

2016 - 2017

Secondary School Placement Handbook



Hillside School

Welcome from the Director of Secondary School Placement

Dear Ninth Grade Families,

As you and your son begin your journey to find the right secondary school, you will share both the excitement of future opportunities and the challenge of navigating the many steps of a secondary school search. Determining the best fit between your son and a school will require you and your son to honestly assess his own strengths, identify areas where he needs support, and envision the kind of environment where he can be successful.

The Secondary School Placement Office at Hillside seeks to equip students and parents with the cumulative knowledge and experience to demystify the search process. Each student must work with their parents to accurately assess the criteria that they deem most important to their search. Together, along with advice from the Director of Secondary School Placement, they will consider resources and begin building a secondary school list based on personal preferences. Good communication between parents, students and placement counselor are as essential to a positive outcome as committing fully to the research and requirements culminating in an application. Through individual counseling sessions, secondary school seminars, and campus visits, you and your son will emerge with an individualized, well-balanced list of excellent schools where he can succeed.

We hope that this Secondary School Placement Handbook will serve as a useful resource to you and your son. Along with a thoughtfully planned timeline and search, our hope is that this guide will supplement the counseling we provide and make the process clearer and more transparent.

Sincerely,

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TIMELINE

Although Eighth Grade students may not yet be researching secondary schools, this year can be a useful time to assess academic interests, explore new subject areas and begin to take tests (when appropriate) that accompany secondary school applications. Extracurricular activities are another avenue through which students can develop specific interests and skills that may influence their final secondary school list.

April and May of Eighth Grade Year

Parents and Students Meet with Director of Secondary School Placement

The secondary school placement process begins with individual conversations between Eighth Grade parents and the Director of Secondary School Placement in the spring of their son's Eighth Grade year. After March break, Eighth Grade parents are invited to contact the Director to arrange a meeting or a phone call to discuss the secondary school process. Parents will share their thoughts about their son and begin to explore secondary school possibilities. This initial conversation is the starting point for an ongoing relationship between the Director and each parent that will provide direction and guidance to each family's search. Once the Director has spoken with each parent he will then meet with respective boys about the secondary school search process.

While the Director of Secondary School Placement will encourage and advise boys and their parents throughout the entire search process, families are responsible for the research of all schools and all applications and enrollment decisions.

Eighth Graders Take SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test)

Hillside encourages all Eighth Graders to take the SSAT in April of their Eighth Grade year. The April test will serve as a "practice" test for future tests that will be administered in the fall and/or winter of each student's Ninth Grade year. The April scores will not be sent to the secondary schools. Boys may take the SSAT at Hillside, which will be administered on Saturdays per the requirement of SSAT.

Hillside requests that all SSAT scores be sent to Hillside. The Director of Secondary School Placement will utilize these scores to initially guide families in their selection of possible school options. At this point in the process, parents

should identify Hillside as the sole recipient of their son's SSAT scores via the SSAT website. Parents are responsible for registering their son for the SSAT through SSAT's website: <http://www.ssat.org/test/registration>.

Hillside's SSAT school number is #3910. Parents may register their son for the SSAT at the SSAT Website. Please sign up early as spaces are limited. Students may also take the SSAT at another test center if it is geographically more convenient for families. Parents should still identify Hillside as the sole recipient of the scores via the SSAT website using our school number #3910.

Summer Before Ninth Grade Year

Research Schools

Hillside recommends that each Eighth Grader and his parents research schools over the summer. They can view school websites and even walk through campuses to help get a feeling for the schools. Because Hillside will help prepare all Ninth Graders for their interviews and tours during the fall of their Ninth Grade year, boys should not interview with secondary schools over the summer. Students and their families will be given the week after the Columbus Day weekend to tour and interview.

SSAT/TOEFL Test Preparation

There are many SSAT test preparation opportunities, and Hillside strongly recommends SSAT test preparation for all its Ninth Graders. While Hillside will offer a SSAT preparation course for its Ninth Graders in the fall, all students should prepare for the SSAT during the summer before their Ninth Grade year. Families may arrange for boys to have individual/group tutoring sessions or students may use SSAT test preparation books for practice.

TOEFL [Option]: International students may also be required to submit the TOEFL test, a test designed for international students who want to attend American secondary schools. Parents must register their son for the test through the TOEFL website. Many institutions near Hillside offer the

TOEFL test. The parents of international students may arrange transportation to TOEFL test sites, at their own expense, with our Dean of Residential Life, Monica Lucey by email mlucey@hillsideschool.net. Parents should send all TOEFL test scores to Hillside and to the secondary schools to which their son is applying.

Arrange Interviews and Tours

Once parents and students have identified schools to visit, parents must arrange the interviews and tours at the secondary schools. There are no classes the week after Columbus Day weekend so students and parents can tour and interview (October 10th-15th, 2016). All parents should schedule school visits at this time so the boys' do not miss valuable class time. Because interview times fill up quickly, families should contact Admissions Offices during the month of August to schedule these visits. Hillside recommends no more than two school visits per day.

Ninth Grade Year

Lunch Visits with Secondary School Admission Representatives

Each year dozens of secondary schools visit Hillside in the fall. School representatives will spend about forty-five minutes with some of the boys at lunch, making short presentations and allowing time for questions. With information from parents about their son and the kind of school they are interested in (academic rigor, location, athletic interests, artistic interests...), the Director of Secondary School Placement will invite about six to ten boys to meet with various school representatives. The Director's goal is to include boys for whom the school might be a good fit.

Interviews and Tours

While the Director of Secondary School Placement will meet with the Ninth Grade Class to discuss proper conduct and behavior for interviews and tours, parents should also discuss the expected behavior of their son while on secondary school campuses. Many schools place a high level of emphasis on the interview and tour so these visits should not be taken lightly. In some cases students are accepted or denied entrance to a school based on the interview and/or tour.

Parents and boys often use visits to help identify schools that may be a good fit. However, given the competitive market for secondary school students, Hillside recommends that all parents and boys be open to a wide variety of schools. Hillside does not recommend that boys and their parents “get their heart set on” one or even a few schools. Both parents and students should be open to a wide array of schools.

SSAT, ISEE, TOEFL, and WISC TEST-TAKING

Most secondary schools require students to take the SSAT, the Secondary School Admission Test, during the academic year in which they apply. The test is an important component of a student’s application. Recognizing that a few points on the test can sometimes make or break a candidacy, it is essential that students take the test seriously. However, as anxiety about the test can hinder performance, it is important for parents not to overly emphasize the importance of the test nor any “target score” for which their son should be striving.

Hillside is an official SSAT test site and will offer the SSAT on three Saturdays during the academic year: Dates To be Announced. When initially creating an account and registering for the SSAT, parents should identify Hillside School as the sole recipient of their son’s scores using our SSAT school number (#3910).

Extended time for testing is available for students who qualify due to specific learning disabilities. SSATB requires that students must have *current* educational testing that formally recommends extended time. Hillside’s test center is set-up to offer the “time-and-a-half” of additional time for those students who qualify.

It is the parents’ responsibility to register their son for the SSAT and to report SSAT test scores to Hillside School. Standardized test scores do not appear on a student’s Hillside transcript. Hillside will send SSAT scores to the secondary schools to which a boy is applying. To ensure that Hillside receives a student’s SSAT scores and writing sample, parents must select Hillside School (code 3910) as a score recipient when they fill out the list of schools to receive their son’s SSAT results. It is very helpful for the Director of Secondary School Placement to have each boy’s SSAT results. The Director will utilize SSAT scores to help guide families in finding viable secondary school options for their son.

Hillside recommends that students take the SSAT in November and/or December. Should boys want to take the SSAT again they will have that opportunity in January.

Some boys have comprehensive educational testing completed by an educational professional (WISC/WIAT). In some cases secondary schools will accept this testing in lieu of standardized testing or require it for a student's application to be complete. Parents should check with each school their son is applying to and determine application requirements. In most cases secondary schools require educational testing that is no more than three years old.

Some secondary schools also accept the ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam) in lieu of the SSAT. More than 2,000 member schools worldwide accept ERB admission assessments, making it a convenient way for families to submit standardized testing to schools. **For more information on the ISEE, please review the ISEE website: <https://www.erblearn.org/parents/admissions-testing-isee>.**

The Application

Completing secondary school applications can be daunting, but the Standard Application Online (SAO) can make the process more streamlined. Families and boys may use the SAO to complete one application and one set of essays and send them to multiple secondary schools. Since more than 450 schools accept the SAO, Hillside recommends using this platform throughout the application process. Please go to the SAO website (www.ssat.org/admission/the-sao) to learn more about the Standard Application Online and the schools that accept it.

While most schools require applications to be submitted by January 15th or January 30th, please check specific school websites for application deadlines.

Both parents and boys are required to complete essays for the SAO. While Hillside teachers will offer broad guidance to the boys in their essay writing, the boys must be the catalyst behind this part of the process. Students may use weekends, evenings, Thanksgiving vacation and winter vacation to work on their essays. Hillside recommends that all applications and essays be completed by the end of winter vacation, knowing that boys will use this vacation time to finalize their applications and essays.

For the very few schools that do not accept the SAO, parents and students will need to complete the application of specific schools or utilize an often less used application platform called Gateway to Prep Schools (<https://www.gatewaytoprepschools.com>).

Recommendations and Transcripts

Once parents and boys have finalized their list of schools, parents should email the Director of Secondary School Placement with their list of schools. The Director will send recommendations and Hillside School transcripts to each school no later than January 10th, 2017.

While the SAO has specific teacher recommendation forms, Hillside will send its own recommendation forms on behalf of our students. Parents and students should not distribute the SAO recommendation forms/requests to Hillside teachers.

The Director of Secondary School Placement will coordinate and send the following Hillside recommendations to the secondary schools:

- Character Recommendation
- English Teacher Recommendation
- Math Teacher Recommendation
- Official Hillside School Transcripts
- Previous School Transcripts (if requested by specific secondary schools)

On the very rare occasion that a secondary school requires additional recommendations (example: Science teacher recommendation), parents must contact the Director of Secondary School Placement with this request. The Director will arrange to have this recommendation completed and sent to the specific secondary school.

Hillside Parents are responsible for the following:

- Scheduling School Visit
- Submitting application and application fee (including uploading student essay)
- Submitting required testing , SSAT's, TOEFL, WISC, etc.

Decision Day

Most secondary schools announce their applicant decisions on March 10th. While all schools are different, boys will likely receive email notifications. This is an exciting and anxious time for everyone involved. Parents should keep the Director of Secondary School Placement abreast of all admittances, wait list statuses and declines.

Revisit Days

Many schools offer revisit days for accepted students to visit a school's campus in late March and/or early April. Boys and their parents may take one last look at schools before they commit to a secondary school. Students and parents should check each school's websites for their revisit day dates and times. Parents are responsible for taking their sons to revisit days.

Commit to a Secondary School

While each school is different, for most secondary schools, April 10th is the deadline for submitting a signed contract and a non-refundable deposit. Boys and their parents should check individual school websites regarding required decision dates. Parents should inform the Director of Secondary School Placement of all final decisions.

Final Transcripts Sent to Secondary Schools

In June the Director of Secondary School Placement will send all end of year transcripts to the secondary school where each boy will attend. Once all grades have been finalized, transcripts will be sent by the end of June.

CAMPUS VISITS & INTERVIEWS

One of the best ways to accurately determine if a secondary school is a "good match" is to visit the campus in person. Visits are also one of the best ways to demonstrate true interest in an institution – a factor that many admission offices consider during the application process.

Boys and their parents should plan to visit schools of various sizes, communities and locales so they can determine which type of institution and environment best meets their son's academic, athletic and social needs. They should try to visit schools when classes are in session to get a broad understanding of the community and student life. When parents speak with schools to arrange the visits, they should let them know that they would like a campus tour and to schedule a personal interview.

If families would like to attend a class, meet with a teacher, eat lunch with a student, or meet with a coach, they should make these requests known when scheduling the visit. While some schools will not arrange meetings with faculty, it never hurts to ask and it demonstrates a specific interest in a program. Also, boys and parents should take

notes after each visit, identifying both the pros and cons of each school. In three months' time, it will help them distinguish one school from the other.

Hillside School encourages all of its Ninth Graders to write handwritten thank you notes (not e-mail) to those who conducted the interview. Students should get a business card from each admission officer.

Interviews

Interviews are an important means of both determining the “fit” between a student and a secondary school and of demonstrating interest in the institution. Demonstrated interest is an important factor considered by many secondary schools during the application review process. An interview on the secondary school’s campus will be conducted by a representative from the Admission Office. Interviews are usually initiated upon the student’s request.

All schools require students to interview. Admissions Officers utilize interviews to learn more about applicants and their interest in their school. Boys should effectively communicate in person with adults and speak confidently/eloquently about themselves and the kind of school that interests them. To emphasize the importance of the interview and tour, some students gain entrance or are denied entrance to a secondary school based on the interview and tour.

Although interviews are often conversational, they serve as an important way for both the student and the interviewer to assess the student’s interest in and fit with the school. It is important that students prepare for interviews and be prepared with good questions and ample knowledge about the school.

For more specifics regarding interviews and tours (dates, times, etc...),
please see page 4 in this handbook.

Helpful Hints for Interviews

Schedule tours and interviews well in advance. August is a good time to schedule school visits for the week after Columbus Day.

When scheduling a visit, please make it known if you would like to meet with a particular faculty member or coach, have lunch in the cafeteria, and/or meet with a coach or teacher.

Boys should be well-prepared for all tours and interviews. They should learn as much as possible about the school prior to the visit. Parents should help their son generate questions and do a self-assessment before the visit. Also, parents should discuss with their son the expected behavior while on a secondary school campus.

An interview is a mutual sharing of information. Parents and students should consider their visit as an opportunity to interview the secondary school about their programs and community.

Boys should take time to introduce themselves and to shake hands with everyone he meets. Good eye contact is also important.

Do not schedule more than two school visits per day. More than two visits per day will be overwhelming for both students and parents.

While on campus, parents can read the school newspaper, yearbooks and scan bulletin boards and kiosks to get a sense of the campus culture.

Questions to Ask School Representatives

Admission representatives genuinely enjoy talking to students. They like to share their ideas about their school, so much so that many admission offices now offer blogs or Facebook pages that reveal detailed information about their school. These professionals appreciate students who have researched the school and who want to know more than what is stated in the viewbook or on the school's website.

Below are examples of questions that are appropriate to ask during an interview. Thoughtful questions can lead to answers that help students and parents decide if the school is a good match. Families should select or create a few questions that cover a number of areas of secondary school life and pose those questions to many different people at any given school.

Academics

What is the student/faculty ratio and average class size?

What are your graduation requirements? Do you require two or three years of a foreign language?

What is the percentage of graduates who attend college, and where?

Does the school offer special programs of interest to your son? (i.e. ESL, Academic Support)

Does the school have a particular strength in a specific academic department?

About Extra-curricular and Social Activities

What kinds of activities are offered on weekends?

How is the school spirit? What school events are popular to attend?

How difficult is it to make a sports team? What intramural or club teams do you offer?

How easy is it for first-year students to join activities?

About Housing and Dining

Our tour guide showed me/us one dorm. Are all the dorms similar? How many students to a room? Can you please tell me about the dining hall/food service provider?

About Facilities

Can any student use the rink/pool/weight room without being in a specific class or on an athletic team?

Are practice rooms and art studios available without being in a class? Do all residence halls have wi-fi?

Is the entire campus wireless?

Does the library staff assist in research? How quickly can one get interlibrary loans?

General Questions Parents Might Ask About Community

Can you talk about campus safety?
How does your school deal with drugs and alcohol?
What are the most distinctive qualities of your institution?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of your school?
What is there to do in town? How would my son get to town without a car?
Are there Community Service opportunities in which students can become involved?
How safe is the surrounding neighborhood?

About Financial Aid

Is the school need-blind in its admission process?
Are merit-based scholarships offered? If so, is there a separate application process?
Tell me about your payment schedule.

HOW TO APPLY

General Information

Once families have come up with a final list of schools to which they will apply to, parents should email that list to the Director of Secondary Placement so recommendations may be sent. Please keep the Office of Secondary School Placement informed of any changes to that list throughout the application process.

There are many types of secondary school applications, the more commonly used are:

1. The Standard Application Online (SAO), or,
2. Gateway to Prep Schools
3. Secondary School's own application (hard copy online, if available)

Teacher recommendations, standardized test scores, transcripts, a writing sample and letters from Hillside will be submitted to secondary schools by our Director of Secondary School Placement.

There is a fee applied to each application that is submitted. The amount and payment policy varies for each school.

It is the parents' and student's responsibility to ensure that each application is complete; however, some schools will also notify students if parts of their application are missing. *Hillside does not upload transcript and recommendations to on-line applications. We e-mail that information directly to the school.* Hillside's Office of Secondary School Placement is happy to help resend recommendations and Hillside transcripts as necessary.

The Standard Application Online (SAO)

The Standard Application Online, also known as the SAO, is a convenient, electronic platform to apply to many secondary schools. Developed by SSATB, the institution that also administers the SSAT, the SAO allows parents and students to apply to several secondary schools via one application. Very similar to the Common Application for colleges, the SAO aggregates information within a student account so one application may be sent to many secondary schools. Since the SAO is specifically designed for independent schools, many of the secondary schools that Hillside boys apply to accept the SAO. Parents and boys should check specific school websites or the SAO website to identify which schools accept the SAO.

Hillside recommends that parents and students utilize the SAO to streamline the application process. In early September of each year, the new SAO application goes "live", at which point parents and students may create an account and begin the application process. Biographical information, school information, parent essays and student essays may be completed online. These essays should be well thought-out and grammatically correct. Since student essays will be compared to the writing sample on the SSATs, Hillside encourages parents to let their son's essays be an accurate representation of his own writing skills. It is also important to think of any possible "gaps" in a boy's academic record and to address them directly.

The SAO website often has a short webinar that explains the overall process of using the SAO, and Hillside recommends that all parents view the webinar before beginning the application process.

Please note that Hillside will send its own recommendations on behalf of the boys.

There is no need to request Hillside teachers to complete the SAO teacher recommendation forms.

The SAO website is www.ssat.org/admission/the-sao. While there are many resources available at the SAO website to answer questions regarding the application process, you may also contact the Director of Secondary School Placement.

Teacher Recommendations

Hillside uses its own recommendation forms to best communicate to secondary schools the positive qualities of each boy. The Director of Secondary School Placement will send the following Hillside recommendations to the secondary schools:

- Character Recommendation
- English Teacher Recommendation
- Math Teacher Recommendation
- Official Hillside School Transcripts
- Previous School Transcripts (if requested by specific secondary schools)

If you are applying to a school that requires supplemental forms (for example, a Science recommendation), please notify the Office of Secondary School Placement.

Grades & Transcripts

Hillside will send an official Hillside School academic transcript to each school to which a student is applying.

Supplemental Application Materials

It is the responsibility of parents and students to send any supplemental materials - such as additional writing samples, music CDs, or videos - to secondary schools. When submitting supplemental materials, parents should identify their son's name and address on each item. Most items will not be returned.

Financial Aid

Families applying for financial aid must visit sss.nais.org to complete the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) or request that the secondary school to which their son is applying send you a printed PFS. Parents can fill out one PFS to submit to all the schools to which their son is applying.

Step-by-step PFS instructions are offered on the website (sss.nais.org) as well as via a toll-free helpline at (800) 344-8328.

Schools will require a copy of parent tax returns to complete the SSS Application. Hillside recommends that parents file as early as possible.

FACTORS CONSIDERED BY SCHOOLS DURING THE APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Academic Record/Test Scores

Schools are looking for students who have continually challenged themselves with their academic work. They often look for trends in transcripts such as whether grades have improved each year. Also, some schools weigh SSAT/TOEFL/ISEE scores heavily. Some students gain entrance or are denied entrance to a secondary school based on grades and/or standardized test scores.

Character/Activities/Involvement/Leadership

Secondary schools seek applicants who have been involved in meaningful activities and who are upstanding individuals of character. Whether through school, church/temple activities, community service, athletics, music, drama, arts or other activities, students should be able to demonstrate a reasonable dedication to one or more activities. In addition, students who have fulfilled leadership positions (prefect, proctor, team captain, etc.) have demonstrated their commitment to their communities by doing so.

DECISIONS FROM SCHOOLS

Regardless of when an application is submitted, most schools notify applicants on March 10th regarding application decisions. Many schools have adopted a practice of notifying applicants when/if their application is complete. While self-advocacy is important for students and families during the application process, Hillside's Director of Secondary School Placement will support and respectfully advocate for Hillside School Ninth Graders as appropriate.

In turn, parents will have until April 10th to notify schools of their decision. If a school is asking for a decision prior to April 10th, please notify the Director of Secondary School Placement.

RESOURCES

While there are many electronic and print resources to help students and parents through the secondary school selection and application process, below are a few that are particularly helpful:

The Association of Boarding Schools Magazine and Directory –
www.boardingschools.com

NAIS – National Association of Independent Schools – www.nais.org

Standard Application Online – www.ssat.org/admission/the-sao

SSAT Website - www.ssat.org/test/registration

Boarding School Review - www.boardingschoolreview.com

AISNE – Association of Independent Schools of New England – www.aisne.org

TOEFL Website - <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

Educational Consultants

Some students and their families have come to Hillside through the recommendations of educational consultants, and Hillside will continue to work with them during the students' Hillside careers. If parents wish to use the services of an educational consultant during the secondary school placement process, Hillside's placement office will partner with all consultants to provide the best possible information and advice.

