

How to pick a school!

5 steps to find the right school for your child

Start with your child in mind

Fill out "About my learner" in this guide.

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Explore 9 school aspects commonly important to families in this guide

Identify what's important to you & your child.

Access resources that can help you determine what schools could be a good fit

- Review Minneapolis School Finder profiles
- Look at school websites
- Talk to friends & family

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Tour a few schools

Bring this guide to remind you of what you might look for or ask. Write down your first impressions.

Apply to a few schools & enroll in 1 school

The best time to do this is in the fall of the year before you want to switch schools. Check out a school's profile in Minneapolis School Finder for how to apply.

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About my learner

Answer these questions about your child. This will help you start in a strong position when thinking about what you want in a school for your child. We invite you to complete this page with your child!

1 What excites my child?

2 What is my child's favorite part of school?



3 What is the most challenging part of school for my child?

4 How does my child learn?

The next pages includes 9 elements of a school that local parents often cite as important. We encourage you to think about which 3 or 4 are the most important to you & your child—by focusing on those when researching schools.

Under each aspect you will see **things to look for & questions to ask**.

Things to look for



Evidence you can find on school profiles, school websites, or when you visit the building to see how it meets what's most important to you.

You're invited to put a check next to the things you're planning to look for in a school.

Questions to ask



Examples of questions you can ask to better understand how the school meets the areas most important to you. You can ask the questions listed on the following pages, or come up with your own!

We encourage you to put a check next to the questions that are the most important to you, or write your own down.

Bring this guide with you when you visit a school to help remind you what you're looking for & what you want to ask.

100 parents of color in Minneapolis helped determine which elements of a school were important to them, & develop things to look for & questions to ask.



Students access grade-level materials

For example, you wouldn't want an 8th grader being taught 3rd grade math. We know from The Opportunity Myth and other research that this problem is pervasive; on average students spend 500 class hours a year doing assignments that are not the right level for their grade!



Things to look for:

- Students access grade-level curriculum & instruction
- Students are reading & doing math at grade level, averaging more than a year of academic growth
- High schools: Percent of graduates who attend (& graduate from) college



Questions to ask:

- How do you ensure all students are working at or toward grade-level standards?
- What data will you share with me throughout the year so that I know whether my child is on grade level?
- What are your interventions for students who are not mastering grade-level content?
- Are you a pathway to college (college tours, earning credits in high school...)? What indicators do you monitor to ensure kids are on track?

Other questions:

Curriculum & instruction is student-focused—for everyone

The student should be at the center of learning—the curriculum should reflect their background & interests, & they should be taught in a way that works well for them.



Things to look for:

- Students have the opportunity to make choices regarding their learning & know how it's measured
- Opportunities to understand how curriculum is selected & provide feedback
- Teachers use assessments & feedback to inform/modify instruction
- Curriculum is reflective of students' interests & culture



Questions to ask:

- How do teachers accommodate different learning styles & tailor instruction?
- How does your curriculum & instruction reflect the backgrounds, interests & native languages of your student community? Do you partner with local organizations & experts?
- What are your special education & Emotional Behavior Disorder rates by ethnicity? Why?
- How do teachers provide feedback to students? How do you collect student feedback?
- How are you ensuring that the student demographics in advanced courses, magnet classes or other special programs mirror your school's enrollment?

Other questions:

There's diversity, experience & cultural intelligence among educators

Students often have strong experiences in schools with teachers who reflect their identities, understand their cultures, & have worked with students like yours.



Things to look for:

- Percent of teachers of color reflect student demographics, diverse school leadership
- Educator completion of cultural competency trainings



Questions to ask:

- How do your teachers & staff reflect your student population? What are you doing to improve this number & keep staff who reflect my community?
- Have all teachers completed cultural competency trainings in compliance with state law? What are the trainings?
- How do you help teachers become well-versed in trauma-informed practice, positive youth development, social-emotional learning, or other frameworks?

Other questions:

Communication is responsive to cultures & needs

Schools should tailor communication to the preferences of parents



Things to look for:

- Meetings scheduled around parent availability
- Interpreters & translations are standard practice
- School personnel changes are communicated to families in real time



Questions to ask:

- Does your school offer home visits or family-teacher conferences in the community?
- Do you provide interpreters for events?
- How are families informed of staffing changes during the school year?
- What ways & how often do teachers make contact with families (e.g., positive or multilingual notes)?

Other questions:

Culture & climate is welcoming

When you're in the school, do you feel like you belong there or do you feel uncomfortable?



Things to look for:

- Signage is multilingual (main office, library, cafeteria)
- Accommodations (interpreters, transportation, child care, food)
- Examples of diversity & inclusion (e.g., named in the school's mission &/or a core value)
- When you're in the school you feel warm & welcomed



Questions to ask:

- How do you welcome parent feedback & respond to it?
- What is the procedure for visiting my child's classroom?
- How do you make it easier for families to engage (transportation, interpreters...)?
- What's your attendance percentage?

Other questions:

Opportunities to include families are meaningful



Things to look for:

- The school has a family liaison or someone responsible for working with & advocating for families
- Schools give families tools to engage other families &/ or connect



Questions to ask:

- Do you empower families to reach out to each other, including those who might be less engaged?
- Do you provide families with access to advocacy or empowerment trainings? If yes, do they attend?
- Can families suggest topics for staff training?
- Do you allow parents to engage in school improvement? How?

Other questions:

Discipline rules & rates are fair

Students should not be more likely to receive disciplinary actions based on their race & discipline practices must be culturally appropriate



Things to look for:

- Percentages are reported out by ethnicity (e.g., suspension)
- Communication is sensitive to historical trauma, avoids triggering words



Questions to ask:

- Do you use restorative practices, Culturally Responsive Behavior Interventions, or something similar?
- What are you doing to reduce the number of disciplinary actions? Do you share discipline actions by ethnicity?

Other questions:

Board &/or site council mirrors the school's diversity

The board of directors & school leadership should reflect the diversity of the students who attend the school.



Things to look for:

- Families are presenters/experts of their culture
- There's an active family council or committee



Questions to ask:

- Do you have parents on your board or council? What are the demographics? What decisions are they responsible for?
- What's the process to volunteer?
- Do you have a parents' bill of rights?

Other questions:

Families help set values—& evaluate how the school lives up to them



Things to look for:

- Is there a family satisfaction survey—in multiple languages? How do you use the feedback?
- What's the family grievance procedure?



Questions to ask:

- Families & cultures are embraced (no undermining of families or cultures)
- Families & educators set &/or reflect on values together

Other questions:

Fill out this sheet before & after
you research & visit a school.

I'm interested in:

(School name)

**3 things I want to learn more about the school
before I apply:**

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

**Through research &/or visiting the school, I
learned:**

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

My first impression of the school:

**I need to apply by _____ (date) for
my child to have the best chance to receive a
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