



EDUCATION PATHWAYS

HIGH SCHOOL PLACEMENTS

Contents

Topic	Page
Bay Area High Schools	2
Private or “Independent” High Schools	2
Boarding Schools	3
Applying to Private Schools	3
Admissions Timeline	3
Financial Aid	3
ISEE, SSAT, HSPT Testing	3
Test Prep	4
Accreditation	4
Other School Options - Beyond Private Schools!	4
Public High Schools	4
Charter High Schools	4
International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs	5
Middle College	5
Concurrent Classes	5
Online High Schools	6
Highly Individualized HS Programs	6
Special Programs	6
Military Schools	6
GED	6
We are here to help	6

Your child’s transition to high school requires you as a parent to be engaged and informed regarding the many options available. The four years go by very quickly but finding the “right fit” program and school for your child is a very important step on their educational journey and will lay the correct foundation for their entry into college. This white paper gives you an overview of the key aspects of the transition to high school, including school options and the task areas where decisions need to be made.

✔ Bay Area High Schools

In the Bay Area, high school programs are typically structured as four-year programs which encompass grades 9-12 (general age range is 14-18 years old), and most students who apply to private high schools enter as freshmen/9th graders in August of that academic year. All accredited high school programs in the Bay Area offer courses that meet or exceed the University of California’s (UC) A-G requirements – completion of specific subjects and classes that will mean the student is eligible to matriculate into a UC undergraduate program.

The availability of places for 9th graders may vary from year to year, but generally speaking, the Bay Area is an extremely competitive market for private high schools. Some private high schools can be impacted by the volume of siblings that are “coming up” into their programs, meaning that only a handful of places may be open for new families. However, places may occasionally open up in programs for grades 10 and over, so if you have a current high school student and are looking to make a change mid-stream, that can sometimes be an option.

The Bay Area has a remarkable number of very high quality high schools to suit almost every family’s needs: parochial/diocesan, independent Catholic, progressive, international, Christian, Waldorf, performing arts, special focus charter schools ... and beyond. And, if you are considering a charter high school, they also have deadlines that must be met – even though they are a branch of the public high school system. It’s critical to be aware of the timeline for each school’s individual admissions process.

✔ Private or “Independent” High Schools

There are many excellent private high schools in the Bay Area. This includes schools in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Jose, Alameda, and Marin counties. Although there is definitely a “right fit” school for every child, there may not be an available PLACE at that right-fit school. As the population of the Bay Area continues to grow and more families move here for jobs and career opportunities, the process of choosing a school becomes not simply an issue of geography. And picking the right school for your child is a decision that will set the trajectory for the college years and beyond. It is an important process that cannot be left to chance; and, like many aspects of life, it can often be a numbers game. How many

schools should your child visit? How many applications should they complete? How do you ensure that your child is being presented in the best possible light to admissions directors? How do you manage all this information when you are trying to juggle a high-pressure job and the demands of your family? We can help you with all these questions and steer you through the process one step at a time. Yes, there will be things that only you as the parent can do, but as we get to know your child and his/her personality, hopes, passions, and gifts, we can work with you to make sure your child stands the best possible chance of admission at your top-choice private high school. Whether you are seeking a Catholic education, a progressive environment, a small highly individualized curriculum, a top-tier athletics program, or a school that specializes in the visual and performing arts, we can help you find the right school for your child and your family.



✔ Boarding Schools (These are also Independent/Private schools)

Here on the West Coast, boarding during high school is not as top-of-mind an option as it is for families back East, and many parents are surprised when we suggest it as an option. However, it can be a fantastic choice for high school, and we always encourage families to investigate every path available. We believe the positive aspects of boarding are so numerous that it is impossible to list them here. But consider this: If you have a child who is a very strong athlete, for example, and who spends many hours in the car travelling to and from practice, trying to cram homework assignments into snatched minutes during his/her commute; or a child who just wants to do EVERYTHING – academics, theater, choir, sports, student government, community service, outdoor pursuits, etc., a boarding program will allow them to make the most of every, single moment of the day. Boarding schools that are within driving distance of your home can offer flexible plans: Your child can board Monday –Thursday nights and come home on the weekend (sports and extracurricular events are exceptions, of course!), so do not rule out boarding until you have weighed the potential benefits. We have successfully placed many students into boarding school programs on the West Coast, Midwest, East Coast – and even overseas in the UK. After initial reactions of “Oh we’d never send our child to a boarding school,” every single parent has commented after a few months that “this was absolutely THE BEST option for our child. Thank you!!” So again – it is all about individual fit, and we are here to make sure that we help you find the right path for your child.

APPLYING TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

✔ Admissions Timeline

If you are thinking about having your child apply to a private high school or boarding school, it is important to be aware of the timeline for admissions. The high school admissions process runs from October through April every calendar year with deadlines and deliverables that cannot be missed. Typically, families start talking about which high school might be a good fit for their child in the second semester of 7th grade, and families should be ready to embark on the multi-step admissions process in September of their child’s 8th-grade year.

✔ Financial Aid

Most independent schools offer financial aid to prospective parents; therefore, you should never decide not to apply to a school if you think that school is exactly the right fit for your son/daughter even if financial circumstances are an obstacle. Most schools now partner with

independent third-party organizations to receive all your financial information, for example FAST (Financial Aid for School Tuition) <https://ismfast.com/home/> and the school will then receive a report determining your eligibility for financial aid. This helps maintain your privacy, keeps your financial records safe, and is held off-site from the school. If you feel your family is eligible for financial aid to help pay for your child’s high school education, you should review the school’s website at the earliest opportunity. Admissions decisions are not typically made based on a family’s need for financial aid as this information is kept private.

✔ ISEE, SSAT, HSPT Testing

Parents often feel a sense of panic when they learn that their child must take a placement test to apply to a private high school or boarding school. In our experience, this is usually a much more straightforward experience for the child. These tests are simply designed to determine your child’s level in math, language arts, and writing.

When you apply to a private high school, you will learn early in the process WHICH of the available placement tests your school(s) require. There are several tests on the market, and most schools will take one or two of the choices. It is important to get this information as soon as possible giving you ample time to register your child to take the test either at the school you are applying to or another at high school location within your geographic region. In regions where there is extensive competition for places, testing locations fill up almost immediately. We have experienced people driving up to 50 miles to find an available testing location, so plan for this as early as possible.

Most private high schools – both day and boarding programs – accept the ISEE (Independent Schools Entrance Examination), and this tends to be the test of choice for East Coast schools. However, some schools may ask for the SSAT (Secondary School Admissions Test). The HSPT (High School Placement Test) is the third of the most commonly used tests and is often the test of choice for independent Catholic high school programs in the Bay Area. By visiting the websites of each of these test providers, you can learn about upcoming testing locations and fees and register your child to take the test(s). All three tests are offered multiple times during the regular admissions season.



✔ Test Prep

Just as you would not take your driving test without practicing, your child should prepare for the high school placement tests – even if they are a straight A student. Often, it is not that your child does not know the material, it is the way the questions are structured and the way the students are expected to perform that can trip them up. Something as simple as filling in a bubble sheet can confound the smartest of students and they will accidentally skip a bubble if they are stressed. You can download the practice tests from the internet and have your child take one or two a week under timed conditions before they take the actual test. Or, sign your child up for test prep with a professional tutoring service or an independent tutor. Any one of these options will help build your child’s confidence so he or she knows what to expect. We have seen students with stellar grades and teacher accolades flunk the test on the first try, and then gradually build up to be able to “show what they know” over the course of a few weeks. We highly recommend test prep – it is a good life experience for your child and helps them build skills that will serve them well throughout their academic journey. If you need referrals to good prep centers or tutors, we can also help with that.

✔ Accreditation

Reputable independent schools are typically accredited by third-party organizations whose business is to ensure that schools are performing as expected and offering a quality education to the students enrolled. Although standards between accrediting agencies may vary slightly, each agency will look at three things: basic standards of administration, physical facilities, and the quality of the academic program. Think of it as a seal of approval that

lets you know the school is meeting or exceeding the standards expected by the accrediting agency. You can read more online about accrediting bodies and understand how to check that the schools you are applying to are in good standing with regional and national agencies.

OTHER SCHOOL OPTIONS – BEYOND PRIVATE SCHOOLS!

✔ Public High Schools

Although it may seem counterintuitive for us as high school placement specialists to discuss public high schools, if you are considering applying to private high schools, it is important to also have a clear picture of what your local public high school has to offer your child. The Bay Area is blessed with a relatively high tax basis, and in neighborhoods and cities where public high schools are good, this positively impacts property values – and it is a self-perpetuating cycle. In fact, in towns and cities where there are prestigious private high school options, the public high schools are often very competitive. The key factor here is “competition.” The public high school districts know that they must compete with a buoyant and highly desirable private school option – and the public schools in the Bay Area offer very strong programs, high-caliber teachers, and state-of-the-art facilities for families. Many public high schools offer AP (Advanced Placement) classes as part of their internal college track programming for their top students, allowing students to gain college credit for courses while still enrolled in high school. Our philosophy is this: We are lucky in the Bay Area to have so many outstanding choices for high school, so you should always review every option carefully and factor in what is the very best environment for your child. Factors to consider are: maintaining friendships from elementary school (if your child has been in public elementary), coordination and transportation, finances, and size of classes, among others.

✔ Charter High Schools

Charter high schools are public schools, so what is the difference? Charter schools are still funded by public money which is calculated on a per capita basis and dependent on the number of students enrolled at the school. However, the “charter” means that the governing body/founders of the school have been given the option to chart the mission of the school and are released from some of the rules relevant to regular public comprehensive schools. This helps (in theory) to keep costs down. Charters have become very popular in the Bay Area as we are a very entrepreneurial region (the concept of a charter school appeals to the Silicon Valley “hacker” mentality of “let’s deconstruct this and build a better model!”), and

there are several very successful charter schools. The wrinkle is that you must apply by lottery and you have no guarantee of a place for your child. To help with planning, most charters will open their lottery in early January each year, close it in February, and then run a strict linear wait list for places. Therefore, if you have also applied to a private high school and you are offered a place in March, you can then decide if you are going to give up your place in line for the charter. It is important to check out charter options as some have very specific curriculum focuses – for example Design Thinking/Technology or Performing Arts.

✔ International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs

Some public, private, and charter high schools in the Bay Area offer International Baccalaureate (IB) programs either as the only curriculum or as a curriculum pathway within the overall larger school and course options. Well known in Europe and internationally, the high school IB program offerings are gaining traction here in the U.S. as an alternative to regular college-level and AP coursework for top-tier students. So, what is an IB program? While the website <http://www.ibo.org/> provides massive amounts of information, in a nutshell, the IB was originally devised in 1968 to provide a standardized curriculum for European diplomats whose children were shuttled from city to city and needed to be taught in the same language and have the same academic standards in order to be able to get into top universities in Europe. Thus, the IB has become the “gold standard” as a global, accredited curriculum that universities throughout Europe would accept for admission.

Since then, the organization has expanded worldwide and into lower grades and continues to expand its reach. To offer the IB Diploma (high school level), schools must go through an exacting accreditation process and uphold these exacting academic standards. Colleges and universities throughout the U.S. now recognize IB diplomas, and the added benefit is that, if you have a child who is considering applying to a university in Europe, or your family is European and there is a chance you may move back to Europe during the high school years, finding a school that offers IB can help smooth the administrative headache of transferring. One thing to bear in mind: Many schools require students to “test in” to IB programs or to have a significant GPA to qualify for the IB program classes. There are several high schools in the Bay Area that are accredited for IB, and you can find the list that includes public, private and charter Bay Area IB high schools on the International Baccalaureate website.

✔ Middle College

Middle College is an alternative high school concept that was initially conceived on the East Coast. It is typically a collaboration between the high school or high school district and a local community college for students who want a more independent learning environment than regular high school offers. Middle College is typically made available for students who are juniors and seniors. One of the benefits of enrolling in a Middle College program is that it is possible to take college-level classes while you are still in high school. This can reduce the cost of coursework leading to an undergraduate degree if you then carry those course credits forward into community college. You can read more about local Bay Area Middle College programs online.



✔ Concurrent Classes

For students who are enrolled in a high school program but whose school does not offer a specific set of classes or coursework that the student needs to be able to graduate, enrolling in concurrent classes is worth considering. This option allows a high school student to be enrolled concurrently at his/her local community college and take those classes there. These classes, once completed, will be part the student’s high school transcript and count as credits toward graduation. A scenario for this might be: A family moves to the Bay Area from the East Coast where their high school student has already completed two years of French. French is not offered at their new school, but classes are available at the local community college. The student (if transportation is possible) is released from campus daily to take classes at the community college campus. Fees may be charged for enrolling in classes at the community college level.

✔ Online High Schools

For some students, being able to “do” high school at their own pace and in their own time via an online provider can be an excellent option. There are many reasons why an online high school can work: health/mobility issues; a disruption in your child’s regular life due to an unexpected move; a need to take a “break” from a regular high school environment due to social pressures; a family bereavement... There are many, many reasons why this could be a great choice either for an entire four-year high school experience or for just a semester. The good news is that so long as you have a great WIFI connection and a laptop, it is now entirely possible to progress through an accredited high school curriculum remotely. Most online high school providers understand that high school is typically a very social time in a young person’s life, and they will create “community” for students enrolled via chat rooms, Skype/FaceTime, and webinars. With sophisticated LMS (learning Management Systems) now available to tutors and teachers, your child can be held accountable for logging into lectures, engaging in online chat with teachers and peers, and completing assignments on time. We can help you determine if an online high school program is right for your child.



✔ Highly Individualized HS Programs

There are several organizations in the Bay Area that offer programs absolutely 100% tailored to your son or daughter’s highly specific individual needs. Some are independently owned and operated deliverers of high school classes; some are chains with premises in other towns

and cities. You can have your child enroll for just ONE class – for example high school chemistry – or you can enroll for multiple classes. This can be a great option if, for example, your child is struggling with one class due to factors like a personality clash with the teacher or they have missed some classes because of an external commitment or extended illness.

✔ Special Programs

Sometimes families need extra-special help finding the right high school for a child with special needs or circumstances. We can help. Typically by partnering with a child’s existing support team, we can help you determine the best options, reviewing day programs versus boarding choices available both in and out of state. Happily, Northern California has many excellent choices for parents in addition to the out-of-state options. We look forward to helping you narrow the options in order to choose the right program for your child.

✔ Military Schools

There are many independent military boarding and day schools located all over the U.S. If you are considering a military high or prep school education for your child, you can search options online. We can help you navigate the choices available and understand your and your child’s goals and objectives in applying to a private military high school program.

✔ GED

Sometimes, your son or daughter may not finish high school in a conventional manner. If that is the case, we strongly advise your child to take the GED (General Educational Development) test to show proficiency in basic academic subjects. You can read more about the GED, find out testing schedules, and source test-prep materials online.

✔ We are here to help

Navigating all the choices for your child’s high school experience can be overwhelming. The pressure of applying to many of the Bay Area’s top-tier high schools is intense. It is important to manage expectations regarding whether your child will be offered a place at his or her top-choice school, and part of our expertise is to help guide the whole family during this process. There are, of course, no guarantees in the world of admissions. However, we can promise to ensure that your son’s or daughter’s chance of being offered a place is maximized.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO GETTING TO KNOW YOUR FAMILY!

