

School Choice in Minnesota

In Minnesota, school choice is part of state law. When considering a new or different school for your child, parents can choose from a variety of options. These include:

- Open enrollment
- Charter schools
- Online public schools
- Private schools
- Homeschooling

What is open enrollment?

Open enrollment allows parents to enroll their student in a public school district different from the one in which they live. This might be a neighboring school district or one farther away. Transportation may not be offered from your home to the public school district in which you enroll.

Parents may also have the option to enroll their student in a different school located within their school district's boundaries. That is called an inter-district enrollment option. Check with the superintendent's office to find out your school district's local policy on inter-district open enrollment and the availability of transportation.

What is the difference between a public school and a charter school?

A charter school is an independently operated public school. It designs its own classrooms to meet its students' needs. All charter schools operate under a contract with a charter school authorizer. The authorizer is usually a nonprofit organization, government agency, or university that holds the school accountable to the high standards outlined in its "charter."

What is an online public school?

This is a public school that takes place online instead of in a physical setting, such as a school building. There are full-time online programs or supplemental ones (taken in place of a course period during the regular school day). Some online learning combines traditional classroom courses and online courses at the student's local school, while others allow students to attend classes from home and other locations.

What are my non-public school options?

Non-public school options include private schools and homeschooling. Private schools do not rely on government funding. They include parochial schools, which are affiliated with a religious organization and may include religious education. Homeschooling is educating your child at home or a variety of places other than school. If you decide to homeschool your child, you must register with the public school district where you live and you will be responsible for educating your child. You must also meet your reporting requirements and ensure that your student meets grade level standards and graduation requirements.

It's important to think through the decision of choosing a new school. Consider why you are leaving your current school and what you might gain at the new one. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ➔ Why am I leaving my current school?
- ➔ What am I looking for in a new school?
- ➔ What will be different at this new school? How will it benefit my child?
- ➔ What are the possible disadvantages of leaving my current school for a new one?
- ➔ How does my child feel about changing schools? How might this affect them emotionally or socially?

As you consider a new school, you may want to ask the following questions:

- ✓ Does this school have a particular mission or philosophy?
- ✓ What is the teacher to student ratio and average class size?
- ✓ Is there a high turnover rate among staff or is it stable?
- ✓ Are all students held to the same expectations?
- ✓ How diverse is the school and staff? Does the school provide training to staff on working with diverse populations?
- ✓ What are the discipline policies and how are such issues handled?
- ✓ How does the school support students with different learning styles and needs?
- ✓ How does staff communicate with and engage parents? Is there a family engagement policy or plan?
- ✓ Are there extracurricular or after-school activities?
- ✓ Does the school have policies in place to address school climate issues like bullying or safety?
- ✓ How is a student's academic progress measured? How is their developmental and social-emotional progress measured? How is this information communicated to families?
- ✓ Will the school provide transportation for my student?

You may have other questions, especially if your student receives special education or English language services. Be sure to ask those questions. Remember to tour the school so you can see what it looks, feels, and sounds like. Seek out other parents whose children go to the school and talk to them about their experiences. This will help you make a better decision about whether this is the right choice for your student.

School ratings provide useful data and information about a given school, but should not be your only source of information. They may not show a complete picture of the school and all its strengths and options.

If you are not satisfied with your new school, what can you do?

Parents can take steps to ensure schools are accountable to their students, families, and community members. Public schools receive public funding and are subject to state and federal laws that help ensure all students receive a quality education. If you have concerns about your child's education once you have enrolled them in a new school, here are some steps you can take:

- Start at your school building by speaking to your child's teacher or principal to see if they are aware of the issue and can address it
- If they are not able to help you, speak to your superintendent and your local school board
- For charter schools, contact the "authorizer" or sponsoring organization
- Find other parents with similar concerns and go to a school board meeting to speak about those concerns
- Educate yourself about the state and federal laws that apply to your situation
- Ask to see the school's policies and procedures to ensure they are being followed

For more information, consult:

- Minnesota Department of Education:
<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/fsce/mod/choice>
- GreatSchools:
<https://www.greatschools.org>
- Minnesota Department of Education School Report Cards:
<https://rc.education.state.mn.us/#mySchool/p--3>

Research finds high-performing schools tend to have the following nine characteristics:

- ✓ Clear and shared focus
- ✓ High standards and expectations for all students
- ✓ Effective school leadership
- ✓ High levels of communication and collaboration
- ✓ Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with standards
- ✓ Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning
- ✓ Focused professional development
- ✓ Supportive learning environment
- ✓ High level of parent and community involvement

Source: Building Blocks of High Performing Schools, Michigan Association of School Boards