



Choosing the Right Private School for Your Child



Tennessee
**Education Savings
Account Program**

Tennessee Department of Education | 2020-21 School Year

How do you find the best private school to fit your child's needs?

There are a lot of details to consider when choosing a private school in the ESA program.

Which things are most important to your family?

For example, are you looking for a private school with:



**A Family
Atmosphere**



**Supporting
Staff**



**Commitment to
Parents**



**Diversity,
Inclusion**

- Are you looking for a **faith-based** and/or **values-based** education?
- Will your child need **transportation**? Not every private school will provide transportation.
- Does your child have any **support services** at his or her current school, such as language learning, math/reading support services, or tutoring?
- Does your child participate in **extracurricular activities**, such as choir, band, or drama?
- Will the school's **tuition and fees** be more than the ESA amount? Will you need financial aid?

Next Steps

- 1. Pull up the list of participating schools from www.familymembers.esa.tnedu.gov, under “Choosing a Private School.”** Remember, ESAs can only be used at a participating private school from this list. If you already have a school or two in mind that interests you or your child, check out the information those schools have provided on their websites. If not, pick one to start.

You will want to look at each school's:

- List of tuition and fees
- Academic calendar
- Admissions policy
- School handbook

Also, read about the school's mission which may be under the “About” section of the website. Look for core values that are important to you and your child.

- 2. Make a list of “pros and cons” about each school.** On the “pros” side, list the things you or your student like about the school as well as how they match your needs or wants. On the “cons” side, list the drawbacks or your concerns about the school.

Now, look at your “pros and cons” list. Which schools have the most “pros?” These are the schools you will want to check out further.

- 3. You may want to call the school and make an appointment for a visit.** Ask if the school will allow your student to shadow a few classes while you visit with the school administration. *(See page 4 for questions to ask during your school visit.)*

Financial Aid: Paying for Private School Tuition

You will notice that several participating private schools have tuition and fees that are more than the \$7,000 ESA funds. If you choose a school that costs more than the ESA amount, you may need to explore financial aid or agree to pay the remaining balance yourself. There are three main types of financial aid for private schools:

Grants - Money available for education, based upon family income

Scholarships - Money available for education, based upon income, grades, or athletics

Loans - Money available for education that must be repaid with interest, just like credit cards

*Grants and scholarships do **NOT** have to be repaid and can be used in addition to the ESA. Private loans must be repaid with interest. It is important that you understand the school's fees and tuition payment policies. Any amount of tuition you agree to pay to the school can be sent to collections if you default on your tuition payment agreements.*

Questions to ask during your private school visit

1. Is there an entrance or placement exam required?

2. Are there grants and scholarships available that can be paired with the ESA?

3. Are scholarships available to cover the cost of extracurricular activities?

4. Is the meal plan included in tuition? If not, how much are daily meals?

5. What is your school's attendance policy? How many absences are permitted?

6. Do you offer bus transportation? If so, what are the costs and where are the stops located?

7. Do you offer before- or after-school care? What are the costs and hours?

8. How often do you expect parents to communicate with their child's teachers?

9. How do teachers typically communicate with parents (By phone, email, etc.)?

10. Are parents required to attend parent-teacher conferences? Are parents required to volunteer in class or on field trips?

11. If the school is faith-based, are students required to take religion classes or attend worship services?

12. What other classes are students required to take?

13. Are there support services for diverse learners (such as ESL, math and reading resource teachers, etc.)?

14. Does the school require students to perform community service? May the students serve their own church or community?

15. What would the transition look like to help my child feel welcomed and included?

Notes from your school visit:

Before the first day of school

Purchase uniforms, textbooks, and all required materials.

(The complete list of supplies for your new school may be found on the school's website.)

If you have funds remaining in your ESA account after tuition has been paid, review the list of items you can buy with your ESA funds. *(The pre-approved purchase list may be found in your family handbook or on www.familymembers.esa.tnedu.gov.)*

If your child would like to participate in extracurricular activities, be sure to ask if there are additional supplies, equipment, or fees required.

Adjusting to a New School Environment

New Friends

It will take time for your child to make friends at a new school. If your child doesn't seem to be adjusting, talk with the school administration about support strategies.

New Culture

Your child may experience a "culture shock" when meeting other children from different backgrounds, especially those who have only attended private schools. Remind your child that every student at the school is there to do his or her best.

Support

It will be important to identify a mentor for your child at the new school. This could be a teacher, guidance counselor, or coach whom your child can go to if they experience stress at school.



For more information, visit
www.esa.tnedu.gov

What are the student's responsibilities?

Conduct

ESA program participants must follow all the rules of the new school. Both parents and children should carefully review the school's rules for classwork and behavior so that they understand the rules **before** they begin their first day of school. Private schools may have stricter standards for behavior than public schools.

What are the parent's responsibilities?

Attendance

Each private school could have a different attendance policy.

- Review the school's attendance policy and plan for your child to attend each day school is in session unless ill.
- Make a plan to arrive at school on time:
 - Prepare the uniform the night before, allow extra time for traffic, etc.
 - Have homework, school supplies, and bookbags packed and ready to go the night before a school day.
- Be aware that some schools charge a fee if students are not picked up on time.

Volunteering

Each school has different rules. Parents may be asked to:

- Volunteer in the classroom.
- Chaperone at least one field trip during a school year.

Communication

Be sure to communicate with the school in a timely way.

- If a teacher or administrator reaches out to you, they often expect a response within one business day.

Communication often is sent through a parent website.

- Set aside at least 15 minutes each day to visit the website, review your child's grades and check for teacher comments.

Planning for the school year

First Week of School

Set aside time to check in daily with your child. Instead of “yes” or “no” questions, try:

What do you like best about your new school?

What is hard at your new school?

Who said the nicest thing to you today? What did they say?

What was lunch like? Who did you sit by?

What’s the name of someone you played with today?

Review the paperwork the teacher has sent home.

Grades K-2

Students often have a folder with alphabet practice, sight words, and a chart to show their daily behavior in the classroom.

Grades 3-8

Students often have an assignment book where they must write daily homework. It is important to be sure your child is keeping up with homework and projects.

High School

Students receive a packet with the calendar for the year, assignments, teacher expectations, and additional materials you may need to purchase (binder, dividers, index cards, flash drive, etc.). This is often called a course syllabus. Review the syllabus with your student to make sure they understand how homework should be completed and turned in.

Planning for the school year

First Month of School

Within the first or second month (September or October), your child's teacher will ask for a conference. This is a short meeting to view grades, ask questions, and make sure that your child is receiving the support they need.

The teacher will guide you through the conference. You will want to be sure they cover the following questions:

What are my child's areas of strength? Where does he/she need growth?

Is my child keeping up with their homework and projects?

What needs to be done at home to ensure my child is successful?

Does my child feel comfortable participating in class discussions and activities?

Would my child benefit from additional services (clubs, after-school activities, etc.)?

Throughout the School Year

Check in with your child's teacher monthly to be sure they are on track with grades and assignments.

View the school's calendar each month to be sure your family takes advantage of community and social events (*plays, concerts, grandparents' day, etc.*). These are valuable opportunities to make new friends, meet other families, and inspire your child to try new activities.

If you have any concerns throughout the year, reach out to your child's teacher by email first. Email will enable you to have a record of when you reached out and will usually allow the teacher to respond more quickly. If the teacher is part of your concern, don't hesitate to call or email the school principal.



Additional questions for consideration

What is the difference between an entrance exam and a placement exam?

Both entrance exams and placement exams are tests to measure your child's academic ability. If the school requires that students perform on grade level, the entrance exam is used to see if your child meets the school's requirements. For other schools, the placement exam is simply used to place your child in the right grade level, the right individual classes, or to provide additional services such as math or reading support for your child.

What is in the course syllabus?

Most colleges and universities use a course syllabus to clearly articulate grading scales and expectations of a course. Many schools use them so that high school students understand how to read a syllabus before college.

The course syllabus is simply a way for the teacher to let students know:

- **The goals of the course**
- **The homework assignments and projects**
- **How homework must be completed, for example:**
 - **Some assignments must be typed, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font**
 - **Some papers require a bibliography**

Your local public library can also help high school students learn how to write papers according to a syllabus.

What is digital citizenship?

Some students may go online and try to bully others through social media. Private schools often have rules about how to use social media both at school and at home.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is when a student turns in someone else's work but puts his or her own name on it. Plagiarism can be confusing because some students can accidentally plagiarize when they cut and paste an online source and forget to use quotation marks. Most private schools purchase software that can find plagiarism. It is very important that your child learns about plagiarism so that he or she doesn't accidentally break the school's rules.

What additional classes are required?

Faith-based private schools may require students to take Bible, religion, or theology classes. These classes may either be on the Bible or may be on the teachings of a religion (*Christianity, Judaism, etc.*) or denomination (*Baptist, Catholic, Non-denominational, etc.*). These classes often require students to perform community service outside of school, on their own time. Be sure to ask about all the classes your student is required to take.



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