

# School Choice Decision Making

Fall 2024



**School choice decisions are really a MATCHing process.**

**Educators can help in the process by:**

- **suggesting issues to consider,**  
*Feel free to customize the attached issues document for your family's priorities.*
- **providing information about schools, and**
- **discussing your child's development.**

*At the Children's School, fall conferences are opportunities for the teacher and parents to discuss their views of the child, which will help parents choose a school whose program will best meet the child's needs. Feel free to make an appointment with Dr. Carver if you need additional consultation.*

*For families applying to private schools that require recommendations, the teachers review their conference reports, make any modifications to reflect recent changes, and then submit them to Miss Hancock for mailing to the relevant schools. **Parents must submit a release form for each school to which the conference report needs to be sent.***

**What we cannot do, however, is make the match for you, because that is a matter of values, priorities, resources, and life circumstances that are unique to each family.**

**Above all else, remember that you are making choices among excellent options for talented children; there are many schools in which they can excel.**

## Issues to Consider When Choosing a School for Your Child

*Prepared by the Children's School, Fall 2024*

**Focus on the MATCH** between your child, your family, and the school rather than seeking an absolute best choice (i.e., one school that would be best for all children in all families). **Take a BROAD, LONG-TERM VIEW** including your priorities for future years' programs as well as other children in the family so that you can avoid multiple school changes and placements of siblings in too many different schools.

Use the following **list of characteristics** as a catalyst for considering your own priorities for your child's education. We have left space on the left for you to indicate these priorities and space on the right for your general notes. We have also prepared forms for additional note-taking about individual schools when you talk with their representatives, read their literature, visit their campuses, and talk with parents of other children who attend the school.

### Philosophy

\_\_\_\_\_ •Academic, Social, and Physical Goals (*consider stated priorities as well as implicit priorities, i.e., space, time, and money allocations*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Developmentally Appropriate School Practices (e.g., amount of seatwork, homework, testing, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Abstract (theory) vs. Concrete (hands-on) Experiences

\_\_\_\_\_ •Standardization vs. Individualization

\_\_\_\_\_ •Competition vs. Cooperation

\_\_\_\_\_ •Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

*\*In the categories listed above (as well as others throughout this document), **appropriate BALANCE is the key !!***

\_\_\_\_\_ •School Policies (e.g., dress, behavior, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Discipline Strategies

### Admissions Criteria

\_\_\_\_\_ •Age Cutoffs

*The Children's School maintains its cutoff of 12/31/25 for K in Fall '25.*

#### **For Most Private Schools & Public Schools:**

Children must be 5 by 9/1/25 to enter kindergarten in Fall 2025

Children must be 6 by 9/1/25 to enter 1st grade in Fall 2025

***Pittsburgh Public Schools has a cutoff of September 30th!***

\_\_\_\_\_ •Readiness Assessment Used

*Many of the private schools use individual and/or group screening. Most of those are concerned primarily with social skills and communication, though some basic academic skills are being considered also. When discussing these "visits" with your child, we'd suggest a low-key approach, such as, "We're going to visit a new school today. I'd like you to listen to the teachers and follow the directions, just like you do in your classroom. You'll have fun at this school too. Maybe you can make some new friends."*

\_\_\_\_\_ •Grades Available (K-8, K-12)  
*Schools that continue through high school have the benefit that you're not forced to make a school change mid-way, but sometimes such change is a positive step. Be sure you consider when and how much the older and younger children interact (e.g., on the bus, in the library, on the playground) and, therefore, influence each other.*

**Educators** (*teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Leadership / Vision (*consider how comfortable you, the staff, and the students feel with the leaders, their practices, and their goals*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Who Plays What Roles? (*consider who has a voice and who has responsibility for curriculum, policy, discipline, etc. - administrators, teachers, parents, students?*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Teacher/Student Ratio (*consider aides and volunteers too*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Training (*initial and continuing professional development*) & Evaluation

\_\_\_\_\_ •Individual vs. Team Teaching

\_\_\_\_\_ •Interactions with Students (*warmth, volume, tone, engagement, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Teaching Methods (*direct instruction, hands-on, coaching, child-initiated, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Approach to Handling Individual Differences & Special Needs (*consider both additional help and additional challenge your child might need*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Connection to Current Research

\_\_\_\_\_ •Communication with Families  
(*consider newsletters, conferences, visits, PTO meetings, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Program** (*again, look for BALANCE*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Required vs. Elective Courses

\_\_\_\_\_ •Mixed Grouping vs. Ability Grouping (Tracked)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Single vs. Multi-Grade Interaction

\_\_\_\_\_ •Separate Subjects vs. Themes across Subjects

\_\_\_\_\_ •Social Skills/Values (*consider both the explicit and implicit messages*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Emphasis on Independence, Cooperation, Creativity, and Critical Thinking

\_\_\_\_\_ •Reaction to Student/Parent Input and Concerns

\_\_\_\_\_ •Nature of Assessment, Homework, Report Cards, Parent Conferences, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ •Courses Offered / Curriculum (*consider who has access to which*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •English, Social Studies, Math, and Science

\_\_\_\_\_ •Modern Language & Culture

\_\_\_\_\_ •Health/Sports/Movement/Dance

\_\_\_\_\_ •Outdoor Time/Recess/Learning through Play

\_\_\_\_\_ •Art/Music/Theatre

\_\_\_\_\_ •Additional Courses, e.g., Computer, Psychology, Politics, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ •College Admissions Record

\_\_\_\_\_ •Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Diversity** (*educators and students*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Gender

\_\_\_\_\_ •Economics

\_\_\_\_\_ •Race & Culture

\_\_\_\_\_ •Religion

\_\_\_\_\_ •Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Resources**

(*consider people, space, and equipment, consider access policies, and consider funding for the future*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •School Atmosphere (*welcoming, orderly, clean, inspiring, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Class Size

\_\_\_\_\_ •Classroom Size / Atmosphere (*organized, student work displayed, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Supplies (*texts, subscriptions, science, art, drama, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Library

\_\_\_\_\_ •Technology (*television, computers, video & audio recorders, digital cameras, etc.*)

\_\_\_\_\_ •Tutoring / Gifted or Special Education Support

\_\_\_\_\_ •Referral for Special Services

- \_\_\_\_\_ •Cafeteria, Meal Quality
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Gym, Auditorium
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Playground, Playing Fields
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Extra-Curricular Activities, Clubs, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Performances, Presentations, Concerts, Field Trips, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Family Activities & Events
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Community Activities, Innovative Projects
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Neighborhood Resources (*community facilities that are within walking distance*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Safety, Security, Nurse On-Site
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Financial Aid
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Family Impact**

- \_\_\_\_\_ •Tuition & Fees
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Schedule (*greeting, dismissal, extended day, holidays, in-service, etc.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Before & After School Care
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Transportation (*if bus, what ages of students are together?*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Distance from home to school to friends' homes (*consider play dates, birthday parties, etc.*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Parent Involvement in the School (*consider encouragement, expectations, and requirements*)
- \_\_\_\_\_ •Other \_\_\_\_\_

*If you are planning to volunteer in the public or charter school classrooms, you may want to apply for both the Criminal Background History and Child Abuse History clearances the summer before your child begins school.*

**School:**

**Philosophy:**

**Admissions Criteria:**

**Staff:**

**Program:**

**Diversity:**

**Resources:**

**Family Impact:**

### **Philosophy**

- Academic, Social, and Physical Goals
- Developmentally Appropriate Practice
- Abstract vs. Concrete Experiences
- Standardization vs. Individualization
- Competition vs. Cooperation
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- School Policies & Discipline Strategies

### **Admissions Criteria**

- Age Cutoff
- Readiness Assessment Used
- Grades Available (K-8, K-12)

### **Educators** (*teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, etc.*)

- Leadership / Vision
- Who Plays What Roles?
- Individual vs. Team Teaching
- Interactions with Students
- Handling Individual Diffs & Special Needs
- Teacher/Student Ratio
- Connection to Current Research
- Training/Professional Development
- Teaching Methods
- Communication with Families

### **Program**

- Required vs. Elective Courses
- Separate Subjects vs. Themes across Subjects
- Nature of Assessment, Homework
- Courses Offered / Curriculum
- Social Skills/Values
- Emphasis on Independence, Cooperation, Creativity, and Critical Thinking
- Reaction to Student/Parent Input and Concerns
- College Admissions Record
- Mixed Grouping vs. Ability Grouping
- Single vs. Multi-Grade Classes
- Outdoor Time/Recess/Play
- Art/Music/Theatre

### **Diversity** (*educators and students*)

- Gender
- Economics
- Race & Culture
- Religion

### **Resources**

- School Atmosphere
- Class Size
- Classroom Size / Atmosphere
- Supplies
- Library
- Cafeteria, Meal Quality
- Tutoring / Gifted or Special Education Support
- Referral for Special Services
- Extra-Curricular Activities, Clubs, etc.
- Performances, Concerts, Field Trips, etc.
- Innovative Projects
- Gym, Auditorium
- Technology
- Playground, Playing Fields
- Neighborhood Resources
- Safety, Security, Health Care
- Family & Community Activities
- Community Activities
- Family Activities & Events
- Financial Aid

### **Family Impact**

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- Distance from home to school
- Schedule
- Before & After School Care
- Transportation
- Parent Involvement in the School