How The Standard Application Online Helped St. Luke’s School Streamline Admissions and Reduce Paperwork by Nearly 90%

“Independent schools today have to work harder to maintain and increase enrollment. As a group, if we can make it easier for families to apply, all schools will benefit. The SAO is transformational — it has made our entire process more accessible and efficient for everyone.”

— Ginny Bachman, Director of Admission & Financial Aid, St. Luke’s School (CT)

THE BIG IDEA: Families deserve a better application experience.

As consumers, we like it when things are simple. We shop online and our passwords autosave. Our address pops up. Our payments prepopulate. One click and our items appear at our doorstep the next day. Poof!

This is, of course, by design. Companies have long focused on reducing friction in the sales process by removing any steps that might stop someone from completing a purchase. As business guru Seth Godin says, “If someone knows what they want, get out of their way and help them get it.”

So what does this mean for independent schools, as we strategize new ways to broaden our admissions funnels?

While independent schools are certainly not Amazon, and families are not purchasing their child’s education with a “Buy Now” button, parents are still consumers — and consumers are more demanding than ever.

The question now becomes: How can we evolve, as technology has, and reduce friction throughout the independent school admissions process in order to improve the overall application experience?
ST. LUKE’S SCHOOL’S SOLUTION: The Standard Application Online

Nearly a decade ago, St. Luke’s School in New Canaan, Conn., began rethinking its admissions process. Though the school enjoys robust enrollment, they wanted to remove unnecessary friction for families.

“Our philosophy has always been families first,” said Ginny Bachman, Director of Admission & Financial Aid. “We asked ourselves, ‘How can we make it easier for families to explore independent schools? And how can we get families more engaged at St. Luke’s right away?’

The grades 5–12 secular day school decided to split its application into two parts, punctuated by a family interview, in order to better connect with prospective families and avoid a backlog of administrative work. It was a success, so St. Luke’s continued to innovate.

“We knew families were changing the way they were accessing information,” Bachman said. “It was important to begin moving our application online.”

At first, the St. Luke’s admissions team struggled to find a solution that was flexible enough to best serve the diverse needs of its prospective families. Enter The Standard Application Online (SAO), a flexible, single solution where students can submit all application components once to any school that accepts it.

“We were attracted to the SAO because because both families and schools find it easy to use,” said Bachman. “It gets us the application pieces we need in a more streamlined fashion, we can customize certain components for our different divisions, and there’s seamless processing with our back-end enrollment management systems.”

St. Luke’s also appreciated the way the SAO integration would simplify the application review process for its committee — rather than shuffling paper folders between members, all files could now be reviewed online at a convenient place and time. “It’s just a much more efficient and cleaner process overall,” Bachman said.
THE BOTTOM LINE: “It’s a game-changer.”

Since fully adopting the SAO, St. Luke’s School has earned impressive results, including:

- A nearly 60% reduction in paperwork in Year 1
- An additional 90% paperwork reduction in Year 2
- Significant increase in Grade 9 applications
- A highly accelerated committee review process

Considering the SAO for your school? St. Luke’s advice:

“Try it. If you’re concerned, you can start by using both the SAO and your own application. It’s an easy transition; EMA’s customer service is excellent and incredibly responsive. By providing an online platform for families to learn and apply to multiple schools, SAO helps independent schools to better serve today’s families.”

— Ginny Bachman, Director of Admission & Financial Aid, St. Luke’s School (CT)