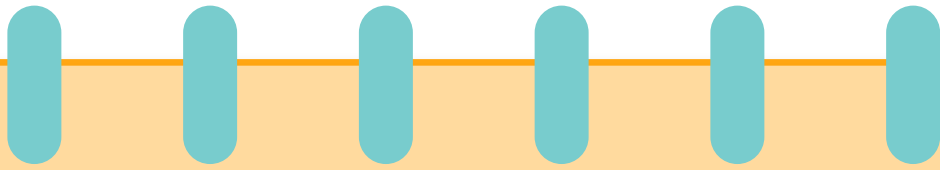


# How to Choose

## THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD





We're Connections Academy®—a tuition-free, online public school that offers a different kind of educational experience to students across the country.

But this guide isn't about us. **It's about YOU.**

At Connections Academy, we've met thousands of parents and family members like you—dedicated caregivers who are looking for the perfect educational environment for their students. But like with most things, there are a lot of factors to consider when deciding which school is the right one.

Things like class size. Academic focus. Social opportunities. One-on-one support. And more!

Considering all of these factors can seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. This guide includes a bunch of essential information as well as helpful exercises to help you organize your thoughts.

So, take a look, gather your thoughts, and take a deep breath. By simply starting to think about your child's education path, you're already well on your way to helping them succeed.

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# Step 1:

## DEFINE YOUR FAMILY'S PRIORITIES

Before you start to dive into the different types of education options that are out there, it's a good idea to look inward—toward your own family.

Every student—and their family—has unique goals, priorities, and needs. These questions aren't meant to be all encompassing, but rather are designed as thought starters to get you thinking.

## CONSIDER YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

- Does your child need an environment that is more structured or less structured?
- Does your child need to be challenged or need more individual attention?
- Does your child have any special learning needs?
- Does your child have any activities or skills outside of school that they want to devote more time to?
- What type of environment does your child thrive in?
- How does your child learn best? With more independent time to work things out? By listening to a teacher? By watching videos?
- Does your student have specific scheduling needs?
- Is your student more of an independent or collaborative learner?
- Does your child want to be in a school with their friends?
- Does your child have any special transportation needs that must be considered when choosing a school?



## YOUR NEEDS AS A PARENT/CAREGIVER

- How involved do you want to be in your child's education?
- Do you picture yourself actively participating in your child's school community? In what ways?
- Do you need a school that offers before- or after-school care to accommodate your workday?
- Are there specific values that you want incorporated into your child's education?
- What kind of relationship do you want with your student's school or teacher?
- Do you want your child to go to a school within walking distance of your home?
- How far are you willing to drive your child to school?



## Step 2:

# EXPLORE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS

The type of school your child attends will have a large influence on their early life—after all, it's likely the place they spend the most time outside of home. Depending on the area you live in, you may have only a few options to choose from, or what seems like an endless number of different schools. Below, you'll see some of the most common types of schools offered in the United States.

### **Traditional Public School**

Operated by local, state, and federal government funds, public schools are open to students based on where they live, and do not charge tuition. Public schools have to meet certain standards, which include licensing requirements for teachers as well as rules of curriculum, policy, and governance—typically decided at the state and local levels. Class size, extracurricular offerings, and more, often vary by location.



## Charter School

Like traditional public schools, charter schools do not charge tuition. However, enrolling your child in a charter school typically requires a separate application, as space is limited. Charter schools, which can be opened by any company, organization, or individual, receive a certain amount of funding for a limited period of time once the state grants their charter. Many charter schools offer a unique learning environment, which may include a specific specialization or mission.

## Online Public School

Publicly funded and tuition-free to students, virtual public schools have the same teacher credential requirements, academic assessments, and management as a traditional public school. Public online schools often offer a greater level of customization, giving students the freedom to set their own schedule, work at their own pace, and more. Some brick-and-mortar schools also offer a hybrid version that includes online classes in addition to in-person instruction.

## Magnet School

Like public schools, magnet schools are free, but specialize in specific areas, such as technology, science, or the arts. Many magnet schools admit students based on their achievements and can therefore be highly selective and competitive, while others enroll students based on a lottery system. Magnet schools can be a great option for students who have an established passion in a specific area and want to explore their interests more in-depth.

## Private/Independent School

Private schools are not funded by the government, and therefore have the freedom to develop their own curriculum. These schools may be operated by for-profit businesses, private foundations, religious organizations, and more, which typically determine the type of environment or philosophy the schools focuses on. Private schools typically charge tuition, though many offer scholarships. They can be either online or brick and mortar.



**In addition to the major categories above, we invite you to do additional research on more niche or specialty school options, which include Montessori, nature, boarding, language immersion, and more.**

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## Step 3:

# DETERMINE WHICH SCHOOL FACTORS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU

It may not be possible to find a perfect school. After all, each school you consider has its own unique offerings, which may include both benefits and disadvantages. That's why it's important to figure out two things: which considerations are most important to you and your family, and which may be nice to have, but are not necessarily essential to your student's success.

## Some factors to consider may be:

### 1. Tuition

- ☐ Does your family feel comfortable paying tuition?
- ☐ Does the school's tuition and fees fit into your budget?
- ☐ Would you rather allocate that money in other ways (private tutoring, traveling to historic/educational sites, etc.)?

### 2. Academic Offerings

- ☐ Does the school offer Advanced Placement<sup>®,\*</sup>, honors, International Baccalaureate<sup>®</sup>, or gifted and talented programs?
- ☐ Are there additional programs for students with learning disabilities?

### 3. Student-Teacher Ratio

- ☐ Would your student benefit more from group learning or individualized attention? Do the school's offerings match those needs?

### 4. Accreditation Status

- ☐ What accreditations does the school have? Do those match your needs?

### 5. Teacher Quality/Credentials

- ☐ What credentials do each of the teachers have? What level of degree have they earned or they are currently working on?

\*Advanced Placement is a registered trademark of the College Board. Used with permission.



## 6. Diversity

- ☐ Does the school's population reflect that of the greater community around you?
- ☐ Will your child have the opportunity to learn with—and from—people from different backgrounds or experiences?

## 7. Curriculum Quality

- ☐ Does the school have a strong program of core academic subjects, such as English, history, mathematics, science, arts, and foreign languages?
- ☐ What courses does the school offer in addition to the core subjects?
- ☐ Does the school have a special focus or theme for the curriculum?
- ☐ How do the school's test scores compare to those of other schools? (Check the school's report card if it is a public school or ask for information from the school if it is a private school. See "Parent Tip" on school report cards.)

## 8. Extracurriculars/Sports

- ☐ Does the school have extracurricular activities that support what is taught?
- ☐ What extracurricular activities does the school offer after school or on weekends?
- ☐ Do all students have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities?
- ☐ Does the school sponsor field trips?

## 9. Safety

- ☐ Is the school safe?
- ☐ How does the school prevent and handle violence, bullying, harassment, and other forms of abusive behavior?
- ☐ What measures does the school take to ensure safety? What security measures are in place?
- ☐ What does the school do to ensure that parents and all school administrators know the emergency plan?

## 10. Support Services

- ☐ Are there tutoring programs?
- ☐ Are counseling services available to students? Are there limitations to these services?
- ☐ Is the school accessible to children with mobility limitations?
- ☐ Does the school have bilingual teachers to assist children from families speaking languages other than English?



**Highlight the areas or questions that are most important to you and your family.**

# Step 4:

## RESEARCH INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

At this point, you've moved on from figuring out what type of school you think might work for your family, and you're ready to move on to researching individual schools. We recommend asking friends, family members, or neighbors about schools they may know of, as well as conducting an internet search. Once you have that list, we suggest you:

### Check Out the Schools' Websites

- Many schools will have key information online, including tuition rates, application requirements (if any), student handbooks, curriculum, and more. While you peruse, make sure to write down any questions you have.

### Request More Information

- Doing so can give you access to additional downloadable content from the schools or put you on their mailing list so you can receive printed materials. (We suggest getting some sort of folder or filing system, so they're easily accessible when you're comparing schools.)

### Look at the Schools' Social Media Accounts

- These should give you a good sense of the school's personality and offerings, and may offer a sneak peek into what life at the school may look like for you—and your student.

### See What Others Are Saying

- You can find out about other families' experiences by looking up the school on review websites, online blogs, Reddit, Google reviews, and more. You also may be able to find parent testimonials on the school's website or YouTube.

### List of Schools to Research:

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# Step 5:

## CONTACT THE SCHOOLS

Now's the time to take things to the next level by contacting your short list of schools. You should be able to find contact information on the school's website. Emailing might be the easiest way to keep everything organized (we recommend printing out useful communications or saving copies in an online folder), but feel free to pick up the phone and call if you prefer.

**Once you get in touch, ask any questions you wrote down during Step 4. Some other questions you may want to ask include:**

What distinguishes your school from others? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the school's expectations for its students? How does the school help students achieve them?

\_\_\_\_\_

What's the student-teacher ratio for my child's grade level? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of checkpoints are used to make sure my child is where they need to be? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do you support children with different learning styles and needs? If my student has special needs, can I get an Individualized Learning Plan? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What will the workload for my student be like? How long are classes, amount of down/free time, amount of at-home work, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How are behavior issues handled? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is my time commitment as a parent/caretaker? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If my child has engagements during school hours, what does that flexibility look like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Step 6:

# ATTEND AN EVENT

Many schools hold regular open houses for potential new families. Make sure to mark your calendars and register in advance, as space may be limited. We also recommend taking another look at the school's website and any notes you've taken during your research to help you remember questions to ask.

You can also feel free to attend another school event, like an athletics competition, play, or fundraising event. This can give you a unique opportunity to get to know the community you could be joining. Most schools have social calendars on their website, but you can also ask an administrator if they have any upcoming public events.

## Online School

	Pros	Cons
Academics		
Social Activities		
Safety		
Support Services		
Scheduling		
Other		



## Step 7:

# PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS

It's essential to familiarize yourself with your top schools' enrollment processes, including key dates and deadlines. Below is a chart for you to fill out so you have all the information you need if or when you decide to submit applications.

<b>Name of Schools:</b>	
<b>Is there an application process?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Key dates:</b>	
<b>General supporting documents needed to submit application:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Test scores <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation <input type="checkbox"/> Interview <input type="checkbox"/> Application fee
<b>Specialized requirements:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation letter <input type="checkbox"/> Audition <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of interest
<b>General range of test scores of admitted students:</b>	
<b>Are admissions requirements published in your preferred language, if other than English?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Other notes:</b>	

# Step 8:

## COMPLETE A SCHOOL CHECKLIST

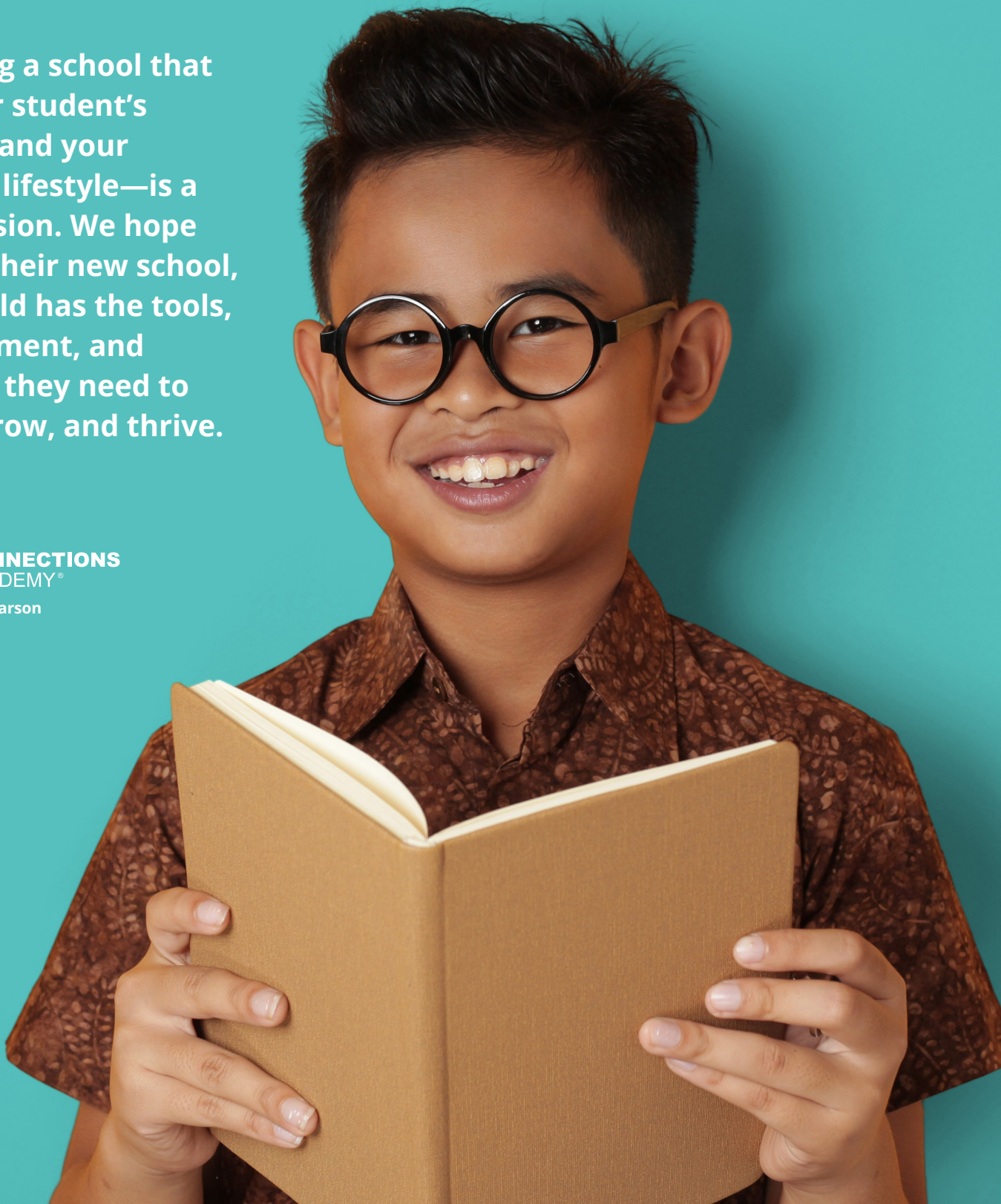
Use the exercises throughout this workbook to help you analyze your options and decide which school will best fit your student's needs and match your family's lifestyle.

### School Checklist

School Name	Academics	Cost	Diversity	Support Services	Extra-curriculars

# Congratulations, **YOU DID IT!**

Choosing a school that fits your student's needs—and your family's lifestyle—is a big decision. We hope that in their new school, your child has the tools, environment, and support they need to learn, grow, and thrive.



# Printables



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	Pros	Cons
Academics		
Social activities		
Safety		
Support services		
Scheduling		
Other		

<b>Name of school:</b>	
<b>Is there an application process?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Key dates:</b>	
<b>General supporting documents needed to submit application:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Test scores <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation <input type="checkbox"/> Interview <input type="checkbox"/> Application fee
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<b>Other notes:</b>	

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