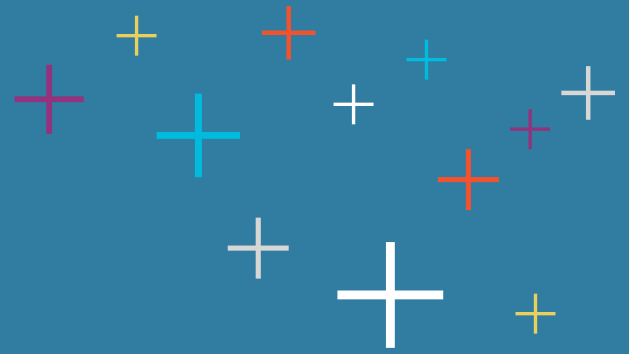


The
**Enrollment
Management
Association**



Yield Your Best



The Standard Application Online (SAO)

User Report
2015-2016

Why a "Common" Application?

Some schools feel that it is their application that sets them apart, but in fact, it is the differences between and among applications that makes the application process burdensome for families.



When school applications are confusing and nonstandard in both form and function, we create barriers to educational opportunity. In an era of declining demographics, smart independent schools strive to reduce the hurdles that students and families must clear in their search for a perfect school. Streamlining the application process allows enrollment leaders to do what they do best—focus on making the right match between their school and each applicant. Because when great schools enroll great students, everything is possible.

The Standard Application Online (SAO) is a free service provided by The Enrollment Management Association to member schools, in which students submit their information, essays, transcripts, and recommendations just once, online, to apply to as many of the nearly 500 member schools that accept it as they like.

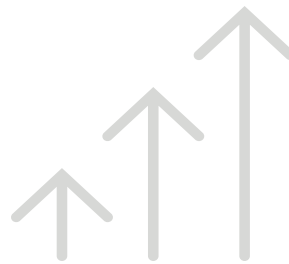
The SAO is used by small schools (with correspondingly small budgets, that cannot afford to onboard a costly vendor-based online application solution) and large, high-volume schools that value the efficiency afforded by online delivery. In addition, regional groups of schools interested in making the application process less arduous for families have embraced the SAO. Even those schools that require unique applicant information take advantage of the SAO by utilizing its supplemental form functionality.

Some schools feel that it is their application that sets them apart, but in fact, it is the differences between and among applications that makes the process burdensome for families. Show families that you value applicants—not applications. We are proud to offer the independent school community's only truly "common" application and to support the schools and families that use it.

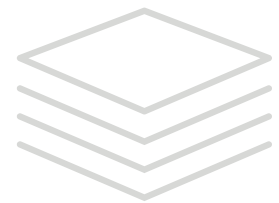
Nearly 500 Schools Accept the SAO



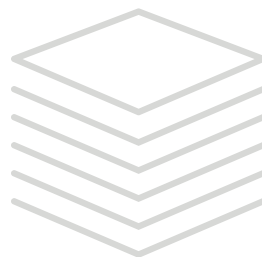
20% Growth in Applications for Schools Using the SAO



2014-2015*
27,556 Applications



2015-2016*
35,046 Applications

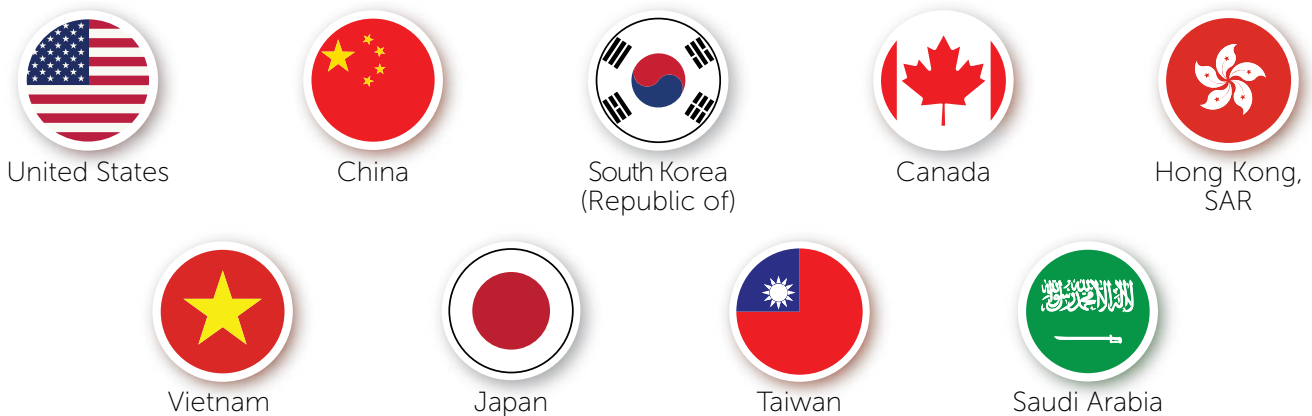


* Data updated to 06/24

SAO by the Numbers

Launched in 2005, the SAO was envisioned as a tool that would simplify the application process for both students and schools. It was immediately embraced by families and also by independent schools that recognized its value as a way to remove one of the barriers to independent school admission—the cumbersome application process. In the years since, the SAO has grown exponentially in use with both families and admission offices. It's seen numerous upgrades in response to rich member school feedback and new technological solutions that have made it possible for the entire process to be managed online. These solutions allow the online submission of transcripts and recommendations and the development of an API (application programming interface) that enables schools to seamlessly integrate SAO data

Top Applicant Countries of Origin



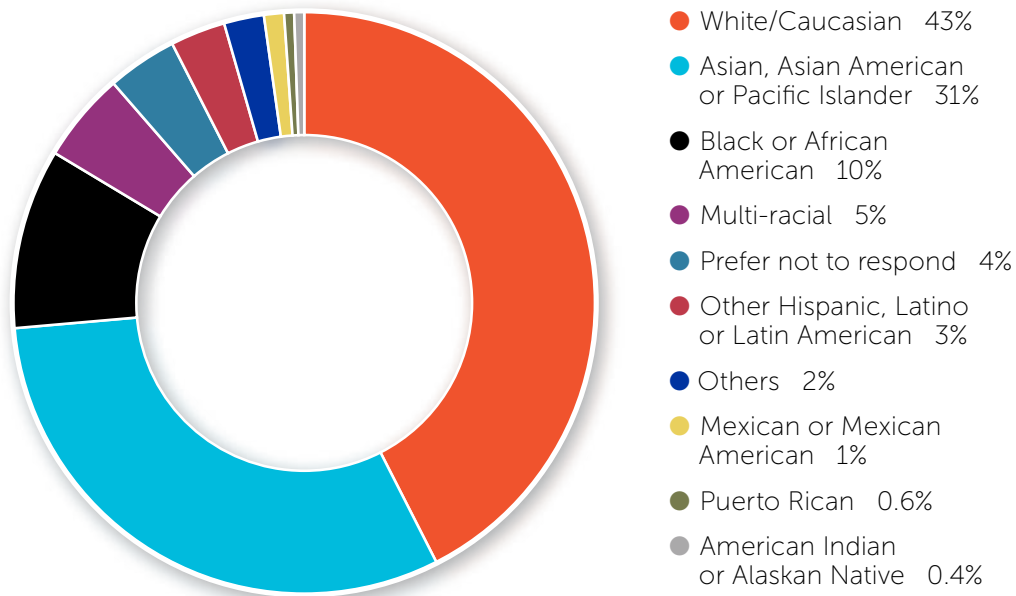
Native English Speaking Applicants





with their proprietary databases. We were also able to create and launch a program that streamlines the application process for students applying through community-based organizations (CBOs) and allows schools to accept the SAO only for this purpose. We've only recently added a marginal administrative fee to students for submitting an application (\$6, which is waived for students receiving application fee waivers) and maintained it as an exclusive membership benefit. These fees support enhancements to the system. In addition, The Association collects a school's application fee directly during the process, and disburses it fully to the school at regular intervals. We also maintain a support staff of experienced customer service representatives to provide both schools and families with troubleshooting assistance.

Unique Applicants by Ethnicity



54% of Applications are from U.S. Students



The SAO in our Schools

Paperless Office, Pleased Families



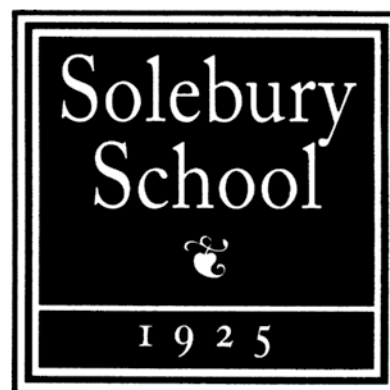
Solebury School has always accepted the SAO, so the change for us was really to use it exclusively and abandon our own application. The main reason was for efficiency and a goal of being a paperless office—I was sick of being inundated with paper. Even though the applications and recs came through our system, some people still printed them out and gave them to teachers (or teachers printed them out) so a lot of things still came to us via mail, or fax, or email. I became convinced that the value of the school-specific questions on our application and recommendations was minimal at best, and possibly nonexistent. Once this was clear to me, there was no question about going exclusively to the SAO. I wanted it to streamline our process, to make my office run smoother, and provide better service to families.

The SAO has allowed us to become a paperless office. I love being able to just download one PDF and have it be the entire file that I then share with the committee—it's easy for us in terms of file management and is easier for them to read. Additionally, rather than trying to make sure we have everything, scanning in parts of a file that came in via the mail, etc., we can focus our energies on following up with families and building our relationship with them. The SAO has eliminated duplication of materials in a file, and the occasional mishap that used to occur when a recommendation or a report card went missing, etc.

The feedback from families has been consistently positive. To be able to say to them, "I value your time and your teachers' time, and so we use this common application so that you can focus on continuing to do well in school and not filling out different applications" feels really good to me. The SAO family interface is intuitive and easy to use.

The biggest SAO savings for me are somewhat incalculable, but I know they are significant. We've saved reams of paper—I honestly don't even know how much, but it's a big number! And we've saved tons of time—probably 5-10 hours a week at our busiest points.

Scott Eckstein, Director of Admission, Solebury School (PA)





"Deciding to use the SAO completely has made every facet of my office more efficient—our file management, our interaction with families, the reading of files by the committee, etc. It's one of the best administrative decisions I have made at my school."

-Scott Eckstein



Paper-based Reading System, Seamless Process

Tabor still utilizes a paper-based reading system, though we accept the SAO exclusively. Although we have to print the applications, the SAO has made the collection process much easier. The Enrollment Management Association has done a tremendous job in making the process smoother each year. It was always very good; now it is excellent! The process is very user-friendly and intuitive. I know that The Association worked hard on that, and it is much appreciated.

*Nita Howland, Administrative Assistant,
Admissions, Tabor Academy (MA)*



"The process is very user-friendly and intuitive. I know that The Association worked hard on that, and it is much appreciated."

-Nita Howland

Meeting Students in St. Louis: ISSL Schools Adopt the SAO (Again!)

The Independent Schools of St. Louis (ISSL), early adopters of the SAO, decided a few years ago to pursue other application options. Yet, after a less than satisfactory experience, ISSL looked anew at the SAO.



"We always saw a value in a common application," said Jamie Driver, Executive Director, Independent Schools of St. Louis (ISSL). "And when our consortium started the review process, we quickly saw that the SAO had become a one-stop shop for families—using just one login to register for the test and apply to one of our schools. The combination eliminates barriers, and is clearly the best tool for tracking the status of an application. This helps anxious families feel in control and lessens some of their anxiety, while removing the burden of family calls so many admission offices receive day after day. We have to put families first in this process, and the SAO does just that."

From a school perspective, Driver explained that the ISSL group was impressed by the evolution of the SAO, noting that many of the recommendations presented by ISSL schools had been implemented over the years, improving the product tenfold. Seeing that so many of ISSL's suggestions had been implemented has made the transition easy," she explained.

ISSL schools were concerned about maintaining the identity of the application specific to each school, but Driver explained that the SAO put the consortium at ease. "Some schools may worry that with a standard application there is no way to set your school apart from the others, yet the SAO allows supplements that quickly allow schools to maintain and address their identity and culture in the application process with just the upload of a PDF. It was a great selling point for our schools."

Driver explains that the decision is about more than just the SAO. "From the association side, The Enrollment Management Association is at the forefront of trends that affect every one of our schools. It's so important to our schools and membership to have the robust professional development support from The Association to help reach our career goals, to have the test to support student assessment, and to access data from all the services to help us make our informed decisions. The SAO is just part of the full package that The Association can offer, and we're thrilled to get our schools using this fantastic product."

Jamie Driver, Executive Director, Independent Schools of St. Louis (ISSL)

"SAO allows supplements that quickly allow schools to maintain and address their identity and culture in the application process with just the upload of a PDF. It was a great selling point for our schools."
-Jamie Driver

Making Applying Easier

Mercersburg has accepted the SAO application for over 10 years as an option for students applying to multiple schools, but we chose to use the SAO exclusively this past year. Our primary reason for this was that we wanted the process to be more streamlined for families who were already completing the SAO for other schools. We didn't want families to feel they needed to submit our Mercersburg online application in order to appear as a "better" candidate to our school. We also hoped the online application status and application support through The Enrollment Management Association would alleviate some of the demand on human resources internally.

Once we adopted the SAO exclusively, the admission staff noticed a significant decrease in calls from families with questions and issues.

My favorite feature about the SAO is the real-time updates and online application status designations for families. The application process seemed more streamlined, and we think families benefited by having just one place and one login for accessing and submitting all of their information (i.e. testing, recs, and application materials).

100% of our applicants used the SAO, and we definitely saw a slight increase in our overall application numbers. Although we moved to a fully digitized approach three years ago, using the SAO certainly further reduced our need to print as much and lessened the amount of paper documents families submitted directly to us. We manage our applications through the API automated process. This has worked very well for our office this year.

We are strong supporters for the use of a common application such as the SAO. We chose to use it exclusively not because we hoped to see a drastic increase in our applicant pool, but instead because we believe it is important to make the process of applying to all of our schools less daunting and laborious for prospective families, particularly with the knowledge that students are now applying to more schools than ever. Our use of a short supplement still allows us to remain distinct, as well as to collect Mercersburg-specific information from our applicants.

*Quentin McDowell,
Senior Associate Director of Admission & Financial Aid,
Mercersburg Academy (PA)*



Making Families the Priority

It is a priority for all schools to make the application process easier for families. Allowing families to register for the SSAT and complete an online application, all under one umbrella, one username, is only common sense. This is now the expectation of families applying to our schools.

The SAO supports our school's goals in online application processing, and we appreciate the support The Enrollment Management Association provides; the SAO support staff is very responsive when we or a family have questions. Additionally, the SAO makes tracking the application pieces quick and easy. Applicants are able to easily send us application materials, and we instantly see what they've submitted. Our favorite feature is the activity chart.

Caroline LaVigne, Director of Admissions and Tuition Aid, John Burroughs School (MO)



"Allowing families to register for the SSAT and complete an online application - all under one umbrella, one username, is only common sense."

-Caroline LaVigne



All Access Pass: The SAO/CBO Program

Access. For children dually confronted by little familiarity with the independent school world and the challenges of a disadvantaged background, the word *access* can mean something as simple as filling out just one, free application to schools. Over the years, The Enrollment Management Association has provided member schools and organizations with millions of dollars in fee waivers for testing. This year, we added another tool to simplify the equation for families and access organizations—a new program that combines the Standard Application Online (SAO) and a school’s application fee waiver process to provide children (and the access organizations with which they work) a simple, quick, and one-stop application option.

The Community-Based Organization (CBO) program, launched as a pilot program in 2015, has proven to be a remarkably useful tool for the access organizations that signed on to utilize it, as well as the schools using it to accept applications. In 2015-16, Oliver Scholars and Breakthrough New York helped 78 families submit 269 applications to a total of 63 schools.

Members of The Association who accept the SAO are automatically eligible for and enrolled in the CBO program; for those who do not use the SAO for general admission, it is possible to use the SAO exclusively for the CBO program. Several of our member schools (Choate Rosemary Hall (CT), St. Andrew’s School (DE), and St. Paul’s School (NH) elected to do just that, and saw increased applications from access organization students this season.

To utilize the program, counselors in an access organization work with their students to identify the schools to which they will apply. They then help the student complete a single SAO application and submit it to the chosen schools free of charge. Additionally, the school’s application fee is automatically waived for applicants identified under this program. There is no additional paperwork for admission offices, and students and organizations have a streamlined tool that makes the application process much easier to understand and employ, with an intuitive workstation that makes it simple for families to track these applications.

We anticipate broad usage of the CBO by a range of access organizations in 2016-17 and encourage members who do not currently utilize the SAO in their admission process to use it specifically for the purpose of increasing access via this program. For more information, visit the CBO webpage at enrollment.org/CBO or contact us at members@enrollment.org.



A CBO's Perspective

How has the SAO/CBO program affected the way kids at Breakthrough New York apply to schools?

The SAO/CBO program really simplified the application process in many ways. First, the SAO application itself is very user-friendly, which, in turn, really helped our families to navigate the application process independent of a lot of BTNY support. In addition, the back-end view for BTNY staff allowed us to keep tabs on each student's application, quickly identifying missing pieces, holes in applications, or portions that needed improvements. The one-stop hub really streamlined the process overall, and it was awesome that SO MANY schools accepted one application.

Did you receive any feedback from kids and families about the ease of using the SAO?

The BTNY students and families appreciated how user-friendly the application was. They found it easy to use.

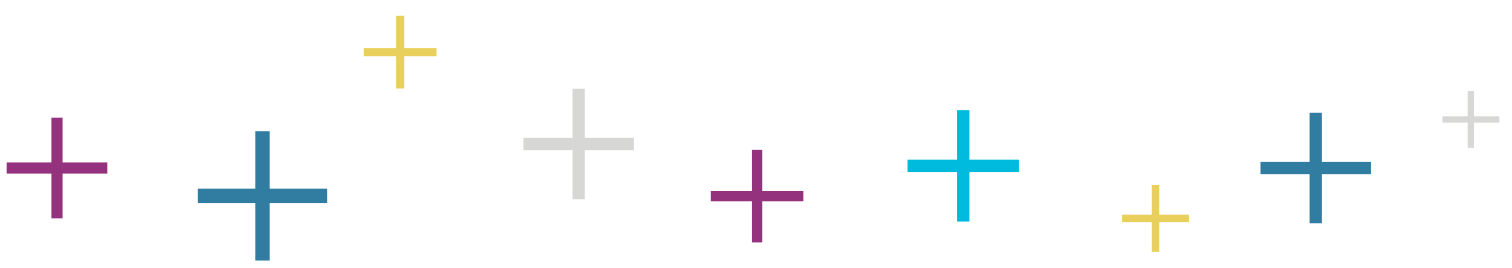
Did you find that the program streamlined your process?

The automatic fee waivers was a huge time saver and incredible! The process was definitely streamlined.

How have the final results been?

We received great results! We submitted 162 applications using the SAO. Our application coaches saved hours each week due to the ease of uploading documents, and the SAO's advisor interface made it so much easier for them to review applications. This year, with the help of the SAO, BTNY increased independent school acceptances by 54%, ensuring 100% of BTNY 8th grade students are on track to matriculate to college preparatory high schools in and outside of New York City.

*Whitney Mufson,
Middle School Director,
Breakthrough, NY (NY)*



A Family's Perspective

Juan Carlos and Lina Gonzalez's daughter, Laura, is an Oliver Scholars student who used the SAO to apply to schools this year. She will attend The White Mountain School (NH) this fall.

Thinking about the application process for private schools, how difficult did you anticipate that it would be?

We anticipated the process to be more logistically challenging than what we actually experienced. The application process was more emotionally challenging for our family.

When you heard about the Standard Application Online (SAO) that Oliver Scholars is using, what were your first thoughts?

We felt a sign of relief. Our first thought was we only have to work with ONE website to submit all our boarding school applications and supplements!

Did you find the process (using the SAO to apply) easier or more difficult than you originally anticipated?

We found the process to be much easier than we anticipated. We found the SAO website to be user friendly and easy to navigate. We also had the opportunity to access webinars and workshops to help us familiarize with the entire process before we began our application.

What was the best thing about applying to schools using the SAO through Oliver Scholars?

The best thing about applying to schools using the SAO through Oliver was its partnership. We never felt alone in the process. Our guidance counselor, Melissa Providence, organized a webinar for Oliver Scholar families with The Enrollment Management Association, so we understood the application process before going into it. She also managed all our school documents (teacher recommendations and transcripts) as our SAO online advisor, and we had access to check the status of both our family and our school document uploads at any time.

"We were engaged in the SAO application process because we felt a strong partnership between The Enrollment Management Association and Oliver Scholars. We found the SAO platform to be user friendly and found it easy to keep track of our application status."

The Gonzalez family



Did you go online to track your application(s) once the initial pieces were complete?

Yes, we checked the status of our application regularly until all the columns read submitted and turned from red to green.

What would you tell another family going through this process for the first time?

Take a deep breath and trust that it will all work out in the end. Even during moments of confusion, the process is not as complex as it may initially seem. Take it one step at a time. Organize your thoughts and documents in one clearly marked folder for easy access. Make the time to attend available SSAT workshops or online webinars before you begin the journey. Mark your electronic or paper calendar with interviews, test dates and application deadlines. And if you are working with your school or an Oliver Scholars guidance counselor, be grateful for their help and mindful of their time. He or she will be a much welcomed extra set of eyes to help keep you on track, go over essays before you hit the submit button, and guide you through the process if doubt lurks in. Taking these steps will give you some peace of mind and keep you sane throughout the process.

If you could use three words to describe your experience using the SAO to apply to schools, what would they be?

Engaged. Supported. Satisfied!



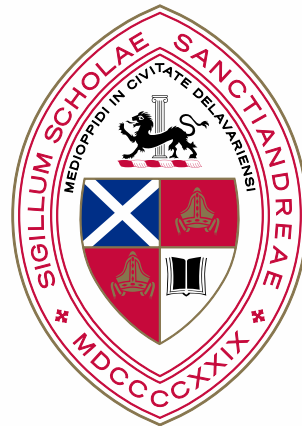


A School's Perspective

We could not have been happier with the outcome of our participation in the CBO Pilot program. With other methods of application, we see such a wide variety of application forms that it can be a bit of a challenge for us to compare and assess them. The SAO allowed over a dozen qualified applicants to apply to St. Andrew's with ease. We saved staff time spent gathering recommendations and transcripts; we helped lift the burden of multiple forms and communications off our hardworking colleagues at the schools and CBOs; and most importantly, it allowed us to meet great students we might not otherwise have encountered (one of whom sent her contract yesterday!) We hope this pilot program becomes a regular offering from the SAO.

*Matthew E. Wolinski, Director of Admission,
St. Andrew's School (DE)*

(St. Andrew's accepts the SAO for CBO applications only.)



"It (The SAO) allowed us to meet great students we might not otherwise have encountered."

-Matthew E. Wolinski

Getting SAO Data Into Your System—The API

Most schools work with providers to develop a single source for the data systems needed on campus, from student records to homework and notifications. Collecting data from the Standard Application Online (SAO) and moving it into these systems has proven challenging for many admission offices in the past. We knew it was essential to collaborate in order to allow our members to take full advantage of this powerful service.

Our Partners



In 2013, taking the lead on feedback provided by member school users of the SAO, we partnered with some of the industry's foremost system providers to venture into the API (Application Programming Interface) economy and develop a robust, gold-standard API - a customer interface for technology products that allows software components to communicate. This data bridge allows admission offices to seamlessly integrate information and data between unique school databases and the SAO.

Nearly 90 Schools use the API





With seven current partner providers and nearly 90 schools using the API to integrate their data, member schools are experiencing numerous benefits:

- Paperless admission office
- Reduction of operational costs
- Increased productivity (elimination of manual data entry, reconciliation, and printing needs)
- Reading process efficiencies
- Mundane data entry eliminated; refocus of precious time on the strategic use of readily available student data for marketing and recruitment
- API service is free of charge for members (data companies may charge for their implementation)
- Full control over what data you want and how you want it to appear in your unique database



Using the API: Saving Time and Effort

While we have used the SAO for several years, the new API integration with Senior Systems is a game changer. The data and files now transfer into our database automatically, saving us a tremendous amount of time, giving us more information than we could enter manually, and making paper files obsolete (finally). The entire application, with recommendations and score reports, is there with all of our existing data and is accessible from anywhere for file reading, notes, and follow-up. The SAO was already preferred by many of our applicants, and with the integration, it instantly became our preferred application!

This is an example of technology working as it should: saving time and effort for everyone involved.

*Bethanne Stish,
Admission Systems Manager,
Madeira School (VA)*



Streamlined Data Input, Less Chance for Error

Although we continue to use our paper and proprietary online applications, we accept the SAO as well, to make it more convenient for candidates to apply to our school, and apply concurrently to multiple schools. We found that the SAO has increased our volume of applications. Using the SAO has helped us manage a significant increase in the number of common applications we receive. It is a very helpful tool for storing, downloading, and referring to these applications during the peak of admission season.

Additionally, the new SAO interface through the inRESONANCE PWS system allows us to easily and cleanly input SAO data into our Filemaker database with minimal time-intensive manual data entry, thus reducing potential for input errors. It's a simple process - we refer to our member access portal as a data storage resource, and we print the applications from the website. Then we use the inRESONANCE PWS function to input SAO data directly into our Filemaker database.

Our families really appreciate the convenience of using the SAO to streamline the method and timing for schools to receive their applications, and to be able to check on the release and processing time of their application materials.

*Melissa Schuette, Associate Director of Admission,
Stevenson School (CA)*



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