

SURFING THE NET FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BEING OVERSEAS MAKES IT BOTH MORE VITAL AND MORE DIFFICULT FOR FOREIGN SERVICE FAMILIES TO FIND GOOD SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN. BUT, THERE ARE MANY ONLINE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP.

By STEPHEN YEATER

Foreign Service children constantly face changing cultures, an uneven quality of schools abroad, and a scarcity of educational facilities for special-needs children. As if that weren't daunting enough, just being overseas makes it both more vital and more difficult for Foreign Service families to find good schools for their children.

Nor is this a problem for just a few people: in December 2001, according to the State Department's Family Liaison Office, there were approximately 10,000 children in Foreign Service families, of which about 7,200 are school-age. Of those, around 93 percent attended local schools located in the city of the parents' assignment, 5 percent were enrolled in boarding schools, and the other 2 percent were homeschooled by their parents.

Fortunately, in addition to the Schools Chart on p. 55 of this issue, there are many other helpful online options for researching and comparing secondary schools (high schools), both overseas and in the United States. These sites encompass boarding schools, art schools and schools that accommodate students with learning disabilities, as well as homeschooling resources. And they are all free.

Start with State

For overseas secondary schools, a great place to start your search is at the State Department's Web sites, beginning with the *Family Liaison Office* Web site (<http://www.state.gov/www/flo/>). In addition to giving a general overview of FLO's many activities and resources, the site provides detailed guidance on finding a suitable overseas school for your child's particular needs and offers various lists of support networks.

You should also check out FLO's *Education and Youth* Web

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page (<http://state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1958.htm>), which provides excellent resources and advice on school-related issues. The educational and emotional development of children from mobile families is a particular priority for the Family Liaison Office. Accordingly, the FLO participates in a "flow of care" for teenagers to assist them with issues of international mobility and reentry to the United States.

Here you can find information on many topics, including: college considerations for students, youth groups, education allowances and scholarships, child care, boarding schools, homeschooling, and special educational needs. And if you have more specific questions not answered by those resources, you can e-mail FLO's Education and Youth Officer or Education Program Assistant directly from the site.

Another very useful State Department resource is the *Office of Overseas Schools* (http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/schools/index.html). Simple to use, the OOS Web site provides specific information on schools in every country. Just click on the country and city, and an informative school summary is provided including a picture of the school, school history, curriculum, faculty, student population, school facilities, finances and contact information. This Web site saves considerable time otherwise spent going to each individual school's home page.

Other Resources

Ed-U-Link Services (<http://www.edulink.com/>) also offers an index of overseas schools with contact information and links to the schools' individual Web sites. This site does not include the useful summaries that the OOS site does, but it does have a comprehensive list of overseas schools and their respective Web sites. It also usually lists about twice as many schools for any particular country as the OOS Web site, making it a good complement.

For those who wish to pursue their creative passions,
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ArtSchools.com (<http://www.artschools.com/>) is a useful Web site for locating art schools all over the world and in the United States. The Web site is intuitive, allowing you to search for schools in a specific state, country or academic specialty, such as cinematography or sculpture. You will also find areas of study, degrees offered, contact information and links to schools' Web sites. Note that many of the U.S. institutions provide a brief summary of their art program.

The *Association of Boarding Schools* Web site (<http://www.schools.com>) is an excellent online resource for those who want to know more about the boarding school learning experience. This site lists over 300 boarding schools, mostly in the United States, but it also details schools in Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy and Austria. School information includes an introduction written by the school, number of students, student-teacher ratio, gender requirements (coed, etc.), grades taught, accreditations and contact information.

In addition to searching for schools by state and country, you can narrow your search to look only for military boarding schools, art boarding schools, coed-only schools, etc. Having so many options in one location might sound confusing, but it isn't, because the site is laid out very clearly. Information is also available on the admissions process for each school and on the "common application" that many of the boarding schools use. (Note that State's FLO Web site also has good information on boarding schools.)

Looking Ahead to College


Whether the courses that one takes at overseas secondary schools will be accepted at a particular college, overseas or in the United States, is a major concern parents need to take into account when selecting secondary schools. The regular movement of Foreign Service families means that it's likely that their children will have attended multiple schools in different countries by the time they are ready for college. Will an international secondary education meet the admissions standards of universities worldwide?

Acquiring an International Baccalaureate diploma is one option that addresses this question. Since the 1970s, students in secondary schools both abroad and in the United States have had the option of attaining the IB to supplement a regular high-school diploma. This internationally-recognized certificate is now offered in 1,365 public and private high schools in 112 countries, according to the *International Baccalaureate Organization* Web site (<http://www.ibo.org>). This site is a good place to learn more about the IB and the schools that offer it.

Many Foreign Service parents have been happy with the benefits of the rigorous curriculum required to earn an IB, particularly those hoping to attend European universities. Increasing numbers of American universities also accept the IB; however, there are still many that don't, so do check with individual colleges about their policy. (The State Department's FLO is another helpful resource for determining if the IB is right for your child.)

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Excellent resources are also available if you are looking for schools in the United States. The *National Center for Educational Statistics* is the primary federal entity collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States. Its Web site (<http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/>) is a superb source for information on secondary schools throughout the United States. One can search for schools according to state, city or zip code. You can also limit your search to just public or private schools. Contact information, gender requirements (coed, etc.), affiliations, grades taught, number of students, student-teacher ratio and the ethnic diversity of the school are given in easily readable charts and graphs. You can even search for school libraries.

Special Needs

Online resources are especially important when one is searching for schools that can accommodate children with learning disabilities. An estimated 5 percent of students attending public schools have been diagnosed with a specific learning disability. Finding an appropriate school with well-trained staff is crucial to the success of these children.

The *National Center for Learning Disabilities* offers a comprehensive Web site (<http://www.nclld.org/map.cfm>). Even though it contains a wealth of information, the site has a clear, understandable format. For example, you can find schools and testing centers throughout the United States and some provinces of Canada by going to the "Resource Locator" hyperlink on the NCLD home page and searching by state or province. The Web site also includes information on warning signs and diagnosing learning disabilities, the latest legislation relevant to learning-disability issues and links to many advocacy groups.

The State Department Web sites mentioned earlier have excellent information and resources for finding overseas schools, including schools that accommodate students with learning disabilities. The Family Liaison Office

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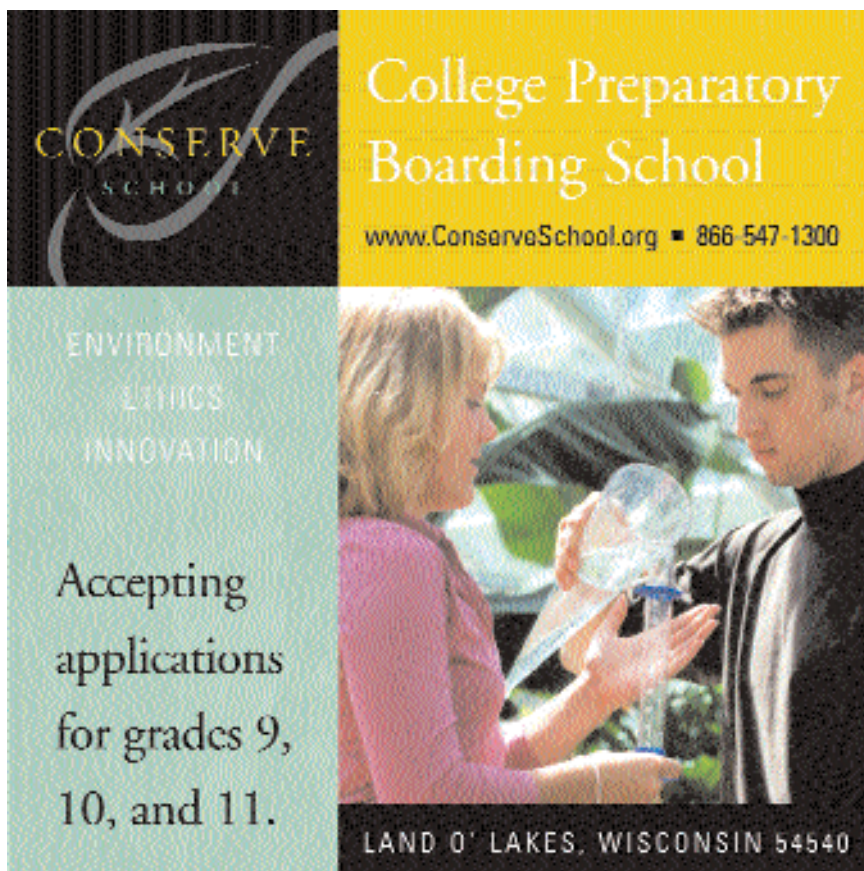
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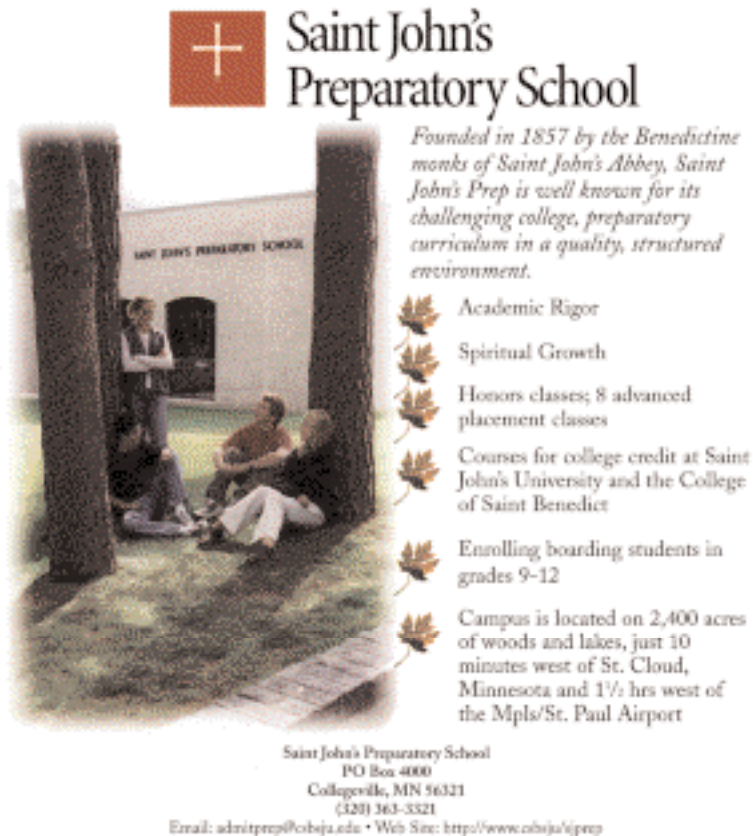
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offers referrals to schools, hospitals, outpatient services and testing facilities; go to the "Special Educational Needs and the Foreign Service Child" hyperlink on the FLO Web site to access some of this information. You will find additional information in a book titled *Overseas Schools Attended by U.S. Government Dependent Children*, a compilation of evaluations by Foreign Service families of over 650 overseas schools.

Last, but not least, what about the increasingly utilized learning option of homeschooling? Although only about 2 percent of Foreign Service children are homeschooled, overall this is a growing trend in American society. To help these families, here are a couple of useful Web sites. *The American Homeschool Association* Web site (<http://www.americanhomeschoolassociation.org/index.html>) is comprehensive and easy to use. It offers suggestions for school supplies and resources to help with home-

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- <http://www.state.gov/www/flo/> — Family Liaison Office
- <http://state.gov/m/dg/hr/flo/c1958.htm> — FLO Education and Youth Officer
- <http://www.state.gov/www/about/state/schools/index.html> — Office of Overseas Schools

Other Sites of Interest

- <http://www.edulink.com/> — Ed-U-Link Services
- <http://www.artschools.com/> — ArtSchools.com
- <http://www.ibo.org> — International Baccalaureate Organization
- <http://www.schools.com> — The Association of Boarding Schools
- <http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/> — National Center for Educational Statistics
- <http://www.nclld.org/map.cfm> — National Center for Learning Disabilities
- <http://www.americanhomeschoolassociation.org/index.html> — American Homeschool Association
- <http://www.nhen.org> — National Home Education Network



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schooling, as well as access to numerous newsletters and magazines such as *Home Education Magazine* and relevant books (including links to the authors). They also provide the latest legislation pertaining to homeschooling.

You can also search for local, state and national homeschooling support groups through the site's link to the *National Home Education Network* (<http://www.nhen.org>). The AHA site should be your principal resource as it is much better designed and more user-friendly, but the NHEN site does contain useful information as well. (Once again, the State Department's FLO Web site also has some basic information on homeschooling.)

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Genius without education is like silver in the mine." Whatever your child's educational needs, these online resources should help you polish that silver to its full shine. ■

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