Navigating Elementary School Options: Finding a Program That Works for Your Family

Carnegie Mellon University

Human Resources

Table of Contents

Contents

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools 3

- Curriculum 3
- Accountability and Assessment 4
- Social and Emotional Learning 5
- Logistical Planning 6
- School Resources 6
- Sample School Comparison Worksheet 8

Public School Districts in Allegheny County 9

Magnet School Programs 11

Special Schools and Centers 13

Charter Schools in and Around Pittsburgh 14

Private Schools in Allegheny County 17

Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program 20

Homeschooling in Pennsylvania 22

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools

Curriculum

Does instruction support the type of learning you want?

Subject Matter – Most schools focus instruction on four main content areas; English language arts, mathematics, science and history/social studies, along with a few electives, such as music, art and gym. Some schools expand upon this model by providing additional subject areas, such as second language studies or technical skills. It is also important to note the emphasis schools place on each subject. Schools impacted by standardized test scores tend to focus a great deal of energy on English language arts and math, subjects for which they are held accountable. Schools not impacted by this testing may choose to focus their energy on other subjects. Charter schools in particular tend to have a unique focus for instruction, which forms the basis of their charter. It is important to consider whether a school's instructional focus aligns with your own priorities for your child's instruction.

Rigor – Rigor is a hotly debated topic which describes how challenging the subject matter is for students. Some feel that rigor, or productive struggle, is a valuable learning tool which can yield strong academic growth. Others feel it can be a source of unnecessary stress, especially for younger children or children with learning differences. Alternatively, some schools that focus more on social and emotional growth feel that children will each set an appropriate pace for themselves if provided with challenges that come from exploration of their environment or real life problems. It is important to consider where your own viewpoints land on this spectrum and to seek a school that aligns with your viewpoints.

Instructional Methods – A number of instructional methods and strategies can be applied in a number of teaching situations. Most teachers will selectively apply different methods at times when they can be most beneficial for student learning. You will notice, however, that certain school environments tend to encourage or favor certain forms of instruction. Parents may also develop strong preferences for certain instructional methods. Understanding a few key terms might help you determine what kind of instruction you are looking for, but it is also important to remember that balanced instruction can be extremely beneficial for students.

- Direct Instruction – A teacher-directed method where information is presented directly from the teacher to the students.
- Inquiry-based Learning – A form of active learning which allows students to pose questions and seek answers to those questions through personal discovery, experimentation or research.
- Differentiated Instruction – Tailoring instruction to meet the needs of different students in the classroom. Teachers can differentiate content, process, products, the learning environment and even assessment.
- Kinesthetic Learning – Kinesthetic or tactile learning encourages learning through the process of physical activities rather than listening to a lecture or watching demonstrations.
- Flipped Classroom – A strategy that allows students to do research or readings on their own before engaging in problem solving or discussion in a class setting.
- Independent Study – Allowing students to follow their own interests and use and grow skills of their choosing as they research or problem solve independent of the class.
- Project-based Learning – An approach that attempts a deep connection to subject matter and engagement by allowing students to learn through active exploration of real life challenges.

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools

Accountability and Assessment

How will your child's learning be measured and how will teachers be held accountable for ensuring that students meet desired outcomes?

State Standards – Most public schools are governed by state instructional standards which inform teachers about learning that should be taking place in their classrooms at each grade level. In Pennsylvania, public schools must adhere to a Standards Aligned System of instruction developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. These standards set expectations across 12 subject areas and provide benchmark measures that define what students should know and be able to do at specified grade levels. These benchmark measures are also used in statewide assessment testing which seeks to measure whether students are meeting the goals set for them by the state.

Standardized Tests – Standardized tests are a topic of constant debate. School district funding and autonomy can be impacted by low test scores, which can indicate levels of proficiency in students. This, in turn, increases the pressure for districts to teach "to the test" instead of providing a rounded curriculum. These tests also do not take into consideration various types of learning or the role socioeconomic factors may play in lower test scores. From another viewpoint, these tests provide a measurable and consistent way to hold districts and teachers accountable for the outcomes of their instruction. They also provide parents a window into the overall achievement of students in each school, which many factor into their choice to enroll their children. Any school that accepts public funding is subject to these tests, which include public, charter and a small number of private schools. The results are public record.

Non-standardized Assessment – Within each classroom, teachers have a variety of assessment options available to help them decide if their instruction has been effective for students. Typically, teachers will draw on different forms of assessment as they deem appropriate, but school philosophies can also greatly impact how student learning is assessed. As a parent, you may also have a preference for how learning is assessed. Understanding the following terms can help you determine if a school's approach is right for you.

- Diagnostic Testing – These assessments are intended to measure all current knowledge or misconceptions about a particular topic and are usually implemented at the beginning of a school year to help teachers understand the work that needs to be done, or at the end of the year to demonstrate growth. MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) testing in reading and math and DIBELS testing in ELA are both examples of diagnostic testing.
- Formative Assessment – This type of assessment can be described as a kind of short, regular check-in to ensure students are on track and a lesson was successful. These can be both formal, such as quizzes, homework, or presentations; or informal, such as observations, pair and shares, and student reflections.
- Summative Assessment – This type of assessment measures mastery of a specific topic, usually after a long period of instruction has been completed. These can be formal, such as unit tests, essays or capstone projects; or less formal, such as portfolios or performances.

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools

Social and Emotional Learning

How will the school support the growth of the whole child, not just academic needs?

Impact of Emotional Learning – Helping our children understand their emotions and how to form connections with others can help them regulate their behavior, form lasting relationships and improve academic performance. As parents, there are a number of ways we can support this aspect of development, and success in this domain can look very different for each family. Finding a school that supports the social and emotional growth you are looking to foster in your child can be extremely beneficial. We have listed topics which may come up in a discussion about social and emotional learning in schools. Understanding these topics can help you navigate these discussions and find a program that matches your preferences.

- Contribution vs. Competition – Different schools will provide different environments which can either promote competition aimed at personal achievement, or focus more on each child's contributions to the learning community as a whole.
- Growth Mindset – A growth mindset embraces the belief that one's knowledge, skills and abilities can increase. This stands in contrast to a fixed mindset, which holds that one's abilities cannot change. A growth mindset can encourage persistence, progress over time and a positive disposition toward learning. Most schools have begun to implement some version of this, but how this mindset plays a role in daily instruction will differ for each program.
- Compassion and Empathy – These concepts relate to the capacity to support, care for and express concern for others. In schools, this may manifest in a number of ways, such as the language educators use, systems and practices for encouraging positive behaviors, how challenging social interactions are managed, and having opportunities to collaborate and connect with others.
- Self-regulation – Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses, usually as the result of a greater awareness of the consequences for one's actions. All children need to learn self-regulation, and schools can help them. This is a good place for a discussion about how the school handles disruptive behavior and discipline. Some schools operate on a zero tolerance policy while others take advantage of opportunities to help children understand the impact of their behavior.
- Self-Awareness and Metacognition – Children are constantly learning about themselves as they grow; their likes and dislikes, talents and challenges, and what makes them unique. Additionally, they can learn to organize and evaluate their thinking as it relates to learning and problem solving. Schools can support this introspective process in a number of ways. Some examples include providing opportunities for students to name their needs and feelings; reflect on their values, preferences and identities; and express opinions. They can also provide time for students to reflect on how they arrived at solutions to problems and compare their thinking with other students.
- Family and Community – Schools may find different ways to partner with families and the larger community, acknowledge many people and places that influence students' environments, and illustrate how groups of people live and work together. Schools may do this by inviting families to participate in committees, events or special instructional topics; or engage with the larger community by having lessons on community helpers, planning field trips or doing various service projects.

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools

Logistical Planning

Does the school fit within our budget? Can we secure safe, reliable transportation?
Are there after care options that work for our family? How long will we wait for a spot?

Hours of Operation: Most schools are open for a period roughly between 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. each day. Since this is shorter than a typical work day, parents may need to consider before and after school options for each school. Some schools provide their own after care programs. Others, particularly public schools, may provide transportation to local child care centers that can provide this service. This service almost always comes at a cost, so it is important to factor that into your decision making. It is also worth noting that some kindergartens are only open for a half day, which makes the after care an even greater need for this age group.

School Closures: Most schools will provide a calendar for the year detailing their planned closures. While these closures often coincide with major holidays, there are also days off for other reasons. Schools are also typically closed during the summer months, often creating the need for summer camps. Some schools may provide summer camp programming; others may not. Typically, there is a cost for summer camps, and they are usually more expensive than after care rates. Summer camps can be provided by child care centers but also by places that do not normally provide child care, like museums or the zoo. There are a lot of options for school aged children in the summer months, but be sure to register early because spaces fill up.

Transportation: Most, but not all, public school districts provide free busing to their students. These districts often will provide free busing to students attending private or charter schools as well. These arrangements are typically only upon request. Some school districts are walking-only districts, so it is important to factor this in when selecting a district or school.

Lunches: Free and reduced price lunches are available at most school districts to students who meet certain income requirements. For those who do not meet these requirements, lunches are provided for a small fee. Additionally, all Pennsylvania public school students have access to free breakfast at school, regardless of family income. Different schools handle the quality and nutrition of their lunch programs in different ways.

School Resources

Does the school provide the resources we are looking for?

Well maintained facility

Ample classroom supplies

Welcoming classroom environment

Access to a library

Special services for gifted or special education

Cafeteria and healthy food options

Access to a gym

Access to an auditorium

Access to a playground and outdoor space

Extracurricular activities

Family activities and events

Access to a nurse

Factors to Consider When Comparing Schools

Part of the process of finding a school that works best for your family is understanding where your preferences lie and what is most important to you. While we provided a lot of information, ultimately, you will need to decide which direction your family should take when choosing from the available options.

On subsequent pages, we list a number of school options available to families in our region. Each of these schools should provide information sessions you can attend or have enrollment personnel who can answer your questions. There is no need to be shy about asking for information you think is important for the education of your child. As their parent and primary advocate, nobody else will be more invested in their future.

Below, we have provided space for you to write notes on topics that stood out to you as important. Feel free to do further research or explore these topics more. On the next page, we provide a sample worksheet you can use when comparing schools. We highly suggest you create one customized to what you are looking for in a school, but feel free to use this one if it works for you. We also hope you will reach out to **HR Family Care** with any questions or for support. We are always happy to help you navigate this process.

Notes

Sample School Comparison Worksheet

Name of School:_____

Logistics

Hours of Operation:

Location:

Transportation:

Price:

Aftercare/summer camp options:

Program Features

Philosophy:

Staff credentials:

Admissions criteria:

Specialized programming:

Curricular features:

Enrollment Procedures

Applications due:

Enrollment process (lottery, etc):

Youngest age served (best time to enroll):

Priority for siblings?:

Start of the program year:

Public School Districts in Allegheny County

Public schools are regulated and funded through local government authorities and provide free schooling to all children within a district population. In Pennsylvania, schooling is compulsory at age 6. If you choose not to attend the public school options available, you will need to arrange another option for your children.

Generally, families are assigned to a neighborhood school based on the location of their home. However, some districts may allow you to choose which school to attend within the district. Depending on the size of the district, there may also be magnet school options for you to consider. Enrollment for magnet schools is typically by lottery system, meaning there is no guarantee you will get a spot.

Most public school systems start with kindergarten. Enrollment usually opens at age 5, but each district has its own age requirements for attendance. Most districts also require documentation such as proof of residency, your child's birth certificate and immunization records.

While most districts will accept children on a rolling basis, it is recommended to enroll them prior to the start of the school year, which generally starts around September. Applications for magnet schools may be due far in advance of this. School districts also run on an academic calendar, with planned closures throughout the year and no school during the summer months. The typical school day is also shorter than the average work day, with most schools in session from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day. Some districts will provide after care and summer camps, while others will partner with local providers and bus children to centers that offer these services.

If you live within the City of Pittsburgh, your school district is Pittsburgh Public Schools. There are many neighborhood schools as well as a variety of magnet schools provided within this district. To find your neighborhood school, use the Discover PPS Tool. If you live outside the city, find your district below.

Find Your School District

Allegheny Valley School District — Cheswick Borough, Springdale Borough, Harmar Township, Springdale Township

Avonworth School District — Ben Avon Borough, Ben Avon Heights Borough, Emsworth Township, Kilbuck Township, Ohio Township

Baldwin-Whitehall School District — Baldwin Borough, Whitehall Borough, Baldwin Township

Bethel Park School District — Municipality of Bethel Park

Brentwood Borough School District — Brentwood Borough

Carlynton School District — Carnegie Borough, Crafton Borough, Rosslyn Farms Borough

Chartiers Valley School District — Bridgeville Borough, Heidelberg Borough, Collier Township, Scott Township

Clairton City School District — City of Clairton

Cornell School District — Coraopolis Borough, Neville Township

Deer Lakes School District — East Deer Township, Frazer Township, West Deer Township

Duquesne City School District — City of Duquesne

East Allegheny School District — East McKeesport Borough, Wall Borough, Wilmerding Borough and North Versailles Township

Elizabeth Forward School District — Elizabeth Borough, Elizabeth Township, Forward Township.

Fox Chapel Area School District — Municipalities of Aspinwall, Blawnox, Fox Chapel, Sharpsburg, Indiana Township, O'Hara Township

Public School Districts in Allegheny County

Gateway School District – Monroeville Borough, Pitcairn Borough

Hampton Township School District – Hampton Township

Highlands School District – Tarentum Borough, Brackenridge Borough, Fawn Township, Harrison Township

Keystone Oaks School District – Dormont, Borough, Castle Shannon Borough, Green Tree Borough

McKeesport Area School District – City of McKeesport. Municipalities of Versailles, South Versailles, Dravosburg and White Oak.

Montour School District – Kennedy Township, Robinson Township, Ingram Borough, Thornburg Borough, Pennsbury Village Borough

Moon Area School District – Crescent Township, Moon Township

Mt. Lebanon School District – Mt. Lebanon Township

North Allegheny School District – Marshall Township, McCandless Township, Wexford, Bradford Woods Borough, Franklin Park Borough

North Hills School District – Ross Township, West View Borough

Northgate School District – Bellevue Borough, Avalon Borough

Penn Hills School District – Penn Hills Township

Pine-Richland School District – Pine Township, Richland Township

Plum Borough School District – Plum Borough

Quaker Valley School District – Sewickley Borough, Leetsdale Borough, Edgeworth Borough, Glen Osborne Borough, Sewickley Hills Borough, Sewickley Heights Borough, Bell Acres Borough, Haysville Borough, Glenfield Borough, Leet Township, Aleppo Township

Riverview School District – Oakmont Borough, Verona Borough

Shaler Area School District – Shaler Township, Etna Borough, Millvale Borough, Reserve Township

South Allegheny School District – Port Vue Borough, Liberty Borough, Glassport Borough, Lincoln Borough

South Fayette Township School District – South Fayette Township

South Park School District – South Park Township

Steel Valley School District – Homestead Borough, Munhall Borough, West Homestead Borough

Sto-Rox School District – McKees Rocks Borough, Stowe Township

Upper St. Clair School District – Upper St. Clair Township

West Allegheny School District – Findlay Township, North Fayette Township, Oakdale Borough

West Jefferson Hills School District – Jefferson Hills Borough, West Elizabeth Borough, Pleasant Hills Borough

West Mifflin Area School District – West Mifflin Borough, Whitaker Borough

Wilkinsburg Borough School District – Wilkinsburg Borough

Woodland Hills School District – Braddock Borough, Braddock Hills Borough, Chalfant Borough, Churchill Borough, East Pittsburgh Borough, Edgewood Borough, Forest Hills Borough, North Braddock, Borough Rankin Borough, Swissvale Borough, Turtle Creek Borough and Wilkins Township

Magnet School Programs

Magnet schools are public schools, managed by the school district, which offer special instructional focuses or programs not offered elsewhere in the district while still following all district required curriculum. Unlike typical public schools, these schools are typically not neighborhood specific, meaning children from anywhere in the district can attend. Sometimes, magnet programs exist within existing neighborhood schools, offering a partial magnet program.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Magnet Program

Pittsburgh Public Schools operates 20 magnet school programs within the district. A guide to these program offerings is available on the PPS website. City residents receive priority for enrollment; however, non-city residents can be admitted if there is space available. Tuition is charged for non-resident students unless they are the children of Pittsburgh Public Schools employees. Some magnet programs have eligibility criteria that students must meet in order to be considered for admission. This criteria is outlined in the district's Administrative Regulation.

Admission to Pittsburgh magnet school programs is administered by a lottery system. Applications are usually due in December in the year prior to admission, and determinations are usually made by February. Students must be registered in Pittsburgh Public Schools to apply to a magnet program. Applicants can receive weights (extra chances for admission) for the magnet lottery based on a variety of factors outlined on the PPS website. Applicants can also increase their chance of admission by being granted a preference based on either having a sibling who is already enrolled in the program, or continuing from an elementary magnet program to a similar secondary magnet program.

Magnet Options in Pittsburgh Public Schools

Allderdice High School, Pre-Engineering — a partial magnet program focusing on critical thinking and engineering

Allegheny K-5 — emphasis on writing skills is embedded throughout the curriculum

Allegheny 6-8 — emphasizes academic achievement, structure, discipline, character development, technology proficiency, and community responsibility

Brashear High School, Computer Science & Teaching Academy — partial magnet program for students who have indicated an interest in the teaching profession

Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) 6-12 — a creative and performing arts program in Downtown Pittsburgh

Carmalt PreK-8 — specializes in science and technology

Classical Academy 6-8 — curriculum provides an in-depth look at the influence classical societies have had on our modern, western world and how we can continue to use those ideas to help shape our future world

Dilworth PreK-5 — emphasis on arts integration and humanities for all subject areas

Fulton PreK-5, French Emphasis — a partial magnet program which promotes the study of French culture and the study of French language in various countries of the world

Liberty K-5 — emphasis on Spanish Language instruction and studies of Spanish speaking countries

Linden K-5 — emphasis on language and culture exposure in either Mandarin Chinese or German

Magnet School Programs

Milliones University Prep, University Focus — a partial magnet program focused on preparing students for college acceptance with advanced coursework

Montessori PreK-5 — aligns Montessori pedagogy with Culturally Relevant Teaching strategies

Obama Academy of International Studies — provides an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, which is recognized worldwide for the rigorous education it provides

Perry High School, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) & STEAM — two partial magnet program options: STEAM education or Service & Military Science

Phillips K-5, Spanish Emphasis — a partial magnet program with an emphasis on Spanish language instruction

Schiller 6-8 — provides a rigorous academic program which involves STEAM- focused curriculum in all classes

Science & Technology Academy (SciTech) — tailored to students who have a passion for science, technology, engineering or math

Sterrett 6-8, Classical Academy — a partial magnet program emphasizing reading, writing, speaking, problem-solving and computer use while cultivating an understanding and appreciation for the influence and contribution of various cultures to human history

Woolslair PreK-5, STEAM — a partial magnet program offering a focus on STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math)

Special Schools and Centers

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Schools and Centers

Pittsburgh Public Schools operates seven special schools and centers in the district. These provide students with an equitable education that addresses individual needs so students can reach their fullest potentials. A list of these program offerings can be found on the guide from A+ Schools Pittsburgh. Some special schools and centers have eligibility criteria that students must meet to be considered for admission. This criteria is outlined on the PPS Special Schools/Centers webpage.

Special Schools and Centers in Pittsburgh Public Schools

Pittsburgh Clayton Academy 6-12 — alternative education for students who were expelled

Pittsburgh Conroy Education Center — for students ages 5-12 who have life skills support, autism support, and multiple disability support needs

Pittsburgh Gifted Center — provides specially designed instruction for students with a Gifted Individual Education Plan (GIEP) one day a week

Pittsburgh Oliver Citywide Academy — for students in grades 3–12 who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Pittsburgh Online Academy 4–12 — an online school option using Oddysseyware courseware

Pittsburgh Pioneer Education Center — Available to students with IEPs who need support for multiple disabilites

Pittsburgh Student Achievement Center — An alternative school program for students in grades 6–12 who need to recover credits, are serving long-term suspensions, etc.

Charter Schools in and Around Pittsburgh

Charter schools are independently operated, publicly funded schools with fewer regulations guiding their approach to instruction. All charter schools operate under a contract with a charter school authorizer that holds them accountable to the standards outlined in their charter. These schools are part of the public school system and are provided free of charge but are not operated by the school district.

You must apply to charter schools to be considered for admission, and most do enrollment through a lottery system. Some charter schools accept students from outside of their public school district.

There are two primary types of charter schools: 1) "brick-and-mortar" charter schools, which offer in-person instruction and are located within the boundaries of the school district that granted the charter; and 2) cyber charter schools, which use technology as its primary means of instruction and may have limited, if any, physical facilities or in-person instruction.

Charter schools generally run on similar academic calendars as public schools and have schedules that run shorter than a typical workday. Some charter schools offer summer camps or before or after care programming, or partner with local providers to bus children to and from these programs. However, as transportation is not always provided by charter schools, external programs can be more challenging.

Below, we have listed **charter schools in the City of Pittsburgh** and **surrounding regions**. We encourage you to read the descriptions and learn more about programs that seem to align with your preferences.

Charter Schools in the City of Pittsburgh

Catalyst Academy Charter School — Three important core values guide us in pursuit of our mission: Belong. Grow. Achieve. Our educational philosophy is that a child's education should seek mastery along three dimensions: college readiness, career readiness, life readiness. Our model features high expectations, academic rigor, quality teaching, strong relationships, innovation and personalization, and holistic development.

City Charter High School — A technology infused charter school whose mission is to graduate students who are academically, technologically, personally and socially prepared to succeed in post-secondary education, training or employment. Our six core beliefs are connections to the real world, continuous challenge, individual responsibility for learning, personal academic connections, safe and caring environment, collaboration.

Environmental Charter School at Frick Park — Combines academic rigor with a multi-disciplinary, "out-the-door" learning approach rooted in real-world problems that build active, engaged and empathetic citizens. We think differently. We approach school differently. We believe that it is our responsibility to build an active, engaged and thoughtful citizenry — not just graduate students. We strongly commit to building systems thinkers, and use the platform of environment and ecology to explore complexity, diverse perspectives and various disciplinary ways to engage or explore a problem.

Manchester Academic Charter School — Committed to providing a superior education to children from all backgrounds in preparation for success in high school, college and beyond. We foster the dreams of all children by providing an outstanding and dynamic education in a nurturing environment. We will continue to be an educational center of excellence and become a community pillar of support where students excel, families are engaged, teachers are empowered and alumni flourish.

Charter Schools in and Around Pittsburgh

Passport Academy Charter School — PACS serves high school students who are at least 17 but under age 21 who reside in Pennsylvania. We are a blended school that combines online learning with in-person teaching. Our tuition-free public school allows each student the opportunity to succeed using his or her own individualized way of learning. Students have the option to take a full array of online courses coupled with onsite teacher support in a school building during regular school hours, Monday through Friday.

Propel Charter School – Hazelwood — Designated as a community school, we encourage a truly unique breed of scholars by supporting their passions and encouraging their dreams. Our mission is to inspire achievement through critical thinking, evidence-based understanding and innovation. We accomplish this through a meaningful, collaborative, academically rigorous intellectual community. Our scholars will graduate with increased college and career readiness empowered with critical thinking skills, effective communication abilities and an appreciation for the arts needed to be successful life-long learners.

Propel Charter School- Northside — Designated as a community school, our mission is to create and sustain a culture focused on academic excellence, continuous growth, and a positive school environment. We prioritize building and strengthening community ties so that we can remove barriers to learning and improve our broader community.

Provident Charter School — Designed for educating students with language-based learning differences such as dyslexia. The overall structure of Provident Charter School is different than traditional schools as it offers an environment tailored for supporting students who are struggling to read.

The New Academy Charter School — Established to serve a specific type of student, one whose previous academic performance was the direct result of poor attendance, behavior problems and academic deficiencies. To help these students begin to redirect their lives, New Academy Charter School pioneered a ground-breaking new school environment designed to change the very foundations of how these young people — and even their parents and their communities — view academic success.

Urban Academy of Pittsburgh Charter School — The school's twenty year mission has been to provide a superior education that will develop our students' academic excellence, leadership skills and social values enabling them to ultimately become positive contributors to the community in which they live, and society as a whole. We work daily to deliver instructional and school-based activities that reinforce our students' perception of skill, self-esteem and self-sufficiency. We have high expectations for our students, and as such we make sure our students have access to the tools, resources and support needed to succeed in an environment of high expectations, academic standards and familiar cultural context.

Urban Pathways 6-12 Charter School — A tuition-free public charter school that focuses on giving every student the chance to find their pathway to success in the classroom and beyond. Our staff works to form meaningful relationships and uplift our students by providing individualized attention through smaller class sizes, lower student-to-teacher ratios (12:1), and supervised after-school activities.

Urban Pathways K-5 College Charter School — We are a free charter school located in downtown Pittsburgh. Since opening our doors in August 2011, we have created a learning environment where students thrive. We are the only school in Pennsylvania to fully implement the Core Knowledge Curriculum. Using rigorous educational standards, and connecting learning with experiences in the Pittsburgh Cultural District and City of Pittsburgh, we help students achieve their full potential.

Charter Schools in and Around Pittsburgh

Charter Schools in Nearby Regions

Northeast of Pittsburgh

Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship

Spectrum Charter School Inc.

LIFE Male STEAM Academy

Northwest of Pittsburgh

Propel Montour High School

Propel Montour Elementary

Southeast of Pittsburgh

Young Scholars of McKeesport Charter School

Propel Andrew Street

Propel Braddock Hills Elementary School

Propel Braddock Hills Middle School

Propel Braddock Hills High School

Propel East

Propel Homestead

Propel McKeesport

Propel Pitcarin

Westinghouse Arts Academy

Southwest of Pittsburgh

Young Scholars of Western PA Charter School

Statewide Cyber Charter Schools

21st Century Cyber Charter School

Achievement House Cyber Charter School

Agora Cyber Charter School

ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School

Central PA Digital Learning Foundation Charter School

Commonwealth Charter Academy

Esperanza Cyber Charter School

Insight PA Cyber Charter School

PA Distance Learning Charter School

PA Virtual Charter School

Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School

Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School

Reach Charter Cyber School

Private Schools in Allegheny County

Private, or independent, schools are privately owned and funded by nongovernmental agencies. Private schools typically enroll via an admissions process which may include an assessment, teacher recommendations, and/or an interview. Students are charged tuition to attend private schools, though certain schools may have scholarships or offer financial assistance.

Private schools tend to have enrollment periods every year where potential students can apply to join the school. Applying does not mean you will be accepted. Many of these schools can be competative and some may be difficult to get into. Generally, it is best to start trying to enroll your child at the youngest age they offer, as this will afford you the most spaces available. There are typically application fees, so it can be costly to apply to several at once.

Private schools may be affiliated with an outside organization, such as a university or religious institution. In Pennsylvania, there is a State Board of Private Academic Schools, which licenses and regulates private schools with regulations that are similar to those for public schools. Not all private schools are licensed; some may be considered "nonpublic nonlicensed schools" or "accredited schools" instead.

Private schools are similar to charter and public schools in terms of running during the academic year, having scheduled closures, and having a schedule that runs shorter than the typical workday. Some charter schools may offer summer camps or before or after care school programming at the school itself.

You can learn more on private schools through the Department of Education website or search for a private school based on location, type, affiliation or other criteria.

Private Schools

University Affiliation

The Campus Laboratory School of Carlow University — Oakland

The Children's School — Oakland

The Cyert Center — Oakland

Falk Laboratory School — Oakland

The University School — Shadyside

Learning Differences and Special Needs

ACLD Tilotson School — Whitehall

DePaul School for Hearing and Speech — Shadyside

Hope Academy — Multiple Locations

New Story Schools — Monroeville

PACE School — Churchill

Pittsburgh New Church School — Point Breeze

PLEA — Wilkinsburg

Pressley Ridge — North Side

St. Anthony School Programs — Wexford

The Day School at The Children's Institute — Squirrel Hill

Watson Institute Social Center for Academic Achievement — Sharpsburg

Watson Institute Friendship Academy — Friendship

Watson Institute Education Center Sewickley — Sewickley

Wesley K-8 — Upper St. Clair

Wesley High School — Castle Shannon

Western PA School for Blind Children — Oakland

Western PA School for the Deaf — Edgewood

Private Schools in Allegheny County

Religious Affiliation

Archangel Gabriel Catholic School — McKees Rocks

Aquinas Academy Pittsburgh – Gibsonia

Ave Maria Academy – Mt. Lebanon

Bishop Canevin High School – Carnegie

Blessed Trinity Academy – Glenshaw

Cheswick Christian Academy – Cheswick

Christ the Divine Teacher Catholic Academy – Aspinwall

Cornerstone Christian Preparatory Academy, Wilson Campus – West Mifflin

Blessed Francis Seelos Academy – Wexford

Central Catholic High School – Oakland

Community Day School – Squirrel Hill

Divine Mercy Academy – Monroeville

Eden Christian Academy – Multiple Locations

Greater Works Christian School – Monroeville

Harvest Baptist Academy – Natrona Heights

Hillel Academy – Pittsburgh

Hillcrest Christian Academy – Bethel Park

Holy Cross Academy – North Hills

Holy Family Catholic School – Plum, Verona

Imani Christian Academy – East Hills

Nazareth Prep – North Hills

Mary of Nazareth Catholic School – White Oak

Northside Catholic School – Northside

Oakland Catholic High School – Oakland

Our Lady of Sacred Heart High School – Coraopolis

Pittsburgh Urban Christian School – Wilkinsburg

Providence Heights Alpha School – Allison Park

Redeemer Lutheran School – Verona

Rhema Christian School – Coraopolis

Robinson Township Christian School – McKees Rocks

Sacred Heart Elementary School – Shadyside

Serra Catholic High School – McKeesport

Seton LeSalle High School – Mt. Lebanon

Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy – Wilkinsburg

St. Bede School – Point Breeze

St. Benedict the Moor School – Hill District

St. Edmund's – Squirrel Hill

St. Elizabeth Regional School – Whitehall

St. James School – Sewickley

St. Joseph High School – Natrona Heights

St. Louise de Marillac – Upper St. Clair

St. Therese – Munhall

Trinity Christian School – Forest Hills

Universal Academy of Pittsburgh – Swissvale

Walnut Grove Christian School – West Mifflin

Yeshiva Schools – Squirrel Hill

Private Schools in Allegheny County

Unaffiliated

Ellis School — Oakland

Kentucky Avenue School — Shadyside

Montessori Center Academy — Glenshaw

Mt Lebanon Montessori School — Mt. Lebanon

Sewickley Academy — Sewickley

Shady Side Academy — Fox Chapel

Shady Side Academy Junior School — Point Breeze

The Glen Montessori School — Ross

The Neighborhood Academy — Highland Park

Three Rivers Village School — Hazelwood

The Waldorf School of Pittsburgh — Bloomfield

Winchester Thurston — Oakland

Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program

Created in 2012 as a result of ACT 85, this program allows eligible children who reside within the boundaries of a low-achieving school on the first day of classes to apply for a scholarship to attend another public or nonpublic school. It is important to note that this scholarship is only accepted by certain schools and cannot be applied universally. You can **search participating schools** or look for an asterisk on the private schools listings in this guide.

Student Eligibility: This is a statewide program specific to Pennsylvania, and funds are provided on a limited basis. Participating families are required to have an annual income of no greater than $112,348, plus $19,775 for each additional dependent. This scholarship can be awarded for each year of enrollment for up to the lesser of five years or until completion of grade 12, provided the applicant otherwise remains eligible. For the 2024-25 school year, the maximum scholarship award available to non-special education students is $8,500. The maximum for a special education student is $15,000. Please note that funds shall not exceed the cost of tuition and school expenses and cannot be used for home education programs.

How to Apply: Scholarships are awarded by approved **Opportunity Scholarship Organizations** and not the Department of Education. You will need to contact one of these organizations to apply. The Children's School on CMU's campus is currently one of these approved organizations. If you would like to apply for this program via the Children's School, email **lh37@andrew.cmu.edu**. There is a $35 application fee.

School Eligibility: Low achieving schools are defined as those ranked in the lowest 15% of their designation based on the combined Mathematics/Algebra I and Reading/Literature scores from the annual assessments they administer (PASA, PSSA, and/or Keystone). The list of schools changes annually, so be sure to check the **Department of Education**'s website for an updated listing. For those residing in the Allegheny County, the following schools were listed in the lowest 15% for the 2024-24 school year. If one of these schools is your designated neighborhood school, you may be eligible for this credit.

Low Achieving Schools (Allegheny County)

Clairton City School District

Clairton Elementary School

Clairton Middle School/ High School

Cornell School District

Cornell High School

Duquesne City School District

Duquesne Elementary School

East Allegheny School District

East Allegheny Junior and Senior High School

McKeesport Area School District

Twin Rivers Elementary School

Founders Hall Middle School

McKeesport Area Senior High School

Penn Hills School District

Penn Hills Elementary School

Linton Middle School

Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program

Pittsburgh Public Schools

Academy at Westinghouse
Pittsburgh Allegheny 6-8
Pittsburgh Arlington K-8
Pittsburgh Arsenal K-5
Pittsburgh Brashear High School
Pittsburgh Classical 6-8
Pittsburgh Faison K-5
Pittsburgh King K-8
Pittsburgh Langley K-8
Pittsburgh Lincoln K-5
Pittsburgh Linden K-5
Pittsburgh Manchester K-8
Pittsburgh Mifflin K-8
Pittsburgh Miller K-5
Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12
Pittsburgh Morrow K-8
Pittsburgh Obama 6-12
Pittsburgh Perry High School
Pittsburgh South Brook 6-8
Pittsburgh South Hills 6-8
Pittsburgh Spring Hill K-5
Pittsburgh Sterrett 6-8
Pittsburgh Weil K-8

South Allegheny School District

South Allegheny Middle School

Sto-Rox School District

Sto-Rox Primary Center
Sto-Rox Upper Elementary School
Sto-Rox Junior and Senior High School

Wilkinsburg Borough School District

Turner Intermediate School

Woodland Hills School District

Edgewood Elementary STEAM Academy
Wilkins Elementary STEAM Academy
Woodland Hills Elementary School

Homeschooling in Pennsylvania

Compulsory School Attendance

In the state of Pennsylvania, parents can elect to educate their child at home as long as they meet certain criteria established by the state. In order to have your decision to homeschool count towards your child's compulsory school attendance, you will need to supply your local school district with:

- A notarized affidavit or unsworn declaration (examples can be found on the Department of Education's website). The initial affidavit may be submitted any time during the school year before the homeschool program begins, but all subsequent affidavits are due by August 1 every year, or July 1 if you wish to do year-round schooling.
- Evidence of student medical/dental exams and immunization (see a full schedule of screenings/exams as well as guidelines and forms)

Mandated Program Components

Home Education Evaluator — someone qualified to conduct student interviews and review your student's portfolio. View the qualification criteria.

- This evaluator will need to submit written certification that an appropriate education is occurring to your home district's superintendent by June 30 each year. An appropriate education is defined as consisting of instruction in the required subjects, meets the time required, and the student demonstrates sustained progress in the overall program.
- The twelfth grade evaluator that co-signs the home education high school diploma confirms that the student is suitable for graduation.
- There is often a cost associated with hiring an evaluator that the parent is responsible for paying.

Home Education Program Supervisor — the parent or guardian of the child who will be responsible for planning, conducting and documenting the homeschool program.

- The supervisor of the home education program must have a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- All adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children must not have been convicted of the criminal offenses itemized in 24 P.S. §1-111 (e) within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit.
- During the school year, the supervisor maintains a portfolio of records and materials, demonstrating that an appropriate education is occurring.
- The program must be conducted in English.

Student Work Portfolio — a collection of work completed by the student that showcases the learning that occurred in the homeschool program. This will be maintained over the course of all grade levels and reviewed each year and upon graduation.

- Homeschool children are required to take standardized tests in grades three, five and eight, without exception. If you choose not to take advantage of the PSSA testing at your local school district, you may select from the approved alternatives. These tests will be reviewed as part of your student's portfolio.

- There are certain courses a student is legally required to take. The portfolio should provide evidence of completion of this material. (Parents have a legal right to borrow copies of the school district's own planned courses, textbooks and other curriculum materials appropriate to the student's age and grade level; these are provided free of charge. However, parents are not required follow the district curriculum, as long as the mandated topics are covered.)

Additional Considerations

Homeschooling should not be confused with cyber schooling. Cyber, or online, school options provided by a school district or charter school are already state recognized programs which will earn your child a diploma. Non-public, private cyber schools are not registered with PDE, and their diplomas are not state-recognized. For more information on obtaining a diploma for homeschooled children, see the Department of Education's website.

There are additional requirements for homeschooling students who have been identified with a disability. The homeschool program must address the specific needs of the student with a disability and be approved by a teacher with a valid certificate from the Commonwealth to teach special education or a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist. Provision of special education services to homeschool students is at the discretion of the school district where the family resides.

Homeschooled students also have the right to participate in extracurricular activities in their school district of residence, and are subject to the policies of those programs, if they choose to participate.

Resources and Support

There are a variety of resources available to families designing their homeschool experience. Homeschool Legal Defense Association, the US Department of State, and Homeschool-Curriculum.org all provide resources and support.

Parents of homeschooled students will sometimes coordinate their efforts to share resources, ideas and planned activities, such as graduation celebrations. Some examples of formal homeschool cooperatives are listed below, and an extensive list of support groups and resources is available.

Family Instructors of the North Suburbs (FINS)
- association, conference, evaluators, information, support group
- Email: pfins-owner@yahoogroups.com

Homeschool Co-op of Pittsburgh
- field trips, support group
- Email: pghhomeschoolcoop@gmail.com

North Pittsburgh Star Co-op
- enrichment classes, social opportunities, and support
- Email: hellostarcoop@gmail.com

PALS Enrichment Pittsburgh (People Always Learning Something)
- enrichment classes, field trips
- Email: new@palsenrichment.org

Saint Ambrose Academy
- enrichment classes, religious
- Email: Info@SaintAmbroseAcademy.org

South Hills Homeschool Cooperative
- enrichment classes, religious
- Email: Contact Form

Western PA Enrichment Center
- enrichment classes, religious
- Email: WECquestions@gmail.com