

# Parent's PCS Checklist for Changing Schools

## 2-3 Months Before Moving...

**Hunting and Gathering Stage.** You know where you will be moving, but what is the right school for your children? It's time to hunt down the hidden information about schools, teachers and procedures. And, to gather insight into the type of school life your children will have after you PCS.

- Heed the warnings! You will want to begin with [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org) for specific school ratings and reviews from other parents.
- Search Facebook and other social media for PTO/PTA groups. Ask a lot of questions on the page and let them know you are a military family. Most other military parents who read your post will reach out to you.
- Contact your receiving command or sponsor for local contacts. Ask FRG leaders or ombudsman for contact information of other spouses with similar aged children. Also, connect quickly with Installation Facebook pages. Ask questions, but do not forget to be friendly. A great disposition will go a long way in getting help from strangers.
- Get information about local schools. Contact the receiving base FFSC or school liaison officer and Family Readiness Center. Ask them to give you a contact for a local family willing to field your questions about neighborhoods and schools.
- Network! Ask your friends and active duty co-workers about the new PCS location and best schools.

**Picking the Right School.** This is the toughest part of moving with school-aged kids. You have to make a decision about what school is right for them without so much of a walk thru, an introduction or seeing classrooms/teachers with your own eyes. Here are a few critical questions you need to ask yourself about your child's education and proposed school:

- Will the school be able to meet the educational needs of your child?
- Do you want public or private school? Why?
- Can you provide your own transportation?
- What before and after programs are available?
- What extra-curricular activities do they have for your child?

**Compare Your Schools.** Compare curriculum between where you are and where you are going. There may be major discrepancies between different state education systems. You may find yourself moving to a school district far more advanced or behind than your current one.

- Visit state, district and school websites for grade level curriculum objectives.
- Collect and review important schoolwork showing your child's academic levels.
- Compare current schoolwork to curriculum in receiving district.
- Contact receiving school to discuss curriculum similarities and differences. Call the school guidance counselor.
- Ask the receiving school how they handle new students who are behind/ahead of current grade level objectives.

**The Teachers.** When a military child moves from one school district to another – no matter what grade they are in – they lose the continuity of care and knowledge that only comes from staying local. Teachers are the key to continuity in your child's education, ask them to help set your child up for success.

- Ask your current child's teacher write a letter to their new teacher. This is a perfect venue for teachers to share information about your child's learning methods or insight into behavior.
- Meet with your child's current teacher before you PCS. Schedule a conference with teachers before you PCS and take notes. These notes will be critical when you have to advocate for your child's education or services at the next school.
- Ask your current school what their procedure is for sending official transcripts. Every school might have a different method, do not assume.

**Education Binder.** Create an educational binder that is home to all your important documents. Items such as:

- Report cards
- School work samples
- Assessment results
- Teacher comments
- Notes from conferences
- Copies of IEP
- Copies of 504 plan
- Shot records
- Speech or occupational therapy evaluations/summaries
- Letters from teachers (to teachers), including specialty teachers like music, dance instructors, coaches or art teachers, if applicable.
- Copies of testing results – Cog AT, Iowa Assessments, reading readiness, SAT's.

**Information About the New School.** Before PCSing, parents should find out as much as they can before moving. More importantly, know to ask the right questions:

- Do you have a school calendar? It should list important dates you need to know.
- What are your registration requirements? Every school is different but most schools require copy of orders, proof of residency and Immunization records.
- What are your summer hours? This will also help you plan a tour and when to register. Most schools are closed or have very limited hours during the summer.
- What placement options are available? Utilize the district and school websites to determine the options available to your child given their specific learning needs and the procedure for getting them placed appropriately for their academics.
- Does the school district have language immersion programs or the ability to transfer schools you are not zoned for? Know the choices available to your child and transfer request procedures.
- How do you handle incoming students with IEP/504 plans?
- How do you handle new students who have documented academic struggles from their previous school?
- Do you have a program for gifted and talented students? Not all schools are equal when it comes to offering curriculum or testing.
- May I speak with a grade level teacher and/or counselor? This will allow you to get a feel for the climate of the school and programs available to your child.
- How do you handle academic discrepancies with new students?
- Do you school offer a way for my child to connect with a peer before school starts? Another military family is great but any welcoming family will do.
- Can you connect me with a specialist? If your child is currently working with a specialist (i.e., speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, reading specialist, counselor) at school seek out that person at the receiving school and share your child's story with them to discuss continuity of care.
- Can you help me understand how to transfer credits, graduation requirements and ranking? For secondary students, this will help you determine appropriate placement in their academic classes.

### **When You Arrive at Your New Location...**

- Register as soon as you arrive. Bring the education binder you created which holds all your important documents.
- Schedule a tour of the school with your family.
- Play on the playground or find the local hangouts where other parents/students might be. Start introducing yourself, ask questions and seek out other military families.
- Ask administrators about the school's procedure for reviewing and implementing a new student's IEP or 504 Plan.
- Schedule any necessary meetings to review your child's IEP or 504 Plan.
- Ask about procedures for parent/teacher conferences.
- Contact the PTO/PTA representatives to find out how to get involved with the school, any open houses they have planned or open positions/opportunities for volunteers.