

Prospective School Interview Tool

School Name:

Date of Interview:

Contact Person & Title:

Email Address & Phone Number:

Choosing the right school for your gifted child is a significant decision that extends far beyond grades and test scores. You're looking for more than just academic rigor—you want a school that truly understands and nurtures your child's unique strengths, challenges, and needs. This interview tool is designed to guide you in exploring a school's culture, its approach to gifted education, and how it can support your child's emotional, social, and academic development.

As you navigate this process, it's important to recognize that you won't be able to ask every question on the list. Some may be more relevant in certain contexts than others. You might want to circle the questions that stand out most to you and prioritize them. Not all questions need to be asked of everyone you speak with—consider the role of the person you're meeting. For example, if you're meeting with the school's administration, you may want to focus more on questions about the school's overall philosophy and approach. When meeting with a music teacher, however, you can dig into questions specific to the arts and how the school supports artistic growth.

These questions are crafted with intention, designed to give you a deeper understanding of how the school fosters an environment that supports your child holistically—not just academically but socially and emotionally as well. The hope for asking these questions is to help you gain a deeper understanding of how a potential school may align with your child's unique needs, your family's values, and the overall experience you envision for your Young Scholar.

1. School Mission & Administration:

- A. What is the school's mission? How clearly is it communicated to students, parents, and the community? What do educators, parents, and students say about this school? What is it known for; what is its reputation?
- B. Who are the leaders within the school? What is the educational background of the administrators? How much experience do they have?
- C. How do the administrators understand their role? How do they lead; what is their leadership philosophy? Are they flexible? Are they open to experimenting with different curriculums, teaching approaches, etc.?
- D. What is the administration culture at the school; do they build a sense of community? How much time do the administrators spend with working teachers, parents, and students?
- E. Do the administrators have enough support (resources, support staff, etc.) to do their jobs effectively? What opportunities do they have for professional development?

- F. When was the last administrative turnover? What was that like?
- G. What are the school's budget priorities? Who makes the budget?
- H. What challenges has the school experienced in the last 3 years? How did they work through those?
- I. What's the vision for the next X number of years for the school; what are some projects or programs you hope come to fruition? (*Insert how ever many years your student might be at the school.*)

Your Notes:

2. Practical Considerations:

- A. If this is a private school, what is the cost of tuition? Are there other costs to consider (registration, uniforms, etc.)? What are the financial assistance options?
- B. How long does it take to commute to the school? What transportation options are available (e.g., bus, carpool)? Are there other logistics to consider?
- C. How does the school feel? Is it a comfortable, safe, inviting, stimulating place? Is it clean and well-maintained?
- D. How is the facility furnished, organized, and decorated? What does that 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.
- E. How does the school maintain physical safety on campus? What are their crises protocols?
- F. How does the school cultivate a sense of psychological safety on campus? What practices support student emotional well-being?
- G. How does the school handle health issues? What are their vaccine policies and protocols for disease outbreaks?
- H. What food services are available? Do they meet your student's dietary needs and provide quality options?

Your Notes:

3. Scheduling, Transitions, and Free Time:

- A. How long is the school day? How much of this is instruction time?
- B. What scheduling constraints does the school work with (not enough staff, not enough rooms, too many students, etc.)? How often are special classes offered (such as AP French or sculpture)?
- C. How many classes does a student take in a day? Are there extra/optional periods (such as zero period)?

- D. 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 and your student's capacities for transitions?
- E. How much time do students spend with each subject per day? Does the schedule allow students to dive deep into a subject?
- F. How much control do students have over their schedules? Is there flexibility?
- G. 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?
- H. What is the school calendar? Does this work with your family's plans and other activities?

Your Notes:

4. Instructional Design & Flexibility

- A. What's the overall curricular design or focus for the school? Is this a traditional liberal arts program (the core academic subjects + a few electives) or something more specialized (such as a STEM magnet or a performing arts school). Or, does the school ascribe to a particular pedagogical approach (such as the Montessori approach or the International Baccalaureate (IB) program)?
- B. 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?
- C. 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?
- D. Can a student test out of a course or replace a curriculum with a more advanced curriculum? For example, could a student do an online algebra class instead of 5th grade math?
- E. 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?
- F. 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?

Your Notes:

5. Gifted Program:

- A. Does the school have a gifted program? What does it look like, and what resources (staff, funding, support) are dedicated to it?
- B. How does the school define giftedness? How and when are students identified?
- C. Who makes decisions about the gifted program, identification procedures, and accommodation policies? What are their written policies around acceleration, enrichment, and differentiation?
- D. What is the school's track record with gifted students? What are some examples of successful students?

Your Notes:

6. Special Education Program:

- A. Does the school have a special education program? What does it look like, and what resources (staff, funding, support) are dedicated to it?
- B. How does the school define disability? How and when are students identified?
- C. Who makes decisions about the special education program, identification procedures, and accommodation policies? What are their written policies around accommodations, modifications, and supplementary aids and services?
- D. What is the school's track record with special education students? What are some examples of successful students?
- E. How knowledgeable are the staff with twice-exceptionality? How do they both support a student's strengths and their challenges and take into account the whole student?

Your Notes:

7. Student Services:

- A. What student services are available, such as counseling, college planning, or career exploration programs?
- B. Is there a school nurse, occupational therapist, or other professionals available to support students' health and well-being?
- C. Are they full-time at this school or are they part-time/splitting time across multiple schools? What is their case load? Are they easily accessible? How long do they typically spend with each student?
- D. How knowledgeable are support staff about gifted/twice-exceptional students?

Your Notes:

8. Behavior & Discipline Policy:

- A. What is the school's behavior policy? Is the policy flexible; does it allow for individual circumstances to be taken into consideration?
- B. What is the philosophy behind discipline at the school, and does it align with your family's understanding of behavior?
- C. Does the school have systems in place to support students in resolving conflicts, and what is the school's approach to justice and fairness in handling discipline?
- D. Who and what gets regularly recognized and rewarded at the school?

Your Notes:

9. Language Arts:

- A. What specific curriculums or materials are used in this subject? How do these cultivate creative and critical thinking processes?
- B. Is the focus on reading, writing, grammar/mechanics, vocabulary, or public speaking? What's the approach to teaching in these different areas?
- C. What do assignments look like? Is there group work? Are there opportunities for a wide breadth of learning? Are there opportunities for in-depth study?
- D. What does feedback look like? Are students receiving feedback from the teacher, other students, or themselves through reflective activities?
- E. Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents?
- F. Is there time and support for students if they need to practice specific skills in this area?
- G. For students talented in language arts, what advanced opportunities are there? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve in this subject?
- H. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, student publications, competitions, book clubs, etc.)?

Your Notes:

10. Math:

- A. What specific curriculums or materials are used in this subject? How do these cultivate creative and critical thinking processes?
- B. Does the school offer different tracks or levels of math (e.g., standard, honors, or advanced)? Are there any opportunities for students to explore math beyond the standard curriculum?
- C. What do assignments look like? Is there group work? Are there opportunities for a wide breadth of learning? Are there opportunities for in-depth study?
- D. What does feedback look like? Are students receiving feedback from the teacher, other students, or themselves through reflective activities?
- E. Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents?
- F. Is there time and support for students if they need to practice specific skills in this area?
- G. For students talented in math, what advanced opportunities are there? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve in this subject?
- H. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area such as math teams or competitions?

Your Notes:

11. Science:

- A. What areas of science are taught? Is there a specific sequence or set of classes that a student is required to take?
- B. What specific curriculums or materials are used in this subject? How do you incorporate hands-on learning and inquiry-based activities in science? How do you challenge students to apply scientific concepts to real-world problems or complex scenarios?
- C. What do assignments look like? Is there group work? Are there opportunities for a wide breadth of learning? Are there opportunities for in-depth study?
- D. What does feedback look like? Are students receiving feedback from the teacher, other students, or themselves through reflective activities?
- E. Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents?
- F. Is there time and support for students if they need additional support?
- G. For students talented in science, what advanced opportunities are there? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve in this subject?
- H. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area such as science fairs or research opportunities?

Your Notes:

12. Social Studies:

- A. What areas of social studies are taught? Is there a specific sequence or set of classes that a student is required to take?
- I. What specific curriculums or materials are used in this subject? How do these cultivate creative and critical thinking processes?
- B. What do assignments look like? Is there group work? Are there opportunities for a wide breadth of learning? Are there opportunities for in-depth study?
- C. What does feedback look like? Are students receiving feedback from the teacher, other students, or themselves through reflective activities?
- D. Are there opportunities for students to tailor this curriculum to their interests and talents?
- E. Is there time and support for students if they need additional support?
- F. For students talented in social studies, what advanced opportunities are there? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve in this subject?
- G. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area such as Model UN or research opportunities?

Your Notes:

13. World Languages

- A. What world languages are taught? When and how often do students have exposure to world languages? Do students have to wait until a certain grade to access certain opportunities?
- B. Does the curriculum emphasize speaking, listening, reading, writing, and/or cultural understanding?
- C. For students who are adept at language acquisition, is the curriculum flexible to allow for acceleration, enrichment, or differentiation? How far does this curriculum go; what is the top level that students can achieve?
- D. Do students have access to native speakers? Are there opportunities for immersion experiences (such as exchanges or study abroad)?
- E. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, student clubs, etc.)?
- F. What value does the school place on world languages? Is it a central piece to the school or more of an “extra” or afterthought?

Your Notes:

14. The Arts (Visual Art, Music, Drama, Dance):

- A. What art forms are taught? When and how often do students have exposure to arts education? Do students have to wait until a certain grade to access certain opportunities?
- B. How often are there opportunities for performance or showcases throughout the year? What types of performances and showcases are offered?
- C. How do students access opportunities? Are there open-access as well as audition-based or merit-based opportunities?
- D. For the visual arts, what mediums are taught? What does art class look like; what do students do during class? Does the curriculum emphasize learning specific skills, expressing oneself creatively, art appreciation, and/or art history?
- E. For music, what instruments (including voice) are taught? What does music class look like; what do students do during class? Does the curriculum emphasize music theory, instrument proficiency, or creative expression? Does the curriculum explore different genres, cultures, and historical periods of music?
- F. For drama, does the curriculum emphasize the academic-side of theater (script analysis, theater history, etc.), acting, musical theater, technical theater, or another aspect of theater? What does drama class look like; what do students do during class?
- G. For dance, what styles are taught? Does the curriculum emphasize technical proficiency, creative expression, or movement exploration/exercise? What does dance class look like; what do students do during class?
- H. What resources are available (kilns, dark rooms, practice rooms, theaters, lighting and sound equipment, etc.)? How often do students get to utilize specialized equipment or supplies?
- I. For students adept in the performing arts, what advanced opportunities are there?
- J. Are there additional programs that support learning in this area (guest speakers, field trips, competitions, master classes, individual lessons, student compositions, etc.)?
- K. What value does the school place on performing arts? Is it a central piece to the school or more of an “extra” or afterthought?

Your Notes:

15. Technical Education & Life Skills

- A. Are there opportunities to gain technical or life skills at the school?
- B. What opportunities are there to work with community partners or make an impact in the local area?
- C. What facilities or resources are available? How often do students get to utilize specialized equipment or supplies?
- D. What value does the school place on technical education? Is it a central piece to the school or more of an “extra” or afterthought?

Your Notes:

16. Physical Education & Health:

- A. What does the P.E. program include? How is it structured to support students with different abilities and interests? What accommodations exist for students with health or physical concerns?
- B. 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?
- C. What qualifications do PE instructors have? How does the program balance sports, exercise, and health education?
- D. What facilities are available (gyms, tracks, fields, courts, pools, etc.)? What specialized equipment is available (gymnastic equipment, various rackets, etc.)?
- E. What does the health curriculum cover? What is its approach or philosophy? Does it match your values/family philosophy?
- F. What is the relationship between athletics/sports at the school and P.E.?
- G. What are the P.E. requirements? Is the program flexible? Are there P.E. releases for athletes or other students? Are there opportunities for a student to tailor this curriculum by choosing specialized classes?

Your Notes:

17. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):

- A. Is there a social-emotional learning curriculum in place? What is the philosophy or approach of the curriculum? Does it match your values/family philosophy?
- B. Outside of a curriculum, how does the school support the emotional and mental well-being of students?
- C. How does the school foster a positive and inclusive school culture, promoting healthy relationships among students and addressing issues like bullying?
- D. Given the impact of social media on young people today, how does the school approach digital citizenship, helping students navigate online spaces with responsibility, empathy, and respect?
- E. How does the curriculum encourage self-reflection, critical thinking, and metacognition?

Your Notes:

18. Independent & Advanced Learning Opportunities:

- A. What support is available for students pursuing independent research/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?
- B. Does the school support internships or other career exploration opportunities? How many students are pursuing these opportunities?
 - C. Are there opportunities for dual enrollment at local colleges or universities, and how accessible are these options? How many students are pursuing these opportunities?
 - D. Are there any other special classes or programs that students can participate in?

Your Notes:

19. Extracurricular Activities:

- A. What extracurricular activities are available, and who manages them? Do students have to wait until a certain grade to access certain opportunities?
- B. Which extracurriculars receive the most support and attention?
- C. What type of support does the school or district provide? Are any extracurriculars fee-based, or do students need to pay for equipment/uniforms?
- D. Are there opportunities to start new clubs or other extracurriculars? Can students participate in extracurricular activities at nearby schools? Are there partnerships with outside organizations or competitions?

Your Notes:

20. Homework Grading, and Assessment:

- A. 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.)?
- B. 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?
- C. How many standardized tests do students take? Which ones? How are the results utilized?
- D. How are grades assigned, and what do they represent? Are there narrative evaluations, and do students participate in self-assessments?
- E. What is the school's grading philosophy, and how does it impact the overall culture of the school? What weight do grades hold in the student community?

Your Notes:

21. Teaching Staff – Size & Composition:

- A. How many teachers are employed, and 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?
- B. Are they in the process of hiring more teachers or laying them off? What are the staffing priorities of the school (e.g., more focus on STEM, arts, or specific grade levels)?
- C. What is the average class size, and is it consistent across different subjects and grade levels?

Your Notes:

22. Teaching Staff – Experience, Education, and Support

- A. What is the educational background of the teachers? What opportunities do they have for professional development?
- B. Are new teachers mentored? Are there teacher-leaders or department heads that give content-specific or grade-specific support?
- C. How much time do they have to lesson plan? How much support do they receive in integrating creative or new ideas into their classrooms?
- D. How knowledgeable is the general teaching staff about gifted/twice-exceptional students and their unique needs?

Your Notes:

23. Teaching Staff – Culture:

- A. How do they understand their role as a teacher; are they instructors, guides, facilitators, advocates, mentors, collaborators, classroom managers, or learning supervisors?
- B. Are the teachers flexible? Are they open to experimenting with different curriculums, teaching approaches, etc.?
- C. What is the teacher culture at the school; do the teachers get along, collaborate, and support each other?
- D. How much time do they spend with students one-on-one?

Your Notes:

24. Social Scene & Student Culture:

- A. Who are the students at this school; how would you characterize a typical student? Are students surrounded by people that share their interests and abilities? Are students surrounded by diverse people? Who, historically, has had a hard time finding a place at this school?
- B. Is the culture of the student community vibrant; is there a definite sense of a cohesive student body and/or are there traditions that build a spirit of comradery? Do the students get along, collaborate, and support each other?
- C. What opportunities are there for socializing?
- D. Would your student fit or find a niche in this social scene? Would this scene nurture your student's social development?

Your Notes:

25. Parent Community:

- A. What is the parent community like? Do parents share similar values? Is there a diversity amongst the parent community?
- B. What opportunities are there for parents to come together?
- C. What is the parent community culture at the school; do parents get along, collaborate, and support each other?
- D. How does the school view parents? How and how often do they communicate with parents?
- E. 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?

Your Notes:

26. Other Individual Considerations:

What are some additional questions you want to make sure to ask considering your specific student and your family's unique situation?

- A.
- B.
- C.

Your Notes:

27. Overall Evaluation:

- A. From your perspective as a parent, what aspects of the school stand out as particularly positive or concerning? What elements resonate with you as strengths or potential drawbacks?
- B. From your child's point of view, what stands out about the school? Are there any aspects that excite them or cause hesitation?
- C. **Bottom Line:** What is your gut telling you?

Your Notes:

Conclusion

Before exploring the range of options available, it's important to pause and reflect on your next step. Take this opportunity to craft a clear plan for addressing the final question: Is there anything you need to explore further to ensure this is the right choice for your family?

The key to making an informed decision lies in understanding not just the academic metrics, but the full scope of what each school offers—its culture, flexibility, and the level of individualized support it provides. To guide you in this process, consider this interview tool as a blueprint to uncover the most pertinent details in your child's educational journey.

As you engage with the questions and reflect on your findings, use our "School Comparison Chart" to organize your thoughts. This tool allows you to systematically track the factors that matter most to you, comparing each option on the qualities that are most important to your Young Scholar and your family.