



U.S. Public Schools

A Word About School Ratings

IOR understands that for a relocating family, the number one priority is ensuring that their children receive the best possible education during their time in the US. Regarding schools, IOR's Destination Services Consultant (DSC) will help advise you to take into consideration a variety of factors that include school ratings, word of mouth, personal experiences, and school options as it relates to your housing parameters (budget, size, style of home, commute time).

In the US, the most popular school rating sites are [Great Schools](#), [Niche](#), and [School Digger](#). In addition, many states have their own "report card" of public schools based on state standard of learning tests. You can find ratings for private schools on Great Schools, Niche, and School Digger, but because these schools are not required to test their students with the standard of learning benchmarks, the ratings are almost fully subjective.

While most parents believe that school ratings are an indicator of school quality, the reality is that these ratings do not reflect what parents think they do. In short, a school with a rating of 10 does not mean that your child will get a better education than they would from a school with a rating of 6 or 7. It generally means that the standardized test scores are higher. However, research has shown that test scores are at least 70% attributable to parent income and not school quality. Schools in affluent areas tend to have higher scores while more diverse schools, where English may not be the first language spoken at home, are likely to get lower ratings. Other factors that influence the ratings include attendance, class size, and subjective parent/student reviews. These evaluations may be written by individuals that add feedback based on a child's personal experience and not on the overall quality of the school.

What should matter in combination with scores is the schooling experience. Does the school have teachers who care about and challenge their students? Do the children feel a sense of safety and belonging? Are they developing critical thinking skills and becoming engaged citizens? Do they have access to the arts? Parents are seeking a positive learning experience that will provide opportunities for differently abled learners and diverse inclusive classrooms. Growth and learning should be the top priorities. To better measure a school's quality, these are the types of questions and concerns to explore.

In the absence of a fully objective and wholistic approach by rating sites, how can you evaluate school options? In a perfect world, evaluating school options would begin with a school tour, but for safety reasons many schools in the US will not allow in person tours. Your IOR DSC can often only show the outside of the school, usually during early morning drop off, recess time, or the end of the day, to help get a feeling for how the children interact with the staff and each other. The DSC can also provide you with resources to help evaluate the best schools for your children that will coincide with your rental budget and other housing parameters. These resources include the website of the school district and individual schools to evaluate curriculum, teachers, student body make up, and sometimes a virtual tour. Email addresses of administrators, special education personnel, and ESL/ELL (English as a Second Language/English Language Learners) teachers are published, and you can reach out to ask questions and potentially schedule an informative phone meeting. The website for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is another great resource to help you understand how your involvement in the school and the programs offered can supplement everyday learning. Reach out to the PTA President to ask specific questions about their experiences. Finally, school and PTA Facebook pages can be a great source when determining if a school is right for a child.

For families relocating to the US, it is important to remember there are many resources available to evaluate school options. When looking at school ratings and listening to others advice, we caution you to take this information, as Americans say, "with a grain of salt," that is to say with a little skepticism that there is more to a great school experience than a subjective score. Rely on your DSC to answer any questions you have and provide a variety of resources to help you choose one of the many great public-school options.