

What's the right school for you?

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Editor's note: The following student column compares and contrasts public and private schools. Statistics used to illustrate the author's point refer to public and private schools on a national level and do not necessarily reflect offerings at local public and private schools.

Many parents struggle over the important decision of choosing whether or not their child should go to a public or private school. Private school may seem like the wiser choice, but is it? Other than being cheaper, public schools offer many different opportunities and advantages to their students.

First, private schools don't accept everyone who wants to enroll. According to an article in the Washington Post, 71 percent of Catholic high schools require an entrance exam, as do 43 percent of other religious schools and 66 percent of private, non-religious schools. And 80 percent of Catholic high schools require that entering students have completed their previous year of school successfully. To simply put it, private schools are not obliged to take all comers — as public schools must. And they are free to get rid of students who do not work out.

Second, teachers in public schools seem to be better qualified than private school teachers. According to Education Digest, 42 percent of public school teachers have earned a master's degree versus 30 percent of private school teachers. Public school teachers also have more teaching experience than private school teachers, averaging 15 years versus 12.

Third, private schools can turn students away if they are "full." Public schools accept everyone, including those who have special needs. Federal law requires public school districts to look for and evaluate students who are suspected of having disabilities. At Barker Middle School, students who receive Special Education services are in several classes that help guide them toward a great future. Students participate in the Standard Core Subjects and other available classes: Resource, Life Skills Curriculum, Functional Academics, Personal Management, Recreation and Leisure and Vocational Training. Not only do students with disabilities have those classes, but they participate in projects that can benefit the school or community while having them interact with other students and teachers.

Also, according to Education Digest, public schools are much more likely than private ones to provide remedial programs (83.2 vs. 54.5 percent), gifted and talented programs (70.7 vs. 24.9 percent), bilingual



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programs (17.8 vs. 4.2 percent), English as a second language programs (42.7 vs. 11.3 percent) and programs for overcoming learning disabilities (89.2 vs. 24.8 percent).

Fourth, public schooling is a better choice, health-wise. According to Education Digest, for meeting the varied health needs of students, 58.7 percent of public schools offer medical services while 31 percent of private schools do. To help students steer clear of illegal substances, 93.6 percent of public schools provide some form of drug and alcohol prevention program; 70.6 percent of private schools do. Not surprisingly, while 94.3 percent of public schools offer a free or reduced-price lunch program, that figure for private schools is 22.4 percent.

In conclusion, families will gain more out of public schools. Both public schools and private schools have their pros and cons, but the positive facts about public schools overcome private school pros. In public schools, not only will families save money, but students have more opportunities.

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