

Prepared by the Independent School Section of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). Based, with permission, on the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) publication *A Student's Guide to Evaluating Libraries in Colleges and Universities*, Nov. 2001.

Independent Schools Section
American Association of School Librarians
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611



American Association
of School Librarians

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www.ala.org/aasl

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A Student's and Parent's Guide to Evaluating Libraries in Independent Schools



Selecting the independent school to attend is among the most important decisions you and your family will make in your life. You should carefully examine all aspects of an academic institution, including the faculty, academic programs, and facilities. One of the factors to consider when choosing your school is how well its library will help you succeed in this increasingly complex and often chaotic information age.

Your selection of an independent school should include an evaluation of library services and resources in order to help determine the level of educational opportunities a school will provide you during your academic career. The Independent School Section of the American Association of School Librarians has prepared this guide with questions to consider in three critical areas: facilities, resources, and services.

According to some experts, the amount of information available will more than double by the time you graduate. Therefore, locating and evaluating information is critical to becoming an educated individual. The library staff will help you develop these valuable information literacy skills.

FACILITIES

The campus library will provide an important environment for your education. In the library, you will have the opportunity to receive individual and group instruction, study alone or in groups, obtain assistance with assignments, use books and journals, read for pleasure and enlightenment, use computers for accessing databases and web-based resources, or just meet with friends.

- ✓ Is the library centrally located and easy to find?
- ✓ When you are in the library, can you find your way around?
- ✓ Is the library space inviting?
- ✓ Is there adequate space for users and collections?
- ✓ Is there a variety of study and activity spaces?
- ✓ Are computer terminals available and easily accessible?
- ✓ Are the library hours convenient?
- ✓ Can the library accommodate any disabilities or special needs you may have?

RESOURCES

A quality library collection consists of information in a variety of formats and requires sustained support over many years for adequate development. Increasingly, electronic information is supplementing the wealth of print and other types of information available in most libraries. Careful consideration and evaluation of information in all formats is always important.

- ✓ Is there an adequate collection in a variety of formats, including electronic and audiovisual materials as well as traditional books and magazines?
- ✓ Does the collection adequately support the school's curriculum?
- ✓ Is the collection sufficiently current and interesting?
- ✓ Is there a web-based catalog?
- ✓ Are there electronic tools for locating magazine and journal articles?
- ✓ Are library resources available in classrooms, dormitories, and other school spaces?

- ✓ Are resources available electronically in full-text format?
- ✓ Are library resources available from home?
- ✓ Will the library readily obtain materials for you that are not owned by the library?

SERVICES

Library services support your school experience. These services may range from having librarians available to assist you in locating information to providing photocopy machines. It is important for you to understand and appreciate the variety of services offered to enhance your academic success.

- ✓ Is sufficient staff available to help you?
- ✓ Is the staff friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, and available when you need them?
- ✓ What instruction programs are available to teach you how to use the library?
- ✓ Are there fees for services, such as printing? If so, are the fees reasonable?
- ✓ What services are available beyond the academic day?
- ✓ Is the library open and available during the times you prefer to work?
- ✓ Can you get help electronically, such as via an e-mail question to a library staff member?
- ✓ How does the library support distance education, if the school offers courses you can enroll in from off-campus?
- ✓ Does the library support laptops and other technologies such as scanners and ebooks?

Libraries vary as markedly from one another as do schools. Consider what is special about each school and library you visit, and how those qualities will enhance your learning. Whatever school you choose to attend, we hope you will make the library an integral part of your educational experience.