The Pollards. Four kids. Trinity. Ursuline. $188,000.

These are actual families and the estimated actual price for their kids' private pre-college education.


Who's getting the better deal? Are the Aderhold kids getting more education than the Pollards because their schools cost more? Are the Ashleys set for life because they went to two of the "best" schools in Dallas? Should the Speisers plan on a life of community college and mediocre jobs because they have no connections?

IS PRIVATE SCHOOL WORTH IT?

And, if so, why?

Most families who pay for private school believe they are worth the high price for four reasons. But not necessarily for the reasons you might expect.

By Dawn McMullan

Photography by Tadd Myers of Dick Patrick Studios
THE PARENTS WE TALKED TO LISTED THESE ADVANTAGES IN THIS ORDER:
• Personalized service they get from the school
• Close-knit community
• Academics
• Religious environment

PRIVATE SCHOOL MEANS I HAVE MORE VOICE IN MY CHILD’S EDUCATION.
Private school parents, students and principals have a list a football field long about what they think private school accomplishes. But in the end, parents say it depends on the child. Some parents have one kid in public, another in private. Some drive their kids to three private schools. One advantage of private school is that your child’s education can be chosen to suit his needs: your high IQ math whiz flourishes at Cistercian, your self-starter is happy at White Rock Montessori, and your bright but slightly dyslexic dancer is encouraged at Winston.

Parents feel they have more of a voice in their child’s education at private school—that their opinions matter, that faculty and administration are more accessible and accommodating.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS PROVIDE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.
Public schools were conceived as community schools—it’s a sad sign of the times that a sense of community is so often cited as the reason parents prefer to pay tuition. But smaller class sizes (which also bolster academic achievement) mean that kids know all their peers. And parents who are paying tend to be very involved—they’re consumers and feel they have a right to ask for what they want.

Bishop Durne recently conducted a survey of parents, asking why they send their kids there. And the survey says—the value-based education, college prep, safe environment, and small classes.

“People want a safe and positive environment where their kids are loved, appreciated, and respected,” says the school’s principal, Kate Collins Dailey. “My rule is that the school is too big if I don’t know everybody’s name.”

That’s what these parents are paying for. And, for them, it’s worth it. Regardless of whether their kid gets into Harvard, they say.

Ruth Ritterband, at the Solomon Schechter Academy, says she never used the word safety 10 years ago. Now, it’s in every speech about the school.

“Safe doesn’t mean preventing Columbine,” she says. “What happened in Columbine could happen anywhere. Columbine says to me, ‘You’ve got to know all your kids.’ And we can.”

The corollary of the community advantage is that at many private schools, kids form connections which last for life. After working in California for 13 years, an executive moves back to Dallas, and who does he call to get plugged in? His old St. Mark’s buddies, now directing their fathers’ companies.

ATTENDING PRIVATE SCHOOL REINFORCES FAMILY VALUES AND BELIEFS.
“We are passionate about it,” Highland Park resident Jennie Gilchrist says about Providence, where her son and daughter attend.

“They emphasize not only knowledge but godly wisdom. They address the children’s soul, not just their mind. To be able to send
your children to school and not have to think twice about what they're learning—academically or morally—that's worth three times what we pay.”

More and more private schools are religion-based because parents are as concerned about values as they are academics. Schools like Providence preach anti-materialism, encouraging kids to break away from consumer culture. On the other hand, private schools are a consumer good, in their own way—something to shop for and a luxury not everyone can afford.

Denise Dunlap, whose kids have been through both public and private schools, supports both teams. “I feel that what my kids got out of public school was a real knowledge of all different kinds of people—something no amount of money can buy,” she says. “But then I’ve really enjoyed private school. Jesuit has a motto, ‘Men For Others,’ and they don’t just give lip service to it. I feel like they’re educating my son’s mind, body, and spirit. And who wouldn’t want that for their child?”

ATTENDING PRIVATE SCHOOL MEANS MY CHILD WILL GET INTO THE BEST COLLEGE.

The parents who are writing huge checks each year certainly believe it. Private schools are booming, with more applicants than they can accommodate. Parents in East Dallas no longer complain about a school in North Dallas. If they like it and can get in, they are smiling as they make that 45-minute drive.

Private school kids—some who have gone to public schools, some who have never been closer than a Welcome Back, Kotter rerun—agree with their parents.

“My education has been impeccable,” says Laura Tobolowsky, who started first grade at Hackaday and will graduate this year. “When you combine some of the brightest minds in Dallas with a brilliant teacher and an amazing curriculum, it’s amazing what happens.”

Laura has heard the stories from girls coming back after their first year at Yale, saying their junior year at Hackaday was tougher. She may not be getting her eight hours in every night during the school year (I see a lot of sleepy faces as I walk through the halls”), but she believes all the work will pay off. “They start young at Hackaday working you pretty hard,” she says. “Sometimes I wonder if I’m missing out on something.” Her sister, Kathryn, spent first grade through 12th at Greenhill. Now, her first year at Colgate University behind her, she says she was completely prepared: “I learned in a place where education was cherished. I got a sense from my friends in public schools that extra push wasn’t there. And that extra push was well worth it.”

Bruce Beavers, who went to Highland Park public schools but really didn’t even consider putting his kids into their DISD school, says his local schools were not up to par. Even with his Highland Park education, he felt behind compared with the St. Mark’s kids when he started Yale. “I don’t think that children get an adequate education in DISD,” he says. “If I couldn’t afford private schools or couldn’t get them in, I’d move.”

The truth is, though, that most graduates of St. Mark’s end up going to UT—an excellent university but one easily accessible from a public school. And though the best colleges do recruit at private schools, the search for diversity at the best colleges means that a white boy with a 4.0 average, a perfect SAT, and a prep school education may be passed by for a minority boy with similar numbers and a less cushy background.

THE COST?

Private school used to be a place for rich kids. Of course, it still is. But some families don’t travel so they can pay the bills. Moms who didn’t plan to work, do. This is where many families—some disillusioned with the public school systems and their metal detectors and TAAS tests, others just wanting more control over their children’s days—are spending their disposable income.

“It is a huge sacrifice for some of the families,” says Cullen Aderhold, who sent his three children through Parish Day School, his sons to Cistercian and Jesuit, and his daughter to Good Shepherd and, eventually, Ursuline. “I have three kids, times 15 years of private schools. That’s 45 years of private school tuition. I don’t even want to think about what that adds up to.”

To be fair to the private schools, the actual price isn’t so bad when you compare it to what public schools are spending. DISD, for example, spends an average of $6,038 per year on each of its students. Your child can get an education at Jesuit or Bishop Lynch for that price. Or, for twice as much, you could attend St. Mark’s or Hackaday.

The difference is, of course, it’s coming out of your pocket. All of it. Plus the thousands you pay to support the public schools anyway.

THE OPTION

There is the other side, however. The cheerleaders for the public schools say if we all pull out, what will be left?

Ted Soules went to great public schools in small-town Ohio in the ‘60s and ‘70s. He put himself through school at OU and hung out with “salt-of-the-earth” people, not the snooty frat guys who grew up in private schools. While he says private schools are probably much better these days since many middle-class people are using them, private schools still leave a bad taste in his mouth.

“Many of them create an atmosphere that makes people think that they are better than others,” he says. “While getting children—especially mine—a good education is very important to me, so is learning to be a good person.”

Ted and his wife, Lesley, have a 2/2-year-old son. They didn’t want Zachary at DISD or at the huge suburban schools like Plano. So, they moved from Dallas to Gunter (30 minutes north of Allen) to try to recreate that small-town school experience.

“If we had stayed in Dallas, in DISD, we would have sent Zachary to a private school. This is an added expense, which meant that Lesley would have probably had to work. So we found the best public school for us that also gave us many of the other things we were looking for—friendlier people, slower pace, less traffic, etc.”

Susan Schuerger, Lakewood mom with five kids in DISD, says her attitude was that she would leave her kids in public schools until she saw a reason to take them out. Which she still hasn’t. Instead, she spends their money on great vacations and saving for college. And, perhaps because they are in public school, she feels she pays closer attention to their education than some private school parents do.

“I think we expect so much from our kids,” she says about the stress of private schools. “We’re prepping them for college in the fourth grade. Kids don’t need a planetarium in junior high. I know kids at Greenhill and Hackaday have lots more homework. I don’t know what that accomplishes.”

Still, private school principals defend their territory.

“If parents were not seeing results,” says Sue Henry, director of White Rock Montessori, “we would all quickly be out of business.”
AKIBA ACADEMY OF DALLAS
6210 Churchill Way, Dallas (972-239-7248)

Being Jewish is a way of life, especially if you are an orthodox Jew. Your diet is different. You can't use modern conveniences on the Sabbath (timers can turn your lights on, but you can't). Your second language is Hebrew.

That's why many parents decide to send their children to Jewish schools like Akiba, where kids can feel comfortable within their Jewish skin and their culture is reinforced.

Thirty percent of Akiba's 360 students come from orthodox families. They observe Jewish dietary laws (no ham and cheese for lunch here) and boys wear their kippah. Eight rabbis are on staff.

Students study academics half the day and Jewish studies the other half. "It forces us to be more organized," says Headmaster Robert Scott. "We also integrate the subjects. We have a Holocaust segment that goes through history, art, language, and Jewish studies. Some of our teaching is informal. Children don't just learn through textbooks and classrooms."

The school's state-of-the-art computer lab features 22 networked computers with Internet access. Students begin computer classes at age 3; Hebrew lessons start in kindergarten. As in most preschool classrooms, many of the objects are labeled (desk, chair, crayon). At Akiba, everything is labeled in English and in Hebrew.

ADMISSION: Akiba tests for academic ability, general Judeo knowledge, and wants previous school records and recommendations. They want to know whether you were born Jewish (or are a copy of your conversion documents) and what synagogue you go to. About 10 percent of students are second generation. COST: $4,150 for pre-K up to $7,400 for grades 5-8. To help keep tuition low, the school has a "give or get policy," where parents raise or contribute $425. THE PAYOFF: Most students go to Yavneh High School, other private schools, or public (including the Arts Magnet). Most alumni attend college, including the Ivy Leagues. Alumni include Richard Rohan, a Harvard Law School grad currently practicing in Dallas, and Stuart Wernick, the president of the Dallas Kosher Committee. PARENTS SAY: The pre-school program is fabulous, with rooms designed especially for each age group (3-year-olds with a little slide and short for area; 4-year-olds with a little higher; 5-year-olds with a little lower). Academics are excellent. But while many parents appreciate the commitment to a Jewish education, some think making it half of a student's day could sacrifice academics.

BENDING OAKS HIGH SCHOOL
11884 Greenville Avenue, Dallas (972-669-0000)

The first thing you'll notice about Bending Oaks is that it's in a strip mall. The second thing you'll notice is that it's tiny: 8,500 square feet house 75 students—productive high schoolers who often haven't been too successful elsewhere.

Bending Oaks is flexible, thus the name. You can chew gum and drink a Diet Coke in class if you want. Students call teachers by their first names. With only six kids in a class, sometimes as few as three, rules can be relaxed.

They pride themselves on the fact that students want to come to school— "Where the students choose us" is their motto. The school looks for students who can benefit from their amazing teacher-student ratio and have struggled academically in other schools. Forty to 50 percent of students have learning differences.

The school looks like an office, with students and teachers gathering in the kitchenette for a break. Bending Oaks uses computers for most subjects. (Biology students even do a computer simulation of a dissection, keeping smelly carcasses out of the building.)

ADMISSION: The personal interview is the most important facet. Prospective students spend a day or two in the classrooms, and their skills must be at or near their grade level. COST: $10,000 to $12,000 a year. THE PAYOFF: Eighty-five percent of students go immediately to college (65 percent at four-year schools; 20 percent at two-year). Lance Armstrong, winner of this year's Tour de France, attended. PARENTS SAY: Most parents are grateful to have found Bending Oaks after struggling with their kids in other schools, often public. If they seem sporty and pep rallies are your thing, this is not the place (although the school uses the local Y and has a membership at the gym across the street).

BISHOP DUNNE HIGH SCHOOL
3900 Rugged Drive, Dallas (214-339-5561)

The 30 wooded acre campus in Oak Cliff houses one of the most diverse and affordable private schools in the area: 28 percent at Caucasian, 27 percent African-American, 38 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent Asian or other ethnicity. Thirty-five percent of students take advantage of available loans and grants. Sports are huge here. As is technology. The school features three high-tech labs, with another middle school lab in the works. Each student has an e-mail account with immediate access through the Internet on a T1 line. Each classroom has five computers.

The school sends out grades every two weeks, and seeks evaluation by annual parent and student surveys. While the school celebrates its Catholicism with mass every Friday, the 30 percent of non-Catholic students say they feel comfortable regardless of their religion.

ADMISSION: Prospective students take a placement test, write an essay, and go through an interview process. Bishop Dunne is looking for students who can contribute positively to the school and be successful in academics and community involvement. THE BILL: $8,600 for 7th and 8th; $4,800 for high school (with a guarantee that tuition will not increase during that two or four-year period). THE PAYOFF: Seventy percent of students go to four-year colleges; 30 percent to two-year schools. Last year, the graduating class of 66 earned more than $1 million in scholarships. PARENTS SAY: Parents love the parochial school environment, small classes, and seeing half the faculty at the football games. Teachers here are paid less than at public schools, so parents feel—and appreciate—their dedication. Teachers and other families have been known to take in a child having trouble at home. There are no metal detectors here.
At Bishop Lynch, every kid gets a chance.

There are some struggling C students who will happily go on to a community college they can afford. Some A students who will get into (and can afford) West Point or Yale.

While offering individual attention for students for whom academics don't come naturally, teachers also cater to those who need more of a challenge. The East Dallas school has twice been named a Bice Ribbon School.

Not quite as diverse as Bishop Dunne, Bishop Lynch's stats still are impressive: 73 percent Caucasian, 21 percent Hispanic, 3 percent African-American, and 3 percent other ethnicity. Lincoln Stephens, an African-American Baptist student who graduated in May, says he'd like to see a more diverse campus but that he appreciated the academics and religious centering Bishop Lynch provided.

"I had a lot of friends in public school who wouldn't have any book bags when they were walking home," said Stephens, who just started the University of Missouri. "I'd have two book bags. I often wished I didn't, but I really enjoyed that I had something to study instead of just goofing off. Bishop Lynch helped me be a more centered, focused person."

**ADMISSION:** This year, 480 students applied for 300 places. Freshmen take placement tests; all prospective students must provide recommendations and transcripts and go through a family interview. **THE BILL:** $5,450, 21 percent of students took advantage of the $320,000 worth of financial aid this year. **THE PayOFF:** Seventy-three percent of graduates go to a four-year college; 26 percent go to a two-year college, usually for financial reasons. **PARENTS SAY:** Parents generally like the high priority given to discipline at Bishop Lynch. Some students, though, think being kicked out of school for drinking or fighting off-campus might be crossing the line. While teachers do stress academics, Bishop Lynch is a more family-based school than St. Mark's or Hackaday. The combination of upper- and lower-class students can sometimes be tough when the kid in the BMW pulls up to your Dad's old Corolla. But the uniforms help.

**CISTERCIAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

One Cistercian Road, Irving (972-273-2022)

What sets Cistercian apart are the extremely high—even by private school standards—academic programs. And the monks.

The Cistercian monks of Our Lady of Dallas monastery founded the school, which starts at fifth grade and goes through graduation, in 1952. And in case mentioning the monks didn't clue you in, the school emphasizes Christian principles and Catholic theology.

Each entering class is assigned a "form master," a liaison between the school and the parents who follows the students' academic and emotional growth through graduation. The students are all in honors courses, often taking high school courses in middle school and earning college credits before they graduate.

Middle school students stand when their teacher enters and sit when they are told to be seated. And these teachers are probably worthy of that respect. With 76 percent of them having earned a master's degree and the other 24 percent a doctorate, they are the most educated staff of any school interviewed.

Although Cistercian is one of the few private schools that doesn't require community service, the school received an honorable mention award from the Volunteer Center of Dallas County this year for student volunteers. **ADMISSION:** Cistercian usually admits 40 boys at the entry level (grade five) and others as spots become available. Applicants go through entrance tests and provide the usual transcripts and teacher evaluations. They want to know everything from your First Communion date to your attention span. **THE BILL:** $7,600 to $8,700. Need-based scholarships are available. **THE PayOff:** Brown, Cornell, Duke, Georgetown, Harvard, Baylor, UT, A&M. Almost 100 percent of graduates go to four-year col-

**Are Day Schools Becoming Extinct?**

Private elementary schools used to get most of the tuition money in Dallas. But transferring schools is stressful. And most parents vow never to go through that again once they land the desired spot in one school. They don't want to deal with the middle school level then again at high school. Cradle-to-college schools have the most appeal.

**Parish Day School,** which currently goes through sixth grade, has officially created a task force to investigate the possibility of extending beyond sixth grade into junior high. No promises, Head of School Gloria Snyder says.

While most other private schools enrollment numbers soar, Parish has gone from 415 in 1989 to 434 in '94 and 428 this year. That's true even at Lamplighter.

Although the school continues to help its students make the transition from the fourth grade to Dallas' most exclusive private schools, enrollment at Lamplighter has taken a slight downturn. In 1989, 445 students attended the school; this year, 440.

**THE LAMPLIGHTER SCHOOL**

1111 Inwood Road, Dallas (214-369-9201)

**ADMISSION:** 3- and 4-year-olds come for a family interview; K-4 applicants go through a family interview, an individual assessment, and a group assessment. **THE BILL:** $8,500 for pre-schoolers up to $9,895 for primary grades (due in one lump sum in July). Financial aid is available. **THE PayOFF:** 44 members of the last year's graduating class attended private schools, the greatest number starting fifth grade at Hillcrest Academy, Greenthill, St. Mark's, and Hackaday. ESD and Lakehill seem especially impressed with Lamplighter students. Lakehill offered 15 spots (4 accepted); ESD offered 12 spots to students (5 accepted). Four graduates went to public schools. **PARENTS SAY:** Emphasize creativity. Huge library. Teachers really turn students on to learning, even creating individual learning plans for those having trouble in one area or excelling in another. Parents want the school to extend past the fourth grade.

**PARISH DAY SCHOOL**

14115 Hillcrest Road, Dallas (972-239-8011)

**ADMISSION:** 3- and 4-year-olds go through individual and group screening and must submit an evaluation form by a current teacher (if they have one). Applicants for kindergarten and primary grades take tests and submit report cards, teacher evaluation forms. **THE BILL:** $2,820 for your 3-year-old to go two days a week, $6,735 for K-6. **THE PayOFF:** Kids with a stable foundation who attend schools like ESD, Cistercian, Jesuit, Ursuline, Hackaday. The alumni news section of Parish's newsletter shows they are often on the honor roll and active in the arts. **PARENTS SAY:** According to a recent survey, they choose the school for three main reasons: religion, reputation, and academics. Kids—and their extremely involved parents—cry when they graduate the sixth grade. Both hate to leave this safe, loving haven, even though they excel at the next level. Parents long for a junior high program.
Dallas International School
6309 Churchill Way, Dallas (972-991-6379)
Parlez-vous Français?
Well, your kids would if they attended the Dallas International School.

In some ways, ESD is like a public private school.
Father Stephen Swann started the school in a Galveston beach house 25 years ago. ESD's unique advisory system—in which one teacher shepherds eight students for two years, eating lunch with them every day—shows that its staff feels education goes way beyond books and computers. Teachers are there to cultivate the students' minds and souls (chapels attendance is mandatory each morning).

Keep Those Dollars Rolling

Episcopal School of Dallas; Greenhill, Jesuit, TCA—sell out faster than Crystal Charity and raise more bucks: more than $400,000 this year at Hockaday. Attendance is enormous. Jesuit's benefit annually draws at least a thousand parents. Prep school benefits are more fun, less formal than Dallas prany social circles. Several years back St. Michael's parents showed what "really" happens at a Princely Princess camp-out: dads put the little gals to sleep in the tents, then cheerleaders roll in carts of finely rolled Cubans, fresh-floved Nova Scotia salmon, a liqueur cart, and exotic dancers.

As with most philanthropic projects these days, the auctions are sophisticated productions. Consultants have been consulted—pro bono, of course—on how to host wrestle the bucks out of parents and grandparents. The teasing begins early in the spring, countless fliers, car pool line T-shirt sales, phone calls. Ticket prices are usually affordable—below $100 a couple. The auction program gets packed early and all the live and silent auction items are written up often by pros at local ad agencies. Parents volunteer on mass to help things run smoothly and you never get a letter in the mail saying tuition will be less next school year.

The volunteer shake-down begins in early September at the first Parents Meeting. St. Mark's has Trumell Crew has been known to sing lust at St. Mark's, pudding-pushers know long after working the lunch line with Dolly Kyle Browning that President Clinton dined with other women. And cashiers in the school store had a feeling Rock Weathers was heading for trouble.

But the most fun and hard work come with each school's auction.
Charity auctions at Dallas' top private schools—Hockaday, St. Mark's, St. Michael's have Eiseman and Lagor, but where else can you buy a mystery dinner for twelve in Gene Phillips' Preston Hollow mansion, an Arabian night with John and Lyn Muse, golf clubs signed by Lee Trevino, a face lift by Hunt Neuros and Jack Gunner? Stellar vacation homes in Maine, Martha's Vineyard, Utah, Telluride for several thousand a visit; ranch weekends come complete with hunting and guides. If little Susie's sixteenth birthday is coming up, get her new car at the auction. Carl and Peggy Sewell have donated so many cars to the auctions his company may turn a profit since the kids graduate. John and Jennifer Eagle have also contributed a car a year to ESD's auction the last six years.

Here's what would go over very well at future auctions: an investment seminar taught by Tom Hicks, Makeover tips by Jinger Heath, City Councilwoman for a day, donated by Laura Miller.

At the auctions, you get a clear picture of the competition your child faces in school everyday nudging elbows with the genetic offspring of the rich and powerful. One year some ESD dads almost got into a fist fight over a trip out west. The auctioneer was refereed—finally, the donor agreed to offer her mountain home for two weeks. At Brav St. Mark's last spring, a beloved teacher was getting the crowd worked up over a hot live auction item and became so revved up he passed out. Fifteen prominent physicians in the room jumped to his aid. Most were alumni.

—Mary Candace Evans
ESD became one of Dallas' largest cradle-to-college schools when it merged with St. Michael (which offered kindergarten through sixth) in 1995. The school has recently expanded its athletic fields, has a new chapel, and offers a concurrent college enrollment program with SMU.

**ADMISSION:** ESD's admission committee looks at the applicant and family, preferring students with a high intelligence and emotional maturity. To determine how well-rounded a potential student is, admission staff looks at standardized tests, a student's past record, teacher recommendations, and requires an interview with someone from the admissions staff. But if your three-year-old is accepted into the Beginners class, he's in till he graduates. Or gets kicked out. **COST:** $4,200 for your three-year-old's three half days up to $12,500 for your high school senior. Financial aid is available. **THE FUTURE:** Harvard, Georgetown, Yale, SMU, Baylor, UT. 100 percent of graduates attend college. Of the 1999 graduating class, 55 percent received scholarships totaling almost $2.9 million, including 32 full-tuition scholarships. **PARENTS SAY:** Many parents like the fact that ESD is co-ed and isn't as small as many other private schools (about 1,000 students attend). While religion is taught, students aren't beaten over the head with it. Discipline and good behavior are important. Although the agreement with St. Michael makes it difficult for outsiders to adjust, parents feel staff sees their kids as an entire person, not just a student to be taught lessons. Parents feel the adviser-lunch set-up is a good one, although students sometimes wish they could share their P.B.'s with a different group. Most of the student population comes from affluent North Dallas.

**FIRST BAPTIST ACADEMY**
Eravy at Patterson, Dallas (214) 969-2488

First Baptist takes advantage of its unique downtown location. Students visit the DMA. They go to the symphony. Many use DART trains and buses to get to school. And the science teacher, mindful of the resources a 10th-floor downtown classroom offers, makes good use of the pigeons.

He feeds them. And he uses them for dissection.

First Baptist differs from other private schools in Dallas in that parents—often from the suburbs—enroll their children often for the diversity the school provides. In the school's downtown campus (First Baptist also has an East campus that is K-6), 25 percent of students are minorities; 46 percent in the elementary program.

Michael Beidel has been the school's headmaster for three years. Previously, he was headmaster at Trinity Christian and a math teacher at St. Mark's. "What I love about this place is that we are a cross-section of Dallas society," Beidel says. "We have 91 zip codes represented here. We are diverse geographically, ethnically, and socio-economically."

Religion classes are required at all grade levels. Students go to chapel once a week, and the Bible is used in other classes where appropriate. The school recently completed an athletic complex in East Dallas, 10 minutes from the school, with football and baseball fields and tennis courts.

**ADMISSION:** Many grades are full or close to full. Previous records, test scores, and (in bold print in the admissions information) "a commitment to Jesus Christ and Christian education." First Baptist is looking for parents and students with an evangelical Christian, although not necessarily Baptist, lifestyle. **THE BILL:** $10,905 for kindergarten up to $11,680 for seniors; 20 percent of students are on financial aid. **THE FUTURE:** Texas A&M, UT-Austin, Baylor, Rice, Boston University, Cornell; 85 percent of graduating seniors attend a four-year college. **PARENTS SAY:** The school's humanities program has always been great. Since Beidel came to the school, he has greatly improved the science and math programs. Parents want the Christ-centered education and believe their graduates are prepared for college in more ways than academic. The school is not elitist and parents enjoy the diversity. Extra-curricular activities—sports, band, drill team—are a big attraction. "The school has a strong emphasis on volunteer work," says Julie Thomas, the parent of two First Baptist graduates.

**GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL SCHOOL**
11122 Midway Road, Dallas (214) 357-1610

A typical day includes chapel, international music and art, and maybe a look at worms, composting, or acid rain. Good Shepherd also features its"classroom of the Earth," including nature walks and hikes for the younger kids, overnight camping, and, eventually, several-day hiking and backpacking trips to Big Bend and Rocky Mountain national parks.

Good Shepherd has been under construction for the last few years. An expansion and renovation of the pre-K facility in 1996, a new middle school building in 1997, a new dining facility/performing arts center in 1998, and a new lower school building this year.

Unlike many schools that strive to become cradle-to-college facilities, Good Shepherd is happy to stop at the eighth grade, seeing no need to expand since their students get in anywhere they want to go.

**ADMISSION:** Students applying for 2nd through 8th grades visit classes. Kids of all ages are tested for entrance and must supply teacher evaluations. **THE BILL:** $14,994 for pre-K to $16,000 in 8th grade. Financial aid is available. **THE FUTURE:** 100 per-
Greenhill School
4141 Spring Valley Road, Addison (972-661-1211)

Greenhill is the flower child of Dallas’ top private schools. But these hippies are learning Spanish as toddlers and getting into Ivy League schools when they graduate.

Greenhill was Dallas’ first co-ed, non-denominational private school, opening in 1950 and coming into its own during the ’60s and ’70s with trendy open classrooms. Its current headmaster, Peter Briggs, has tried to take the school more mainstream, still remaining highly academic.

The 78-acre campus (which includes a football stadium, 12 tennis courts, a windmill, and a creek) is a place where students focus on being well-rounded individuals who are a part of their community and more than prepared for life after Greenhill—emotionally and academically.

Admission: Competition gets tougher each year. Greenhill uses tests and interviews to determine a student’s intellectual curiosity, self-motivation, academic ability, and enthusiasm for community involvement. The bill: $8,650 for pre-K and kindergarten; $10,380 for elementary school; $12,120 for 7-12; 14 percent of students receive financial aid. The payoff: One hundred percent of graduates attend college. Brown, Cornell, Georgetown, Harvard, Yale, Rice. UT-Austin. Parents say: "The diversity (23 percent of students are minorities) and acceptance are big pluses to Greenhill parents. The debate program is nationally recognized. "The teacher really knows my child," says parent/alum Janet Kafka.

The Highlands School
1451 East Northgate Drive, Irving (972-554-1890)

John Paul II would feel right at home here.

Students have mass, confession, sacrament of the Baptism. Last year, 30 students from The Highlands School celebrated Pentecost in Rome: "That’s part of living your faith," explains Susan Norton, director of admissions at the school. "There isn’t a set of rules, a list. It’s something that has to be lived. As one person put it, it’s in their air they breathe here."

The school started with six kids in someone’s living room and in 12 years has grown to 460 students on a 35-acre wooded campus in Irving. The school is directed by The Legionaries of Christ—an order of Catholics who run more than 100 similar schools worldwide, mostly in Mexico. The order is orthodox but quite “forward-looking,” staff explains.

The Highlands’ philosophy is three-fold: to teach the intellect, to educate the heart, to form the character. Father Steven Reilly, who serves as the school’s president, knows the name of every student.

Eighty percent of students are Catholic, and aspects of the faith are taught at every grade level. Boys and girls go to school together until the 4th grade; from that point on, they are separate. Sports, especially soccer, are huge here. Coached by Tita from the Dallas Sidekicks, the boys’ soccer team won state two years ago.

Admission: Tests are given K-12th. Staff also looks at essays of recommendation and transcripts, sacramental records of all Catholic applicants, and a family interview with Father Reilly are required. The Bill: $5,200 for pre-K through 5th; $6,100 for high school. Catholicget a $500 a year discount. The Payoff: One hundred percent of graduates go to college. Many go to Texas schools, others to Stanford, Notre Dame, Vanderbilt, Smith, the Citadel. Parents say: "Parents, many of whom move to Irving to be closer to the school, run the school store. They are leaders of boys’ and girls’ clubs. They help coach sports teams. Behavior codes are rigor and strict, and out of school. Kids feel they can talk to the clergy. "In Dallas, we kind of suffer from the My-Kids-Has-To-Go-To-Harvard syndrome," says Carol Ackels, who has four kids at The Highlands and one who just transferred to Jesuit, her husband’s alma mater. "Although the academics are excellent here, the school really works with parents in a partnership, forming and forming a whole person."

The Hockaday School
11600 Welch Road, Dallas (214-363-6311)
All girls. All bright. All studying. All the time.

Hockaday—St. Mark’s estrogen-laden counterpart in the top echelon of Dallas private schools—has deep pockets, deep tradition, and deep school spirit.

Hockaday’s program is based on four cornerstones: scholarship, character, athletics, and courtesy. Hockaday is studying the Byzantine Era in the second grade, using Lego blocks connected to their computers in the fifth, and volunteering at the North Texas Food Bank between classes such as Values of the Victorian Woman and Web Design and Publications by high school.

While “diversity week” seems ironic—it features an Asian fashion show—Hockaday has made great strides in diversity with a minority population of 23 percent.

Admission: About four girls apply for each spot at Hockaday. There are 36 openings in each pre-K class. Other than that first shot, Hockaday’s “points of entry” are 5th, 7th, and 9th grades (15-17 new spots at each unless someone moves. Student testing, student and family interviews are important. But so is legacy.

The Bill: $4,760 for pre-school to $12,845 for high school (boarders pay up to $25,045). 115 students last year took advantage of more than $1 million in financial aid offerings. The Payoff: Columbia, Harvard, Julliard, University of California at Berkeley, Yale. Parents say: "Parents feel they are giving their child the best education a girl can get. They may not care if their daughters go to Harvard, but the fact that many graduates get Ivy League offers means something. Parents used to think the science department wasn’t up to par (because it was an all-girls school), but not so anymore. Junior year is the most difficult, and girls don’t get much sleep."

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Jesuit College Preparatory School
12345 Inwood Road, Dallas (972-387-8700)

In the days of metal detectors, this place runs on the honor system. If you're caught stealing, you're out.

Jesuit is a boys-only school for grades nine through 12—boys from many backgrounds and socio-economic groups (less than 80 percent are Caucasian.) The school is building a counseling center, science wing with six new labs, an assembly hall, fine arts classrooms, and music facilities.

Community involvement and academics go together like Catholics and communion at Jesuit. Seniors must contribute at least 100 hours of community service; most average more than 200 hours.

ADMISSION: Two students apply for each spot at Jesuit. Applicants take the ISEE, submit their junior high transcripts as well as recommendation forms from their English and math teachers, and go through interviews. COST: $6,750 a year. Need-based scholarships available. About 25 percent of students participate in a work grant program to offset tuition costs. Jesuit also offers a suggested tax-deductible donation each year—ranging from $750 to $850—to make up the difference between the tuition rate and the school's actual bills. Some parents pay more, some pay less.

THE PAYOFF: Harvard, Cornell, Northwestern, Princeton, Yale. As of May, the class of 1999 had been given $5.7 million in university scholarships. PARENTS SAY: Colleen Aderhold asked a lot of people about their alma mater before selecting a school for his sons. "When I asked guys from Jesuit what stood out about their experiences there, the first thing they would talk about would be community service, how the school taught them the value of giving back to the community." Sports, especially football, live up to the Texas high school fever at the school.

Lakehill Preparatory School
2720 Hillside Drive, Dallas (214-826-2931)

Lakehill was founded 25 years ago by the same educators who created the Greenhill School. Compared to most Dallas private schools, facilities are simple here—the school is located in an old church with one sports field, a small library, and a gym.

The school has 270 students this year, compared to 260. Ten years ago, Lakehill is in the process of renovating the entire school, adding 11 new classrooms, an auditorium that seats 450, a student commons room, and a student computer lab.

ADMISSION: Lakehill is trying to expand, adding new classes for kindergarten, first, and seventh grades. For other grades, enrollment is difficult. Lakehill uses admissions tests, teacher recommendations, student questionnaires and essays, as well as a review of students' previous academic standing and conduct. THE BILL: $6,770 for kindergarten up to $9,190 for high school. THE PAYOFF: Vanderbilt, Georgetown, Northwestern, Duke, SMU. PARENTS SAY: Lakehill is a very close-knit community without a lot of cliques. Academics are tough, putting students at least a grade ahead of other schools. Because of the school's size, anyone who wants to play sports can—there are no tryouts.

Lutheran High School of Dallas
5454 Stults Road, Dallas (214-349-8912)

Oprah would love this school.

The academic program at Lutheran—a small, two-campus school in Northeast Dallas—centers around reading and writing. Its Book-A-Month club—in which every student reads a book each month and writes a report—exemplifies the importance teachers here put on the written word.

Students read Faulkner, Shakespeare, Conrad, and Fitzgerald.

"Reading is the key to whatever they want to do the rest of their lives," says Steven Lund, head of the English department and creator of the Book-A-Month program. "I have the radical belief that not only can all students learn to read, but that they learn to love Shakespeare."

Lund has had former students fax him their first papers in college. One student received an A-minus from him on a paper, only to turn in the same
Religion is important, too, although only 30 percent of students are Lutheran. Students have religion class once a day and chapel once a week.

**ADMISSION:** Tests, a student questionnaire, previous principal and teacher evaluations, and interviews all play a part in getting into Lutherans. The EISS: $5,120 for grades 7-8, $6,950 for 9-12. Scholarships are available. **THE PAYOFF:** Texas A&M, SMU, UT-Austin, Baylor, Air Force Academy, Notre Dame, Citadel. 90 percent of graduates go to a four-year college; 8 percent to a two-year school.

**PARENTS SAY:** Because the school is small (280 students), kids get lots of individual attention. Although the school is not noted for its ability to teach kids with learning differences, parents of LD students say their children do well here. The small faculty means kids often have the same teachers for years.

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL**
848 Harter Road, Dallas (214-328-9131)

Walter Sorensen says his school is the best-kept secret in Dallas. Well, we're outing it.

Walter Sorensen's school is St. John's, and it is very much a community school, with most of its 493 students coming from the White Rock/Lakepark/East Dallas area. The sprawling campus, which is tucked away in a White Rock neighborhood, is home to students for pre-K through the eighth grade.

St. John's is known for its art program. The school has an acoustic sound music room, a full-size gym, and a "wildeape" area, where the students can get back to nature sitting by the lily pond-filled pond or caring for the many flowers. St. John's kids go to the Farmer's Market to buy pumpkins, then study how fast they deteriorate. The kids go to Kuby's when they're studying German and can take "Star Trek Science" if they choose.

So there. The secret's out.

**ADMISSION:** Last year, the school had 16 openings for K-8. Candidates must visit the school, take an entrance exam, and provide recommendations from teachers and school records. The process is more relaxed for pre-K and kindergartners, who go through an informal evaluation. **THE BILL:** $2,740 to $4,643. **THE PAYOFF:** Most students attend private high schools, with a large percentage in honors courses.

**PARENTS SAY:** Parents describe St. John's as nurturing, a mix of academics and athletics. Sports aren't too competitive, which allows everyone to participate. Some parents say the school is too large to accommodate kids who need special attention, others say they've easily accommodated their children with learning differences.

**ST. MARK'S SCHOOL OF TEXAS**
10600 Preston Road, Dallas (214-346-8000)

This school's reputation precedes it. Whether that reputation is accurate, though, is the question.

Yes, it's the place where the kids work constantly, getting by on only a few hours sleep most nights of their tenure. Yes, it's where names are dropped and lifetime contacts are made.

St. Mark's also has a reputation as a rich kid's school—lots of wealthy Dallas families call it their alma mater. But it is much more diverse than you would think: 23 percent of its students are minorities, as are 17 percent of the faculty. Currently, 15 percent of the school's students receive financial aid.

Amed Holtberg, the school's headmaster, says he is most proud of the school's "exceptionally strong academic curriculum, coupled with outstanding and varied instructional practices, as well as our rich commitment to the development of the whole boy through a rich and varied co-curricular program." That's the tone grown-ups take when they talk about St. Mark's. The boys say it differently.

**ADMISSION:** Only one-third of those applying get in. All applicants, even those little 6-year-olds, take an on-campus test and an off-campus test (administered by a licensed psychologist). St. Mark's discourages parents from "prepping" their boys for tests and interviews, saying it simply makes them anxious. **THE BILL:** $10,515 for the early elementary years up to $13,360 for senior year (all due to practically one lump sum on July 1). **THE PAYOFF:** All state. St. Mark's graduates attend four-year colleges. All the big League schools are represented, but the greatest number of students in the last two years have attended UT, SMU, Vanderbilt, Emory, Harvard, and Duke, in that order.

**PARENTS SAY:** It seems to be a given that everyone believes this is the best education money can buy a boy (although Cistercian parents might disagree). This is as close as you'll get to an Eastern prep school in the Lone Star State.
TRINITY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
17001 Addison Road, Addison (972-931-8325)

Trinity is conservative in one sense and liberal in another, Headmaster Dan Russ says: "We are conservative because we hold to an historical Christian orthodoxy that focuses on the truth of the gospel and the Bible. We are liberal in that we teach a Christian liberal arts curriculum that enables our students to be free to think through all aspects of God's creation."

The school's foreign language lab is one being emulated by other schools. The lab can run two classes at the same time, can connect any combination of students at any booth to whatever level they need, has connecting computers that allow students to go online and read foreign newspapers. Trinity is adding a major addition to its lower school complex (more than 57,000 square feet) and two new playgrounds.

ADMISSION: About half of the students who apply are accepted. Tests, observation and family—not just students—interviews all play a part. Christianity is a must. THE BILL: $3,700 for kindergartens, up to $9,800 for senior year. Trinity gives about $850,000 in financial aid each year. THE PAYOFF: Georgetown, Harvard, Princeton, Baylor; 94 percent of graduates attend four-year colleges, with 6 percent going to two-year schools. PARENTS SAY: Small classrooms with plenty of time for individual attention and nurturing. Not an extremely diverse school, but one that is very inclusive instead of exclusive. English and writing classes are tops. Since Russ has been headmaster, Trinity has become a bit more updated, less judgmental. "He has an emphasis on classics and bringing them into the millennium, but not losing sight of the Christ-centered focus," says one parent.

URSULINE ACADEMY
4900 Walnut Hill, Dallas (214-363-6551)

Once thought of as the "other" girl's school, Ursuline now ranks right up there in the minds of Dallas parents as one of the "the" places to send your daughter for a first-rate private education.

Ursuline, which teaches grades nine through 12, is the old girl's school in Dallas. The Catholic prep school was founded in 1874 by the Ursuline Sisters of Dallas.

This school has deep tradition and deep pockets. The Preston Hollow campus sprawls over 25 acres. Other schools have computers in the classrooms. Ursuline students each have a laptop. Most schools offer French and Spanish. Ursuline juniors and seniors study Russian literature. Most schools celebrate Earth Day.

ADMISSION: Only half the students who apply land a spot. The admissions board looks at grades, teacher recommendations, and test scores. Applicants must also write a personal statement. THE BILL: $7,300. Scholarships, grants, and loans are available. THE PAYOFF: Most students go to Texas colleges, UTD, A&M, SMU and Baylor. Quite a few attend the Ivy Leagues, and many go to Catholic universities like Notre Dame and St. Mary's. Ninety-eight percent go to a four-year college. Fifty percent attending out of state. PARENTS SAY: Teachers really look after the students, going to them when there is a problem instead of waiting for the students to ask for help. The girls make life-long friends. Parents say the old administration created an atmosphere that was too structured—"Does the word Getup explain it?" one mom asks. Students were pretty beaten down emotionally, looking back on their high school years as a great academic but limiting social experience. The current generation of Ursuline girls has much more freedom.

WHITE ROCK MONTESSORI SCHOOL
1601 Oates Drive, Dallas (214-324-5580)

More Montessori parents are attracted to the educational philosophy as much or more than they are attracted to the private school concept. They think it sounds wonderful for pre-K, then plan to send their kids elsewhere.

Most at White Rock School never do.

In fact, parents have pushed White Rock. The school started 24 years ago, teaching pre-school. Soon, it expanded into elementary school, then into a middle school.

Last year, the school of 147 kids started the school year in its brand new building, nestled in a wooded area near White Rock Lake. Children are grouped in at three levels (ages 3, 4, and 5, for example). The teacher doesn't stand at the blackboard. Instead, children are given the tasks they must accomplish that day or week and do them at their own rate.

ADMISSION: Parents are still on the waiting list so early that many have already found another school or moved before they are accepted. Parents observe classrooms and meet the staff to see if they are a good fit. THE BILL: From $2800 for half-day preschool to $3952 for middle school. THE PAYOFF: About 95 percent of White Rock students go to college, attending Brown, Stanford, UCLA, SMU. At least six former students have been valedictorians of their high school classes. PARENTS SAY: The environment is nurturing and individualized. They talk about the calm, busy, yet quiet hum of the school, about the pre-school level, at kids go from station to station, learning at their own pace. Children with varying personalities fit in here. "My daughter never ever said she didn't want to go to school," says parent Pam Hoffman, whose daughter is in the sixth grade at White Rock.

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