



# Finding the Best School for *Your* Child

PRIVATE SCHOOL  
ADMISSIONS 101  
Including Parent's Guide to Educational Terminology



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## Private School Admissions 101

As parents, we want the best education for our children, but the “best school” may not be the right fit for your child. When it comes to private schools, each school has unique and distinct qualities. Knowing your child’s strengths, needs and preferences will help you find the school that stimulates their intellectual, social and emotional growth.

### 1. Why should I consider a private school? What are the advantages?

Private schools are mission driven—a private school can adopt the philosophy, values and approach to teaching that serve the best interests of its students. At [The Elisabeth Morrow School](#), our [mission](#) involves challenging students’ intellects, promoting academic excellence and cultivating individual interests in a supportive and creative learning environment.

**Other advantages:** Independent schools can tailor lessons to engage students in authentic learning. The curriculum is elevated when teachers have the freedom and responsibility to implement innovative learning experiences. Private schools also offer extensive collaboration and a strong sense of community among faculty, students and parents.

### 2. If I investigate private schools, how will I know which school is a good fit?

Start, by asking some basics:

- What is the school’s mission and philosophy? Ask for examples of how the mission and educational philosophy are practiced on a typical school day.
- How does the school investigate students’ progress?
- Is the school accredited? By whom?
- What qualifications do the teaching staff have?
- What is the average class size? Keep in mind, teacher-student ratio is different than students per class.
- How many students does the school have?



**PARENT TIP:** You may also want to ask the school about any areas where they are planning improvements or innovations. One sign of a great school (and possibly a great fit for your child) is an institution that is committed to growing, changing and improving to meet the needs of its students.

### 3. How will I know if a school will be a good fit as my child grows older?

Be aware of how the school changes as its students progress:

- How are students’ interests and passions nurtured over time?
- Are there dedicated facilities and buildings to accommodate early childhood, lower, middle and upper school students?
- What leadership opportunities does the school offer as students age?
- How do homework assignments change over time?
- Which high schools and/or colleges do students attend after graduation?

Take time to look at all of a school's divisions—examine the focus, curriculum and goals—before selecting a school. After all, if your child enjoys the school, you'll want it to be a place with which you can create a long-term relationship.

#### **4. What other indicators should I look for to determine the best fit?**

When touring or visiting a school, talk to teachers and other parents. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this a classroom my child would love to spend time in?
- Are the teachers dedicated to helping children learn?
- Does this school seem capable of bringing out the best talents of my son or daughter?
- Will my child thrive in this school?



**PARENT TIP:** Ask for a copy of the school's latest magazine or alumni publication; some schools may post publications on the website. Reading these publications will give you insight into the values, priorities and culture of the school. Also, try to attend an Open House or event where the Head of School is scheduled to speak. The Head sets the tone for the school, and over time, schools can change or modify course with new leadership and direction from the Head.

#### **5. I've found a private independent school that's a great fit. What's next?**

Independent private schools have an application process with specific timelines and deadlines. Schools typically post or update the admissions schedule and financial aid material in August or September. You may also need to register for standardized tests and schedule an interview and/or class visit. Here are a few tips to keep in mind about school visits and interviews:

- For young children entering an early childhood program or kindergarten, schools are generally looking for school readiness.
- Older children may spend time in the classroom and/or interview with a faculty member or administrator.
- Resist "coaching" your child before a visit or interview—schools can sense when a child is being his or her authentic self. If your child is a great fit, you don't have to "act;" the school will see it.
- Your child will take their cue from you—they'll avoid feeling stressed if you remain calm. Let them know they are going to visit a school to see if they might like it one day. Be sure to give them a hug and remind them—and yourself—that you are looking for the right school.

**Take the first step and take a tour of a private school campus.  
Visit the 14-acre Elisabeth Morrow School campus in Englewood, N.J.,  
just nine miles from New York City.**

**Sign up [online](#), call our Admissions Office at 201.568.5566 x7212  
or email our Director of Enrollment Management, Kathleen Visconti,  
at [admissions@elisabethmorrow.org](mailto:admissions@elisabethmorrow.org).**

# Parent's Guide to Educational Terminology

Here is a guide to terminology, educational practices and acronyms parents may encounter when touring The Elisabeth Morrow School and other independent schools in our area.

## TERMINOLOGY & EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

**Accreditation:** A process of review that validates that a school is meeting or exceeding its standards for academics, curriculum, outcomes and resources to support its educational goals. Accreditation indicates that a school is achieving its stated purposes and is on firm ground to sustain its mission for the foreseeable future. The Elisabeth Morrow School is accredited by the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools (NJ AIS).

### ASSESSMENT:

The measurement of a student's learning and performance. A student can be assessed using a variety of criteria, including standardized tests; having the student complete a complex task such as a research report, oral presentation or scientific investigation; and evaluating the student's portfolio, which is a collection of his or her body of work over time.

[Learn how EMS approaches Academic Assessment from Early Childhood to Middle School here.](#)

**Best Practices:** Classroom instructional strategies that have been demonstrated and accepted by the professional educational community to inform and enrich student learning.

**Character Education:** Essential part of a child's social and emotional development that equips students with the skills to be their best selves. Character education is an integral part of an EMS education that is embodied in the [4C's: Courtesy, Consideration, Cooperation and Compassion.](#)

### COLLABORATE:

Individuals working together to solve a problem or accomplish goals.

**Cognitive Development:** The changes in the way children think, process information and learn as they develop more complex ways of understanding the world.

**Critical Thinking:** A deliberate thought process that develops objective analysis and evaluation of an issue or problem in order to form a conclusion. When students are engaged in critical thinking, they are learning how to:

- Find, analyze and make sense of facts, data and trends
- Assess the veracity of sources, especially online sources
- Make distinctions between facts and points of view
- Present and defend an argument or intellectual position

**Differentiated Instruction:** An instructional technique that includes various methods to teach content and assess learning. Since small classes and strong teacher-student relationships are hallmarks of an independent school education, EMS is quite effective at using differentiated instruction to help students reach their fullest potential based on their individual needs, readiness, interests and learning styles.

**Diversity:** Recognizing a variety of student characteristics including those of age, gender, physical abilities, viewpoints, race and ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. The Diversity Statement adopted by the EMS Board of Trustees asserts that it is among the School's highest priorities to provide a safe, positive and nurturing environment in which to appreciate and understand differences.

**Experiential Learning:** Process of learning through experience that also involves reflecting on the work and outcomes students produce. At EMS experiential learning is embedded in every grade. Preschool students study the life cycle by planting and growing food in the Chilton House garden, the fifth graders walk the Hudson River as the earliest settlers did while learning about 18th century America and eighth graders deepen their understanding of the three branches of American government during an annual trip to Washington, DC.

**Higher Order Thinking Skills:** The ability to understand complex concepts and apply conflicting pieces of information to solve a problem that may have more than one correct answer.

### **INCLUSION:**

The practice of educating all children of various needs and capabilities in the same classroom. Inclusion is also sometimes used when referring to diversity to indicate that diverse individuals are not just accepted into the community, but empowered to be a part of it in every way.

**Individualized Education:** A practice that provides each student with lessons and assignments according to his or her needs.

**Inquiry-Based Learning:** An instructional method where students create questions about a unit of study and work to answer their questions through a rigorous exploration of the topic.

**Interdisciplinary Curriculum:** The practice of incorporating multiple disciplines such as language arts, social studies, math, art and music, into the study of one theme or topic. For example, when fourth grade students study Ancient Egypt at EMS, along with investigating the social order of an early civilization they may also study the geography of the region, explore the ecology of the Nile River, recreate artifacts in art class and learn about the biology of mummification.

**Maker Space:** Dedicated space outfitted with tools and technology for students to create, invent and learn.

### **MANIPULATIVES:**

Any objects—for example, blocks, small cubes or coins—that can be used to represent or model a problem situation and develop a mathematical concept. Manipulatives have been credited with developing authentic understanding of mathematics as students use the tools to create concrete evidence of thinking, reasoning and problem solving.

**Modeling:** The process of demonstrating to a student how to do a task so that the student can emulate the model. At EMS, modeling often includes helping students think aloud or talking about how to work through a problem or task.

**Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Learning strategy that encourages students “to learn with and from each other.” Rather than receive information and knowledge from the teacher, students are involved in the search, collection and analysis of information, and form conclusions through questioning and discussions with one another.

**Play-Based Education:** Approach to early childhood education that provides a context for learning in which children organize and make sense of their world as they actively engage with materials, people, ideas and their environment.

**Secondary School Placement:** A comprehensive program that assists students and families with identifying, applying and selecting the best-fit high school following eighth grade. One advantage of attending an independent threes to eighth grade school is robust Secondary School Placement that serves the interests, talents and needs of its students. [Learn about EMS' Secondary School Placement program here.](#)

## ACRONYMS

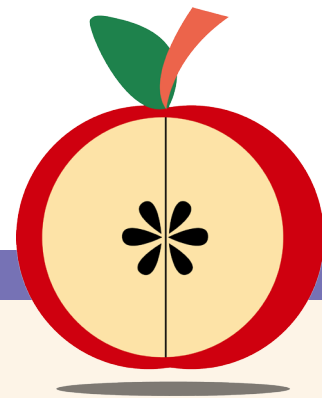
**ERB:** Educational Records Bureau, the not-for-profit educational services organization that offers assessments for admission to independent schools. EMS requires that Middle School applicants (students entering fifth–eighth grades) take the ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam), administered by the ERB. EMS eighth graders also take the ISEE as part of our high school placement program.

**NAIS:** National Association of Independent Schools, the nonprofit membership organization that provides services to more than 1,800 independent primary and secondary schools nationwide. EMS is a member of NAIS.

**NJAIS:** New Jersey Association of Independent Schools, the nonprofit membership organization serving more than 80 independent schools in New Jersey. EMS is accredited by NJAIS, which administers a rigorous, standards-based program that supports continuous school improvement. [Learn more about NJAIS-accredited schools in Bergen County, including EMS, here.](#)

**STEM:** Integrated learning approach that utilizes Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in hands-on and collaborative ways to solve real-world problems. While all schools teach science and math, dedicated STEM programs are deeply focused on developing the capabilities students need to compete in a global economy.

**STEAM:** Integrated learning approach that utilizes Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math in hands-on and collaborative ways to solve real-world problems. The STEAM initiative at EMS includes a robust Arts program to further develop students' innovative thinking. [Learn more about EMS' approach to STEAM here.](#)



### Appleseeds Podcast

Listen to our new podcast, [Appleseeds](#), for talk on educational topics and raising resilient kids with experienced faculty and administrators from The Elisabeth Morrow School. Have a question on education or an idea for a future podcast topic? Join the conversation at [appleseeds@elisabethmorrow.org](mailto:appleseeds@elisabethmorrow.org).

*Appleseeds, a podcast about raising resilient kids, is a production of The Elisabeth Morrow School, an independent school serving a diverse student body, from threes to eighth grade, from Bergen, Hudson and Rockland counties and New York City.*