

Catholic Schools Week Directory

FINDING THE WAY

An insider's guide to Catholic school admissions

By **PERRI ORMONT BLUMBERG**

I'm a second-generation Trinity alum. While I had a stellar education, with private school tuition in NYC through the roof and wokeness abounding, my dad is already saying we need to get my unborn, Jewish child into Catholic school.

Beyond potential tuition savings and ultraliberal educational agendas, there's no denying that these top-notch educational institutions have their merits.

Ahead, admissions pros walk you through the ins and outs of getting into a Catholic school.

Use the 'three Es'

Luciano Lovallo, director of admissions and financial aid at Xavier HS in Manhattan, urges parents to home in on the three Es — explore, experience and envision — when selecting a school for their child.

Here's how he breaks down these guiding principles.

Explore: Research schools by visiting their websites and speaking with current students and families.

Experience: Attend open houses or other admissions events listed on the schools' websites.

Envision: Attend a shadow day so they can imagine themselves

as part of the school community.

"By following these steps for two or three of their top choices, students will gain a clear sense of which school is the best fit for them," he said.

Echoing that sentiment, Christopher Farrell, dean of admissions at Saint Anthony's HS in South Huntington, emphasized that students will know where they feel most at home. "Trust your instinct. I vividly remember my own search for a high school . . . I knew the moment that I set foot on the campus at Saint Anthony's over 25 years ago that it would be my high school," said Farrell, who was right and who has now been at Saint Anthony's for 18 years as a teacher and administrator.

Attend an open house

It's open house season — time to make the most of these opportunities to scout potential schools with your family.

While open house formats vary, Cindy Chanin, founder and director of Rainbow Education Consulting & Tutoring in Los Angeles and New York City, said that most include a tour of the school, a general information or Q&A session with

members of the school's staff and an activity fair that offers a chance to get to know the school's extracurricular activities and student organizations.

"Sometimes current students of the school are present at the event as well, which can also offer a unique opportunity for prospective students to both ask questions and make connections," she said.

During these events, Mario Gallo, director of admissions at St. Benedict's Preparatory School in Newark, further clarified that parents can expect to meet teachers, administrators and current students who can share insights about everything from classroom expectations to how the school supports students' emotional and spiritual growth. Students, he said, will be able to sit in on classes and gauge what it feels like to be part of the school's community.

"You really get to see and feel the energy of a school," said Jean Cousins, director of admissions at Paramus Catholic High School in Paramus.

"You can expect to engage in conversations from those teaching students,

See **SCHOOLS** on Page 38

A WEEK OF OUTREACH

National Catholic Schools Week has been celebrated on the last week of January since 1974. Led by the National Catholic Educational Association, schools will hold Masses, open houses and other activities for students and their families, prospective students and the community.



Catholic Schools Week Directory



Many Catholic schools foster diversity in the classroom, and offer more personalized teaching.

A FOOT IN THE DOOR

From **SCHOOLS** on Page 37

coaching them and students themselves. We encourage you to explore; there is no limit to what you can learn observing or being an active participant. There is no pressure at an open house.”

Barbara Robertson, director of admissions at Iona Preparatory in New Rochelle, advised targeting one or two teachers and coaches or club moderators you most wish to speak with, as there might be 500 other families all trying to get face time. “Come with a game plan!” she said.

If your child is on the shy side, Robertson recommends the more intimate settings of shadow days, where your son or daughter is paired with a current student for a “day in the life” experience.

Tackle the TACHS

TACHS, or Test for Admission to Catholic High Schools, should likely be on your to-do list for November of your child’s eighth grade year. Your child’s perform-

admissions counselor at IvyWise in Portland, Maine, advising parents to check with each school on whether they prioritize admitting Catholic students.

“Many Catholic schools value diversity and often welcome families from different religious and cultural backgrounds,” she said. “Use the application to share how your family’s values align with the school’s mission of fostering faith, service and academic excellence.”

That said, there is a lens through which the educators view their roles. “If you’re just in it for the grades and presumed trajectory, you might be missing out on what makes that community special,” said Robertson.

Don’t let your kid be part of the ‘2:41 club’

We lifted that expression from

ance on this high school entrance exam may even qualify your family for scholarship funds.

“Another commonly administered exam for students applying to Catholic high schools is the High School Placement Test,” said Chanin, though the HSPT is more widely used outside of New York. Chanin stressed the importance of knowing the timeline for required exams and interviews as early as possible. “The more foresight you have, the calmer your admissions experience will be,” she said.

If you didn’t sign up for that once-a-year TACHS test in November, some schools may still allow you to apply. Reach out and see if other options are available.

Have a little faith

Whether you’re Jewish, agnostic or any faith under the sun, Catholic school may be a great fit for your family.

“If your family isn’t Catholic, don’t let that hold you back from applying,” said Katie Burns, an

Iona Prep, words that are often repeated at the school because 2:41 p.m. signals the final bell, “but it’s not the end of the Iona Prep experience for the day,” said Robertson. “Every Catholic school wants students with diverse sets of interests who will contribute to the vivacity of their communities.”

Even if your child excels in a particular area, make sure you’re always presenting your son or daughter as a well-rounded individual with involvements inside and outside the classroom.

Similarly, Gallo said that admissions teams love to see students who bring more than just academics to the table.

“Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities like sports, music, community service or clubs as these will help them develop new interests, and therefore let schools get a better picture of who they are,” said Gallo. “These experiences showcase leadership, teamwork and a commitment to personal growth, all qualities that Catholic schools highly value.”

For Gallo and his colleagues at St. Benedict’s, this well-roundedness has a bigger-picture goal.

“By helping to break cycles of absenteeism and poverty commonly seen in the community we serve in Newark, we’re not just preparing students for the next test, we’re preparing them for life,” said Gallo.

Always be networking

It’s a great move to leverage contacts within your network when navigating the Catholic school admissions process (or any admissions process, for that matter). “Know another family who sent their child to the same school, or is your child friendly with an alumnus or current student? Having someone inside your desired community vouch for your child and their ability to contribute to that community is priceless,” said Robertson.

If not, there’s still some networking you can do. Robertson said not to be shy about asking an administrator at your child’s current school to back their candidacy.

“Great schools can draw from as many as 80 different public school districts; your target Catholic school might not be deeply familiar with the rigor and reputation of all its different feeder schools, but nobody will know your child better — who they are and how they perform — than someone from inside your school who can write a formal letter of recommendation or simply send an email of support,” she said, stressing that when there are candidates of similar merit, admissions directors are always looking for differentiators.

You can also make connections on your own. “Always talk to alumni or current parents of the schools you are considering; they can speak to the value of the education for their own child and what the school community is like to join,” said Robertson. The admissions office should be able to put you in touch with alums or current parents; or just ask around at open house events.

Consider the cost

First, the good news: “Cost-wise, Catholic schools are often more accessible than many families realize,” said Gallo, noting that tuition is typically lower than most private schools. Plus, per Gallo, many Catholic schools are committed to meeting families where they are financially, whether through partial financial aid, scholarships or flexible payment plans to help close the gap.

Weigh what the school has to offer you and your family in the long run, too. “Cost is certainly a determining factor, but even more important is the school’s value proposition, and does it hold water for you? A good starting point for comparison is the per-pupil cost of your current public district and to assess the value of what Catholic schools do better for that added tuition,” said Robertson.

Per Robertson, parents shouldn’t give in to the temptation to judge a school based on the relative size — large or small — of that tuition figure. “While a Catholic school’s tuition might double your local public school per-pupil costs, the amount of college scholarships earned by graduates might be four or five times higher,” she said, adding that the bottom line is that high-performing, college-preparatory Catholic schools (even those with higher tuition) might end up paying for themselves in terms of merit-based scholarships your child will receive, or college credits earned in the classroom.

Robertson additionally said you should ask about what’s included in the tuition or what other fees you can expect to pay. A school that appears less expensive might tack on uniform, technology, transportation and other fees.

At Catholic school, kids forge friendships that can last a lifetime.



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IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

For these NYC parents, a Catholic school education is a win-win

By LAMBETH HOCHWALD

THERE'S something special about a Catholic school education. Whether it's the small classes, the faith-based approach or the sense of community, for many parents, this is the ideal choice for their kids.

"In my mind, there was no other option for my kids," said Vanessa Rivera, whose children attend St. Brigid St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Academy in Bushwick. "A Catholic education gives my children the opportunity to not only be academically successful but to grow spiritually in our faith. The everyday lessons they learn take place not only during religion class but in every interaction they have."

For Rory Byrne, whose son Henry is a junior at Xavier, a Jesuit high school in Chelsea, there's an even more fundamental reason she and her husband opted to send him to this school.

"As a family of mixed faith, sending Henry to Xavier has given him an opportunity to understand his father's background," said Byrne, who is Jewish, while her husband is Catholic. "Our thought is that the more he knows where he comes from and understands varying points of view, the more he understands his place in the world."

A principal who knows the name of every student — and their families — is just one of the many appealing facets of Catholic school for Nadia Singh. Her children, Victoria, a seventh grader, and Alexander, who is in fifth grade, attend Midwood Catholic Academy in Brooklyn.

"I like that in the mornings and afternoons the principal is outside greeting everyone," Singh said, adding that this close-knit feeling

reminds her of her years at Catholic school, which she attended despite not being Catholic. "At Midwood Catholic, the school community feels like one big family."

At St. Brigid St. Frances, students know that their feelings matter, said Rivera, whose son, Derek, is in sixth grade and her daughter, Olivia, is in kindergarten.

"Students can walk into the principal's office for any reason and they won't be judged," she said. "They know they're going to be heard because we grow in our faith every day so the compassion is always there."

While Valerie Hegarty wasn't planning on sending her 9-year-old daughter, Miya, to Catholic school, the pandemic prompted her and her husband, Sean, to enroll her in kindergarten at Immaculate Conception Catholic Academy in Astoria.

"When COVID came, the public schools were only going back one day a week and that wasn't an option for us, since I was expected in the office every day," said Hegarty, who went to Catholic schools in New York; her husband attended them in Ireland. "Once we chose this school, we never looked back."

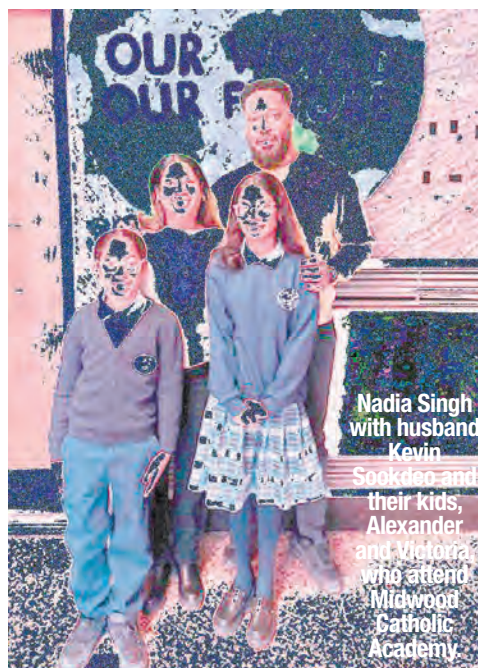
The immersion in Catholicism was a big draw for the family.

"My daughter sings in the church choir every Sunday and she says her favorite things are family, friends and God," Hegarty said. "At school, she attends Mass once a week and has religion classes a



Vanessa Rivera (left) with her kids, Olivia and Derek, who go to St. Brigid St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Academy.

Sean Holmes and Valerie Hegarty (below) with daughter Miya at Immaculate Conception Catholic Academy.



Nadia Singh with husband Kevin Sookden and their kids, Alexander and Victoria, who attend Midwood Catholic Academy.

Principal Nicole Freiwald



Grandmother Patricia Garcia with her son-in-law Elvis Alcivar and his kids, Anastasia and Atticus, who go to Father Vincent Capodanno Catholic Academy.

couple of times a week. I think this has been really important."

For Rivera, the tenets of a Catholic school education are seen in the ways classmates interact.

"Our faith is presented to students in every class," she said. "It's knowing that if the classmate next to you is a little confused on their math homework, you understand that you need to help that classmate; that we always work together."

Ultimately, Singh believes the

school has enriched her children's lives.

"Catholic school gives kids a moral structure and opens up conversations about things like the sacraments and how they play a role in how we live our lives," she said. "The goal is that every day you have to make a choice to be a good person."

That classes in many Catholic schools aren't overcrowded is another bonus, said Rivera, who lives in Ridgewood.

"My kids aren't a number," she said. "They're seen and heard."

With just 11 students in her daughter's class, Hegarty has no-

ticed that close bonds are constantly being formed.

"There's a love for each other that emerges," she said. "Because they're in such a small group, they're always protecting each other."

Knowing that safety is a priority was one of the main reasons Elvis Alcivar, a retired NYPD officer, opted to send his three youngest kids to Staten Island's Father Vincent Capodanno Catholic Academy.

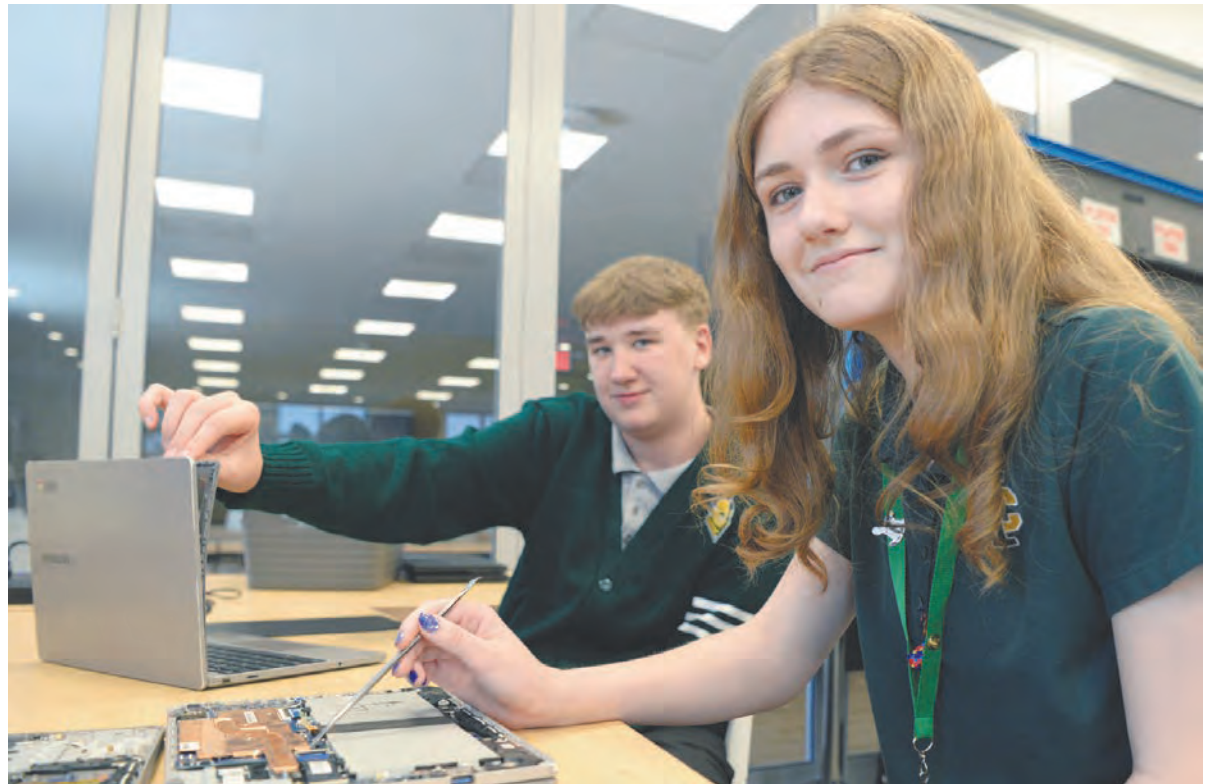
"As soon as we visited the school, we felt so comfortable," he said. "With the way things are going in this world, knowing my kids are safe while they're in school matters so much to me."



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The Xavier cross-country team at Nike Cross Nationals in Portland, Ore., in December.

Chelsea, shares that this academic year's cross-country team was very successful, winning the McQuaid Invitational Sept. 28, 2024, defeating over 200 teams hailing from New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Canada.

For the cherry on top, the team won the New York State Catholic High School Athletic Association sectional title, the CHSAA city title and the CHSAA state title, and placed second at the New York State Federation meet.

But wait, there's more: "The team qualified for Nike Cross Nationals —becoming the first New York City school to accomplish this feat," said Dormer.

Joe McGrane, longtime basketball coach, as well as physical education and health department chair at Xavier, likes to caution parents not to choose a school based on the sports program alone. "It's all about the fit — academic, athletic and social. Do your homework and start visiting schools with your child as early as sixth grade," he said.

Some standard questions the basketball coach recommends considering: Does the school offer a summer program in academics or athletics? How many of the faculty or coaches work in those programs? Is there an open house and/or athletics information night? Can I visit school for the day? Can I attend a practice or game?

Blessed ballers, take note: The CHSAA is widely recognized as one of the best basketball leagues in the country. The league comprises 31 member schools, encompassing the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Speaking from his experience and perspective as a basketball coach, McGrane said that Division 1, 2 and 3 colleges and universities make recruiting the CHSAA a priority due to the academic and athletic success of its student-athletes. "College recruiting is at the forefront for all of our players and the league helps to facilitate the process by hosting three events, both pre- and post-season," he added.

No surprise here, but Catholic schools also place an emphasis on being an all-around good person whether the clock is ticking or not. "In Catholic schools, being part of a team is more than just playing a game," said Dormer, who believes that the coaches and schools in the Catholic leagues allow the students to implement the lessons learned in the classroom come game time. "Athletes learn to overcome the obstacles of life and the importance of teamwork," he said. "Most of the teams in the CHSAA pray together and, in fact, there is a prayer before every game. This is what sets us apart — giving student-athletes the opportunity to pursue their passions while strengthening their faith."

Carlos Hegner

Michael R. Scanlan/St. Benedict's Prep

TEAM SPIRIT

Catholic school sport excellence extends way beyond hoops and footballs

By **PERRI ORMONT BLUMBERG**

FROM divine dunks on the basketball court to saintly saves on the soccer field, Catholic school sports teams sure do impress.

If your child has athletic talent, Catholic schools may help fast-track their success thanks to a regimented program and outstanding coaches. Being on a Catholic school sports team may even boost your kid's shot at a college scholarship.

"Catholic schools are known for their strong sports programs, often serving as a pathway for students to earn college scholarships and achieve athletic success," said Frank DiPiano, athletic director at St. Benedict's Preparatory School, a co-ed K-12 institution, in Newark, NJ. "One unique advantage is their ability to attract top-tier, professional coaches that bring specialized expertise, connections and real-world experience, giving student-athletes a competitive edge."



St. Benedict's Prep girls' flag football team

Ryan Mahoney, director of athletics at Iona Preparatory School, a boys' pre-K to 12 school, in New Rochelle, NY, sees the strength of Catholic school sports programs lying in the diversity of their demographics. "Because they are not limited to a defined geographic area, they can be like the best travel teams, pulling talent from across multiple counties," he said. "Pair that with rigorous academics, supportive alumni and having college counselors on staff, and it's easy to see why col-

legiate commitments from Catholic school athletes often double the national average."

Ahead, highlights from these record-and-bread-breaking teams in the New York City area and insider tips from Catholic school coaches on facing the fierce competition with a bit of faith.

Xavier HS, Chelsea

Standout sport: cross-country
Pat Dormer, longtime track and cross-country coach and history teacher at all-boys Xavier HS in

Pope Photo/Getty Images



O'Baynor Photograph



Iona Preparatory School's volleyball team (left) are the intersectional champs. Saint Anthony's HS girls' varsity badminton team (above) pose for a team shot.

St. Benedict's Preparatory School, NJ

Standout sports: boys' fencing and girls' flag football

At St. Benedict's Prep School, the fencing team illustrates "how talent, grit and opportunity come together to achieve success," per DiPiano. "As the only high school in Newark with a competitive fencing program, the program has flourished even though 99% of our 'Gray Bee' fencers are brand-new to the sport," DiPiano said of the program, which received a major boost with the opening of the Cetrulo Family Fencing Center, a state-of-the-art facility funded by

Larry Cetrulo's family, who have deep ties to both Newark and fencing, in 2018.

Another unique offering that makes the school proud is its girls' flag football team. Despite being one of the newest additions to the sports lineup, the squad is making waves, said DiPiano. "Starting just last spring, the team exceeded all expectations by making it to the playoffs in their first season."

Top tip: Don't sweat if your youngster doesn't get a spot right away.

If your child doesn't have a starting spot on a sports team's lineup, don't get discouraged. "The talent

pool is different from public schools, so opportunities to start may be limited at first, but perseverance pays off," DiPiano said. "While earning a starting spot may take time, Catholic schools offer an environment where both academic and athletic growth are prioritized, encouraging long-term success."

Saint Anthony's HS, Melville, LI

Standout sport: girls' badminton
At this co-ed high school, the girls' badminton team shines, finishing the 2024 season with a 9-3 record. "Heading into the postsea-

son, they were able to pull an upset in the semifinals to get to the championship match. This championship [exemplified] teamwork and picking each other up," re-capped Joseph Minucci, athletic director at Saint Anthony's.

If you are interested in playing sports at a Catholic school, Minucci says to consider attending their summer camps, which will give you an opportunity to meet coaches and current and future students. Also, attend an open house to get you more acquainted with the school's sports program, said Minucci.

Iona Preparatory School, New Rochelle, NY

Standout sport: volleyball

Sure, their football team won Catholic State Championships this past fall, but keep Iona Prep's volleyball team on your radar, too.

As Mahoney said, its varsity volleyball team claimed its fourth consecutive City Championship this past spring. "Incredibly, our Gaels haven't lost a set in CHSAA play in over two years," he said. "And because Catholic schools produce 'scholar-athletes,' it's no surprise our team leader and back-to-back CHSAA 'Player of the Year,' Kristof Spellen, was also the Class of 2024 valedictorian. Fluent in Mandarin, he is currently study-

ing and playing for MIT." Take that, Friday Night Lights at over-priced private schools.

Be prepared to pray and play — a lot.

Sweatin' for salvation (or a scholarship) will take up a good chunk of your child's schedule.

"Sports, especially at Catholic schools, help provide the foundations for future success, from individual responsibility and teamwork to midgame adjustments and adaptability," said Mahoney. "Because of the time commitment required — most of our teams are six days a week in season — it is no surprise that our top athletes are often our best students."

That said, these student-athletes know how to prioritize, manage tasks and projects, work collaboratively and set goals, Mahoney added, noting they provide a great atmosphere for new students to get acclimated to a school community.

Despite the massive time commitment, Mahoney emphasized that parents should remember that their child is a student-athlete in that order for a reason. "Academics come first and students not making the grade will forfeit playing time; similarly, coaches don't want players whose availability will regularly be called into question," he said.



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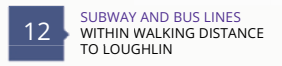
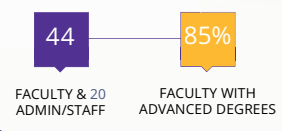
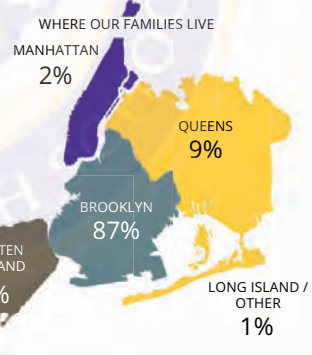
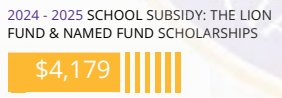
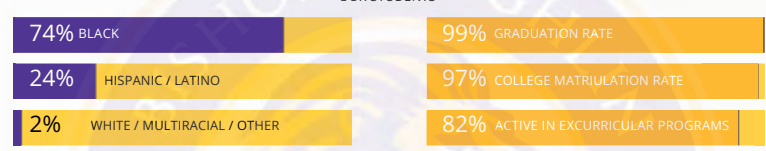
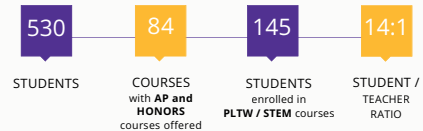
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