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How to Get Into *Harvard*

A WSJ study finds that certain high schools have a remarkable record of sending their students to elite colleges. By Ellen Gamerman

AS COLLEGE-APPLICATION season enters its most stressful final stretch, parents want to know if their children's schools are delivering the goods—consistently getting students into top universities.

It's a tricky question to answer, but for a snapshot, The Wall Street Journal examined this year's freshman classes at eight highly selective colleges to find out where they went to high school. New York City private schools and New England prep schools continue to hold sway—Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., is a virtual factory, sending 19 kids to Harvard this fall—but these institutions are seeing some new competition from schools overseas and public schools that focus on math and science.

The 10 schools that performed best in our survey are all private schools. Two top performers overall are located in South Korea. Daewon Foreign Language High School in Seoul sent 14% of its graduating class to the eight colleges we examined—that's more than four times the acceptance rate of the prestigious Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, N.Y.

No ranking of high schools is perfect, and this one offers a cross-section, rather than an exhaustive appraisal, of college admissions. For our survey, we chose eight colleges with an average admissions selectivity of 18% and whose accepted applicants had reading and math SAT scores in the 1350-1450 range, according to the College Board: Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Williams, Pomona, Swarthmore, the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins. Some colleges that would otherwise have met our criteria were excluded from our study because information on their students' high-school alma maters was unavailable. All the colleges in our survey received a record number of applications last year.



Lise Haney

We tracked down the high-school alma maters of these colleges' current freshmen—nearly 7,000 kids in all—and made a list of the high schools that had graduating classes of at least 50 students. We then calculated what percentage of last year's graduating class at each high school had gone on to the colleges in our survey.

Despite the fact that many people who went to state schools or obscure liberal arts

colleges lead happy, successful lives, high-school seniors and their parents are routinely terrorized with alarming and now familiar college-admissions statistics. There are more high-school seniors going on to college in America now than at any point in U.S. history. Last year, Harvard admitted an all-time low of 9% of applicants after receiving a record 23,000 applications.

In a sign of the shifting global economic

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food chain, students from abroad now take up a growing number of spots. At the University of Pennsylvania, 13% of the class of 2011 is made up of international students, up from 11.8% the previous year.

And coming from a prestigious suburban public school or elite private school may not offer the same advantages it once did for students. Many Ivy League schools say they're going after low-income students more aggressively, making it harder for middle-class kids to stand out.

"It's scary," says Jessica Assaf, 17 years old, who's waiting for word on her early application to Brown University. Ms. Assaf, whose parents send her to the \$29,800-a-year Branson School north of San Francisco, is highlighting her work with an organization that focuses on the health hazards of cosmetics. But she worries her activism won't be enough to get her in, especially given Brown's record-low acceptance rate of about 13.5% last year. "A 14% acceptance rate isn't a good statistic," she says. "If someone said you had a 14% chance of living, that's nowhere near being reassured."

WHO'S GETTING IN

Among public schools, those that specialize in math and science fared well in our survey, in part because some top universities are focusing more on drawing high-caliber science and engineering students. Last year, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, a magnet school in Alexandria, Va., sent 9% of its graduates to the colleges on our list—with 14 students, or 3% of its graduates, going to Princeton.

Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, another public school for kids who excel in science and engineering, last year sent graduates to Harvard, MIT, Duke and Cornell, and 14 went to nearby Johns Hopkins. Kids see that list of colleges every time they walk by the guidance office: It's written on a 10-foot board to give students inspiration, the school's director says.

Good neighbors make good feeder schools. Princeton High School, a public school down the street from Princeton University, sent 19 kids to the college last year, up from 12 four years ago. Jeff Lowe, the high school's college adviser, says the numbers are so high in part because the children of Princeton professors are more likely to attend the high school, and they're also likely to be good students. He says the school typically sends between 10 and 20 kids to the university every year. (The university subsidizes up to half the tuition for the child of a faculty member.) Two years ago, the high school began accepting kids from outside the district for \$15,817, after parents requested it.

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Still, many parents enroll their kids in private schools for the trump card that top

How the Schools Stack Up

Weekend Journal looked at the freshman classes at eight top colleges and compiled a list of the students' high-school alma maters. The survey ranked the high schools based on the number of students sent to those eight colleges, divided by the high school's number of graduates in 2007, limiting the scope to schools that had senior classes of at least 50 (see "Behind the Numbers"). The "success rate" column represents the percentage of students in each high school's graduating class that attended one of our chosen colleges.

—Ellen Gamerman, Juliet Chung and SungHa Park

HIGH SCHOOL	CLASS SIZE/ STUDENTS SENT IN 2007	SUCCESS RATE	CURRENT TUITION	COMMENT
Collegiate School New York	50/13	26%	\$29,100	Just over 600 boys make up the student body from kindergarten through 12th grade at this small private school.
Brearley School New York	51/12	24	31,300	The all-girls school says on its Web site that it sent a total of 93 kids to the Ivy League in the last five years.
Chapin School New York	58/13	22	29,100	Kindergartners at this all-girls school learn creative writing; third-graders study yoga.
Polytechnic School Pasadena, Calif.	87/17	20	23,750	School sent nine kids to Stanford last year, more than to any other college.
University of Chicago Lab Schools Chicago	113/22	20	20,445	College counseling office recently hired a former University of Chicago admissions officer.
College Preparatory School Oakland, Calif.	86/15	17	26,850	School's director of college counseling worked in the University of Pennsylvania admissions office for eight years.
Trinity School New York	116/20	17	30,120	School will celebrate its 300th birthday next year.
Phillips Academy Andover, Mass.	327/52	16	29,000#	School says that about 10% of its students are from outside the U.S. and 35% are students of color.
Delbarton School Morristown, N.J.	116/18	16	23,600	Independent school for boys is led by an order of Benedictine monks; about 30% of students are non-Catholic.
Phillips Exeter Academy Exeter, N.H.	317/47	15	28,200#	This year Exeter announced it will waive tuition for students whose family income is under \$75,000.
Milton Academy Milton, Mass.	184/27	15	31,175#	School requires seniors to take a course on transition to adult life. Students do mock college interviews.
Groton School Groton, Mass.	83/12	15	31,530#	Students are required to write two college essays summer before senior year, which are critiqued by faculty.
Daewon Foreign Language High School Seoul, South Korea	78/11	14	About 5,000	School is divided into two separate programs; one for students planning to attend university in South Korea, the other for those bound for U.S. colleges. Our class-size figure reflects the U.S.-bound track.
Lawrenceville School Lawrenceville, N.J.	239/33	14	32,110#	School sent 16 kids to Princeton last year; since 2003, it says it has sent 59 students there.
Kent Place School Summit, N.J.	59/8	14	26,818	Director of college advising worked in undergraduate admissions at Columbia and Georgetown universities.
Hunter College High School New York	177/24	14	0	The public school , administered by Hunter College, limits seventh-grade applicants to kids who scored at least 90% in reading and math on standardized tests.
Rivers School Weston, Mass.	74/10	14	30,500	Applications to Rivers increased 20% over the past year, and ninth-grade applications rose 27%, school says.
Saint Ann's School Brooklyn, N.Y.	76/10	13	25,500 (12th grade)	School has an arts-centered approach; poetry teacher starts working with kids as young as 5.
San Francisco University High School San Francisco	92/12	13	28,725	Last year's seniors scored about 10% higher on SATs than previous class, says director of college counseling.
Menlo School Atherton, Calif.	139/18	13	29,400	School offers a program that pairs kids with parents to discuss college, careers and community service.
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Harker School San Jose, Calif.	167/20	12	29,894	Five students from Harker were selected as a youth delegation to the G8 conference in Germany this year.
John Burroughs School St. Louis	97/11	11	18,575	School has one of the lowest tuitions of the U.S. private schools in our study. Midwestern schools generally cost less than those on the coasts.
Rye Country Day Rye, N.Y.	92/10	11	27,500 (11-12th grades)	School says that since 1996, 97% of kids taking the Advanced Placement BC Calculus course received perfect scores on the AP exam.
Korean Minjok Leadership Academy South Korea	133/14	11	16,000	School in South Korea's Gangwon-do province requires students to speak only English for many classes.
Buckingham Browne & Nichols Cambridge, Mass.	115/12	10	31,440	School opened \$26 million visual and performing arts center this year.
Princeton High School Princeton, N.J.	299/31	10	0	This year, school sent 19 kids to Princeton University, which is down the street from the high school.
Ramaz Upper School New York	100/10	10	23,000	Many students at the Jewish day school spend a year in Israel before college, which the school says may affect its numbers in our survey.
Stuyvesant High School New York	674/67	10	0	Selective public high school specializing in math and science says it sent 17 kids to Harvard last year.
Head-Royce School Oakland, Calif.	81/8	10	25,590	School opened a new building devoted to world languages this year, and recently added Mandarin classes.
Regis High School New York	125/12	10	0	Tuition-free Catholic boys school says on Web site that recent open houses drew 2,300 potential applicants.
Blake School Minneapolis	127/12	9	19,900	Minnesota school has both Alpine and Nordic skiing teams.
Illinois Math and Science Academy Aurora, Ill.	203/19	9	0	School requires kids to participate in an "intersession" in January, a break from regular studies with courses like "Exploring the Meaning of Life: Why It All Matters."
Hotchkiss School Lakeville, Conn.	172/16	9	32,400#	New headmaster is a former head of schools in Botswana and Wales.
Bishop's School, La Jolla, Calif.	120/11	9	24,400	A Bishop's graduate won the Olympic trials in Laser sailing—competing in a small single-handed boat—and will participate in the Olympics in China next year.
Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology Alexandria, Va.	428/39	9	0	Competitive magnet school for science-minded kids sent 13 students to MIT this year.
Lakeside School Seattle	132/12	9	22,160	Students can't graduate without at least 80 hours of community service and a weeklong outdoor program.
Deerfield Academy Deerfield, Mass.	188/17	9	27,642#	Most students at the school are boarders, paying a tuition of \$37,756.
St. John's School Houston	122/11	9	16,825	Students can take educational summer trips with faculty to places like Indian monasteries or the French Alps.
Boston Latin School Boston	381/33	9	0	School, founded in 1635, sent 25 kids to Harvard this fall—more than any other high school on our list.

A # denotes tuition for day students at schools that also have boarders.

prep schools have long held: the powerful, highly connected college counselor. The college counselors at many private schools have spent years building relationships with college admissions offices. Some have inside experience in the admissions process.

Jon Reider, director of college counseling at San Francisco University High School, is a former senior associate admissions director at Stanford University. Mr. Reider says his former colleagues are no longer working at the university—he left seven years ago—but he still thinks having worked in an admissions office gives him an edge. "Because I've been on the other side of the desk, I have some idea how an application reads and what goes through an admissions officer's mind when they read it," he says. Last year, he says, Stanford admitted 11 of his students—more than any year since he took the high-school job.

Nancy Siegel, head counselor at Millburn High School in northern New Jersey, says that when an applicant vows that he or she will attend a particular college if accepted, she'll often let the school know. That can help a student's chances—but if the child has a change of heart, she says, the high school is in trouble. "You talk to kids ahead of time and say, 'Don't you dare say that unless you mean it because the high school's reputation goes down the tubes,'" she says.

Samantha Broussard-Wilson promised to attend Georgetown if the school accepted her early application. It did. But later that spring, the student from Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach, Calif., got into Yale. When she decided to go to New Haven, she says some teachers at her high school turned hostile. "I actually did get a lot of negative comments," says Ms. Broussard-Wilson, 18, now a freshman at Yale. "Teachers told me, 'You may have taken one of the spots from someone else at our school.'"

Richard Bischoff, director of admissions at the California Institute of Technology, says parents overestimate the importance of a high-school name. He recently received a letter from a parent of a toddler wanting to know where the child needs to go in order to get accepted at Caltech. Mr. Bischoff wouldn't indulge the question. "I don't have the formula," he says.