

Taft School

Watertown, United States



On 226 acres in Connecticut's Litchfield Hills, a 19-percent-acceptance boarding school still lives by one motto: to serve, not be served.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	79/100
Academic outcomes	79/100
University placement	78/100
Prestige & heritage	81/100
Alumni network	80/100
Facilities	84/100
Transparency	73/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Taft’s sales pitch is built into the place itself: ****226 acres**** in western Connecticut, about ****583 students****, and a boarding-school model that still expects adolescents to live close to adults who know them well. That matters more than the school’s polished facilities, though those are substantial: a 45,000-square-foot science and maths building, two theatres, two ice rinks, an 18-hole golf course and a library with 55,000 print volumes. The real draw is the combination of scale and supervision. Taft is big enough to offer serious sport, arts and academic range, but small enough for students to be known. The school quotes a ****1:5 teacher-student ratio**** and classes averaging 11, while the editorially verified figures put the ratio at ****10:1**** with an average class size of 18; either way, the market position is clear: this is a

high-attention, fully resourced American boarding school, not a loose, sink-or-swim campus.

What sets Taft apart is not novelty but discipline of purpose. The motto, “Not to be served but to serve”, could read as pious boilerplate at another school; here it sits at the centre of the school’s self-definition, alongside an honour code and a declared commitment to developing academic, artistic and athletic talent together. That combination gives Taft a recognisable shape in the US boarding market: *traditional*, *demanding* and invested in character without religious framing. It is also selective. A 19 per cent acceptance rate places it firmly in the competitive tier, and parents paying an average annual boarding fee of **US\$75,400** will expect substance. Taft’s NEASC and NAIS accreditations are standard for a school operating at this level; they do not distinguish it, but they confirm institutional seriousness.

The right student for Taft is not a narrow specialist. This is a school for teenagers who want breadth and can carry it: strong academics, competitive sport or committed arts, communal living, and a culture that places weight on conduct as well as performance. It suits boarders who thrive in *structured intensity* and who want the classic American independent-school experience rather than a progressive experiment or an urban day-school rhythm. It will appeal less to families hunting for radical flexibility, overt informality or a highly sheltered environment. Taft belongs on a shortlist because it offers something concrete and durable: a *serious* boarding education with scale, resources and a moral framework that the school has kept intact since 1890.

STRENGTHS

- Founded in 1890 by Horace Dutton Taft, brother of President William Howard Taft, giving the school over 130 years of continuous operating history.
- Small class sizes (average 11 students) and a 5:1 student-to-teacher ratio support close academic supervision across the curriculum.
- The school states it meets 100 percent of demonstrated financial need, with roughly a third of students receiving aid.
- 226-acre Watertown, Connecticut campus sits within a 95-mile drive of New York City and 125 miles of Boston, easing family visits and cultural access.
- Notable alumni span distinct fields, including U.S. Senator Robert A. Taft, Nobel laureate Alfred G. Gilman, and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn.

TRADE - OFFS

- Boarding tuition runs approximately \$75,250 and day tuition \$55,500 for 2025-26, placing it among the costliest US secondary options.
- Admission is highly selective, with an acceptance rate commonly cited around 16-19 percent, so entry is far from guaranteed even for strong applicants.
- With about 82 percent of students boarding, day students are a small minority and get comparatively less immersion in the dominant residential culture.
- The rural Litchfield County setting means no direct urban amenities on the doorstep, unlike city-based day schools.

ADMISSIONS

Entry points are primarily grade 9, with additional openings through grade 11 and a postgraduate year; the application deadline is January 15. Admissions is holistic, weighing academic transcripts, essays, extracurricular record, and recommendations, alongside SSAT scores (international applicants also submit TOEFL). Acceptance rates are commonly reported in the 16-19 percent range, indicating a highly competitive pool. Day-student places draw mainly from the surrounding Litchfield County area, while the large majority of the student body boards on campus.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (44)

SPORT: Barbara Potter, James Driscoll

MUSIC: Dudley Taft

DRAMA: Peter Berg, Dominique Dunne, Spencer Treat Clark, Grant Goodeve, Derek Li, Jill Kargman

LETTERS: Geoffrey T. Hellman, Marc Thiessen, Philip K. Howard, Tom Santopietro

POLITICS: Robert Ferdinand Wagner Jr., Earl E. T. Smith, Manuel Rocha, Nathaniel N. Craley Jr., Richard Funkhouser, William Howard Taft III, Leighton A. Hope

SCIENCE: Rollin G. Osterweis, Willy Oppenheim, Thomas Kuhn, Stevan Dedijer, Sumner Chilton Powell

BUSINESS: Harry Payne Bingham, Peter Berg, Adrian Cheng

WTS RATING 

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