

School choice checklist

This checklist may be used by parents/guardians who are considering transferring their children under “No Child Left Behind” guidelines, or by anyone selecting a school. Additional copies of this checklist are available from the District’s Parent Educational Resource Centers (PERCs).

1. Evaluate your child’s needs.

Thinking about these questions first may help you learn more from a school visit.

Does my child work best when:

- ❖ Working in a group?
- ❖ Working alone?
- ❖ She/he has a lot of time to work?
- ❖ She/he can move around while working?
- ❖ The classroom is quiet?
- ❖ The classroom is busy and active?

Make a note of any services your child receives at his/her current school, including tutoring, clubs and other afterschool activities, or a special education program. Plan to ask whether these same services would be available at the new school.

2. Visit the school.

Call the school for an appointment. Explain that you will have questions and you want to meet with someone (the principal, a counselor, or a teacher) who can answer them. If you can, plan to spend an hour or more. Ask for copies of any informative materials, such as school newsletters or fact sheets. Ask to see the school’s Comprehensive Education Improvement Plan (CEIP), or just ask for information about the school’s annual goals.

Consider the following aspects.

Facility:

- Yes —No Is the building in good condition?
- Yes —No Does the school library have new books?
- Yes —No Are there books that show many cultures?

continued

- Yes —No Is there good, safe equipment in:
- Yes —No The gym?
- Yes —No The playground?
- Yes —No The music and art classes?
- Yes —No The science classes?
- Yes —No If your child uses a wheelchair, are all areas of the school accessible?
- Yes —No Are the bathrooms well maintained?
- Yes —No Are classrooms clean and comfortable?

Safety:

- Yes —No Does the school seem safe?
- Yes —No Does it have, if needed:
- Yes —No Security guards?
- Yes —No A security system in the entrances?
- Yes —No Crossing guards?
- Yes —No Are there adults to help children on and off buses?
- Yes —No Are there adults to help children who walk home?
- Yes —No Is there a conflict resolution program?

Teachers/staff:

- Yes —No Do students and teachers treat each other with respect?
- Yes —No Do teachers handle behavior problems well?
- Yes —No Can teachers tell you about things they are proud of at the school?
- Yes —No Can teachers tell you what the school's goals are for this year?

When is a counselor available? _____

What is the counselor-to-student ratio? _____

When is a nurse available? _____

Classrooms:

- Yes —No Is student work posted on the walls?
- Yes —No Are "student-friendly" academic content standards posted in the rooms?
- Yes —No Do students have enough room to work in small groups and to work alone?

Schoolwork:

- Yes —No Are there activities in the room that children can do if they finish their assigned work? _____

How often will my child have a chance to use a computer? _____

- Yes —No Are students grouped by their achievement levels (such as eighth grade "Scholars")? If so, how are those decisions made? _____

—Yes —No Do students seem engaged—interested and absorbed in their work?

How often will I hear about my child's progress? _____

—Yes —No Will a teacher be available to answer questions about my child's homework?

—Yes —No Will my child bring school books home?

Family needs:

—Yes —No Will my family's culture and religion be respected here?

Are families welcomed in the school:

—Yes —No Any time during school hours?

—Yes —No For special events?

—Yes —No To volunteer in classrooms?

—Yes —No To meet with teachers?

—Yes —No To meet with the principal?

—Yes —No If the school is a charter school, are there requirements for parent involvement?

—Yes —No Is there an active parents' group, such as a PTO?

—Yes —No Is there a Title I Parent Representative?

How many parents participate on the Parent School Community Council (PSCC)? _____

When are meetings scheduled? _____

—Yes —No Are parents involved in other ways? _____

What family events/programs are offered, such as "Family Math Night" or "Family Fun Night"?

How does the school staff communicate with families (school or classroom newsletters, memos, automated phone messages, phone calls, e-mail)? _____

How often will I receive information? _____

—Yes —No Will I be able to exchange e-mail with teachers?

—Yes —No Will I be able to use "Dashboard" (an online parent-school information exchange)?

What are the school's hours? _____

—Yes —No Does the school have before/after school care?

—Yes —No Is child care available nearby?

—Yes —No If so, is transportation available?

continued

3. Talk with other parents.

Ask the principal for names of parents who can tell you more about the school. You may want to talk to parents who:

- ❖ Are members of the PSCC
- ❖ Are designated parent representatives (such as Key Communicators, Parent Communicators or Title I parent leaders)
- ❖ Belong to the PTO
- ❖ Volunteer in classrooms
- ❖ Have children who are in the same grade as your child

4. Look for additional information.

Request the District's "Public School Choices" booklet (call the Office of Communications and Marketing at 412.622.3615), or check these websites, all of which provide facts about individual schools:

- ❖ www.pps.k12.pa.us ("Public School Choices" can be downloaded from this site)
- ❖ www.SchoolResults.org
- ❖ www.paprofiles.org
- ❖ www.yourschoolsyourmoney.ed.state.pa.us
- ❖ www.ses.standardandpoors.com

NOTES

This school choice checklist is based on an earlier version developed by the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education with the support of The Pittsburgh Foundation.

© 2004 Pittsburgh Council on Public Education