



PARENT RESOURCE GUIDE:
CHOOSING A PRIVATE SCHOOL



WE ADVISE PARENTS TO FIRST CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN CHOOSING A PRIVATE SCHOOL:

LOCATION

Students do not need to live in a specific district to attend a private school. However, location can make a difference in your decision. It's important to think about the distance and route you'll take to drop off and pick up your child each day, if transportation is not provided:

- Is it more convenient to look at options near your home or your workplace?
- What are the logistics of dropping off and picking up siblings who attend different schools in different locations?

SCHOOL VISITS

You can learn a lot about a school with a simple phone call, visit to its website, or even by word of mouth. But nothing compares to experiencing the school yourself. Schedule a school tour so that you can get a feel for the environment. Sit in on a few minutes of class, observe the hallways during class change, or visit the cafeteria during lunch. This will give you a feeling of the students' day-to-day. How is student work displayed? How do teachers interact with students, administration, or front office staff?

Perhaps a parent-teacher representative is available to share about parent involvement opportunities. Schools should be excited and eager for you to visit and learn what they offer.



RESOURCE: NC Schools Around Me is a great place to start to see schools close to a specific address.

Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina has a team of parents who have been in your shoes and they are ready to answer your questions about finding and enrolling in a private school.

Email kwan@pefnc.org and we'll reach out to you as soon as possible!



WHEN YOU TOUR A SCHOOL, HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER.

We've compiled a step-by-step school tour guide that contains specific questions to ask of schools you're exploring. We've even created a worksheet that you can personalize and fill in which helps you easily see comparisons between your schools of interest.

[To access this downloadable document, click here.](#)

WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY OR VISION?

Make sure that their mission is consistent with your own educational beliefs and values. What is crucial to know is how it's put into practice. In other words, how does that philosophy or vision translate into teaching, learning, curriculum, and student life?

WHAT IS THE TOTAL COST OF YOUR SCHOOL?

Private schools charge tuition and those amounts vary depending on the school. Tuition costs should be shared with you upfront when inquiring about enrollment. In addition to the cost of tuition, there are other financial implications to choosing a private school. Below are a list of some of the expenses you will often see beyond tuition. Be sure to ask for a comprehensive list of costs and charges that you should expect.

- Enrollment fee
- Registration/New Student fee
- Curriculum/Book/Resource fee
- Enrichment Classes (ex: Discovery, AIG)
- Uniforms, Class T-Shirts, etc.
- Lunch
- Transportation
- After School Care
- Sports/Clubs/Band
- Field Trips

HOW CAN I MAKE PRIVATE SCHOOL MORE AFFORDABLE?

Private school may seem out of reach because they charge tuition, but it may be closer to reach than you may think. There are financial resources available to you to consider:

Scholarships: North Carolina provides two scholarships for private school. The Opportunity Scholarship is a program that covers tuition and fees for a private school. All NC K12 students are eligible. See details here.

The ESA+ program is for students with special needs that also covers tuition and fees for private school, as well as covering other related services. See details here.

Financial Aid: Some private schools offer financial aid. This is not a loan. Financial aid reduces the total amount of tuition due to the school. Financial aid is based on the family's need and is typically evaluated by a third party. The third party will make a recommendation regarding the reasonable expectation for a family's contribution. The balance for tuition can typically be split into monthly payments. Many schools set a financial aid budget, so it is important to ask about financial aid and the process to apply.

Discounts: Private schools will often provide a tuition discount for siblings. Catholic schools will often provide a discount for students who are Catholic or, if the school is connected to a parish, for students who are members of that parish. Students of school employees are typically eligible for a discount. If there are job openings at the school that are a good fit for your skill set, it may be worth considering seeking employment at the school.

WHAT FINANCIAL COMMITMENT AM I MAKING TO YOUR SCHOOL?

You may groan at the idea of reading through the details of the contracts you will sign at enrollment. However, it is extremely important to understand the financial obligations you agree to when enrolling your child in a particular school. Typically, it will include an obligation to the full tuition balance. This may also include your obligation to pay the full tuition balance if you decide to unenroll your child at any point in the school year. There may be considerations if you lose a significant portion of your income or you move a certain number of miles away, but these details will be found within the financial agreement.

WHAT CURRICULUM DO YOU USE?

You'll want to make sure that your child has the right learning and academic profile for a school. Find out what the curricular guidelines and standards are at the school. You should also ask about their approach—it should align with your child's learning needs and style.

WHAT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DO YOU OFFER?

Basic learning standards are set by North Carolina for both public and private schools, but public schools must adhere to state educational guidelines where private schools do not. For example, where public and private schools must administer achievement tests in English grammar, reading, spelling, and math, the lessons and content for each course (the curriculum) may differ. Private schools may offer enrichment courses that public schools do not, like sports medicine, mandarin as a foreign language option, or Bible in faith-based schools. They may also be restricted on courses that they are able to offer because of limited staff or resources. It's important to think through how the school's academic programs can meet your child's needs and align with your desires for him or her.

WHAT ARE YOUR CLASS SIZES AND STUDENT TEACHER RATIOS?

Private schools do not have mandated class sizes, but individual schools often have their own philosophy on class size and student teacher ratios. Research shows that class sizes of fewer than 20 students generally yield greater gains in achievement. While this is not true for every child, it's a benchmark to consider. Class size (the number of students assigned to a class) is different than the student teacher ratio (the number of instructional staff divided by the number of students). You should consider the student teacher ratio, as this can help you understand what level of attention your student may receive in class to enhance learning.





HOW DO YOU MEASURE INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AND PROGRESS?

All schools measure progress in some way. In North Carolina public schools, student achievement and competency of North Carolina's state education standards are measured through standardized tests (EOG). Remember, private schools are not required to follow the state's education standards so they are not required to take those tests. However, private schools are required to administer a standardized test—typically a nationally normed test—that will measure the child's achievement and competency compared to students like them across the nation. Rather than rely on end-of-year testing, you should ask about the school's approach to measuring student progress throughout the year so that you will know how your child is doing.

WHAT TYPE OF STUDENT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Most schools accept students with many different academic, social, and emotional profiles. But many target certain types of students. They may prefer students with a specific academic focus, such as math, science, or the arts. Beyond academics, they may prefer students who are socially aware, well-rounded, independent, ambitious, or actively involved in student and community life. This will help you decide whether your child is likely to be a good fit.

WHAT IS STUDENT LIFE LIKE?

Student life is an important part of education. You want your child to be happy, productive, and engaged at school. You also want them to develop and maintain strong friendships and peer relationships. Look into what the school is like for students—socially, emotionally, and intellectually. This is a good opportunity for you to share about your child's experience—the good and the bad—about their previous school.

WHAT EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES DO YOU OFFER?

Most private schools offer a wide range of extracurricular activities. This may include sports teams, after-school and lunch clubs, art and science programs, and community service opportunities. Ideally, a school will offer extracurriculars that meet your child's interests and needs. Consider which activities your child can sign up for (such as a science program or Spanish club) and which require a special condition for participation (such as trying out for the soccer team).

HOW CAN PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN SCHOOL LIFE?

Parents play a huge role in their children's education. In addition to finding the right school for their child, many get involved in their children's day-to-day school life by volunteering in class and serving on parent committees and school boards. Kids learn best when their parents are involved in their education, so it's crucial to find out how a school welcomes you into their community. You should look for a school that offers both opportunities to be involved and an open line of communication between parents and the school.

HOW IS YOUR SCHOOL OPERATED AND GOVERNED?

Private schools are operated in different ways, but they are not subject to your county school board. On the financial side, they can be for-profit or non-profit. On the governance side, they can be led by school directors, owner-operators, or boards of directors. Schools can also be accredited, governed, and funded by independent educational organizations. Ask about the leadership hierarchy and who is responsible for making which decisions.

To access your step-by-step school tour guide that contains specific questions to ask of schools you're exploring, click [here](#).



WHAT ARE YOUR TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS AND WHAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM?

Teaching is a major factor in the quality of education your child will receive. While private schools are not required to hire certified teachers, many do. In some cases, private school teachers had a career in a specific field of study and have now chosen to teach it—like a former chemical engineer teaching high school chemistry. Find out about the training and credentials of a school's teachers. You should also ask about opportunities available to teaching staff for professional development, as this shows a school's commitment to supporting the success and growth of its teachers.

HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY INTO THE CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM?

Modern-day technology is becoming the norm in education. Many schools equip classrooms with laptop computers, interactive

whiteboards, e-readers, and more. Some offer optional or required courses in tech-based subjects, such as computer programming or graphic design. You may hear from school officials about what technological resources the school has, but be sure to ask how they are used to enhance learning.

HOW DO YOU ADDRESS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

While private schools are subject to federal laws pertaining to students with disabilities—such as discrimination against a student because of a disability—private schools are not required to provide the same level of services and supports as the local public school system. Your child's 504 plan or IEP will not simply transfer to the private school. That does not mean that private schools cannot and will not provide the level of services or supports your child needs. It's incredibly important to be specific about what your child needs and understand from the school if they can meet those needs adequately.



PARENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM IN NORTH CAROLINA IS THE SOURCE FOR PARENTAL SCHOOL CHOICE. WE CAN HELP!

The Parent Liaison Team is a project developed by Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina to educate parents about the benefits of parental school choice. The team is made up of parents, just like you, who have exercised parental school choice for their own children. They understand you because they ARE you!

Their work encompasses local and one-to-one outreach to North Carolina parents of school-aged children. Team members, who hail from regions all over the state, connect with parents across an array of platforms and venues to share information, stories, and resources, and ultimately, to empower parents to utilize the state's school choice programs.

LET US HELP YOU FIND A SCHOOL THAT MEETS YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS!

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