



## Private versus public school

Choosing the right school for your child is a weighty decision. How your child is taught, what they learn and who their friends become may significantly influence the way their lives unfold, particularly their likelihood of going to university and the career they choose. It's a lot to think about.

Should you send your child to a private school? For some people, it's a matter of religion. Other parents choose private schools because they believe in a specific educational method, such as Montessori, International Baccalaureate (IB), Waldorf, or because they want a specialized focus, like arts or athletics. Others are simply after the best quality of education.

### **WEIGHING THE OPTIONS**

However, tuition fees at private schools run the gamut, from \$4,000 to \$40,000 per year. The average fee,

according to the Fraser Institute, is about \$6,200, but some elite boarding schools cost much more. Is it worth it?

"The more relevant point is that your public school may offer an excellent learning environment for your child – without the expense," according to *Your Child: Emotional, Behavioural, and Cognitive Development from Birth through Preadolescence* (edited by David B. Pruitt, M.D.).

There's also your child's social life to consider, they add. "It probably revolves around neighbourhood friends who go to the local public school and reflect a diversity of backgrounds and philosophies that will serve your child for a lifetime."

On the other hand, a private school may offer smaller classes, fewer discipline problems and more opportunities.

If you're thinking of switching your teen to a private high school, get them involved in the choice, or you





may have a full-scale rebellion on your hands. Talk up the facilities, programs, clubs or extracurricular programs that would be of special interest to your teenager.

## CONTEMPLATING THE COSTS

Sending your children to private school may require some serious budgeting and saving. Unlike university, which is far off in the distance when you first anticipate saving for it, private school often begins at kindergarten and can last 12 more years. For two children attending a school with annual fees of \$10,000, the cost could be \$260,000 or more by the time they graduate.

Consider setting up a low-risk, high-interest savings account, and contribute any extra money you have to it to help pay school fees during lean years. It's also worth checking whether or not your province offers tax credits for private school fees. These have been controversial in recent years, though; so don't count on them as you plan ahead.

Ultimately, you'll have to sit down with your budget and evaluate your priorities. Private school might mean doing without that second car, sacrificing winter getaways or working longer hours – or more than one job. In the end, it's a family decision.

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