

Step by Step to Secondary School

A Guide for Students and Parents

INTRODUCTION

October 1, 2009

Step by Step is the product of BCD's years of involvement in the Secondary School Placement process—secondary school nights, interviewing admissions officers from a variety of schools, visits to many of these schools, feedback from parents, personal contacts within secondary schools, and our experience with the mechanics of applying to secondary schools. A variation to the secondary school formula is to consider “early college” - a growing national trend. The College of Bard at Simon's Rock offers this possibility and we encourage BCD families to consider this option as they plan for their child's educational future.

We are here to help you through the process of applying to secondary schools. It can be a challenging time for students and their families and we hope that you will utilize our services and depend on us throughout the experience.

Sincerely,

Paul Lindenmaier, Head of School
Carmen Dockery Perkins, Associate Head of School

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ABOUT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Traditionally BCD families begin the task of exploring all of the secondary school options available to them as they enter the 7th and 8th grade. It is an exciting time for parents and students to take a reflective look at the educational opportunities for high school, as well as to map an educational plan for the years ahead. The options are numerous ranging from continuing ones education at BCD through the ninth grade, transferring to a local public high school or independent boarding school as a day student, to leaving home to enroll at one of the many boarding schools in New England and beyond. Also there is the “early college” option at the College of Bard at Simon’s Rock that is available to bright juniors and seniors in high school as well as a limited number of exceptional rising 10th graders.

How do you know what is best for your son or daughter? The Head of School or Associate Head of School at BCD can be a great help to you and your child as you ponder this important question. “Should I stay at BCD for ninth grade?”; “What are the public schools like?”; “Are there real differences between them?”; “I hear a lot about school choice but what does it mean and should I consider it for my child?”; “What is it like to be a daystudent at a local boarding school?”; “What are the advantages and disadvantages of going away?”; “How do I begin the search process?”; “Should I consider Simon’s Rock and if I do, how do I go about the search?”

These are the questions that the Head of School or Associate Head of School has been asked previously and is prepared to answer for you. Each year in the fall he/she invites you and your child to come in and talk about secondary schools and to ask varied questions. The Head or Associate Head is available at all times to help you and your child wade through the sea of information available to you pertaining to different schools, and if you choose to apply to an independent school, will help guide you through what may appear as a daunting application process.

The independent school community beyond BCD offers opportunities for you to tour and visit their schools. A tremendous amount of information is at your fingertips to learn more about one or many of New England’s boarding schools. A copy of the current edition of the National Association of Independent School’s (NAIS) publication of **Independent Day and Boarding Schools** is available to you. Please go online to www.nais.org to obtain a copy. Many independent schools offer open houses in the fall and winter, as well as offer individual tours which can be arranged by calling the admission office at the school that interests you. The Internet is also another resource, for all boarding schools have their own web sites.

A few websites to investigate:

- www.boardingschoolreview.com
- www.petersons.com
- www.IECAonline.com (Educational Consultants)
- www.greatschools.net

The local public schools encourage you to visit as well. Berkshire County residents can take advantage of the “school choice” option and as a result guidance counselors at local public schools are extremely helpful to families interested in their schools and its programs. They can set up a day for a tour and a student visit. They also publish helpful and detailed information about their school’s curriculum and extracurricular programs.

Simon’s Rock is a unique option for high schoolers. This educational option offers an “early college” program for bright high school juniors and seniors. It is an exciting option for BCD families to explore. A number of our fellow students have enrolled in Simon’s Rock successfully, including some of our ninth graders, and the Head of School or Associate Head of School can help answer some of your questions about it.

As you read this wealth of informational material, you should begin to think about the options open to you, their advantages and disadvantages.

HOW TO PROCEED: A TIME LINE

FALL:

The first order of business is to make an appointment to see the Head of School or Associate Head of School to talk about secondary school ideas. They will discuss with parents and students the issue of appropriate fit. He/she will work together with you to develop a comprehensive list of potential schools (independent and public); this list will serve as the basis for choosing schools to look at and for determining which ones, if any, might be a stretch for this particular student. It may include both day and boarding independent schools as well as area public high schools. With "School Choice" in Berkshire County, public school is an even stronger option for BCD students. Students considering independent schools should apply to a broad range of them - this is most important - in order to form a good fit. In no case should a student apply to a school he or she really does not wish to attend.

When considering boarding school options, the Head or Associate Head would like you to review some school websites in advance of meeting. Try to come up with a preliminary list of schools to discuss in your meeting. Often a student can save the family considerable time by browsing school websites on the internet, and by eliminating those schools which clearly seem inappropriate to him or her. You can also collect more information by calling for catalogs.

If the College of Bard at Simon's Rock is an option, please plan to discuss it with the Head or Associate Head.

Each student is asked to arrange a second meeting time with the Head or Associate Head in the winter to update him/her on school plans.

The Public School Option:

The Visit: If your eighth or ninth grader wishes to consider attending your local high school or parochial school, please call to find out about requirements, to receive a student handbook and a program for students, and to arrange for him or her to spend a day or part of a day at the school. We encourage you to schedule visits on days when BCD is closed for a holiday yet public schools remain open. In most cases, you will be speaking to the guidance department or to the principal of the school. The public schools in the Berkshires and Columbia Counties are anxious for you to see their programs in action and they encourage all potential applicants to visit. This is the best way for you to determine whether your local school is a good fit for you.

School Choice: If you are interested in pursuing a "School Choice" option (available to Berkshire County residents only) to attend a public school other than the one in your own school district, you must send a letter of application to that school. (Not all Berkshire County high schools accept "School Choice" applicants.) In some, there are few, if any, opportunities to choose to attend through School Choice; however, this may vary from year to year and from school to school. Please note that admissions to School Choice are made by lottery; students' academic credentials are not a factor. It is important that you submit your application in the fall, because schools begin making their decisions in the winter, sometimes as early as late January. Even if you are uncertain whether or not you will pursue the non-independent school route, we encourage you to apply in order to keep the greatest possible number of options open.

Out of county residents: These families may consider a Berkshire County school only if space is available. A tuition fee is charged to the family and the fee varies from school to school. Please call the school's superintendent to receive information about this option.

The Independent Day and Boarding School Option:

Planning the Visits: The official round of formal school visits should take place in late 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. Remember: call well in advance for a tour and interview. We recommend weekend visits and urge you to take advantage of school holidays-both of these times fill up quickly. If these school holidays do not work, we urge you to make appointments following the close of the first trimester so that your son/daughter remains focused on the academic work at BCD and does not miss vital class time. Try to complete visits by the start of the winter holiday vacation. Please remember that for most schools the deadline for visits is usually the end of January.

Plan your visits on a “circuit” so that you cover all schools in a given area on the same trip. Limit your schedule to two visits in a day: a morning and afternoon appointment. These visits can total up to three hours per school in addition to driving time. To do more would be too much for your son/daughter to absorb or to judge fairly. If a school trip must be taken during school time, please notify BCD as far in advance as possible and please gather assignments in advance as well.

The Interview: It is important that the family arrive at each interview 10 minutes early and well prepared. Be sure to research the school in advance so that you know as much about it as possible. The student should dress appropriately and based on the school’s dress code.

The student should have met with the Head or Associate Head before the first visit to perform a mock interview. You should ask intelligent, probing questions such as:

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

Be sure to visit classes and evaluate the program if offered. If you are accepted, a class visit day is usually available for all accepted students.

Talk to students about the school’s community, sense of purpose, and personality.

Do not be dazzled by facilities; they are only important if they fit into your overall program.

Some Notes to Parents:

- Remember that the admissions office staffs want to get to know your son/daughter; be sure to take a back seat!
- Please remember that admissions offices are busy places and admissions officers are on tight schedules; you can help the process by telling officers and guides of your son's/daughter's specific interests in your initial inquiry to the school.
- Try to determine the quality of the faculty and the school's attitude with regard to professional growth and staff development.
- Ask for a list of current families from the Berkshires that are attending the school.

If appropriate, be candid about your need for financial aid or a merit scholarship during the parent portion of the interview or on the phone with you admission officer.

Some Notes to Students:

- Remember, this is your time to market yourself.
- Prepare yourself with questions to ask.
- Respond to all questions with extended answers.
- Dress appropriately for your interview.
- Look directly at the interviewer and show keen interest in what he/she is saying.
- Be sure to thank the admissions people for their time and help. A follow up note or postcard to your admission officer is a good idea.

WINTER:

December:

• **Applying for School Choice:** Make sure you have submitted your application for school choice before the winter vacation. You can receive the necessary forms from the superintendent's office in the school district you seek.

• **Applying to Independent Schools and the College of Bard at Simon's Rock:** Before the winter holidays you should have completed your school visits and you should have applications well on the way to completion. The process of application involves: (1) your son/daughter; (2) a number of his/her teachers; (3) the BCD office; and (4) the Head of School or Associate Head of School). You will receive forms of all kinds from each school to which he/she is **applying**, and each school will put its own spin on the forms. The BCD office will do everything in its power to make the process as simple and as streamlined as possible. Please take note of the following:

1. Keep BCD informed every step of the way. We cannot do our job properly if we do not know where you are in the admissions process at your schools of choice.
2. BCD's application packets are mailed to all schools in mid-January unless a school has an earlier application deadline. If your son or daughter is applying to one of these schools, please inform the Head or Associate Head immediately.
3. You and your son/daughter should fill in any necessary information required by any school (especially the applicant's name!) before delivering the forms to BCD for completion.
4. By mid-October, each student should bring to Mrs. Dockery Perkins a list of the teachers (usually English and math) who will be asked to write recommendations for each school to which your

son/daughter plans to apply. Each student is then responsible for distributing his/her recommendation forms together with the special envelopes each school has provided. Remember to personally ask each teacher to write and follow up with a note of thanks for the time and effort they will expend on your behalf.

5. Before departing for the winter break, you must notify the Head or Associate Head in writing of all the schools to which you intend to have your son/daughter apply for admission. BCD must be sure to send all materials to appropriate schools, and not send them to schools you have eliminated from consideration.

6. Also prior to the winter break you should bring to the Head's or Associate Head's office (a) the various forms, which the BCD administration must complete, along with (b) the return envelopes each school has provided.

7. **It is imperative** that all the above are accomplished prior to the December vacation. Please remember that BCD cannot be responsible for forms which a student fails to give to the Head or Associate Head. Teachers have time over the break to complete their recommendations for you--not in January. Please be sensitive to the fact that each teacher is asked to write as many as 25 recommendations, and that each demands a lot of time and careful thought. These teachers deserve your heartfelt thanks.

TAKING THE SSAT: (Secundary School Admissions Test) is **required for all eighth and ninth graders who are applying to independent schools**. Parents are responsible for filling out applications and for doing so by the stated deadline. In completing the application, students are asked to indicate schools to which test scores should be sent including BCD (**code = "1606"**). This list should only include those schools to which the student has already applied. Should he or she apply to other schools at a later date, BCD will forward the SSAT scores in its recommendation packet.

In October, your son or daughter will receive the application forms for the SSAT. Please complete these in a timely fashion. We recommend that BCD students register for the November or December test date. Families can register online at www.ssat.org.

•Some Final Thoughts: Our sense is that independent schools weigh the parts of a student's profile equally in deciding whether or not to accept that student. These are:

→the student's transcript → the interview → the school letter of recommendation
→ test scores → teacher recommendations
→ extracurricular activities, strength in the arts, community service, life experience and sports

Legacies (a student whose family member(s) is an alum of the school) are highly individualized matters between schools and graduates. Generalizations no longer hold in these highly competitive times. If your child plans to apply to a school that you attended, you should ask about their current policy regarding legacies and know that there are no guarantees.

January:

•Applying for School Choice: Please make arrangements to visit the school to which you are applying and meet with a guidance counselor. The lottery date for school choice varies from district to district starting at the end of March and continuing through the summer.

• Applying to Independent Schools:

1. Details: As soon as we return from winter break, the Head of School or Associate Head of School will collect all teacher recommendations, - sealed in their individual envelopes, - and incorporate them in the January mailing, which will be sent out soon.

2. BCD's Mailing: In mid-January BCD compiles the 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, 8 and 9; (5) the test score sheet (including SSAT results - see below); (6) a brief outline of BCD courses. 7) Students should send DVDs or artwork portfolios of something they are proud of - short films, photography, etc.

Admission committees begin to read files and make decisions at the end of January for the first band of decisions. It is better to be at the beginning of the reading than at the end.

Secondary Schools receive literally tons of paper in January, and admissions offices will process and begin to read immediately when processed by the end of January and until March. We **strongly advise** parents not to call the admissions offices during this time period as to do so could be extremely counterproductive, and might cause a breach of trust between that school and BCD. If you have followed the recommended application procedure, then there is nothing left to do except wait for the day of notification. If there is something in particular that you wish to convey to a certain school or schools, the Head of School or Associate Head of School will be happy to make that contact--the fewer individuals contacting these schools, the better.

While February 1 and February 15 (for Financial Aid Applications) is the final deadline for submission of this information to most schools, deadlines do vary from as early as December 15th (for early decision at a few schools) to April. We make every effort to mail all information packets by mid-January.

•Other reminders:

1. Bear in mind that admissions deadlines are changing. Be sure you know the deadline of each school to which you are applying.
2. A few schools now offer early decision.
3. Applicants for financial aid must submit their applications by deadlines set by each school. Check the deadline dates carefully for each school you are applying to. They must include copies of their **2009** income tax returns which have already been filed. This means, of course, that returns must be prepared and filed early. Other supporting documentation, such as W2s or a brief paragraph describing the family's economic situation, helps bring light to their need as the school's Financial Aid committee reviews applications.
4. Some schools now ask the applicant to collect all material, including the student's application, and mail it in one large envelope which they provide. **Please note that it is BCD's policy to mail all reference letters directly to the secondary schools. BCD will not release them to a student or a parent to deliver and mail.** In such cases please get the envelope and your material to us as soon as possible. We will mail everything in plenty of time before the deadline. BCD has consulted with each of these particular schools and has their permission to mail them for you.

February:

This is a good time for families and applicants to sit down and weigh all possible school options. Ideally, you should decide on which school you would attend if a place is offered to you. We urge you to do this now--- before you are offered a place--to make your final decision by April 10th that much easier. You have visited each of the schools, you have read all the materials, and thus you are prepared to make an educated and wise decision. Delaying in doing so simply draws out the process unnecessarily once you have heard from the schools. The admissions people of each school will offer you a return class visit between March 10 and April 10. This is a special invitation to accepted students and families. It is a time

to visit and have time for class visits, mini sessions for parents and panel discussions with current students, faculty and deans of students. The school hopes to give you an intimate vision of a “day in the life” of a student’s experience at their school. The experience should assist you and your family in the decision-making process for April 10th.

March:

The independent schools send out their decision letters the second week of March. If you are offered places at one or more schools, you will have four or five weeks in which to respond. You will also be invited to revisit in the following month. Ideally, you should be able to inform each school at once; if, on the other hand, you are still undecided, you should let the admissions offices know that you wish to revisit.

April:

All applicants are encouraged to inform (in writing) all the schools to which they applied--- not just the school they have decided to attend--- of their decisions. Applicants should also personally thank all the teachers who wrote letters of recommendation on their behalf.

SPRING:

Do not let your schoolwork slip! Your final trimester grades are just as important as your prior ones, and they are sent to your new school in June. From personal experience, we know that schools have rescinded acceptances of applicants whose effort and conduct (poor academic or behavior) fell during their spring terms. Do not take this risk! Complete your BCD career on as high a note as possible.

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
ADMISSIONS CHECK LIST and CALENDAR FOR APPLICANTS**

FALL:

- Make appointment with Mrs. Dockery Perkins.
- Keep Mrs. Dockery Perkins informed every step of the way.** Tell her A.S.A.P. that school “X” does not interest you and that school “Y” is at the top of your list. As things change, please let her know.
- By October 15:** Update your “Brag Sheet” and give to Mrs. Dockery Perkins.
- Make appointments for admissions visits on holidays in the fall or after 1st trimester closes.
- If applying to an independent school, register to take the SSAT test in November or December. SSAT dates, registration and locations are available with Mrs. Dockery Perkins or online at www.SSAT.org.
- Set up a time to meet with Mrs. Dockery Perkins to practice the school interview.
- Cluster school visits (appointments and tours) geographically, and see no more than two schools per day. BCD prefers visits to be scheduled on fall or winter school holidays or on weekends, or after the first trimester is completed.

WINTER:

- As soon as you know the schools to which you will apply, begin work on your applications.** By November 1 at the latest, please give to Mrs. Dockery Perkins:
 - A list of these schools
 - The appropriate forms from each school for BCD to complete
 - The names of your current English and math teachers (most schools require recommendations from these two subject teachers). If other recommendations are required (for example, one of your choice for a personal recommendation), be sure to indicate the teachers’ and/or individuals’ names and the schools requiring them.
 - Distribute the teacher recommendation forms with the appropriate envelopes to the appropriate teachers for completion; Mrs. Dockery Perkins will collect them and keep them with the BCD letter of recommendation and other material to be sent out before each school’s required deadline (mailed around Jan. 15th). No postage required.
- November or December (Saturday):** Take the SSAT.
- Late December/Early January:** Recommendation letters are written, transcripts updated, forms all copied and prepared for mailing in mid-January. If you are applying to a school whose deadline for receiving material is in December or early January, **please inform Mrs. Dockery Perkins A.S.A.P.!**

SAMPLE LETTER

January 3, 2009

Name

Title

School

Address

City

Dear (Name):

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of CANDIDATE’s application to the Class of 2013 at (School). CANDIDATE is a special young woman with enormous potential as a student. A high honors student at BCD, CANDIDATE also excels on the stage and as a horseback rider. She is a kind and giving friend and I am confident that she would be a tremendous asset to your boarding school community.

CANDIDATE’s testing profile reveals an extremely bright and capable student. She received a full-scale score of 150 on her seventh grade Otis-Lennon School Ability Test. Her seventh and eighth grade ERBs are equally strong, indicative of a student able to achieve at the highest level in the school of her choice. When compared to other students attending independent schools, she obtained:

	Grade 7 Score	Grade 8 Score
Verbal Ability	93%	94%
Reading Comprehension	96%	98%
Quantitative Ability	85%	79%
Math Computation	91%	80%

I stated earlier that CANDIDATE has maintained a place on the Head of School’s List with a high honors average throughout her Upper School career. She does not shy away from an intellectual challenge. At BCD, she is enrolled in all honors courses, and even takes two foreign languages as well. The BCD faculty speaks glowingly about her as a student in their classes. Here are some examples of their comments:

“CANDIDATE has been doing a fine job in English. She prepares well, works hard, is resilient concerning drafts of her writing and is supportive of others in the group.” “I understand it is her nature to be a thinker, unconcerned with being in the spotlight.” “CANDIDATE is a pleasure to have in class. She is always cheerful, motivated and positive. She comes to class well prepared and ready to work ... CANDIDATE is also a good citizen in class, always willing to do what is good for the class.” “CANDIDATE has been doing an excellent job this term in all her work in French.... it is wonderful seeing her putting such great efforts into her work--- the results speak for themselves.” “CANDIDATE is intellectually stimulating.... she is a superb history student and someone who is a positive influence in the classroom.”

CANDIDATE will be missed at BCD when she graduates in June after eleven years here. CANDIDATE has grown up and matured in so many wonderful ways during her years at BCD. She is now ready for this next venture. As a result, I heartily endorse her candidacy and urge the Admissions Committee at (School) to give her candidacy serious consideration. She is a good find; do not let her get away. If I can be of additional help as you review her portfolio, please call me at school (413/637-0755) or email me at cdockeryperkins@berkshirecountryday.org.

Sincerely yours,

Carmen Dockery Perkins
Associate Head of School

**BERKSHIRE COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL
BRAG SHEETS FOR CLASSES OF 2009/2010**

So that we may confirm data for transcripts and begin preparing your official BCD school recommendation, please complete this form *as far as possible* and return it Mrs. Dockery Perkins ASAP. We will add information as the year goes on. Tell us what you think you will do for Grade 9 spring sports. Thank you.

Carmen Dockery Perkins, Associate Head of School

NAME: _____

Honors and Awards received at BCD:

Latin National Exam standings (Grs. 7 and 8 / Gr. 9 to be added later):

BCD sports in Grades 7, 8 and 9 / please check [✓] all appropriate items:

Soccer: 7JV 7V 7 capt 7JV-MIP 7V-MIP 7JV-MVP 7V-MVP
 8JV 8V 8 capt 8JV-MIP 8V-MIP 8JV-MVP 8V-MIP
 9JV 9V 9 capt 9JV-MIP 9V-MIP 9JV-MVP 9V-MVP

Other soccer awards (explain):

Alpine: 7JV 7V 7 capt 7JV-MIP 7V-MIP 7JV-MVP 7V-MVP
 8JV 8V 8 capt 8JV-MIP 8V-MIP 8JV-MVP 8V-MVP
 9JV 9V 9 capt 9JV-MIP 9V-MIP 9JV-MVP 9V-MVP

Other alpine ski awards (explain):

X-C: 7JV 7V 7 capt 7JV-MIP 7V-MIP 7JV-MVP 7V-MVP
 8JV 8V 8 capt 8JV-MIP 8V-MIP 8JV-MVP 8V-MVP
 9JV 9V 9 capt 9JV-MIP 9V-MIP 9JV-MVP 9V-MVP

Other cross-country ski awards (explain):

Basketball: 7JV 7V 7 capt 7JV-MIP 7V-MIP 7JV-MVP 7V-MVP
 8JV 8V 8 capt 8JV-MIP 8V-MIP 8JV-MVP 8V-MVP
 9JV 9V 9 capt 9JV-MIP 9V-MIP 9JV-MVP 9V-MVP

Other basketball awards (explain):

Lacrosse: 7JV 7V 7 capt 7JV-MIP 7V-MIP 7JV-MVP 7V-MVP
 8JV 8V 8 capt 8JV-MIP 8V-MIP 8JV-MVP 8V-MVP
 9JV 9V 9 capt 9JV-MIP 9V-MIP 9JV-MVP 9V-MVP

Alternative Sports (explain your participation and awards received)

BCD Theater and Film (productions and awards received)

Other activities outside of BCD :

Community Service:

Unusual travel or other summer activities in the last 3 years:

Favorite activities and/or hobbies:

What do you like best about BCD?

What is the #1 thing you would like to do in your new school?

Please list the schools to which you will or may apply:

1 _____	6 _____
2 _____	7 _____
3 _____	8 _____
4 _____	9 _____
5 _____	10 _____