



*High School
Selection Guide*

Class of 2021

ST. JAMES ACADEMY

CLASS OF 2021

Dear Parents,

The information compiled in this booklet is intended to assist you and your child through the high school admission process. It includes everything you will need to know as you navigate the many steps involved in successfully transitioning your child from SJA to high school.

Charlotte Riggs, Lisa Davis, Katie Wareheim, the Middle School faculty, and the SJA office staff are committed to supporting you and your student through this process. During the month of September, the students explore the many aspects of transitioning to high school in their Eighth Grade Leadership Seminar. This class includes activities such as individual mock interviews with a school administrator. You will also have an opportunity to schedule a Zoom meeting with SJA's Administration to discuss your child's admission profile and the high school admission process.

Although the admission climate is competitive, be assured that graduates of St. James Academy are well prepared and sought after as strong candidates for independent, Catholic, and public upper school programs. Selecting the best high school match is a time consuming and emotional process. It is also an important learning process and a capstone experience for our Eighth Grade students.

We look forward to working with you and your child during this exciting time.

Lisa Davis

Middle School Head

Katie Wareheim

Director of Admission & Enrollment Management

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Admission Timeline

SEPTEMBER

- ⇒ Read and discuss the contents in this handbook as a family.
- ⇒ Select at least four schools and gather information from their websites.
- ⇒ Mark your calendar to attend virtual information events.
- ⇒ Individual virtual parent meetings with SJA Administrators.

OCTOBER

- ⇒ Organize your applications. Note special requests, information needed, and deadlines. Begin working on the essay draft.
- ⇒ Register online for ISEE and/or HSPT test dates. Be sure the dates do not conflict.
- ⇒ Submit Common Referral Forms, transcript requests, and release of records forms directly to the Academy office; **complete student information on each.**
- ⇒ Individual virtual parent meetings with SJA Administrators.

NOVEMBER

- ⇒ If you will be taking the Catholic schools test (HSPT), be sure you are aware of the exam date, location, and specifics.
- ⇒ Continue working on admission applications and financial aid applications (if desired).
- ⇒ Make sure all Common Referral Forms, transcript requests, and release of records forms are submitted to the SJA front office.

DECEMBER

- ⇒ Complete and submit online applications to the schools you have selected **by December 1st**. Save a copy of each.
- ⇒ File financial assistance forms online with payment. Retain a copy for your records.
- ⇒ Catholic High School Placement Test (HSPT) — Call individual schools for correct dates and times.
- ⇒ ISEE test for the independent schools

Admission Timeline, con't.

JANUARY

- ⇒ Upload/submit supplementary financial assistance forms (W2, 1040) to the schools. **Watch deadlines especially for scholarship applications and testing.**

FEBRUARY

- ⇒ Decision letters mailed **Thursday, February 18th.**
- ⇒ High School welcome events for accepted students.

MARCH

- ⇒ Independent school enrollment deadline for new students is **March 5, 2021**
- ⇒ After you enroll your child at the selected high school, notify any schools to which your child was accepted and will not enroll to allow those schools to contact applicants in their wait pools.
- ⇒ Magnet school decisions are announced.

MAY 1

- ⇒ If enrolling in a public school, schedule an appointment with the counselor to discuss course selection and placement.
- ⇒ **N.B. After this date, enrollment contracts at many schools become binding for the full year's tuition.**

School Considerations

Many factors determine where students should apply to high school. Each family will need to decide which factors are most important in the decision making process for each individual child. The chart below is a guide to help you prioritize. Find time to discuss your choices. Narrow your priorities to those that are most important to both parent and student. Although your collective priorities may change during the process, remember to use these priorities as benchmarks for your decision-making.

Selection Criteria	Parent Priority	Student Priority
Academic Atmosphere		
Affiliation of School		
Student Diversity		
Daily Class Schedule		
Campus Facilities		
Class Size		
College Graduates Attend		
Cost		
Counseling Services		
Course Offerings		
Cultural Experiences		
Distance From Home		

School Considerations, con't.

Selection Criteria	Parent Priority	Student Priority
Extracurricular Offerings		
Financial Assistance		
Honor System		
Independent Study		
Interscholastic Athletics		
Intramural Athletics		
Methods of Instruction		
# of New Students Enrolled		
School Policies		
Size of 9th Grade		
Student/Faculty Relationship		
Student Government		
Technology Integration		
Transportation		
Urban/Rural Setting		

School Visits

Families should contact the schools under serious consideration to schedule visits and interviews. Most schools will conduct tours, open houses, shadow days, and interviews virtually this fall. **Personal visits for parents and students are arranged in different ways by each school.**

SJA will treat virtual visits as we would in-person shadow days. Eighth Grade families should let their child's advisor know when they have visits scheduled. Students are welcome to participate in distance learning or return to school if the visits are not full days.

Virtual visits matter! Please note that the virtual visits carry weight in the admission process just like in-person visits do. SJA visitors should be courteous and attentive to their hosts and spend their time learning about the school. This is a chance for the high school faculty and admission team to get to know your child as well.

This is the time to ask questions to determine whether the school can provide an appropriate program to meet your child's educational needs and personal preferences. A parent and/or student interview might also take place during this visit or at another time. Check with the individual admission offices to determine how they are conducting their interviews this fall.

Again, after the visit a "pro & con" list can be helpful in recalling and organizing information, experiences, and impressions when you are comparing schools. Open discussion between parents and students and comparison of lists helps. **While student input is valued and important to consider, the final decision has to be one that considers the impact on the entire family.**

Completing the Application

FOR THE STUDENT:

Before Starting the Application

- ⇒ **Download and print a copy of the online application** to use as a draft.
- ⇒ **Read the entire application carefully.** Some school websites will not save a partially completed application for later completion. Some applications have an “optional” essay. SJA students should complete this essay.
- ⇒ **Highlight any special instructions** - e.g., the details of an essay to be included with the application; or an application deadline, submitting online, etc.
- ⇒ **Set a target date of December 1st for submitting all applications.**
- ⇒ **Submit printed copies of the transcript request & referral forms directly to the SJA school office.** Clip together all forms for each school. Be sure to complete the student & family information. **Please do NOT give forms to classroom teachers.**

You may be able to prepare one essay for several applications, however, some schools require essays on a specific topic. Your child's English teachers, by request, will review the application essay with the student. Allow plenty of time for consideration and completion of the draft application. **The student should complete the applications.**

What to Expect: The Interview

The admission process requires a parent/student interview in most schools. The interview will focus on the student and his/her personal attributes, academic history, and extracurricular interests. **Interviews will likely take place virtually this fall.**

In early fall, an SJA Administrator will meet with each 8th Grade student individually to practice interviewing skills.

When you meet with an interviewer as part of the admission process, realize that these professionals expect to meet a nervous student and are trained to obtain information by making the interviewee comfortable.

This interview is your child's chance to "toot his/her horn." For years we have taught our children not to boast, but to be humble. An occasion such as an admission interview, however, is an opportunity for your child to share his/her exceptional accomplishments and successes. Schools are looking for: 1) academic performance and intellectual ability; 2) quality students with good values; 3) specific talents, interests, or accomplishments; 4) willingness to try new things.

- As part of the interview, students are expected to answer questions honestly and succinctly, and they are expected to ask pertinent questions specific to that school and/or program. A thorough review of the school's website or literature before the interview is essential for a student to formulate appropriate questions.
- A applicant might want to bring an iPad, photo or short DVD to demonstrate his/her particular accomplishment or skill.

The Interview, con't.

Questions Students May Be Asked

- Why are you considering our school?
- Where else are you applying and why? What is your first choice?
- What makes you think this school is a good match for you?
- What are your academic strengths / weaknesses?
- Do you like movies? What have you seen recently?
- What are your special interests?
- What makes a good teacher?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What's the last thing that you read and enjoyed?
- Tell me about your family. Tell me about a typical day at school.
- How do you spend your summers?
- What extracurricular activities have you found most satisfying?
- Who are your heroes? Why?
- What qualities are important in a student leader?
- What contributions have you made to your school?
- What contributions will you make to our school?
- How would you handle the following situation (example given)?
- What event or person has had a profound impact on your life?
- What is one thing you would like to try that you have not yet done?
- What is one thing you'd like to change about yourself?

Questions Students May Want to Ask

- Tell me about your advisory system. How many students does each advisor counsel?
- How many new students do you enroll in the Freshman Class?
- How many students are in a typical English/History/Math class?
- Do your students have laptops? How are teachers using technology in the classroom?
- Describe student access to theater/music/athletic facilities.
- Do you have design, tinkering or building classes?
- What are the big issues on campus?
- What is the usual course load?
- How does the school assist with college guidance? How many students work with each college counselor?
- How often are AP courses in English, U.S. History, etc., offered?
- Can a freshman play varsity sports?
- Do you have a list of recent college acceptances?

The Interview, con't.

Questions Parents Want to Ask

- What is the student body makeup and geographic distribution?
- How does the school communicate to parents and how frequently?
- What is expected financially beyond tuition?
- What are the school's specialized programs?
- How does the school teach and reinforce study and organizational skills?
- What support services are offered for students?
- How individualized can the program be for my child's abilities?
- What types of projects do teachers assign? How much independence is expected?
- What does the faculty consider to be important in their teaching?
- What forms of literature do the students read?
- How accessible are teachers outside of classroom time?
- How much does class discussion, writing assignments, and test engage the student's higher order thinking skills (analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and application)?
- How do you advance moral development beyond dependence upon rewards and consequences?
- What do your students value? Is it "cool" to be smart, involved, and friendly with teachers?
- How does the school involve students in leadership?
- How does the school ensure that students are doing the best work of which they are capable?
- Who handles college guidance? For how many students?
- How would you describe the class my child will be entering?
- How is technology integrated into the program for students?
- Where can I view your student publications?

Once the interview process is complete, it is important for parents and students to emphasize the positive points of each experience. Consider making a pro/con list similar to the one on Page 5 to formalize your thoughts and feelings. **(It will be easier to remember your impressions later if you make notes after each visit and/or interview.)**

A Final Note: Consider sending a handwritten note or email to the school within a few days of the interview; express your continuing interest in the school, mention experiences you had as a visitor and meeting with the Admission staff. This applies to both parents and students.

Admission Considerations

Testing Profile

Admission test scores (ISEE, HSPT, SSAT)
Achievement test scores (CTP / ERB)
School ability test scores (OLSAT)
CTY Testing (Center for Talented Youth)

Academic Record

Quality and range of courses
Consistency of performance
Improvement of performance
Report Cards for Grades 6, 7, & 8

Extracurricular Activities

Degree of Involvement in School Activities
Summer Activities
Sports, Performing Arts, Visual Arts
Community Service
Leadership Service / Student Council

Teacher Referrals/ Recommendations Interview

Quality of Application and Essays

Other Considerations

1. Demonstrated Academic Excellence & Achievement
2. Affiliation to school / Sibling or Child of Alumnus/Alumna
3. Individual Talents: Athlete / Musician / Performer/Artist
4. Outstanding Social Contribution
5. Virtual Visit(s)
6. Student & Parent Interviews
7. Religious Affiliation
8. Unusual Background

Moreover, schools are looking for candidates and families who understand their mission and will be contributing members of the school community.

High School Admission Tests

Applicants for high schools are generally expected to take admission tests. Some schools may waive testing this fall and instead require additional teacher referral forms. Please be sure to check with each school to which your child is applying to confirm their testing requirements.

Registration for these tests is required. Be sure to inquire about possible scholarship testing at each school, as well.

- Baltimore area independent schools generally require that applicants take the **ISEE** (Independent School Entrance Exam). Some schools may not require the ISEE this year, so please be sure to check with the admission offices of the schools to which your child is applying. Registration is online at <https://www.erblearn.org/parents>. Check the ISEE website and high school application deadlines before considering this option. Results will be sent to each school specified on your registration. The ISEE is two and a half hours long and includes a timed, written essay section. **Please add St. James Academy to the score report list.** If requesting testing accommodations, a copy of the educational evaluation **must be submitted at least 5 weeks before test date for approval.** The link for more information is: <https://www.erblearn.org/parents/accommodations-isee>
- Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore administer the **HSPT** (High School Placement Test) to prospective students at the Diocesan schools on **December 5th, 12th, and 19th**. Testing date and time may be obtained from the Catholic school to which you are applying. The test is three hours and the fee of \$40. Registration is online at <https://stsusers.com/stsusers/registration/static/baltimore.php>
- Boarding schools and some day schools require applicants to take the **SSAT** (Secondary School Achievement Test). Information and pre-registration should be provided by the school as part of the admission process.
- Portfolios and / or prime assessments are required for Public Magnet Program Schools. Portfolios and auditions can take a full year of preparation.

Required Referral Forms

As part of the Admission process, the application for each school will include at least one Teacher Referral Form and a Release of Records. Both of these forms should be submitted to the SJA school office. **Please do NOT give referral forms directly to individual teachers.** The Academy Office keeps a record of the incoming forms to assure that they are completed, returned to the Office, and mailed with the students' transcripts.

Please indicate which teachers you wish to complete the referral forms. **The Academy Office will direct the referral forms to those teachers.** Sometimes schools specifically name an individual, i.e. the head, guidance counselor, current math or English teacher, etc. to complete forms.

Please be considerate of the faculty's time. Often faculty members have several forms to complete for each student. **Email forms to Mrs. Holden (jholden@saintjamesacademy.org) in the SJA school office by November 1, 2020.**

Please be sure to complete your portion of the referral form: including name and the school to which you are applying if not printed on the form. The Release of Records form requires a parent's signature authorizing the Academy to mail copies of report cards and standardized test results.

Referral forms and Release of Records should be provided in early fall to ensure completion by the end of the first marking period (early December). At that time, faculty can provide a more comprehensive evaluation of each student's performance and the first trimester grades can accompany the referral. No referral forms will be completed during the Christmas holiday, so submit them early!

Applying for Financial Aid

If your family needs financial assistance, parents should request information from the high school Admission Office or follow the directions for applying on the school's website. Financial assistance awards are based on family need and availability of funds. Each school has a financial aid service with whom forms are to be filed. The form must be completed by each school's specified date and filed online. Some schools also require that you provide them with your most recent federal income tax form, and/or other financial information. These details should be part of the admission information on the school's website.

Based on the information provided on the financial aid forms, your family's ability to contribute to an individual student's education is computed using a standard formula. Factors considered include: parental income; assets; debt; special family or business circumstances, cash savings and available funds; number of children in tuition paying institutions; etc. **Be sure to adhere to deadlines; a late application can result in refusal of aid.**

Each school determines the amount of an individual award. For example, if the FA results determine that your family has \$5,000 available to contribute to this student's tuition and the tuition at a particular school is \$15,000, it does not necessarily mean that you will be awarded \$10,000 in financial assistance from that school. The number of requests for aid and funds available for distribution fluctuate each year. Schools may consider requests from current families before considering the needs of new students, as well.

N.B. Some high schools offer competitive academic scholarships. Information can be found on the school's website or through the admission office.

Catholic families interested in scholarships should also search The Knott Scholarship Fund at ww.knottscholar.org. The Knott Scholarship Funds award four-year, scholarships to attend a local Catholic high school. Please see the scholarship website for specific requirements and detailed information.

After the Decision Letters

When your child has applied to several schools, it is important to allow all schools the opportunity to inform the family of a decision before a commitment is made to one school. If two schools are still weighted equally for you and your child, call to schedule a second virtual visit or another opportunity to learn more about the community. Most schools will accommodate this request.

Once you make a school selection for your child, immediately notify the other schools to which your child was accepted, releasing your child's spot for another student in their wait pool.

St. James Academy expects our families to complete the admission process in an ethical way. A personal call to the admission office is strongly encouraged. Delaying your call to notify the schools that your child will not attend puts the school and families waiting for a decision in an unpleasant position. It can also be a poor reflection on St. James Academy and the valued relationships SJA has with the high schools.

Often an admission director will inquire why you have made another school choice. Your response provides helpful information to schools as they strive to improve the admission process for families. Your cooperation is appreciated!

Public School Directory

Bel Air High School

Guidance Office—410-638-4606

Dulaney High School

Guidance Office – 443-809-7635

Fallston High School

Guidance Office - 410-638-3542

Hereford High School

Guidance Office - 443-809-1907

Loch Raven High School

Guidance Office – 443-809-3832

Towson High School

Guidance Office - 443-809-4280

Baltimore County Schools Website — www.bcps.org

Harford County School website — www.hcps.org

Magnet School Programs have competitive admission and often require a portfolio of work or an audition. Be sure to meet the application deadline.

Baltimore County Magnet Programs Website: https://dci.bcps.org/department/educational_options/educational_opportunities/magnet_programs

Harford County Magnet Programs Website: www.hcps.org/schools/magnetprograms

Independent School Directory

Archbishop Curley	410-485-5000 archbishopcurley.com
Boys' Latin School of MD	410-377-5192 boyslatinmd.com
Bryn Mawr School	410-323-8800 brynmawrschool.org
Calvert Hall College	410-825-4266 calverthall.com
Concordia Prep	410-825-2323 Concordiaprepschool.org
Friends School of Baltimore	410-435-2800 friendsbalt.org
Garrison Forest School	410-363-1500 gfs.org
Gilman School	410-323-3800 gilman.edu
The John Carroll School	410-879-2480 johncarroll.org
Loyola Blakefield	410-823-0601 loyolablakefield.org
Maryvale Preparatory	410-252-3366 maryvale.com
McDonogh School	410-363-0600 mcdonogh.org
Mercy High School	410-433-8880 mercyhighschool.com
Notre Dame Preparatory	410-825-0590 notredameprep.com

Independent School Directory

Oldfields School	410-472-4800 oldfieldsschool.org
The Park School of Baltimore	410-339-7070 parkschool.net
Roland Park Country School	410-323-5500 rpcs.org
St. Paul's School	410-825-4400 stpaulsschool.org
St. Paul's School for Girls	410-823-6323 spsfg.org
St. Timothy's School	410-486-7400 stt.org
Jemicy High School	410-753-8131/8123 jemicyschool.org
AIMS (Association of Independent Maryland & DC Schools)	aimsmddc.org