

NoChild
LeftBehind



Choosing A School For Your Child

United States
Department of
Education
Office of Innovation
and Improvement



*"School choice gives
you more opportunities
to achieve your
expectations for
your child."*

*U. S. Secretary of Education
Margaret Spellings*

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Dear Parents,

Do you remember when your child was born, how your child quickly wrapped all five fingers around your one? Your child will continue to grasp your hand throughout childhood and youth. You are your child's first and lifelong teacher. And, as a parent and teacher, you will make important decisions for your child.

Some of the most important decisions you will make are about your child's education. You want your child's school to meet the same goals of high academic achievement you have set. You may want your child's school to reflect the values of your family and community. In other words, you want to choose a school that is a good fit for your child. In an increasing number of communities in our nation, you now have the ability to do so.

This booklet, *Choosing a School for Your Child*, is a type of "decision tool" that can help you navigate the process of choosing a school. It explains some of the public school choices now available in many communities and covers private school options that may be available as well. It outlines steps that you can follow to help you make a thoughtful choice, and it includes questions that you might want to ask when going through the process.

In addition, this booklet highlights new options for your child's education provided in the federal law, the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The law allows parents whose children are in public schools that need improvement or are unsafe, to choose other public schools or take advantage of free tutoring or extra educational help.

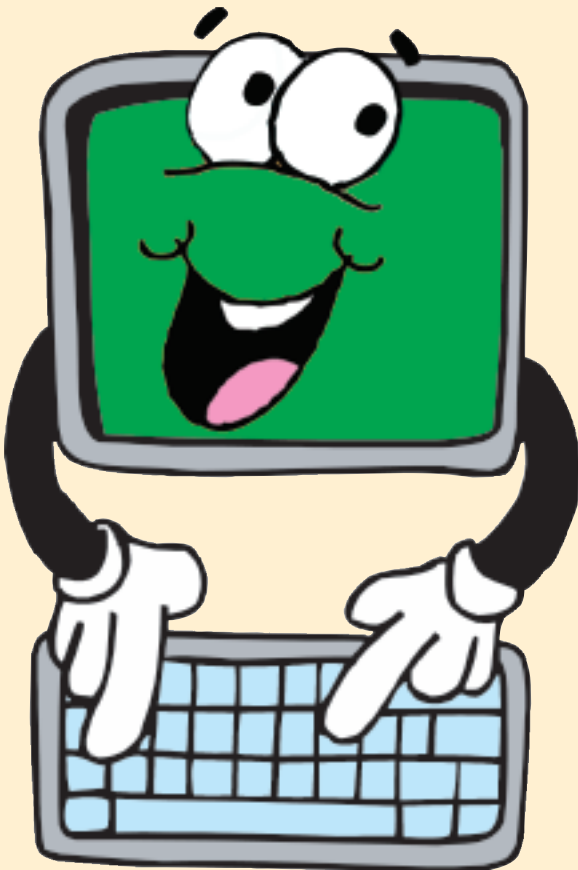
The law also supports the growth of more independent public charter schools and funds some services for children in private schools. Finally, it mandates states and local school districts to provide a wealth of new information to help you make informed educational choices for your child.

School choice can help give every child an excellent education. It is amazing what can happen when parents get involved. School choice gives you more opportunities to achieve your expectations for your child. Armed with options and information, you can be a powerful advocate for your child.

I offer you *Choosing a School for Your Child* as a tool with practical information to help you make informed decisions about your child's education. I wish you success with this challenge.

Sincerely,
Margaret Spellings
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

For additional resources on choosing a school, you can visit the U.S. Department of Education's page for parents at <http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml> or the page on school choice at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice>



Choosing a School

Parents have a growing array of options in choosing a school, though the extent of the options varies from state to state. The enactment of the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001; the rapid growth of the charter school movement; the increasing number of states enacting scholarship and tax credit programs for students to attend private schools; the expansion of privately funded scholarship programs for low-income children; and the growing acceptance of homeschooling have all increased the choices available to families.

Parents can exercise choice in many ways. The most common way may be in choosing where to live based on the public school district or neighborhood schools. In many areas, parents can choose from neighborhood schools, charter schools or other public schools of choice, or transfer their child to another public school (in or out of district). They can also select a private school (religious or secular) or teach their child at home.

Choosing a School for Your Child offers step-by-step advice on how to choose among the schools available to your child. It identifies important factors you may want to consider before making a decision. As you and your child visit different schools, you may want to consider the questions in each section of this booklet.

Why Should You Choose Your Child's School?

No one cares more about your child's welfare than you do. No one else will be more careful to see that your child is well educated and well treated in school. You know your child's personality, strengths and weaknesses. You know the interests that light up your child's eyes. You know the values that your family wants a school to respect.

Choosing your child's school may also make you more confident that she will be taught effectively and treated fairly. Choosing your child's school carefully is an important way you can help your child achieve all that he can be. This is a head and a heart decision. Don't be afraid to heed your own informed and intuitive wisdom.

Learn What Choices Are Available to You

Different schools offer alternatives in teaching styles, content, and learning opportunities. This section briefly describes some types of schools you may find.

Public Schools

Neighborhood Public Schools

Many parents choose to send their children to the public school in their neighborhood, according to an assignment system developed by the school district. Attending a neighborhood public school can make it easy for your child to get to school, to work with classmates on group projects, and to visit friends. These schools are often anchors in a community.

Other Public Schools

You may want to investigate other public schools. In an increasing number of districts, you can choose to send your child to a specialized public school. These schools of choice often emphasize a particular subject or have a special philosophy of education. One school might emphasize science, art, or language study. Another might offer a firm code of conduct, a dress code, or a rigorous traditional academic program.

Another may be an alternative school designed to respond to students who are insufficiently challenged by the regular school program, who are likely to drop out, or who have behavioral or substance abuse problems. These schools, often small, work to make students feel they belong. Some states also offer second chance schools or clinics for students who have dropped out of regular schools and now want to complete their education.

- **Charter Schools**

Charter schools are public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the local and state regulations that apply to traditional public schools. Charter schools allow parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs, and others the flexibility to innovate, create and provide students with increased educational options. Charter schools exercise increased autonomy in return for stronger accountability. They are sponsored by designated local, state, or other organizations that monitor their quality and integrity while holding them accountable for academic results and fiscal practices.

- **Magnet Schools**

Magnet schools are designed to attract students from diverse social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds by focusing on a specific subject, such as science, technology, or the arts. Some magnet schools require students to take an exam or demonstrate knowledge or skill in the specialty to qualify to go to the school, while others are open to students who express an interest in that area.

- **Virtual Schools**

Instead of taking classes in a school building, students can receive their education using a computer through a virtual school. Virtual schools have an organized curriculum. Depending on the state and district, students can take the full curriculum or individual classes. Some school districts have used these online schools to offer classes that will help students learn at their own pace. Virtual education is sometimes used in remote areas for specialized or advanced courses that are not available in the immediate area. This type of studying is also called “distance learning.”

- **Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs**

Advanced Placement (AP) courses offer rigorous content, and at the end of a course students can take the national Advanced Placement exam. If they score well on the exam, many colleges and universities will grant college credit for completing the course. The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a program of rigorous academic courses. Students who graduate from the program receive an

International Baccalaureate diploma that is recognized by colleges and universities throughout the world. Other students may choose not to take the full IB curriculum but pursue certificates in individual areas. Elementary and middle schools may also offer components of the IB program.

Nonpublic Schools

In addition to public schools, there may be a variety of religious and other nonpublic schools available in your area or boarding schools away from home. These schools of choice have been part of the fabric of American education since colonial days. These schools have been established to meet the demand to support parents' differing beliefs about how their children should be educated.

Religious Private Schools

The majority of nonpublic schools are religious. Many are affiliated with a denomination, local church, or religious faith such as Roman Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or other.

Secular Private Schools

There are also many nonpublic schools without a religious identity or affiliation. Some of these private schools are preparatory schools designed to prepare students for college. These schools often have a traditional or elite reputation and a long history. Other schools are based on a particular educational philosophy or approach to learning, such as Montessori or Waldorf schools; have a special education focus, such as schools for the deaf or blind; or have been established for families and children who may be dissatisfied with various aspects of conventional schools.

Home Schools

Homeschooling is an option for a growing number of parents. Some parents prepare their own materials and design their own programs of study, while others use materials produced by companies specializing in homeschool materials. Some take advantage of virtual school programs or other educational resources available on the Internet. Of course, exercising this option may require major changes in how your family lives. Teaching your children at home is an ambitious undertaking, requiring time, planning, creativity, and commitment. Be sure to check with your state because different states have different requirements for homeschooling.

Selecting a School for Your Child

How do you pick the best school for your child? Whether you are choosing a public or private school or homeschooling, whether or not you are paying tuition, careful planning is a must. The following sections have questions for you to consider, with workspace for you to write down your thoughts, as you go through the process of choosing a school for your child. Remember, you are looking for a school that will make the educational experience for your child and you as rewarding as possible.

Write Down Five Things That Are Most Important to You

You may wish to write down five things that are most important to you as you consider the choice of a school. As you go through the selection process, you may want to add to and revise your list.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....
4.
.....
5.
.....

Four Steps for Selecting the School That Is Right for Your Child

Step 1

**Consider
your child
& your
family.**

Start your search for the best school by thinking about what you want a school to do for your child. Perhaps your child has special language or education needs. Keep these in mind. After all, you know your son or daughter better than anyone else does.



Your Child's Needs

Does your child need a more structured environment?

Does your child need a less structured environment?

Does your child need more challenging work?

Does your child need more individual attention?

Does your child generally need extra help or more time to complete an assignment?

Does your child have any special learning needs?

Does your child need an environment that fosters creativity?

Does your child need an English language acquisition program?

Your Child's Learning Style

Does your child learn best by seeing how things work?

Does your child learn best by reading about how something works?

Does your child learn best by listening?

Does your child like to participate in discussions?

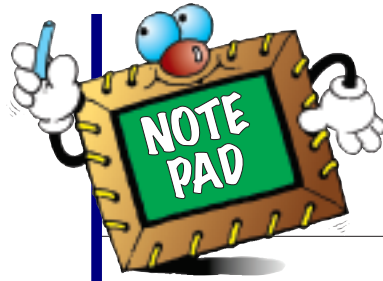
Does your child like to learn through physical activity?

Is your child logical or mathematical?

Is your child musical or artistic?

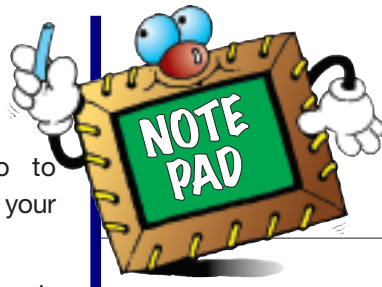
Does your child like to learn in groups?

Does your child like to work alone?



Read the questions and jot down some notes to help you with your decisions.

Location of School



Read the questions and jot down some notes to help you with your decisions.

Do you want your child to go to a school within walking distance of your home?

Can your child's talents be nurtured outside your neighborhood?

How far are you willing to have your child bused?

How far are you willing to drive your child to school?

Does your child want to be in a school with his or her friends?

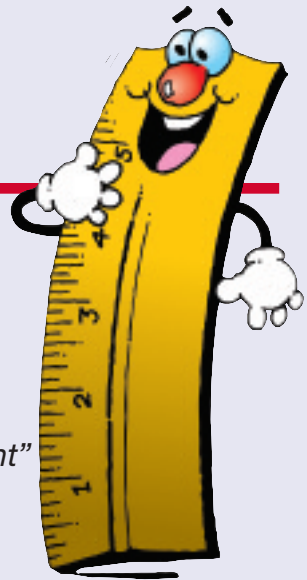
Do you want your child to go to a school near your after-school care? Near where you work? Near a close relative?

Does your child have any special transportation needs that must be considered in choosing a school?

Parent Tip:

Know Your Options Under the No Child Left Behind Act for Children in Public Schools That Are “In Need of Improvement”

Parents of children in public schools designated as “in need of improvement” can choose another public school or supplemental educational services (free tutoring).



If your child's public school receives federal Title I funds, it must let you know how well the students in the school are learning. The school district must contact you if the school does not meet the academic standards set by the state for two consecutive years. You can find out how well your school is doing by looking at the school's report card.

If your child's school has been identified by the state as in need of improvement, the school district must give you the choice of keeping your child in that school or sending him or her to another public school.

If your child attends a school that has needed improvement for more than a year, your school district is required to give you a list of organizations and institutions that provide tutoring or extra help outside of the regular school day. This extra help is called "supplemental educational services." If your child is eligible for this help, and your income is low, the school district may pay for these extra services. Such services may include before- and after-school tutoring in reading, other language arts, or math.

If you have not heard from your public school about whether the school is “in need of improvement” and whether your child qualifies to receive supplemental educational services, contact the school or the school district and ask for the person(s) in charge of choice and supplemental services programs. You can also go to your state department of education's Web site for a list of schools in need of improvement and approved supplemental educational services providers. If you have difficulty finding these lists, call the U.S. Department of Education at 1-888-814-6252 for help in reaching your state contact, or go to the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html> for a list of contacts in your state.

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