

# CHOOSING A PRIVATE SCHOOL

*in Bay County*



*Established 1982*

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## NOT YOUR PARENT'S PRIVATE EDUCATION!

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People all over America and right here in Bay County are considering private schools. They are considering private schools for various reasons. The issues driving these choices are NOT the same ones that caused some people to consider private education in the past. This is not your parent's private education! In the past, the wealthy often chose private education to provide their children with an excellent education, but also (and maybe equally as importantly) to give their children cultural training for an affluent life. Some of these private schools were exceptional; others were simply enclaves of elitism.

Today's parents who are considering private education are often from all parts of society and from every socio-economic area of our culture. Why are parents considering private schools? What's driving these choices? What are good reasons (and bad ones) to choose a private school?

Our hope is that this information can assist parents as they navigate an educational landscape that might seem very different from the one they walked through a generation ago.

## SO, WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

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As parents consider private education, they now have many options. Here is a brief examination of the current private school landscape:

### CHARTER SCHOOLS

These are schools that usually attempt to have a focus on excellence in a narrow arena. Some schools might focus on the arts, others on science and technology; still a few others actually focus on athletics. Sometimes they might blend general academic excellence for exceptional performance in one area. If that particular area is an area of interest for your child, these schools might be attractive. Parents should be cautious when committing to these specialty schools because your child's interest might change.

Finally, some of these schools are public schools, so they usher in similar problems that caused a parent to look at private schools in the first place.

### DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



In Bay County, you are going to find some Christian schools that were founded by historic Christian denominations. Often these schools were established at times when the congregants of these churches did not feel comfortable or welcome in the public schools. These schools were built to be replacements for the public schools for members of those particular churches. Because “replacing” the public schools was at the root of the creation of these schools, they give the benefits of and some of the problems of public schools. They often have good athletic programs and excellent facilities, but they also typically have an educational vision that mirrors public education and might be more tied to the public schools’ academic standards.



## REACTIVE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

There are Christian schools in Bay County that are not tied to a historic denomination, but they have roots similar to those historic denominational schools. Parents trying to escape some of the negative actions, ideas, or curricular decisions in the public schools founded these schools. They were formed to avoid evolution, sex education, or some liberal or secular event. These schools were very committed to protecting Christian children from the world. At times, however, they struggle because their vision was—at its core—negative. They were trying to run away from something rather than running toward something. Again, often these schools are aimed toward reproducing what the public schools are doing while protecting children.

## ONLINE SCHOOLS

Online schools are a new option for parents. Some of these schools are private and others are public. These schools might be a good alternative for parents who are attracted to homeschooling because these schools are a lot like homeschooling, but they offer additional help, support, and access to teachers through the Internet. Students in online schools often need more parental oversight, and they miss some of the formative experiences that go with being part of a brick and mortar school—like athletics, other extra curriculars, and in face-to-face student interactions.



## HOME SCHOOL CO-OP AND UNIVERSITY MODEL SCHOOLS

These schools are part-time schools where classes meet together only one, two, or three days a week. They sometimes have specialized teachers. In other cases, mothers of the children share the teaching load. These schools have the benefit of lower cost and greater flexibility. They are challenged to keep the students working at the same pace because so much of the work is done at home.

## CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Classical Christian Schools are also a newer alternative based on a time-tested philosophy of education. They are schools committed to a particular, historical academic vision. They teach children according to the classical method of education focusing on learning basic facts in fun ways in the early years. Classical schools then shift during the middle-school years to focus on critical thinking because children at that age love to make critical judgments. Finally during the high school years, classical schools train students to communicate effectively through writing and speaking persuasively. Many of the leaders of the Renaissance, Reformation, and most of America's Founders were classically educated.



Classical Christian schools have been growing. These schools focus on academic excellence. They are usually moving toward an educational vision rather than trying to escape the negative impacts of culture. They are also committed to encouraging faith, and their values tend to fit many families in Bay County. These schools often spend a lot of time studying the Bible and the Great Books, but they also have strong math and science options. These schools—in the Association of Classical Christian Schools—have sprung up all across the country and around the world.

Obviously, parents in Bay County have many choices when it comes to private education.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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With all of these options, the choices for your children might seem overwhelming! Here is a list of questions that parents should consider when thinking about what private school option is best for them:

### ***How much does it cost? (Is it worth it?)***

First, of course, you have to be able to afford the school. Many private schools have financial aid, but you need to be reflective and thoughtful. The price tag, however, is not the only consideration. Value should also be considered. What is the school providing and is it worth what they are asking? Some private schools might be costly, but your family might value what they provide that you are willing to make sacrifices to give your children what the school offers.

### ***What are its facilities like? (And its Vision)***

Consider facilities and vision as you think about a private school. A beautiful facility might be great, but most families would trade facilities for excellent teachers, a solid curriculum and quality outcomes. A good facility, though, often supports strong extra-curricular programs. If a school does not have a great facility, make sure you learn from the school leadership where they are headed and what facility they want in the long run.

### ***Does the school have qualified teachers?***

Teachers are the most important element to a quality private school. When you visit a school, meet the teachers. What are they like? Do they love children and their subject matter? What do they think about their school? Checking for particular degrees can be important, but teachers can have advanced degrees and not be gifted or engaging teachers. Ask to have some time to observe classes. If your child is older, ask if he or she may shadow another student for the day. Great teachers are knowledgeable, engaging, and passionate. Ask yourself if the teachers that you meet fit this criteria. (This is actually much more important in most cases than advanced degrees!)

### ✓ ***What is the learning environment like, and what are the students like?***

Again, this requires time at the school and a list of questions to ask. Be thoughtful and intentional. Even if you are a parent of young children, see if you can ask questions to some of the oldest students at the school. These students will tell you a lot about the learning environment. Ask them about their teachers. Ask them about what they want to do after school.

### ✓ ***Does the school welcome parental involvement?***

This is a school-culture element that might be very important to you. Some schools simply want you to drop off a check and the child; others want to invite you, as a parent, into the learning process. If you want to build a closer relationship with your child, being part of the process at school might be critical—your child is going to spend a significant portion of their childhood at school!

### ✓ ***Is the school committed to your child?***

Children are not numbers or statistics; they are people. When researching a school, parents should try to answer these questions: What is the student-teacher ratio? What type of teachers does the school recruit? How do they support struggling students? Great schools don't see children as numbers or problems—they see their potential and their humanity. These questions will help reveal if the school is going to succeed or fail in serving your child.





## SO, WHY CHOOSE A PRIVATE SCHOOL?

There are both good reasons and bad reasons to choose a private school. Here are a few of the best reasons, with some cautions:

### PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CALLING

This is a great reason, but it must be weighed out carefully. A great education is so much more than job training. It is a strong foundation for future learning and for life. That said, a school that does not produce students who are ready for God's calling, a meaningful career, and for future training might not be the right fit. A private school needs to earn its keep and to help your children be ready to earn theirs!

Younger parents should particularly consider how to be balanced about their view of their young child. You don't know the academic abilities and interests of a young child or even if you did, those interests might change. You might think that your child is going to be a doctor or a lawyer, but God might be making him into a carpenter or a pastor. Wait and see.



### HELPING YOUR CHILD REACH HIS OR HER FULL POTENTIAL

The early Christian leader Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a man fully alive." As parents, we want to make choices that enable our children to be as "fully alive" as possible, and standards are crucial for this outcome. Schools that have unclear standards will often guide children toward a vague future. The future might include personal growth, but the growth is skewed towards success without virtue. Does the school have a comprehensive vision of life to support your child's abilities? Will the school encourage your child not only to love God with his heart, soul, and strength, but also to love God with his mind?

## SHARED VALUES

A private school that fits your values could be a great fit, but what does this really look like? To start, you can look at a school's philosophy, mission statement, and (if it is a faith-based school) statement of faith. Shared values mean so much more than this, however! Consider how the school holds its core ideas. Is the school inwardly focused and avoiding interactions with culture and with those who disagree with its standards, or does it have a spirit of engagement and joy? Are staff and students happy, or are they dour? This spirit means a lot over time!

## TIME TO EXPLORE



Parents look for private schools for many reasons. Chief among them are:

- Seeking academic excellence and inspiration for their child.
- Wanting to make sure that their child is prepared for college, career, and calling.
- Finding an environment where their family's values are cherished.
- Placing their child in an environment that encourages
- the faith that they hold dear.

All of these factors lead parents to consider private schools. We hope that this guide can help you to know your options, understand the questions you should be asking, and make the right choice for your family.





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