

## Finding the Right Option for Your Child

Ohio has a number of options from which to choose. Interested in a private school? Is your family eligible for a scholarship? What about open enrollment in a nearby district? Are there charter schools nearby? What about online charter schools? Would home education work for your child? Where do you start?

Below is an excerpt from the “Four Steps for Selecting the School That is Right for Your Child” produced by the U.S. Department of Education:

### 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.
- Does your child need a more or less structured environment?
- 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 have non-academic special needs?
- Does your child have specific interests or hobbies?
- Does your child like to learn in groups or prefer to work alone?
- Do you want your child to go to a school within walking distance of your home?
- How will your child get to school? Does your child have any special transportation needs?
- 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 or near a close relative?

### Step 2. Gather Information About Schools

If you were looking to buy a car, vacuum cleaner, or refrigerator, you could talk to friends and family and find information on the Internet, in consumer magazines, or in other published resources. Similarly, when investigating schools, you may also have to make phone calls, collect written material from different schools and look for reports in your local paper to get the information you need.

Along with the schools' curricula and philosophy, you will want to know about school policies and services. Parents may also wish to consider the after-school programs a school offers, for example, sports, clubs, tutoring, or academic enrichment. Some schools have after-school activities.

Does the school have a strong program of core academic subjects such as English, history, mathematics, science, arts, and foreign languages?

- What courses does the school offer in addition to the core subjects?
- Does the school have a special focus or theme for the curriculum?
- Does the school offer challenging courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and high school honors courses? Enrichment activities?
- Does the school have extracurricular activities that support what is taught?
- If your child has special learning needs, does the school have a curriculum and the necessary supports to appropriately accommodate those needs?
- Does the school have a particular approach to teaching and learning (e.g., group projects, individual performance, frequent testing)?
- What is the homework policy? Does it match your expectations for how much homework your child should do?
- Do you want your child to go to a single-sex (all-boy or all-girl) school, or a coeducational school?
- How large are the classes?

- How do the school's test scores compare to those of other schools?
- What does the school do to help develop character and citizenship?
- What is the discipline policy? How does the school handle students who misbehave?
- Are teachers fair in their responses to students? Does the school have a program and supports to prevent and address behavior problems?
- What is the policy on school absences? How does the school encourage daily attendance?
- Does the school have a dress code? Do students wear uniforms?
- How does the school prevent and handle violence, bullying, harassment, and other forms of abusive behavior?
- Do students have access to computers and to the Internet in the classroom and library?
- Is there a cafeteria, and does the school offer a nutritionally well-balanced lunch program? Breakfast program?
- Are there tutoring programs?
- Are counseling services available to students?
- Is there an application process?
- What is the application deadline?
- Is anything else required in the application (test scores, interview, recommendations, application fees, etc.)?
- Are test scores required for admission?
- Are there any other admissions requirements?
- What is the tuition?
- What are the other fees and expenses (room and board, uniforms, books, transportation, lab and computer fees, activity fees)?
- What scholarships and loans are available?
- Are students or their parents required to be of a particular faith?

### **Step 3. Visit & Observe Schools**

Contact the schools you are interested in and make an appointment for a visit. If possible, tour the schools during regular school hours and visit a few classes. Avoid visiting schools during the first or last week of a semester to get a realistic sense of how the school operates.

A good way to have your questions answered is to schedule an appointment with the school principal. If possible, attend an open house, parent-teacher meeting, or other school function that would also provide valuable information about the attitudes of staff, students, and parents.

Listen closely to what teachers say about the school. The teachers will be the adults closest to your child, and you will want to know if they are well prepared, dedicated, and happy in their work.

- Is the school orderly and neat? Welcoming?
- Do the students appear to be courteous, happy, and disciplined?
- Is there a welcoming attitude toward all parents? Regular communication to parents?
- How are the students with diverse learning needs treated?
- Do the teachers appear to be helpful and friendly?
- What is the principal's philosophy about education?
- According to the principal, what are the school's strengths?
- According to the principal, what are the school's weaknesses?
- Do teachers have high expectations for all students to achieve to high academic standards?
- How do teachers inform students of their expectations?
- Are the teachers know the subjects they are teaching?
- What is the attendance rate for students?
- Do students participate in and enjoy field trips?
- How does the school encourage parental involvement?
- What are the ways parents can get involved?

- Does the school have an active parent-teacher organization?
- Does the school partner with local businesses and organizations?
- Are parents involved in the development of school policies?

## Step 4: Apply to the schools you choose

Once you select the school(s) that you think will be best for your child, you will go through a process of applying to a school (or schools) of your choice and enrolling your child.

You will want to begin this process as early as possible in order to ensure you meet all the deadlines.

Admissions processes can vary. Your child may need to be tested or interviewed, and you may need to provide a school transcript, recommendations, or other information. It would be helpful to learn about admissions criteria for the schools. You will want to double check to be sure you have accurate information on when and how to apply.

- What is the application deadline at each school?
- Submit paperwork and applications before the deadlines
- Have you completely filled out the application for each school?
- Have you submitted applications before the deadline set by each school?

The complete guide is available here:

<https://www2.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose/choosing.pdf>



At School Choice Ohio, we spend our days making sure that families across the state know about the education options available for their children. We also do everything we can to advocate for the expansion of quality options for every child. If you have questions, we're here to help. You can contact us at 614-223-1555 or by email at [info@schohio.org](mailto:info@schohio.org).