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Detailed Summary of School Options

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Draft

On Fri, Jun 20, 2025 at 7:50 AM Kelsey Cullen <kelseycullen16@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED],

Here is a detailed summary of the three school & school alternative options that we have explored so far, including pros and cons of each. It is a long email, but please read over in detail when you have time, as I have been as thorough as possible in providing as much insight as I can about each one.

[REDACTED]

Overview:

- A small building with a narrow hallway and 3 small rooms (think office spaces, not classroom sizes), with no outdoor area in an industrial neighbourhood near [REDACTED].
- 10-20 minute walking distance to 3 parks and a library
- Maximum 8 children, grade K to 12.
- ABA program, led by seemingly very pleasant and knowledgeable staff. They used language that often sounded neuroaffirming, such as allowing children to stim and recognizing that children cannot learn while stressed, anxious or otherwise dysregulated.
- Available as a full time (5 days a week), or part time (2 days/week in fall and 3 days/week in winter).
- Recommended by [REDACTED].

Pros:

- Small group size
- Friendly staff trained to support autistic children
- Part-time option would suit your desire to home school and my desire to have him in a program
- Part-time option completely covered by [REDACTED], with leftover funding available to keep [REDACTED] on Fridays with you

Cons:

- Possibly being an ABA program. There was talk of "training social skills" which can refer to teaching autistic children to mask as "neurotypical", and can lead to self-esteem issues if trained to believe that how they naturally feel or behave is inadequate. We know that ABA was previously a negative experience for him.
- Only autistic children in the class, not allowing for a diverse social experience
- To [REDACTED]'s knowledge, the only child currently enrolled around [REDACTED]'s age is non-verbal.

- They have never had more than 6 children registered, some of those are part-time. This may mean that only 1 or 2 kids may be in attendance on the days he attends, minimizing social opportunities, depending on the demographic of those children.
- Minimal space in the building if he wanted to get space from the adults or other children
- There was mention of some kids having loud and/or violent meltdowns, which would also be difficult for [REDACTED] to separate himself from, given the building space.
- They don't complete all the academic requirements, so we would be required to maintain a consistent homeschooling routine with him at both of our houses on top of his attendance at [REDACTED].
 - o This may be a high demand to ask of him to do work at home after (or before) attending a full day at [REDACTED]

Public School – [REDACTED]

Overview:

- Traditional public school

Pros:

- Flexibility with part-time schedule
- Accommodations to give a soft-start on playground with other kids
- Allowed outside breaks during the day
- Many different children for a wider opportunity to find kids to connect with
- Exposure to classroom education, even if he opts out of activities
- EA support
- The school has experience with [REDACTED] (not to say his own teacher would, though)

Cons:

- Unclear language around level of EA support (1-1 versus other?)
- Unclear language around separation anxiety support (parent access, etc)
- A classroom of 20+ kids can be overstimulating
- A playground of ~300 kid can be overstimulating
 - o Would level of support around social skills be accessible in the playground and classroom?
- Classroom teacher would matter greatly, and this is currently an unknown of who his teacher would be and what their teaching style is like
- General overstimulating activities such as transitions between gym class/music class to the main classroom, school assemblies, etc.

[REDACTED]

Overview:

- Full-time independent school that follows BC curriculum with a focus on art.
- Would not include maintaining registration with [REDACTED].
- Maximum 15 children per class

- Classes are multigrade - K-3, 4-6, 7-9.
- Each class has one teacher and one EA (unclear if a class could qualify for an additional EA, will find out).
- Located in [REDACTED]
- Costs \$1000 per month for 10 months, plus \$1100 one-time registration fee, for a total of \$5550 each if split 50/50, or, over a 12-month payment period, \$462.50/month each.
- Children are a mix of neurodivergent and neurotypical
- Walking distance to 3 parks, including one park directly across the street.
- Quiet neighbourhood.
- Recommended to us by [REDACTED], who has other autistic clients successfully attending there.

Pros:

- The staff appear to speak in neuroaffirming ways, and speak to children respectfully.
- Full-sized classrooms with quiet spaces in corner with pillows
- Experience with autism, adhd, and anxiety with other students
- Separate quiet room if a child needs space
- [REDACTED] had a positive experience at his meet & greet
 - o He arrived with anxiety and the staff supported his use of [REDACTED] to feel safe, and allowed him to consult with [REDACTED] when deciding if he was going to enter the classroom
 - o He was supported in choosing the pillow corner before eventually joining the group, and they understood that he was retaining information from the lesson while sitting in the corner
 - o They engaged him in the class activity by inviting him in a low-demand manner to participate after allowing him to watch the activity once, first, to know what to expect
 - o He played basketball and climbed a tree with the other kids at recess.
 - o He arrived at the meet & greet feeling cautious, and left the visit telling me how much fun he had and that he couldn't believe an hour had already passed and that it was time to leave already.
- They are open to collaborating with us on a separation anxiety plan that includes parent support (will be setting up a call next week to discuss in detail. You can join this too, if interested).
- Class size is small enough to not be too overwhelming, but large enough to potentially make friends.
- Their focus on art is an attempt to introduce curriculum in a low-demand manner that reduces stress and anxiety of learning.
- They may also be open to part-time attendance, but would likely require full-time tuition, regardless (will also confirm these details at the upcoming meeting).

Cons:

- Cost
- Location – would be 30-60 minute commute for me, and a 55-90 minute for you.
- No funding would be available for [REDACTED]

I haven't come across any other cons with this program, yet. Aside from these three big considerations, I felt very comfortable both in the information session as well as the meet & greet that if any program was going to be an ideal fit for [REDACTED], this one would be it.

Please let me know when you are available to connect for a phone call to discuss this together.

Kelsey



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