HOW TO CHOOSE A BOARDING SCHOOL
Your teen is at a crucial time of growth and learning. His education now can determine how he navigates college, a career, and personal relationships – so it’s essential that you feel confident in your boarding school choice. Whether you feel in over your head with the boarding school options available or you come from long line of boarding school alums, take a few minutes to slow down and consider the right factors.

Identify your motivation for considering boarding school.
Are you interested in boarding school because of academics? The atmosphere? Athletics? Specify your motivations so you can narrow your options to schools that are strong in that area. Below, we’ve listed three popular boarding school motivators with tips on how to evaluate schools accordingly.

**Challenging Academics**
Look for teachers with quality experience. This can range from industry experience in their subject area to high-level degrees and training. A school’s competitive acceptance rate does not always mean advanced academics. Teachers are the backbone of education, so look for the ones you can trust by considering their track records and alumni testimonials.

**Atmosphere**
Parents dream of this balance for their teens – the ability to build close, healthy relationships while developing a confident, independent attitude. A boarding school focused on creating an atmosphere of intimacy and independence will provide its students with the tools to learn well and the freedom to problem-solve creatively. It will encourage mentor relationships and student-led groups.

**College Placement**
Go straight to the numbers. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 66% of all 2013 high school graduates immediately enrolled in college.¹ This rate is much higher in boarding schools, some even boasting a 100% college placement rate. Schools keep track of their college placement rate, so ask to see the details.

A school that earnestly focuses on college placement has a clear strategy for motivating students and placing them in the right higher education institutions. Go deeper by asking for college graduation and transfer rates. A high college graduation rate and low transfer rate among a school’s alumni means your child is likely to be directed to a university that fits his long-term needs and goals.
Determine the importance of location.
Keep in mind that as you research boarding schools more, location should become less of a deciding factor. You might fear sending your child to another state, while your teen is eager to travel far away from home – or vice versa. Regardless, the quality of education should outweigh the distance factor.

The Association of Boarding Schools has conducted extensive research on the difference living away from home can make in a student’s life:

- **Boarding school students** spend **17 hours per week studying** versus 9 hours for private day school students.
- **78% of boarding school students** can say they were **prepared for college**, compared to 36% of private day school students.
- **90% of boarding school students** say they have **“great, high quality teachers”**, versus 62% of private school students.
- **“About 70% of boarding school students** say there is **little to no cheating in class**, compared to 31% of private day...school students.”

Living at boarding school, regardless of the distance from home, offers essential advantages for your teen. If you’re intrigued by a school far from home, remember to inquire about its visitation policies and parental involvement recommendations.
Consider gender in the classroom.

Students who attend single-sex schools experience benefits far beyond the removed distraction of the opposite sex. While your teen might consider it old-fashioned, research might change his mind. In 2005, The Department of Education conducted a systematic review of the research done to-date on single-sex versus co-ed schooling. Overall, single-sex schools offered proven advantages while co-ed schools offered no difference in education more often than offering any benefits. Consider the qualitative research that supports the advantages of single-sex education, especially in the categories of “academic accomplishment and adaptation or socioemotional development.”

For Both Sexes
- Single-sex schools had lower dropout rates; 11.3% of males dropped out compared to 33% from co-ed schools, and 7.5% of females at single-sex schools dropped out compared to 30% at co-ed schools. (Woodward, Fergusson, and Horwood, 1999).
- Single-sex high school graduates showed lower unemployment rates, according to Woodward et al.
- Students at single-sex high schools valued grades and leadership activities more than appearances and money in comparison to their co-ed peers (Schneider and Coutts, 1982).

For Males
- Boys in single-sex schools tend to have a higher self-esteem than boys in co-ed schools (Brutsaert and Bracke, 1994).
- Brutsaert and Bracke also found that boys in single-sex high schools had a higher commitment to school and their studies than boys in co-ed high schools.
- At-risk males in single-sex schools had a “significantly higher sense of internal locus of control” than the same types of males in co-ed schools (Riordan, 1990).

For Females
- Riordan also found that females in single-sex high schools “expressed a more accepting attitude” toward working women than females in co-ed high schools.
- Females who attended a single-sex high school were “1.6998 times more likely to choose a college major that is a gender-mixed major,” rather than a major that is considered feminine (Thomson, 2003).
- Females who attended single-sex high schools reported higher satisfaction rates with both their academic and non-academic experiences in college than females from co-ed high schools (Lee and Marks, 1990).³

The extensive research on the outcomes of single-sex education point to the scientific facts of the brain: males and females are designed to learn differently. You can learn the facts behind the male and female brains, and how schools can best educate each, with this infographic.
Research the academic structure and support.
Each boarding school boasts its own set of academic benefits. You need to decide which are most important to you. Keep an eye out for the following forms of academic support boarding schools offer:

A Focused Curriculum
Similar to choosing a concentration in college, boarding school students often have the option to choose a focus area in high school. This opportunity allows them to explore academic areas more deeply, preparing them for the university structure and allowing them to both expand and specify their interests at a younger age. Look for detailed curriculum lists and requirements so you can understand exactly what your teen will learn in general education and focus areas.

Learning Support
Regardless of your child’s current grades, boarding school will be a challenge. Look for a school that not only promises academic excellence but also walks alongside students – no matter their starting point. The best boarding schools are designed to provide all types and levels of learners with the tools they need to excel in the long term. Every type of learner needs to identify his learning styles, discover independence, and learn to think critically. If you’re considering sending your child abroad, you also need to look for strong language-learning resources built in to the program.

Daily Agenda
What will a day in the life of your child look like at each school you’re considering? Consider the following factors:

- Hours per day spent in class
- Study hall offerings
- Downtime
- Meals
- Frequency of group project work
- Level of interaction with faculty outside of the classroom
- Athletic options and requirements
- Chore expectations
- Weekend activities
Get to know the campus personally.

It’s highly recommended that, once you have your boarding school short list, you and your teen visit each one. A school might look perfect on paper but not have the right vibe when you arrive. Or your teen might bond quickly with a teacher at a school he otherwise wasn’t crazy about. No matter how perfect a boarding school seems upon first impression, your teen needs to feel good on campus. Gauge each campus for these final “It” factors:

- Your teen identifies with the current students on campus.
- Your teen connects with at least one faculty member.
- The leadership of the school takes time to listen to your needs and questions.
- You and the admissions counselor agree that the school is a good fit for your teen.
- You feel cared for by the school leadership, faculty, and staff.
- Your teen is excited about at least one extracurricular offering and weekend activity.
- Your teen is optimistic about his academic opportunities at the school.
- Your teen is happy and energized when you leave the campus.

Your goal is to find the boarding school with the right atmosphere, academic support, peers, and mentors for your teen. It needs to be a holistic process for your entire family, and we’re here to help. Contact Grand River Academy if you have questions about finding the right school for your teen.
About Grand River Academy

Grand River Academy is an all-boys college-preparatory boarding school located one hour east of Cleveland. We believe that teen boys activate their true potential by taking a 360-degree approach to education. We walk alongside our students, empowering them to develop academically, socially, and emotionally in a structured yet flexible atmosphere. Learn more about our approach and 100% college placement rate at grandriver.org.

Resources

