

“Demystifying Specialized School Admissions”

By: Joshua Doyle, M.Ed., Educational Consultant, The Goldberg Center for Educational Planning™ in MA, NY, CT, VT

In an ever-changing educational environment, students and families are more often than ever considering options for private schooling to help address learning and attention issues. But what do you need to know about specialized day and boarding school options from an admissions standpoint? A former admissions director with tenure in both specialized day and boarding schools and now educational consultant, Joshua Doyle, M.Ed., helps demystify the admissions process for you as a parent or professional making decisions in the face of student struggles.

The following are Josh’s top tips for navigating the admissions process for specialized schools:

1) Assessment

It is vital that, before embarking on a search for a specialized school, your child has received updated cognitive and achievement testing. Most schools will not consider a student unless the testing has been done in the past 2-3 years. In more cases than not, a school will require the submission of a full Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC- IV).

2) Research

The admissions process for you and your child can prove to be overwhelming and emotionally exhausting. Nevertheless, it is important that you all do a significant amount of research on the schools before applying. All specialized schools cater to different students in varying ways and it is up to you to understand the realm of possibilities.

A few key questions for initial admissions inquiries:

- To which other schools are your applicants most likely to apply as well?
- What types of teaching methodologies and technologies does your school use?
- Are organizational and study skills taught as core curricular disciplines or treated as peripheral?

3) Retention of Students

It is important to know how many students decided not to return to their school. If the number is higher than 10%, ask why that percentage of students didn’t return.

Examples of questions to ask about retention:

- What has been your retention rate for students over the past 3 years?
- factoring out economic variables, why was the retention rate low relative to other schools?
- How many students have transitioned back into a more traditional school environment?
- How many students have been dismissed in the past 2 years? For what reasons?

4) Outcomes Studies

Ask a school if they have done outcome studies on their students’ progress. Many schools have done clinical studies that will give specific data on the reading gains their students have made since they have been attending the school. Note that anecdotal information is not a good substitute for hard data. Also, find out where students go, on a percentage basis, when they graduate from the school. How many go on to a four-year college? A two-year college? Take time off? Jump right into industry?

5) Specialized Schools vs. Traditional Private Schools

In order to meet enrollment goals, many traditional schools are choosing to admit students with learning differences these days. It is very tempting for families to consider these schools because they have a more traditional private school setting and culture. However, not all of these schools have the expertise and/or

proven methodologies “in-house” to academically assist these students. It is important to be cautious and ask detailed questions when considering traditional private schools for your child with specialized needs if the school does not have a proven history of working effectively with this sub-population.

A few questions that can open up a discussion about supports for your child:

- Are the teachers trained in special education and what credentials do they carry?
- Is my child going to be pulled out of class or an after school activity to receive help?
- Will my child have to go to a resource room to get additional support?

- 6) Always ask the school for at least 3 parent references and in doing so make sure each has had their child in the school for at least one full academic year. It may also be helpful to request parent references that are from the same geographical area in order to be able to control comparisons in relating to local school decisions, requirements, etc.

Joshua Doyle, M.Ed. focuses on specialized placements as an educational consultant with The Goldberg Center for Educational Planning™. He can be reached at josh@edconsult.org.

The Goldberg Center for Educational Planning™, one of the nation’s first educational consulting practices, provides comprehensive school, college and special program placement and planning solutions to a worldwide clientele. For more information, please visit www.edconsult.org or call us at (781) 848-8800 in Massachusetts, (212) 358-8095 in New York, and (860) 249-5151 in Connecticut.