

# Which School Best Meets Your Needs?



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As children get ready to attend elementary, middle, or high school, parents have many concerns about the type of learning that occurs in various school settings. Parents often ask how they can determine if a school is successful. For example, most parents believe that a successful school has a high academic ranking. It should offer a variety of performing arts and creative experiences. It must provide extensive experiences in language arts, real world math applications, science experiments, and history activities. The school should also plan for sufficient nutritional and physical fitness activities. Students must feel safe, secure, and learn basic life skills and effective problem-solving strategies in nurturing classrooms. Parents want to feel welcome to support their children's learning and participate in the school. Additionally, students and their families can partner in project-based and service-learning activities that support their community.

# What Are a Family's Values?

When parents consider the various learning opportunities available to their children, they must prioritize what they value most for their family. After considering their values, many parents may opt to have their children attend an average performing school if the school's philosophy aligns more closely to their family's core values. For example, many families select having their children attend culturally diverse schools, even if the English language arts academic performance test scores are lower, because many of these students are learning two languages instead of one in their daily lives. Families may also select economically diverse urban schools where many students are homeless or living in low-income housing. Academic subject test scores may be lower in these urban schools because homeless and low-income children may not have access to homes filled with books and funds that support academic and performing arts extra-curricular activities.

Families, who value diversity and economic equality, may choose to have their children attend schools that are more representative of their community's population even if the overall school ranking may be average or lower. Additionally, diversity in a school's student body can enhance your children's life skills and resiliency growth. Children, who attend and successfully graduate from challenged urban school communities, tend to become effective leaders in large urban universities and leaders in their community's overall development.

# Various Types of School Options

The following is a list of various types of schools. Each type typically creates and reports different kinds of performance outcomes and indicators of success based on the school's educational focus and philosophy:

**Public Schools:** Most public schools in specific townships, districts, and school communities list standardized indicators that report students' successes. These may include students' academic performance indicators, healthy school climate indicators, the number of student suspensions and expulsions, average daily attendance of students, and school safety indicators.

**Charter (Public) Schools:** Charter schools are managed by state, district, or county school district approved charters that describe the school's philosophy for student learning and achievement. Some charter schools focus on science and technology and others focus on basic academic learning with intensive remediation tutorial support for academically challenged students. Many serve as institutes in cultural and language immersion, performing arts, computer technology, science and math, and world economics. Each charter has created its own academic success indicators.

**Private Schools:** Private schools are created with a specific focus and area of expertise. Unlike public schools and charter (public) schools, they are not subjected to the same oversight requirements. Many successful private schools choose to participate in standardized testing and accreditation to measure

effectiveness and document successes.

Parent Participation Schools: Parent participation schools focus on fully engaging parents in the school's activities. Parents can (1) participate in the classroom, (2) become school leaders in the daily management of operations, facilities, fundraising, and community partnerships, (3) develop a charter with teachers for a new type of school in a community serving an underserved student population, (4) contribute to facility improvements, beautification days, tree planting, and building funds, and (5) create booster clubs and fundraising foundations that can support the school's performing arts programs, computer labs, afterschool programs, field trips, teachers' professional development, student counseling programs, and basic student needs.

Project-Based and Community Service Schools: These schools focus on giving back to the community in which they serve. Many have a religious affiliation. Activities may include participating in job shadowing partnership projects with local community agencies and businesses, providing ongoing performing arts at senior centers, creating art activities and mentoring preschoolers, and organizing community advocacy days for disenfranchised community members and social service causes. Project-based curriculum (per [pblworks.org](http://pblworks.org)) is prescriptive and follows a specific sequence of activities that may include (1) responding to a challenging a problem or question; (2) designing a public project; (3) critiquing and revising the project; (4) reflecting on the project per feedback (5) engaging students' voice; (6) ensuring authenticity to solve a problem; and (7)

managing ongoing inquiry as the product is being developed.

When parents consider these and other types of schools, they are hustling to select an appropriate learning environment for their children. Some families can easily access their neighborhood school. Many families in highly populated suburbs and urban communities must participate in a lottery when registering for a school in their neighborhood. Other families are forced to pay high tuition bills at a private school to ensure a safe and stimulating learning environment for their children. As parents approach school districts to identify how to access an appropriate school placement, they should consider their children's emotional, social, and educational needs in their final school selection. Much success considering different school options in relation to your family's values.