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<http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/private-schools/choosing-a-private-school.stml>

K-12 PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Choosing A Private School

You have the right and the responsibility to select the appropriate school to meet your child's learning needs. No one knows your child's special traits, needs, strengths and weaknesses better than you. If you are considering a private school for your child, it is important for you to know some of the fundamental differences between private and public school in Florida.

- Private elementary and secondary schools are not licensed, approved, accredited or regulated by the Department of Education.
- Florida's private schools issue independent school diplomas that do not require approval from the state of Florida.
- Florida's private schools establish their own system of school accountability, grading, reporting, and evaluating and are not included in the state's measurement of public schools.
- Private elementary and secondary schools are structured as private corporations, churches or private businesses that only report directory information and the enrollment of compulsory attendance aged students to the Department of Education.
- Private schools are not subject to school definitions and requirements specified in education statutes and they are not under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education.

Locating Schools

Parents choosing the best private school for their child typically locate all possible candidate schools in relation to the home address. The [Florida Private School Directory](#) will help you find schools in various locations.

The School's Philosophy Each private school has a stated purpose and philosophy unique to that school. Some place an emphasis on college preparation. Some are vocational, while others seek to meet the needs of children with particular learning styles. When considering a private school, parents are encouraged to ask to see the school's statement of purpose and philosophy to determine if the stated direction of the school is suitable to the needs of their child.

The Faculty and Administration Certification of private school teachers and administrators is not required in Florida. Therefore, parents are encouraged to ask the following questions about the faculty and administration:

- Do all of the teachers hold four-year college or university degrees?
- Does the school provide continuing education programs for its teachers?
- Are the teachers known in the community as a faculty that is dedicated to children and their needs? A sign of a well run school is a good working relationship between teachers and administrators and with parents.
- Is there evidence of strong leadership in the school as reflected in the general cleanliness of the school, the appearance and attitudes of the students, and the ready availability of answers to your questions?
- How long has the principal or school head been at the school?
- What is his or her administrative qualification and background? Although private schools are not required to do background checks of all teachers, state law does require background checks of all school chief administrators, all early childhood faculty and staff, and authorizes a background check of all teachers and school employees who have contact with students. Certified teachers are automatically part of the background check process.
- If a school does not require state certification for its faculty and administrators, are other measures taken to verify moral and ethical suitability to engage children in the educational process?

The Academic Program Since the academic program offered at a private school is not part of the state system of K-20 education defined in educational statutes, parents may want to ask the following questions:

- What is the school's authorization to issue report cards, diplomas and transcripts?
- What is the school's evidence of the successful placement of their graduates in the next level of schooling?
- What testing programs are used, and how do the student results of recent testing at this school compare with other schools and with national and statewide norms?
- What is the success rate of students leaving this school at the next schooling level?
- What accreditations or guarantees does this school offer that the next level of schooling will accept their diplomas, transcripts, report cards and transfer credits?
- Good private schools commonly advertise or otherwise assert that their program meets or exceeds state standards. What proof is offered that those assertions are true?

Diplomas and Transcripts

Most postsecondary training programs, colleges and prospective employers require that the applicant's high school diploma and transcript be from an accredited school. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools ([SACS](#)) is the regional accrediting agency for the twelve southeastern states and the only accrediting agency for Florida's public and state university system schools. Many private schools in Florida are also SACS accredited.

For private schools, accreditation is not required and is achieved by the school's adopting and maintaining the academic standards prescribed by an independent accrediting association, usually affiliated with the school's religion or educational philosophy. There are many accrediting organizations for private schools and many private schools that are not accredited at all.

It is wise to check with the college, university, or prospective employers to determine whether or not they accept diplomas and transcripts from a specific private school. Requests for information about the acceptance of credits from a specific private school for postsecondary education admittance should be directed to the local community college or university admissions office.

Accreditations and Affiliations

There is no state law requiring private schools to be accredited, and there is no state regulation of private school accrediting agencies. Some private schools choose to become accredited.

Accrediting organizations will verify individual school status relative to the organization's standards and requirements. Please understand that any contract or tuition payment agreement a parent signs is a matter of contract and business law not education. Therefore, parents may want to ask the following questions:

- To what extent does the accrediting organization stand behind the schools affiliated with them?
- Do they offer mediation services or any kind of parent representation should their child's experiences at that school not meet their expectations?

Financial Policies and Practices

Private schools all have specific policies and practices governing financial matters. Parents are encouraged to ask the following questions:

- What is the history and financial stability of the school?
- What are the policies and practices concerning payment of tuition?
- Is tuition refunded if the student leaves during the school year?
- What penalties or consequences are there for unpaid tuitions or fees?
- Are all expectations regarding tuitions and fees published and part of a contract that parents sign?

Governance

Private schools are governed in a variety of ways. Some by a school board elected by the parents, some by specific churches or religious bodies, some by boards or trustees and some are proprietary schools. Parents are encouraged to ask the following questions:

- What form of governance is used in the school?
- What are the expectations for student conduct?
- What are the expectations for parent involvement?
- What are the processes for communication between home and school?

You and Your Child

Generally, the right school for you will be the school that most closely reflects the values and routines you have established at home; the one that is most comfortable for you and your child. Your child benefits from being involved with you in the process of finding that right school. By collecting information, talking to other parents, visiting schools and exercising your rights responsibly, you assume your rightful role in assuring that your child receives a quality education. By staying actively involved with the school, by providing other learning opportunities at home and in the community and by supervising homework, you can make your child's school years very productive and rewarding for all concerned.