MY SCHOOLS TUCSON

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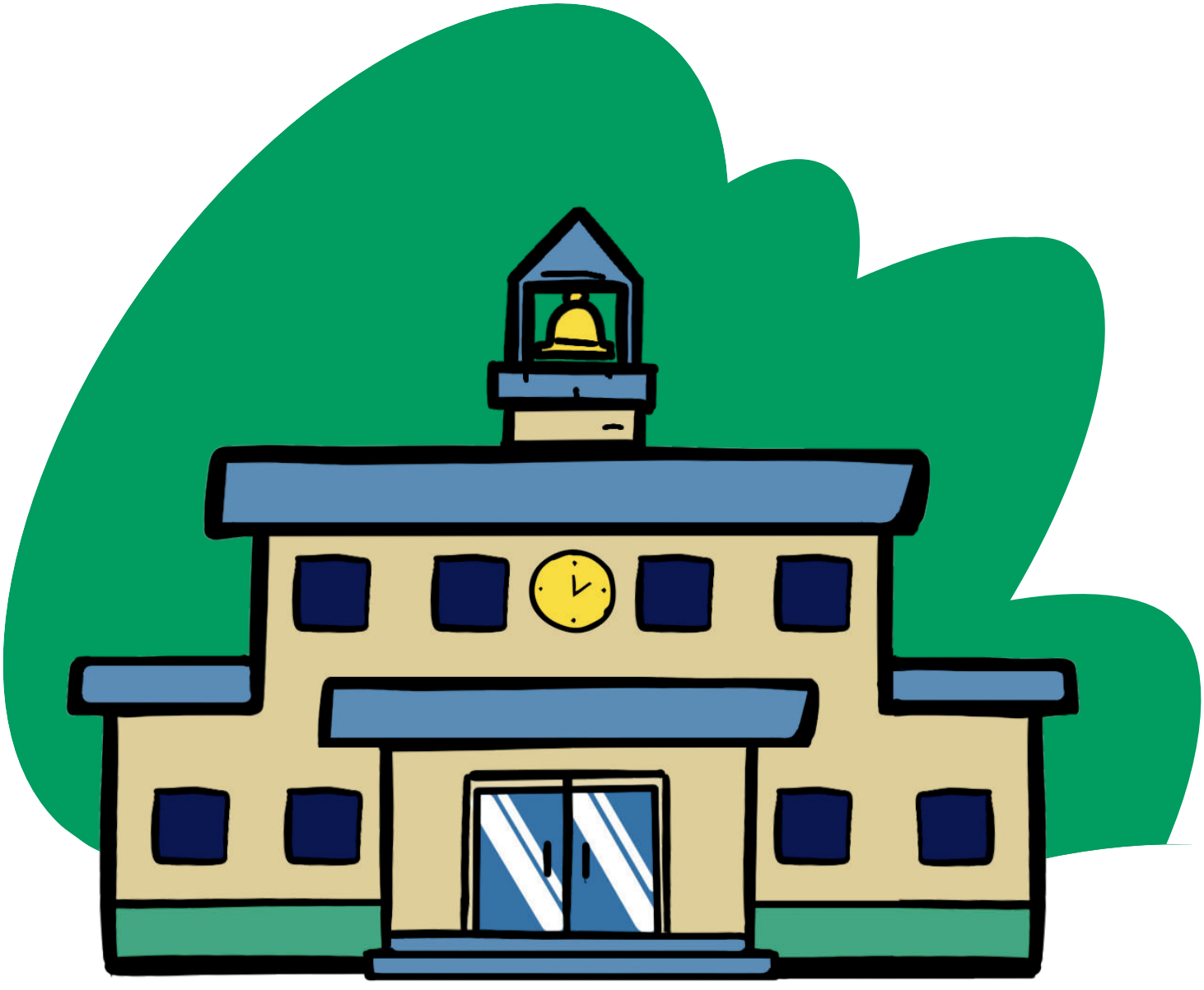
EXPLORING SCHOOLS IN TUCSON

A Step-by-Step Guide for Families



Why Explore Schools?

Every child deserves to thrive at school, and every parent deserves the tools to make that happen.

Pima County offers a diverse range of K-12 school options. The area is home to 15 public school districts, more than 80 charter schools, and 50+ private schools. With Arizona's Open Enrollment, families in the Tucson area have more education options than most cities nationwide.

Just as every child is unique, every school and the way they educate is unique. Finding a school that best fits your child and family's needs is essential to setting your child up for success.

Our Aim

- Ensure families have access to the school information they need to make an informed educational decision about their child's education.
- Equip parents to connect, engage, and lead their child's educational journey
- Provide unbiased support to families looking to explore schools in Pima County and find schools that fit their family's needs.

School Explore Tip #1

Finding a "perfect" school may not be possible. No school will have everything you are looking for. Choose for now re-evaluate, down the road.

School Explore Tip #2

Relying heavily on test scores. Don't overestimate how a school's culture and environment affect a child's happiness and belonging.

School Explore Tip #3

Choosing a school based on reputation or name. Don't judge a book by it's cover. You must get inside, tour the school and ask questions.

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When parents are empowered with the right knowledge, access, resources, and support, they become catalysts for their children's success.

STEP

1

Consider Your Family's Needs

Consider Your Family's Needs

The first step in finding a GREAT school for your child is to identify what your child's AND family's needs are in a school. Schools are very different in the way they approach education. You know your child better than anyone, now is the time to consider what elements will help them thrive.

Questions to Ask as a Family:

Your Child's Needs

Consider personality and learning style

- Is there access to interventions and special education if needed.
- Does the schools teaching style fit your child's learning style?

Location of School

Consider how far you have to travel

- How far away are you willing to send your child to school?
- Is the campus convenient to home, work, or a relative's house?

Learning Environment

Consider curriculum and school culture

- Does the school curriculum align with your child's interests?
- What are the schools' class sizes, diversity and demographics.
- Is it a safe, inclusive environment where students feel supported.

Student Support Services

Consider things outside of the classroom

- Does your child need before or after school care?
- Does the school offer the extracurricular activities that fit your child's interests.

Ask Your Child

Consider what your child might want in a school

- Are there things you don't like or struggle with at school? Why?
- What makes you feel safe and happy at school?
- What is the thing you would be most excited about at a new school?
- What activities do you want to do at school (music, sports, arts, clubs)?
- Are there any new skills or activities you'd like to try?

STEP 2

Understanding Schools

Tucson offers a wide variety of K-12 school options. There are 15 public school districts, more than 80 charter schools, and more than 50 private K-12 schools.

Public District Schools

- Your assigned/neighborhood school is determined by the school's boundary map & your address.
- There is NO cost to attend a public school.

Public Charter Schools

- Free public schools that do not charge tuition. Families may still need to cover certain educational expenses.
- Publicly funded and privately run, offer unique programs with more flexibility, while still following state regulations.

Private Schools

- Not publicly funded, families pay tuition.
- They are not under the AZ State Board of Education.
- They have flexibility to determine their own curriculum.

Virtual (Online) Schools

- Gives students flexibility and broader curriculums to learn at their own pace or outside regular school hours.
- Virtual schools can come in the form of public, charter, or private schools.

Homeschools/ Microschools / Learning Pods

- Flexibility in format, curriculum, location, and instruction.
- Families form or join small groups supervised by parent/instructor.
- Pre-exisiting curriculum and materials are available.

Each child is unique - Find a school that fits

Understanding Schools

Magnet Schools

- Free public schools with specialized programs, STEM, Fine Arts, Montessori, or Dual Language.
- Students can apply through Open Enrollment, have fall deadlines and waitlists.

Montessori Schools

- Values child individuality, interests, emphasizes hands-on exploration and discovery.
- Children are encouraged to ask questions and experience learning through the environment.

Waldorf Schools

- Hands-on, arts-integrated education that supports child development.
- Fosters academic rigor, creativity, and lifelong learning while helping students grow into their unique potential.

Community Schools

- Provides centralized services that meet the needs of students, families, and the community.
- Offers supports like health care, mental health, and family resources, with a focus on the whole child.

Holistic & Specialized Education

Represent specialized school models that offer unique learning environments tailored to students' interests, developmental needs, and community connections.

Learning Focuses:

Gifted and Talented (GATE)

Specialized methods to support gifted and talented students, identified through testing. Can include enrichment, acceleration. Each school offers different options.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

Offers rigorous academic courses recognized by colleges. Students can earn a full IB diplomas in specific subjects, and some elementary and middle schools offer IB components.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a legal written plan developed by a team (parents and educators), that outlines the services, goals, and supports a student with disabilities needs to succeed in school.

Advanced Placement (AP)

High School AP courses offer challenging content, and students can earn college credit by scoring well on the national AP exam at the end of the course.

Dual Language Immersion

Language immersion schools teach core subjects in two languages, helping students become fluent through daily use and exploration.

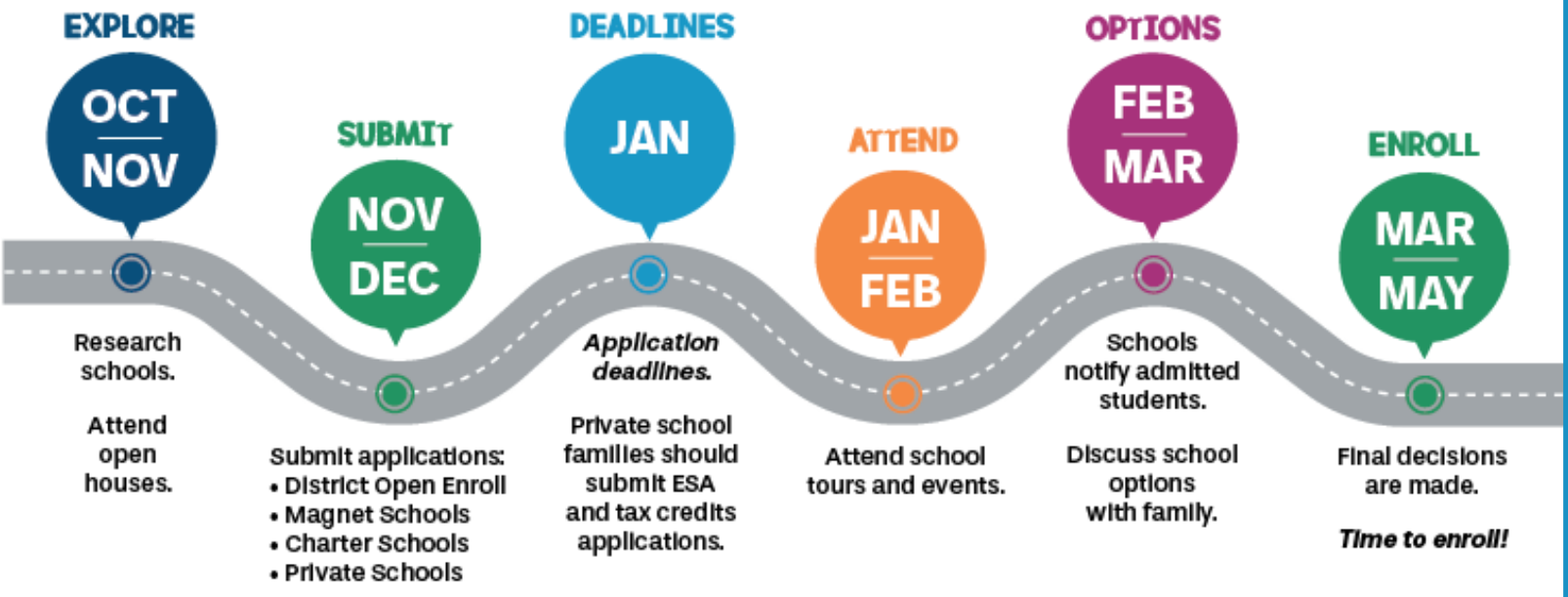
Project Based Learning (PBL)

An instructional method where students learn by actively engaging in real-world and meaningful projects over time.

Open Enrollment Process in Pima County

Understanding Schools

Arizona law allows students to apply to attend any public or charter schools outside their local attendance zone or district, if space and resources are available.



Important Dates!

School	Type	Time Frame
TUSD	District	Early Nov - Mid Jan
Vail Unified	District	Early Nov - Late Dec
Catalina Foothills	District	Early Nov - Late Jan
Basis	Charter	Late Oct - Late Dec
Leman Academy	Charter	First Week of Nov
Salpointe Catholic	Private	Early September

Application Period:
Most Tucson school districts accept open enrollment applications for the next school year from November 1st- mid-late January. Timelines may vary, check with the specific school you're interested in.

Application Process:
Submit your application before the deadline. If you miss the deadline, some schools still accept applications for available seats or waitlist spots.

Selection & Notification:
If applications exceed spaces, schools typically use a random lottery. Applications may still be accepted until schools reach capacity.

Important Considerations:
Parents are usually responsible for transportation for open enrollment students. Charter and District schools CANNOT turn you away if there are seats available. Check in individual school enrollment deadlines.

Private School Funding

Arizona gives ALL families (regardless of income level), two ways to fund private school (or homeschool). These give parents flexibility and choice in customizing their child's education.

Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA)

- **What is it?** Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) in Arizona allow eligible families to use state-funded accounts to pay for approved educational expenses.
- **Eligibility:** All K-12 Arizona students who attend (or would like to attend) a private school/homeschool are eligible for funding. There are no special requirements or income limits.
- **Funding Amount:**
  - Kindergarten: $4000-$5000 annually
  - 1st - 12th grade: $7,000-$8,000 annually.
  - Students with Disabilities: $19,000 - $43,000 (based on diagnosis.

What are funds for?

Approved Educational Expenses

- Private school tuition
- Homeschool curriculum
- Educational therapies
- Special Needs Services
- Online courses
- Tutoring

Students cannot receive ESA funds AND also utilize tax credit programs

Arizona Private School Tax Credit Programs

- **What are they?** Allows individuals and corporations to donate to School Tuition Organizations (STOs),. STO's then award scholarships for private school tuition. Donors receive a dollar-for-dollar credit on their Arizona state taxes.
- **Eligibility:** All Arizona K–12 private school students are eligible for scholarships through the Original Individual Tax Credit program. There are 3 Other tax credit programs that offer extra aid to students based on income, prior public school enrollment, military dependent, disability status, or students in foster care.
- **Funding Amount:**
  - Scholarships may cover full private school tuition, with amounts based on financial need and annual donations.

What are funds for?

Approved Educational Expenses

- Private School Tuition ONLY!
- Other fees related to school or school activities are ineligible

For more info on private school funding options

STEP

3

Research Schools

Research Schools

Learning about different schools will help identify the environment, programs, and supports that best match your child's needs and interests. Thoughtful research and finding the right fit for your child can and will impact student success.

Where do I Start?

Visit My Schools Tucson to find your assigned school and your options.

Talk to friends and family. Word-of-mouth can be a good source.

Explore letter grades and school demographics

Call our education navigators for support

Understanding School Letter Grades

Arizona uses A–F letter grades to show how public K–12 schools are doing each year. These grades are based on things like student proficiency, academic growth, and other school data points. They help improve student outcomes and keep families informed. However, the grades don't reflect important factors like school safety, extracurriculars, school culture, or teacher quality.

Why School Letter Grades Are Useful

Measure school proficiency and growth - via standardized tests and school data points.

Offers parents a clear method to evaluate and compare school quality and performance.

Promote transparency and trust in public education through clear school data.

Reminder

School letter grades do not capture the whole picture of a school. They should be one of many considerations when choosing a school.

More on AZ School Letter Grades

STEP 4

Visit Schools

Questions to Ask Before Enrolling

A School tour may be the most important research tool that a parent has in their pocket. Getting on the campus and asking questions will provide insight that you cannot get from a webpage or your neighbor's experience.

SCHOOL INFORMATION

- What is the max. number of students per class?
- Is transportation available?
- Is there a free or reduced lunch program?
- What are some of the school's biggest challenges?
- How does this school keep parents informed?
- How is parent input and feedback sought?
- What are before/after school childcare options?
- Does the school offer FREE, full-day kindergarten?
- How much homework do students have per grade?
- How diverse are the school's demographics?
- How does the school prevent and handle bullying, violence, and harassment?

STUDENT SUPPORT

- How are behavior issues and discipline addressed?
- How does the school support students who have academic, social, or emotional difficulties?
- How are you addressing potential Learning Loss coming out of the pandemic?
- What type of student mental health and wellness services are provided?

SPECIAL NEEDS

- What special services and supports are offer?
- How are Special Education students integrated into the general curriculum and activities?
- Is the school's behavior plan different for students with special needs?
- Is the staff trained to meet your child's needs?

ACADEMICS

- How do the student's standardized test scores compare to state or local averages?
- Is the school in academic growth or decline?
- Are world languages built into the curriculum?
- Does the school have a curriculum focus, such as STEM or the arts?
- How are students exposed to music, arts, and world languages?

EXTRACURRICULARS

- What sports, clubs, or student leadership opportunities are available for each grade level?
- What percentage of students participate in school-based extracurricular activities?
- What kinds of facilities, resources, support, and opportunities are there for students outside the classroom?
- What school activities build community?

CHARTER SCHOOLS

- Is there a particular curriculum emphasis or teaching philosophy that guides the education?
- What type of academic programs are offered?
- What are the school's enrollment deadlines?
- What type of extracurriculars are offered?
- Are counseling services available to students?

STEP

5

Evaluate & Apply

Evaluate & Apply

Ready to Apply!

Do Your Homework

- Talk to friends and families of current students.
- Make a “Pros/Cons” school list and begin to narrow down your options

Attend Open Houses

- Get on campus, know the school, decide if it is a good fit for your kid.
- Observe the school culture at athletic competitions, or performances.

Take School Tours

- The most important step in exploring your schools.
- Schedule time to take a guided tour.
- Ask key questions during your visit.

Application Deadlines

01 Neighborhood Public Schools:

- All schools have a boundary - your “neighborhood” school is determined by your home address.
- Make certain to register by March.

02 Private Schools:

- Applying can include, admissions test, transcripts, letters of rec, interviews, etc.
- Applications open early Fall.
- Financial Aid/Scholarship deadlines vary.

03 Public Schools VIA Open Enrollment:

- Open to all students (in or out of district).
- Often have limited seats available.
- Be mindful of the Fall deadlines to apply.

04 Public Charter Schools:

- Not guaranteed enrollment.
- Limited seats available.
- Deadlines can be as early as November.
- May have a “waitlist” for students not initially admitted.

Pro Tips:

- Be aware of all deadlines to register - these can be as early as November.
- Applying to multiple schools gives you the best chance at landing in a school that will fit your family’s needs.
- If you missed the deadline or were not selected....ask to be put on the waitlist in the event a seat opens up.

School Enrollment Worksheet

Step 1: Consider Your Family Needs

Location
Is the campus convenient to work or home? Is transportation provided?

After School Care
What are the drop off and pick up times? Is Kinder FREE Full-Day?

Academics
How do the students perform on state testing ?

Learning Enviornment
Does your child thrive in a smaller or larger school setting?

Demographics
Is there diversity among the student body and faculty?

Extracurricular Programs
Does the school offer programs that meet your child's interest?

What do you, your child, & your family need in a school?

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Step 2: Understanding School Options

- **Visit MySchoolsTucson.org to understand the different types of AZ School.**
- **Each child is unique, and each school is unique.**
- **Understand *School Performance Letter Grades* and other key terms.**

Step 3: Research

- **Visit MySchoolsTucson.org school locator to find all Tucson Area schools.**
- **Visit school and district websites for more information.**

Schools I am considering:	School's Pros/Cons:

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School Enrollment Worksheet

☐ Step 4: Visit Schools

- Ask key questions.
- Use MySchoolsTucson's "Questions Parents Should Ask on a School Tour".

What are your key questions to ask on school visits?

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

☐ Step 5: Evaluate and Decide

School of Choice:

.....

☐ Step 6: Gather required documents

- When enrolling your child in a school, you may need to provide these documents.
- Check with your child's school to their determine exact requirements.

☐ Proof of residency - such as a utility bill, driver's license, or lease.

☐ Proof of age - birth certificate, passport, or other documentation.

☐ Immunization records - a copy of the student's immunization records or exemption document.

☐ Previous school information - if your child has attended another school, you may need to provide a transcript or other documentation.

☐ Step 7: Apply

- Pay Attention to Deadlines!
- Some schools have FALL Enrollment Deadlines.

MY SCHOOLS TUCSON

Pre-K

Transition to Kinder

Transition to Kinder

Preparing for Kindergarten

Starting kindergarten is a big step for children and their parents. Exploring school options helps set your child up for success. With your support, they'll be ready to learn, make friends, and grow more independent. A smooth start builds excitement and confidence about school.

When Can My Child Start Kindergarten?

- Your child must be 5 years old before September 1 of the school year to enroll in Kinder.
- Some schools may offer early entry for kids turning 5 between September 1 and December 31.
- Check with your local school for specific age and enrollment policies.

Enrollment Essentials

- Explore ALL School Types. Identify options and compare schools.
- Kinder open enrollment registration often opens in November the year before school starts
- Required documents typically include:
  - Child's birth certificate
  - Immunization records
  - Parent ID and Proof of residency (utility bill, lease agreement, etc.)

Questions Parents Should Ask When Exploring Kinder

1. **Do you offer full or half-day kinder? Is there a cost for full-day kinder?**
2. **What is the typical teacher-to-student ratio?**
3. **What curriculum and teaching methods are used in kindergarten?**
4. **How do teachers assess social and academic progress throughout the year?**
5. **What supports are available for English Language Learners or Special Education?**
6. **How and when will teachers communicate with parents?**

Tips To Prepare Your Child for Day 1

- **Establish routines:** Practice waking up, dressing, and eating on a school day schedule.
- **Build social skills:** Encourage sharing, taking turns, and making friends.
- **Practice self-care:** Teach handwashing and bathroom independence..
- **Talk about school:** Discuss what kindergarten will be like to reduce anxiety.
- **Healthy habits:** Ensure your child gets 9-12 hours of sleep and eats a healthy breakfast.
- **Visit the school:** Attend orientation days when possible – take your child with you.

Resources

Frequently Asked Questions

Tucson School Districts

Special Education Information

All Things Preschool

What Every K-12 Parent Needs to Know

Have Questions? Contact Us!

Free, bilingual, 1-on-1 Support

520-529-1776 Ext: 214 info@myschoolstucson.org
www.myschoolstucson.org

MY SCHOOLS TUCSON

Every child deserves to thrive at school. My Schools Tucson is an unbiased, non-profit program powered by CIC that supports Pima County families in actively participating in their child's education.

Our free, bilingual, resources, one-on-one support, and a Tucson-focused school locator, breaks down barriers and empowers families to make informed decisions and become true partners in their child's learning journey.

Our mission is simple: Connect. Inform. Empower. By bridging the gap between home and school, we help parents unlock each child's potential and create a brighter future.

HAVE QUESTIONS?

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