



Selecting A Non-Public School



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When a parent/guardian decides to enroll a son/daughter in a North Carolina non-public school, one may find that there are several non-public schools in the area from which to select. Since the State of North Carolina does not rate; recommend one non-public school over another; collect school nationally standardized test scores; or issue report cards on non-public schools, the North Carolina Division of Non-Public Education is frequently asked how a parent/guardian might select the non-public school which is most appropriate for the student. This article will provide some helpful suggestions.

Step 1: Compile a list of local non-public schools.

Go to the classified pages of your telephone directory and look under "Schools, Non-Public" (or private); or [click here](#) to view the latest edition of the North Carolina Directory of Non-Public Schools which is published each June. Schools listed in this directory are those meeting the non-public school legal requirements of the State of North Carolina. Schools are listed alphabetically under each county. Additional limited information supplied by the schools themselves is also provided. (Note that some schools enrolling only age six or younger students may not appear in it.) You will observe that North Carolina has many different types of non-public schools.

Step 2: Narrow the list of school possibilities.

Start the elimination process with these five considerations:

- a. Grade ranges currently taught in each school;
- b. Proximity to the home or workplace;
- c. Religious or an independent school;
- d. Large or a small school;
- e. Teacher-student ratios.

Note in the directory last year's total enrollment for each school and its teacher-student (professional staff) ratio. All of the information needed to complete this step can be obtained from the online directory link under Step 1 above.

Step 3: Gather information and materials from each school.

After Step 2 has been completed, visit the [web sites](#) of each remaining school and/or call to request registration information. Carefully study and compare the information provided by each school.

Step 4: Prepare a list of questions to ask each school.

Include questions about matters not addressed in the school's printed materials or focus on issues, policies, procedures, etc., needing further explanation or discussion. In preparing your questions, consider the following:

- a. *Philosophy:* Does the school have a clearly defined mission? What is the school's purpose, its goals and its general philosophy of education? Inquire about its curriculum and textbooks. Does the school appear to compliment your family values as well as your child's personality and interests? What are the principal's and the teachers' priorities for the school? Especially note the school's discipline, homework, grading and reporting policies; its student code of conduct; its admission requirements and procedures; as well as its expectations of the student and the parent.

- b. *Financial:* Cost and payment schedules; what happens if you are unable to make your payment in a timely manner or if your student should have to leave the school during the school year? Read the registration materials and parent and student contractual agreements very carefully. Are student uniforms required?
- c. *Stability:* How long has the school existed? In the last five years, has its overall enrollment remained stable or has it experienced abnormal enrollment fluctuations? How frequently has the school changed locations in the last five or more years? Is the school in reasonably sound financial condition? (Do not rule out a school, however, that has to work extra hard to survive; it may be working to provide something very special and very good for its students at very reasonable financial rates.)
- d. *Faculty:* Ask about academic backgrounds and teaching experience of the faculty and of its administration. Has there been much teacher turnover in the last five years?
- e. *Testing:* How did last year's students generally perform on the nationally standardized achievement tests? Most North Carolina non-public schools test students annually. (*North Carolina non-public school law requires that these tests be administered each year to all grade 3, 6, 9 and 11 students and that the results be retained at the school office for at least one calendar year.*) Schools whose students perform well on these tests are usually willing to share the overall test results with prospective school parents.
- f. *Students:* Has there been much student body turnover in the last five years? How many senior classes has the school graduated? How many of those students in the last five years have been accepted at colleges? Is there any information available as to how the graduates have succeeded in college, the business community and the military?
- g. *References:* Can the school make available to you a list of three or more current or former school parents or school graduates whom you could contact as references and ask some questions about the school? Ask these references about both the strengths and weaknesses of the institution.
- h. *Recent Achievements:* Has the school experienced any recent special achievements, awards or honors?

Step 5: Visit the schools.

Check the "feel" of the school. Call ahead to schedule an appointment for a visit to the school -- preferably while school is in session. (Avoid visiting during the first or last week of the school year; the last school day before a holiday break; or the first or last hour of the school day.) Carry your list of questions and ask them. Ask to briefly visit the classroom to which your child might be assigned. Talk with the teacher(s). Observe the learning environment of the class, its orderliness and the school educational environment in general. Does the campus look generally neat and well managed? Ask about paying a short return visit *with your son/daughter* in the near future. Inquire about attending an open house; the next parent-teacher organization meeting; or other types of upcoming school functions. Subsequent return visits will help capture the real "spirit" of the school. Is a free promotional DVD available to take home for viewing together with the family?

Step 6: Make your decision.

The *parent/guardian* now makes the final decision. Use your best judgment. You are uniquely qualified to do so. No one cares more about your son/daughter's welfare and future than you. No one else will be more careful to see that the student is well educated, protected and well trained in school. No one knows more than you about the child's special traits; strengths that need a school which builds on them; weaknesses that need extra support; interests that light up the child's eyes; and family values that the child's school should respect. Picking your child's school wisely will make you more confident that your child will be taught effectively and treated fairly in the classroom.

Conclusion:

Schools where students do best are clean, orderly, pleasant places. Staff members in good schools respect each other, their students and their parents. They speak enthusiastically and caringly of the students. Teachers are clearly interested in the subjects they teach. Students are friendly, disciplined, respectful and busy learning. Be alert for and avoid schools, which do not manifest these characteristics. Also, be especially cautious about a school which offers high school diplomas via [independent study/distance learning programs](#). Also, see [diploma mills](#).

Your student can benefit greatly from your active concern and involvement as a parent/guardian with his/her education. By doing your research; talking to other parents; visiting schools; and exercising your right to choose, you can take the lead in making sure your son/daughter gets a first-class education. By staying involved with the program you select; encouraging your child to work hard; and providing additional opportunities to learn at home and in the community, you can help your child go even further. Giving your child a good start in life is one of the most important responsibilities you will ever have.

Providing a good home; rearing your child to be a responsible and productive citizen; and making sure he/she progresses well in a good school are three ways you can exercise that responsibility. Selecting your child's school carefully is another way you can help your child achieve all that he/she can.