

School Choice: Understanding Your Options

Choosing the right school is an important decision for every family. Every child has unique strengths, interests, and learning needs. South Dakota offers several educational options, allowing families to choose the setting that best supports their child's success. Understanding your options can help you make informed decisions and feel confident throughout the process.

What Is School Choice?

School choice means families have options when deciding where their child will attend school. Depending on your family's needs, you may choose:

- Your neighborhood public school
- Another public school district through open enrollment
- A tribal or Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) school
- A private school
- Homeschooling (Alternative Instruction)
- An online or virtual learning program

Every family is different, and the best choice is the one that meets your child's educational, social, and family needs.

Why Is School Choice Important?

The school your child attends can affect their learning, friendships, activities, and access to supports. School choice allows families to consider what is most important for their child, such as:

- Academic programs
- School size and environment
- Extracurricular activities
- Cultural or language opportunities
- Transportation and location
- Specialized supports and services

Taking time to explore your options can help you find a learning environment where your child feels safe, supported, and ready to succeed.

What Do Families Need to Know in South Dakota?

South Dakota offers several educational options for families. Public school districts may allow students to attend another district through open enrollment, although requests are considered according to state law and local district policies.

South Dakota is also home to tribal and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools that provide academic instruction while honoring Native languages, cultures, and traditions.

Families may also choose private schools, homeschooling (Alternative Instruction), or online learning opportunities available through local school districts and approved providers.



School Choice for Students with Disabilities

If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan, it is important to understand how services and supports will be provided before choosing a school.

Ask how the school will provide:

- Special education services
- Accommodations and modifications
- Related services such as speech or occupational therapy
- Transportation, if needed
- Opportunities to learn alongside peers
- Communication with families

Students enrolled in private schools may have different special education rights and services than students attending public schools. Before making a decision, talk with both the school and your local school district about the available supports.

Parent Tips

Choosing a school is a big decision, but you don't have to make it alone.

- **Visit the School** - Whenever possible, tour the school, meet staff, and observe classrooms. Seeing the learning environment can help you decide if it feels like a good fit.
- **Ask Questions** - Learn about academics, school culture, extracurricular activities, transportation, and family involvement.
- **Think About Your Child** - Consider your child's strengths, interests, learning style, friendships, and support needs. The best school is one where your child can learn, grow, and feel successful.
- **Plan Ahead** - Some schools have application deadlines or enrollment requirements. Starting early gives you time to explore your options and make informed decisions.

Choosing a school can feel overwhelming, especially if your child has unique learning or support needs. South Dakota Parent Connection provides free information, individualized assistance, and resources to help families understand school choice, special education, and educational rights so they can make informed decisions for their children.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

We offer free support, information, and resources to families across South Dakota.



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