

Discussion Chart for Comparing School Options

Many families wonder how to thoroughly assess different school options for their gifted child. We've created the chart below to help with that process. You can use this chart to help you in creating a list of questions to ask schools and as a guide to discussing different options with your family. You may find answers to the questions below through visiting different schools, meeting with school officials and teachers, talking with current parents and students, and through materials published by the school (including the school's website). After researching different options, you can use this chart to organize your thoughts and impressions about each school.

You don't have to answer all questions. Some questions and sections are going to be more important to you and your student than others. That's all okay! This is just meant as a starting point to help you think through your options.

		School Name:	School Name:
School Mission: What is the school's mission or specialization? How clearly is the mission communicated? Who do they specifically want to assist? Are there measurable outcomes? What impact does the mission have on the school organization or curriculum? What is the school's budget priorities? Who makes the budget?			
Gifted Program: Does the school have a gifted program? What does it look like? How is it supported; is there dedicated staff, money, and resources? What is the school's definition of giftedness? How and when are students identified? What services or accommodations are available? Does the school have an acceleration or differentiation policy? Who makes decisions about the gifted program, identification procedures, and accommodation policies? What is the school's track record with gifted students?			
Core Curriculum: Think through the following questions for each of the core areas listed to the right. Is there a specific curriculum used? How flexible is the curriculum? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve in this subject? What is the quality of the curricular materials? What do assignments look like? Are there opportunities for a wide breadth of learning? Are there opportunities for in-depth study? Does the curriculum cultivate creative and critical thinking processes? Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents? Is there time and support for students if they need to practice specific skills in this area? Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, student clubs, competitions, research opportunities, etc.)?	Language Arts		
	Math		
	Science		
	Social Studies		
Foreign Language Curriculum: What languages are taught? Is there a specific curriculum used? How flexible is the curriculum? What is the quality of the curricular materials? Do students have access to native speakers? Does the curriculum emphasize speaking, listening, reading, writing, and/or cultural understanding? What do assignments look like? What is the school's philosophy in teaching a foreign language? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top			

<p>level that students can achieve with this curriculum? Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, student clubs, study abroad or student exchanges, etc.)?</p>		
<p>Art Curriculum: What art forms are taught? Who is teaching the art classes; what are their qualifications? Is there a specific curriculum used? What does art class look like; what do students do during class? What do activities/assignments look like? Does the curriculum emphasize learning specific skills, expressing oneself creatively, art appreciation, and/or art history? What is the school's philosophy in teaching art? Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents? What resources are available (kilns, dark rooms, theaters, etc.)? Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, student clubs, competitions, portfolio reviews, student galleries/performances, etc.)?</p>		
<p>Music Curriculum: What instruments (voice, recorder, orchestral instruments) are taught? What type of music is taught (classical, traditional/folk, popular/Broadway, etc.)? Who is teaching the music class; what are their qualifications? What does music class look like; what do students do during class? What do activities/assignments look like? Does the curriculum emphasize reading music, learning an instrument, expressing oneself creatively, music appreciation, and/or music history? What is the school's philosophy in teaching music? Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents? Are there school groups (bands, choirs, etc.) that students can participate in? Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, competitions, master classes, individual lessons, student composing or conducting opportunities, etc.)?</p>		
<p>P.E. Curriculum: What is taught during P.E.? Who is teaching P.E.; what are their qualifications? What does P.E. class look like; what do students do during class? Does the curriculum emphasize sports, group activities (like capture the flag), exercise, and/or health? What is the school's philosophy in teaching P.E.? Is the program flexible? What accommodations are in place for students with health or physical concerns? What facilities are available (gyms, tracks, fields, courts, pools, skating rinks, equestrian trails, etc.)? What specialized equipment is available (gymnastic equipment, various rackets, etc.)? Are there P.E. releases for athletes or other students? Are there opportunities for a student to tailor this curriculum by choosing specialized classes?</p>		
<p>Social/Emotional Learning: Is there a social/emotional learning curriculum? What is the philosophy of the curriculum? Does it match your values/family philosophy? What types of skills does it teach? What is the quality of the curricular materials? Does the curriculum cultivate creative and critical thinking processes?</p>		
<p>Extracurriculars: What extracurriculars are available? Who runs the extracurriculars? What type of support does the school or district provide? Which extracurriculars receive the most support and attention? Are there opportunities to start new clubs or other extracurriculars? Can students participate in extracurriculars at nearby schools? Are these extracurriculars fee-based; do students have to pay to register or pay for their own uniforms, equipment, etc.?</p>		
<p>Independent Learning: Is there time and support for students to pursue independent projects, courses, or other opportunities outside of the regular curriculum? What type of support (mentors, physical resources, etc.)? How many students are pursuing independent learning opportunities?</p>		

<p>Advanced Learning Opportunities: In addition to independent study, are there other advanced learning opportunities such as dual enrollment in local colleges, internships, research, and travel? How many students take advantage of these opportunities? Are these opportunities easy to access? For example, for dual enrollment, is there a college nearby? Can a student leave early to attend college classes?</p>		
<p>Special Programs: Are there any other special classes and programs students can participate in?</p>		
<p>Recess/Free Time: Is there downtime built into the school day? How much? When during the day? Do students have a choice with how to spend their time? For example, could a student choose to go the library once a week during recess or bring a chess set out on the playground? What facilities support student free time? For example, for high school students with a free period, what rooms can they utilize?</p>		
<p>Instructional Approach/Philosophy: What type of teaching happens at the school (traditional lecture, discussion-based, project-based, experiential, online, etc.)? Is the type of teaching consistent across all subjects? How much do students drive the instructional approach?</p>		
<p>Instructional Pacing: How quickly do students progress? Who sets the pace? Is the pacing consistent across different subjects? Can a student advance at his or her own pace if need be?</p>		
<p>Subject Advancement and Acceleration: Can a student test out of a course or replace a curriculum with a more advance curriculum? For example, could a student do an online algebra class instead of 5th grade math?</p>		
<p>School Day and Calendar: How long is the school day? How much of this is instruction time? How many classes does a student take in a day? How often do students change classrooms and/or teachers? How long do students have to switch classrooms; is that reasonable amount of time based on the school layout? Are there extra/optional periods (such as zero period)? What is the school calendar? Does this work with your family's plans and other activities?</p>		
<p>Scheduling: How much time do students spend with each subject per day? How flexible is the schedule? Does the schedule allow students to dive deep into a subject? What happens if a student would like more time with a specific assignment? What scheduling constraints do they work with (not enough staff, not enough rooms, too many students, etc.)? How often are special classes offered (such as AP French or sculpture)?</p>		
<p>Grouping: How are students grouped—by ability or by age/grade? Are students able to move to different groups for each subject based on their abilities or do they have to stay with one group? Within an inclusive classroom, is there differentiation? What does that look like? Is there support for the teacher to effectively implement differentiation such as special training, mentorship, and additional planning time?</p>		
<p>Homework: What is the school's philosophy on homework? How much homework is there? What type of homework is there (i.e. is it repetitious, meaningful, busy work, etc.)?</p>		

<p>Testing: What do tests look like at the school? Are there other ways that students demonstrate mastery (projects, papers, presentations, etc.)? What weight do tests have in the school culture? How many standardized tests do students take? What is the school's testing philosophy?</p>		
<p>Grading/Evaluation: How are grades assigned? What do grades look like? Are grades accompanied by narrative evaluations? Do students do any self-evaluation? What is the school's philosophy on grading? What weight do grades have in the school culture?</p>		
<p>Behavior Policy: What is the school's behavior policy? Is the policy flexible; does it allow for individual circumstances to be taken into consideration? What is the school's philosophy when it comes to correcting students' behavior? Does it match your values/family philosophy?</p>		
<p>Resources: What resources does the school have (science labs/equipment, library materials, media equipment, etc.)? How often do they update their resources? Is there a budget for new resources or updating? What are the priorities of that budget (new books for the library, repairing athletic equipment, software updates for the computer lab)?</p>		
<p>Facility: How does the school feel? Is it a comfortable, safe, inviting, stimulating place? How are the classrooms furnished? What do the furnishings say about the school? Example: If there are student lounges, this may indicate that informal socializing among students is valued. If classrooms have rows of desks, this may indicate a traditional lecture teaching approach is prevalent. Is there a budget and staff for maintaining and updating the facility?</p>		
<p>Student Services: What student services are available? Is there a counseling staff, a career exploration program, and a college planning program? Is there a school nurse, occupational therapist, speech therapist, or other professionals? What is their educational background? How much experience do they have? What knowledge of profoundly gifted students do they have? What is their case load? Are they easily accessible? How long do they typically spend with each student?</p>		
<p>Support Services: Is there a bus service accessible to you or a carpooling culture? Are there food services? If so, does it meet your student's dietary needs? Are there quality options?</p>		
<p>Social Scene: What is the social scene like? Are students surrounded by people that share their interests and abilities? Are students surrounded by diverse people? Is the culture of the school vibrant; is there a definite sense of a cohesive student body and/or are there traditions that build a spirit of comradery? What opportunities are there for socializing? What is the student culture at the school; do the students get along, collaborate, and support each other? Would your student fit or find a niche in this social scene? Would this scene nurture your student's social development?</p>		
<p>Teaching Staff – Size and Composition: How many teachers are there? Are they in the process of hiring more teachers or laying them off? What is the teacher retention rate? Is there a mix of teachers that have been there more than 10 years, 5- 10 years, and under 5 years? What are their staffing priorities (more STEM, more arts, more elementary)? How many students are in each class? Is class size consistent among all grades and subjects?</p>		
<p>Teaching Staff – Experience, Education, and Support: What is the educational background of the teachers? How much experience do they have? What opportunities do they have for professional development? What knowledge of profoundly gifted students do they have? Are new teachers mentored? Are there teacher-leaders or department heads that give content-</p>		

specific or grade-specific support? How much time do they have to lesson plan? How much support do they receive in integrating creative or new ideas into their classrooms?		
Teaching Staff – Culture: Are the teachers flexible? Are they open to experimenting with different curriculums, teaching approaches, etc.? How much time do they spend with students one-on-one? What is the teacher culture at the school; do the teachers get along, collaborate, and support each other? How do they understand their role as a teacher; are they instructors, guides, facilitators, advocates, mentors, collaborators, classroom managers, or learning supervisors?		
Administration: What is the educational background of the administrators? How much experience do they have? What opportunities do they have for professional development? What knowledge of profoundly gifted students do they have? How do they lead; what is their leadership philosophy? Are they flexible? Are they open to experimenting with different curriculums, teaching approaches, etc.? How much time do they spend with working teachers, parents, and students? Do the administrators have enough support (resources, support staff, etc.) to do their jobs effectively? What is the administration culture at the school; do they build a sense of community?		
Parent Community: What is the parent community like? Do parents share similar values? Is there a diversity amongst the parent community? What opportunities are there for parents to come together? What is the parent community culture at the school; do parents get along, collaborate, and support each other? How does the school view parents? What opportunities are there for the parents and the school to work together? What opportunities are there for parents to voice their ideas for the school?		
Tuition: What is the cost of enrollment? Are there other costs (registration, uniforms, etc.)?		
Travel Time/Logistics: How long does it take to get to the school? Are there other logistical concerns?		
Reputation: What do educators, parents, and students say about this school? What is it known for?		
<i>Add your own category.</i>		
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Bottom Line: What is your gut telling you?		