

School Placement Selection Guide

What to look for in a school • How to compare options based on your child's support needs

■ Understanding SWD Intensity Levels

Before comparing schools, identify your child's support intensity level. This shapes which school features matter most.

LEVEL 1 Mild	LEVEL 2 Moderate	LEVEL 3 Moderate / Severe	LEVEL 4 Severe
Mostly general ed with some pull-out support	Mix of general & special ed settings	Primarily SDC with inclusion opportunities	Full-time specialized program or center

■ PART 1: What to Look For in a School

1A. Special Education Program Quality

- Does the school have a dedicated Special Day Class (SDC) or only a resource room?
- What disability categories and severity levels does the school serve?
- How many special education students are enrolled at this school?
- What is the student-to-teacher ratio in the SDC or resource room?
- How long has the special education program been in place at this school?
- Has the school received any citations or corrective action plans for special ed compliance?

1B. Specialist Staff On-Site

- Is a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) assigned to this school — and how many days per week?
- Is an Occupational Therapist (OT) available on-site or only via traveling service?
- Is a school psychologist assigned full-time or shared across multiple schools?
- Does the school have a full-time or part-time nurse?
- Is a Physical Therapist (PT) available if needed?
- Are Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) or behavior support staff on-site?
- Are paraeducators / aides dedicated to the SDC, or are they shared school-wide?

1C. Inclusion & General Education Access

- Does the school have a co-teaching model in any general ed classrooms?
- How much time do SDC students typically spend in the general education setting?
- Do SDC students participate in school-wide activities, lunch, recess, and assemblies?
- Are inclusion aides available for students transitioning into general ed?
- Does the school have a Peer Buddy or similar inclusion support program?

1D. Physical Environment & Accessibility

- Is the school building fully accessible (ramps, wide doors, accessible restrooms)?
- Is there a sensory room or calm-down space available?
- Are there designated quiet areas for students who need low-stimulation environments?
- Is the SDC classroom located near or far from the main school building?
- Is adaptive physical education (APE) available?
- Does the school have assistive technology available (AAC devices, visual supports)?

1E. School Culture & Climate

- How does the school handle bullying or peer conflict involving special ed students?
- Are general education students educated about disability inclusion and respect?
- What is the school's philosophy on inclusion — welcoming or compliance-based?
- Have you spoken to other parents of SWD students at this school? What do they say?
- What is the staff turnover rate in the special education department?
- Does the school have an active Special Education PTA or parent advisory group?

■ ■ PART 2: Comparing School Options by Intensity Level

◆ Level 1 (Mild) — What to Prioritize When Comparing Schools

- Does the school have a strong resource room with a qualified credentialed teacher?
- Are accommodations consistently implemented across all general ed classrooms?
- Is the SLP or OT available on-site for pull-out sessions without missing core instruction?
- Do teachers in general ed have training in differentiating instruction for SWD?
- Is the school's overall academic performance strong enough to support grade-level goals?
- How does the school communicate IEP progress to parents throughout the year?

◆ Level 2 (Moderate) — What to Prioritize When Comparing Schools

- Does the school have both an SDC and a resource room — or only one setting?
- How many hours per day does the SDC operate, and what is the daily schedule?
- Is there a dedicated transition plan for moving between SDC and general ed settings?
- Are SLP and OT services provided on-site — not just via a shared traveling specialist?
- How experienced is the SDC teacher with your child's specific disability category?
- What data does the school use to measure student progress and adjust services?
- Does the school have a behavior support plan process for students who need it?

◆ Level 3 (Moderate / Severe) — What to Prioritize When Comparing Schools

- Is there a Moderate/Severe SDC (not just a Mild/Moderate SDC) at this school?
- What is the SDC teacher's credential — do they hold a Moderate/Severe authorization?
- How many paraeducators are assigned to the classroom, and what is their training?
- Is a BCBA or behavior specialist on-site or readily accessible?
- Does the school have an AAC (communication device) specialist or trained staff?

- Are life skills and functional academics part of the daily curriculum?
- How does the school support students with challenging behaviors safely and positively?
- Is there a structured sensory diet or sensory break schedule built into the school day?
- Are OT, PT, and SLP services provided at the school — not at an off-site location?

◆ **Level 4 (Severe) — What to Prioritize When Comparing Schools**

- Is this a district program, special education center, or non-public school (NPS)?
- Is medical support (nurse, health aide) available throughout the school day?
- Does the school have experience with medically fragile or technology-dependent students?
- What is the crisis response protocol for students with significant behavioral needs?
- Is there a trained team for physical management if required by the student's safety plan?
- How does the school coordinate with outside therapists and medical providers?
- What does the transition plan look like as the student ages (middle school, high school, adult)?
- Is transportation to and from this placement provided and appropriate for the student's needs?

■ **PART 3: Side-by-Side School Comparison Notes**

Use this space to compare up to three school options across the most important factors for your child.

Factor	School 1 _____	School 2 _____	School 3 _____
SDC / Program Type			
SWD Severity Served			
SDC Class Size			
SLP On-Site (days/wk)			
OT On-Site (days/wk)			
Psychologist On-Site			
Full-Time Nurse			
BCBA / Behavior Support			
Paraeducator Ratio			
Inclusion Opportunities			
Sensory Room Available			
Assistive Technology			
Parent Satisfaction			
Distance from Home			
Overall Gut Feeling ★			