

Private School: Things to Consider When Looking for a School

First, Know your child: If he/she is presently enrolled in school, is it a happy and challenging situation? Are his work habits good? Are her extra-curricular activities and friends constructive and satisfying? Confer with the teacher to determine if your child is progressing at an appropriate rate.

Second, Decide on your basic requirements: i.e., religious, single-sex, boarding, special programs, LD/ED, extended day care, etc. Then identify some appropriate schools. Request catalogs and other pertinent information from the schools, and determine then which philosophy and program seems to meet your needs. All of this is best done by the fall of the year proceeding the year of actual enrollment

If you feel in need of additional advice from someone who can realistically evaluate your child's potential and give an objective opinion there are many Educational Counselors trained to do this very thing. These Counselors will also have broad knowledge of the local school market and be able to guide you towards an appropriate school choice as well as identify ways of obtaining financial assistance should that be needed.

Perhaps you have other concerns...

Will your child be insulated from the real world?

Today's private schools are largely committed to diversity as well as community. Indeed, many private schools have a broad ethnic, cultural, and international mix compared to the neighborhood public schools; also, due to smaller classroom sizes the student is often times taught as an individual for his or her contributions to the group. Through school community service programs and other involvement the students are made aware of the needs of others not only on the local level but nationally and internationally as well.

How do Independent Schools assist working parents?

Most schools today offer Extended Day or After School programs to allow parents flexibility with their work schedules. Some schools offer transportation or help with arranging car pools. Conference and meeting times are individually set to give parents the opportunity to be involved with their child's education. Many of the schools offer summer programs designed specifically to cover the same hours as the school year.

What is involved in the actual application process?

Call or write the schools you wish to know more about and ask for their literature to be sent to you, preferably in the fall of the year before your child will be applying. Arrange to visit the school and meet with the admissions director. At that time review with the director

their admissions procedure; also ask questions about financial aid arrangements and specific school programs. Quite often the school policy will require:

- An interview with your child
- A transcript with grades
- Some standardized testing
- Personal and/or teacher recommendations

If you are applying to more than one school, inquire about the testing procedure because many of the local independent schools may have agreed to share the test results to keep the child from having to take the same intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests more than once.

Application dates vary from school to school, but generally an application is made between September and January for the following fall; acceptances are usually made in mid-March/April. However, many schools have *rolling admissions* which means a child may apply and be accepted at any time during the year, space permitting.

What if you need Financial Aid?

Most private schools seek a broad economic and ethnic student body today and have established ways of providing tuition assistance. Some schools have funds specifically designed for scholarships; they may be need-based or awarded to students with outstanding talents and accomplishments. Many religious affiliated schools offer reduced tuition for parish or denomination members. Some schools allow discounts for more than one child enrolled.

Budget plans, loan programs and other finance options also exist, often with the school. In certain instances, when a child has not been able to perform in the public school setting, state and/or local jurisdictions may fund part or all of the private school costs.

It is always appropriate to inquire about financial assistance when contacting an independent school. The admission office will generally ask parents to complete a financial statement and may also ask for their IRS 1040 form. At most schools a request for aid does not affect a student's chances of being accepted.

Adapted from and excerpt of: *Independent School Guide for Washington, D.C. and Surrounding Areas*. L.H. Cooper and S.W. Mersereau, 1998.