

A Quality School Checklist

Things to Look For, Questions to Ask

The measure of a school is much more than an arbitrary ranking based on a single test. Parents are encouraged to visit their children's schools and see for themselves. Here are some things to think about when examining the effectiveness of local schools.

Key Questions to Ask:

- ✓ Does this school have a particular educational philosophy or mission?
- ✓ What is this school's approach to student discipline and safety?
- ✓ How does this school encourage and monitor students' progress toward meeting standards?
- ✓ What kinds of library resources are available to students?
- ✓ How is technology used to support teaching and learning at this school?
- ✓ Where do the arts fit into this school's curriculum? Is there a school choir, band or orchestra? A school play? Art classes?
- ✓ What extra-curricular opportunities (sports, clubs, community service, competitions) are available for students?
- ✓ How does this school support students who have academic, social or emotional difficulties?
- ✓ What strategies are used to teach students who are not fluent in English?
- ✓ What professional development opportunities do teachers have? How do teachers collaborate to learn from one another?

Things to Look For:

- ✓ Do classrooms look cheerful? Is student work displayed, and does it seem appropriate for the grade level?
- ✓ Do teachers seem enthusiastic and knowledgeable, asking questions that stimulate students and keep them engaged?
- ✓ Does the principal seem confident and interested in interacting with students, teachers and parents?
- ✓ How is student behavior as students move from class to class or play outside?
- ✓ How well are the facilities maintained? Are bathrooms clean and well-supplied, and do the grounds look safe and inviting?

Especially for Elementary Schools

- ✓ What are some highlights of this school's curriculum in reading, math, science and social studies?
- ✓ What criteria are used to determine student placement in classes?
- ✓ How does this school keep parents informed of school information and activities?
- ✓ Is there an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other parent organization? What other sorts of parent involvement take place at this school?

Especially for Middle Schools

- ✓ How does the school guide and prepare students for major academic decisions that will define their options in high school and beyond?
- ✓ Are foreign language classes (French, Spanish, etc.) offered to students?
- ✓ If the school is large, does it make an effort to personalize activities to create a sense of community?

— More —

Especially for High Schools

- ✓ Does this school have a particular academic focus, such as science or humanities ?
- ✓ Does this school have any school-to-work programs or specialized academies?
- ✓ What kind of emphasis does the school place on college preparation?
- ✓ Does the school have a good selection of Advanced Placement classes?
- ✓ What percentage of students takes the ACT and/or SAT? Where do students go after they graduate? How many attend four-year colleges?
- ✓ Does the school offer a variety of career planning options for students who are not college bound?
- ✓ Are counselors available to help students make important decisions about classes and post-graduation plans?
- ✓ What percent of the students who start at the school in ninth grade make it to graduation?
- ✓ Does the school staff set high expectations for all students?

*Adapted from an online guide to K-12 schools @ www.GreatSchools.net.
Provided by the*



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