

Berkshire Country Day School

2019-2020
Secondary School Application Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This handbook is the product of years of involvement in the secondary school placement process. It reflects information and insights gathered from school programs, interview with admissions officers and visits to schools, and feedback from students and parents. We hope you will find it helpful.

In this transitional year for BCD, the three of us will be working together with you and with faculty advisors to navigate decision-making for secondary school placement. The beginning of the school year is a good time for families of 8th and 9th graders to begin the formal process. It's valuable to gain a sense of all the options available, and to begin to focus on the potential options that may be right for each individual students and family. The next step is to choose schools to further explore and visit.

Families carry the primary responsibility throughout the process. We at school can advise, guide and support you, beginning with this handbook and its timeline checklist. This is an important time and an experience that we want to be a positive one for every student and family. We are committed to working together with you throughout the process.

With sincere good wishes,

Jenifer Fox
Head of School

Leigh Doherty
Associate Head

Melissa Kruse
Assistant/Coordinator

MATERIALS IN THE HANDBOOK

Secondary School Options

**Public Schools
Independent Day Schools
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Further Information for Secondary School Applicants

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The Standard
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BCD's Mailing Process
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Student Strengths Sheet

SECONDARY SCHOOL OPTIONS

The Public School Option:

- Guidance counselors at public schools are extremely helpful to families when considering the local high school option. Please call them to find out about requirements, to receive a student handbook, and to set up a tour or student visit. Websites and publications offer detailed information about curriculum and extracurricular programs.
- If you are interested in pursuing School Choice (available to Berkshire County residents only) to attend a public school other than the one in your own school district, you must complete an application to that school. Not all high schools accept School Choice and it varies from year to year. Please note that admissions are made by lottery; students' academic credentials are not a factor. It is important that you submit your application in the fall, as schools begin making their decisions in the winter, sometimes as early as late January.
- For Out of County Residents, you may consider a Berkshire County school only if space is available. A tuition fee is charged to the family, with fees varying from school to school. Please call the school's superintendent to receive information about this option.
- Even if you are uncertain whether or not you will pursue the public school route, we encourage you to apply in order to keep the greatest possible number of options open.

The Independent Day and Boarding School Option

- The independent school community beyond BCD offers opportunities for you to tour and visit their schools. Many of these schools offer open houses in the fall and winter, as well as offer individual tours, arranged through the admissions office at the schools you are considering.
- To get some information about the various schools, students and their families are encouraged to visit the following websites:
 - 1) www.nais.org National Association of Independent Schools
Here you may download a copy of their publication Independent Day and Boarding Schools, which gives detailed information about the schools.
 - 2) www.boardingschoolreview.com
 - 3) www.petersons.com
 - 4) www.IECAonline.com (educational consultants)
 - 5) www.greatschools.net
- The official round of formal school visits should take place in the fall of the 8th or 9th grade year. Visiting a school when it is in session is very important in order to get its true feel. Call well in advance for a tour and an interview.

- Consider planning your visits on a “circuit” so that you cover more than one school in a given area on the same trip. Limit your schedule to two visits a day (a morning and an afternoon) since these visits can total up to three hours per school in addition to driving time.
- We urge you to schedule visits on weekends, school holidays, or following the close of the first trimester so the student does not miss vital class time or academic work at BCD. If a school trip must be taken during school time, we completely support and understand that, and please notify BCD as far in advance as possible and please gather assignments in advance.

Parents, please note:

- The admissions staff wants to get to know your son/daughter; be sure to take a back seat!
- Telling admissions officers and guides about your son’s/daughter’s specific interests in your initial inquiry to the school facilitates the process since admissions officers are on tight schedules.

Try to complete visits by the start of the winter holiday vacation. Deadlines for visits to most schools are usually the end of January.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT APPLYING TO INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

The Secondary School Admissions Test (SSAT)

- With very few exceptions, the SSAT is **required** for all 8th and 9th graders who are applying to independent schools.
- Families can also register online at www.ssat.org. We recommend that BCD students register for the November or December test date. However, you may decide on an earlier date, and the January test scores may still be considered for submission.
- Parents are responsible for filling out the registration on-line by the stated deadline. DO NOT report any scores until you have chosen the best set from all of the tests taken.

The “Standard Application Process”

- Students, parents, and teachers can complete much of the application and recommendation processes on-line by filling out the “standard app” and indicating all of the schools that they would like the common materials to be submitted to.
- We recommend registering your child and using the Gateway to Prep Schools site at <https://www.gatewaytoprepschools.com/>
- However, a few schools are not listed on the Gateway site. These schools will indicate how they would like you to apply on-line. It is important to let us know every school you are applying to, and to let us know if any schools require the use of a different site than Gateways.

Teacher Recommendations

- By November 19, 2019 (before Thanksgiving break) , each student should bring to the office a list of the teachers (usually English and Math) who will be asked to write recommendations for each school to which the student plans to apply.
- The student is then responsible for distributing the recommendation forms, together with the special envelopes each school has provided, or ensuring the appropriate electronic link is sent via email to the specific teacher asked to provide a reference. Remember to personally ask each teacher to write the recommendation. We prefer that this be done by December 2. **It is essential that you do this prior to the December vacation.**
- Please follow up with a note of thanks for the time and effort the teachers spend on your behalf

Please note that it is BCD's policy to mail all reference letters directly to the secondary schools or to submit them on-line. BCD does not release letters to our students or a parents.

BCD's mailing

- By November 19, 2019, you must notify the office in writing of all the schools to which you intend to have your son/daughter apply. Additionally, you and your child should fill in any necessary information required by the schools (especially the applicant's name!) before delivering the forms to BCD for completion.
- In mid-January, BCD compiles packets of information for each student and sends them to all the schools to which each has applied. The packets contain:
 - 1) The BCD letter of recommendation
 - 2) Teacher recommendations
 - 3) Other recommendation forms supplied by the schools
 - 4) The transcript of grades for Grades 7 and 8/9
 - 5) The test score sheet

* You may want to send anything else the student wants included (DVDs or artwork portfolios, short films, photography, etc.) to the schools yourself.
- Admissions offices will process applications between January and March. Parents are strongly advised not to call the admissions offices during this time.

Financial Aid

- If you are planning to apply for financial aid, you should indicate this during the application process at each school.
- Parents must complete the financial aid application process on-line at <http://sssbynais.org/parents>, indicating all of the schools that they would like the materials to be submitted to.
- Applicants for financial aid must submit their applications by deadlines set by each school. Check the deadline dates for submission of this information, as they do vary; most schools have a deadline by either February 1st or 15th.
- With the application, families must include copies of their **2018 and 2019 Income Tax Returns** that have already been filed. Therefore, returns must be prepared and filed early. These may be uploaded as pdf files on the SSS website. Other supporting documentation, such as W2s or a brief paragraph describing the family's economic situation, helps bring light to the need as the applications are reviewed. ***We recommend asking the schools that you are applying to about their specific financial aid process and approach.***

INTERVIEWING

We recommend that your family arrive at each interview 10-15 minutes early and well- prepared. Be sure to research the school in advance so that you know as much about it as possible. Dress appropriately and according to the school's dress code.

The student should have met with the Head or Associate Head of School before the first visit to perform a mock interview. This can be coordinated through the office.

You should be prepared to ask intelligent, probing questions. Here are some examples:

- What are the strengths of your academic program and what departments are you particularly proud of?
- What makes this school unique?
- Generally, where do graduates go to college?
- What is the student/teacher ratio in a class?
- What type of arts programs are available?
- Please describe your sports program's philosophy and requirements.
- With which other schools do the sports teams compete?
- What service and travel opportunities are offered?
- Please tell us about the support systems you have in place for students academically, emotionally, and socially.
- Please explain what medical support you provide. Where is the nearest hospital?
- What is the school's off-campus policy regarding trips (supervised) and/or walks into town (unsupervised)?
- What's the diversity of the school?
- Tell me about study abroad and international education and community at this school.
- What is the dorm set-up and supervision? Are single rooms available or are they all doubles?

Some further notes to students:

- Remember, this is a time to present yourself well.
- Respond to all questions with extended answers as necessary. Ask, "Does that answer your question?"
- Look directly at the interviewer and show keen interest in what he/she is saying.
- Dress appropriately for your interview.
- Be sure to thank the admissions people for their time and help.
- A follow-up note or postcard to your admissions officer is a good idea.

To help you prepare to talk about yourself, please fill out a "STRENGTH SHEET," included at the end of this handbook, and return a copy to the school office.

CHECK LIST and CALENDAR FOR ALL STUDENTS

EARLY FALL:

- **Make appointment** with Ms. Fox or Ms. Doherty.
- **Inform** the office every step of the way. Tell us ASAP that school “X” does not interest you and that school “Y” is at the top of your list. As things change, please let him know.
- **Update** your “Strengths Sheet” and give to us by **October 11**.
- **Schedule** visits and/or interviews with guidance counselors (public schools) or admission officers; (try to schedule for holidays in the fall or after 1st trimester closes).
- **Register** now to take the SSAT test in November or December. SSAT dates, registration, and locations are available online at www.SSAT.org.
- **Practice** the school interview: set up a time to meet with Ms. Fox or Ms. Doherty.

LATE FALL:

- **Give** the following to the office by December 2nd, at the latest, please:
 - A list of schools to which you are applying
 - The appropriate forms from each school for BCD to complete
 - The names of your current English and math teachers for recommendations
 - The names of the teachers or individuals, if other recommendations are required (for example, your choice for a personal recommendation) with name of school requiring it.
- **Begin** work on your applications.
- **Distribute** the teacher recommendation forms with the appropriate envelopes to the appropriate teachers for completion. (Mrs. Kruse will collect them and keep them with other material to be sent out). No postage required.
- **Take** the SSAT in November/December.

WINTER/EARLY SPRING:

- If you are applying to a school whose deadline for receiving material is in December or early January, please inform Mrs. Kruse ASAP!
- Complete school applications and financial aid applications
- March/April: Decision letters are mailed out the 2nd week in March. You will have 4-5 weeks to respond. Applicants are encouraged to inform – in writing – **all** the schools to which they applied of their decision. Also let Mrs. Kruse know!

4) Which three adjectives would come to your best friend's mind when describing you?

5) Which three adjectives would come to your parent's minds when describing you?

6) What are you most proud of in your work this year?

7) What are you most proud of in your co-curricular activities over the years?

8) Academic (including Honors), Athletic, Arts, and other Awards received?

9) What do you hope your next school offers you?

10) What do you hope to offer your next school?