

ARIZONA SCHOOLS AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING FOSTER CARE

Factsheet

Arizona has a unique landscape of educational options due to a strong school choice movement, a high prevalence of charter schools, and varying community landscapes and needs.

THE 4 MAIN “TYPES” OF SCHOOLS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Traditionally thought of as “neighborhood schools,” they follow state and district guidance for curriculum/content, instructional styles, teacher/staff certification, and typically have a wide scope of resources both at the school and district level for a variety of different student needs.

- Types:
 - Traditional: Elementary, Middle, and High School levels
 - Alternative: Some districts will have “alternative schools” that offer instruction in a different format or with a different focus. These are still considered Public Schools and under that guidance. Examples of Alternative Schools may include:
 - Online
 - Credit Recovery Focus
 - Pregnant and/or Parenting-focused

Special Education: Public schools are legally required to offer special education services to students who qualify for them.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Public, state-funded schools that serve as alternatives to public schools. They operate under different and more “open” guidelines regarding curriculum/content, instructional style, teacher/staff certification, enrollment criteria, and more.

- Types:
 - Traditional: Elementary, Middle, and High School levels
 - Alternative/Specialized
 - Credit Recovery
 - Style Focused: Project Based, Instruction Style, Curriculum Focus
- Special Education: Charters are not held to the same legal requirements for Special Education supports and services. It’s important to make sure that a Charter school can fulfill the requirements of a student’s IEP or 504 Plan before enrollment. Some Charter Schools might not be appropriate for students needing higher levels of support.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

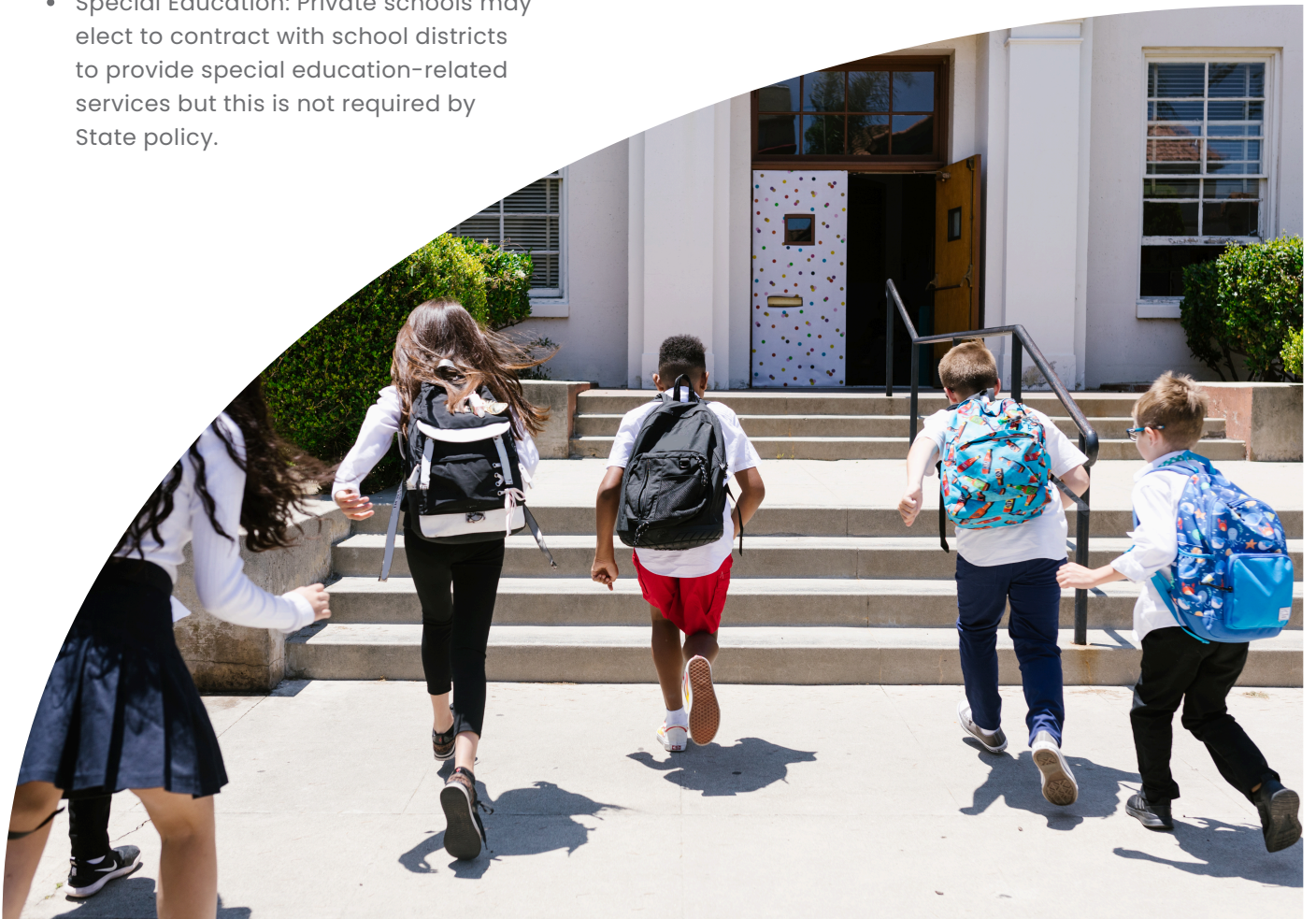
"Private school" is defined as —a nonpublic institution, other than the child's home, where academic instruction is provided for at least the same number of days and hours each year as a public school.

There are no requirements for accreditation, registration, teacher certification, or licensing. No current State policies surrounding curriculum, testing, textbooks, or transportation. They may choose to deny enrollment to any child including children with IEPs.

- Types:
 - Parochial/Religious
 - Focus Specific
 - Highly Academic
 - Special Education
- Special Education: Private schools may elect to contract with school districts to provide special education-related services but this is not required by State policy.

ONLINE SCHOOLS

- Public, Charter, and Private schools may also operate in an online format.
- These schools can provide more flexibility for students but it's important to ensure that a student will have appropriate support from placement to complete their work.
- Many of these are self-paced and require students to have strong executive functioning skills and self-advocacy.
- Special Education: Depending on the student's type and level of special education services, these schools may be unable to appropriately provide those services and supports.



FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Questions for all students

■ **When is this move being considered?**

- For young adults/high school students especially, changing schools during a semester can deeply impact credits. Can a school change wait until a natural break or a new academic year?

■ **Why does the student want to change schools?**

- Consider the root cause of the issues or concerns and see if changes can be made that might support the student in staying.

■ **What schedule meets the student's needs best? Are there unique needs of the placement that also need to be considered?**

- Some schools may offer unique schedule options; shortened days, weekly half days, hybrid learning, and earlier or later start/release times.

■ **What does the Academic Year Schedule look like?**

- Consider the timing of the Semester/Trimester, school breaks, holidays, etc.

■ **What instructional models are used (teacher/aide, project-based, online learning platform use, etc), and what are the class sizes?**

- For online instruction: What experience does the student have with completing online work and what support will they need?

■ **What are the available supports and services?**

- Consider what is most important to the student, such as school counseling, after-school programs, and interventions (i.e. tutoring, online remediation skills building, in-class intervention time).
- Does the school offer electives, clubs, sports, or other extracurricular activities?
- Is there school-based transportation?
- Does the school offer or partner with a program that does before or after-school care, especially for the elementary level?

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Questions to consider for Middle & High School students

■ Middle School: Consider asking if the school...

- Changes classes for subjects?
- Includes High school readiness curriculum?
- Offers electives and/or skill support periods?

■ High School:

• Before Exploring School Options find out...

- How many credits does the student have so far and what's their progress towards graduation?
- Does the student have any after-school commitments?
- What are some ideas the student has for what they want to do after high school?

• Consider asking the school...

- What do their credit recovery options look like and if those will work for this student?
 - Does the student struggle with self-paced classes, and online learning?
 - Does the school offer remedial classes?
 - Is there direct teacher support?
 - In order to graduate, how many credits does the student need to recover given their age and/or hopeful graduation date?
- Do they offer AM/PM sessions, block periods vs shorter periods?
 - Helpful for young people with mental health needs, attention struggles, and ones with after-school commitments like work, visits, or mental health services.
- Are tutoring/Intervention class periods offered?
- Do they offer supportive post-high school planning?
- Do they offer any specific CTE courses, AP/Honors courses, etc?

■ **Things to consider if a student has an IEP/504 Plan or Special Education needs:**

- Public School Districts often offer different levels/types of services within schools across their district, this is commonly referred to as a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in an IEP. Therefore, a student might have to attend a specific school in that district to get their Special Education needs met.
- Charter/Private/Online schools may or may not be able to meet the needs of a student as outlined in their 504 or IEP.
- What type of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) does the student need per their IEP? LRE is determined by the amount of services a student is receiving, where those services are provided at school, and who is providing those services. Based on a student's IEP LRE level they might be only able to attend certain schools in a district. This greatly impacts the BID processes and finding a good fit school for a student. (Types of LRE)
 - Level A: Inside Regular Class 80% or more of the day.
 - Level B: Inside Regular Class for not more than 79% of the day and no less than 40% of the day.
 - Level C: Inside Regular Class less than 40% of the day.
 - Level D: Public or Private Separate Day School for greater than 50% of the school day.
 - Level E: Public or Private Residential Facility – placement initiated by an IEP team.
 - Although other levels exist, the above are the primary ones typically included in IEPs for youth in care.

Partnering with youth who may be changing schools

- Making a list with the students of the things they've liked about previous schools/educational programs can be a great place to start! This can be anything; snack time, study period, helpful counselors/staff, sports, breaks, clubs, etc.
- Consider taking a tour together and holding a supportive school meeting or a BID meeting, if appropriate!