

# HOW TO SELECT A SCHOOL: 7 FACTORS TO EVALUATE



For some students, Monday mornings bring excitement, but for others, they bring a mixture of emotions. Every year in the fall, we hear from parents with students in other schools with concerns about what they and their children are experiencing at their current school. Research shows there are a variety of reasons parents choose independent schools.

## Top Concerns Parents Experience at Other Schools

- Large classroom sizes
- Children aren't being challenged
- Children aren't feeling motivated or excited to go to school
- Teaching to the test
- For advanced kiddos, they're put in a corner to read a book (there's no differentiation)
- Bullying and/or social-emotional learning isn't reaching all students

Often, parents call us because they're looking for a new, safe, home for their students that will bring back their child's love of learning and joy for life.

Our advice to these families is to explore these six things when evaluating an independent school, charter school, or public school:



**1. Values:** Are the values of the school consistent with your personal and family values? In a talk at the World Economic Forum, the late Professor Sumantra Ghoshal talked about "the smell of the place," as a metaphor for the way culture comes to life in businesses. The same is true of schools. When you first walk into a school, what is that experience like for you: does it feel calm? Does it feel energizing? Is it welcoming? Does it feel safe? Do you want to be there? How do the students show up? Are the school's values alive and demonstrated by the environment?



**2. Small Class Sizes & Personalized Lessons:** For students who excel in academics, how is the school able to challenge them at a pace that allows them to continue to learn and grow while meeting the needs of others in the class? How are lessons differentiated for students to have different needs? How do lessons motivate growth mindset and achievement?



**3. Character & Leadership Integrated in Curriculum:** With mental health issues on the rise in Colorado and throughout the US, school curriculum is adapting to incorporate more social emotional learning (SEL) in support of fostering resilience. Does the school address SEL in an assembly now and then, or is it woven into their ethos and classroom curriculum? How does it foster thriving students, who are creating their own positive and purposeful lives? How are students supported in learning leadership of self and others?



**4. Safety & Support Services:** For students who come to our school and have experienced bullying, they find that our values and support services reinforce an environment where each student is celebrated and encouraged. How does the school support and equip students beyond character and leadership? How does the school support safety for students and faculty? In what ways is the school proactive in creating a safe environment?



**5. Constructive Conversations:** A differentiator for schools can be the way faculty and administrators support students and parents. When an issue arises, is it considered a learning moment and a conversation? For students, are they given a chance to better understand the how and why of a situation, as well as creating a plan for themselves to move forward?



**6. Community:** Some schools thrive on having engaged parents. Research shows that higher parent involvement results in higher attendance, higher grades, higher test scores, better social skills, improved behavior, and more. Does the school welcome parents as volunteers in the classroom and throughout the school? How does the school cultivate community beyond student activities? Is there a system or process in place for parents to get involved?



**7. Continuity of Learning:** When the global pandemic took 30 million students out of schools in the US, some schools opted to create a virtual experience for their students. What does remote learning look like for the schools you are exploring? Are the schools able to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students online? Is instruction synchronous or asynchronous? Are teachers able to make personal connections with students?

Once families identify a school that is the best fit, students excel. We've received feedback from parents who shared, "My husband and I couldn't be happier with our decision to move our son...In the public school setting, he was a number in the classroom, and taught in ways that didn't always resonate with him. In his words, 'At my old school, we sit on the carpet for math, but at Aspen Academy we do math.' He is inspired and motivated by the teachers and approach to learning at Aspen, and has developed more of a genuine love of learning. We also have noticed a change in his attitude, and that he has become more accountable for owning his success."

And from another parent who is grateful to have her child's brilliance showing through: "Our daughter walked into Aspen Academy with an experience at her prior school where she had been bullied, unsupported with dyslexia in the classroom, and was beginning to lose the spark in her eye that made her so special. She is now above grade-level, has straight A's, is vice president of the student civic org, has a million sweet friends, and is planning new business ventures she would like to explore to support other kids who have learning challenges. I know it sounds too good to be true. But it is. As a mom, there is no better experience in life than watching your kiddo discover their own brilliance! That is what Aspen has given our family: a happy, confident, thriving kiddo with fire in her eyes again!"

These engaged students who are reaching their potential should be the norm in education. At Aspen Academy, we're on a mission to transform education from what is to what can be and equip generations of children to come with what they deserve.