

Covington Latin School

21 E. 11th St., Covington, (859) 291-7044, www.covingtonlatin.org

The first thing you notice about Covington Latin School—besides the fact that it looks like the unadorned little brother of its next-door neighbor, the historic St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption—is its tiny parking lot. How could a secondary school with so few parking spaces accommodate nearly 250 students, not to mention faculty?

Answering that question reveals an essential truth about CLS: It makes do with less. This small school is bursting at the seams. Classes are sometimes held in science labs or the auditorium due to lack of space. Still, parking isn't a problem. Why? The average age of a CovLatin graduate is just 16. In any given school year, only 10 to 15 students are licensed to drive.

Based on the European "gymnasium" model, in which gifted students accelerate through their secondary education, each CovLatin student must skip at least one level after passing an entrance exam in 5th, 6th, or 7th grade. Sixth-grade graduates who pass the exam may enter "prep year" (a.k.a. 8th grade) or skip directly into their freshman year. As a result, it's not uncommon to find 15-year-old seniors.

Covington Latin students consistently rank in the top 10 percent nationally on ACT and SAT tests. Like their peers from pricier private high schools, all Covington Latin graduates go to college, many attending Princeton, Columbia, Duke, Rice, and Cornell, among others. The good news: Covington Latin costs roughly half what you'd pay for other schools. The not-so-good news: It lacks many of the comforts found at those institutions. Sports teams rely on other schools for gyms and ballparks (though the school has purchased land to expand in the coming years). While a few rooms feature computer-friendly SMART boards, most still sport old-fashioned chalkboards. But the end result is the same: Covington Latin graduates are among the brightest in the country. "There's a misconception that students here are nerds," Rudolph says. "But that's not true. While we don't like to say [our students are] necessarily 'gifted,' they are above average."