

# The Bolles School

Jacksonville, FL, United States



*On a historic river bluff in Jacksonville, a swimming dynasty that has sent swimmers to Olympic podiums for decades.*

RANKING DIMENSIONS

|                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
| Overall              | 56/100 |
| Academic outcomes    | 72/100 |
| University placement | 68/100 |
| Prestige & heritage  | 60/100 |
| Alumni network       | 1/100  |
| Facilities           | 72/100 |
| Transparency         | 57/100 |

EDITOR'S VERDICT

The Bolles School occupies a distinct place in the US boarding-day market: a large, old-established Jacksonville independent school with serious scale, a full age range, and one athletic programme that changes the conversation. This is not a boutique prep school. It enrolls more than 1,800 students across four campuses, runs from Pre-K to Grade 12, and combines a US High School Diploma with Advanced Placement. The boarding cohort is small at 85 students, which matters. Families considering Bolles for boarding are buying into a predominantly day-school culture, not a traditional boarding institution built around houses and weekend life. That cuts both ways: the boarding offer has intimacy, but not the density or self-contained social world of larger American boarding schools. Fees are high, with Upper School

tuition at **\*\*\$34,660\*\*** and boarding at **\*\*\$70,770\*\***. For that price, parents need clear reasons to choose Bolles over stronger-known Northeast boarding brands or cheaper Florida day schools.

One reason is obvious: swimming. Bolles has a *\*rare sporting pedigree\** and a *\*hard-edged performance culture\** in the pool that few schools anywhere can match. For the right athlete, that alone puts it on the shortlist. More broadly, this is a school with the infrastructure to support ambitious students: **\*\*1:8\*\*** student-teacher ratio, average class size of 15, 305 faculty and staff, and meaningful financial aid at **\*\*\$5.5 million\*\***. Its history also matters. Founded in 1933, first as a boys’ military academy, it has had time to build traditions, expectations and alumni loyalty, while shedding the old military model decades ago. The result is a school with *\*institutional weight\** and a *\*settled sense of purpose\**, not a new entrant still inventing itself.

The academic proposition is solid, but parents should read it accurately. Bolles is a college preparatory school with AP, not an International Baccalaureate school and not a specialist STEM academy. It suits students who want a conventional American independent-school route, small classes, broad co-curricular participation and strong university preparation within an English-language environment. It suits families who value structure, organisation and visible school spirit. It will appeal less to students who want an overtly progressive culture, a highly experimental curriculum, or the intensity of a larger boarding community. The school talks about global citizenship, but the defining features here are scale, longevity, and performance.

So why shortlist Bolles? Because it offers a *\*commanding local reputation\**, *\*genuine breadth\**, and one exceptional athletic calling card in a city where few schools can match its reach. The best fit is the student who is motivated, competitive, comfortable in a substantial school community, and ready to use what Bolles has in abundance: facilities, programmes, and expectation. The strongest fit of all is the swimmer who wants serious training without giving up a full independent-school education. For that child, Bolles is not just relevant; it is *\*a compelling proposition\**.

STRENGTHS

- Nationally known competitive swimming program (the Bolles Sharks) with alumni including Olympic gold medalist swimmer Caeleb Dressel.
- Offers boarding for grades 8-12 alongside a day program from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, drawing a mix of local and international students.
- Broad Advanced Placement course catalogue across sciences, humanities and arts supports a US college-preparatory track.
- Long-established institution, founded in 1933, with multiple campuses (San Jose, Ponte Vedra, Bartram, Whitehurst) serving different age groups.
- Regional accreditation and a long operating history give the school an established alumni and community network in northeast Florida.

TRADE-OFFS

- Boarding students are a minority within a much larger day-student population, so the boarding experience is less immersive than at dedicated boarding schools.
- Day and boarding fees are substantial, in line with US independent-school norms, requiring careful financial planning for relocating families.
- Jacksonville is a mid-sized regional city, offering fewer big-city networking or cultural resources than boarding schools near major metros.
- The school's strong athletic (particularly swimming) identity may not suit families prioritizing a purely academic or arts-focused environment.

## ADMISSIONS

Bolles admits day students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and boarding students from grade 8 through 12, with main entry points at kindergarten, sixth and ninth grades, though places can open elsewhere. Applications require transcripts, teacher recommendations, an admissions interview and standardized testing (such as the ISEE). International boarding applicants must also submit English-proficiency scores (e.g. TOEFL or Duolingo) and secure an I-20 for visa sponsorship. Competitiveness varies by grade and boarding availability, with swim-program applicants facing additional athletic evaluation.

WTS RATING 

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