



Points to Ponder in Your Selection of High Schools

Here's a checklist of things to think about as you and your child explore high school options. This process can be full of both excitement and anxiety, and we invite you and your child to use the mindfulness tools honed at Millennium as you explore high school options. We believe there is no one perfect high school, and hope you will discover several promising options for your family!

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Size of school (student body): some kids may want small and nurturing. Others may want a big school with lots of teams and a huge social scene.

Location of school: is the campus in the heart of city streets or in a less-urban environment? Is there outdoor space? Does your child care?

Commute to school: sure, you can carpool from just about anywhere, but that still means that once or twice a week, you'll be driving there and back (or there and on to someplace else). Alternatively, is there a private or public bus your child could take? How long would that take? Some kids commute an hour to school and back. Some kids are OK with that because they use it to do homework or talk with friends. Others find a long commute a real time-waste.

Academic style: Progressive? Project-based? Individually-oriented? Traditional ? Fosters competition? Encourages collaboration?

Academic rigor/level: Appropriate for your student's abilities and desire for intensity? Are there AP / honors/ college level classes, if you think that will be important (in upper grades)? Accommodations for learning differences or any other requirements, if needed? Electives – do they appeal?

Engagement of students: Do students seem engaged in class? Are they sneaking time on their cell phones, tablets, or laptops? This can be best observed on Shadow Days, and also by asking around to the current students.

Homework load: You can go by the official school policy, but it's also helpful (and often a different story) to talk to students from the schools -- Shadow Days are ideal. Remember that some students fly through homework while others slog slowly. So try to gauge realistically by getting many responses.

Social ambiance: Cliques? Socially intense? Mellow? Happy or stressed out? What kind of kids succeed socially at this school? Is it about being in the "in" crowd? Is there a culture around partying and/or use of substances at parties, and how young does it start? Social ambiance is one of the tougher aspects to gauge, since it can't be quantified and is rarely talked about by admissions departments. Anecdotal evidence from current students and families is your best bet here, though keep in mind that some grades/kids/groups of friends are just more socially active or more positive/negative than others.

Lunch: Sounds like a silly thing, but it may be important to some kids and also parents. Does the school provide lunch? For an extra fee? Included? Or through external providers? How is the quality and healthfulness of the meals? But what really may make a difference to some kids and families is whether or not students can and do leave campus for lunch. At schools where kids leave campus (even as freshmen), you need to be prepared for your child to spend ~\$10-15 per day

for lunch, choose their own meals, and eat only with other children who a) can afford it b) have the same schedule c) want the same thing for lunch and d) will be part of a small group to go out and procure it. For some kids, this sounds like an exciting display of independence; it makes them feel cosmopolitan and like they're really relishing the city's vibe. Other kids will find this a source of stress and hurt feelings. The flip side is a school that keeps kids (usually underclassmen) on campus for meals, where they eat together. Again, some kids will love this – that it's highly social in an inclusive way, casual, and easy -- while others will see it as stifling.

Cost: Yes, there's financial aid, but some schools have smaller endowments and may not give as much financial aid as others. Beyond that – look at the other, hidden costs, such as commute costs (if by bus, in particular), lunches, computers, books, and add-on trips. At some high schools, the trips are incredible, but you will generally only get significant financial aid for those trips if you are on significant tuition assistance in the first place.

Extracurricular Activities: This is a big one! Don't assume that because your kid loves basketball, you should go to a school with a great basketball program. First, be realistic about the level of your own child's abilities and interest, and then look into the actual program at the various schools. At some schools, your basketball-loving child may never get to play because the level of competition is just too high. Your child may be better off at a school where he or she can be a big fish in a small pond, playing JV or even varsity at a school where the level of play is lower. On the other hand, if your child plays (or acts/ sings/ plays an instrument etc.) at a really high level and wants the challenge of a top-notch program to help prepare them for future participation, that is worth knowing and considering, too. The extracurriculars make a huge difference to a student's experience. Also ask and consider: in order to get into these activities (school newspaper, plays, orchestra, tennis team, etc.), will your child have to compete? At some schools, they must compete and apply for spots, and you may or may not like that aspect. At others, it's either no-cut or at least very open to newcomers. This is a really important one to think about and research as it's wildly different at various schools (even sometimes schools that appear to be similar in other ways) and also wildly different for each child's needs.

Unique/special academic opportunities: Some of the schools offer something unique: International Baccalaureate (IB), senior projects, Intersession week classes, Immersives (intense all-day/all-month classes), Immersion (languages used in class), Industrial design and woodshop classes, half-day arts training, etc. Some schools are oriented entirely around this special focus, like the School of the Arts or Proof School (with a deep focus on mathematics).

Religious affiliation: Some of the religiously affiliated schools are quite secular, with great diversity in the student body. But some have specific religious education requirements that may appeal to or deter your child and family.