

Colorado School Search Kit for Autism

Tour and compare up to four schools, then ask your district in writing to test your child for special education.



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How Colorado school choice works

Colorado law lets you apply to schools in other districts, and each sets its own dates.

Step 1: Find your district's choice page

Search your district's website for school choice or open enrollment, or call its enrollment office. The state lists every district's website on one page.

Step 2: Check the Denver Public Schools dates

Denver says Round 1, its main application window, for 2027-28 opens in December 2026. You can rank up to 12 schools, and applying early in that window gives no extra priority. Check the dates at schoolchoice.dpsk12.org or call 720-423-3493.

Step 3: Check the Colorado Springs D11 dates

For the 2026-27 school year, D11 lists February 15 as its main deadline. After that, current D11 students can apply until October 1, and families new to D11 can apply all year. Call 719-520-2297 or visit d11.org to confirm the dates for your year.

Step 4: Applying when your child has an IEP

A public school in another Colorado district cannot charge you tuition. The state special education rule says a district cannot ask about your child's IEP, the written school plan, until your child is admitted. A district that uses one application for all its schools may ask, but it cannot use the answer to decide. A district can say no only for reasons in state law, such as no space or no program that meets your child's needs.

Step 5: After your child gets a seat

The IEP team may meet to check that the new school can carry out the IEP, and the district must explain in writing if it cannot. D11 says parents give the ride to a school of choice, and Denver says a bus is not promised. If the IEP lists rides to school, ask the district in writing whether that still applies.

What to look for in the classroom

Take this page on every tour and tick each thing you see. Ask to watch a lesson in the class your child would join.

- ☐ A daily schedule is posted where students can see it.
Pictures next to the words help children who do not read yet.
- ☐ Most students are busy with a task, and few sit waiting with nothing to do.
- ☐ There is a quiet space in the room or close by.
- ☐ Students take short breaks and then go back to their work.
- ☐ The teacher gives one direction at a time and shows what to do.
- ☐ Students who talk less have another way to ask for things.
Look for picture cards or a talking tablet.
- ☐ Students get a warning before one activity ends and the next begins.
A timer or a spoken countdown both count.
- ☐ The room is quiet enough to hear the teacher from the back.
- ☐ The lights are steady, with no flicker you can see or buzz you can hear.
- ☐ When a student gets upset, adults stay calm and keep their voices low.

What to look for around the school

Walk the building before you leave, since your child will spend time in these places every day.

- ☐ The halls between classes are calm enough for your child to walk through.
Ask when classes change, so you can see the halls at their busiest.
- ☐ Adults are out at recess and help students join in play.
- ☐ The lunchroom has a quieter table or a room your child could use.
- ☐ An adult meets students at the bus and car drop-off area.
- ☐ Outside doors stay closed, and visitors check in at the front office.
This matters most if your child tends to leave or wander off.
- ☐ The bell and the hallway speakers are at a level your child could handle.
- ☐ Students who have a helper adult still join the class activity.
A helper adult may be called an aide or a paraprofessional.
- ☐ Office staff greet your child directly when the two of you walk in.
- ☐ The room used for small-group lessons or therapy is calm and set up for teaching.
- ☐ The playground has a fence and a few quieter spots to sit.

Questions to ask the school

Ask every school the same questions, so the answers are easy to compare. Write short notes in the last column while you talk.

Ask this	A good answer sounds like	What they said
Ask how many students and adults are in the class during lessons.	Clear numbers for lesson time, and who covers when an adult is out.	
Ask who would write and update your child's IEP at this school.	The job title, often case manager, and how you would reach that person.	
Ask what training the teachers and aides have with autistic students.	Recent training they can name, with coaching in the classroom.	
Ask what happens when a child gets very upset in class.	Calm steps they try first, and a call or note to you that day.	
Ask whether staff ever hold a child still for a minute or more, or keep a child alone in a room they cannot leave.	A written policy they share. Colorado's rule says a public school must tell you by the end of that day if either one happens.	
Ask how they help a child move from one activity to the next.	Warnings before changes, like a timer or a picture schedule.	
Ask how and how often they will tell you about your child's day.	A daily note or message, and a quick way for you to write back.	
Ask how they measure progress on IEP goals and share it with you.	The months when progress reports go home, and how you can ask about progress in between.	

More questions to ask

Ask this	A good answer sounds like	What they said
Ask whether this school has the kind of program your child's IEP calls for.	A clear answer, and who in the district decides if your child would go to another school.	
Ask whether they will talk with your child's outside therapist, such as a BCBA (board certified behavior analyst).	Yes, once you sign a form that lets them share, with a plan for how often.	
Ask where your child would eat lunch and spend recess.	An adult nearby to help, and a quieter place if your child needs one.	
Ask which related services, like speech or occupational therapy, the school gives on site.	Who gives each one here, and that your child's IEP will set the minutes.	
Ask how many hours a day your child would spend in a regular class.	An answer based on your child's needs, with hours written in the IEP.	
Ask how they keep a child safe who tries to leave the room or building.	Clear steps for adults and doors, and a safety plan written with you.	
Ask how they plan for the move to the next school or to life after high school.	Planning that starts early, with you and your child in the meetings.	
Ask what you can do if you disagree with the school about your child's plan.	A meeting to talk it through, and a copy of your parent rights.	

Compare up to four schools

Fill in one column right after each visit, while the details are fresh.

What to compare	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Name of the school and the date you visited.				
Number of students in the class your child would join.				
Number of adults in that class during lessons.				
A quiet space your child could use when upset.				
How the school would tell you about a hard day.				
Therapies offered at the school and who gives them.				
Whether they will talk with your child's therapist.				
Cost per year, if it is a private school.				
How your child would get to school and back home.				
Deadline to apply and how to send the application.				
Your biggest worry about this school, in a few words.				

Ask the district to test your child

Send this to the principal and your district's special education director, and keep a copy. If your child is not in school yet, send it to your district's special education office. You do not need a doctor's diagnosis to ask.

Today's date _____

Dear principal's name and special education director's name,

I am the parent of child's name, born date of birth, at school and grade, or none yet. I am asking the district to test my child for special education, including for autism.

I have noticed what you see at home or at school

One recent example is what happened and the date

Please send the consent form and a copy of my parent rights. Colorado's rule 1 CCR 301-8 says testing must be done within 60 calendar days after you have my request and signed consent.

If the district decides not to test my child, please tell me why in writing.

Reach me at phone number or email. Thank you for your help.

Your name _____

Email it so the date is on record, and attach any doctor's report. Sign the consent form, your written OK, when it comes, since the 60 days start then. If your child qualifies, the first IEP is due within 90 calendar days of consent. Confirm dates with your district's special education office.

When a facility school is an option

A facility school is a treatment program with its own school. The state approves it to teach students placed there by a public agency, such as your school district. Some are day programs and some are live-in programs. If you think your child needs this level of help, ask the school for an IEP meeting about placement, meaning the kind of setting where your child's IEP is carried out.

Your child's IEP team decides whether your child needs a facility school, and federal rules say the parents are part of that choice. Colorado's rule leaves the choice of the exact school or program to the district's special education director. Write down the help your child needs each day and what the school has tried, and bring it to the IEP meeting.



When the district places your child in a facility school to carry out the IEP, federal rules say the special education there costs you nothing. If you move your child to a private school on your own, the district does not have to pay when it had offered a fitting public program. Your child would also have no right to the full IEP services there, so before you sign anything, ask the district in writing what help it would still give.

The state posts a facility school directory with each program's ages and grades. Some programs list admission steps, such as a family visit and an observation of your child. Ask your district's special education director which programs the team would look at.

Good to know

Placement steps differ by district. Confirm each one with your district's special education director before you act.

Calls and emails log

Write down every call and email with a school or the district, with the date. For questions about the special education rules, you can call the state's Office of Special Education at 720-926-1453.

Date	Who I talked to	What they said	Next step and date

Sources

Facts checked on 2026-09-25. Sources change over time, so check each one before you act on it.

Colorado Department of Education, special education help for parents

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/spedparents>

Colorado Department of Education, Autism Spectrum Disorder eligibility

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/sd-main/sd-autism>

Colorado special education rules, 1 CCR 301-8, section 4.00

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/colorado/1-CCR-301-8-4.00>

Colorado Department of Education, find your special education director

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/office-of-special-education/sped-gifted-dir>

Colorado Department of Education, Public Schools of Choice law, C.R.S. 22-36-101

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/choice/openenrollment>

Colorado Department of Education, school district websites

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/district-and-boces-websites-and-maps>

Colorado Department of Education, facility school directory

<https://ed.cde.state.co.us/facilityschools/facility-school-directory>

Federal special education rules, 34 CFR part 300

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/part-300>

Colorado restraint and seclusion rules, 1 CCR 301-45

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/colorado/1-CCR-301-45-2.00>

This kit is general information and is not medical or legal advice. Talk to a qualified professional about your child's situation.

When you want ABA therapy

If you want ABA therapy to support your child outside school hours, Alpaca Health connects Colorado families with local BCBAs (board certified behavior analysts) and handles the insurance paperwork. You can begin with the Alpaca Health intake form whenever you are ready.



When you are ready

[Start with Alpaca Health →](https://secure.alpacahealth.io/signup)

<https://secure.alpacahealth.io/signup>



Scan to open

The full guide to autism schools in Colorado lists school options by region. <https://www.alpacahealth.io/family-resources/autism-schools-colorado>