

**Discovering a better alternative  
for a child with special needs.**

*your guide to private special education*





As the parent of a child with complex learning disabilities, you struggle to find answers. You struggle with conflicting emotions. You struggle with finding the right educational program.

In the following pages, you will find detailed information to help guide you through these struggles.

Perhaps the most fundamental questions are: Will my child thrive in the mainstream as offered by typical day schools and programs, or in a special education boarding school? Which environment will best prepare my child not just for the next few years, but also for a lifetime of independence and happiness?



Is true inclusion for my child found within a day school that can't fully address all his or her needs?

Will a deeper, more authentic inclusion be found in a private special education setting where my child's individual potential is fully developed within a community of dedicated educators and accepting peers?

Exhaustion, frustration and confusion are often your companions as you struggle to find answers. We hope the following information eases those feelings and validates your efforts. For what's at stake isn't simply his or her education as a child — it's the quality of his or her life as an adult.



Part of a day, part of your child, part of her life,  
part of his potential. Is that enough?

Typical school programs are six and a half hours long, five days per week. For most children, including those with mild disabilities, these programs are adequate. However, for many children with more complex needs, these programs simply do not offer enough.

Typical day programs have larger class sizes and limited opportunities for intensive personalized instruction. A six-and-a-half-hour day has little time available for teaching important social and living skills. This time constraint also hinders a child's ability to develop special interests, talents and friendships. Parents, then, are left scrambling on their own to find extra tutoring and to create recreational opportunities for their child.

And so often, this piecemeal approach just doesn't work.

An excellent alternative is a private special education boarding school. With its holistic approach, a boarding school nurtures the whole child *and* supports his or her family. In addition to strong academics, time and resources are dedicated to fostering communication skills and promoting independence. Students learn to organize and manage their time, inside and outside the classroom. They learn to advocate for their needs and prepare for the future.

Is your child's full potential being realized in a six-and-a-half-hour program?

# THE PROMISE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION



How can an education be *labeled* “appropriate” if it is *not appropriate* for your child?

The most difficult part of the struggle to educate your child properly is not the frustration it causes, or the conflict it engenders. It’s not even the pain and confusion it creates. The heartbreak of this incomplete, incompatible education is its inability to deliver on the promise of special education.



The promise of special education is a richer, fuller life for your son or daughter. It is a life filled with options and opportunities. It is a life enriched by a strong, fundamental self-confidence. Students who feel good about themselves try new things, embrace challenges, develop friendships, seek help when needed and view themselves as more capable and competent.

But children with complex needs often find that typical day schools are unable to deliver upon this promise. Because of limited time and resources, their full potential is not developed as completely as it could be. Expectations and aspirations are not as high as they should be.

For many of these students, this promise can be fulfilled in a special education boarding school. Here they will find expertise, commitment and resources. Here they will feel the transformative effects, many for the first time in their lives, of the promise of special education.

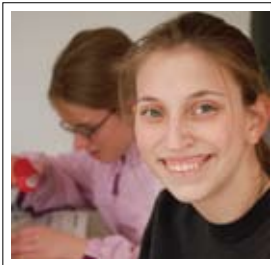
Appropriate special education transforms lives. Is your son or daughter experiencing this transformation?

## PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION BOARDING SCHOOLS



*Embracing the whole child.*

*A better way to educate your daughter or son.*



Embracing the whole child — this is the foundation of special education boarding schools.

In a boarding school, children with special needs are fully included. Instruction is not limited to the classroom. It extends to the playing field, dining hall, residence and community. Establishing a trajectory for a full and rewarding life is the ultimate goal.

Many of these schools employ two groups of professionals — one trained to teach academics in the classroom and the other trained to strengthen independent living skills in the residential setting. The collaboration of these two groups of educators is the true measure of the special education boarding school experience. Working together, they provide integrated instruction and ensure generalization of skills.

Frequently, in mainstream environments, children with more complex needs experience segregation and separation. Oftentimes they are accompanied by one-to-one aides to inclusion classes and/or isolated in resource rooms. At a special education boarding school, they are immersed and integrated. Children find themselves involved in everything. They enjoy typical adolescent activities and experiences. They discover they are not alone. The effect on their self-esteem is profound.

## PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION BOARDING SCHOOLS



The special education boarding school environment also has dramatic effects upon children's learning. So often in other settings, they are tracked with a small group of children whose learning needs, in many cases, are significantly different. At a boarding school, children develop and grow at their own pace.

Boarding schools provide students with a community of support. Everything is available in one place. Most of the experiences of a "typical middle/high school" life become open to them as well. Participation in sports, clubs, music, the arts, student government and prom is the norm. Weekends are filled with exciting options.

Above all, these schools provide students with a deep feeling of connection. The isolation is broken. Self-esteem flourishes. And children become resilient and redefine themselves.





*It helps to think of it not as a child leaving home. But as a child going on to greater opportunities.*



One of the toughest transitions for parents is when a child leaves home. It is both a sad moment and a proud one. It is a heartbreaking event, and a hopeful one too. This is true for all parents.

For parents of children with special needs, the thought of their son or daughter going away to school can be even more daunting.

However, once the right boarding school has been found, the decision becomes easier. And the transformation that takes place is extraordinary.

Boys and girls with disabilities have life-changing experiences in an environment designed to embrace them completely. They make friends, they become more self-aware and they come into their own. Their life's path is directed toward richer, more fulfilling horizons.

Families also experience a transformation. Parents no longer feel alone as they connect with others who have experienced similar challenges. Educators become partners in the journey; partners who are dedicated and invested in their child's future.

Often, when seen in this light, the decision becomes less about leaving home and more about going to the place of greatest opportunity for his or her education and life.

## WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD?



*Is it that your child doesn't fit into his or her school?  
Or the school doesn't fit your child?*

At some point during the process of evaluating schools and educational options you will no doubt want to sit down, consider the information, analyze your current situation and determine if a private special education boarding school is the right solution.

Parents intuitively know when their child's current program is not working. There are no phone calls from friends. There are no invitations to birthday parties. Instead of having weekend plans, the child has the empty feeling of not fitting in. As one boy said, "I have become invisible."

Fortunately, you can help your son or daughter long before his or her life reaches this point.

It is important to remember that many parents have walked the path you are now following. On the next page we have included a series of questions that will help with this crucial decision.



*Below is a series of questions that focus on your child's relationship to his or her current educational program.*

*Is my child frustrated with her current program?*

*Is he challenged enough?*

*Is she being pushed along?*

*Is my child feeling invisible in the mainstream?*

*Is she being grouped with more involved students and not fitting in?*

*Do his teachers understand his needs and know how he learns best?*

*Is my child missing out on typical age-appropriate academic and extracurricular experiences?*

*Does my child have real friends?*

*Does she ask those heartbreaking "whys" about friendships, exclusion, never being picked?*

*Does my child call him or herself stupid and give up easily?*

*Has he learned to rely on parents or other adults too much?*



*This series of questions addresses your relationship with your child's current educational program.*

*Am I frustrated with my child's current program?*

*Can my child's educational needs be met in a typical six-and-a-half-hour school day?*

*Am I trying to manage all aspects of my child's education and life?*

*Do I have to fight all the time for services for my child?*

*Am I utterly exhausted from the struggle?*

*Do I worry about the time I am not spending with my other children?*

*Do I worry about what I am not doing for my child with disabilities?*

*Do I constantly worry about the future?*

*Do I know enough about options beyond high school?*

*Do I have a solid transition plan for my child?*

*Is this program good enough? Is good enough good enough?*



Hopefully, these questions will have helped you come to a better understanding of where your child and your family are at this time.

The self-searching boils down to this: Which environment will best prepare my child for a full and meaningful life?

With the answers before you, it will become clear if things are working well or if *now* is the time to search for something better.

*One parent, when analyzing her relationship with the work she was doing on behalf of her child, came to this revelation — “Advocating for Karen has become my full-time job.”*



*Your child deserves more than simply an appropriate education.  
Your child deserves a world-class education.*

At the Riverview School, the promise of special education is being fulfilled every day. Children and their families are discovering the meaning of a fuller, richer life. And futures are being shaped.

Riverview is a community built around 50+ years of experience, expertise and understanding. The lives of countless children with complex learning disabilities and their families have been changed for the better on the School's Cape Cod campus. The School draws young people ages 12 to 22 from across the country and around the world.

The emphasis at Riverview is on the whole child. Students learn and live in a caring, structured and predictable environment. Different learning styles, interests and talents are respected. Children learn and grow with support and understanding.

The faculty is comprised of academic and residential staff. These two teams of experts work together to provide an integrated and individualized program for each and every student.

### *Riverview Mission Statement*

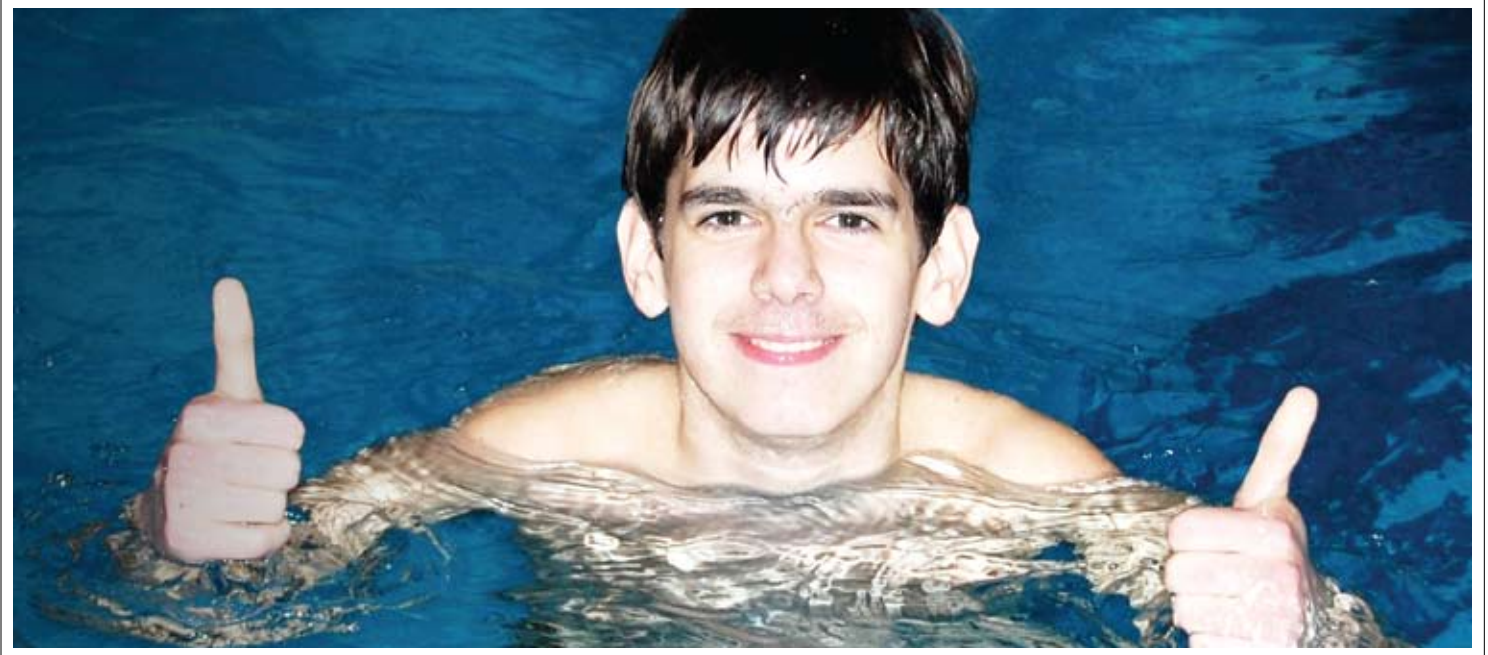
*Riverview School is an independent coeducational boarding school, providing a caring community for adolescents and young adults with complex language, learning and cognitive disabilities.*

*The School is committed to developing student competence and confidence in academic, social and independent living skills.*

## THE RIVERVIEW SCHOOL

More than an education.

*It's a transformation, for your child and his or her life.*



Attending the Riverview School is truly a life-changing experience for children. Having classmates who learn as they do is only the beginning. Young people acquire skills for life. The dormitory is more than a place to sleep and study. It is one of the most important classrooms on campus. From social skills and communication to laundry and cooking, the lessons last a lifetime.

Parents and family members are brought inside the circle of support as well. For the first time, parents find they have a trusted partner in their children's education and future. They make lasting connections with other parents. And they find their lives enriched as they watch the transformation of their sons and daughters.

There is one regret that many parents of Riverview students express time and time again—"I wish I had known about Riverview sooner." Don't let it be yours — contact the Riverview School today.

## IN THE WORDS OF OUR PARENTS

“Sarah told me that she loved Riverview, had signed up for the team, had already played basketball with her friends, enjoyed math class, liked the food, was making friends, and didn’t want to go back to her old high school.”

“Sending Peter to Riverview was a difficult decision for us. It was the right thing to do, however. Thank you for providing such a wonderful and supportive environment for my child and all the others who have fallen through the cracks for so long.”

“Thank you for the wonderful Fall Family Weekend. I can’t stop thinking about how happy Emily and all the other students were. Emily is 15 and this is the first time I saw her laughing and having fun just like other high schoolers.”

“When I dropped Michael off on Sunday we walked by the athletic field and at least six kids yelled out greetings to Michael and asked him about joining them after he got unpacked. I’ve never seen Michael experience that type of greeting from friends before and I could have cried.”

“Thank you for letting us know that Jen was ‘Person of the Day.’ It must have been quite a thrill for her. In just one short month Jen has enjoyed so many experiences she never had in 9 years of public school! I am SO grateful that we found Riverview School, even if it was later rather than sooner.”

“While Jim was home for Thanksgiving, he picked up the newspaper and started reading the front page. John and I were astounded by his reading and confidence. So much progress in a few short months!”

“The simple words my son spoke carried the weight of the *Titanic*: ‘Mom, I really like this school.’”



If your child meets eight of the following criteria, he or she may be a candidate for the Riverview program:

- *WISC or WAIS scores between 70–100.*
- *Socially isolated or rejected, difficulty making friends.*
- *Sweet, gentle, naïve and immature (no significant behavioral or emotional problems).*
- *Poor self-concept.*
- *Relates better to younger students and adults than to same-age peers.*
- *Mild medical issues that complicate — but not compromise — daily activities.*
- *Seeks typical teenage opportunities such as playing on a sports team, participating in student government, attending dances, etc.*
- *Diagnosed attentional and learning problems.*
- *Responds well to a structured, supportive, predictable environment.*
- *Has mastered basic daily living skills, but needs instruction in life skills.*
- *Has a supportive family with realistic goals and a recognition of the importance of homeschool communication and cooperation.*