

Consider Children's Needs for School Choice



Consider Your Children's Needs for School Choice

When considering different school options, you can ask yourself the following questions about your child or collectively about your children:

What is my child's personality type?

Does she prefer playing or socializing in small groups, large groups, or by herself?

Does she like to lead a group in various activities?

Would she prefer to watch others and then follow in small group play and socialization activities?

Is she easily frustrated when playing and socializing with others?

Does she get angry when things do not go her way?

What are her favorite activities?

Does she prefer outside or thinking types of activities?

Does she prefer paper and pencil activities or large muscle and interactive activities?

Would she learn best by reading with you, listening,

or watching others?

What are her academic experiences?

Does she recognize letters and letter combination sounds?

Has she exhibited other pre-reading or reading skills?

How does she apply number sense in everyday activities?

What has the teacher said about her social, emotional, and learning skill development?

What concerns do you have about her academic success and learning challenges?

Middle and High School Considerations

Added considerations for middle and high school students may include:

Is there a specific college and career path that your child is interested in exploring?

What types of classes, experiences, or internships do prospective schools offer to support your child's learning interests?

Does the preferred school provide sufficient extra-curricular activities, sports teams, and academic support programs to accommodate your child's interests and preparation for college?

Does the preferred school's course sequence include options for your child to attend competitive colleges in her area of interest?

What else do you need to discuss with the prospective

school to ensure that it will provide adequate counseling and support services to ensure your child's success?

Conducting School Site Visits

Once you answer these questions and have completed a conference for added information from your child's teacher, you may choose to visit schools in your school district, charter schools, private schools, and parent participation schools to learn more about various learning philosophies. You can review appropriate teaching strategies by visiting your state's department of education website and by researching different teaching philosophies.

It is important to select a school for your child that reinforces your family's values and how you plan to support your child's learning. If you have more than one child starting the school, you should consider the overall school climate that best aligns with your parenting style and your children's diverse needs. This ensures an effective transition into an elementary school or transfer into a middle or high school. After visiting several different schools in your community, consider the following when selecting an appropriate school for your family:

- The various school options and choices for learning in your neighborhood
- How your child will travel to school each day
- The locations of various schools in proximity to your home, office, or access to afterschool childcare

The school's expectations for parent participation, homework philosophies, and expectations for parents' support

How you and your family can manage each day in regards to parent participation and homework support

How much stress your family can manage when considering a selected school's location, teaching philosophy, and homework expectations

A Sample Case Study

The following case study illustrates how parents must align their preference and values when considering a school's expectations.

Case Study of a High Achieving Elementary School and a Family's Demanding Schedule

Tracey and Mark were excited when they visited a high achieving parent participation public elementary school in their neighborhood. They wanted the best for their four children and valued the extensive parent participation components offered at the school. They also loved the focus on service learning and community-based project homework that required hours of support from parents and the entire family beyond the school day. Within the first few weeks of school, Lily, their oldest child, was over-whelmed and feeling like a failure because she could not keep up with her classmates. Her parents were overscheduled with demanding jobs, younger sibling care, and little time to reinforce her learning needs when assigned community-based homework projects. Although her parents valued education, the school's high academic success, and the parent participation components, the values of the school did not align to their ability to fully participate in the school. After meeting with their daughter's teacher, Tracey and Mark were able to adjust their schedules to meet their daughter's learning needs. Scheduling sufficient time for parent participation at the school will continue to be a challenge as their other children start the school.

When considering this case study, it is important that parents work in partnership with the school to successfully complete the registration process that may include:

- Reviewing various school options relevant to the family's values and learning needs
- Registering for a selected school with backup options
- Following-up with the selected school's confirmation and document completion process

Compiling all mandatory vaccinations and medical check-up documentation

Sometimes, parents are not offered any of the schools they selected for their children through a lottery system or when selected schools are over-enrolled. Many parents will then appeal to the school district's student placement office to have their child transferred to another school. Options can include a school that is closer to a student's home or that has a higher student performance ranking in the district. The anxiety of registering for schools can be frustrating, confusing, and challenging. For example, urban parents may feel desperate in their attempts to challenge a school assignment. They may feel forced to wait another year for reassignment while their child attends an alternative program. It is important to reassure your children that they will have a successful school year and that you will be there to support them in this process.

Sample School Selection Worksheet

The sample worksheet below was completed by Tracey and Mark when they decided to send their child to a high performing parent participation elementary school in the neighborhood.

Tracey and Mark's School Selection Worksheet

List 5 primary values for our family:

1. Our family values being active together at home and at school.
2. We value a well-balanced education for our children.
3. We want our children to give more than they receive in their community.
4. We value the individual contributions of each family member.
5. We respect the diversity of our community and giving back to all.

List three characteristics you are looking for in your children's schools:

1. The school is near my home.
2. It is high performing and has a rigorous curriculum.
3. Parents are encouraged to become partners in their children's learning.

List the types of learning that your child/ren prefer or respond to effectively:

1. My children prefer to engage in interactive socialization when learning.
2. They are self-motivated and like to work in small groups.
3. The children are self-starters, creative, and love to socialize as they work in groups.
4. They love to do art projects and use art in their academic learning.

After visiting various schools in the area, identify three schools that will serve your family best. List the reasons to justify your preference:

1. Marian Wright Elementary School is the neighborhood school near our home. This school is our first choice for our children because it is near our home. The school is a high performing school with extensive project-based learning with participating parents.
2. Star Charter School is a rigorous academic K-8 public charter school within 10 miles from our home. The school specializes in science and math technology with lots of parents participating in small group activities with their children.
3. Las Palmas Cooperative School is a private school within 5 miles from our home. It focuses on children exploring careers throughout their K-8 education with a focus on service learning and community development with rigorous academic standards.

Selected school with registration completion requirements includes:

We have decided to have our eldest child attend the local elementary school and must complete the following for school registration:

1. Submit documentation to the district office that confirms that we reside in the neighborhood for this school.
2. Finish the school's application and mail to the district office.
3. Complete the student medical examination documentation with updated immunization records and submit to the school nurse.

Much success identifying your family's learning preferences at specific schools.