



Excellent Schools WASHINGTON





WASHINGTON SCHOOL FINDER







Find a school that fits

A WORKBOOK FOR FAMILIES

USE THIS BOOK TO

- think about what your child needs
- learn about schools
- compare your choices
- get ready to apply

Find your school at **WashingtonSchoolFinder.org**

START YOUR SEARCH ONLINE

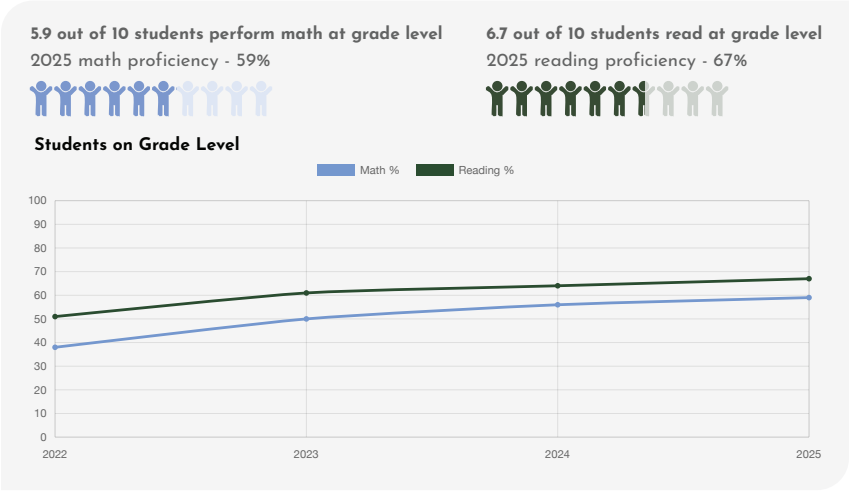
Washington School Finder

Washington School Finder can help you learn about public schools in Washington state.

USE THE SCHOOL FINDER TO

- find schools near you
- learn who attends each school
- see how students are learning
- learn about student life and school climate
- find school programs and other helpful information
- make a short list of schools you want to explore more deeply

EXAMPLE PROFILE SAMPLE DATA



WashingtonSchoolFinder.org

WELCOME

How to use this book

Choosing a school can feel like a big job. This workbook will help you take it one step at a time.

1 **Part 1: Start your school search** p. 4

Think about what your child needs, find school choices, and learn how to apply.

2 **Part 2: What to look for in a school** p.10

Learn what to look for online, inside a school, and during a school visit to make sure you are choosing a school that meets your student's needs.

3 **Part 3: Make a plan to apply** p.17

Write down what you learn about each school you plan to apply for and key dates and deadlines you need to keep in mind.

MY PLAN:

- write down your ideas and questions
- bring it with you when you visit schools
- add important dates and next steps
- ask for help when you need it

Use this book to look for a school that fits your child and your family.



PART 1

Steps to take in looking for a school

Here are five steps you should take when looking for a school.

FIVE STEPS

1. Think about your child in a school setting.
2. Find your school options.
3. Learn more about each school.
4. Check the rules and dates.
5. Apply and enroll.

Use this section of the guide to follow each step.

1 STEP 1 OF 5

Think about your child in a school setting

Start with what your child needs to learn, feel safe, and be happy at school.

My child likes:

My child learns best when:

My child may need help with:

Something I want my child to have at school is:



2 STEP 2 OF 5

Find your school options

Every child has an assigned school based on where they live.

You may also be able to attend another public school either in your home district or out of your home district.

Use **WashingtonSchoolFinder.org** to learn about schools near you.

Start with a short list of schools that may be a good fit.

My home school:

Other schools I want to learn about:

1.

2.

3.

4.

THREE KINDS OF OPTIONS

My home school – based on where I live	Another school in my district	A school in another district

Use **WashingtonSchoolFinder.org** to learn about schools near you.

3 STEP 3 OF 5

Learn more about each school

A school profile can tell you a lot. You can also visit the school, go to an open house, call the office, or talk with other families.

DURING YOUR SCHOOL SEARCH:

- [ ] Read the school profile
- [ ] Visit the school if you can
- [ ] Ask about programs and student support
- [ ] Talk to other families who attend the school
- [ ] Ask about buses and transportation
- [ ] Write down your questions

A school may look different in person than it does online. Pay attention to how the school feels to you and your child.

Ask about transportation before you accept a spot. A bus may not be offered if you choose a school outside your neighborhood or district.



4 STEP 4 OF 5

Check the rules and dates

Each school district may have different forms, rules, and dates.

- Some schools have limited space.
- Some schools use a lottery or waitlist when many families apply.

FOR EACH SCHOOL, FIND OUT:

- [ ] How do I apply?
- [ ] When is the deadline?
- [ ] Is there a lottery or waitlist?
- [ ] Do I need a transfer form?
- [ ] How will the school contact me?

- A transfer or application is a request. A spot is not always promised.

Apply early when you can.
Every district sets its own dates.
Always confirm.



5 STEP 5 OF 5

Apply and enroll

Fill out the form for each school you choose. If your child gets a spot, you may need to accept it by a certain date. Then, finish all enrollment forms.

1 Apply
2 Watch for reply
3 Accept the spot
4 Finish enrolling

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS:

- [ ] Accept the school placement
- [ ] Finish enrollment forms
- [ ] Share health and vaccine records
- [ ] Share an IEP, 504 Plan, or other support plan
- [ ] Make a transportation plan

NEED HELP ENROLLING?

- You can ask the school for a free interpreter.
- All children have the right to attend public school, no matter their immigration status.
- If your family does not have a stable place to live or you do not have all the usual papers, ask the school to enroll your child right away. Ask for the district's McKinney-Vento helper.



PART 2

What to look for in a school

Every child is different. A school that works well for one child may not be the best fit for another.

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO:

- learn and grow
- get the right help
- feel safe and welcome
- build a strong connection with their school
- fit school into your family's daily life

You do not need to find a school that has everything. After you learn what to look for, you will choose the things that matter most to your child and family.

1 WHAT TO LOOK FOR: 1 OF 5

Is my child learning and growing?

A good school helps every child learn new skills and keep growing.

ON THE SCHOOL PROFILE, LOOK FOR:

- reading and math results
- student growth
- graduation rates for high schools
- how students like your child are doing

IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING, LOOK FOR:

- students taking part in lessons
- teachers checking student work
- books and learning materials children can use
- student work in classrooms and hallways
- students asking questions and trying new things

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How will I know if my child is learning?
- What student assessments will you show me? How will you help me understand them?
- What happens when a child needs more challenging work?
- How do you prepare students for the next grade?

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ONLINE SAMPLE DATA

6.7 out of 10 students read at grade level

2025 reading proficiency - 67%



2 WHAT TO LOOK FOR: 2 OF 5

Will my child get the help they need?

Children learn in different ways. Some children need extra help. Others need a new challenge.

ON THE SCHOOL PROFILE, LOOK FOR:

- how many students there are for each teacher
- teacher experience
- who attends the school
- how different groups of students are doing

IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING, LOOK FOR:

- teachers and staff helping students
- small-group learning spaces
- calm or quiet spaces
- signs and information in more than one language
- staff who help students with learning, health, or feelings

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How do you help children who learn in different ways?
- What support is there for students with IEPs or learning differences
- What support is there for students learning English?
- Who can my child go to when they need help?
- What programs are there for advanced learners?

15 to 1 students per teacher

63% of teachers have 5+ years

3 WHAT TO LOOK FOR: 3 OF 5

Will my child feel safe and welcome?

Children learn best when they feel safe, seen, and cared for.

ON THE SCHOOL PROFILE, LOOK FOR:

- student attendance
- school discipline
- who the students and teachers are
- how different groups of students experience the school

IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING, LOOK FOR:

- adults greeting students
- students asking adults for help
- clean and cared-for classrooms and shared spaces
- kind behavior between students and adults
- clear and fair school rules
- books and pictures that show many cultures and families

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How do you welcome new students?
- What happens when a child feels left out or unsafe?
- How do you handle bullying?
- How do you make sure school rules are fair?
- Will my child see their culture and life in what they learn?

4 WHAT TO LOOK FOR: 4 OF 5

Will the school work with our family?

Families and schools should work as a team.

IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING, LOOK FOR:

- a welcoming front office with a staff member to greet you
- clear information about who to contact
- information in the languages families use
- free interpreter information
- spaces where families can meet with staff
- notices about family events and meetings
- staff who listen and answer questions

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How will teachers share updates with me?
- Can I get information in my home language?
- Are free interpreters available?
- Who should I call when I have a question?
- How can families share ideas or concerns?
- Are there ways for families to meet and help each other?



5 WHAT TO LOOK FOR: 5 OF 5

Does the school fit our daily life?

A school also needs to work for your family's schedule and needs.

ON THE SCHOOL WEBSITE, LOOK FOR:

- school hours
- buses and transportation
- before- and after-school care
- school meals
- programs and activities
- the school calendar
- services your child needs

IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING, LOOK FOR:

- a safe place for arrival and pick-up
- a safe bus area
- signs that help families find their way
- clean meal spaces
- spaces for before- and after-school programs
- safe playgrounds and outdoor areas
- entrances and classrooms your child can use

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How will my child get to and from school?
- Is before- or after-school care offered?
- What meals are served?
- What programs and activities are available?
- Does the school have the services my child needs?

MY PRIORITIES

What matters most to us?

After learning more, write down the three things that matter most to your family.

1 PRIORITY

WHY IT MATTERS:

2 PRIORITY

WHY IT MATTERS:

3 PRIORITY

WHY IT MATTERS:

Keep these priorities in mind as you compare schools.



PART 3

My plan

Use the next pages to write down what you learn about up to three schools.

1 **School option 1** p. 18

2 **School option 2** p. 20

3 **School option 3** p. 22

FILL THESE OUT

- while using School Finder
- during a visit or open house
- after talking with school staff
- with a community partner

FOR EACH SCHOOL

- Note dates and application steps
- Think about your three priorities
- Write down what you like and what questions you still have
- ask if it works for your family

You do not need to know every answer right away. Use your notes to help you decide what to ask and what to do next.

School information

School name:

School District

School website and/or phone number:

WEB:

PHONE:

Enrollment or application deadline:

How do I apply?

IS THIS

- [ ] My home school
- [ ] Another school in my district
- [ ] A school in another district

IS THERE A LOTTERY OR WAITLIST?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] I need to ask

Why am I interested in this school?

What I learned

Can my child learn and grow here?

Will my child get the help they need?

Will my child feel safe and welcome?

Will the school work with our family? Does the school fit our daily life?

Transportation plan:

Questions I still have:

My next step:

School information

School name:

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Will the school work with our family? Does the school fit our daily life?

Transportation plan:

Questions I still have:

My next step:



SCHOOL TYPES

Glossary

Washington families have many kinds of schools to choose from Some school types can overlap. For example, a school may be public, online, and a choice school at the same time. Knowing these words can help you understand your options and know what questions to ask.

Traditional Public School

A free public school run by a local school district.
Most students have a home public school based on where they live. Families may also be able to ask to attend another public school.

Choice or Magnet School

A free public school or program run by a school district that families choose instead of their assigned home school.
Choice schools may have a special focus, such as science, arts, language, or mixed-age learning. Families may need to apply, and space may be limited.

Public Charter School

A free public school that has more flexibility in how it runs its program in exchange for higher accountability for results.
Charter schools are open to all students regardless of home address. Families usually apply directly to the school. If more students apply than there are spaces, the school may use a lottery.

Tribal Compact School

A school operated by or in partnership with a Tribal Nation.
Washington has several kinds of Tribal schools. Each school may have its own enrollment rules and programs.

Alternative School or ALE Program

A public school or program that offers a different way to learn.
Alternative Learning Experience, or ALE, programs may include in-person, online, independent, or project-based learning. Students may spend some or most of their learning time outside a traditional classroom.

Online School

A school or program where most learning happens online.
Online schools are run by public school districts or private schools.

Private or Independent School

A school that is not part of the public school system.
Private schools may charge tuition and may have their own application and admission rules. Some private schools have a religious focus. Others may have a special way of teaching or a certain school mission. Many offer financial aid.

Homeschool

Learning that is directed by a parent or guardian instead of a public or private school.
In Washington, this is called home-based instruction. Families who homeschool must follow state rules.

Some words describe what a school teaches or how students learn. They are not always a separate type of school. A school may use one or more of these approaches.

Montessori
Learning often includes hands-on work, student choice, and children working at their own pace.

Language Immersion
Students learn some or most subjects in another language.

STEM or STEAM
Programs with a strong focus on science, technology, engineering, math, and sometimes the arts.

Arts-Focused
Schools or programs with extra learning in music, theater, dance, visual arts, or other arts.

International Baccalaureate (IB)
A learning program that focuses on asking questions, making connections, and understanding the world.

Highly Capable
Programs or services for students who need more advanced learning.

Skills Center or Career and Technical Education
Programs that help students learn career and job skills, often while they are in high school.

Open Doors or Reengagement Program
Programs that help older students reconnect with school and work toward a diploma or other education goals.

Running Start
A program that lets eligible high school students take college classes and earn high school and college credit at the same time.

Remember: A school can fit into more than one group.

Excellent Schools WASHINGTON

Excellent Schools Washington is a nonprofit organization.

We believe every child deserves a great public school.

We created Washington School Finder to make school information easier for families to find and understand.

We also work with trusted community organizations. These partners help families learn about their school choices and use the School Finder.

Washington School Finder does not choose a school for your family.

It gives you information and questions that can help you decide.

You know your child best.

This book was adapted from the Great MN Schools 'How to Pick a School' guide.

Learn more about Excellent Schools Washington: ExcellentsSchoolsWA.org



Excellent Schools WASHINGTON

Take the next step



How to choose a school



What to look for in a school



Get help near you

Washington School Finder is brought to you by Excellent Schools Washington.