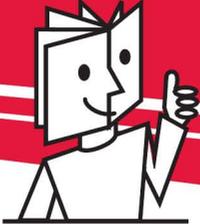


PickyParent

GUIDE



THE ELEMENTARY YEARS (K-6)

Choose your child's school with CONFIDENCE

INCLUDES
Easy to Use
Tool Kit



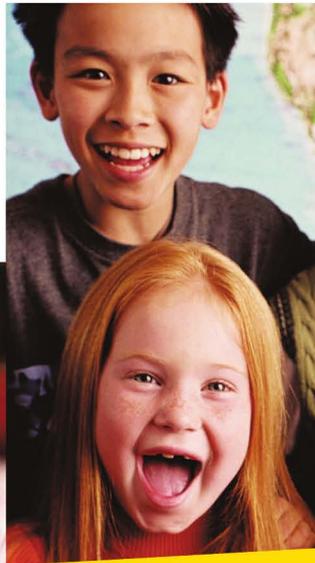
religious?
magnet?
home?



Which School?



public?
private?
charter?



Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. & Emily Ayscue Hassel



Step Five: Chapter 16 *Decisions, Decisions:* *Choose the Right School*

This downloadable PDF is an excerpt from:

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

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LIGHT'NING LIST

What To Know from Chapter 16

- **Picky is as picky does: here's your chance to make a huge difference** in how your child spends thousands of childhood hours at school.
- **Comparing and ranking schools helps you not only choose a school, but prepare to parent your child** outside of school, no matter what school your child ultimately attends.
- **Keep an open mind** and remember that many parents choose schools they did not expect, because of better quality and fit.
- **Perfect quality and fit are rare**, but you can play an active role to fill the gaps for your own child and support positive changes in your chosen school.
- **Consider involving your older or mature child in the final decision**, especially if you have two or more similarly appealing options.
- **Quality and your fit Must Haves should weigh more heavily** in your school decision than Nice to Haves. You may need to rank your Must Haves if you have more than one top school option. Ask yourself this: which needs are most important for your child's school to address?
- **Knowing which school weaknesses you can best accommodate** outside of school is important for choosing the right school for your child and family.
- **If you have two or more great options, you can make a judgment with confidence**, since you will understand each school's major strengths and weaknesses.
- **Remember your Great School Quality Factor #2 and 3 safety valve should your decision become overwhelming:** a school strong in these two factors will meet the quality and fit needs of many children over the long haul. Focusing on these, plus one top need of your child, can improve your child's life greatly.

Chapter 16

Decisions, Decisions: Choose the Right School

It's Time to Decide

You've gotten the scoop on your Target Schools. You've talked the talk, thought the thoughts. But unless you choose your child's school – and plan your out-of-school parenting – based on your work, you lose much of the value.

This chapter will see you through finding the clear view you need to make your school choice with confidence. Now is the time to lay it all out and compare across schools. If you've been holding your breath – trying hard not to draw a conclusion about the schools you've considered – it's time to decompress and look at the facts you've gathered. If you've been ranking your Target Schools in your mind as you learned more about each, it's time to test your conclusions. Even if your choices are limited, you'll need to review the key information you have gathered about each Target School.

Knowing that you have focused on the most important aspects of quality and fit for your child and family will give you great confidence in your choice. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the school you choose will allow you to improve your interactions with the school and your child-rearing decisions outside of school.

Open Your Mind

When you are highly informed about your child's and family's needs, as well as the real indicators of school quality, you may find that the most appealing

Be confident if you choose an unexpected school. Every year, many parents set aside biases to choose schools for quality and fit. Their children, families and schools are all the better for it.

schools are not at all what you expected. Where you began your hunt is not necessarily the same place you will end it. And parents who've been down the road of following their own needs first – only to see their children's school interest and performance wither – know that quality and crucial child needs trump parent needs, hands down.

Many parents travel an unexpected course all the way from considering only traditional, one-size-fits-all schools to considering only schools that break children into very small groups for more personalized learning. Other parents go in unpredicted directions, as well: from public to private, private to public, school-house to home school, assigned school to charter school, magnet to assigned school, and so on. Stay confident even when your destination is not what you expected. You are not alone. Every year, parents throughout the United States alter their commitment from one school, school type or design to school quality and overall fit. Their children, families and schools are all the better for it.



“Feeder Schools”: A Leg Up?

In some cities, a few elementary schools are regarded as “feeders” for particular selective middle or high schools. If your child attends the feeder school, he is presumed to have an advantage when it comes to getting into the upper-level school. If you have your eye on such a secondary school for your child's future, you might be tempted to select the feeder school now to up the admissions odds later. But should you do so?

Let's take the easy case first. If the feeder school meets your fit needs and passes quality muster, the fact that it feeds the desirable high school could well put it over the top in your decision-making, perhaps breaking a tie with a similar school. But now the tougher case – what if the feeder falls short in fit or quality? What then?

Keep this in mind: attending the feeder school will probably not guarantee your child's admission to the selective secondary school. The two schools' perennial relationship may give you an edge, but your child will still need to meet the upper-level school's exacting standards. If the feeder school is a poor fit for your child or weak in quality, what will happen? You may find that after a lackluster elementary career, he doesn't make the cut after all.

So think twice before opting for a perceived feeder school over a school that's a better fit and higher quality. Your child's elementary years are a critical period for development, not just a holding pen for a future school. (If the school you are considering is the elementary section of one larger umbrella school, similar rules of thumb apply. See the box *Up Your Odds: Understand The Admissions Game* in Chapter 17.)

Peer and Family Pressure Nipping at Your Heels

As you zero in on your final choice, peer or family pressure will undoubtedly rear its demanding head for many of you. The mere thought of telling curious neighbors at the park – let alone good friends and family members – that you may take a road less traveled can cause tremors in all but the most irreverent mavericks among us. If you have followed the steps laid out in Chapters 1 – 15, you’ll find sure footing faster when asked about your choice. You know your



Peer and Family Pressure: Let Confidence be Your Reward for Hard Work

If you live, work, or socialize among people who attend a certain school – or type of school – you may feel embarrassed that your child’s or family’s needs would lead you down a different path. If you’ve always been a gung-ho supporter of your alma mater, or public schools, or private schools, how can you explain why you’ve chosen to send your child elsewhere without seeming to put down the very people you’ve rallied with over the years?

We dare say that most of you have made many *other* parenting decisions running counter to what friends, family, neighbors and colleagues would do. School is different only because it is such a *public* parenting decision – everybody knows what you’ve decided in the end, and you may be faced with many folks asking “why?” – especially if you go against the grain.

Arm yourself. The clearer your decision-making, the wiser and more confident you will feel. The wiser and more confident you feel, the better you can explain your decision. You need not put down others’ decisions when your decision is based on fit. This is much harder, of course, when your decision hinges on quality. But remember that different families can make up for differing school weaknesses at home – so even choosy parents may make different decisions in seemingly similar situations. The better you can explain your decision in personal terms, the less affronted others will feel, and the less rebellious you will feel.

But sharing information with others – about fit *and* quality – will help you *all* support and improve your children’s schools. No school is perfect, and parents sharing ideas can only help. Indeed, any school populated by more engaged parents will likely improve. Pick and choose the right times and places to state your quality case to other parents. In turn, listen to others and learn, but stand your ground, too. Meanwhile, be proud to be thought of as a parent who goes the extra mile for your child when it really counts!

child's and family's needs, and you know about quality. You've found out what you reasonably could about schools available to your child. You've both followed your "gut" (putting these values and concerns into words) and you've been logical and smart. Stand strong. Stay confident about your choice, even while listening to others' differing views.

Perfect Quality and Perfect Fit are Rare

Some of you, particularly in cities with many school options *and* many parents making a proactive choice, will find yourselves torn between two or more promising schools. Others of you may find that one school rises to the top, plainly addressing your quality and fit needs the best. But all too many of you will find that you have little real choice in your area, or that none of your options pass muster.

We hope that pressure from better-informed parents will push more schools to do better with more children more of the time. But the reality today is that many parents must choose between the "lesser of evils," and the "best" choice is a mediocre school and an imperfect fit. You can take several paths if you come to this crossroads.

For starters, parents can accommodate many school imperfections once aware of them. *The Child, Family and Quality: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* tables (starting on page 416) are a great place to start. For example:

- School perfect academically but does not include children from your neighborhood? Sign your child up for activities or summer camps that draw children from your area, and set aside one afternoon a week just for play with neighborhood friends.
- School offers high quality, individually-paced education in the basics but covers few other subjects? Include science camp, language classes, drama and other "special" subjects on your child's after school and summer activity list (don't overload; spread throughout the year!).
- Your child needs a small school environment with lots of one-on-one teacher contact to feel motivated about academics, but only private schools in your area offer this, and you can't afford the tuition? Hire a tutor to come to your home one afternoon each week to check your child's progress and motivate your child. The cost of this should be *significantly* less than a private school. Take the lead in asking your child's teachers for regular progress updates – just asking will focus teachers' attention on your child.
- Really need to send your two children to different schools to accommodate their very different needs, but find the differing vacation schedules a challenge? Plan ahead to focus your family time on the vacations your children have in



Home Sweet Home: Should You School There?

More families than ever in our country, well over a million in 2002, are providing their children's educations at home. Parents choose this route for many reasons, all of which boil down to concerns about the fit or quality of more traditional school settings. You might consider home schooling if:

- Available schools are low quality or a poor fit for your child or family.
- Your child did not get into your chosen school, and your second choice school is not of acceptable fit or quality.
- Your child has unusual needs that cannot be met at school or in non-school hours.
- Your family has strong and uncommon values – religious or other – that you want to reinforce through schooling, and no available school fits the bill.
- You want to provide your child with a highly tailored academic experience unavailable in many schools today.
- You feel confident that you can best provide the academic, social, emotional and physical developmental support your child needs by home schooling, rather than by partnering with your child's school.

Home schooling is the best choice only for the right parents and children. You must be as tough on yourself as you are on more traditional schools. Use the *Confident Choice Tools* to compare home schooling with schools in your area, grading yourself just as you have done with other schools you considered. Not all parents possess the broad range of skills and capabilities needed to support their children's development through home schooling. The older your child, the more true this becomes: the more technical and challenging your child's level of work, the broader and deeper your own academic skills must be. Not to mention that motivating your child and conveying knowledge are different skills altogether from possessing the knowledge yourself. The mental work of establishing learning goals, figuring out how you will teach each subject, and finding and choosing materials takes oodles of mental and leg work. In a traditional school, these tasks may be shared by a number of people possessing various skills and talents. When you home school, you must wear these many hats all at once. You may be able to collaborate with other home schoolers in your area, but only if you take the initiative to do so. If you feel up to the challenge, go for it. If not, remember that you are always your child's teacher in non-school hours. You can play an important role in your child's education, even if not home schooling. Check out the Resources for Parents section starting on page 354 and PickyParent.com for links to web sites for families considering home schooling.

common. If you can, use your child's solo time off as an opportunity for valuable one-on-one time with each child.

- Your academically gifted child's needs are not being met by schools in your rural area? Check out the growing array of Internet-based, self-paced educational tools. Seek out public or private schools outside your immediate local area. Some states have public schools that serve gifted students statewide; check with your state department of education. Many private boarding schools offer significant scholarships for gifted students from rural areas, but these are primarily for middle and high school years.
- School inconsistent in fitting your child's needs? Meet with and write a letter to the principal to ensure your child gets the best-fit teachers as often as possible. Clearly communicate your child's needs to teachers at the beginning and during each school year. Use interaction time with teachers (e.g., conferences, open houses) to steer them towards understanding and meeting your child's needs. Fill the gaps with tutoring or extracurricular activities.

If choosing between your child's needs and your own, we encourage you to bend your needs creatively to meet your child's. You'll have fewer regrets and headaches if a school fits your child well.

You can also push for change in your chosen school. Many a school, both public and private, has been spurred to change by a resolute group of parents. A willing principal and eager teachers are necessary for real and lasting change, but parents can be the catalyst that gets things moving. Just as a teacher's high expectations can change how a child performs, your expectations can redirect the energy of school staff towards quality or a common fit need. Discussions with your school's PTA chairperson and the principal are two good places to start if you are bent on change. (See more about pushing for change in Chapter 18.)

Third, this is the point in time when some parents consider home schooling. Only you can make the decision about whether this is the best course for your children and family. You'll need to consider how well you can provide the seven Great School Quality Factors and meet your child's and family's fit needs. Undoubtedly, home schooling is the best option for some children and families. But just as certainly, it is the wrong choice for many. Among other things, you'll need to consider your own personal strengths and weaknesses and how much energy you'll have to address your family's many needs when your home schooling "school day" is done (see Home Sweet Home: Should You School There? on page 283).

Conflict on the Road to Making a Choice

As you wade knee-deep into your final decision, you may start thinking: *us or them?* You may feel trapped, particularly if *either* parent or child has compelling and unchangeable needs. Rest assured, you can resolve conflicts with confidence that you've made the best overall decision for your *child and family*. In many

families, parent values and needs will be the overwhelming determinant of where children go to school. In some cases, with some children, you can make this decision without an ounce of guilt and without much accommodation outside of school. When your child falls in-the-box developmentally and has a learning style compatible with your family's best-fit school, and when that school passes the quality test, your family school preference can reign supreme.

In other cases, both your child and family may have compelling needs, and they may not always seem compatible. Then, you must prioritize your own Must Haves and your child's together, deciding which needs you can most easily address outside of school. Eventually, you may even find that your



Smart
à la

A Story: Parents Defer to Their Child's Needs

Sharon and Chris struggled with the private versus public question. These parents had moved to a city where many members of Chris's family had lived and developed a pleasant tradition of attending a well-regarded private day school. But these parents were not follow-the-crowd types. They thought long and hard about where to send their two children. They felt a more kindred spirit with friends and neighbors who sent their children to public school and wanted their own children to benefit from exposure to a diverse group of children.

And that is the decision they made with their first child. Unfortunately, their child, who was bright in his Basic Learning Capability, suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Because he was bright, he was able to make grade level despite his problems focusing on work. However, he was working far below the level of which he would have been capable if not for the disability. But because he made grade level, his teachers were satisfied. His parents, however, were not. They were frustrated, and saw their son as a classic case of falling through the cracks. Eventually, they had their son formally tested by a psychologist.

Upon realizing what a tremendous gap there was between his performance and capability, they made the painful decision to switch him to a private school. They looked carefully to find one where the values of the parents and other students were aligned with their own. Ironically, they settled on the one that the husband's family had attended. This school, it turned out, had developed a strong school-wide expertise in dealing with a few specific, common disabilities, including ADHD.

Their child's learning soared under the watching eyes of teachers who would not settle for performance below the child's capability. He graduated near the top of his high school class and went on to perform well at a prestigious college. Just as important, he developed self-confidence, high expectations for himself, and the self-control to use his intellectual gifts.

child's Must Haves open windows to new ideas about which schools will meet your own needs.

Families are different from each other, and parents within a family can be, too. If you're part of a two-parent family, you may find that you have differing values, and perhaps needs, from your parenting partner. Many of these conflicts may have been resolved when you assessed your family fit needs. But sometimes, the big conflict comes when you've looked at schools available to your child, and you realize that you must choose between one parent's needs or values and those of the other. Don't let choosing a school become a war of the wills. Sit down



A Story: A Child's Needs Open New Windows in a Family's World

Cindy and Carl assumed that they could get what they and their young child needed only in a private day school. They were a personally conservative, socially well-connected couple living in a prestigious neighborhood where most children attended old-line private day schools. The well-established local private schools seemed a natural focus for their attention. Their child was highly imaginative and conceptual, creating and solving problems he found interesting, noodling through ideas in original ways. But he was also highly sensitive to the emotional traumas of typical preschool peer interactions. To some, their son might have seemed “spacey” and overly sensitive. To his parents, though, he was highly perceptive, insightful and focused – on what interested him.

Hunting for the right elementary school, Carl and Cindy visited the private school they'd targeted (Dad's alma mater) and found the teaching method to be quite traditional. Looking through the lens of their imaginative child, they could feel the straightjacket he would feel here. Most of the day would be spent in teacher-directed activities working on very concrete tasks. At best, their child would not have the chance to develop one of his greatest strengths – his imagination – at school. At worst, he might end up feeling “different” from his peers and agitated by the structure, particularly in a school where parents and teachers value conformity. Furthermore, they'd pay a fat tuition bill for the privilege!

Their search continued, and they ultimately found two public schools that would meet the parents' and child's essential needs: in academic content, teaching method, social environment and practical concerns. These were schools where, it turned out, several families whom Cindy and Carl knew from church, preschool and other places were sending their children. They were guaranteed admission into at least one of them. How different their destination was from what they had expected. A child's needs can, indeed, open new windows in a family's world.



Holding Back and Grading Up: Should You?

At some point, many parents consider holding a child back for a year or moving a child up a grade. How can you make this sometimes wrenching decision with confidence?

In truth, there is no simple answer. Many child development experts believe the normal variation in mental, social and emotional maturity to be very wide up until age 8 or 9. It is reasonable for you as a parent to expect a school to accept these normal variations in the early elementary years. Great Schools do. But you may have less than Great available, or your child may be an extreme case. If your child's birthday is within roughly two months of a school's birthday cutoff, the issue is less problematic – do what seems best for social and academic fit. But even then, know that there are always tradeoffs. Consider the implications not just for this year and next, but for puberty and teenage years. (e.g., How might maturing physically and getting a driver's license well before or after peers affect your child?)

Holding Back: Perhaps you're concerned about your child's academic or social readiness for school. Or perhaps you are not concerned at all, but your child's school is. Here's the score: research shows no long-term *academic* achievement benefit to delaying the start of kindergarten or holding children back a grade. This isn't surprising given the strong evidence that the more a school expects of a child, the more that child learns. Far too many complacent, one-size-fits-all schools claim to have higher grade level standards, but adopt an early birthday cutoff for entry into a grade and a frequent practice of holding children back. These schools may claim that holding back is evidence of their high standards, but in fact the opposite is true. The social costs and benefits of holding a child back are less clear. You will need to weigh the potential social benefit of your child's additional physical and social maturity compared to classmates – now through high school – against the likely long-term academic cost.

Moving Up: For ideal emotional and social development, a child should spend a large part of the day with several children close in age. While very bright children often seem to skip academic steps, they rarely skip social and emotional ones. Getting along with same-age peers will be an invaluable life-long skill quite difficult to develop at older ages. A Great School will not need to move a child up a grade for academic challenge except in the most extreme circumstances. Instead, children across the grade who have similar current academic capabilities will be taught together. But if your best school option doesn't do this well, or if your child is extraordinarily advanced, moving up may be the best move. Even then, attending academic sessions with older children but staying with same-age peers the rest of the day will enhance your child's social development for the long run. And you'll need to take extra care to help your child form and nurture friendships with same-age children outside of school. (For more help with your highly gifted child, see the Resources for Parents section starting on page 354 and visit PickyParent.com.)

together to assess how well schools meet *all* of your quality and fit needs. Prioritize together. In some families, parents' disagreements over educational values have led to focusing on the child's needs as a tie-breaker – not a bad outcome!

If you are a divorced parent and are making decisions with your former spouse, this can be a trying time – one where previous differences come to the fore. We say this: do your very best work and use your best self-control to focus on the needs of your child first. We know you want to. We also know that it is hard when you feel angry or hurt, or both. If you are sharing custody, your child may well spend more waking hours in the custody of school than in the custody of either parent. Think about it. It's possibly one of the most stabilizing and high-impact decisions you can make for your child at this time. Just as we recommend to other families, consider focusing on your child's needs as a tie-breaker when ranking schools if you can't agree on parent priorities.

*If you can't
decide, focus
on Great
School Quality
Factors #2 and
3 and your
child's top fit
need that you
can't meet
outside of
school.*

Involve Your Child

If you haven't already, now is a great time to involve your child. If your child is older or mature, you likely will have involved him or her directly in identifying child needs. Discussing both child needs and family needs is a great way to reinforce your values, increase your child's self-understanding, and help your child feel committed to the school you choose. You need not give your child a primer on school quality, but it is good to point out the quality strengths of the schools at the top of your list.

Once you have narrowed your choice down to two or three equally appealing schools, you might want to consider allowing your child to make the final choice. If your child is older, a rising fourth or fifth grader for instance, he may have strong opinions and be downright insulted if not consulted in the final decision. Remember that your child is an individual, and his interests – academic, social, emotional and physical/athletic – can be child Must Haves. Hopefully, you considered this while thinking about fit. If not, now's your chance. Tell your child:

- Why you are proactively choosing a school for your child, instead of just doing what your neighbors and others do
- The big steps you've taken (reading about what makes a school really good, thinking about what your child and family need in a school, and learning more about schools in your town), and
- The top schools you are now considering and what you like about each one. (And, perhaps, the downsides of each. Of course, keep in mind that anything you say to your child may well be repeated around the neighborhood!)

If you really don't want to involve your child in the choice, but just want to inform him about your decision, stop there. If you do want your child to make the final choice, then ask if your child, after hearing what you like about your top pick schools, has an opinion about what sounds best to him. If admission is uncertain into your chosen school, you'll want to be clear about that with your child and be sure to emphasize the strengths of your lower ranked schools.



When is Switching Schools Worth the Effort?

If your child is already in elementary school or is in a preschool that continues into the elementary grades, you may be wondering when switching schools is worth it. Your child will spend roughly 1,000 hours in school each year (more if you use school child care). Every year of your child's life is valuable, every year of school time precious. The temporary stress of a change is often preferable when the new school is better in quality and fit.

But a stable school situation may be important in some situations: if your child has great difficulty with changes, if your child is challenged in any way (academically, socially, emotionally, or behaviorally), or if your family life is already full of disruptions and changes.

So, how do you decide? Here's what we suggest: complete your school search just as you would if your child were being forced to make a change. Include your child's current school in that search unless you are decidedly displeased with the school's quality or fit. See how your child's school stacks up against alternative schools. In your final decision, consider the stress of change and how well your child will likely deal with that stress, but also consider the great quantity of time your child will be in school after the transition stress is over. If your best alternative is selective or has limited slots (public or private), consider whether your child will be less likely to be admitted if you wait another year.

- In the end, if your child's current school is a close second, you may opt to stay put to avoid the stress and inconvenience of a change. Consider how well you can make up for quality and fit differences between the current school and the best alternative.
- If you stay put, you'll better understand the school your child attends and feel more committed to the school.
- If you decide it's worth the effort to switch schools, then you'll surely be glad you spent the time to investigate alternatives! See Chapter 18 for help preparing for the new school.

The Final March to Choosing a School

When you are ready, here are the steps you'll take to make a *final choice*:

1. Compare your Target Schools directly, using the *School Comparison Worksheet* (page 292).
2. Compare Great School Quality Factors and fit Must Haves first.
3. Know which school weaknesses you can accommodate, and which you cannot.
4. If you must, rank your Must Haves.
5. If you need to, compare Nice to Haves.
6. Make a judgment and rank your Target Schools.

Whatever school you choose, and whatever its imperfections, you can make the most of the situation by carefully crafting your child's non-school experiences and your interactions with your child's school. Chapter 18 will help you take the first steps towards becoming a great partner in your child's education. But first you'll need to take the sometimes dizzying step of getting your child in to your chosen school.


SNAP TO IT
What To Do

- **Compare your Target Schools directly.** Use our *School Comparison Worksheet* on page 292. Here you will transfer the grades you have given each school from your *Great School Quality* and *Personalized Great Fit Checklists*. See an example on page 294. Estimated Time: 15 minutes – 1 hour
- **Compare Great School Quality Factors and fit Must Haves first.** Identify (highlight or circle) the schools with the highest and lowest grades on each Great School Quality Factor and Must Have Fit Factor. Are one or more schools stronger than the others overall? If not, notice the *particular* strengths and weaknesses of each school on your list compared to the others. Look at just *how different* the schools are on each important factor. To help you make a quick visual comparison, you may want to use green to highlight the school(s) strongest on each factor and red to highlight the school(s) weakest on each factor. If you couldn't bring yourself to narrow your Target School list to five or fewer before now, this may be a good time. Estimated Time: 15 minutes – 1 hour
- **Know which school weaknesses you can accommodate, and which you cannot.** What are the weaknesses of each Target School – in quality and fit? Note the schools that *fail* to meet a need you really cannot make up for at home. Now look at the opposite: highlight schools that *best address* needs you cannot accommodate at home, in non-school activities or family life. Use the *Child, Family and Quality: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* tables starting on page 416 to help. Estimated Time: 15 minutes – 1 hour
- **If you must, rank your Must Haves.** If you like to get technical, you may want to assign a numerical weighting to each Must Have. See our decision worksheet at **PickyParent.com** for more help. Or you may just want to highlight the one or two Must Haves that are *most* essential. If you are choosing between your children's needs and your own, we encourage you to bend your needs to meet theirs when possible. Estimated Time: as needed
- **If you need to, compare Nice to Haves.** If you are choosing between two schools very similar in quality and Must Have fit, compare how well each addresses your Nice to Have fit needs. Consider using yellow to highlight the top schools on these factors. Estimated Time: as needed
- **Make a judgment and rank your Target Schools.** Based on all of these factors, rank your Target Schools. Estimated Time: as needed

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

School Comparison Worksheet **PAGE 1**

- Use the information you have gathered about schools to do a side-by-side comparison of both fit and quality. If you are comparing more than five schools, you will need to use two of these worksheets.
- List school names at the top of the school columns to right (use school initials or abbreviations to fit).
- Page 1: Transfer information to the first three blank columns from your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist*. Place your grades for each school on each Fit Factor below school name. Compare how well schools fit your child and family needs.

FIT FACTOR	CHILD & FAMILY NEEDS: Must Haves & top Nice to Haves	MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE	SCHOOL #1	SCHOOL #2	SCHOOL #3	SCHOOL #4	SCHOOL #5
What Your Child Learns								
How Your Child Learns								
Social Issues								
Practical Matters								

School Comparison Worksheet

PAGE 2

- Page 2: Transfer quality grades from your *Great School Quality Checklist* below each school name. Compare the quality of your school options.
- Review pages 1 and 2 and compare the schools. Highlight particular strengths and weaknesses of each school. Remember, not all items listed here are equal in importance for you and your child.
- ✓ Must Haves and quality should weigh more heavily in your decision than Nice to Haves.
- ✓ Use the *Child, Family and Quality: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* tables to help you decide which Must Haves and quality weaknesses you can best accommodate outside of school, if needed.

GREAT SCHOOL QUALITY FACTORS	SCHOOL #1	SCHOOL #2	SCHOOL #3	SCHOOL #4	SCHOOL #5
1. Clear Mission Guiding School Activities					
2. High Expectations for All Students					
3. Monitoring of Progress and Adjusting Teaching					
4. Focus on Effective Learning Tasks					
5. Home-School Connection					
6. Safe and Orderly Environment					
7. Strong Instructional Leadership					

School Comparison Worksheet PAGE 1

- Use the information you have gathered about schools to do a side-by-side comparison of both fit and quality. If you are comparing more than five schools, you will need to use two of these worksheets.
- List school names at the top of the school columns to right (use school initials or abbreviations to fit).
- Page 1: Transfer information to the first three blank columns from your *Personalized Great Fit Checklist*. Place your grades for each school on each Fit Factor below school name. Compare how well schools fit your child and family needs.

FIT FACTOR	CHILD & FAMILY NEEDS: Must Haves & top Nice to Haves	MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE	SCHOOL #1 Elm	SCHOOL #2 Ridge	SCHOOL #3	SCHOOL #4	SCHOOL #5
What Your Child Learns	Child: Basic Learning Capability - Bright/Gifted	X		A-	C+			
How Your Child Learns	Child: Motivation - Weak Family: Values about how - Classroom Behavior - controlling/strict	X	X	A C?	B- A			
Social Issues	Family: Student Community - critical mass of gifted children	X		B	B?			
Practical Matters	Family: • Child-care - need afterschool • Transportation - bus to & from • Money - afford up to \$6,000 plus \$1000 for afterschool; prefer less	X X		B- A	A B			

School Comparison Worksheet

PAGE 2

- Page 2: Transfer quality grades from your *Great School Quality Checklist* below each school name. Compare the quality of your school options.
- Review pages 1 and 2 and compare the schools. Highlight particular strengths and weaknesses of each school. Remember, not all items listed here are equal in importance for you and your child.
- ✓ Must Haves and quality should weigh more heavily in your decision than Nice to Haves.
- ✓ Use the *Child, Family and Quality: Ways to Get What You Don't Get at School* tables to help you decide which Must Haves and quality weaknesses you can best accommodate outside of school, if needed.

GREAT SCHOOL QUALITY FACTORS	SCHOOL #1 Elm	SCHOOL #2 Ridge	SCHOOL #3	SCHOOL #4	SCHOOL #5
1. Clear Mission Guiding School Activities	A	C			
2. High Expectations for All Students	A-	B- ?			
3. Monitoring of Progress and Adjusting Teaching	A	C-			
4. Focus on Effective Learning Tasks	C	A			
5. Home-School Connection	B	C			
6. Safe and Orderly Environment	C?	A			
7. Strong Instructional Leadership	B?	C			



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