great deal of time on the road visiting dozens of campuses each year and attending conferences like SSATB, TABS, and IECA.

FD/BL: That our work is ideally to the mutual benefit of the school and family. We draw from our credibility and longevity, having more than 50 years of experience with independent schools. We’re very forthright with parents about the expectations we have for them (and they for their children), and we strive to develop a truly authentic and personal relationship with each family in the process. Likewise, we believe we can offer families a sounding board and serve as the intermediary with the admission office. By having candid conversations with admission officers about applicants, we can help steer families in the right direction in their school searches and help them set their expectations accordingly. We truly wish to serve our clients and our schools by offering choices to help determine the right match according to the strengths of the child.