



Start *Smart*

4 STEPS

for Identifying
and Enrolling
Your Child at the
Right Private School

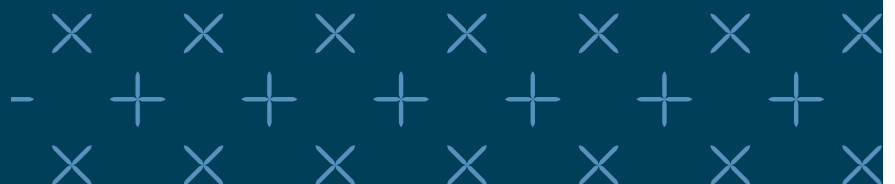


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INTRODUCTION

Before they do their homework,
you'll do yours.



Choosing the right independent school for your child is a lot like digging through a mountain of homework. There are research projects to tackle, stacks of papers to read, numerous forms to fill out, and looming deadlines to plan for.

Be prepared. Evaluating education options can be involved and time consuming. Whether you're crunching tuition numbers, reading countless online reviews, writing down questions for principals, or studying up on curriculum, the process can feel like you're cramming for finals. But it's a worthy assignment, as choosing a school is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make for your child. The right education provides more than knowledge. It doesn't merely teach students what to think; it teaches them how to think. It builds a foundation for all future learning experiences, and provides opportunities for college, careers, and life.

Private schools are becoming more and more appealing to students and parents alike. Evolving technology, competitive college acceptance rates, and a changing global society leave families feeling like public schools can't deliver the education their child needs to succeed in today's world. This means private schools are more plentiful, populated, and competitive than ever before. It also means you have a lot of options on the table and may need to create a game plan. This e-book was designed to help you do just that — to develop a framework for choosing the right private school for your child. It's a resource

for parents who want to commit with confidence, knowing they left no question unanswered, no stone unturned. In the end, you'll choose the learning environment that is best suited for your family, but after following this simple 11-step process, we guarantee you'll feel more informed, more empowered, and more excited to make an enrollment decision.

There's a lot to think about, but remember to relax, take one step at a time, and be enthusiastic about this new journey for your family. It's okay to have fun during the process. Let's get started, shall we?

Rudi Gesch

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STEP 1

Addressing Practical *matters*



the **3P** *s*

Before you start signing up for campus tours, there are a few practical matters that should be considered. We call these the three P's:

*Proximity, Price,
and Philosophy*

If a school is not in alignment with your 3 P's, rule them out and move on. It's not worth wasting your time or theirs. You'll save the time and energy required to research academics, extracurriculars, and other specifics of a school that simply won't work for your family. Don't feel guilty if the admissions person calls asking for an update. Just tell them their school is not the right fit for your family, thank them for their follow-up (because so few schools actually take initiative to call), and cross them off your list. A solid "no" is more helpful than a list of "maybes."

Compile Your List

Proximity



There's probably at least one school on your radar. Now is the time to build up that list to make sure you have a full picture of the options in your area.

Start with a visit to www.privateschoolreview.com. The homepage of this site offers a handy private school search tool. Just punch in your address and student's grade level, and you'll see a full list of schools within driving distance of your home. You can set the tool to show schools within 1, 5, 10, 25, or even 50 miles. If you're exploring boarding schools, visit www.boardingschoolreview.com to expand your options.



Add the relevant schools to your list.



Next, pull up Google and search for:

Private schools, (city, state, OR county)

Independent schools, (city, state, OR county)

High school (or upper school, lower school, middle school, kindergarten, etc.) in (geography)

These searches should add several schools to your list.

Next, if you are on Facebook, ask your friends for recommendations. It could go something like this:



"Does anyone have any personal experience with independent schools in (geography)? We're exploring our options for our (8th grader). We're looking for schools that (have strong STEM programs). Thanks!"

You can learn a lot by simply polling the audience. Once you have some feedback from social media, add the new schools to your list, along with any insights you may have gained from your network.

Ask Your Family

- How far are we able to drive for drop-offs and pick-ups?
- Does our tuition budget allow for a transportation fee?
- Do we have family members or friends who could help with transportation?

Ask the School

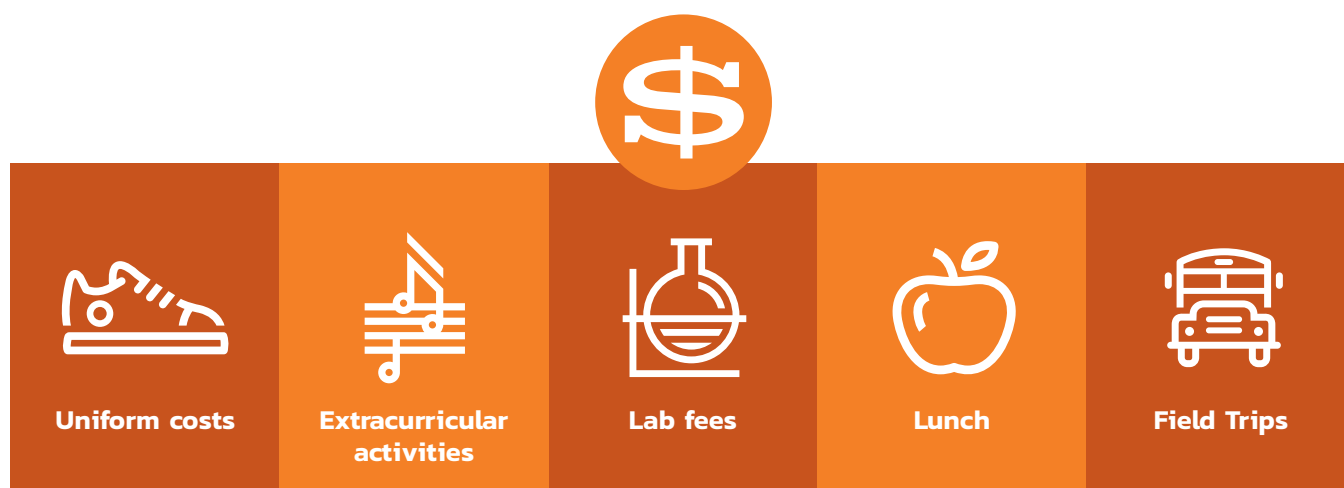
- Is transportation provided?
- Do you know of any families in our area who carpool?
- Is before-and-after school care available?

Cost Considerations

Price

Take a close look at your family's budget and determine what level of tuition you can afford. If a school cannot meet your budgetary needs, it should be crossed off the list early on.

Bear in mind that the sticker price rarely covers the entire cost of a year of independent school. Additional fees to explore may include:



Don't just keep the numbers in your head. Write them down or, better yet, log them in a simple spreadsheet so you can evaluate and compare real costs.

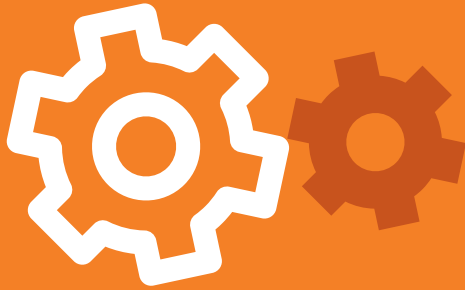
As you compile the numbers, don't be discouraged if a school you want to explore further seems out of reach financially. Many independent schools provide financial aid. Just ask your admissions representative about the options.

You may learn that some schools provide a "variable tuition" option, which essentially allows you to pay a tuition rate that's in alignment with your annual household income. (Learn more about variable tuition on the [EnrollmentCatalyst.com](https://www.enrollmentcatalyst.com) blog.)

Ask the School

- What additional fees should I expect beyond tuition?
- Do you offer any tuition assistance programs?
- Do you offer variable tuition?
- Are multi-student discounts available?

Examining Educational Philosophies



Philosophies

Each school has its own ideals that will define your child's learning experience. This set of principles should align closely with your family's beliefs and values.

Knowing the school's educational philosophy will ensure that what your children are learning – and how they are learning – does not contradict what is taught in your home.

Ask Your Family

- Is religious affiliation important to us?
- Will the worldview of the school align with or compete with the ideals we aim to instill in our children?
- What do we want to learn about the school's tradition and pedigree?

Ask the School

- Please tell us about the mission and vision of your school.
- Do you have a philosophy of education you can share with us?
- What are your aims for my student?
- What type of leadership or governance do you have?
- How can we learn about the worldview held by your teachers?
- How does the school deal with competing worldviews, religious doctrines, etc.
- What kind of diversity in thought do you have among staff, and how can we learn about the worldviews held by your teachers?

STEP 2

Evaluate the Learning *environment*



Now that you've taken a look at proximity, price, and philosophy, your list should be significantly shorter than it was in Step One. Now you can invest your time wisely, researching only the schools that will meet your family's practical needs.

It's time to explore the educational experience — the blend of elements that work together to maximize your student's learning. This isn't something that can be spotted on a school's website or vetted during a campus tour. You'll need to gather and assimilate information along the way to gain a thorough understanding of the academic experience a particular school delivers. The following steps will help you compile the data you need to move forward.



Conducting a Curriculum Review

Each school's website should include basic information on curriculum. If you can't find it, you should request this information as early as possible. Discovering what your children will be exposed to through the curriculum is crucial for choosing the school that will prepare them for success.



Based on your student's learning needs and objectives, you'll want to explore college preparatory tracks, advanced course options, and extracurriculars. If your child has learning differences, you may want to learn more about teaching methods, class sizes, and physical learning spaces. Of course, teachers may not tailor every lesson, but they should be able to connect with their students' strengths, challenges, and interests to maximize learning potential.

Ask the School

- What curriculum do you use? Is it all from the same provider, or do you vary the curriculum by subject?
- Are Common Core Standards being implemented here?
- How many hours of homework will my student have each week? What is average each night for this grade level?
- How is college prep emphasized in the curriculum?
- What kinds of essays are your students writing? Could we see some samples?
- Is the Constitution taught in your classrooms? How do you prepare young minds to preserve our democracy?
- Is tutoring or support offered for students who need extra help?
- How does your school emphasize STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)?

All About Accreditation

Gathering information from schools and their currently enrolled families can be valuable, but accreditation provides objective validation from an external source. Schools that are committed to excellence seek regular review from reputable agencies. The accreditation process is thorough and covers areas that many parents don't think to ask about such as financial stability, strategic plans, security protocols, and objectives.



How to Know if a School is Accredited

Most schools will proudly display accreditation information on their websites or other materials. If you do not find this information easily, ask the school if they are accredited or seeking accreditation, and with which agency(ies). Dual accreditation often indicates strength and intention. Bear in mind that not being accredited should not necessarily rule a school out, but be advised some colleges and universities want to see attendance at an accredited school.

Different Instructional Models

You know your child best. Do you think they would benefit from a traditional model with direct instruction, or an alternative approach to learning? There are numerous instructional models out there; each presents a unique journey for students as they advance from kindergarten through graduation day.



Socratic Method:

Developed by the well-known philosopher Socrates, this is one of the world's oldest and most established teaching models. It is defined by a teacher's intention to foster critical thinking skills by probing students with meaningful questions.



The Classical Model:

The Classical model of education divides training of the mind into a three-stage process. Students progress from grammar, to logic, to rhetoric, systematically laying the critical foundations for higher education and lifelong learning.



Reggio Emilia Approach:

A popular method in early education programs, Reggio Emilia leverages a child's natural curiosity to build knowledge across a broad range of subjects. The learning environment will be characterized by hands-on activities that help students make their own connections about the world around them.



Montessori Education:

Montessori education emphasizes each child's independence and ability to make choices for themselves. Students spend time exploring and creating on their own with support from teachers, but less direct instruction than some models. Mixed age groups may also be a component of this learning model.



Project-Based Learning:

Project based learning allows students to solve real-world challenges with their own two hands. STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) aligns closely with this model, providing a dynamic classroom experience that fosters problem-solving skills.



Ask the School

- What teaching methods would my child be exposed to?
- Why have you selected this methods?
- If my child has not been exposed to this teaching model, what challenges might he/she face coming in? (This is particularly applicable in upper grades where they may not have the same foundation as other students.)
- What's the average student to teacher ratio?
- How is technology applied in the classroom?

Getting Acquainted with Faculty & Staff

You may not be able to meet all of your student's future teachers, but you can gain insight into their qualifications. Teachers can come from diverse backgrounds, hold a wide variety of degrees, and are certified by a number of different agencies. Classroom teachers should hold a bachelor's degree at minimum and be passionate about their subject(s).

If possible, meet with as many instructors as possible who would be teaching your student. If sports are important to your family, ask to meet the coaches they would work with.

One last thought on faculty and staff: Don't be hesitant to ask about how the school addresses background checks on faculty, staff, and volunteers. It is important to know the school has a process for and follows through on background screening.

Look for specialists!

Academic communities are enhanced by faculty and staff with in-depth knowledge in areas such as:

- **Guidance counseling**
- **College and career coaching**
- **Special education and learning differences**
- **Curriculum development**
- **Media and technology**
- **Vocational education**
- **Athletic training**



STEP 3

Explore the *opportunities*



Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities can enrich your child's learning experience and help them discover lifelong passions. Fine arts programs, clubs, athletics, and service opportunities provide outlets for students to develop their talents while learning about motivation, teamwork, and time management.

When the time comes for your child to apply for college, skills and experiences gained through extracurricular activities are important to admission boards and can be the deciding factor between students with comparable academic achievements.

Competitive Athletics



Does your child excel in the classroom and on the field? Remember to ask more targeted questions about the program, season, and time requirements. Some schools have highly competitive athletics programs, while others are more inclusive and club based. If sports are an important part of your child's life, you'll want to choose a school that maximizes their opportunities in this arena.

Ask the School

- Do you have a list of extracurriculars my child might participate in?
- Is there heavier emphasis on athletics or fine arts programs?
- What fees are involved for extracurricular programs?

Your Campus Tours

By this time in the process you should have removed several schools from your list. Now, it's time to get on campus. Spending time on-site (preferably during operating hours) is the best way to understand a school's unique culture.

Pay attention to how you are engaged when you come on-campus. The person whom you are meeting with should be on time, smartly dressed, and attentive. He or she should be knowledgeable of the school and genuinely interested in helping you evaluate the opportunity. They should not be pushing you to make a decision on the spot, but rather walking you through the value their school creates for students and families. Like you, they should be asking relevant questions as they guide you through a smooth, intentional process.



In addition to touring classrooms, labs, gymnasiums, lunchrooms, and other facilities, you should look for the intangibles: Are students enjoying themselves? Are they engaged? Are they aware, polite, and respectful? Are the faculty and staff pleased to see you, or do they seem bothered that a tour is disrupting their class or activity? These indicators will give you some sense of the campus culture.

If the walls could talk...



Take note of how wall space is utilized throughout classrooms and corridors. If student work is displayed, you might get a sense of what is being taught and how the subject matter is made relevant to young minds. Wall decor can also be a strong indicator of the school's culture, values, and priorities. Be on the lookout for vibrant yet orderly displays.

While on the tour, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- What is your first impression of the school?
- Look at details like landscaping, signage, and visitor parking.
- Do you feel like a welcome guest?
- Are you greeted by faculty and staff?
- Are the students engaged?
- Does the environment feel safe?
- Do classrooms look age-appropriate and inspiring?
- Is technology integrated in the classrooms?

Ask the School:

- When is your next open house?
- Can we schedule a private tour for our family?
- Do you offer shadow days for prospective students?

After the visit, ask your student:

- Did you feel happy when we visited the school?
- What new activity or sport would you like to try there?

Important Details

The campus tour should provide helpful insight into the learning experience a school can offer, but at this point, there may still be some unanswered questions. Make a list of things that are important to your family, and schedule a follow-up conversation with your admissions team member to get the answers you need.

Important - but not always evident - details to consider include:

- Test scores
- Retention/attrition rates
- Percent of graduates that go on to college
- How many students do you anticipate will be in my child's class?
- How long has the teacher been in this role?

Parent Involvement

PTOs or other types of parent involvement initiatives should remain active throughout the school year. Ask not only about opportunities to get involved, but how and when teachers prefer to communicate with parents.

Cultural Diversity and International Students

Choosing a school with a diverse student body can enrich the learning experience and help prepare your student to function in an increasingly diverse country. Look for a breakdown of student and faculty diversity and ask how respect and inclusion are fostered.

Foreign Language

Becoming fluent, or semi-fluent, in a second language provides numerous opportunities for your child. Consider what foreign language programs are offered at the school and ask at which grade level instruction begins.

Writing Skills

An essay will be required on every college application your student submits. After moving on to higher education, they will be required to research and write many lengthy essays. Learn how a school will prepare your child as a strong

writer. In some educational environments, basics such as grammar and handwriting are lost arts. Don't hesitate to ask questions.

Technology Use and Fees

Understanding how technology is used to support both teaching and learning is important. Some students will be responsible for their own tools such as computers or tablets. Find out beforehand how technology is used with intention, what fees are involved, and if measures are in place to ensure digital safety.



Side note: Speaking of technology, have you explored the school's website? Does it seem to be a valuable resource for parents? Web-based parent portals for grades and announcements can make staying involved with your child's education a breeze.

Student Outcomes

Have you asked where past students have matriculated to? This is one of the simplest – yet often overlooked – ways to certify the quality of a school. Inquire about alumni, including a college acceptance rate, specific schools they've attended, how many receive scholarships, and even what careers they have chosen.

STEP 4

Vet Your *options*



Initiate Conversation

By following steps one through ten, you have given yourself a clear and comprehensive picture of the opportunities each school will afford. You're close to an enrollment decision, and hopefully you've narrowed the list down to a few good options. With the details fresh in your mind, take some time to hear from vested individuals.

Online reviews

You've likely already glanced at online reviews, but specialized web pages can provide deeper insight from trusted sources. Check out reviews on sites like GreatSchools.com, PrivateSchoolReview.com, or the school's Google+ page.

Current parents (and students!)

Do you know a family who is currently a part of the school community? Reach out to them and schedule a playdate or family dinner to discuss their experience. If you don't know any families at the school, ask for a list of parents of students who are either in or recently through the grade you're considering. Their insights will be valuable.

Public events

Have you considered attending a public event at the school? Whether it is a football game or a theatre production, showing up can provide valuable insights to the school community. The level of spirit shown by students, families, faculty, and staff speaks volumes on the experience your child will have.

Prospective teachers

Does your student have a strong talent that you would like to see nurtured, perhaps in writing, music, art, or a specific sport? Ask to speak with a teacher or coach in that area.

The principal(s)

Principals tend to have busy schedules, but if you feel that your family would benefit from a conversation, he or she should be accessible and welcoming. After all, the head of school sets the tone for the entire school. Establishing this relationship early on proves beneficial for many families.



Making Your Decision

You've put a lot of time and energy into the process, and now it's time to make the call. You have reached the most exciting step of all. Your child is officially ready to join the student body of a fantastic independent school. Each school has a different enrollment process, so after your decision has been made, get the ball rolling with admissions. In most cases, you can expect to fill out an application, pay a fee, and complete testing before your child's enrollment is confirmed.

Things to Remember:



Bring your child into the conversation when making a final decision. Even young ones can get a sense of where they will learn best and feel most comfortable.



If you have not heard back from your school of choice, follow up with them on the admissions decision.



After getting an acceptance letter, remember to notify the school that your child will in fact attend.



After you've confirmed your enrollment, buy the T-shirt, hang the flag, apply a window decal, and get excited about your student's new journey.

CONGRATULATIONS!

And don't forget to take a picture of your student's first day of school and post it to your social media accounts. Who knows? One of your friends may be embarking on a similar process, and they'll certainly want to know about your process for choosing the right independent school for your family.



Share it!



Thank You
for helping your student

Start Smart



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