

## CHOOSING SCHOOLS - PUBLIC Wisdom Provided by Parent to Parent of Colorado



Trusting that you will find a nugget or two of wisdom that addresses your situation and gives you another resource, a piece of information, or hope to hang onto.

*If you are a current P2P member and interested on discussions on the listserv regarding specific schools or districts, please email [info@p2p-co.org](mailto:info@p2p-co.org) and put "Choosing Schools District Discussions Password" in the subject line. We will email you a link to the file and a password.*

**We have many parents, especially those who are moving in from out of state, ask questions about finding the best school/school district for their child. Several replies to one such question on the P2P listserv provided some excellent guidelines for all parents who have children in school.**

### **RECOMMENDED WEBSITES:**

Tips for Selecting the Right School - Great information for parents who are moving:  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/?p=625>

Great Schools - Resources for Choosing Schools (a selection of articles):  
<http://www.greatschools.org/find-a-school/defining-your-ideal/95-resources-for-choosing-schools.gs?page=1>  
<http://www.greatschools.org/find-schools/>  
<http://www.greatschools.org/colorado/denver/>  
Parent Comment: They also have good posts on special needs and you can follow specific schools.

Colorado School Grades dot Com  
<http://coloradoschoolgrades.com/Default.aspx>

Want to Find a Special Education Program That Meets Your Child's Needs Before You Move?  
Go Shopping: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/move.schls.shop.gopaul.htm>

Changing Schools and IEPs: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.change.schools.htm>

We're Moving - When Should I Tell the School <http://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/?p=1175>

Colorado's official state information on schools and programs. Hover over the LIVE link to see Education, and then choose from the list:  
[colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CO-Portal/CXP/1165693060180](http://colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CO-Portal/CXP/1165693060180)

Parent to Parent's education resource page:  
<http://p2p-co.org/subsite2/resources/resource-you&school.htm>  
While there, look at the other resources available under the Education heading.

Great Education Colorado - Statistics:  
<http://www.greateducation.org/statistics-faqs/statistics/>

Ratings of Colorado school districts on performance on Colorado's State Performance Plan:  
[http://ideamoneywatch.com/states/co/?page\\_id=39](http://ideamoneywatch.com/states/co/?page_id=39)

Details of the performance of each Administrative Unit and school district:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/AUperformanceprofiles.asp>

The **Common Core of Data (CCD)** is a program of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics that annually collects fiscal and non-fiscal data about all public schools, public school districts and state education agencies in the United States. The data are supplied by state education agency officials and include information that describes schools and school districts, including name, address, and phone number; descriptive information about students and staff, including demographics; and fiscal data, including revenues and current expenditures.



**Build a Table** - This application enables users to create customized tables of CCD public school data for states, counties, MSA's, districts and schools using data from multiple years.



**Search For Public Schools** - Use the Search For Public Schools locator to retrieve information on public schools from CCD's databases.



**Search For Public School Districts** - Use the Search For Public School Districts locator to retrieve information on public school districts from CCD's databases.



**Additional Data Tools** - The CCD contains much useful data in databases and downloadable files. NCES has developed powerful application tools to assist everyone from the casual browser to the serious researcher to search for and extract the information they need.

**\*\*\*This document is intended solely for use by the individual who requested the document. Do not forward this information on to anyone else. \*\*\***

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An opinion by posters or references in this document to any specific product, service, therapy or company does not constitute a recommendation by Parent to Parent of Colorado. Information/advice in this document should not be substituted for professional consultation.

- [Relocating to Colorado? Find Education Information Here](#) (Colorado Department of Education)
- Find-A-School from the Great Schools site (<http://www.greatschools.org/find-schools/>) offers lots of information for parents. You can look up your child's school on this site and get information about the school. It's a starting place for parents who are moving and investigating schools.

Shirley Swope, resource specialist at PEAK (Colorado's PTI), says, "I would encourage you to write a review about your child's school. Great Schools is one of the resources that I encourage parents to check when they are investigating schools for their child."

Shirley Swope, Parent Advisor, 611 N. Weber St. Ste. 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80903

[www.peakparent.org](http://www.peakparent.org)

719-531-9400 ext. 104, 800-284-0251

Choosing a School from a Distance from Great Schools:

## **PARENT WISDOM**

Isn't moving a PIA? I have had to move to 4 different school districts. So I have recommendations to lighten your transition.

1. Request copies, for yourself, of all school evals, reports, most recent IEP.
  2. Buy a file folder box. Mark it your child's school box. In bold letters "DO NOT PACK!!!" You will want to carry this in your car, when you move.
  3. Put it in a location, where you can add pertinent information, as you collect it.
  4. Collect any and all reports, evaluations pertinent to your child's diagnosis.
  5. Download, the Child's Life Guide, I've previously posted. This will be your friend.
  6. Just a heads up, not all state services automatically transfer, from one state to another. However the sooner you start, the more ahead of the game you will be.
  7. Do you know where specifically you are moving? Have an address? To qualify & apply for any state services you will need to have a physical address, with a utility bill, in your name.
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## **PARENT TESTIMONIES**

**JKH says:** I think some school districts are better than others are but I don't think anyone has ever devised a good way to measure that. Word of mouth only goes so far because so much relies on individual circumstances and, let's face it, unless you've had an incredibly bad or incredibly good experience, most folks aren't too vocal about such issues. I've heard words of praise and condemnation regarding the same district/school/teacher, etc. Too much of the information out there is too subjective.

Instead of trying to evaluate a school or district, I recommend (in no particular order):

- Know your child's strengths and areas to work on most and fight to get them addressed in the IEP.
- Know your child's IEP.
- Know your child's rights.
- Get to know everyone in the school administration, special education administration, district administrators and school board members and make sure they know you and your child's needs.
- Don't lose sight of the goal — your child's future. Otherwise, it's too easy to get bogged down in the fight itself. But don't be afraid to ask for what your child needs, either.
- Get to know parents of other children in your child's class/school/district — particularly those with disability issues and the same disability/ies.
- Get to know what other services are being offered to children in the class/school/district/state.
- Keep up on the latest research, techniques, court cases, precedents, etc.
- Thank the people who work to give your child a better quality of life. A card, a plant, candy all go a long way but if you can't afford/or don't have time for such gifts, just saying "Thanks" goes a long way, too.
- Don't expect to do all of these things 100% all the time because you can't. It's too much. Do what you can and never give up.

Everything builds over time. It doesn't necessarily get easier but you get better at doing it (and doing more).

**TW says:** My advice to parents would be to check the FTE (full-time equivalent) allocations of any school and the number and severity of the special education students they are serving. Have a hard look at the school's success with children like yours and special ed students in general, before uprooting them, especially if the

school you are choosing has a small student population where FTE becomes a critical issue in the school having the necessary resources to meet your child's IEP requirements.

**RW says:** We had an elementary school that we loved, adored. Our son, who has pretty significant support needs, was fully included all the way through elementary school. It was a wonderful experience, both for our family and for the school. Fast forward now to his younger sister. Same school, change in administration. I won't go into details, but suffice it to say she was the victim of severe bullying, her visual impairment needs were ignored and not met, it finally got so bad we pulled her out and sent her to the School for the Blind (which has overall been a delight).

My point is, you can do your best at choosing a school, but things can change and you need to keep on top of things.

**TK says:** I would just like to add, that there are many options for children regarding education. There are great private schools (who offer scholarships), online virtual schools, and homeschooling as well. While public schools are probably the most utilized, they are not necessarily the only route.

**SK says:** You definitely, as a member of the IEP team, get some say in where your child goes to school. The law says that placement can't be predetermined unilaterally. I had a great experience going to meet the programs in our area myself, including our neighborhood school. I do think that the welcoming nature of the school and the tone that the principal and the classroom teacher set is one of the most important things to consider. Many principals consider keeping siblings together a priority of its own. It is wise to have in mind what supports you definitely think your child needs in the classroom before you go visit. And yes, use the expertise of PEAK, [peakparent.org](http://peakparent.org), 1-800-284-0251. Walking in the footsteps of those who have "been there, done that" is the best way to go =) .

**JD says:** I would encourage you to visit any and all schools that you can and keep in mind a couple of things.

1. A school doesn't always have to make a statement on inclusion but what is best for the child.
2. Least restrictive environment is individual.

A home school can be very restrictive without the correct support and being a special educator (as well as a parent), I know first hand that no matter how hard I try to work with regular educators, their plates are very full also and the pace in a regular education classroom is extremely fast. If I am always pushing for inclusion for the sake of inclusion, am I losing what is best for the student and how they learn best? I require that my students are participants in regular education, not spectators. This makes it paramount that I pick and choose every moment spent in the regular education classroom. Otherwise, I support their learning and education in my small, structured, highly supportive classroom. Every student's inclusion needs are different and fortunately or unfortunately, most of the time the special educator makes or breaks the education for each student.

**PF says:** I found that for my child's time in the regular classroom, it worked best for him to have a full-time paraprofessional to assist him. He was in a "special school" for kids with physical disabilities for two years, preschool and kindergarten. I enrolled him there because our neonatal follow-up clinic helpers felt that intensive early speech therapy (for articulation) might give him a good start with communication. They recommended the school and I sent him.

However, what I found was that (a) the education was not individualized enough to accommodate his needs to access the curriculum and (b) it was pretty much impossible to get out once I got him in.

My son has faced many, many barriers because of attitudes toward his disability. Those attitudes changed, in almost every case, as the result of his presence in the classrooms that were lucky enough to be forced to include him.

*The fundamental advice I would give to any parent is this: \*\*Become part of a community that truly values diversity.\*\* We may not be able to control where we live, entirely, but we can have impact on who we choose as our friends and in many cases on the schools our children attend.*

**DP says:** The Parent Liaison from the CDE told us that even if we moved to get her into a district that had just exactly what we wanted for our child, it could change the following year. Her advice was to stay where we were, get an advocate, learn about our rights and keep working on our own district. So far, her advice has worked out.

We're learning ALOT and staying very active in our community. It has also helped to try and be a team, stay open minded but also not give in on what we think is most important for our child.

Anyway, you know the old saying "the grass is always greener on the other side of the street"? Well, I think each district has its advantages and its disadvantages.