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# THE CHOICE IS YOURS

## THE PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT PROCESS COMES WITH LOTS OF OPTIONS

BY ANNA RABHAN

**T**he parents of many of today's First Coast students likely remember the days when there were really only two choices: enroll in a private school, or attend the public school for your neighborhood "zone." Times have changed; today, parents can choose from several academic options, both public and private.

While the attendance zone model is still in place, the difference these days between "public" and "private" has been blurred by the surge in popularity and availability of magnet and charter schools that provide a cost-effective alter-

native to a private school education. Duval County currently has 21 charter schools, and magnet programs are offered at 62 different schools.

Websites like DuvalSchools.org and MagnetPrograms.com provide school information, application guidelines and admission deadlines. Parents and students considering a magnet school should first work together to determine the child's interests or potential career path. A student with a passion for music, for example, might thrive at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, while a more technologically-focused student may prefer the course offerings at Frank H.

## MonkeyBars

Innovative new playground pops up in Springfield

When the nine-acre **Confederate Park** originally opened in 1907, it held the city's first playground. Now, it's home to a playground that looks like it came straight from an episode of *The Jetsons*.

A cutting-edge children's playground is the final installation of the Confederate Park revitalization project, set for completion in January 2013. Designed by a sculptural artist and child development specialist, the Kompan equipment used in the new park has a smart look that catches Mom's attention, and a fun factor that has kids drooling from the car window. Bright color contrast, galvanized steel, and unearthly geometric shapes are themes in the futuristic Kompan Galaxy equipment.

Each piece of equipment was selected to meet the needs of children on many developmental levels, and constructed on top of a shock-absorbent rubber surface that lessens the blow of falls by kids of all ages.

The park is located at 949 Hubbard Street, and is open every day from dawn to dusk. \*

BY MEGAN CHAMPION



**UNDERCOVER LEARNING:** Let the kids keep the science textbook in their backpack this month—they'll probably get a better grasp of concepts like air pressure and static electricity while in the audience for **Let's Go Science!** than by staring at the periodic table. This family-friendly show, hosted by Professor Smart and Dr. Knowitall, combines education and entertainment through fun and engaging demonstrations. Presented by The Artist Series, parents can choose from two showtimes on January 19, 1:30 PM and 4:30 PM. Tickets are \$16 for adults, \$8.50 for children 12 and under. To learn more, visit [artistseriesjax.org](http://artistseriesjax.org) and [letsgoscienceshow.com](http://letsgoscienceshow.com). \* BY NATALIE WEARSTLER



Peterson Academies of Technology.

According to PrivateSchoolReview.com, there are 182 private schools in Duval County alone. The choice between religious or secular instruction can narrow the field considerably. But private school can be quite expensive—according to the National Center for Education Statistics' 2010 Digest of Education Statistics, instruction at a K-12 private school costs an average of \$10,045 per year. Parents naturally want to know that they can expect a good return on the money spent.

Evaluating a private school's performance can be a complex process, especially if one is used to the wealth of data available for public schools. Private schools are free to pick their own assessment tools and are not required to report results publicly. Private school students take the SAT or ACT, just like their public school counterparts, and schools do tend to share their overall average or median scores on those tests. College acceptance rates and the reputation of the school are other factors that parents typically use in choosing a school. But Brian Pargman, director of admissions at St. Johns Country Day School, recommends that parents (as well as prospective students) look past statistics and schedule a time to tour the schools they're considering.

"It's almost like test driving a car," says Pargman. "There's no better way to learn about the environment than to actually sit in the classroom."

The private school application process can be extensive, and a placement offer is not guaranteed. "The students that we typically admit here at St. Johns are ones that have the drive to go on to college," says Pargman. "We also want them to have grit and determination so they'll succeed in the classroom, or on stage, or on the athletic field."

Most public schools are responsible for providing transportation to their students, whereas private schools are not. Some private schools offer arrangements with transportation companies. Mandarin mom Mandy Gunning, whose two sons attend Christ's Church Academy, says, "We actually have three families in the neighborhood that all go to the school, so we do carpool in the mornings and afternoons, which helps."

Parents agree, though, that the biggest issue they deal with from the very beginning of the process is cost. Many schools offer scholarships or other forms of tuition assistance. Parents like Gunning feel that the experience is worth the cost.

"You can't re-do the first few years of school," says Gunning. "We didn't want to spend a college-education [amount] on their elementary school, but we view it as an investment in their future to have a good, solid foundation in the beginning." \*



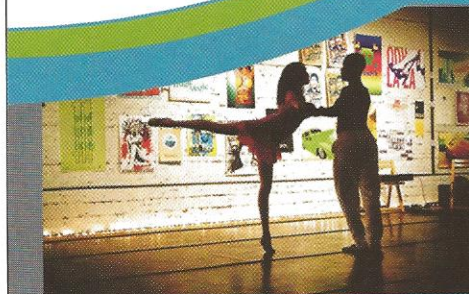
# The Place to Be

## So Much To Do in

# January

- Community First Saturdays
- Jacksonville Giants Basketball Games
- 2013 Gator Bowl
- B. B. King
- Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus
- Jerry Sienfeld
- Mary Poppins
- Shen Yun

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*For a complete events calendar, visit: [DowntownJacksonville.org](http://DowntownJacksonville.org)*

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