

Parents in Pennsylvania face critical educational choices for their children. Children may be publicly educated in local school districts, charter schools, or cyber schools, privately educated, or homeschooled.

This booklet is intended to help parents find the best educational fit for their children.

A more detailed handbook is available at www.aauwpa.org. Many public libraries can provide additional information about schools and provide computer access for those who need help.

HOW DO I CHOOSE A SCHOOL THAT FITS MY CHILD?

We recommend that parents visit several schools, interview staff, and then compare information with their own priorities for their child's education.

Any questions relevant to your child's placement should be explored before enrolling your child.

When visiting the schools, you may ask to sit in on a class. Remember, it is OK to ask, "May I see examples," or "May I see the textbooks."

Also, you can talk with parents you see at the school.

WHAT SHOULD I ASK THE SCHOOLS?

◆ General Information

1. Request the basics: name, location, size of the school, typical class sizes, and graduation rates or dropout rates. Many cyber charter school names are similar, so be careful to identify and contact the correct school.
2. For charter and cyber schools, you may want to know how long they have been in operation.

◆ Educational Programs and Services

1. Is there a special educational emphasis at the school? Is it a magnet? Does it have a specific focus, such as science or the arts?
2. How does the curriculum compare with state standards for math, reading, social studies, and science? Does the school offer advanced courses? Are remedial help and enrichment available?
3. Are classes ability grouped? What range of abilities is likely to be in one classroom?

◆ Achievement Results

1. What is the student grading system?
2. What are the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) results?
3. What percentage of students score proficient and advanced on the PSSA?

4. What percentage of graduates is accepted to college or post secondary programs?
5. What student awards and recognitions are given? Have students received awards from other organizations?
6. Does the school have an improvement plan monitored by the state?

◆ Faculty and Administration/Leadership

1. Has the school received any educational awards, recognitions, or grants?
2. What percentage of teachers and administrators is state certified?
3. What are the class sizes and teacher-to-student ratios?

◆ School Environment

1. What are the school's Mission and Vision?
2. Does the school require a parental contract, student contract, or uniform?
3. Does the school use distance learning or other technology-based learning?
4. Does the school use volunteers or parents to support learning?
5. What are key policies regarding safety, drugs, bullying, harassment, discipline, suspension, equal access, and discrimination?
6. How are behavioral and disciplinary issues addressed? *(continued on back panel)*

WHAT TYPES OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE THERE?

Public schools are funded by taxpayer dollars without extra cost to families. They are subject to supervision from the PA Board of Education and fall into three categories:

School District Public Schools

Typically these schools serve students living within the physical boundaries of the school district. Sometimes the school district creates magnet or other selective schools for a certain portion of its population. School boards are elected by the voting public.

Charter Schools

These also are public schools but are exempt from some state regulations. Some charter schools give preference to children from a particular school district; others are open on a first-come, first-served basis or by lottery.

Cyber Charter Schools

These also are public schools where students receive instruction at home using the internet and a computer with adult supervision.

Charter and cyber charter schools are sometimes organized by for-profit companies.

◆ Student Participation

1. What student assessments are made upon student enrollment?
2. What activities are provided for students outside the classroom?
3. Is care available before and after school?

◆ Parent and Community Involvement

1. In what ways are parents involved?
2. To what extent do teachers, parents, and others influence the curriculum and educational policies?
3. What services are provided by Pennsylvania Intermediate Units, management companies, private foundations, or other groups?
4. Are there key partners within the business community, foundations, or elsewhere?

Expanded information available at:

http://aauwpa.org/content/?page_id=1818

This guide was developed by the Fox Chapel Area Branch of AAUW and endorsed by AAUW Pennsylvania, which coordinates AAUW initiatives in the state. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) was founded in 1881 and is the nation's leading voice promoting education and equity for women and girls.

AAUW does not endorse any public education alternatives which abridge civil rights or women's rights, direct taxpayer funds to private schools, or limit public accountability.

Finding Your Way[®]

Exploring Options in Public Education in Pennsylvania

A Guide for Parents of Children in Kindergarten through High School

This guide is intended as a starting point for parents. Parents should form their own judgment on educational issues important for their children and should rely on their own research in choosing schools for their children.