What Happens Next?

Middle-School Choices after Lesley Ellis School
“In essence, the best middle schools are happy places because they are havens for children, places where children and adults celebrate success together. They catapult early adolescents to new experiences—academic, athletic, social, or artistic—that build confidence and mollify the angst of their molting selves. Simultaneously, these almost/early teens are taught, cared for, and supported by adults who understand their moods and energies, and are sympathetic to their adolescent turmoil, while supporting their academic development. The best middle schools are places where children belong rather than merely attend, places where they are connected.”

—Roy Parker, The Next Right Thing: A Guide for Parents and Teachers as They Navigate the Middle School Years

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This booklet has been prepared specifically for Lesley Ellis School families considering middle-school choices after Lesley Ellis School and speaks to the unique developmental and educational issues of middle-school children.
“No other age level is of more importance to the future of individuals, and, literally, to that of society; because these are the years when youngsters crystallize their beliefs about themselves and firm up their self-concepts, their philosophies of life and their values - the things that are the ultimate determinants of their behaviors.”

—John H. Lounsbury, Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years

Dear Lesley Ellis School Families,

Congratulations! You are about to become middle-school parents. Middle school is an exciting time of dramatic growth. Take a look at any random group of sixth graders—they may vary in height by a foot and a half. Some may already look almost like adults, and others still will look like small children. Some will be confident and poised, while others will be visibly anxious, too, they may be just as varied with some children maturing much faster than others. Some will be socially sophisticated and others still innocent. During this period, developmental variation is greater across all dimensions of growth and maturity than at any other stage of life!

Middle-school programs in our area usually form the highest level of an elementary school, or the lowest level of an upper school. In a few towns such as Arlington, there is a separate middle school. But such differences are only the beginning! As you learn about your options, you'll discover many more. A great middle school needs to support your child’s rapid developmental changes—individually, intellectually, physically, socially, and even ethically. Choosing a middle-school program that can support and nurture what's unique in your child can be a complex and exciting process.

Your Lesley Ellis student has been well prepared to take on the many interesting challenges of being a middle-school student and making a good transition—whether you choose a public or a private path. As he or she matures into adulthood, the lessons learned here, in our school community, will provide a solid and joyful foundation for learning and growing

This booklet has been designed to provide you with information to help you make a good choice. If you have any questions or need assistance in the process, please know that we are here to support you, offer advice, suggestions, and help you in any way that we can.

Onward!
All Kinds of Schools

Public or private, next school choices for Lesley Ellis students come in an astonishing array! Our area is one of the educationally richest and most varied in the nation with independent schools, religious schools, charter schools, and other options. There are even choices to be made in some public school systems.

Many Lesley Ellis elementary students continue on in independent schools. Our students have been extremely successful in gaining admission to other independent schools. Almost every elementary family who has chosen to apply to another independent school has been admitted to at least one of their top two choices. Now that we have a complete elementary school, Lesley Ellis families will have even greater choice—and we expect them to do just as well. Area independent schools increasingly view our elementary program with respect and enthusiasm and look forward to seeing Lesley Ellis applicants. Most of our students have transitioned to their new schools capably and confidently and have been well-prepared for meeting new challenges. Students who choose parochial or other religious schools have also done well, though historically very few Lesley Ellis families have chosen this route.

Some families have chosen to attend local public schools after Lesley Ellis. Though public schools tend to be much larger than Lesley Ellis, most Lesley Ellis students have adjusted well to this change of environment. The solid foundation they receive here is a clear benefit—not only academically, but socially and personally, as well.

Making a Choice

Which school is a decision that involves the notion of “fit.” “Fit” is the confidence that a child will thrive in a particular school community, that a family’s values and a school’s values are compatible, and that parents will feel comfortable being parents at a particular school. It may not “fit” if it is too far away, too expensive, or too large. A school may not “fit” your religious beliefs. It may not “fit” your child’s learning style. It may not “fit” in terms of offering enough challenges or opportunities. With so many options, there are probably several schools that will “fit” your family—and while a perfect fit is rare, you will find many wonderful schools from which to choose.

An Overview of School Types
Generally speaking, schools are either public or private. In Massachusetts, public schools are usually governed by local school committees; this system of local authority means that each school system is unique. Some systems, such as Cambridge, offer choices among schools, while other cities and towns, such as Lexington, assign schools by neighborhood. Public schools are required to work within state guidelines to develop curriculum and to administer statewide assessment tests. Public schools do not charge tuition and are required to teach all students.

Independent schools, such as Lesley Ellis, are privately funded and determine their own mission and curriculum. They charge tuition and choose their own systems of assessment. They may have admission criteria and are not required to admit all students. Each independent school is unique and has a unique curriculum, philosophy, and program.

Parochial and other religious schools are also private schools and are located in many communities throughout Massachusetts. Most, but not all, of these schools provide religious or faith-based instruction in addition to teaching a secular curriculum. They also charge tuition, though the tuition charged by these schools is sometimes lower than that charged by other private schools.

Independent Schools

Massachusetts has many independent schools and the range of choices available is extraordinary. Demand for independent education is also on the rise in this state and admission at some of these schools can be competitive. Lesley Ellis students typically do extremely well when applying to area independent schools.

Sticker Shock

Families interested in independent schools may suffer from sticker shock once they start looking around. Lesley Ellis School’s tuition is sometimes $5,000 or even $10,000 lower than the tuition charged by some schools for the next grade. Almost all independent schools offer some financial assistance programs, but the amount of aid available varies greatly from school to school. To assess need, most independent schools use exactly the same process. Read more about financial aid and financing later in this booklet.

School Configurations

Independent schools come in many shapes and sizes. (We have not included independent elementary schools such as Lesley Ellis in our descriptions unless they also offer middle-school programs in addition to elementary programs.)
Independent Elementary + Middle

Many schools popular with Lesley Ellis families are in this category. They include such schools as 
Belmont Day School (Belmont), Fayerweather Street School (Cambridge), and Shady Hill School (Cambridge). These schools typically add new students or even a new class at middle school. Such schools tend to be small and close-knit. They may feel “younger” than some of the larger schools, but by no means are they any “less academic.” Many of these schools offer distinctive programs designed specifically to meet the academic and developmental needs of middle-school students. Families who don’t mind or even welcome another transition at high school often choose these kinds of schools.

Independent Middle Schools

Only one local independent school in our area is exclusively a middle school—the Fenn School (Concord). Fenn is all-boys and enrolls boys in grades 4-9. A little further out, the Hillside School in Marlborough offers a grade 5-9 program.

Independent Secondary + Middle

A number of excellent schools fall into this category: Good examples are Beaver Country Day (Chestnut Hill), Dana Hall School (Wellesley), The Rivers School (Weston), and The Winsor School (Boston). These schools tend to be larger, they have athletic facilities that can also serve older students, and generally feel more like high schools. These schools are especially good choices for families who would like their child to continue on in the high-school program.

Independent PK-12 Programs

Independent PK-12 programs include BB&N (Cambridge), Brimmer & May (Brookline), and Milton Academy (Milton). In some schools, the middle school is located in separate buildings or even on separate campuses. These schools are also good choices for families who may wish to avoid another transition at high school. Not all schools automatically admit students to their high school programs, however.

Independent Boarding Schools with Middle-School Day Schools

Some independent schools in our area offer boarding programs beginning in the ninth grade (a few schools even offering boarding at middle school). A school that has a boarding program is a school 24-hours a day. Campus events will take place well into the evening. Teachers will still be on campus in the late afternoon—some may even live on campus. Day students may find themselves interested in sticking around to partake of later activities.
Boarding schools will also have students who come from different parts of the country—and from different countries. They can be, but are not always, more diverse than the day schools in their communities. Milton Academy (Milton) is one such school with students from 25 states and 29 different countries. For more information about boarding schools, visit the NAIS website at www.nais.org.

**Single-Sex Schools**

Several all-girls schools and all-boys options are also available locally. A few local all-girls, middle-school options are The Winsor School (Boston), Dana Hall School (Wellesley), and Nashoba Brooks School (Concord). The National Coalition for Girls' Schools offers a wealth of information on the advantages of single-sex education for girls: www.ncgs.org.

All-boys schools also offer unique benefits to boys—the thinking about boys’ education and ways of learning has changed dramatically from what it was even 25 years ago. Visit the Boys’ School Coalition to learn more at www.boysschoolscoalition.org. Local all-boys schools include Fessenden School (Newton), Fenn School (Concord), Belmont Hill School (Belmont, 9-12) and Roxbury Latin School (Boston, 7-12)—the oldest private school in the nation.

**Entry Point/Intake Years**

Among area independent schools, you will find a wide range of “entry point” years. An entry point year is the first year and any year in which the school expands its class size. Families may apply in years other than entry-point years, but should understand that the only spaces that will be available will be those created by attrition; that, in many schools, these spaces may go first to siblings of current students; and that no spaces may actually be available even if the school accepts your application. Why would a school accept your application if no spot is available for your child? The school may be concerned that a current family will be unable to return. Most admission offices are usually straightforward about admission prospects, but do not want to discourage anyone who wants to apply.

**Non-Sectarian, Independent Schools Offering Middle-School Programs in Our Area**

To learn more about the schools on this list, visit their websites, check Lesley Ellis School’s resource library, or call and ask for information. This list may not be entirely complete, but it includes most schools that might be of interest to Lesley Ellis families:

- **Andover**
  - Andover School of Montessori (PK-8)
  - (978) 475-2299
  - www.andomon.org

- **The Pike School (PK-9)**
  - (978) 475-1197
  - www.pikeschool.org

- **Belmont**
Belmont Day School (PK-8)
(617) 484-3078
www.belmontday.org

Beverly
Glen Urquhart School (PK-8)
(978) 927-1064
www.gus.org

Shore Country Day (PK-9)
(978) 927-1200
www.shoreschool.org

Stoneridge Children’s Montessori (PK-8)
(978) 922-3938
www.stoneridgecms.org

The Waring School (PK-12)
(978) 927-8793
www.waringschool.org

Boston
The British School of Boston (PK-12US, Foundation to Key Stage 3, UK)
(617) 522-2261
www.britishschool.org/boston/index.html

Roxbury Latin School (boys, 7-12)
(617) 325-4920
www.roxburlynlatins.org

The Winsor School (girls, 5-12)
(617) 735-9503
www.winsor.edu

Braintree
Thayer Academy
(781) 664 2221
www.thayer.org

Brookline
Dexter School (boys, PK-9, 12 by ‘07)
(617) 522-5544
www.dexter.org

The Park School (PK-9)
(617) 277-2456
www.parkschool.org

Southfield School (girls, PK-12)
(617) 522-6980
www.southfield.org

Cambridge
Boston Arch Choir School (5-8)
(617) 868-8658
(no website)

Buckingham, Brown & Nichols BB&N (PK-12)
(617) 800-2131
www.bbn-school.org

Cambridge Friends School (PK-8)
(617) 354-3880
www.cambridgefriendschool.org

Cambridge Montessori School (Tod-9)
(617) 576-5154

International School of Boston (PK-12US)
(617) 499-1451
www.ecolebilingue.org

Fayerweather Street School (PK-8)
(617) 876-4746
www.fayerweather.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shady Hill</td>
<td>Shady Hill School (PK-8)</td>
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<td>(617) 868-1260</td>
<td><a href="http://www.shs.org">www.shs.org</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chestnut Hill</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Beaver Country Day (6-12)</td>
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<td>(617) 738-2100</td>
<td><a href="http://www.beavercds.org">www.beavercds.org</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brimmer &amp; May School (PK-12)</td>
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<td>(617) 738-8695</td>
<td><a href="http://www.brimmer.org">www.brimmer.org</a></td>
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<td>Concord</td>
<td>Nashoba Brooks School (PK-8,</td>
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<td>(978) 369-4591</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nbsc.org">www.nbsc.org</a></td>
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<td>girls 4-8)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fenn School (boys, 4-9)</td>
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<td>(978) 368-5600</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fenn.org">www.fenn.org</a></td>
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<td>Danvers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Clark School (PK-8)</td>
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<td>(978) 774.3088</td>
<td><a href="http://www.clarkschool.com">www.clarkschool.com</a></td>
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<td>Dedham Country Day (PK-8)</td>
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<td>(781) 329-0850</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dedhamcountryday.org">www.dedhamcountryday.org</a></td>
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<td>Noble &amp; Greenough School (7-12)</td>
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<td>(781) 326-3700</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nobles.edu">www.nobles.edu</a></td>
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<td>Dover</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Charles River School (PK-8)</td>
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<td>(508) 785-0068</td>
<td><a href="http://www.charlesriverschool.org">www.charlesriverschool.org</a></td>
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<td>Framingham</td>
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<td>Wayland Academy of Framingham (PK-8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(508) 877-7706</td>
<td><a href="http://www.freewebs.com/waylandacademy/inform.htm">www.freewebs.com/waylandacademy/inform.htm</a></td>
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<td>Sudbury Valley School</td>
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<td>(508) 877-3030</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sudval.org">www.sudval.org</a></td>
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<td>Foxborough</td>
<td>The Sage School (K-8)</td>
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<td>(508) 543-9619</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sageschool.org">www.sageschool.org</a></td>
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<td>Hingham</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Derby Academy (PK-9)</td>
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<td>(781) 749-0746</td>
<td><a href="http://www.derbyacademy.org">www.derbyacademy.org</a></td>
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<td>Lexington</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lexington Montessori (Todd-8)</td>
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<td>(781-862-8571)</td>
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<td>The Waldorf School (PK-12)</td>
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<td>(781) 863-1062</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thewaldorschool.org">www.thewaldorschool.org</a></td>
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<td>Marblehead</td>
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<td>The Tower School (PK-9)</td>
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<td>(781) 631-5800</td>
<td><a href="http://www.towerschool.org">www.towerschool.org</a></td>
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<td>Manchester</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Brookwood School (PK-8)</td>
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<td>(978) 526-4500</td>
<td><a href="http://www.brookwood.edu">www.brookwood.edu</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Milton</td>
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<td>(617) 898-1798</td>
<td><a href="http://www.milton.edu">www.milton.edu</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Newton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fessenden School (boys, K-9)</td>
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<td>(617) 630-2300</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fessenden.org">www.fessenden.org</a></td>
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<td>Quincy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Woodward School (girls, 6-12)</td>
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<td>(617) 773-5610</td>
<td><a href="http://thewoodwardschool.org">http://thewoodwardschool.org</a></td>
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<td>Salem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Phoenix School (K-8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(978) 741-0870</td>
<td><a href="http://www.phoenixschool.org">www.phoenixschool.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Southborough</td>
<td>Fay School (1-9)</td>
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<td>(508) 485-0100</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fayschool.org">www.fayschool.org</a></td>
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Public Schools

In Massachusetts, public schools are governed by local school committees, and this system means that each town or city’s schools are unique. Some systems, such as Somerville, offer choices in schools, while other cities and towns, such as Arlington, offer no choice.

One of the biggest differences between public schools and private schools is the curriculum. Since 1993, Massachusetts has required schools to work toward goals outlined in the state’s curriculum frameworks. Most schools supplement these frameworks with their own goals, programs, and advanced courses. A Core Knowledge school, for example, blends the Core Knowledge curriculum with the state frameworks. To learn more about what public schools actually teach, visit www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks.

The 2001 “No Child Left Behind” Act (www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb) requires that states meet standards in reading and mathematics, annually test all students in third grade through eighth, and develop statewide progress goals to ensure that all students reach proficiency within 12 years. This legislation also requires each school to produce an annual school ‘report card.’ School report cards describe characteristics of the school, including the number of children, test scores, ratios of teachers to students, ethnic ratios, poverty levels, and more. The National Center for Education Statistics provides an analysis of state report cards and links to each state’s report cards at http://nces.ed.gov/forum/performance.asp. Additional information, including school profiles, test scores, and funding-per-student statistics, is available online at: www.doe.mass.edu. More on report cards can be found at http://www.nclb.gov/next/faqs/accountability.html.

You might also wish to review your school district’s annual report to compare the expenditure per pupil among districts. In some systems, this dollar amount is a good indicator of school quality. The National Center for Education Statistics offers a searchable resource called the Public School District Finance Peer Search that puts this data in context. This data allows users to find out the per-pupil expenditure for school districts of interest, how those figures compare to school districts...
that have similar demographic characteristics, and how the district’s per-pupil expenditure compares to state and national averages. This resource is located at http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp.

Public School Systems

The following is a list of the school systems most commonly chosen by Lesley Ellis families. We have included phone numbers for the town or city’s Superintendent’s Office and websites for more information. Many individual schools also have websites that will give you a peek into life at particular schools. If you are considering a public school system, we urge you to call this number to request enrollment information as soon as possible. We have also included school sizes: generally speaking, you will find that public middle-school programs are significantly larger than those of independent schools.

Arlington
(781) 316-3501
www.arlington.k12.ma.us
Arlington’s system offers one middle school (grades 6-8) enrolling approximately 1,000 students.

Belmont
(617) 484-2642
www.belmont.k12.ma.us
Belmont’s system offers one middle school (5-8) enrolling approximately 1,100 students.

Boston
(617) 635-8015
www.boston.k12.ma.us
Boston’s extremely diverse school system offers an array of choices. If you are interested in Boston middle-school options, please visit their website.

Brookline
(617) 730-2403
http://bec.brookline.mec.edu/publicschools
Brookline’s nine elementary schools include grades 6-8. There is no school choice in Brookline.

Cambridge
(617) 349-6551
www.cpsd.us/index.cfm
Cambridge’s middle schools are part of five elementary programs. Students register and are assigned to school in Cambridge, under a Controlled Choice Plan. Cambridge’s schools offer a variety of school types including traditional, progressive, “core knowledge,” and bilingual programs. Cambridge also has a charter school with a middle school program.

Concord
(978) 318-1510
www.colonial.net
Concord has one middle school (grades 6–8) enrolling about 670 students.
Dover
(508) 785-0635
http://www.doversherborn.org
Dover has one middle school (grades 6-8). There is no choice. The school is a regional school (with Sherborn) and enrolls about 500 students.

Lexington
(781) 861-2550
http://lps.lexingtonma.org
Lexington has two middle schools (6-8), Jonas Clarke Middle that enrolls about 750 and Diamond Middle that enrolls about 780. There is no school choice in Lexington.

Lincoln
(781) 259-9409
www.lincnet.org
Lincoln has a PK-8 program of 730 students total and also administers Hanscom Middle School (4-8) for families who reside on Hanscom Field Air Force Base,

Medford
(781) 393-2387
www.medford.k12.ma.us
Medford's system has changed dramatically in the past few years. Medford now has two middle schools that each enrolls 600–650 students. Medford has also adopted a “controlled choice” plan. Parents of middle-school students may choose either the John J. McGlynn (K-8) School or the Madeleine DuGger Andrews (6-8) School. Students are assigned according to space availability, sibling placement, and diversity plan guidelines.

Somerville
(617) 625-6600
www.somerville.k12.ma.us
Somerville offers controlled choice and a variety of programs. Middle schools are part of the nine elementary schools. There is also one alternative special-needs middle school.

Winchester
(781) 721-7004
www.winchester.k12.ma.us
Winchester has one middle school, McCall Middle (grades 6-8), enrolling about 900 students.

Waltham
(781) 314-5440
www.city.waltham.ma.us/SCHOOL/WebPage/ms.htm
Waltham has two middle school s, John F Kennedy Middle (grades 6-8) enrolling about 530 students, and John W. McDevitt Middle School (grades 6-8), enrolling about 270 students. There is no school choice in Waltham. Waltham's middle-school program features a cluster model of instruction. Teams of teachers share a common group of students and co-teach academic, fine arts, and practical arts courses. This enhances interdisciplinary reinforcement of instruction and ensures that all students experience a wide variety of course offerings.

Watertown
(617) 926-7700
www.watertown.k12.ma.us
Watertown Middle (grades 6-8) is the only middle school in Watertown, and it enrolls about 600 students.
Woburn
(781) 937-8200
www.woburn-massachusetts.com

Woburn has two middle schools. Woburn does not offer school choice. Daniel L. Joyce Middle school (grades 6-8) enrolls about 550 students. John F. Kennedy Middle School (grades 6-8) enrolls about 600.

Other Systems

For information about other school systems, call that town or city’s superintendent’s office, or the Massachusetts Department of Education 800-297-0002, or visit their very useful website. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu.

Massachusetts School Choice Program

This program is not the same as the choice programs mentioned in the descriptions above—this is something entirely different!

The Massachusetts School Choice Program is available in selected communities. It allows parents to choose schools outside their school district. This program is free of charge. Each year, individual school committees decide whether their district should participate in the school choice program. If they choose not to accept school choice pupils from other districts, they must take a vote and report the result to the Department of Education by the end of June. They may also choose to accept new pupils, but only in certain grades. What this means is that you may be able to choose a school in a different town at no charge. To see which districts have participated in the School Choice Program, visit: http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/SchFin/choice/choice_list.aspx.

Charter Schools

Charter Schools are also public schools and were created in 1993, when the Education Reform Act was signed into law. Charter schools are established by parents, teachers, or, in some cases, corporate or nonprofit organizations. They remain separate administratively, are financially independent from any school district, and are free and accessible to all school-age children on a space-available basis—including students with special needs. There are two types of charter schools: Horace Mann Charters, which operate under auspices of the local school committee; and Commonwealth Charters, which operate independently of any school committee. Most are open to any student in the state, provided that district or regional residents are accepted first. Charter schools are public schools and do not charge tuition.
Charter schools often have distinct educational philosophies or approaches. Some charter schools are run by for-profit corporations, while others are home-grown. They vary widely in mission, and size. The following is a small selection of the local public charter schools serving middle-school students. If you are interested in a charter school, we urge you to investigate your options at least a year and a half in advance. Some charter schools have waiting lists of over 1,000 students. For a complete list of charter schools and profiles, please visit: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/charter.asp

**Academy Of the Pacific Rim Charter School**  
Hyde Park, (617) 361-0050  
www.pacrim.org  
A 6–12 program combining the best of the East—high standards, discipline, and character education, with the best of the West—a commitment to individualism, creativity, and diversity.

**Benjamin Banneker Charter School**  
Cambridge (617) 497-7771  
www.banneker.org  
An urban K–8 Science and Technology School committed to excellence in education.

**Prospect Hill Academy Charter School**  
Somerville and Cambridge (617) 284-7800  
www.prospecthillacademy.org  
K–12 school in two locations ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education that emphasizes mastery in all core subjects.

**Mystic Valley Regional Charter School**  
Malden (781) 388-0222  
www.mvrcs.com  
A K–10 "Core Knowledge" School

### Special Education and Gifted Programs

Massachusetts has a wide range of special education options. Different schools serve different needs and a full description of each program is beyond the scope of this booklet. At Lesley Ellis School, families of children with special needs receive advising and guidance throughout all their years at our school, undertake appropriate testing, and are likely to have explored future education options. As much as we can, Lesley Ellis will help to advocate for each special needs child in making the transition to a public system or special-needs private school.

A list of all DOE approved special education programs (public and private) can be found at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/speds.asp

We also recommend:
A Parent’s Guide to Special Education, by the Federation for Children with Special Needs in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Education. The Guide contains the most current and accurate information available regarding the special education system in Massachusetts.

Independent Schools

A number of excellent independent schools serve students with learning disabilities and differences and have developed high-quality, special education programs. Please check with the school, however, to learn if their program is a good match for your child’s unique needs before applying—each school meets very different needs. Some of these schools include:

The Carroll School Lincoln (K-9)
(781) 259-8342
www.carrollschool.org
The Carroll School is the nation’s premier independent day school for students, ages 6-14, who have been diagnosed with primary language learning disabilities and/or dyslexia.

The Hillside School Marlborough (5-9)
(508) 485-2824
www.hillside.net
An independent boarding and day school for boys, attending grades 5-9. For over 100 years, Hillside has provided educational and residential services to boys who need to develop their academic and social skills while building self-confidence and maturity. The 250-acre school is located in a rural section of Marlborough, MA and includes a working farm. Hillside accommodates both traditional learners who want a more personalized education, and those boys with learning differences and/or attention problems.

Landmark Middle School Manchester-by-the-Sea (6-8)
(978) 927-4440
www.landmarkschool.org
This program for middle-school students emphasizes the individualized development and acquisition of language skills. Each student in this program has a daily one-to-one tutorial specifically designed to address his/her diagnosed needs in reading, spelling, writing, and comprehension. This program provides rigorous language remediation for students experiencing particular difficulty with written and oral expression. Classes of six to eight students are based on skill needs and are offered in math language arts, science, social studies, and electives.

Willow Hill School, Sudbury (6-12)
(978) 443-2581.
www.willowhillschool.org
Coeducational day college-preparatory, outdoor education, drama, and visual arts school; primarily serves underachievers, students with learning disabilities, individuals with attention disorders, dyslexic students, and non-verbal learning disorders.
Gifted and Talented Programs

There is no professional consensus on what ‘gifted’ means, and no agreement on how schools should educate “gifted” students. Some education professionals assign a definition based on intelligence test scores: gifted is an IQ above 130, for example. One definition labels a student as gifted if his or her development is significantly “asynchronous” in one or more areas. In some contexts, “academically advanced” is equivalent to “gifted.”

Gifted and talented programs have long been politically controversial in the state of Massachusetts. The political pros and cons of gifted education are enormously complex. Massachusetts is the only state that does not fund such programs at the state level. The state also does not define what it means to be a “gifted” student, nor does it have a law mandating the identification of such students. The state sometimes, however, participates in initiatives that serve academically advanced students. Individual school districts may also initiate and offer their own gifted and talented programs. Check with your local system as these programs vary with the availability of resources and interest.

Brookline, for example, has developed a program for academically advanced students. Brookline does not formally identify students as “gifted and talented” and its program is part of the regular Brookline curriculum. Their system uses a consulting teacher model, which means supporting classroom teachers in extending and enriching the curriculum to meet the needs of academically and intellectually advanced students in the regular classroom. In Brookline, resource teachers also work with small groups of students in “pull-out” situations—both inside and outside of the regular classroom. Brookline does not test for giftedness, but offers these extra challenges to students who can advance beyond regular class work.

The following independent schools offer middle-school programs for gifted student—there may be others as well. Note: The definition of “gifted” varies widely among schools.

**The Phoenix School** (K-8)
(978) 741-0870
www.phoenixschool.org

**The Sage School** (K-8)
(508) 543-9619
www.sageschool.org

A report detailing local and state programs for gifted and academically advanced students can be found at: www.doe.mass.edu/famcomm/aae.html

Additional Resources: www.massgifted.org
Families choosing a school with a religious affiliation will be looking for a close match with respect to their religious beliefs in choosing such schools. Once you have selected a few possibilities, applying to parochial and other religious schools will be fairly similar to applying to independent schools, though some religious schools do have different deadlines. Others may also have different kinds of screening processes or tests. It is important to check with these schools early in the process so that your child can be prepared.

Catholic Schools

By far the most common religious schools in our area are the Catholic schools. Where they were once strongly hierarchical and lead by nuns and priests, they have, since the 1970s, become much more decentralized and reflective of their local parishes. Each Catholic school is unique and virtually autonomous. You can find schools that struggle openly with some aspects of the Catholic faith, single-sex schools, academically demanding schools, and schools that are richly diverse. If you are considering a Catholic school, we recommend looking at several schools to get a sense of the many options. (NOTE: A number of Catholic schools are expected to close beginning in 2004. Check with the Archdiocese of Boston for more information.)

A number of catholic schools tend to use traditional teaching methods, but increasingly you can find schools that incorporate progressive practices. Catholic schools also incorporate varying degrees of religious teaching into the day. Some use a specific Catholic curriculum; in others, Catholicism infuses the culture of the school community and religious education is more generally about the subject of religion. Austin Prep (Reading) is a popular Catholic school that includes a high school; Newton Country Day School (Newton) is an all-girls Catholic school; and St. Peter’s (Cambridge) is a PK-8 Catholic school. There are at least a dozen Catholic school options in our area.

To obtain a list of Catholic schools, contact:
Archdiocese of Boston 617-298-6555 or 800-school-4
www.abcso.org

Jewish Schools

The Boston area boasts many outstanding Jewish schools, some with national reputations for excellence. They include Maimonides (Orthodox, K-12), the Solomon Schechter Schools (Conservative, K-8), and Rashi (Reform, K-8) schools—all teach Hebrew, the Torah, and Jewish
history and culture. Some of these schools appeal to non-practicing families and even non-Jewish families who choose Jewish schools for their academic quality, strong cultures, and values.

To obtain a list of local Jewish schools contact:
Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston
617-457-8500 / www.cjp.org

Find more Jewish day schools at:
http://boston.ujcfedweb.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=69497

Christian Schools

One of fastest growing school movements in the country is the Christian school movement. These schools have strongly held beliefs about the nature of the world and humanity and tend to attract families with similar perspectives. Many of these schools ask children to follow a dress code, agree to a school-wide code of conduct and have daily prayer. Many Christian schools also employ traditional teaching methods, such as memorization, and use only text books and workbooks supplied by Christian publishers. Christian schools are either fundamentalist, evangelical, or charismatic. Fundamentalist schools tend to be the most conservative and traditional. Examples of local Christian school include: Lexington Christian Academy (Lexington, 6-12), Agape Christian Academy (Winchester, PK–12), and Brookline’s Boston Trinity Academy which was founded in 2002 and serves children in grades 6-10.

Families interested in Christian education should speak with friends and churches, as there are no comprehensive listings of Christian schools. Two sources to get you started are:

The Association of Classical and Christian Schools: http://www.accsedu.org/
International Christian Accrediting Association: http://www.icaa.us/icaaschools.asp?schoolID=1

Society of Friends (Quaker) Schools

The Society of Friends is unusual as a religious organization. It has no formal creed or set of beliefs, no churches or clergy. The teachers in Friends schools are not often Quakers themselves, nor are the students. Instead, Friends schools are open to families of all faiths as well as to non-believers—and are famous for being extremely religiously diverse. The Friends culture has a tradition of being opposed to war and taking oaths and devoted to simplicity and modesty. Friends schools offer a humanistic-progressive education and are committed to multi-culturalism, anti-bias learning, and social reform. Two important ideas you will find in Friends schools are the idea of consensus in decision-making (as opposed to majority rule), and the idea of daily
reflective silence. Those interested in this type of education should visit the Cambridge Friends School (grades, PK-8) — the only Quaker school in our area.

To learn more about Friends Schools, contact:
The Friends Council on Education
1507 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19012
215.241.7245

The Friends Council also offers information about Quaker education.
http://www.friendscouncil.org

Schools with Other Religious Affiliations

There are many other religious schools in New England, including Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonite, Greek Orthodox, Scientology, and Islamic schools. To find out more about religious education, we encourage you to call or write to national organizations or check with leaders of local churches, mosques, temples, and other appropriate religious organizations.

Delphi Academy in Milton advertises itself as a non-sectarian independent school. This school, however, uses curriculum from the Church of Scientology.

Choosing a Public School

While you can learn a lot about your public school choices by surfing the web, nothing can take the place of a visit. Even if your school system does not offer choice, it’s still extremely valuable to spend some time observing the classrooms, teachers, and student interactions.

Here are some things to bear in mind—many of these same issues may also apply to private schools.

Is the environment welcoming and orderly, yet creative and child-friendly? Do the classrooms have desks, or do the children work collaboratively at tables located in various parts of the room? Classroom arrangement can suggest a structured approach or an approach that encourages independent learning. Look for student work on walls and in display areas— including writing and other evidence of literacy projects and artwork. Displays allow parents to see beyond test scores to what the children are learning and how they are learning it.
How do the adults interact with the children (are they friendly, harsh, respectful, etc.)? Does order seem to be maintained? What do teachers see as strengths and concerns at the school and in the community? Parents can ask about turnover of staff and the rate of student transfers, as well as student and teacher absentee rates.

Has the school been recognized with any excellence awards or grants or awards for dramatic recent improvements in achievement?

You may want to ask about arts and music programs, which are often the first to suffer in a budget crisis.

**Other issues you may wish to review include:**

- **Services** such as guidance counselors, specialists, school nurse, a librarian, etc.

- **Discipline policy** Most schools will provide a copy of this policy. It is important to ask how conflicts among students are resolved as well as how student/teacher issues handled, and how children are supported.

- **Grading and assessment** Ask for a sample report card and explanation of the system. Many middle schools will begin to use letter grades and you will find vastly different forms of conference and assessment than what you have become used to at Lesley Ellis.

- **Homework policy** Some schools require a great deal of homework, some much less. Ask to see some homework.

- **Social events and extracurricular activities** Does the school create and support middle-school friendships and community outside the classroom with social events, clubs, community service, etc. Extracurricular activities are especially important for middle-school students. Look for a diversity of activities that will help children form friendships outside their immediate social group and around a variety of interests that go beyond “hanging out.”

- **Textbooks and classroom materials** Are they current or out of date? Most schools update materials on a schedule. Inquire about this schedule and request to see any textbooks used. If they seem out of date, do not hesitate to ask about plans for replacements or supplementary materials that may be used.

- **Safety policy** Ask about rules for playground activities, restroom supervision, and strangers on school property. The National School Safety Center provides additional information about what to look for with respect to safety at http://www.nssc1.org.

- **Class size** Research suggests that the optimum class size for young teens is about 15 students. Many public schools exceed that—but for middle-school students it is especially beneficial to have a class size as close to 15 as possible. Class size is different from student/teacher ratio—and smaller classes with higher student-teacher ratios are preferable to lower ratios in larger classes.

- **Library/media center**—is it well equipped? Can children check out books and use the center’s resources?
• **Parent communication** Are there school newsletters or a website?

• **Parent organization** Ask for a schedule of events. An active parent organization is a sign of a healthy, happy school.

• **Before- and after-school programs**—even if you don’t plan to use them. These programs are often vital to maintaining a healthy middle school.

## Choosing an Independent School

The process of selecting an independent schools has three phases: **Research**—reading about schools, visiting campuses and websites, collecting materials and applications, talking with friends, teachers, and advisors; **Application**—choosing a small number of schools to apply to, completing the requirements for each school; and **Decision**—gathering more information to make a final decision, choosing a school, and submitting a contract.

### Research

After reading this booklet, we recommend visiting school websites, requesting brochures, and talking with Tricia Moran. You may also want to attend school fairs or schedule visits to campus for the fall of your last year. In the back of this booklet, we have also included a list of resources for learning more about schools and education. We keep materials and guidebooks in the Lesley Ellis office. All parents are encouraged to talk with Tricia Moran about next schools, and to attend our “next school” events. It is important to be open-minded in this phase of the process—many families discover wonderful schools they had not heard of before, and learn things about how schools work that can be valuable in the decision-making process.

### Questions to Ask

Here are some issues (suggested by NAIS) to think about as you look through each school’s materials:

- Is the school accredited and by whom?
- What is the school’s mission and does its philosophy appeal to you?
- Does the school have a special or particular educational focus?
- Are academics rigorous?
- Are there high expectations?
- How large is the school and its student body?
• Where is the school located and what are your transportation options?
• What variety of learning experiences are available at the school -- in class, on the playing field, in extracurricular activities, and in community service? Are extracurricular activities obligatory?
• Does the school seem to have a diverse student body and faculty?
• Do the school materials discuss parental involvement?
• If the school is a 6-12 school, what percentage of students enter colleges—and what kind of colleges do they attend?
• If it ends after middle school, what kinds of schools do students go on to after leaving this school?
• What is the tuition and how flexible are the school’s financing options?
• What is the school’s application process?

After developing a list of schools that meet your family’s needs, make appointment for a visit and a tour. Usually, your tour will be given by a student or a parent volunteer. The quality of the tour and the knowledge or biases of the guide can vary widely and are not always a good representation of the school. If you don’t think you got a useful tour, you can ask for another tour with a different guide at a later date or with an admission officer if possible.

NAIS suggests the following: When you schedule your visit, allow enough time to get a feel for each school. (Ask how much time you’ll need for a complete tour.) Bring your wish list and notes to the interview, and don’t be afraid to ask lots of questions! Remember, the interview is a two-way process allowing you to find out more about a school, and helping admission officers to better understand your child. During the interview, take time to honestly discuss your child’s candidacy as well as to ask any unanswered questions that may be lingering in your mind. Here are a few to get you started:

• Do the students you see seem productive, engaged, and happy?
• How do the teachers interact with their students?
• What will students at your child’s age be expected to study?
• What are the backgrounds and experiences of the faculty?
• Does the school provide its teachers with opportunities for continuing professional development?
• How does the school measure individual achievement and progress?
• Is the campus clean, well lighted, secure?
• What kind of leadership and governance does the school have?
• Are faculty and staff involved in decision-making and curriculum development?
• Does what you see reflect the school's stated mission?
• What kind of counseling and support services are offered?
• Does the school feel like a community? Are students interacting with teachers outside as well as inside the classroom?
• Is the school willing and eager to involve parents?
• How, and how often, does the school communicate with the family?
• Can you picture your child growing in this environment?

Before you leave each school, consider asking for some names of parents you can call for more information. You may feel more comfortable if you can talk to families experiencing the school now. Former Lesley Ellis families have also volunteered to help parents in this process—just ask for their contact information. If you visit a lot of schools, keep notes on responses to your concerns. Also, write down any additional thoughts on the day you visit, while impressions are fresh in your mind.

**Application**

The application procedure can be confusing—there are specific steps with rigid deadlines. Most families will apply to 2-5 different schools, depending on the child and the schools in which you are interested. After you visit several schools, create a "short list" of those you wish to pursue. As you complete each selected school's application form you trigger the rest of the admission process.

Your application to an independent school will typically include the following components:

• A completed application form
• Your child's school record
• Student writing sample
• Past standardized testing results if any
• Teacher recommendations
• Results of a standardized admission test and/or a school-administered entrance exam
• Notes from a formal interview with your child*
• Payment of the application fee

Some schools also consider:
• Student artwork/portfolios
• Specialized testing (e.g. results of Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children)

The Application Form
Each school will have a different application form. Some schools will use a two-part form; you’ll get part two after completing part one. The form or forms collect basic data such as name, address, birth date, etc. Most schools also let you download applications on their websites—some may even let you complete them online. Applications tend to have a number of short answer questions about student activities, sports and athletics, favorite subjects, etc. Some applications are to be completed by the student, others by a parent. If an application requests answers from the student, it’s very important to let the student answer the questions in his or her own words. It will be clear from the instructions which sections should be answered by the student.

Some applications are very complicated! Do not wait until the last minute. Draft answers ahead of time. It is not necessary to type an application—neat handwriting is completely acceptable. Keep copies of all applications! If you apply to the same school for another child or for a later grader, you will want to make sure not to repeat yourself!

It is extremely important to get your application in before the deadline! Late applicants are generally viewed as less serious applicants.

Application fee
The application form is usually mailed in by a specific deadline with payment of the application fee (usually $30-$75). Waivers are available at most schools in cases of financial hardship. Ask the admission office.

Student Essay
Some applications include space for a student essay—others may request it separately or not ask for one at all. Help and gentle guidance are valuable, but it is very important to let the student to write in his or her own words and style. Seasoned admission officers are skilled at detecting undue parental influence and it may count against your child.

The School Record
Your child’s school record or report is maintained by Lesley Ellis. Usually a school provides a transcript release form which a parent signs so that we may release the record. Help us make sure nothing falls through the cracks by making all requests for school records at the same time! Pre-addressed envelopes (9x12) are very useful.
Test Scores

Test scores are NOT a major factor in most admission decisions. Admission offices typically use test scores to help confirm overall impressions of a student's academic ability. Some offices only use scores to choose between otherwise equal candidates.

Many of the private schools in our area require middle-school applicants to submit scores from the either the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) or the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE). Some schools only accept scores from one test or the other, so it is important to determine which test the schools you are interested in require. Students applying to middle school take the “Lower” versions of these tests. Sign up for the ISEE at www.erb.org. or the SSAT at www.ssat.org. Catholic schools may require a different test, and some schools use their own entrance examination.

Test scores must be submitted from the testing organizations directly. Not all schools require test scores. We recommend that you do not submit scores unless they are requested. If your child scores well on these tests, you may call the testing service and have scores sent to these schools, but it may not make any difference in their decision-making.

During the school year, we offer test practice and some test preparation. These activities will not necessarily change your child’s score significantly; they are designed primarily to introduce the experience of taking a test, impart some basic test-taking strategies, and build children’s confidence.

Teacher Recommendations

Most schools request that teachers use a standard AISNE recommendation form. If a school does not request this form, many LES teachers will probably use it nonetheless. The form provides a very clear structure around which to organize a recommendation. You can get a copy of this form, if you are interested. Ask for one in the office or visit the AISNE website. Normally, you will not get to see a teacher’s recommendation.

Friend of the Family Recommendations

Some schools request a recommendation from a friend of the family or someone other than a teacher who knows your child well. The best choice for this is someone who knows your child’s intellectual as well as personal strengths, knows your family, and can write good letter. Don’t choose a famous graduate or trustee to write this letter if he or she doesn’t know your child.
**Student Interview and Screening**

Most schools will interview and screen applicants. Screening varies widely. Some schools may even use their own entrance examinations as part of screening. Others will use an individual interview with your child. Still others will organize a “mini-class” with a small group of applicants, and your child will spend as much as half a day with school teachers who evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Occasionally, a screening goes completely awry, but most schools will offer a second chance if you wish.

**Parent/Family Interview**

Many schools interview parents apart from the student. Each school approaches this process differently, but they are seeking to learn more about your student and also to provide you with a chance to ask any questions about the school. How parents “perform” in this interview almost never has any impact on an admission decision.

**Financial Aid Form**

In most schools, requests for financial aid should be made at the time of application. Parents are asked to complete and submit financial aid forms to the school and Student Service for Financial Aid. You can request these forms from the schools to which you are applying. Parents must also submit their most recent 1040 income tax form. The school’s Financial Aid Committee reviews each accepted student’s application and distributes the funds that are available. Decisions are typically mailed in March.

Applying for financial aid does not affect an applicant’s chances for admission; applicants are almost always accepted for admission on a need-blind basis. In most schools, families must reapply for financial aid each year so grants may be adjusted if the family’s financial situation changes.

**A Note about Deadlines**

Unlike the IRS, which looks for a postmark, schools want your package in their office by the deadline. If you have any question at all about the mail getting your package the before the deadline, consider dropping it off in person.

**Decision**

Admission officers take many factors into consideration before making a decision on each applicant. Among the factors considered in making a decision are:
• Past academic performance and previous school records
• Recommendations from teachers/counselors
• Special strengths and talents (academic, artistic, etc.)
• Personal insights from the application
• Impressions gathered from an interview with your child
• Your child’s potential contribution to the life of the school
• Gender balance, diversity, and mix of personalities
• Number of applicants and number of spaces available
• Results of standardized tests

Some schools also consider:
• Your alumni connections to the school
• Sibling or other connections to the school

Most schools notify families on or before March 10th. Your child will be accepted, declined, or wait-listed at each school to which you have applied. Before you decide, you may want to revisit your list one last time. Families of accepted students are also usually invited to some school events such as a panel discussion, a re-visit day, or a chance to spend a half-day as a student at that school. If you still are not sure, ask to talk to a few teachers or current families.

If your child is placed on a waiting list, be sure to let the school know if you are still interested with a note, email or phone call. Ask about your chances as well. Wait-listed students may be notified all the way up until September. If you feel that you would accept an offer from a school that has wait-listed your child, please be sure to discuss this carefully with your back-up school. A back-up school may require at the very least a significant non-refundable deposit and may not always agree to hold a space for your child without a contract.

Once you return a signed enrollment contract together with a tuition deposit, your family will be considered part of the school community. Many schools offer "buddy" programs for incoming students who would like to communicate with currently enrolled peers.

If you decline an offer, you may also be asked to complete a survey about the school or the process. We encourage you to do this as it helps each school make important improvements.
What if you missed all the deadlines?

Try not to miss individual deadlines, but if you do, don’t panic. There are many schools that continue to admit students throughout the academic year and during the summer months. Talk with Jenn Young as soon as possible and be sure to check this site: it lists some schools that may still have spots open: www.ssat.org/membersearch.nsf

Financial Assistance and Financing Programs

In most schools, requests for financial aid should be made at the time of application. Parents are asked to complete and submit financial aid forms to the School and Student Service for Financial Aid. Parents must also submit their most recent 1040 income tax form. The school’s Financial Aid Committee reviews each accepted student’s application and distributes the funds that are available. Decisions are typically mailed in March.

The best sources of information are the financial aid officers at the individual schools you are considering. They can explain the full range of options and may be able to provide some information on the limited outside funding sources available. Each school will have different policies, so it is important to ask each school about their specific requirements.

Applying for financial aid does not typically affect an applicant’s chances for admission; applicants are almost always accepted for admission on a need-blind basis. In most schools, families must reapply for financial aid each year so grants may be adjusted if the family’s financial situation changes.

Types of Assistance

Tuition and Loan Programs

Many families require assistance beyond what a school may be able to offer. Visit www.nais.org—the Tuition Loan Programs and Tuition Payment Plans pages are an excellent resource to help you identify other types of financing options that may be available to you.

Need-Based Financial Aid
Schools award grants based upon financial need. These grants do not need to be paid back and are used to offset tuition costs. The money for these grants comes directly from the school’s budget and demonstrates the school’s commitment to having a socio-economically diverse student population. To determine your family’s eligibility, you will have to fill out an application for financial aid. You can get this form from the school’s financial aid officer. Most schools use the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) from the School and Student Service for Financial Aid (SSS) in Princeton, New Jersey. If the school you are considering does not use SSS, be sure to ask what steps you need to follow in order to apply for assistance.

**Merit Awards**

Some schools offer special scholarships based on criteria other than economic circumstances. Merit scholarship awards are based upon some demonstrated talent such as athletic, artistic, or academic.

**Sibling Discounts**

Sibling depend upon the number of children enrolled within the same school. These discounts may not be very large, but if you have more than one child, be sure to see if the schools you are considering offer such a program.

**Payment Plans**

Many schools offer a variety of payment plans that can ease the burden. Ask about monthly plans, for example.

**Tuition Insurance**

You may also wish to budget for tuition insurance. This program covers your commitment to the school if you move or your child must withdraw.

**Different Philosophies and Values**

In choosing a middle school, you will want to consider the school’s values, curriculum, and teaching philosophy. The differences between schools can be dramatic! Even public school systems often have schools that use different methods. The following are some common words and phrases schools will use to describe their philosophy of education and practices.
Anti-bias Curriculum

“The purpose of freedom,” writes author Toni Morrison “is to free someone else.” As they grow up, children observe that color, language, gender, and physical ability differences are often connected with privilege and power. An anti-bias curriculum asks teachers and children to confront difficult issues of fairness and sets up a healthy tension between respecting differences and not accepting unfair beliefs and acts. Lesley Ellis has a successful anti-bias curriculum; Lexington’s public schools and the Cambridge Friends School (independent) also offer excellent anti-bias programs.

Central Theme or Subject

Some schools build a program of learning built around a single or very small number of topics (2 or 3) that are taught over an extended period of time—usually for a whole year. Shady Hill School (independent) use central subject as an organizing principle. By organizing learning around a single topic, children learn from multiple perspectives, with “multiple intelligences,” and gain genuine mastery and expertise.

Character Education

Character education seeks to shape a child’s ethical sense. Some of these programs are well know: DARE, for example. Some aim to teach specific values: for example, the Character Counts program defines six teachable “pillars of character”: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Character education is frequently the subject of intense political debate, but almost every school—public or private—incorporates some form of character education. At Lesley Ellis, it is our anti-bias curriculum that comprises the foundation of our character education program. We encourage you to investigate how the schools that interest you address the issue of character. (See also Social Curriculum.)

Coalition for Essential Schools

Coalition schools are intensely progressive schools that place special emphasis on mastery and deep knowledge as demonstrated by performance and presentation. These schools teach a smaller number of topics deeply instead of broad exposure to many topics. Brimmer & May (independent, Brookline), The O’Maley Middle School (public, Gloucester) and the Francis W. Parker Charter School (charter, Devens) are all “Essential” schools. (Parker is an interesting public school—and worth a visit! It enrolls students in grades 7-12. www.parker.org.) The “Essential” schools program was originally developed by the former Dean of the Harvard School Education,
Theodore Sizer, and is a program that can be adopted by any school, public or private. Note: some “Essential” schools have a 42-week year and a longer school day.

**Controlled Choice Plan**

A system used by public school districts to offer families choices in education. A controlled choice plan mixes choice with a variety of diversity factors and assignment preferences, including socio-economic status, siblings, proximity, and race or ethnicity. Choice programs encourage schools to differentiate themselves—some schools may adopt programs that are quite different from those of other schools in the same system. Somerville and Cambridge are two cities that offer controlled choice.

**Cooperative Learning**

At Lesley Ellis, we frequently use cooperative learning techniques so your child has already experienced some of the benefits of cooperative learning. Some educators believe that cooperative learning opportunities are especially important in middle school because children at this stage are increasingly identifying with peers and instead of parents. In cooperative learning, students work in mixed ability groups. Each student in the group is charged with making sure every other student masters the assignment. Cooperative learning helps children develop important group skills along with a positive sense of interdependence. It does not, as is often charged, hold bright kids back. Cooperative learning is a very common practice in progressive schools, “coalition” schools, and other non-traditional schools. To learn more about cooperative learning, we recommend David W. Johnson and Robert T. Johnson, *Learning Together and Alone*.

**“Core Knowledge” School**

In sharp contrast to “Essential” schools are “Core Knowledge” schools that aim at familiarity with and broad knowledge of many subjects. These schools are curriculum-centered and based on a belief that schools should teach a common cultural heritage and common body of knowledge to all children. This body of knowledge is incorporated in a wide-ranging specific curriculum devised by E.D. Hirsh Jr. (*Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*). It is presented for any interested family in the *What Every [Third, Fourth, Fifth etc.] Grader Should Know* series. Many Core Knowledge schools also incorporate the “values” curriculum developed by William Bennett, former Secretary of Education. Mystic Valley Regional Charter School (charter, Medford) *Wayland Academy* (Framingham, 6-12) and the *Morse School* (public, Cambridge) are Core Knowledge schools.

**“Free School” Programs**
Free schools give children incredible power to control their own education—no matter what their age. They establish their own curriculum, their own limits, and their own goals—with guidance from teachers. They design their own courses of study, their own classes, and even decide when to go to class—all without interference from adults. You may be wondering how such a school could even exist—but there is one in our area, The Sudbury Valley School (PK-12+) in Framingham.

**Gifted and Talented**

Academically advanced programs are offered in the public systems of Wrentham, Brookline, and Bedford among others. Check with your local system as these programs vary with resources and interest. Also see the section on Special Education and Gifted and Talented programs in this booklet.

**International Baccalaureate**

The International Baccalaureate Organization describes its program as aiming to “develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.” This is a worldwide program used in over 85 countries. The IB program is most commonly used in international schools, but some public schools use it as well. To obtain a list of local schools offering the IB program, call or write to International Baccalaureate of North America, 200 Madison Ave. Suite 2007, New York, NY 10016, or visit www.ibo.org. International School of Boston in Arlington/Cambridge (PK-12) offers an IB program.

**Looping**

Looping is a practice used by some progressive and developmentally oriented schools and refers to the practice of keeping children with the same teacher for many years. This allows the teacher to really get to know students extremely well and to be able to guide students in their learning more effectively and sensitively. The Waldorf School uses looping.

**Montessori Schools**

The Montessori method of teaching is one of the best-known and most widespread philosophies of education in the world. It is a practice based on the ideas of Maria Montessori, an Italian educator. The Montessori method is essentially developmental. It sees teaching as “preparing an environment” and a schedule for learning. Teachers are facilitators not sources of information, and
learning is individual. Many different types of school programs incorporate Montessori-like methods and materials—including Lesley Ellis. There are two types of Montessori school in the US. American Montessori Internationale (traditional) and the American Montessori Society (more innovative). AMI schools use only traditional materials and methods while AMS schools incorporate non-Montessori practices. Cambridge Montessori and Lexington Montessori are local Montessori schools that accept students in middle school.

**Multi-Age Grouping**

Multi-age grouping refers to the practice of combining students at different grade levels in the same classroom. This is something we do at Lesley Ellis. Brimmer & May is another school that typically uses multi-age grouping. In many middle schools both public and private, electives often bring together students of different grades and by high school the practice is very common. Multi-age grouping encourages students to learn from each other, learn different strategies for problem solving and helps build a sense of teamwork, collaboration, and mutual respect. Younger children enjoy the extra challenges they see, and older children cement and deepen the knowledge and skills they acquire by becoming “teachers.”

**Multiple Intelligences Programs**

In 1983, educational psychologist Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligence*, which challenged the traditional psychological view of intelligence as a single capacity and, instead, proposed that all individuals possess seven independent intelligences: linguistic and logical-mathematical (the styles of thinking measured most often on psychological tests), musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic (including large and small motor skills), interpersonal (an area of strength for teachers, social workers, and politicians), and intra-personal (self-knowledge). Since then, MI has been interpreted and adapted in many different schools and in many different ways, a few new “intelligences have been added, but generally speaking, this theory has given educators a powerful way to understand diversity in learning styles and has encouraged a much richer set of approaches to learning and teaching. Most schools now incorporate some of the lessons of this theory. The Saltonstall School (public,) in Salem has been particularly innovative in incorporating MI theory.


**Progressive**

Lesley Ellis is a progressive school, so you already know a little about the progressive approach. Progressive schools are child-centered and try to teach children as individuals. Progressive education views the learner not as a small version of an adult, but as an individual who is
unfolding, transforming, developing, and growing. Different abilities appear at different stages and each child has his or her own timetable. The goal of the progressive educator is to meet each child at his or her individual stage of development and to guide them into discovery. In addition to Lesley Ellis School, local progressive schools include Fayerweather Street School (private, Cambridge) and the Graham & Parks School (public, Cambridge).

Social Curriculum
Social curriculum refers to a school's efforts to teach such things as conflict resolution, self-control, and even manners. Some of these programs are offered by a variety of publishers or educational foundations. These are then purchased and incorporated by schools, while others are more home-grown. As children develop identities apart from their families in middle school, social learning can take on a new importance. Social curriculum and character education programs often overlap.

Traditional
Traditional education is a phrase used to describe the kinds of schools many Lesley Ellis parents might have attended in the 1960s and even 1970s. Traditional education is typically content-driven with the goal of all students knowing same general things. Report cards, assigned desks, and worksheets are all hallmarks of so-called “traditional education.” Teachers have considerable authority in the traditional classroom and lead learning. Children’s interests typically do not play a role in the development of the curriculum. The “traditional versus progressive” debate is an old and thorny one, and the differences between the two are often much exaggerated. Many schools combine the best practices from both traditions. Christian and Catholic schools tend to be among the most traditional schools in our area. Winsor and BB&N are also somewhat more traditional when seen in contrast to Fayerweather Street School or Beaver Country Day (compare to progressive, collaborative learning, etc.). For a conservative view of traditional and progressive learning, we recommend Diane Ravich’s, Left Back; for a progressive view of the issue, see books by Deborah Meier or Theodore Sizer.

Waldorf Education
Waldorf schools are based on the ideas of a turn of the century Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner. Waldorf schools are a unique mix of traditional and developmental approaches—they have distinct ideas about children’s stages of development, but also incorporate traditional work in music, crafts, curriculum content, and language study. The Waldorf teacher stays with the same class for many years. TV, radio, and the consumption of mass culture are also discouraged. People who are uncomfortable with mainstream culture often find the Waldorf approach a comfortable
fit. Visit The Waldorf School (Lexington) for a peek into what this unique school community is like. For more info on the Waldorf philosophy you can also visit: http://www.awsna.org/

Next Schools Time Line

Fall/Winter Grade 5

• If your community offers school choice or you are interested in a charter school, it is important to ensure that you acquire and complete any necessary paperwork before any deadlines. Some popular schools fill up quickly.

• Even if you think your family will continue in an independent school, we encourage you to visit your public schools. At the very least you should have a sense of what goes on in your school system. Your local School Department can help you understand the differences among the schools that will be available to you.

• Some systems have special tours and open houses throughout the fall. Fall is an excellent time to visit public schools.

Spring/Summer Grade 5-6

• If you are interested in independent schools, visit websites of schools now and request information.

• Talk with teachers about where your child is academically and what kind of learning environment would be the best fit. Get recommendations from teachers about possible programs.

• If any schools in which you think you might be interested require the ISEE or the SSAT, you might want to review a practice test.

• Some of your school choices may require their own entrance examinations or another kind of test. It is important to find out early in order to help your child prepare for the test.

September/October Grade 6

• Make time to meet with Jenn Young to discuss your next school options.
• Request or download applications from the schools you are interested in.
• Schedule interviews and visits
• Attend open houses, fairs, and panel discussions about schools.
• Sign your child up for the ISEE and/or the SSAT. Plan to arrange for some test prep if needed. Test Prep may NOT change your child’s score. What test prep will do, though, is help your child feel comfortable and confident while taking the test and help him or her know how to use the knowledge and skills they do have to answer the questions.
November/December Grade 6

• Begin filling out applications for the schools you like best.
• Request forms and recommendations from Lesley Ellis. Each school requires different information and has different deadlines. If you need help with this process, let us know. We appreciate receiving all requests before the Thanksgiving break.

December/January Grade 6

• Your child will probably take the test around this time. Be sure that scores are sent to all schools requiring the test. If scores are optional, you can wait until you receive the scores before deciding to send them. If you have any questions about whether or not to send the scores, please discuss with Jenn Young.
• Screening processes take place around this time. You can talk to former families to get an idea of what the screening process entails from the child’s perspective.
• Applications are usually due around this time.

February/March Grade 6

• Screening processes continue.

March 10 Grade 6

• Letters of acceptance are generally sent by this date
• Schedule any “re-visits if needed and talk with current parents.
• Your child may be invited to spend a morning in the schools to which he or she has been accepted.
• Attend panels and parent events to get more information.
• You may get calls from current parents offering to answer any remaining questions.

April 10 Grade 6

• Letters of intent, contracts, and deposits are generally due by this date.
• Wait-listed students may begin to hear from schools around this time.

May/June Grade 6

• Request Lesley Ellis end-of-year records to be sent to your next school.
• Some schools hold picnics or other events to welcome new families in the spring and summer.
• If you decline an offer, you may receive a survey as to your reasons and about your impressions of the school. Please take the time to complete this survey—the information you can provide is very valuable and will help that school improve its process for other families.

July Grade 6-7
• First payments are usually due in early July.
• Another round of wait-list letters may go out at this time.

“Next School” Services

Lesley Ellis School is committed to making the transition to middle school successful for students and families. The following are some of the services we are offering to families.

Next School Events

Group events at schools for families to network, ask questions, learn about schools and hear presentations and panel discussions.

Resource Collection

Guidebooks, current school viewbooks, and other materials to help you research about educational choices are located in the library.

Individual Family Guidance

Jenn Young will meet with each family individually to discuss next school choices and provide support. Members of the administration meet regularly with the admission directors of other schools and keep up-to-date on the many different programs available to Lesley Ellis students.

School Record/Recommendations

The school maintains excellent student records. Before Thanksgiving, simply provide an addressed 9x12 envelope for each school to which you are applying, and we’ll make sure each school receives what they need by the appropriate deadlines.

Test Prep

Lesley Ellis integrates test preparation for the ISEE into its upper elementary program.

Financial Aid Assistance

Families interested in applying for financial aid at their next school can receive guidance and advice in completing the forms.

Former Families Program

Several former Lesley Ellis School friends and families have volunteered to serve as contacts to current Lesley Ellis families seeking information about a particular school. Please ask Jenn Young for emails if you would like to get in touch with a former Lesley Ellis family at one of these schools:

• Belmont Day School
Recommended Resources

About Schools
Alfie Kohn, The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards,"
Ronald E. Koetzch, The Parents’ Guide to Alternatives In Education
Deborah Meier, The Power of Their Ideas
Diane Ravitch, Left Back: A Century Of Failed School Reforms
Theodore Sizer, Horace’s Compromise and Horace’s School

Theories of Learning and Development
Thomas Armstrong You’re Smarter Than You Think: A Kid’s Guide to Multiple Intelligences
Howard Gardener, Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century
Jane Healey, Endangered Minds: Why Children Don’t Think And What We Can Do About It
David W. Johnson & Robert T. Johnson, Learning Together and Alone
Maria Montessori The Montessori Method

Middle School Development
Harriet Mosatche PhD and Karen M. Unger, Too Old for This, Too Young for That!: Your Survival Guide for the Middle-School Years (for students)
Margaret Sagarese and Charlene C. Giannetti, The Rollercoaster Years
Michael Thompson and Dan Kindlon, Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys Rosalind Wiseman, Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence

Homeschooling
One of the leading advocates for home-schooling was John Holt, a former Lesley Ellis School teacher. Every once in a while a Lesley Ellis family considers home-schooling as an option after Lesley Ellis. To learn more about home schooling and the special challenges of home school young adolescents, we recommend the following sources.

The Massachusetts Home Learning Association provides advocacy and general support for home-schooling families. www.mhla.org

John Holt, How Children Learn
Test Prep

Download or order What to Expect on the ISEE from the ERB for the best picture of the ISEE at www.erb.org. It may be ordered at the time of registration or by calling the ISEE Operations Office at 1-800-446-0320.

Visit www.ssat.org for SSAT practice tests, guides, and more information. For full-length sample tests, you can order Preparing and Applying on your SSAT Registration Form or by calling SSATB Customer Service at (609) 683-4440.

While these booklets provide good introductions to the tests, you may want to arrange for more practice. Unfortunately, none of the existing commercial guides provides an accurate picture of both tests. The Princeton Review’s Cracking The SSAT and The ISEE is, at this time, the only guide that includes a Lower Level ISEE sample test.

Websites for Information about Public Schools

Public School District Finance Peer Search
This searchable resource lets users compare the finances of a school district with its peers. Teacher-student ratios and revenue analysis are also provided.
http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp

The School Report Express
This site contains statistics and information on individual school districts around the United States to aid parents in choosing a district.
http://www.homefair.com/sr_home.html

The Nation’s Report Card
National Assessment of Educational Progress from the National Center of Education Statistics is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and the arts.
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/sitemap.asp

State profiles are available at:
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states

Standard and Poor’s School Evaluation Services
The site contains S&P reports that discuss each school system’s strengths, challenges, and educational return on resources.
http://www.ses.standardandpoors.com/Homepage.html

Guidebooks to Private Schools

The Educational Register (Vincent-Curtis Publishing)
Handbook of Private Schools (Porter Sargent Publishers)
Peterson’s Annual Guide to Independent Secondary Schools (also www.petersons.com)
Private Independent Schools (Bunting and Lyon)

Web Resources for Researching Independent Schools
Peterson’s Education Center: Private School Center
This commercial site provides information on Peterson’s database of 1,400 private secondary schools. http://iiswinprd01.petersons.com/pschools/

School Directory Search Database from the National Association of Independent Schools
This site from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) includes information on admissions and financial aid and allows you to search for NAIS member schools in the United States or other countries.
http://www.nais.org/schools/school_search.cfm

Web66 Registry of Schools on the Web
This site contains a clickable map interface to a list of school Web sites and text-only links to the various country and state lists.
http://web66.umn.edu

Other Useful Websites
A fascinating history of education project:
http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_schugurensky/assignment1/index.html

American Association for Gifted Children
http://www.jayi.com/aagc

Association of Boarding Schools
http://www.schools.com

Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE)
http://www.aisne.org

Council for American Private Education (CAPE)
http://www.capenet.org

Independent Educational Consultants Association
http://www.educationalconsulting.org

International Coalition of Boys’ Schools
http://www.boysschoolcoalition.org

Junior Boarding Schools Association
http://www.jbsa.org

National Association of Independent Schools
http://www.nais.org/

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
http://nces.ed.gov

National Coalition of Girls’ Schools
http://www.ncgs.org

National Middle School Association
http://www.nmsa.org
This organization has a great deal of useful information on the education needs of young adolescents.
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
http://www.neasc
This accrediting organization lists some schools not found in other databases.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Non-Public Education
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OIIA/NonPublic/

Other Resources

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has published articles describing what to look for when visiting a school and presents information on related issues. Two useful documents are available online:

Moving to a New School
http://www.naesp.org/comm/r0296.htm

What Parents Should Look for in Their Child's Elementary School