



THE ELEMENTARY YEARS (K-6)

Choose your child's school with **CONFIDENCE**

INCLUDES
Easy to Use
Tool Kit



religious?
magnet?
home?



Which School?



public?
private?
charter?



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Step Two: Chapter 10

The Puzzle Solved: A Personalized Profile of Your Great Fit School

This downloadable PDF is an excerpt from:

Picky Parent Guide: Choose Your Child's School with CONFIDENCE

**Get all the chapters in electronic form, for free, at *PickyParent.com*, or
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LIGHTNING LIST

What To Know from Chapter 10

- **Deciding what a school should offer to fit** your child and family needs is the next step. The *Great Fit Triangle* (page 162) and *Fit Factors Unfolded* table (page 177) show school differences that affect fit.
- **You can use our short-cut tables to identify the specific ways schools can meet your needs** – *Child Needs: What to Look for in a School* (page 380) and *Family Needs: What to Look for in a School* (page 400).
- **Think for yourself about how a school can meet your needs.** You should consider:
 - ✓ *How exclusively focused on children and families like yours is the school? Or, how effectively does the school individualize learning for children?* If you choose a school focused on children or families like yours, make sure the school is a very good fit. A school adept at meeting many needs may have fewer children and families just like yours, but is more likely to fit your changing needs and multiple children.
 - ✓ *How much will a school tap and build your child's strengths?* A school should appreciate and support children who have strengths like your child's.
 - ✓ *How much will a school develop your child's weaknesses?* You shouldn't choose a school entirely focused on your child's weaknesses, nor one that will ignore them. Look for a school that will develop your child's weaknesses so that they do not keep your child from using and enjoying strengths.
- **School type** (for example, private or public) and **school design** (like Montessori) can matter for fit. But you'll want to look beyond a school's "label" and **find out what the school is really like** before making a choice.
- **Prioritize among your many child and family needs.** When you get down to the business of choosing a school, know that you may need to prioritize among even your Must Haves.

Chapter 10

The Puzzle Solved: A Personalized Profile of Your Great Fit School

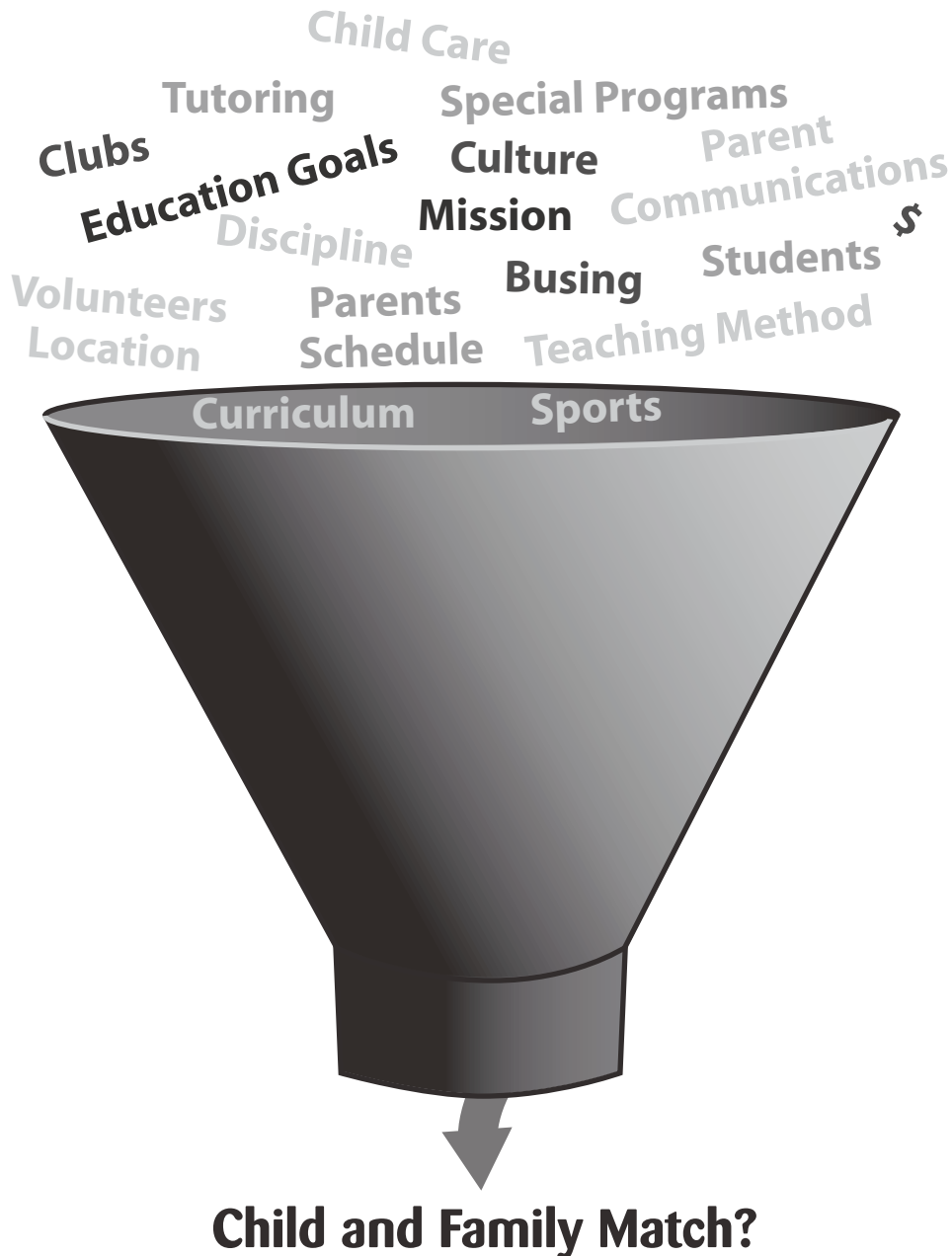
What Kind of School Will Meet Your Needs?

You know your child's and family's needs, or at least you're headed in that direction. Now what? Even when you know your needs, it is not always easy to know the many ways that a school can meet them.

When you start looking at schools (or if you've already been around the block with your older child), you'll see that they vary in many, sometimes confusing, ways. One school says it has high standards because teachers cover a lot of subjects. Another also says it has high standards, but focuses mainly on the basics. One uses a tried and true teaching method, another seems to be trying several different approaches in the classroom all at once. One is beautiful – lovely, neat classrooms with stimulating displays – while another school is chock full of materials but not so neat looking. One school's classrooms are so quiet you can hear a pin drop, another school's classrooms seem to have constant buzz. One school's students are all dressed similarly, another's students wear uniforms, while still another's students are very different from each other in dress and other ways, as well. It can be overwhelming to experience so many different environments during your concentrated school hunt. Which school differences really matter for *your* child and family?

In this chapter, we'll help you determine what a school should offer to meet your child and family needs. With some needs, there is a clear best fit way to meet the need: other approaches are a distant second best. With other needs, there are a lot of ways to “skin the cat” (or the apple, for animal lovers). We'll help you explore all of the options and think for yourself on these matters, *with confidence* of course.

What Matters for Matching A School to My Child and Family?



Specifically, Chapter 10 will prepare you to find a Great Fit school. It will help you:

1. **Identify what you should seek in a school** to fit your specific, common child and family needs using our tables
2. **Think for yourself** about what you want in a school to fit your child and family needs
3. **Understand how school type, school design and school culture** can affect multiple fit needs, and
4. **Prioritize** among your many child and family needs.

You'll likely find this chapter a satisfying confidence-builder, whether or not you are working through the *Confident Choice Tools* while you read. You'll start to get a picture of the school elements that may work best for your child and family. These elements will become so familiar to you that you'll soon be able to spot schools that fit (and those that don't) quickly and accurately. There's no better confidence-builder than being very well informed and ready to take action.

When you are ready, this book will help you complete your own *Personalized Great Fit Checklist* – summarizing on one page your child and family Must Haves and what you want in a school to meet those needs. This little tool will be your constant companion later as you explore schools available to your child.

The Great Fit Triangle: The Third Piece of the Puzzle

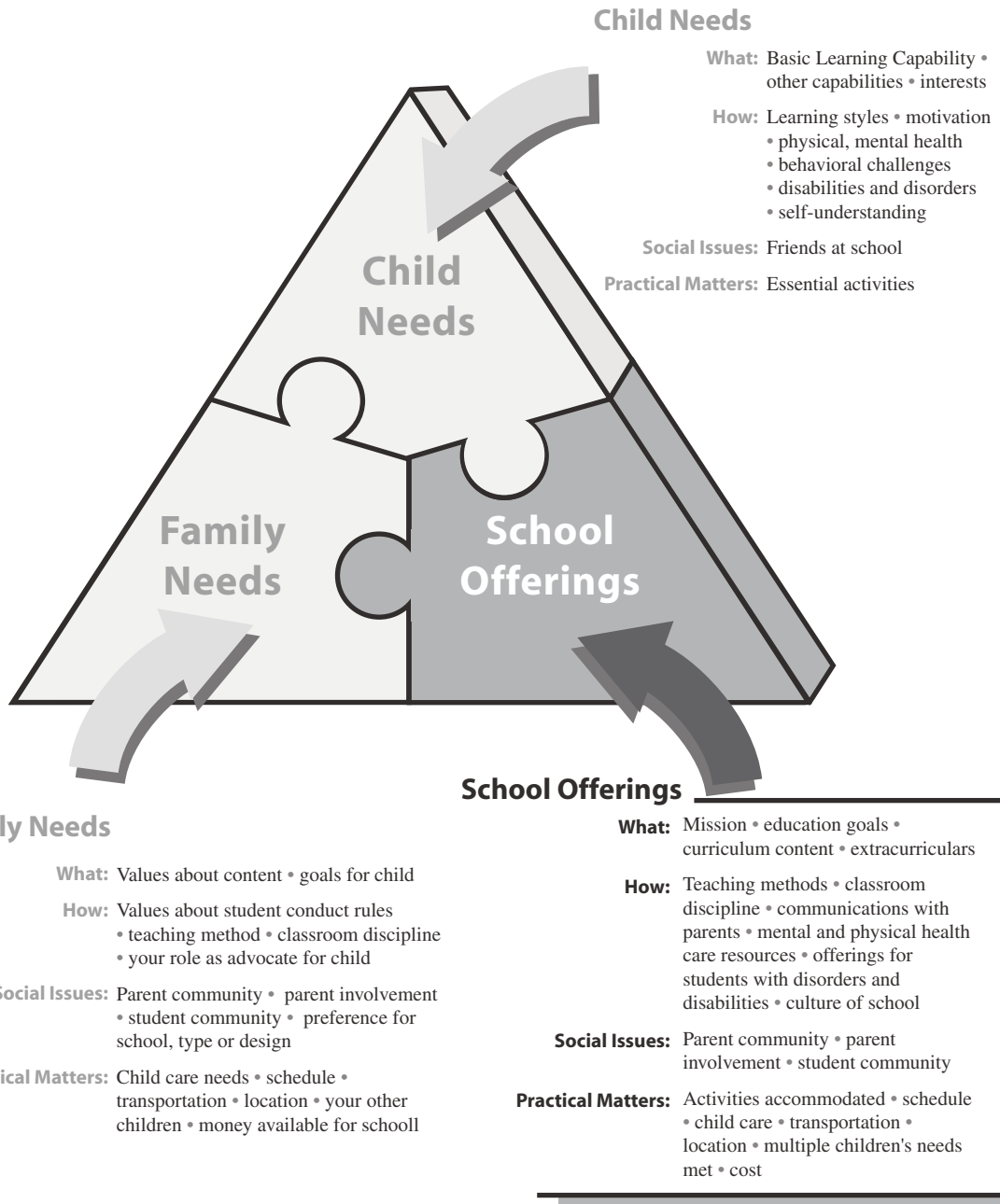
You won't be surprised to find that the Great Fit Triangle is our first stop on the way to matching your needs to school offerings. The third part of the Triangle shows the offerings of schools that differ to address the varying needs of children and their families.

It's no coincidence that the Great Fit Triangle has three interlocked puzzle pieces. School and family should work together as a team for you and your child. When they do, your child will benefit and you can share the education load with your child's school. When they don't, you or your child will suffer.

If family life develops your child in the ways that school doesn't, your child has the chance to grow and develop into a well-rounded adult without one area (e.g., social skills) inhibiting his ability to use the others (e.g., academic skills). Similarly, if school fills voids in your family life (e.g., time for physical exercise), especially when family time is very limited, your child will be all the better. And if you are

Great Fit Triangle

Matching Child and Family Needs with School Offerings



fortunate enough for school and family to reinforce each other – promoting and teaching the same values along with a broad set of life skills – the more likely your child is to develop a *strong and well-rounded* set of knowledge, skills, values and habits consistent with your parental desires.

Focus on the Four Fit Factors

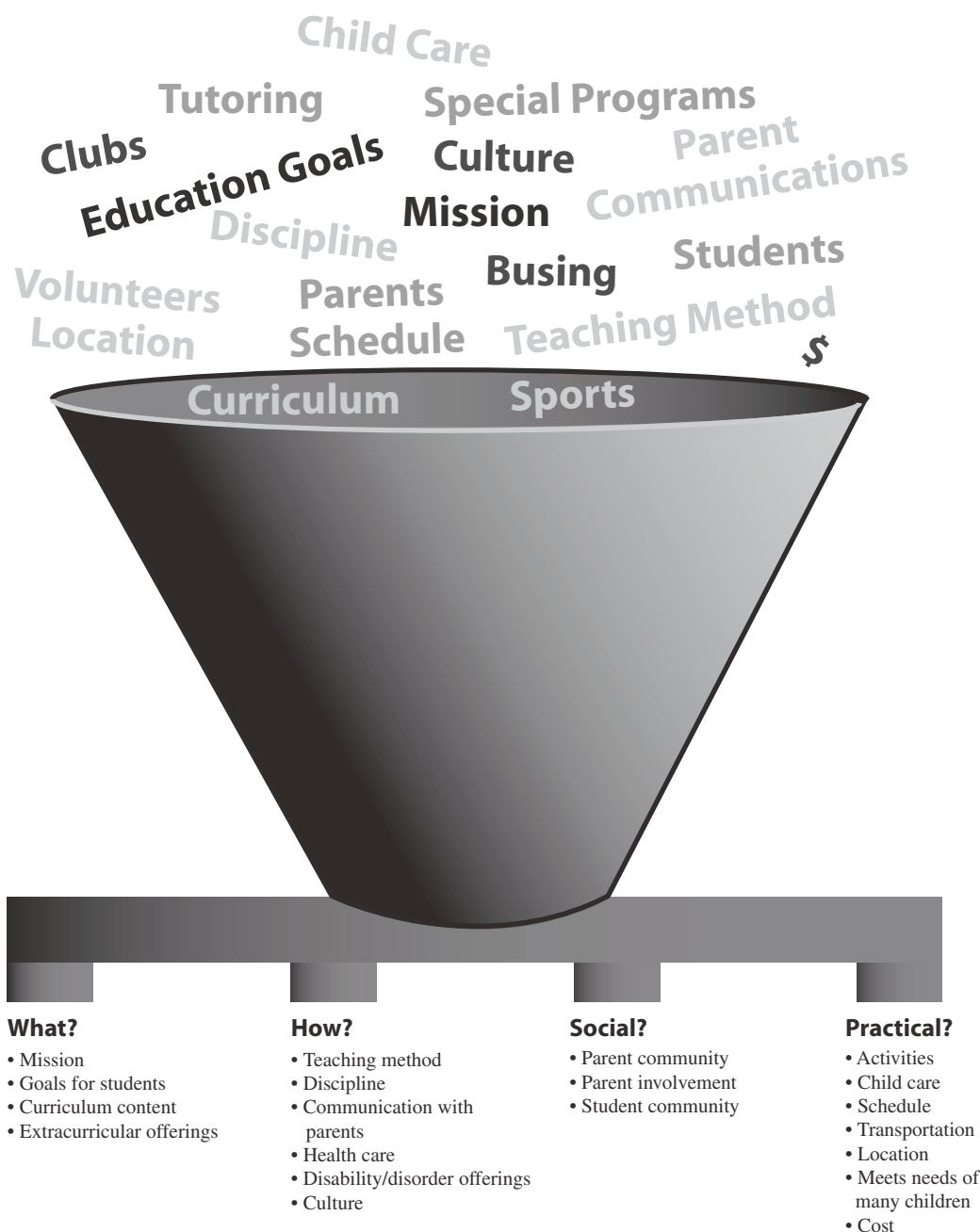
Some school differences affect school quality, some affect fit with child and family needs, and some affect both. Here, we are focusing on school differences that affect fit. (Chapters 11 – 14 will address quality.)

So how can you, the parent, make sense of the jumble of characteristics you see when you begin to investigate schools? As with your child and family *needs*, you can use our four Fit Factors to understand how one school's *offerings* differ from another's:

- **What Your Child Learns:** Schools differ greatly in their overall educational “mission,” which is a statement of what a school aims to accomplish and why. Schools also vary in the range of subjects taught, how challenging the educational goals are for each child, and extracurricular offerings.
- **How Your Child Learns:** Schools differ in how teachers instruct students, both in their main approaches used for all students and alternative approaches used for students with particular needs and challenges. Schools vary in their disciplinary policies and practices (in and out of the classroom) and the overall culture of interaction between the school, students, and parents.
- **Social Issues:** When you choose a school, you're choosing a unique group of kids and adults with whom you and your child will spend time. Social Issues include the school's social norms and values as well as the characteristics of its students and parents. The types and levels of parent participation in the school community are part of this Factor, too.
- **Practical Matters:** Each school has its own daily and annual schedule, transportation system, and location. Some offer before and after school care, some don't. Some are free of charge, others charge anywhere from a lot to a little in tuition.

If you've given some thought to your child's and family's needs within the four Fit Factors, you're ready to start thinking about what school offerings will meet those needs. To see how school offerings line up with child and family needs, skim down the columns of our *Fit Factors Unfolded* table on page 177.

What Matters for Matching A School to My Child and Family?



Short-Cut Tables for Common Child and Family Needs

We know you're picky about these matters (and we like that). But you're also busy. It takes work to think through all of these issues on your own. Fortunately, most children and families have needs shared by many others. We have taken some of the most common needs – those included in the *Child and Family Needs Summaries* – and identified the characteristics of schools that best meet those needs.

While we twisted your arm in Chapters 2 – 9 to get you to at least *consider* all of the many needs and wants your child and family might have, in this section we let you focus on those items most important to you. The specific school prescriptions for common child and family needs appear in tables rather than text, so you may focus only on the material that's relevant to you. “More tables?” you say. “Oh no!” Don't worry: you need read *only* those sections pertaining to your own child and family. We won't subject parents of typical kids to reading the really annoying prescriptions for “highly gifted” kids, and we won't rattle the rest of us mere working folk with ideas for parents who find themselves with extra cash on hand to support their children's educations!

The tables *Child Needs: What to Look for in a School* (page 380) and *Family Needs: What to Look for in a School* (page 400) translate your common needs into matching school offerings. In reading the tables, focus just on the items that you have identified as Must Haves first, then circle back to your top Nice to Haves. In many instances, a school may meet your needs in one of several ways, leaving you more flexibility. As you go, note “What to Look For” on your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist* (page 59).

Thinking for Yourself: Matching School Offerings to Your Needs

Our *What to Look for in a School* tables will help you with specific issues, but you really can and should *think for yourself* about what to look for in a school. You may have needs different from the common ones listed in the *Child and Family Needs Summaries*, you may prefer to think things through for yourself, or you may just want a better understanding of how to find a Great Fit school. In many instances, you will find that there are multiple ways to address a need, which leaves you more flexible to seek quality and a better overall child and family fit, too. This section will give a sense of the *range* of school options and the tradeoffs you make with different kinds of schools.

If you begin to feel uncertain about what to seek, focus on one top child Must Have and Great School Quality Factors #2 and 3.

*Thinking for
yourself never
goes out of
style.*

Some fit needs, particularly family needs, are easier to translate than others. For example, if you need a certain location, schedule, child care or transportation, you can look for schools that directly fit the bill. If religious education is a school Must Have for your family's children – and you have no other conflicting Must Haves – you can narrow the list quickly to schools that address your religious group. If the kind of families and students attending a school is a major concern – e.g., you want school friends who live nearby or you want your child exposed to international students – you can ask pointed questions about each school's population. If you want a school addressing certain content, you can ask if and how each school covers that material.

In other cases, it is harder to translate your needs into school offerings. What *should* a school do to conform to your family's values? To meet the needs of academically challenged children? Gifted children? Learning disabled children? Go-get-'em, super-motivated children? Bright but unmotivated children? And so on. The answers are not always apparent, particularly when it comes to your *child's* characteristics.

Fortunately, many needs – even when they are compelling Must Haves – may be met in multiple ways. For example, most academically gifted students may be educated effectively in special schools for gifted children, in special programs within larger schools, in more diverse schools that break children into small (ever-changing) groups by current achievement level, in schools where learning is self-paced, or in schools that carve out one-on-one time for teacher and student (including home school). A similarly broad range of schools – from those that admit only children and families meeting certain criteria to those adept at individualized learning for many types of children – will address many of your needs.

So how do you distinguish among these options? Consider these three questions:

- How *exclusively focused on children and families like yours* is the school? (Or: how effectively does the school individualize learning for children?)
- How much will a school *tap and build* your child's strengths?
- How much will a school *develop* your child's weaknesses?

How exclusively focused on children and families like yours is the school?

Some schools target a particular kind of child or family – e.g., families of a certain religious or ethnic background, children who learn well sitting and listening in a big group, academically challenged children, bright children who need motivation – and set out to meet the needs of that limited population only. Other schools are adept at meeting the needs of a broad range of children and families. The more of the school day spent in activities tailored to your values and your child's

capabilities, interests, learning styles and other characteristics, the more enjoyable and fruitful your child's schooling will be. But, the more specialized or focused a school is, the more important it is that you have made *just* the right match.

Many families choose schools, both public and private, with a one-size-fits-all approach only to find that the curriculum targets the wrong level of learning (too advanced without support for their struggling children or too slow) or wrong learning style. You must be *sure* to make the right match with highly focused or selective schools, so that your child will not be an academic or social fish out of water. Research clearly shows that there is lost opportunity in any school that focuses the curriculum entirely on the "average" student, even the average in that particular school. Even highly selective schools will have students with a broad range of abilities and learning needs (especially if siblings or alumni are favored in admissions). *Watch carefully for signs that your child's needs are not being met if you choose a school offering a one-size-fits-all curriculum or teaching method.*

Fortunately, many schools find ways to accommodate a broader range of children and families:

- ***Providing a special program housed within a larger school*** so that all of a child's academic work is done with similar children, but informal contact may occur with other children. You must make sure such a program is a good fit and that your child is comfortable being perceived as "different" by children not in the special program. Special programs are *not* effective if they are used to lower expectations for struggling students.
- ***Dividing all students up into small work groups*** to address their varying needs for most school work. Children will spend a large portion of the school day working at their current level of capability, and teachers are more likely to lock onto your child's interests and learning style than in large group. Watch out for schools that provide only a weekly pullout for "gifted" or "remedial" education, as these will provide little long-term benefit to your child. Instead, small group learning should consume a *large portion* of each school day and week and should be used to engage and challenge your child, not to lower expectations. Small groups should *not* be set for an entire school year, but should change very frequently as needed (weekly). Children learn in fits and starts, and frequent changes in the groupings should reflect this fact. Note: If your child is very strong visual or auditory learner, she may have trouble with the noise and feeling of disorder at transition times unless this process is managed with skill and discipline.
- ***Rotating children through one-on-one teacher-child activities***, in combination with large group or small group activities. A great arrangement for chil-

*If your child
will be
different from
the norm in a
school, find out
whether
children like
yours are
treated kindly
and with
respect.*

dren who need the extra motivation that a little undivided attention inspires. Although less time in the overall day may be focused on work at your child's current level of capability, most homework and some class work can be *highly* tailored to individual needs.

- ***Rotating all children through a variety of learning activities*** geared to meet the needs of each student for at least some portion of the day. All students have the opportunity for a few inspiring and engaging moments and the chance to develop weaknesses as well as strengths. Your child *may* have less time in day working at the appropriate level (ask how activities are selected for children). Note: If your child is a very strong visual or auditory learner, she may have trouble with the noise and feeling of disorder at transition times unless this process is managed with skill and discipline.

How much will a school tap and build your child's strengths?

It is unlikely that your child will ever feel great about a school if your child's greatest strengths are not valued or addressed by the school. At best, yours will be one of those children waiting for the better days of college or work. At worst, your child may feel unappreciated and socially isolated (if the school tends to attract children very different from yours). On the other hand, even children with tremendous strengths – be they academic, artistic, social or other – need additional skills and knowledge to function happily and successfully in our world. So an overdose on your child's strengths, particularly if other important developmental needs aren't addressed, may not be the best choice, either.

You need to choose a school that, at the very least, respects and encourages your child's strengths. Beyond that, you and your child will need to decide just how much the child's strengths need to be addressed and how important it is for your child to attend school with children who have similar strengths.

How much will a school develop your child's weaknesses?

Help your child strike a balance: find a school that offers your child the chance to improve academic, social, emotional and physical weaknesses without dwelling on them for a large part of the day. Is your child academically challenged? Don't start a mover-and-shaker letter campaign to gain admission to a school that typically admits only very bright students. Do find a school that provides high academic expectations and the focus on basics, repetition and tutoring he'll need. Does your child have motivation challenges, such as difficulty setting goals and dealing with challenges? Don't torture her with an unstructured school

where children are expected to be highly self-directed. Do find a school with a structured goal-setting process to ensure children are challenged.

Remember: it's not just your child's current achievement at stake, but also the long-term discipline and confidence needed to achieve your child's own goals for herself. You'll want your child to feel that she can overcome weaknesses, learn to enjoy strengths despite the weaknesses, and develop the concrete skills for making it happen.

School Type, School Design, School Culture

The *What to Look for* tables are helpful because they are very specific: they tell you particular things to seek to match your child and family needs. Many parents ask us: what about the “big picture”? Shouldn't we decide, first, whether we want a private or a public school? Or: isn't there some well-known “school design,” like Montessori or International Baccalaureate, that we should be looking for above all else? Or: can't I just get a feel for a school's “culture” and go on that?

School type, design, and culture certainly can matter for fit. But here's our message: you can't learn everything you need to know about a school by looking at the label on the outside. The fact that a school is private or public, or a magnet or charter school, doesn't tell you much about whether it will fit your needs. A school's design and culture tell you more. But even within a well-defined design, there's a lot of variation from one school to the next. And while some aspects of culture are readily observable when you walk into a school, others that you can't see without digging a bit more deeply may or may not fit your Must Have needs. You still need to look inside the particular school and see what it's *really* like.

That said, type, design, and culture can make a difference. Here are some thoughts on how and when.

School Type

The types of schooling available in your community may include:

- district public schools (regular or magnet),
- public charter schools,
- private independent schools,
- private religious schools,
- special programs within other schools of all types, and
- home schools.

Research has not shown a consistent difference in *quality* based on school type alone. Because school type does not determine quality, and because it affects so

few *child* needs, we encourage you to consider schools other than your top-pick type. Many parents who *never* dreamed they would “go public” or “go private” have done so when they realized that a truly critical child (or family) need could best be met in a school that did not fit their pre-conceived notions.

Nonetheless, the school type (or the particular school) is something you should consider *if* one of the following is a Must Have or top Nice to Have:

Family

- *Social Issues: I want my child to attend a certain school or school type.*
If you determine that you strongly prefer (or don’t like) one type of school, or one school in particular, then the school or school type is a matter for you to consider in your school hunt. Note *why* this is important to you on your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist*.
- *Practical Matters: Money available for school.*
Some types of school will cost you more “out of pocket” than others, and you may not want to waste time exploring schools that simply aren’t feasible financially. But, scholarships or vouchers may be available to your child to cover or reduce the cost of a private or religious school, so do not dismiss a school for cost alone until you’ve explored these wallet-builders.

School Design

Schools may use an existing design already in use by other schools, or they may hammer out their own. Common examples of pre-existing designs are listed and described in the table on page 172. Visit *PickyParent.com* for more information and links to websites of school designs you are considering.

For schools that have one, an overall design often means that the school mission, curriculum, teaching method and other elements of school life adhere to a prescribed way of thinking about children and education. A school’s design *may* cover all aspects of school life, from philosophy to practical matters like the schedule. But many existing school designs cover only *some* aspects of school life, such as the content of what’s taught and the teaching method.

Knowing a school’s design can help you make a quick judgment about fit – when the design affects issues important to you or your child. Beware, though, that even schools subscribing to particular designs can vary quite a bit. Before you settle on a school, you’ll need to ask questions about your specific needs to know just how well the school will fit. If you are considering a special program within a larger school, it is important to find out just how much the program’s daily practices follow the routines of the larger school.

Many schools do not use a pre-existing design. Instead they create their own or pick and choose from among the elements of others. If you can't get a handle on a school's overall design, fear not: you can look for the specific things you need in a school using our short-cut tables, *Child Needs: What to Look for in a School* and *Family Needs: What to Look for in a School*. In fact, you need to do that even if a school says it's using a certain design.

What About "School Culture"?

Sure, a school may have an explicit design that determines what is taught, and how. But what about the more subtle aspects of a school: the dress code, expected and actual student behavior, manners among students and staff, the values of the children and families attracted to the school? All of these policies, practices and aspects of the school community define how a school expects people to treat each other and which values – such as honesty, kindness, respect for different ideas and teamwork – are reinforced and which are not. Together they make up a school's "culture."

Shouldn't parents seek a school culture that fits? Definitely. If you have worked through the Snap To It exercises in our *Child* and *Family* chapters, then you already have a good handle on which aspects of school culture are most important to you and what values you want reinforced at school. You may be able to make a quick judgment about a school if many aspects of its culture are aligned – or misaligned – with your Must Have values.

Prioritizing Your Many Fit Needs

If your child and family have competing needs – ones that would lead you to very different kinds of schools – then you'll really want to make careful choices about what to seek in a school.

A Great Fit school is one that meets both the most *important* and *difficult-to-accommodate* needs of your child and family. Few schools will meet every one of them. But some needs are more essential than others: for your child or family, you must address them either in school or family life. The more vital a need is to your child's being, or your family's needs and values, the more important it is that you find a school to address it.

For example, if your child is a social and leadership superstar, few venues will make up for the extraordinary opportunities in a school with significant small group interaction, unstructured time and extracurricular activities. If your child is challenged academically, tutoring will help; but a school that makes the most

School Designs Defined

This table provides brief descriptions of some common school designs. If you're exploring school designs, you won't want to stop here. Visit *PickyParent.com* for references and links to more information about these and the many other school designs.

DESIGN	GRADES	MAJOR PHILOSOPHY	KEY COMPONENTS
Accelerated Schools	K - 8	Provide all students with enriched instruction based on entire school community's vision of learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifted-and-talented instruction that engages and challenges students is offered to all students. • Governance structure empowers school community to make key decisions about change through participatory process.
The Coalition of Essential Schools	K - 12	Students and teachers should be active partners in creating meaningful learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not offer a specific curriculum, but rather a set of guiding principles. • These include: small classes, in depth coverage of material, personalization, teacher-as-coach, democracy, and demonstration of mastery. • Students should be engaged in "authentic tasks," and assessments should improve teaching.
Core Knowledge	K - 8	Focus on teaching a common core of concepts, vocabulary, skills, and knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequential program of specific topics for each grade in all subjects. This sequence makes up 50 percent of a school's curriculum. • Instructional strategies are modeled for teachers, but the selection is left up to them.
Direct Instruction	K - 8	Aims to improve achievement significantly over current levels by using highly prescribed curriculum and instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction is fast-paced and demands frequent scripted interaction between teachers and students. • Students are placed in small, flexible groups by performance level. • Student progress is assessed frequently.
Edison Schools, Inc.	K - 12	For profit educational management company that operates public schools nationwide using research-based school design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades are clustered together in academies, and students have the same teachers for several years. • Schools operate with longer school day and year. • Rich liberal arts curriculum with research-based instruction and ongoing student assessment.
International Baccalaureate	Pre K - 12	Develop whole child, including cultural capabilities, through study of prescribed international curriculum promoting thinking and transdisciplinary skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines for what students should learn in six core content areas. • Prescribed teaching methodology that emphasizes: critical thinking, inquiry, risk-taking, global understanding, sensitivity and open-mindedness, moral principles, and reflective self-understanding. • Ongoing monitoring of individual student learning integrated with daily lessons. • Mastery of a second language.

School Designs Defined ...continued

DESIGN	GRADES	MAJOR PHILOSOPHY	KEY COMPONENTS
Montessori	Pre K - 8	Develop culturally literate children by nurturing their intelligence, independence, curiosity and creativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Classrooms are multi-age and students stay with one teacher for several years. ● Method values and supports individual learning styles. ● Curriculum is carefully structured to move individual children from one skill to the next. ● Encourages independence and self-discipline.
Multiple Intelligences	Pre K - 12	Design instruction so that it supports student's natural abilities and talents in order to access a broad range of human potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintains that traditional schooling supports some types of intelligence more than others. ● Encourages teachers to be aware of and to value students' natural forms of intelligence. ● Designed to support students' individual learning strengths so that they learn more effectively.
Paideia	K - 12	Foster more active learning and better use of teacher and student time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus is on active learning and developing critical thinking skills. ● Individual schools have flexibility in how they implement basic principles.
School Development Program	K - 12	Meet the needs of urban students by improving educators' understanding of child development and fostering healthy relations with families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School-wide committee directs school improvement process and promotes parent involvement. ● Schools receive some guidance with curriculum and instruction, but teacher and school-wide teams are expected to make most decisions.
Success for All	Pre K - 8	Structured research-based reading program designed to teach all children to read well in the early elementary years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 90 minutes a day of instruction for students in reading, writing, and language arts; one-on-one tutoring for young students struggling in reading; extensive family support services. ● Students are grouped by reading level (reviewed by assessment every 8 weeks) and often work cooperatively.
Waldorf	Pre K - 12	Children learn best through experiences that awaken multiple senses and focus on capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students learn through experiences and personal exchange with teachers, rather than textbooks. ● Focus on developing intellectual, emotional, spiritual capabilities, not just content learning. ● Arts and physical activities used as learning tools. ● Intense study of one subject over several weeks. ● Students stay with same teachers in grades K-8.

of the long school day to *breathe life into and reinforce* the basics is hands down the best solution in most cases. If your family is cash-strapped, and your child does not have the particular strengths that might lead to a private school scholarship, finding the best public school truly is essential.

Few schools will offer everything you want and need for a perfect fit. You will need to decide for yourself which wants and needs you can handle elsewhere. Just because your child has an essential educational need does not necessarily mean that the need must be met at school. Many parents will be able to supplement the school experience with a broad range of extracurricular activities, tutoring, social experiences and so on.

Parents also can meet many of their own needs outside of their child's school experience. Had you counted on being part of the parent community at your neighborhood school or alma mater? You need not choose a second-rate or poor fit school just to satisfy these yearnings: get more involved in other neighborhood activities, and shore up your friendships with former classmates (or even continue to volunteer and improve your former school). You can find several ways to meet most needs, once you understand what they are and the range of ways to meet them.

You'll have another chance to think this through when it comes to decision time (Chapter 16). But it will be easier then if you've already narrowed down your Must Have list. You need not eliminate a need altogether from consideration – make it Nice to Have if you think you can meet the need outside of school. To get some help thinking about how you can meet needs outside of school see our helpful, you guessed it, tables: *Child Needs: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* (page 416) and *Family Needs: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* (page 428). You'll find the advice in these to be very basic, and we think you'll be able to add ideas to this list once you get started.

Chapter 16 will help you face the often wrenching choices about how to balance child and family fit needs – along with school quality. You can decide which kinds of school shortcomings would be easier for your child and family to accommodate outside of school, depending upon the schools available to your child. But before that, you need to learn more about the proven pillars of school quality that make a truly Great School.


SNAP TO IT
What To Do

- **Turn to your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist*** (page 59). You will use this checklist to investigate schools you are considering. If you haven't already, fill in the first column, "Child and Family Needs," with your child and family Must Have needs based on your *Child* and *Family Needs Summaries*. Include top Nice to Haves, if you have few Must Haves. Estimated Time: 15 minutes
- **Use our short-cut tables, *Child Needs: What to Look for in a School*** (page 380) and *Family Needs: What to Look for in a School* (page 400), to decide what you will seek in schools for a Great Fit. These tables also tell you what questions to ask principals, teachers and parents. Estimated Time: 10 - 20 minutes
- **Try to narrow your Must Have list as much as possible.** Consider carefully what needs you can meet outside of school. Use our tables to help: *Child Needs: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* (page 416) and *Family Needs: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* (page 428). Estimated Time: 30 minutes
- **Record top questions and things to look for in your school hunt** in the middle column of your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist*. You need not include every detail there. Include just as much as you'll need to feel confident investigating schools later.
 - ✓ You may prepare separate interview sheets for principals, parents and teachers as needed. See our *Interview Forms* on pages 273-75
 - ✓ You may want to mark or copy key sections of the tables to take with you to schools, if you find it helpful to have detail close at hand
 - ✓ See the example completed *Checklist* on page 176
 Estimated Time: 30 minutes
- **Think for yourself as needed and as time allows.** Do you want a school focused just on children and families like yours or one adept at meeting varying needs? How much do you want a school to focus on developing your child's strengths? Weaknesses? Work these thoughts into your *Checklist*. Estimated Time: As needed
- **Note any school type, school design or school culture "big picture" thoughts to consider** as you cast your net in search of schools. Work these into your *Checklist*. Prepare a clean final *Checklist* that is now a truly personalized profile of your Great Fit school. Estimated Time: 0 - 10 minutes

Need more? Want more? Got more to share? Visit PickyParent.com.

Personalized Great Fit Checklist

School Name: _____

- In the first blank column, list in pencil the precise names of your top child & family needs based on your *Child and Family Needs Summaries* (pages 38 and 110) and on your reading of Chapters 2–9 and related tables. For example, write: "Basic Learning Capability, Typical." See a complete example on page 176.
- Check whether each of your needs is a Must Have or Nice to Have.
- In next big column, make note of the characteristics a school must have to meet your need based on your reading of Chapter 10 and related tables.

- Include specific questions to ask school principal, teachers, parents, and others (or use our *Interview Forms* on page 273).
- Make an extra copy and fill in notes for each school you consider.
- After you gather the information you need, grade each school on how well it fits each Must Have and Nice to Have item:

A perfect fit **C** halfway fit

B very good fit **D** poor fit

F very poor or no fit

FIT FACTOR	CHILD & FAMILY NEEDS: Must Haves & top Nice to Haves	MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE	WHAT TO LOOK FOR and QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES ABOUT THIS SCHOOL	GRADE
What Your Child Learns	Child: Basic Learning Capability - Bright/Gifted	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indiv. learning goals ahead of grade level or high overall goals • Frequent monitoring • Focus on critical thinking 		
How Your Child Learns	Child: Motivation - Weak Family: Values about how - Classroom Behavior - controlling/strict	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of teaching methods • Frequent feedback for parents • Individual work with teacher • Clear behavior expectations • Clear punishments & rewards 		
Social Issues	Family: Student Community - critical mass of gifted children	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High % of children designated "gifted" or scoring at high levels on tests (not just % at grade level) 		
Practical Matters	Family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child-care - need afterschool • Transportation - bus to & from • Money - afford up to \$6,000 plus \$1,000 for afterschool; prefer less 	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afterschool available • Bus to and from school available (for afterschool, too) • Tuition & fees minus aid is no more than \$6,000, or total with afterschool no more than \$7,000 		

Fit Factors Unfolded

Each section of the Great Fit Triangle includes the four Fit Factors. Your child's, family's and school's most important characteristics must match to make a Great Fit.

	FIT FACTOR #1: What Your Child Learns	FIT FACTOR #2: How Your Child Learns	FIT FACTOR #3: Social Issues	FIT FACTOR #4: Practical Matters
Child Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basic Learning Capability ● Other capabilities: musical, artistic, physical and hands-on, social and leadership, creativity, ESL ● Interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning Styles ● Motivation ● Physical and mental health challenges ● Behavior challenges ● Learning disorders and disabilities ● Self-understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Friends at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Essential non-school activities
Family Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values about what content is important, e.g., academic basics, other subjects, religion, ethics ● Goals for your child, e.g., grade progression, academic performance, college opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values about school-wide expectations and rules on student conduct, e.g., manners, discipline, dress, honor code ● Values about how children should learn: teaching method and classroom behavior management ● Your role as advocate for child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Characteristics you want in parents ● Your preferred level and type of parent involvement ● Characteristics you want in students ● Preference for certain school, school type or design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child care: before/after school, summer, etc. ● Schedule: daily and yearly ● Transportation needs ● Location ● Your other children ● Money available to pay for school
School Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mission ● Educational goals for students ● Curriculum content (regular classes and special programs) ● Extracurricular offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teaching method ● Classroom discipline ● Communication with parents ● Mental, physical health care ● Disability and disorder offerings ● Culture of school (and special programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parent community characteristics ● Parent involvement, expected and actual ● Student community characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activities accommodated ● Child care provided ● Schedule and schedule flexibility ● Transportation provided ● Location ● Meet needs of all your children ● Cost



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