

13 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN VISITING POTENTIAL SCHOOLS

We also provide the best practice
answers you should hear.

CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SELECTION GUIDE



A Resource for Parents from Maranatha Baptist Academy

Thank you for downloading this guide. At Maranatha Baptist Academy, we know that the education of children is incredibly important. We also know that pointing our children toward God and teaching them biblical truth is of even greater and eternal importance.

There are many educational options for your family to choose from so we've assembled this guide to help as you narrow your choices and evaluate various Christian schools. In some cases the choices can feel a bit overwhelming.

Here are our 10 suggestions for choosing a Christian school that is right for your family.

1. Seek God's help and wisdom.
2. Engage some knowledgeable godly friends in this discussion. You can fill them in on what you are learning and ask for their input along the way.
3. Determine your financial situation and ability to budget, sacrifice and afford tuition and fees.
4. Use this guide to help determine what is most important to you as a family.
5. Read the best practice answers and considerations we have assembled to help you know what you are looking for.
6. Research up to 10 options online. Visit their school's website and Facebook page. This will give you facts on the school via their website and also a look at their students and activities via their Facebook page. If you have an older student include them in this process too.
7. Narrow your choices down to three options and make plans to visit each school. Try to plan your visit when their students are around. You will want to observe the atmosphere or the school and school life in action. Plan to visit some school functions such as ball games or fine arts programs as well.
8. Use this guide to form the basis for your questions for the Administrators of each school when you visit and meet with them.
9. After your visits, discuss your thoughts and findings with family and godly friends. Make a list of any follow up questions that arise and get answers. Prayerfully consider all you have learned as a family. After this process is complete, we find that typically one school seems to stand out as the best option.
10. Contact that school to begin the admissions process.



Educational process

What happens in the typical classroom hour?

Is the teacher interacting with the students, or do students come to class to read the textbook and answer questions? Is higher-level thinking promoted? What projects stimulate the students to go beyond rote memorization of lecture notes?

Are the classrooms orderly?

Lively discussion is good—if the teacher is in control. When you observe, you can tell whether this is a positive environment or not.

Ask questions and visit the classroom(s). One visit cannot reveal everything, but it may reveal something important.

Educational outcomes

What are the average standardized achievement test scores for your students at my child's grade level? What are the test scores of graduating seniors?

A *standardized* test is not made by the local school. It is made by a large educational organization, and it provides comparison to students across the country. *Achievement tests* measure academic areas like reading comprehension or math computation. Common achievement tests taken in grades K-12 include the Stanford Achievement Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, The ACT (American College Test) and the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) are commonly taken in the senior year as college entrance exams.

Spiritual values

What emphasis is put on learning God's Word and instilling a Biblical worldview in students' hearts and minds?

Is the Bible taught in every grade? Is Scripture memory a part of the classroom? What measures are in place to ensure students are growing in their knowledge of God's Word? Are high school students being prepared to deal Biblically with the unbiblical philosophies pervasive in our society today?

Peer climate

Are students respectful toward each other and toward the adult staff?

Are they kind?

If you are enrolling a student in kindergarten, take time to attend a high school athletic event. At least visit the cafeteria during high school lunchtime. In these less structured moments, the behavior and attitudes of students indicate something about what the school really produces. Caution: you may be seeing the exception or the newcomer, but observe.

Personal outcomes

What kind of character does the administration hope to develop?

Are students encouraged to love and serve others? Is kindness promoted in the classroom? How do teachers encourage these traits in the classroom? Are the faculty and staff exemplifying these traits?

Costs

What is the total financial commitment?

Here you are asking for more than the tuition. Some schools have a list of other costs, such as enrollment fees, student services fees, curriculum fees, athletic or music participation fees. These are not intended to be hidden fees; some schools just believe that people need to see where the money is going.

Faculty qualifications

What are the requirements to be a teacher here?

You are looking for teachers who can teach the subject matter. They usually should have a college degree in education and they should have thorough knowledge of the area that they teach. Sometimes a teacher may be very good at teaching a specific area without the college degree, such as a person skilled in computer applications, but you need to consider how many of these exceptions you can be comfortable with.

You are also looking for teachers whose spiritual values mirror your own. Children, and even teens, often admire their teachers and readily adopt their values. Most Christian schools require that teachers be actively involved in the sponsoring church (if the school is sponsored by a certain church) or a church of a particular type.

Extracurricular activities

What extracurricular activities are available to students?

These may be sports, music lessons, band, Bible quiz teams, and community service activities.

Is participation in any of these required? What costs are associated with them?

Student-teacher ratio

What is the student-teacher ratio?

Common figures may be 15:1 ("fifteen to one") or 20:1. If teachers are skilled in classroom management, higher numbers can work. Also, consider that low student-teacher ratio does not guarantee extra attention to each child's needs. This is just one item to consider.

Facilities and safety

The cleanliness and upkeep are obvious if you visit the school when classes are in session or come to interview with the administrator. An older facility is not necessarily a problem, but it must be clean and in good repair.

Are the classrooms crowded? Are they comfortably warm or cool in the different seasons?

The adequacy of classroom space for the number of students and the heating and cooling systems are also important, although less obvious than the basic upkeep.

What safety procedures are in place in regard to fire, tornado, or intruders?

Fire and tornado drills are required in most states. In modern times, it is important to make provision for other dangers.

Diversity

How have students of different backgrounds or needs have been welcomed here? What diversity is reflected in your students?

These questions should be tailored to meet your child's needs.

Of course, discuss how staff and peers welcome students of different race or language background. Your child may be just learning the English language. Can this be made to work this year?

Stability of leadership

How long has the current administrator functioned in this role? How long has he or she been part of this school (or other schools) before assuming this task? How many years of experience do my child's prospective teachers have?

New is not bad. Every teacher must have a first year, and there is an enthusiasm that compensates for the lack of experience.

However, if there is too much turnover, say over 20%, you want to know why.

Variety of course options

What courses are required for graduation? What other courses are available?

Ask for a list of courses for your child. The elementary school day may have its basic classes with other courses available one or more times per week, such as band, choir, computers, physical education, or art.

The high school will have its required courses for graduation and may have many electives.

Do not shy away from some electives presented in more modern formats, such as online courses that the local school subscribes to, or dual enrollment (earning both college credit and high school credit by taking one course).

As a parent, you'll want to carefully consider the answers to these questions as you decide what option is best for your family. Each family will prioritize these questions differently in regard to the importance of the answers in your particular situation.

We hope you'll give us a call at Maranatha Baptist Academy and set up an appointment to come by for a visit and give us an opportunity to answer these questions as well.

We certainly applaud your desire to find the best possible education option for your family. May God bless you as you seek his will in this very important decision.

