

SAINT DAVID'S SCHOOL

Maximizing Your Visits to Secondary Schools and Making Informed Decisions About Applying to the "Best" Schools

Michael A. Imbelli

*Director of Counseling and Secondary
School Placement at Saint David's
School in New York City*

The time has arrived to apply to secondary school, an anxious time for parents and child. Secondary schools utilize many criteria in making admissions decisions. A candidate's file will include a completed application; writing sample; English, math and character recommendations; testing records; transcripts of grades, and reports of interviews at schools visited. Candidates are evaluated on their character, test profile, academic achievement, potential, motivation, special talents and their projected ability to perform well at a given school.

Those are the criteria used by schools. What criteria should parents and child use to determine whether or not they will apply to a particular school?

The process of applying to secondary schools can seem daunting at first. Parents and children are often concerned about how they can maximize their visit to a secondary school. Most visits, tours and interviews last approximately two hours. In such a short time, how can parents and their child make an informed discernment about whether or not a particular school is the "right school?" The following should help make your school visits more meaningful and provide you with solid information upon which you can make good judgments.

Tips

1. Anticipate the questions you may be asked during the course of an interview. Most interviews are conversational in tone. Topics usually covered concern school, family, extracurricular activities, hobbies and interests, and contributions you might make to the secondary school.
2. Prepare a number of questions before your visit to a school by studying each school's catalogue.
3. Never plan on visiting more than two schools a day.

4. Try to arrive at least 15 minutes early. Observe kids, teachers and the interaction of people.
5. Parents should call to make appointments for visits and interviews. At that time, information can be given about a boy and a visit can be tailored to an individual's interests. Ask if it is possible to sit in on parts of classes.
6. If your son is planning on attending a boarding school, request that your tour be given by a student who is boarding at that school. Sometimes day students will give the tours and will not know enough about the boarding experience.
7. Be attentive to seemingly superficial things that are very important. For example, the condition of the campus; the appearance of the dorm rooms; the dress of the faculty and students; the degree of openness and friendliness of faculty and students; how many people smile, say hi, or seem willing to be engaged in conversation all can tell you a great deal about a school.
8. Be honest. Candidly discuss a student's needs, strengths and weaknesses and measure them vs. the strengths and weaknesses of the school. If bringing out an important factor of your son's background means that the school discovers that it is not the best school for him, this is far better than ending up months into the fall term with the realization that a mismatch has been made.
9. Questions you might want to ask - A to Z. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Too often parents feel that a school is making a judgment about them or their son. You need to ask questions to make a judgment about the school.
 - How does the school encourage parental involvement?
 - Are there formal sit-down dinners with faculty?
 - How structured a school is _____?
 - Who is looking after my son?
 - Are there supervised study halls?
 - How free are kids to come and go off campus?
 - What is the school's policy on drugs? alcohol?
 - What is there for the kids to do on weekends?
 - If my son is struggling academically, how do you insure that he not fall between the cracks?
 - How many different level teams do you have in a particular sport?

- What influence do you give to values education?
 - What arrangements are made to get students to religious services?
 - How often do you communicate with parents on the progress of a student?
 - How often is an advisor required to meet with his advisee?
 - How often does the faculty meet to discuss students on a formal basis?
 - What provisions are made for campus security?
 - Could you briefly describe the philosophy of the school?
 - What kind of imprint does _____ school hope to leave upon its students?
 - What distinction is there between _____ school and comparable schools?
 - What's special about this school?
 - What off-campus activities are available to students?
 - What is the school's commitment to the development of the ethical and spiritual lives of its students?
 - In what ways are students asked to give service to the community?
 - How does the school help a young person make the transition between elementary school and secondary school?
 - Isn't it true that the academic diet offered by prep schools is all pretty much equal?
 - How are boy/girl dorm visitations regulated?
 - How often is my child allowed to come home?
10. Several schools ask that your son write an essay after his interview. He may be asked to write about a past experience, activity, or relationship that is important to him. He may be asked to give his impressions of the tour and interview.
11. You and your son should make notes about your visit before you leave the campus and drive to the next school. If you don't, you will forget what you liked or didn't like about each school.

12. Save all notes in a folder.
13. As soon as you get home, your son should write a brief thank you note to the person who interviewed him. Try to mention your tour guide by name.
14. Once accepted by a school, consider a second visit. These visits can be very revealing. The real flavor of a school may come through. Your son may be able to visualize more fully what it might be like to live at the school.
15. After you and your son decide on the school he will attend, call and then write the other schools that accepted him to inform them of your decision.

This is an exciting time in your child's life. Avoid the danger of living vicariously through him. Remember, he is going to the school, not you. As parents, we select our children's elementary school. They will select their college. For secondary schools, we must enter into a selecting partnership with them. Our task is not to convince them or cajole them into attending a particular school. Apply only to the "best" schools that are appropriate to his academic, emotional, social and physical needs. Apply to a number of schools, any one of which you would be happy to see your child attend. Then, when the acceptances come in, you can sit back and relax. Help your child clarify his thinking, hopes, and dreams. You can be secure, knowing that you've provided your child with the information and guidance to make a responsible decision.

SAINT DAVID'S SCHOOL

Secondary School Admissions Possible Interview Questions

WHO ARE YOU?...WHAT DO YOU DO?

School

1. Tell me about Saint David's.
2. What do you like best about your school?
3. What do you like least about your school?
4. If you could change anything about your school, what would it be?
5. What would you like to never see changed about Saint David's?
6. What is your favorite course of study?
7. What is your least favorite course of study?
8. What are you currently studying in English, History, Mathematics, Science and foreign language?
9. What is your idea of a perfect teacher?
10. How do you organize your time when you get home from school?
11. How much time do you spend doing homework?
12. What have been your greatest contributions to Saint David's?
13. What are your academic strengths?
14. What are your academic weaknesses?
15. Do you like to read?
16. What is the best novel you ever read? What do you like about this book?
17. Is there a particular character in literature of whom you are fond? What characteristics do you admire about this individual?
18. Have you won any awards or honors at your school?
19. What sports do you play at Saint David's?

20. What experience have you had in theater, music or the arts? Family

Family

1. How many brothers or sisters do you have? How old are they? Where do they go to school?
2. How do you feel about being the oldest/ youngest/ middle/ only child in the family?
3. What does your Dad do for a living?
4. Does your Mother work outside the home?
5. What kinds of things do you like to do together as a family?

Outside of School

1. How do you like to spend your free time?
2. Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
3. Do you play any sports outside of Saint David's?
4. What do you do when you get together with your friends?
5. Have you ever had a job of any kind?
6. Describe for me your most memorable day.
7. When are you the happiest?
8. What qualities do you look for in a friend?
9. How would your friends describe you?
10. How did you spend your last two summers?

Interest in a Particular School

1. How did you hear about _____ school?
2. What activities, clubs or sports do you think you would participate in?
3. What do you think your biggest adjustment would be if you attended _____ school?
4. What contributions do you feel you could make to the community of _____ school?
5. What other schools are you looking at?

Miscellaneous

1. If you could invite three people from history to dinner, who would they be and why would you invite them?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
3. Tell me about an important person in your life. What influence has he/she had on you?
4. People define success in many ways. How would you define success?
5. Describe your room.
6. Is there anything about yourself that you would like to change?
7. Why are you considering attending a boarding (or day) school?
8. Describe an experience that has had an impact on your life.
9. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about you?
10. What questions do you have?