

# Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program

## Choosing a Private School



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent  
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"  
[www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)

**As a parent/guardian interested in the private school choice option through the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) Program your biggest decision will be selecting a private school for your child.**

**This document will help you in making that decision.**



Do your research and make sure you understand your responsibilities under the GSNS Program by reading all information provided on the web page at <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>



**Do this BEFORE you review the private school list on the web site.**



# GSNS Private Schools Things You Need to Know



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# GSNS Private Schools

- Many of the private schools currently participating in the GSNS Program do so because parents asked them.





# GSNS Private Schools

- Participation in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program is voluntary on the part of private schools and is open to all private schools.
- If there is a private school you are interested in that is not on the current approved private school list you should ask it to apply.



# GSNS Private Schools

- The deadline for a private school to send in a completed application for each upcoming school year is June 30.
- The application with instructions and eligibility requirements for private schools is available on the GSNS web page  
<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/Special-Needs-Scholarship-Program.aspx>



# GSNS Private Schools

- The list of authorized private schools with contact information is posted on the GSNS web page.
- If a private school's name is not on the list then it is not authorized to participate and an eligible student cannot attend the school and receive funds through the program.





# Selecting a Private School

- As a parent, consider the needs of your child.
- Ultimately you will want to select a private school that will be a good fit for your child.



# Visit a Private School

- Contact a private school you are interested in and ask if you can visit the school with your child.
- If possible, attend an open house, parent-teacher meeting, or other school function that would provide valuable information about the attitudes of staff, students, and parents at the private school.



# Look Around the School

- Does the private school seem to be clean and well organized?
- Is the staff friendly and helpful?
- Do the students seem happy to be there?
- Is the private school operating in a safe environment that is conducive to learning?



# Private School Accreditation



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# Ask a Private School About Its Accreditation

- How long did it take the private school to receive its accreditation?
- What standards did the private school have to meet to receive its accreditation?





# Private School Accreditation

- Usually, the longer the accreditation process e.g. 2 – 3 years, the more rigorous the accreditation agency's standards for the private schools it accredits.



# Special Education Services



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# Special Education Services

- Many parents/guardians are surprised to learn that a private school participating in the GSNS Program is not required to follow a student's IEP and it is not required to provide special education services to students.



# Special Education Services

- You as a parent/guardian have to ask a private school directly regarding the specific special education or other services it provides for students.



# Special Education Services

- Talk to the private school about your child's learning disability(ies).
- Ask the private school how it could accommodate those needs.





# Special Education Services

- Ask the private school if it is willing to put services in writing as a plan for your child's education if he/she were admitted to the school.
- This will help provide guidance to your child's teacher(s) and other school staff as the school year progresses.



# Questions To Ask About A Private School's Teachers



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# Teachers

- Ask the private school what qualifications it requires of its teachers e.g. degrees and certifications.



# Teachers

- Ask about the rate of teacher turnover at the private school.
- What does the school do to keep good teachers and improve teacher performance?



# Teachers

- Listen closely to what teachers say about the private school.
- The teachers will be the adults closest to your child, and you will want to know if they are well prepared, dedicated, and satisfied in their work.





# Questions to Ask About a Private School's Curriculum



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# Curriculum

- The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program requires private schools to provide a program of instruction offering at least the subjects of math, science, reading, language arts, and social studies. It cannot dictate to the school what curriculum it chooses.



# Curriculum

- Ask for information regarding the private school's curriculum.
- Does the school have a strong program in the required core academic subjects?



# Curriculum

- Ask to see the text books and other materials students use in their classes.
- Are the materials current and in good condition?



# Curriculum

- Does the school have a well-equipped media center available where students can check out books, access computers, use other learning resources, and do research?





# Parental Involvement



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# Parental Involvement

- Talk to other parents whose children attend a private school and get their feedback on the school.

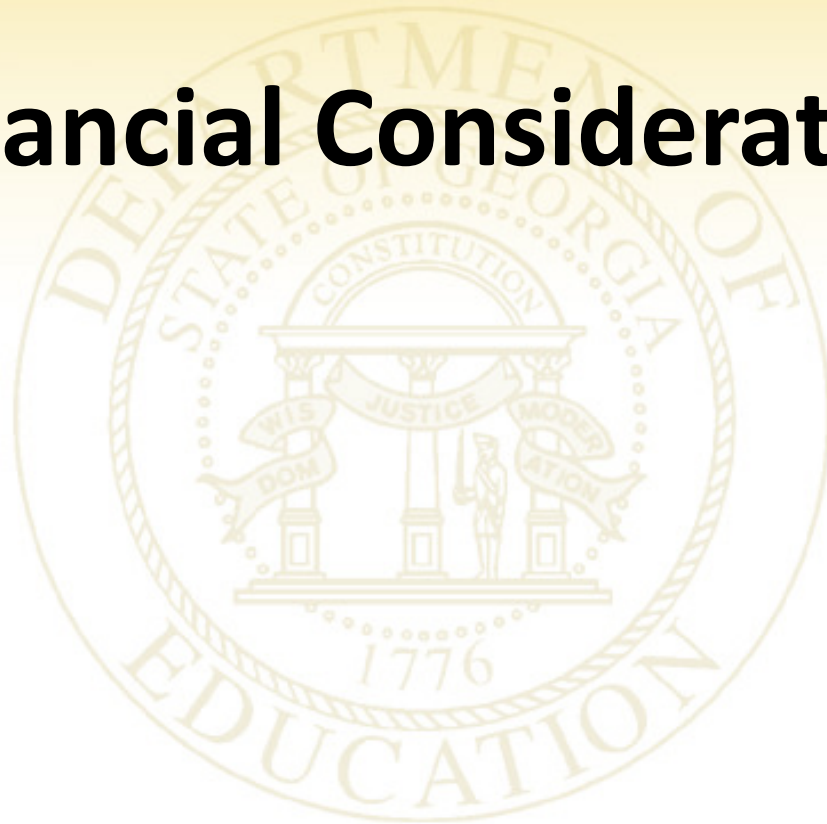


# Parental Involvement

- Ask the private school how parents are encouraged to be involved at the school.
- Ask the private school if it has an active parent-teacher organization.



# Financial Considerations



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# Selecting a Private School is a Business Decision

- Treat selecting a private school for your child as you would any other business transaction.





# Tuition and Fees

- Under the GSNS Program, if tuition and fees charged by a private school are higher than the scholarship award, a parent/guardian is responsible for paying the additional tuition.
- There are also costs not covered by the GSNS Program such as after school care and meals.



# Tuition and Fees

- Most private schools participating in the GSNS Program charge tuition and fees that are more than the amount of a student's scholarship.



# Tuition and Fees

Example:

- Tuition & Fees= \$12,000
- Less Student Scholarship = \$5,000
- **Parent Financial Responsibility= \$7,000**



# Tuition and Fees

- Since you are most likely going to have some out of pocket expenses when your child attends a private school, it is important you have a clear understanding of a school's tuition and fee policies.



# Tuition and Fees



**Make sure you receive  
a written copy of a private  
school's tuition and fee policies.**





# Tuition and Fees

- The tuition and fees document should explain how parents are charged for tuition and fees and how payment is accepted.
- Information should be easy for parents to read and understand.



# Tuition and Fees

- Due dates, penalties (if applicable), and payment plans should also be clearly outlined.
- Tuition information must explain to parents how the school will handle the processing of tuition for GSNS students



# Tuition and Fees

- Read the written copy of a private school's tuition and fee policies.
- Do you clearly understand them?
- If you don't, ask for clarification. Get any additional information needed in writing.



# Tuition and Fees

- Always get written copies of any contracts/agreements entered with the private school e.g. tuition reimbursement, fee schedules.



# Tuition and Fees

- If you give a private school money, obtain documentation from the school detailing what the funds will be applied towards e.g. matriculation fee.





# Tuition and Fees

- Staff at the Georgia Department of Education GaDOE **cannot** resolve any disputes that may arise between a parent/guardian and a private school.

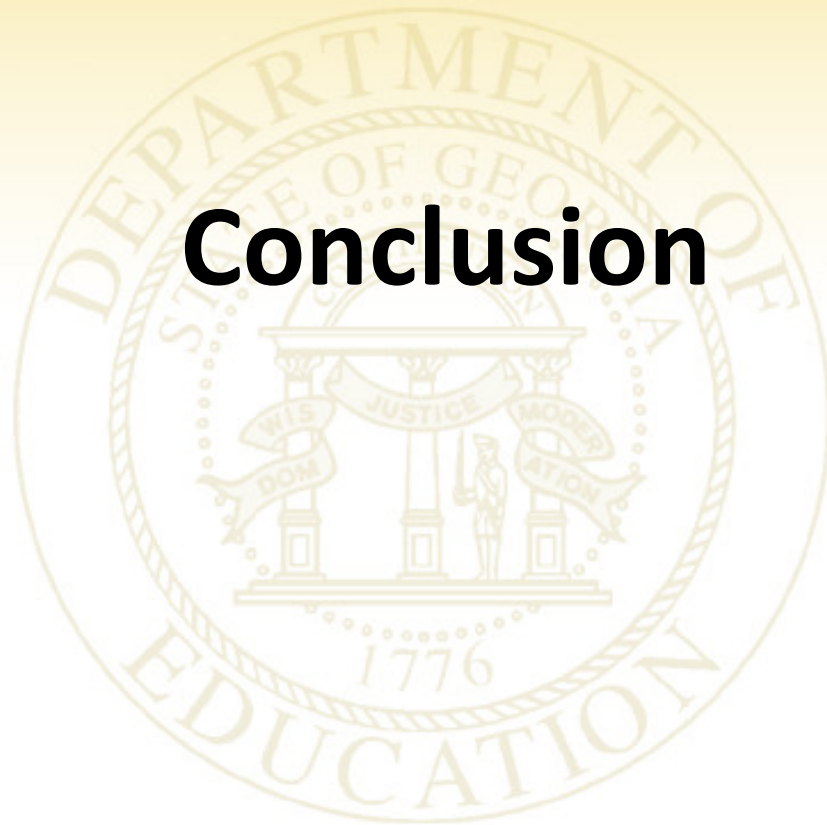


# Tuition and Fees

- **Don't sign any document you do not understand!**



# Conclusion



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# Quick Check List

- ✓ Visit as many private schools as you choose.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- ✓ Don't be pressured into making a quick decision when choosing a private school.
- ✓ Make sure you understand anything you sign.
- ✓ Never pay money to a private school without receiving documentation.



# 10 Things to Look for in a School

- ✓ High expectations.
- ✓ Busy students.
- ✓ Great teachers.
- ✓ Great principal.
- ✓ Vibrant parent-teacher organization.
- ✓ Children are neither invisible nor scared to be at school.
- ✓ Gut reaction that this is the school for your child.
- ✓ Rigorous curriculum.
- ✓ Families like yours are welcome, and their concerns are acknowledged.
- ✓ You are satisfied with the school's results on standardized tests.





**Thank you for participating!**

**Please contact me with any questions you have:**

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## Sources:

- *Minnesota Department of Education, Office of Choice and Innovation*
- *United States Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement*

