

Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program

Choosing a Private School



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As a parent/guardian interested in the private school choice option through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program your biggest decision will be to select a private school for your child.

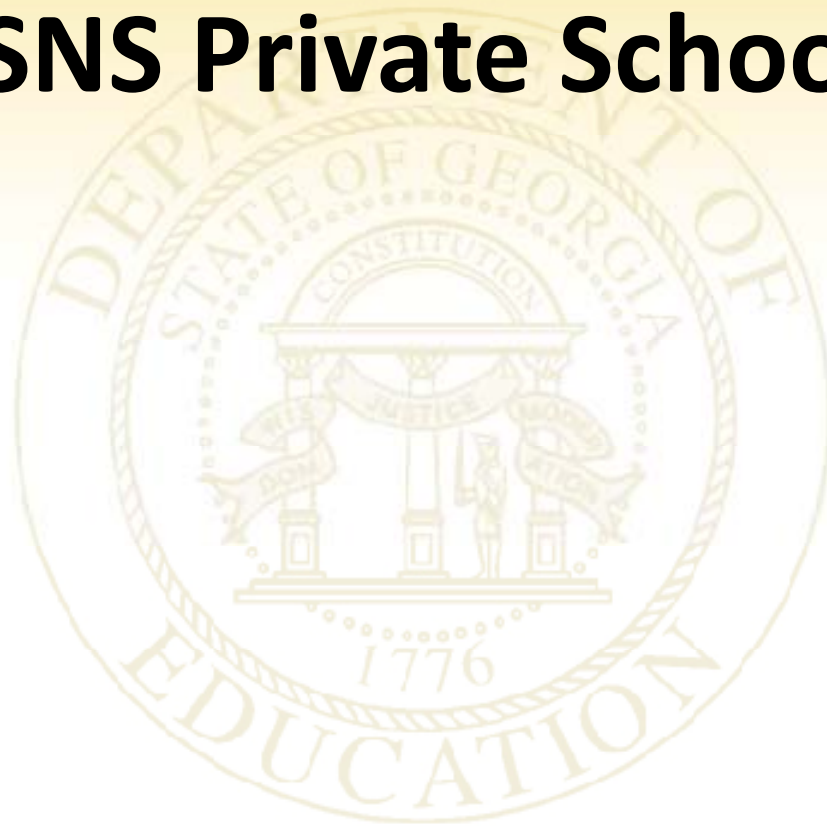
This document is an attempt to guide you in making that decision.



- Do your research and make sure you understand your responsibilities under the GSNS Program by reading all information provided on the web page at <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/sb10.aspx> **BEFORE** reviewing the private school list.



GSNS Private Schools



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GSNS Private Schools

- Many of the private schools currently participating in the GSNS Program do so because parents asked them.



GSNS Private Schools

- Participation in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program is voluntary on the part of private schools and is open to all private schools.
- If there is a private school you are interested in that is not on the current approved private school list you may ask them to apply.



GSNS Private Schools

- The deadline for a private school to send in a completed application for each upcoming school year is June 30.
- The application with instructions and eligibility requirements for private schools is available on the GSNS web page <http://www.gadoe.org/sb10.aspx>.



GSNS Private Schools

- A private school participating in the GSNS Program is not required to accept students that qualify for the GSNS Program.
- The list of authorized private schools with contact information is posted on the GSNS web page.

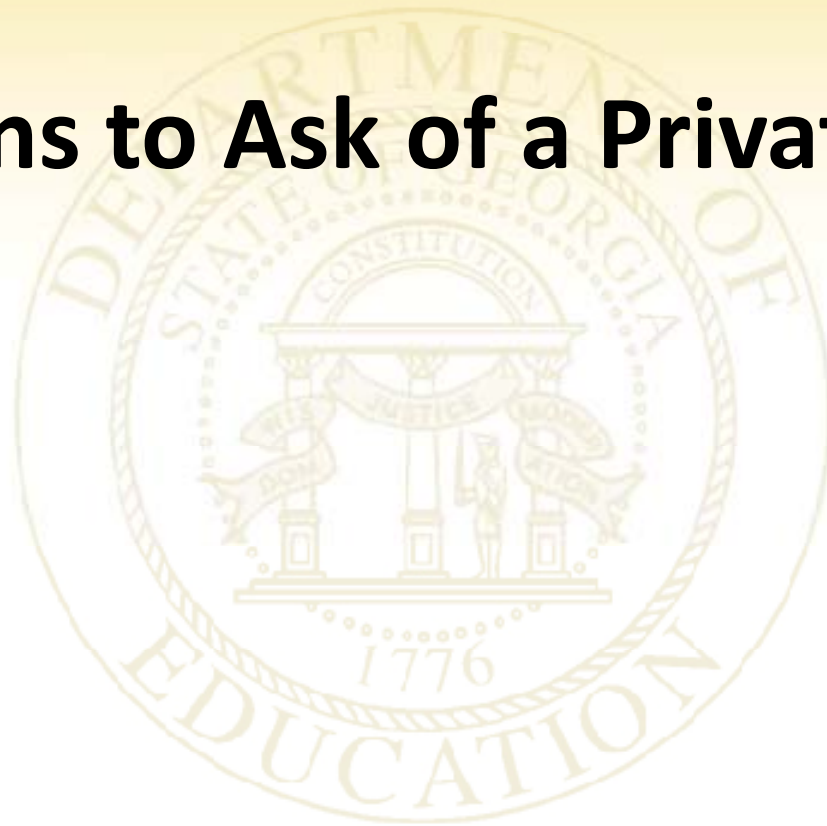


Selecting a Private School is a Business Decision

- Treat selecting a private school for your child as you would any other business transaction.



Questions to Ask of a Private School



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Selecting a Private School

- As a parent, consider the needs of your child.
- Ultimately you will want to select a private school that will be a good fit for your child.



Visit a Private School

- Contact a private school you are interested in and ask if you can visit the school with your child.
- If possible, attend an open house, parent-teacher meeting, or other school function that would provide valuable information about the attitudes of staff, students, and parents at the private school.

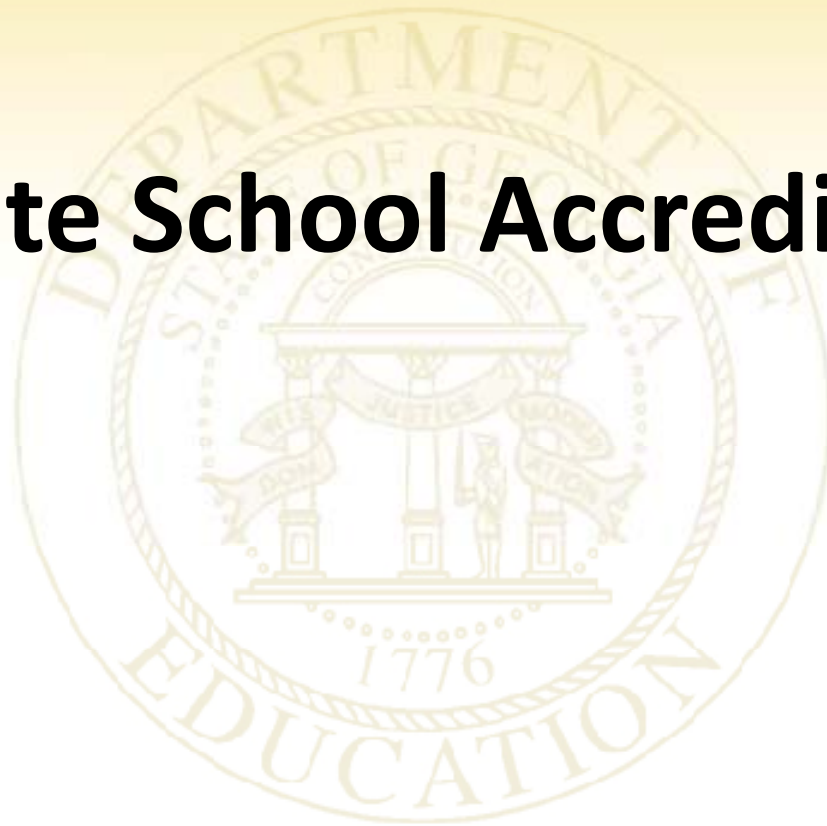


Look Around at the School

- Does the private school seem to be clean and well organized?
- Is the staff friendly and helpful?
- Do the students seem happy to be there?
- Is the private school operating in a safe environment that is conducive to learning?



Private School Accreditation



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Ask a Private School About Its Accreditation.

- How long did it take the private school to receive its accreditation?
- What standards did the private school have to meet to receive its accreditation?

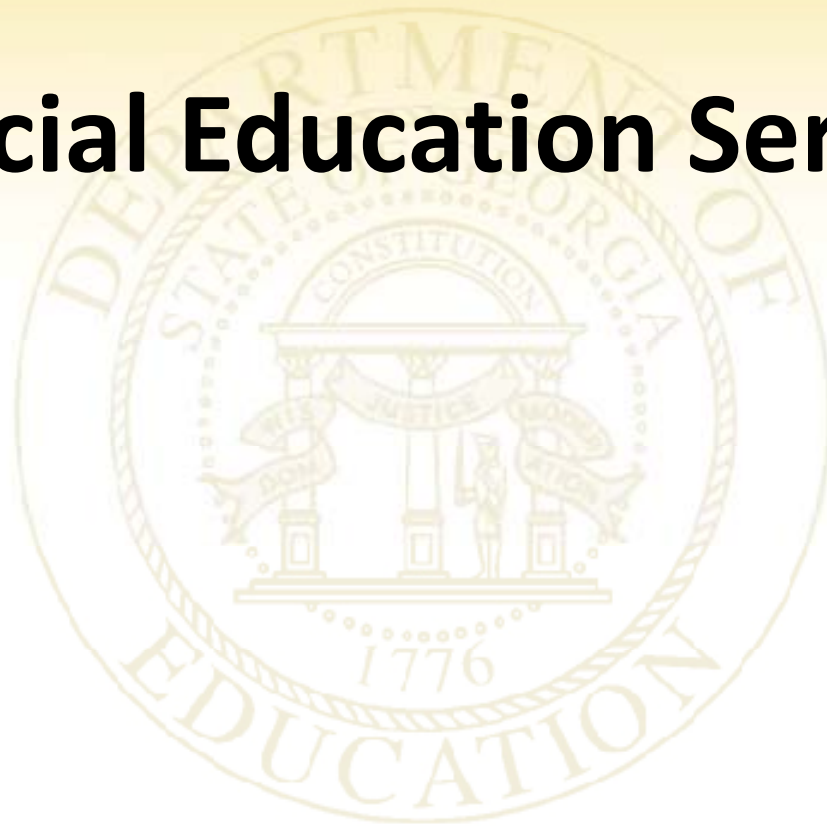


Private School Accreditation

- Usually, the longer the accreditation process e.g. 1 – 3 years, the more rigorous the accreditation agency's standards for the private schools it accredits.



Special Education Services



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Special Education Services

- Many parents/guardians are surprised to learn that a private school participating in the GSNS Program is not required to follow a student's IEP and it is not required to provide special education services to students.



Special Education Services

- You as a parent/guardian have to ask a private school directly regarding the specific special education or other services it provides for students.



Special Education Services

- Talk to the private school about your child's learning disability(ies).
- Ask the private school how it could accommodate those needs.



Special Education Services

- Ask the private school if it is willing to put services in writing as a plan for your child's education if he/she were admitted to the school.



Questions To Ask About A Private School's Teachers



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Teachers

- Ask the private school what qualifications it requires of its teachers.



Teachers

- Ask about the rate of teacher turnover at the private school.
- What does the school do to keep good teachers and improve teacher performance?



Teachers

- Listen closely to what teachers say about the private school.
- The teachers will be the adults closest to your child, and you will want to know if they are well prepared, dedicated, and satisfied in their work.



Questions to Ask About a Private School's Curriculum



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Curriculum

- The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program requires private schools to provide a program of instruction offering at least the subjects of math, science, reading, language arts, and social studies.



Curriculum

- Ask for information regarding the private school's curriculum.
- Does the school have a strong program in the required core academic subjects?

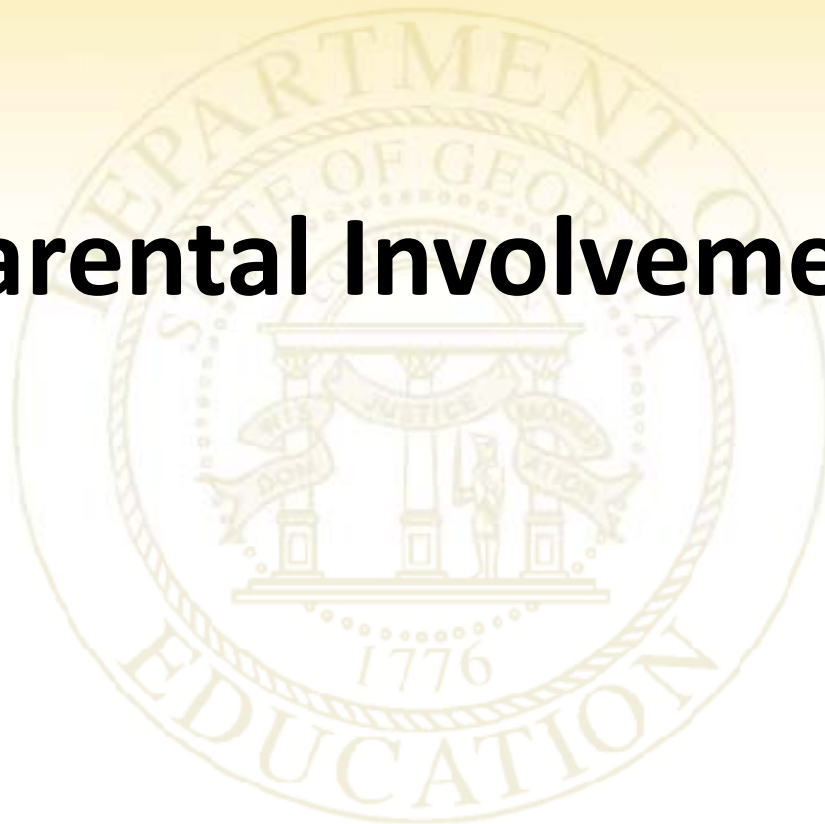


Curriculum

- Does the school have a well-equipped media center available where students can check out books, access computers, use other learning resources, and do research?



Parental Involvement



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Parental Involvement

- Talk to other parents whose children attend a private school and get their feedback on the school.



Parental Involvement

- Ask the private school if parents are encouraged to be involved at the school.
- Ask the private school if it has an active parent-teacher organization.



Financial Considerations



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Tuition and Fees

- Under the GSNS Program, if tuition and fees charged by a private school are higher than the scholarship award, a parent/guardian is responsible for paying the additional tuition.
- There are also costs not covered by the GSNS Program such as after school care and meals.



Tuition and Fees

- Most private schools participating in the GSNS Program charge tuition and fees that are more than the amount of a student's scholarship.



Tuition and Fees

Example:

- Tuition & Fees= \$12,000
- Less Student Scholarship = \$5,000
- Parent Financial Responsibility= \$7,000



Tuition and Fees

- It is typical private school practice to charge parents upfront for tuition for the upcoming school year.
- For example, a private school can require parents to have tuition paid for the school year by September 1 of that school year.



Tuition and Fees

- Since you are most likely going to have some out of pocket expenses when your child attends a private school, it is important you have a clear understanding of a school's tuition and fees policies.



Tuition and Fees

**Make sure you receive
a written copy of a private
school's tuition and fees
policies.**



Tuition and Fees

- The tuition and fees document should clearly explain how parents are charged for tuition and fees and how payment is accepted.



Tuition and Fees

- The tuition and fees document should contain information regarding penalties for non-payment of tuition.



Tuition and Fees

- The tuition and fees document should contain information for GSNS parents.
- It should explain how reimbursements will be done by the private school when the Georgia Department of Education issues payments if parents have paid upfront for tuition and fees.



Tuition and Fees

- Read the written copy of a private school's tuition and fees policies.
- Do you clearly understand them?
- If you don't, ask for clarification. Get any additional information needed in writing.



Tuition and Fees

- Always get written copies of any contracts/agreements entered with the private school (e.g. tuition reimbursement, fee schedules).



Tuition and Fees

- If you give a private school money, obtain documentation from the school detailing what the funds will be applied towards e.g. matriculation fee.
- Remember to ask for a receipt



Tuition and Fees

- Staff at the Georgia Department of Education GaDOE **cannot** resolve any disputes that may arise between a parent/guardian and a private school.
- Therefore, don't sign a contract/agreement with a private school if you don't understand it.



Scholarship Payment Process



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Payment Process

- Scholarship checks are made out to a parent/guardian, but payments are mailed directly to private schools.



Payment Process

- By law a parent/guardian must endorse a check over to a school for deposit for educational services provided.
- This is referred to as a *restrictive endorsement* in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship law.



Restrictive Endorsement Sample

Pay to the order of ABC School: For Deposit Only

John Doe

ABC School's Bank Deposit Stamp would go here on check



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Payment Process

- Parent(s)/guardian(s) cannot remove checks from private schools and they cannot deposit or cash payments issued by the Georgia Department of Education.



Payment Process

- If a private school owes you a reimbursement it must write a check drawn from its own account issued to you for reimbursement.



Conclusion



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Quick Check List

- ✓ Visit as many private schools as you choose.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- ✓ Don't be pressured into feeling you have to make a quick decision when choosing a private school.
- ✓ Make sure you understand anything you sign.
- ✓ Never pay money to a private school without receiving documentation.



10 Things to Look for in a School

- ✓ High expectations.
- ✓ Busy students.
- ✓ Great teachers.
- ✓ Great principal.
- ✓ Vibrant parent-teacher organization.
- ✓ Children are neither invisible nor scared to be at school.
- ✓ Gut reaction that this is the school for your child.
- ✓ Rigorous curriculum.
- ✓ Families like yours are welcome, and their concerns are acknowledged.
- ✓ You are satisfied with the school's results on standardized tests.



Sources:

- *Minnesota Department of Education, Office of Choice and Innovation*
- *United States Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement*

