

## Imagining Your Ideal School: An Exercise for Setting Priorities

**Getting Started:** Figuring out what you want in a school is not a simple task. When you imagine the ideal school for your child, you may picture colorful classrooms, dynamic teachers and a variety of extracurricular programs.

But when you really start to weigh your options, you'll probably discover that practical constraints become an issue, too, such as finding a school near child care or your workplace.

**How do you sort it all out?** Follow these simple steps to identify the elements of your ideal school and prioritize your needs before you begin your school search.

**Step 1: Brainstorm.** Using the guidelines below for each column, list the characteristics and qualities you're looking for in a school. Then continue on to steps 2 and 3.

**Step 2: Prioritize.** Review each of your lists and number your ideas in order of importance to you. While all the factors may play some role in your decision, the goal of this exercise is to clarify the elements you can't do without.

**Step 3: Start your search.** Through this exercise, you've created a basic picture of the school you're looking for. Next, go to [www.greatschools.net](http://www.greatschools.net) to search for schools. Be sure to keep this list handy to help you remember what's most important for you and your child.

### The Practical Elements

- How far can my child travel to school?
- Do I need transportation provided?
- Do I need child care before or after school?
- Does my child have any physical, emotional, linguistic or learning needs that require special attention?
- For high school, does my child want training for a skilled trade or college preparation courses?
- Are modern school facilities important to me?

List the practical elements that matter to you:

---

---

---

---

---

### The Philosophical Elements

- Would my child be suited to a small school environment, or would a large school be better?
- Do I want a school that spans many grade levels, such as K-8, or a more traditional structure?
- How important is student diversity?
- Do I want a traditional, back-to-basics program or an alternative approach to learning?

List the philosophical elements that matter to you:

---

---

---

---

---

### The Extra Elements

- How important are music and art programs?
- Are sports important? Which ones?
- Are parents expected to be very involved in the activities?
- Are foreign language classes important? Which languages?
- How many students are assigned to each counselor?

List the extra elements that matter to you:

---

---

---

---

---