



The Journey to Secondary School

Welcome to the Secondary School Placement Office!

Our Mission

Fueled by a tradition of innovation, self-discovery, and the pursuit of excellence, Renbrook School places students at the center of their learning.

We educate and inspire students to develop the character, knowledge, and creativity to lead in an increasingly global and inclusive world.

In a nurturing community, Renbrook students gain the skills and dispositions of engaged, life-long learners.

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Our Values

Renbrook School prizes respect, integrity, empathy, tenacity, and service to others.

We believe in the power of a supportive community to effectively instill these values in our students.

WELCOME!

Each year, Renbrook seventh graders begin a journey that will culminate in April of their eighth-grade year when they decide where they will attend secondary school. Starting in January, seventh graders attend Secondary School Seminar classes which help them identify their strengths, set goals for their eighth-grade year, explore the school search process, and get to know the Secondary School Placement Director. In addition, parents attend an information session in April followed by a personal consultation with the Secondary School Placement Director to discuss which schools are the best match for their child.

In eighth grade, students resume Secondary School Seminar classes where they practice interview skills, plan and write their school essays, discuss school visits, and refine their school list. In addition, the Secondary School Placement Director maintains close relationships with admission officers from many secondary schools, and Renbrook hosts both a school fair and lunch visits from school representatives to help families with their decisions.

Renbrook eighth graders attend independent secondary schools, parochial secondary schools, or local public high schools. Because of our excellent academic program and the past success of our students, Renbrook students are prized by independent schools in Connecticut and beyond. Renbrook students are known for their superb preparation, self-advocacy, poise, and confidence. Renbrook faculty know each student as an individual and understand their potential, allowing us to foster the best match for every student with their next school. The secondary school process is a voyage of discovery for students and their families, and the placement office is here to guide you through this journey.



Secondary School Application Timeline - Grade 7

JANUARY

- STUDENTS:
- Begin Secondary School Seminar (SSS) class
 - Inventory their strengths
 - Take the Values in Action Character Strength Inventory
 - Begin creating their student profile

FEBRUARY

- STUDENTS:
- Write about their strengths
 - Learn how schools select students
 - Set goals for the remainder of the school year

MARCH

- STUDENTS:
- Learn about standardized testing
 - Take the Benchmark SSAT

APRIL

- STUDENTS:
- Learn how to research schools
 - Learn how to use school search engines
- PARENTS:
- Attend secondary school placement evening
 - Make appointments for consultations

MAY

- STUDENTS:
- Learn about the eighth-grade Leadership Program
 - Make plans for summer work to support school applications
 - Meet individually with the placement counselor
 - Take the SSAT, if desired
- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Attend open houses and information sessions for various schools
 - Create a school list with the Placement Director
 - Register student for the upper level SSAT, if desired

“The placement office finds schools they know you’ll do well in with communities and opportunities they know you’ll love. I was so nervous to leave Renbrook, and without the help of the placement office I wouldn’t have found my new home away from home.”
~Alumni - Class of 2021

“Thank goodness for the Placement Office. Not only are parents and students taken through the secondary school application process step by step; the placement director goes above and beyond to find the “just right” school for each student. How? They get to know each student and cultivate relationships with each school. When it comes time to advocate for a student’s admission, they are prepared!”
~Parent - Class of 2017 and 2021

Secondary School Application Timeline - Grade 8

SEPTEMBER

- STUDENTS:
- Resume Secondary School Seminar (SSS) class
 - Schedule Mock Interviews
 - Finalize leadership roles
- PARENTS:
- Make appointments for interviews and school visits
 - Create spreadsheet with school deadlines for applications and financial aid

OCTOBER

- STUDENTS:
- Take SSAT if desired
 - Plan and begin writing essays
 - Record impressions from school visits
- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Attend the Secondary School Fair
 - Visit schools and interview
 - Learn about application portals

NOVEMBER

- STUDENTS:
- Take SSAT if desired
 - Continue working on essays
 - Request teacher recommendations
- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Continue school visits and interviews
 - Complete parent essays
 - Gather materials for financial aid submissions

DECEMBER

- STUDENTS:
- Finalize essays before Break
 - Submit final list of schools to Placement Office
- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Submit early decision or early deadline applications

JANUARY

- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Submit applications by deadline

FEBRUARY

- STUDENTS:
- Write thank you notes to all teachers who wrote recommendations

MARCH

- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Receive decisions

APRIL

- PARENTS & STUDENTS:
- Sign contract with secondary school!
 - Celebrate!

School Fit

Families should consider a variety of factors when choosing schools to explore. Distance from home, school size, unique offerings, or a family's personal connections may influence the student's list, but placement professionals recommend considering the following touchstones as well when evaluating school fit.

PEOPLE

Beautiful facilities are wonderful, but strong interpersonal relationships are priceless. How welcoming and open are the students and faculty that you meet?

INSTRUCTION

How does the school teach and evaluate students? Some schools expect incoming students to have all their study skills solidly in place. Other schools teach test-taking and note-taking skills explicitly. What does this school do?

FEEL

Would you rather spend time in a village or a bustling city? The size of your school affects the kind of community you will live in for the next four years. Do you want a school where you will eventually know everybody, or a place where a new face is always around the corner?

SELECTIVITY

If you plan to apply to schools that accept 10% or less of their applicants, you need to include some schools that accept at a higher rate to ensure that you have options on March 10.

ADVISING

The independent school advantage is that your child will be known. How does the school get to know your child? How many adults will be part of that deep knowledge?

PROGRAM

Schools, especially big schools, have tremendous offerings. As you peruse a school's extensive course catalog, make sure you understand when and how students take advantage of the most exciting opportunities.

What Schools Look For

All schools want students who:

- love to learn
- get involved in campus activities
- are independent
- want to attend

To assess these factors, schools consider:

- Transcript from grades 6-8
- Recommendations
- Student profile
- Student essays
- Student interview
- Parent interview
- Parent essays
- Testing*

*Previously, the SSAT was routinely used to assess student readiness, but this has been changing.

Developing the School List

The placement office sends out a questionnaire to seventh-grade parents before the parent evening in April and uses those to help formulate suggestions for a school list. Sometimes the list is focused on proximity to home if the applicant will be a day student. If the student is open to boarding, the placement office can make additional recommendations. The list is discussed at the initial parent consultation, and then students and parents do additional research to see if there are schools that they had not originally considered.

Additional Considerations

Students considering day schools are encouraged to apply to one boarding school.

Students are encouraged to consider a single-sex school.

Your public-school sector may offer a variety of choice and spark family interest.

Families will be provided with several websites to help generate their list.

School Visits

Summer can be a great time to visit a campus, even though it will feel very different from the official fall visit when students are on campus. During a school visit, you learn much more about the program and facilities, and you really have a chance to see how students behave.



Application & Interview Process

Students meet with the Director of Secondary School Placement individually in the spring of seventh grade and again in the fall of eighth grade. These informal meetings provide students with a safe space to hone their interview skills. In SSS class, we discuss the dos and don'ts of interviews and go over the most common questions that will be asked. Each student will participate in a mock interview with the Placement Director to make sure they are ready and feel confident.

Introduction to the Application

The application form most commonly used is provided by SSAT and called the Standard Application Online (SAO). Almost all schools use this common app, but a few will require a separate platform.

Schools that **DO NOT USE SAO** are **Andover, Choate, Deerfield, Exeter, Groton, Hotchkiss, and St. Paul's**. They use a portal called Gateway to Prep. In addition, Catholic schools use their own online portals, as do some schools located in other parts of the country or along "the Gold Coast," which includes Fairfield and Westchester counties.

ALL students need to create an SAO account, as this is how we collect transcript and recommendation release forms. If students are applying to Choate or another "Gateway" school, they will need a Gateway account **IN ADDITION TO** their SAO account.

Since you can use Gateway to Prep to apply to many other local schools, families sometimes ask if they can bypass using SAO altogether. The answer is **NO**. SAO provides the placement office with a superior interface to track applications, and we far prefer using it to Gateway. At this time, we require that students use SAO for all applications except the seven schools in bold and Catholic schools. If you are applying to a school that does not accept SAO or Gateway, discuss what platform to use with the Placement Director.

Five Parts of the Application

1

Student Profile: Includes biographical information, activities, interests, and achievements is provided by Renbrook School.

2

Transcript: Provided by Renbrook School and generally includes grade six, grade seven, and the fall of grade eight.

3

Student and Parent Essays: These are generally standardized in SAO and school-specific in Gateway and other portals.

4

Confidential Renbrook teacher recommendations: These always include a student's **CURRENT** math and English teacher. If a student is not submitting SSAT scores, a third teacher recommendation from a current teacher is recommended. In addition, we recommend that students ask for a personal recommendation from any teacher or adult who knows them well, and a special interest recommendation from a coach, music teacher, club advisor, or similar.

5

Additional requirements: Some schools require a **GRADED** essay from the student's eighth-grade year. Others have supplementary questions they ask in addition to the required, standard essays. Students will be given a spreadsheet template to organize these requirements.

Recommendations

As mentioned above, students need a variety of recommendations so that schools can assess readiness for their programs. At this time, Renbrook bypasses the online request systems in the application platforms and submits its own teacher recommendations separately. Families may use the online request system for recommendations from outside of the Renbrook community.

Students will receive recommendation request “cards” which they need to hand to teachers. We feel that it is important that students approach teachers to ask for a recommendation. Teachers then send those recommendations for proofreading to the Placement Director, who also benefits from knowing what is being said about each candidate. Finally, the Placement Director uploads the recommendations to SAO or sends them to the Gateway to Prep or other schools.

Students are encouraged to ask coaches, music teachers, neighbors, etc., to write recommendations if they feel that these individuals know them well. Recommendations from outside of Renbrook can be sent EITHER to the Placement Office OR directly to schools. The online portals should be used to email those requests to anyone OUTSIDE the Renbrook community.

“The placement office made the process much easier than it would have been otherwise. It was scary thinking about all the steps involved, but we were guided through everything week by week. Even better, I got to know about schools I wouldn’t have ever thought about before going through the process, and I couldn’t be happier with my school choice.”

~Alumni - Class of 2020

“It is a privilege to work with Renbrook as an independent boarding school admissions director. Renbrook students are always prepared for and excited about the next step in their educational journeys. More importantly, the school is genuinely committed to finding the right fit for each child in their graduating class. It is obvious to me that every student at the school is known and loved; this allows for the school to make recommendations for high school that will help Renbrook students continue to thrive in a variety of ways. The attention and care that Renbrook gives to secondary school placement is second to none.”

~Admission Director - Miss Porter’s School

Testing

Secondary schools often use the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) as a way to verify information in a student’s file. Since the pandemic, many schools have become test-optional for the SSAT, and many students have decided to bypass this sometimes stressful process. Good test scores can be helpful for students seeking admission to schools, but they are never enough to guarantee admission. For financial aid candidates, higher test scores can sometimes help a school decide to award aid dollars. Renbrook will support students who wish to take the SSAT in a variety of ways.

Financial Aid

Secondary school is expensive and families who need aid should apply. The income levels at which aid is awarded are probably higher than you might expect. On the other hand, financial aid candidates will have a harder time facing admission; only a few schools can afford to consider applications without referring to whether students need financial support. Families often ask if seeking financial aid will hurt their child’s chances of gaining admission. The answer is that it adds another screening level. A wonderful candidate who needs aid will be sought after at the right-fit school. Students needing a high amount of financial aid (over 50% of tuition) are encouraged to apply to boarding schools out of the immediate area to increase their chances of a positive outcome. Families whose children have attended Renbrook for many years should also be aware that day schools are traditionally more generous with financial aid than boarding schools.

Families should also be aware that schools take a dim view of awarding financial aid if families do not appear to prioritize education with their spending decisions. In other words, a family that drives expensive cars and takes lavish vacations may qualify on paper for financial aid, but admission officers are much less likely to choose students if the family is clearly not interested in paying what they can afford for education.

Decision Time

Most secondary schools release their admission decisions on March 10. Families then have one month, until April 10, to sign a contract with a school and submit a deposit. A few schools have instituted early decision deadlines, most notably Suffield Academy.

Students receive three possible results of their application:

- **Accept:** The secondary school is offering a place in the next year's class as long as the student finishes the year in good standing at Renbrook. Parents need to plan to put down a deposit along with the contact when students are accepted. As soon as families know that their student will or will not attend, they should let the school know.
- **Waitlist:** The secondary school does not have a place in the next year's class for this student at this time. Other students fit the school's needs better, and until a number of students decline their admission offer, the waitlist will not open up. Students can indicate that they wish to remain on a waitlist, but they may not learn whether a place is available until after April 10, when contracts are due.

"The Renbrook Secondary School Placement Office was instrumental in helping our child select and gain admission to her top choice secondary school. The Director of Secondary School Placement truly got to know our child and carefully considered her goals and preferences. The Director worked closely with our family and provided us with tremendously helpful guidance throughout the process of finding the right "fit" school. The Director has extensive knowledge about the secondary school programs and is personally invested in the success of each Renbrook student. Our daughter's transition to secondary school was seamless; she is thriving socially and academically. We cannot adequately express our deep gratitude to the Renbrook Secondary School Placement Office for their advocacy, support, and guidance. This outstanding program is an invaluable resource for Upper School students and their families."

~Parent - Class of 2021

- **Deny:** Some selective secondary schools receive applications from many more qualified students than they can offer admission to. Because of this, admissions offices are often forced to make difficult decisions and deny students who may indeed have been quite successful at their institution.

Waitlist and deny decisions are very difficult for families to process, and explaining that the decision of the school is not personal, is challenging. However, it is important to understand that very often, the decision is not about the student specifically. Schools only have room for a certain number of students in their freshman class, and the number of families seeking day spots in local boarding schools has skyrocketed.

Schools fill openings with what they need; this varies wildly from year to year. One year, the band program may be desperate for horn players. Another year, a school is trying to find students who love public policy and government for a new program they are offering. Demographic quirks sometimes mean that too many girls are applying for too few places. Another year the issue will be boys. Certainly, students may feel upset for not having ideal transcripts and blame that for losing a coveted space at an area school, but if their list of school choices was realistic, they should have an option for the next year.



Where Do Renbrook Students Go?

Renbrook students have proudly attended the following schools over the past five years:

Andover (Phillips Academy)

Avon Old Farms School

Benedictine School

Benjamin School

Berkshire School

Brooks School

Choate Rosemary Hall

Deerfield Academy

Emma Willard School

Episcopal High School

Ethel Walker School

Frederick Gunn School

Germantown Friends School

Governor's Academy

Groton School

Hotchkiss School

Kent School

Kimball Union Academy

Kingswood Oxford School

Loomis Chaffee School

Middlesex School

Millbrook School

Miss Hall's School

Miss Porter's School

Northfield Mount Hermon

Northwest Catholic High School

Pomfret School

Proctor Academy

Putney School

Salisbury School

Sierra Canyon School

South Kent School

St. George's School

St. Paul Catholic High School

Stoneleigh-Burnham School

Suffield Academy

Tabor Academy

Taft School

Vermont Academy

Watkinson School

Westminster School

Western Reserve Academy

Westover School

Wilbraham & Monson Academy

Williston Northampton School



Phillips Academy
ANDOVER



CHOATE
ROSEMARY HALL



Miss Porter's School



AVON OLD FARMS
SCHOOL



ST. PAUL HIGH SCHOOL
COLLEGE PREPARATORY



HOTCHKISS



KINGSWOOD
OXFORD



LOOMIS CHAFFEE



Final Thoughts

To ensure the best possible outcome in the secondary school process, keep the following principles in mind:

- **Commit to the Process**

Make sure you follow the directions for applying to each school. Meet the deadlines and don't give schools a reason to think that you aren't serious about them.

- **Do Not Apply to a School You Don't Want to Attend**

Students talk about "safety" schools or say that a particular school is at the bottom of their list. Since that might be the students' only option come March 10, they should be positive about all applications.

- **Keep an Open Mind**

Parents and students need to examine each school from their own perspective. Being able to brag about a school that your child got into will sour quickly if they are unhappy and unsuccessful there. A "good school" is anywhere your child will grow and flourish. That might be a boarding school a few hours away or a single sex school.

- **Let it Go**

Ultimately, you only have control over a few elements of the application process. Students can work hard and take their applications seriously. Parents can express interest in the school, network, and pull strings, but ultimately, the Secondary School Admission Committee will do what is in the best interest of the school and the class it is building. Recognize that this may be the first time you may not be able to provide what your child wants. Build resilience before you get to decision day by expressing your belief in your child no matter what the outcome is.

Who Does What in the Process?

Secondary School Placement Office	Parents
Recommend schools	Research schools, attend events, submit inquiries
Provide counseling about SSAT	Sign students up for SSAT testing or test prep, as desired
Prepare students for interviews: students may interview virtually from school during the school day, and the placement office will set this up	Make appointments for interviews and tours and inform school of any absences
Organize and host school fair	Attend school fair with student
Hold information sessions about using the application portals	Attend information sessions
Assist students in writing essays	Write parent essays
Assist students with profile	Review student profile
Help students find and upload graded essays	Monitor due dates for various schools
Tell students how and when to request recommendations	Discuss with student who they might ask for additional recommendations (besides the current English and math teachers)
Request release forms and portal access	"Sign" releases and add Renbrook to SAO
Collect and send recommendations and transcripts to schools	Let the placement office know if outside recommendations are being sent to the placement office
Let parents know if essays are missing	Submit final application with fee. Fee waivers for financial aid candidates are available from each school separately
Discuss students with schools and provide additional information in support of applications	Let the placement office know your degree of interest in various schools
Prepare students for outcome of decision day	Prepare students for outcome of decision day
Discuss school choices with families	Attend revisits and make final decisions



Renbrook School

2685 Albany Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117
860.236.1661
www.renbrook.org

Bringing Learning to Life