



Choosing a school for your child with special learning needs

Choosing a school for a child with unique learning needs can be overwhelming. Often the hardest part is knowing where to start. While every family will make decisions based on their child's individual needs and circumstances, these common considerations can help guide you through the process.

GO WITH YOUR GUT

Begin by having a thorough understanding of your child's needs and strengths and what accommodations your child would need in order to succeed. Look for schools that will integrate these accommodations throughout the day. It may sound simple, but a large part of finding the right school starts with your gut feeling. What is your initial reaction when you walk into the school? This first impression doesn't always tell the school's whole story, however, that feeling may be a good sign to dig deeper.



PRINCIPALLY SPEAKING

Meet the school's Principal(s) and the teachers your child will be interacting with. Be sure to ask about their training, qualifications, and any certifications that relate to their experience educating children with unique learning needs. Attend a school open house or schedule a visit where you can observe classroom activities. Be sure to ask:

- Does the school offer methods of instruction tailored to the specific learning needs of my child?
- What therapies are available onsite to assist my child in meeting developmental, social, and academic needs?
- How are the therapies integrated throughout the school day?
- How will my child's progress be monitored to ensure the goals of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) are being met?
- What professional certifications and/or compliance standards does the school adhere to that would qualify it to meet my child's needs?

CHOOSING A SCHOOL, CONT.

FAMILY SUPPORTS & RESOURCES

Because your child isn't in the classroom 24/7, ask what type of supports are available throughout the school to help you and your family sustain what is being achieved in the classroom. Are there professionals on staff that can help your child transition into his or her new school, or even help you identify community resources that can enhance your child's growth and development? How does the faculty involve and engage parents (and siblings) in academic and social functions at the school?

COMMUNICATIONS

We all know that communication is critical, especially concerning your child. It's vital that you remain informed of your child's progress and even setbacks. How often are parent-teacher conferences conducted? What vehicles for communication are utilized by the teachers and staff? Is parental input welcomed and encouraged?

TALK ISN'T CHEAP - IT'S PRICELESS

Conversations with other parents will prove to be invaluable - perhaps more than any other source. Ask other parents about their experience at the school. Why did they choose this school for their child over other available options? What advice would they offer new students and their parents?

OTHER THINGS TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

Tuition and scholarship opportunities - The state of Ohio offers two scholarships (The Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship and The Autism Scholarship) for children with special learning needs. Ask if the school you are considering is a service provider of either of these scholarships. Keep in mind that all providers don't offer the same programs and services. Inquire if other financial aid options are also available. Does the school provide transportation? If not, you will want to check with your school district of residence to see if they provide transportation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember, nothing is set in stone, particularly your child's development. As your child's parent and advocate, remain flexible and keep an open mind about options for your child. What may have worked wonderfully for your child one year, may not the next. When you start viewing everyone as your child's team for success, with you at the helm as captain, then you know you are on the right path to helping your child achieve academic and social success.