When your child struggles socially

Tips for your school visit

- Check out the resources: Make sure the school has the resources required to support your child. Does it have a counselling centre and what does it look like? Does it have onsite psychologists or social workers? Does it have a health and wellness program?
- Observe the environment up close: Where do people gather? Are teachers interacting with students outside the classroom? Is there happy banter in the hallways or do students walk with their eyes down, focused only on their destination? How do students interact with each other? Are there lots of hugs and high-fives? Are students respectful of each other? Is there any graffiti in the washroom, and if so, what does it say?.
- Talk to students: Ask them lots of questions, making them as specific and personal as possible. For instance, instead of asking a student, "What's the social climate like at your school?" ask, "What was it like trying to make friends when you first started here?" You're more likely to get honest and detailed answers this way, especially if you're out of earshot of school officials.

Questions to ask schools

- **Student community:** What is your student community like? Is it close-knit and cohesive? Is it inclusive? Do kids generally get along?
- **Student conflict:** How do you deal with student conflict in class and out? What is your policy regarding bullying and how is this communicated to students and staff? How do you try to prevent bullying and other unacceptable behaviour? Are there penalties?
- Support systems: What student support systems do you have in place? Do you have onsite guidance counsellors, social workers, or psychologists? Do you have a mental health and wellness program?
- Class sizes: What are your class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios?
- Values: What kinds of values do you try to instill in your students? For instance, do you emphasize kindness and inclusivity, and if so, how? Does your curriculum include character education? If so, how?
- **Positive interactions:** How do you promote positive interactions between students, in class and out? (<u>Catherine Wang</u>, who was looking for a girls-only school for her daughter Skyler, offered this: "I asked the girls' schools how they make sure that the girls aren't in a clique, and all those fundamental questions about mean girls and the possible dynamics that were making me a bit nervous about <u>putting her into an all-girls</u> <u>school</u>. They had great responses, like they're very careful to watch the social dynamics. They're strategic when they put classes together.")
- Social skills: How do you help kids with their social skills like cooperation, sharing, listening, respecting personal space, communication, reading body language, and empathy?

