

RATING EXERCISE

STEP THREE in the school search process is to determine what you and your family need and want from a school. Start by filling out this Rating Exercise, and then identify your five top priorities from this exercise. List these top five priorities on the Priorities Worksheet. On that worksheet, you will also identify the things you need most from a school. Moving forward, the Priorities Worksheet will serve as a valuable resource and you will refer to it frequently.

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES: WHAT YOU WANT A SCHOOL OR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO OFFER

Read each of these possible priorities. Then, circle whether you consider each of these items to be:

- A priority for you
- Neither important nor unimportant to you (neutral)
- Not a priority for you

When you are finished, you will evaluate your ratings and continue adding to your Priorities Worksheet.

A focus on core subjects

Do you want a school that focuses specifically on core subjects, such as reading, writing, math, science, and history, so that your child can demonstrate mastery of these subjects? Some parents believe that an active focus on “the basics” will best prepare their children for life.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Competency-based education

Do you want a school that focuses on teaching students skills rather than abstract theories? In the competency-based education approach, students learn one skill at a time. Once they master each skill, they move on to the next one.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Critical thinking

Do you want a school that focuses on cultivating critical thinking skills in students? These skills include interpreting and analyzing problems and challenges, evaluating possible solutions to specific problems, communicating with others, and, ultimately, solving problems.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Character development

Do you want a school that pays particular attention to building students' characters? This could include educating students on honesty, decision-making, trustworthiness, personal ethics, compassion, fairness, morality, and citizenship.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A specific instructional strategy or methodology

Do you want a school that offers a specific instructional strategy such as cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, individualized instruction, direct instruction, or inquiry-based teaching? Some parents know which instruction methods work best for their children.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Extra focus or emphasis on a specific subject

Do you want a school that focuses on a specific subject or theme, such as reading, foreign language immersion, English Language Learner (ELL) education, STEM, or gifted and talented education? Some parents know that their children need or benefit academically from a specific focus.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Art and music programs

Do you want a school that prioritizes art and music education? Some students find greater learning—along with greater inspiration and happiness—through art and music classes, activities, or programs.

- YES - PRIORITY
 NEUTRAL
 NO - NOT A PRIORITY

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Use of modern or advanced technology

Do you want to find a school or learning environment with a specific approach to using technology? Some parents know that their children acquire knowledge more quickly when they are paired with effective technology, while other parents find that technology distracts their children.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Number of students in the school

Do you want a school that—in terms of the total number of students enrolled—is smaller or larger than most? Some students learn more in smaller schools that have fewer students, while other students find that they benefit from schools with more students.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

Student-to-teacher ratio or class size

Do you want a school that has a specific student-to-teacher ratio or class size? Some students might learn more effectively in smaller classes, while other students might feel more comfortable—and thus learn more effectively—in larger classes.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that offers a career and technical education program

Do you want your child to learn about a trade, craft, or specific type of career while in school? These programs can include career-focused studies on everything from health care to technology, culinary arts, vehicle repair, plumbing and carpentry, and more.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that offers advanced coursework or programs for gifted students

Do you want a school that offers a specific set of advanced coursework, such as honors courses, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, or a program designed to serve gifted and talented students?

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that offers catch-up courses or credit recovery programs

Do you want a school that provides opportunities for students who have struggled in specific subjects or previously failed classes to be able to retake these classes using a different instructional strategy that might be a better fit for them?

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that prioritizes social-emotional learning

Do you want a school that prioritizes social-emotional learning (a learning strategy that focuses on helping students work with teachers and parents to learn emotion management, how to set and achieve goals, and how to show empathy for others)?

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A variety of activities and sports programs

Do you want a school that offers sports programs, clubs, activities, and extracurriculars? Some parents seek schools that offer specific activities, while other parents simply want a variety of sports or activities from which their child could choose.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A specific homework policy

Do you want a school that has a specific approach to or policy regarding student homework? Some parents feel that too much homework can have a negative effect on student learning. Other parents believe that if students receive no homework, they might miss out on learning opportunities.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

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A specific approach to standardized testing or test prep

Do you want a school that offers a specific approach to standardized testing or preparation for standardized testing? Some parents find these assessments to be valuable tools, while other families worry that too much “test prep” takes away from learning.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that embraces community service/involvement

Do you want a school that emphasizes community service, volunteerism, or community involvement? Some parents believe that their children’s learning is positively affected by these types of programs and by increased community involvement in schools.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school’s atmosphere or environment

Do you believe that your child’s learning will be affected significantly by things like the cleanliness, noise, temperature, lighting, air quality, or accessibility of a school building? Do you have a particular atmosphere- or environment-related concern?

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A discipline policy that you agree with

Do you want a school that offers a specific approach to student discipline? For example, some parents might want a school with a stricter approach, while other parents prefer more leniency. Some parents feel that a specific discipline policy has a significant impact on their child’s learning.

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

A school that offers “wraparound” services, such as nutrition or after-school programs

Do you want a school that offers a breakfast program, an after-school care program, social services, counseling, or health services?

- YES - PRIORITY
- NEUTRAL
- NO - NOT A PRIORITY

PRIORITIES WORKSHEET

TOP PRIORITIES

At the beginning of this step, I shared five top priorities that many parents say are essential in a school or learning environment. Do you agree? If so, check the box next to each item so that you can remember these priorities throughout the school search process.

- I need to find a school or learning environment:
- in which my child will learn
 - in which my child will be safe
 - that embraces the importance of mutual respect
 - that will maximize my child's happiness
 - in which my child will succeed

Now, identify two or three of your own top priorities. To help you do this, you can simply finish the following statement: "I need to find a school or learning environment that " or "My child needs a school or learning environment that..."

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES

Now, identify five specific priorities. You can use the examples provided in the Specific Priorities Rating Exercise, or you can simply finish the following statement: "I want to find a school or learning environment that offers "

Once you have completed your Priorities Worksheet, you are ready to move on to Step 4. However, make sure to keep the Priorities Worksheet handy, as it will play an important role in the rest of this process.