

## Choosing an Educational Consultant by Stephen G. Bozak, CEP



The complexity of a child's needs and the variety of facilities available can make it challenging for parents to research schools and select the best possible choice. Most parents know when their child requires some sort of special educational setting to meet his/her needs, but the balance of academic and behavioral interventions at schools can be difficult to identify. A short visit to the campus and a review of the school's brochure may outline only the good points of a program. In such an important decision, however, expert help is available.

Educational consultants have been around for some time, but it wasn't until 1976 that they collaborated and were recognized for the assistance they provide to both parents and schools. With the help of a consultant, parents can be shown the best options and students can be referred to suitable schools in a timely manner.

Over the last 25 years, schools have become more specialized and the needs of individual students more identified. This provides parents with better opportunities for finding an appropriate placement. When parents research schools on their own, they may overlook other suitable options.

A school which may seem like their only choice may actually be only one of several appropriate possibilities.

Recognizing this limitation, many parents seek the assistance of a paid professional consultant for placement recommendations. Here are some guidelines to aid in the selection process:

**Certification.**-While some educational consultants are not certified, this accreditation helps to ensure that the consultant has met and is current with appropriate field experiences. Certification comes from the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners in Fairfax, Va., and certified consultants adhere to a specified code of ethics in their practices. They also do not receive commissions from the programs where students are placed. While commissions were more common 15 years ago, they still exist in some settings. If the consultant uses this method, it could limit the choice of schools. Make sure to ask the consultant and school if commissions are being paid in your case.

**Placements.**-Consultants should have extensive knowledge of the placements available based on the needs of your child. Educational consultants maintain their certification by visiting and evaluating hundreds of schools and programs each year, and can provide you with firsthand information. Consultants may also recommend psychological and academic evaluations if needed for admission.

The consultant should understand the needs of both you and your child, and his/her advice should ensure that all options have been explored so your child is placed in an appropriate

academic and social setting.

**Location.**-Some consultants concentrate on specific areas of the country, while others may specialize in national placements. Consultants may work with colleges, high schools, summer camps or special needs schools, so choose one that is familiar with the programs addressing your child's needs.

**Cost.**-The cost of any consulting service depends upon the level and types of services furnished. Many consultants will not only provide a list of suitable placements, but may also travel with you to the school. In other cases, more than one program may be needed. A short-term program for behavioral problems may be an option before a more traditional school can be considered. Fees range from five to 15 percent of the school's fee. Hourly rates are sometimes charged, and a flat rate with specified services may be the most comfortable option.

**Contracts.**-When selecting a consultant, it is critical that the clients (parents) review a written contract detailing the types of services to be provided and the fees involved. Some of the services which may be provided include:

1. Gathering all necessary information on the child and family to clearly understand their needs and limits.
2. Regular communications with the consultant.
3. A face-to-face visit with the consultant. (Should be available, but not always needed.)
4. Communication with possible placements to ensure they have room for the child at this time.
5. Developing several possible placement recommendations and discussing them with the parents in order to finalize the list.
6. Recommendations of short-term or long-term programs as needed.
7. Expediting further testing or evaluations if student's evaluations are incomplete.

Using an educational consultant expedites the process of placing a student into a program by identifying the appropriate schools up front, assisting with the paperwork and finding the best option for the student. It can also help alleviate some of the unknown factors parents face as they make these important decisions.

**Stephen G. Bozak, CEP**, is a certified educational consultant and a member of the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners. He places hundreds of kids nationally each year into mostly special needs schools and programs. Information is available at <http://www.school-placement.com>.