

Guide for Sixth Grade Parents: Fall and Winter

YOUR NEXT SCHOOL

Most Miquon graduates living in Philadelphia continue their education at independent schools, Masterman Junior and Senior High School, charter schools, schools with a religious affiliation, or one of the other public school programs. All of these schools have selective or limited admissions and require that application be made.

Some suburban families choose to send their child to their public school and may or may not have decisions to make about special programs within the school itself, including instructional tracks.

General Attitudes

Our Miquon graduates make successful transitions into a widely differing range of environments. There are almost certainly many suitable schools for your child, and they may look quite unlike each other.

A school that you reject for your child may be another family's first choice. You may both be making an excellent decision. **Please help us maintain a positive tone** in the classroom about school choices by keeping destructive generalizations out of your discussions with or in front of your child. *"Only spoiled rich children go there"* and *"That school is for kids who can't get into a good school"* and *"School X is the best choice for Miquon families"* are bound to be repeated in class and can cause real hurt and confusion. We work hard to emphasize the strengths of public and independent schools alike, along with the importance of individual family choice, and we need your help and sensitivity.

Your child is the central focus in the process in making your school decision. However, very few children this age are capable of the kind of overview needed to be the one who determines the entire outcome. Children can be heavily influenced by what may be only part of the picture to us: a uniform or dress code, for example, may bring strong protests from a child who is working hard at independence. A well-equipped athletic program or arts facility may make a school exceedingly attractive to your child, no matter what the suitability of the academic program may be. The school choices of a friend whose academic and social strengths are entirely different may be a major factor in your child's preferences.

Let your children know early on what your criteria are and what issues are not going to be decided by them alone. If you are choosing a neighborhood school, there may be course selection for elective subjects for which your child's opinion may be very important, whereas the decision about the school itself may be already made. Look for ways to empower your child appropriately.

Suburban School District

Make an early contact with whomever is in charge of new student enrollment and/or whomever will oversee your child's first year. Let them know a little bit about your child and about Miquon. Find out what the school will need in the way of records, and arrange for us to send them by the time the receiving school needs them. Some public schools don't do this on their own initiative until long after the school year has begun and placement decisions have been made.

Find out if there is any kind of orientation program that your child might attend. Some school districts bring their sixth (or fifth) graders to the middle school near the end of the year for a tour of the building and an

introduction to the routines. If your school district begins middle school at fifth or sixth grade, your child will probably be one of relatively few new students at seventh. Some schools do a special orientation for new students entering at all grades. If there is some kind of transition preparation during this current school year, ask how your child can take part.

Find out if the school does any kind of academic tracking or offers any special programs. If they do, find out about program differences, placement procedures, and degree of mobility offered to students who end up in the wrong track or who may need a different placement after a year or two. Some schools do none of this; others have very rigid placement and instructional programs that lock a student in place. *Do everything you can to be sure your child is in the most suitable grouping on the first day of school.* This may mean arranging for testing or for some phone contact between Miquon and the other school.

Try to arrange for your child to visit the school as early as possible. Some public schools do not allow student visits at all, but many do. If all else fails, go to a function held at the school (theater, carnival) and see as much of the buildings and grounds as you can. It really helps to give your child some mental images of the new environment.

Philadelphia Public Schools

All Philadelphia school applications must be completed online by parents.

If you have decided to send your child to a Philadelphia public school that does not require a special transfer application, you still need to complete the appropriate transfer work.

Philadelphia Public Schools and Programs with Selective Admissions

If you are considering a public school or program with selective admissions (e.g., Masterman, a charter school, a gifted instructional plan, a cyber-school, etc.), you need to **find out the application deadline and make sure to meet the deadline.** Find out what the admissions criteria are (lottery, test scores, etc.). Since these things can change from year to year, it is essential for you to obtain current information.

Private Schools

If you are looking at private schools, **you should begin the application process in September or October of your child's sixth grade year.** This process includes a visit by and interview of your child and of the parent(s).

You are choosing a school for your child for seventh grade. This means that you need to think about your child's needs, interests, strengths, and personality in terms of the way your child is *now*. Your future hopes or your child's hidden potential are important, but your child must fit the school on the first day as best as he or she can.

You also need to think about your family's characteristics: its schedule, its resources, and its values. A school that causes conflict with any of these may not be the right choice for you, no matter what else it may offer.

Start with as large a list of schools as you can. Get suggestions from neighbors, friends, and acquaintances in education, and—of course—from Miquon. We can help to put you in touch with Miquon families who have chosen schools that you are considering. Contact the schools on your list for information. Look over the materials, call if you have questions, and narrow the list to those to which you want to begin application – three is a good number.

Most schools set up visits for children after the first stage of the application work is complete. This usually involves a fee and may require providing recommendations and records in advance of the visit. *You* need to

arrange for Miquon to send records. They will give you a release form to sign and send to Miquon. This is very important. Most schools will give you a set of forms that should be passed on to Andrea (not the classroom teacher).

These include the transcript release and one or more recommendation forms to be filled in by teachers. Your child's current group teacher will complete one of those forms. You should decide which other **current** teacher(s) you would like to have do any additional recommendations, contact them, and be sure that Andrea knows who should get the form(s).

Along with the recommendation form(s), we will send the fifth grade end-of-year report and a narrative report written by the sixth grade teacher. This is similar to the end-of-year report, but it is briefer and focuses on the kinds of information that a prospective school seeks.

We also send your child's scores from the Terra Nova Standardized Achievement Tests that will have been given in October of sixth grade. You are likely to be asked to arrange for your child to take additional testing: the SSAT or ISEE examinations, which are given at various school sites in the fall and can also be done through a private testing service. If you are asked for two different kinds of outside tests from two or more schools, find out if they will both accept the same one. Most will. We have established Miquon as an ISEE test site. We will let you know about the testing date and the option of having your child attend after-school "familiarization" sessions early in the fall of 6th grade.

As soon as you can, visit the schools yourself. Most schools have open houses, but you will also want a personal tour. You can find a list of most area independent schools' open houses at www.advis.org. There is a linked line of text near the top of their home page, which says "Click here to view open house dates . . .". Please try to avoid taking your child out of school for an open house; your child will have an opportunity for a much more informative visit if you decide to apply. Many parents have found it helpful to go without children so they can create a short list of schools that is later shared with children in the fall.

Bring questions to the visit that will help you determine how that school will go about serving your child.

These include finding out about support resources and special-interest programs; curricular inclusion of things in which your child is especially interested, such as computers or music; requirements for after-school participation in sports; and the like.

Then, if you are still interested in the school, arrange for your child to visit. Find out what the visit experience will be: a tour by an adult or student, a day or two in classes, a personal interview with the admissions person, perhaps some in-house testing? Make sure your child knows what to expect and is properly prepared. Will he or she need money for lunch? Special clothing or shoes for a gym class? It's important for you and your child to keep in mind that *you* are making a choice. The spectre of being rejected or placed on a waiting list will be much on your child's mind. Most of our graduates are accepted by schools that are among their first choices. This is a result of careful thinking and pre-selection on the part of the parents and close communications between home and Miquon. You and we know your child better than do any of the schools to which you are applying. It is at that level that the real decisions must be made. Acceptance by a school does not guarantee that your child will succeed there; you may decide to reject an accepting school or withdraw your application because you have determined that it is not the right place for your family after all.

Many things affect admissions decisions from one year to the next, and some have nothing to do with your child. A school that is short on girls in its current sixth grade, for example, may look more favorably upon seventh grade girl applicants. A school that is seeking racial balance may accept or reject your child on that

basis, although not openly. A school with a large number of places for seventh grade may accept new students who would not have been admitted in a different year. Siblings and alumni children generally get priority over other applicants, as do members of any religious group with which the school may be affiliated.

Ask about admissions criteria when you visit. It does not hurt to try for something that may be a challenging goal, but it is a mistake to make that your child's only option. The more you keep us informed of the progress of your school search, the more we can help. If you experience difficulty with admission to a school that seems to all of us to be a good choice, let us know. We may be able to help with some direct contact with their admissions committee.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE (MIQUON) RANCH . . .

As sixth graders, your children are taking their places as the oldest, perhaps biggest, and most competent members of our student body. They are often admired by other students for their athletic skills and sought out to provide organizational and social leadership. They preside over our Good-of-the-School assemblies. They write a graduation speech and create a personal page for the yearbook. These things are just a few of the formal and informal structures that mark a time of accomplishment and successful closure.

Sixth grade is also a time for thinking about leaving old friends and making new ones. It's a time in which academic work takes on added significance in the children's minds. They begin to ask if other schools teach the same things we do, and they wonder if they will be adequately prepared. They begin to think about adjusting to their new school (without any clear idea of what that adjustment may entail), and they think about entering a world of more responsibility, more independence, less nurturing from teachers, and new complexities (such as studying for exams). Because all of these things involve so much that is unknown, some children feel worried and uncertain as they think about life after Miquon.

The children talk about these concerns among themselves, and we take them up as part of the daily program. As children visit schools, they report back to us at morning circle and tell about what they saw and did. We begin to point out to them some of the things that are unique to Miquon and how things may be done just as well but in other ways at other schools. This sort of thing is helpful not only to sixth graders in working through their questions and worries, but it also is helpful in moving fifth graders in the group toward their own transition next year.

Throughout the fall, many of last year's graduates will visit us for all or part of a day as our schools' calendars diverge. Their testimony at morning circle is the most reassuring proof we can offer that there is not only life but a good life after graduation from Miquon. At home, your discussion of your own school experiences and feelings about transitions as you moved from one level or school to another may help your child to talk about questions and concerns.

At the same time, we work hard to help graduating students remain engaged with this year and this place as they contemplate the changes ahead. Although the issues of leaving are present from the very first day of school, we try to minimize the extent to which they may distract your child from enjoying this final, culminating year. We try to create a strong sense of group. We offer leadership opportunities to the class as a whole because they are the "big kids." We focus children's attention on plays and projects, trips and special events, and the daily life of the classroom. We try very hard to build the study habits and skills that your child will need. We try to keep the excitement and distraction of graduation event preparation to an absolute minimum before the month of May, when speech-writing begins and fifths start working on skits.

While each child experiences the move from Miquon to a new school in an individual way, the following generalizations can be made about most children in each graduating class:

If you are looking at private schools or public school programs with selective admissions, your children may become anxious as they consider the issue of “getting in” as a measure of themselves.

If you are planning to enter a non-selective public school, they may wonder if they are going to a less-desirable institution because it accepts everyone. They will be less worried about unknown destinations if they can visit the school(s) you have in mind as early as possible. Many public schools are receptive to this kind of request and may even work out a day of visiting classes with a neighborhood friend who attends the school.

Children often start to immerse themselves in sentiment and nostalgia. They will think about doing things at Miquon “for the last time” and start visiting favorite sites for a final look. They may demand unreasonable amounts of power and privilege for their final year as they begin to realize that the school is going to go on without them in the fall. They also may become scornful of some of the “babyish” things we do and look forward to the more grown-up sports program, course offerings, and cafeteria at their new school.

They may have their hardest time late in the summer between. They have left one place and not yet become a part of the new one. Consider making an early connection with your child’s new school and classmates: a summer athletic or arts program may be held there; enroll in a summer camp to which many of the new classmates are going; perhaps just plan another visit to the grounds and buildings. Keeping your child busy at *anything*, especially in August, is also helpful. This may be the time of greatest need for reassurance and sympathetic listening.

By the end of the second week in the new school, most of the doubts and questions will have resolved themselves and everything will be fine.

Part 2 of the *Guide for Parents of Sixth Graders* is about graduation traditions and activities. We will distribute that document later in the year.