K12 ACADEMICS — SCHOOL TRANSITIONS SERIES

Public & Private: Switching Schools

A parent's guide to moving between public and private school in either direction — what changes, the admissions and enrollment steps, the key differences, and how to help your child adjust.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

TWO DIRECTIONS, REAL DIFFERENCES

Families move **public to private** and **private to public** for all kinds of reasons — cost, fit, values, academics, or needs. Each direction changes real things: admissions, cost, size, culture, and (importantly) how **special-education services** work. This guide covers both directions honestly, in **ten steps**.

General guidance. Admissions, records, cost, and services differ by school and state, and private schools are not bound by all the same laws as public schools. This guide describes typical patterns; confirm specifics with the schools, and know your rights.

1

STEP 01 OF 10

Know Why Families Switch

WHAT TO KNOW

Families switch in both directions for real reasons: **cost, academic fit, class size, values or philosophy, specific programs, social environment, or changing needs**. Neither direction is "better" — it depends on your child and priorities.

BY THE NUMBERS

Both ways	Cost & fit	No "better"
common & valid	+ values, needs	depends on your child

HOW TO HELP

Get clear on your **reasons and priorities** — they determine which direction and which specific school truly fit your child and family.

GOOD TO KNOW

Judge the switch by **fit for your child**, not prestige or assumptions — great and poor schools exist in both sectors.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Public → Private: What Changes

WHAT TO KNOW

Moving **into private school** brings: an **admissions process**, **tuition** (with possible aid), usually **smaller classes**, a specific philosophy or religious identity, more selectivity, and — crucially — **different special-education obligations**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Admissions	Tuition	Smaller/specific
apply, test, interview	+ possible aid	philosophy-driven

HOW TO HELP

If going private, prepare for the **admissions process and cost**, and understand the school's philosophy and what it does (and doesn't) provide for special needs.

WATCH OUT

Private schools are **not required to provide IEPs or IDEA services** the way public schools are — a critical thing to confirm before enrolling a child with needs.

3

STEP 03 OF 10

Private → Public: What Changes

WHAT TO KNOW

Moving **into public school** brings: **free enrollment** by residency, a **bigger and more diverse** school, more course and activity options, full **special-education and EL services**, and a different (often less individualized) structure.

BY THE NUMBERS

Free	Bigger & diverse	Full services
enroll by residency	more options	IEP/504/EL available

HOW TO HELP

If going public, enroll by **residency**, gather records, and take advantage of the **full services and options** — while preparing your child for a larger environment.

GOOD TO KNOW

Public schools **must** provide special-education and EL services — a real advantage if your child needs them and the private school couldn't.

4

STEP 04 OF 10

Navigate Private-School Admissions

WHAT TO KNOW

Private schools have an **admissions process**: applications, sometimes entrance testing, interviews or visits, recommendations, and deadlines — plus a separate **financial-aid** application. Timelines often run months ahead.

BY THE NUMBERS

Application	Deadlines	Financial aid
+ testing/interview	often early	apply separately

HOW TO HELP

Start the private-admissions process **early**: note deadlines, prepare for any testing and interviews, and apply for financial aid — most schools offer more aid than families expect.

GOOD TO KNOW

Never assume private school is unaffordable before applying for aid — many schools offer significant need-based assistance.

5

STEP 05 OF 10

Handle Enrollment & Records

WHAT TO KNOW

In either direction, **records and credits** must transfer: request transcripts, confirm how credits align (especially in high school), and complete the receiving school's enrollment — residency documents for public, the admissions packet for private.

BY THE NUMBERS

Transfer records	Credit alignment	Enrollment docs
either direction	especially high school	residency or admissions

HOW TO HELP

Request **records transfer**, confirm **credit alignment** with the new school, and complete enrollment — and clarify anything about graduation requirements in high school.

WATCH OUT

Credit and graduation requirements can differ between sectors — confirm alignment early, especially for high-schoolers.

6

STEP 06 OF 10

Understand the Academic Differences

WHAT TO KNOW

Public and private schools can differ in **curriculum, pace, rigor, teaching style, and expectations**. Your child may need to adjust — catching up, being challenged more, or adapting to a new academic culture.

BY THE NUMBERS

Curriculum	Pace & rigor	Teaching style
content differs	varies by school	adjust to it

HOW TO HELP

Talk with the new school about **academic expectations and placement**, and support your child through any adjustment in pace, rigor, or teaching style.

GOOD TO KNOW

Neither sector is automatically "more rigorous" — it varies enormously by specific school, so evaluate the actual school.

7

STEP 07 OF 10

Understand the Cultural & Social Differences

WHAT TO KNOW

The **culture and social world** often differ most: private schools tend to be smaller and more tight-knit (and sometimes less diverse); public schools are bigger and more varied. Both take social adjustment.

BY THE NUMBERS

Size & culture	Diversity	Adjustment
the big difference	often differs	either way

HOW TO HELP

Prepare your child for the **social and cultural shift** — smaller and closer, or bigger and more diverse — and help them find their place through activities.

GOOD TO KNOW

A child moving to a much bigger or much smaller school will feel the **social change** — activities are the fastest way to belong.

8

STEP 08 OF 10

Weigh Special Considerations

WHAT TO KNOW

The biggest one: **special-education rights differ**. Public schools must provide IEPs; **private schools generally are not required to**, offering varying (or no) services. Also weigh EL services, gifted programs, and any needed supports.

BY THE NUMBERS

IEP rights differ	Private = varies	Confirm supports
public vs. private	services not guaranteed	before enrolling

HOW TO HELP

If your child has an **IEP, 504, or other needs**, confirm exactly what the new school will provide — this is where the public/private difference matters most.

WATCH OUT

Moving a child with an IEP **from public to private** can mean losing guaranteed services — understand this fully before switching.

9

STEP 09 OF 10

Factor In Cost & Logistics

WHAT TO KNOW

Private school means **tuition and often extra costs** (fees, uniforms, trips, transportation), partly offset by aid. Public school is free but may involve its own logistics. Budget the **real, all-in cost** either way.

BY THE NUMBERS

Tuition	Financial aid	Logistics
+ hidden costs	reduces it	transport, uniforms

HOW TO HELP

Calculate the **full, all-in cost** of private school (after aid) and any logistics of either move — so the decision is financially clear-eyed and sustainable.

GOOD TO KNOW

Private-school costs go beyond tuition — fees, uniforms, trips, and transport add up, so budget the true total.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Help Them Adjust

WHAT TO KNOW

After switching, **support the adjustment**: stay involved, communicate with teachers, encourage activities for friends, and give it time — usually about a semester — while watching for struggles that don—t ease.

BY THE NUMBERS

Stay involved	Activities	Give it time
+ communicate	the friend route	~a semester

HOW TO HELP

Support your child through settling in — involvement, communication, patience — and reach out to the counselor if the adjustment stalls after a semester.

GOOD TO KNOW

Give any switch **a full semester** before judging it — most children adjust well with support and time.

QUICK REFERENCE

Public vs. Private: Key Differences

A snapshot of what changes when you switch — generalizations that vary by specific school, so evaluate the actual one.

Cost & access

Public: free, enroll by residency. Private: tuition (with possible aid) and an admissions process.

Size & culture

Public: larger, more diverse, more options. Private: often smaller, tight-knit, and philosophy- or faith-driven.

Special education (key)

Public schools **must** provide IEPs and IDEA services. Private schools generally are **not required to** — services vary or may be unavailable.

Getting in

Private: apply, sometimes test/interview, meet deadlines, apply for aid. Public: enroll with residency and immunization documents.

The adjustment

Both directions bring academic, cultural, and social change — support it, encourage activities, and give it about a semester.

THE RIGHT FIT, EITHER WAY

Find Your Community.

Explore our Understanding School Choice, Special Education Journey, and School Transitions guides — among **1,297 free resources** to help every family thrive.

tools.k12academics.com →

K12 ACADEMICS

k12academics.com

© 2004–2026 K12 Academics