

Beware the School District Map, It Could Cost You in Real Estate

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A big part of many homebuyers' real estate search includes researching school districts. As we've highlighted previously on realtor.com®, [school districts affect home prices](#) in a clear and measurable way. Buying the right home, near the right school, can significantly affect your home's value, as well as the education of your children.

What's missing in a lot of consumers' research, however, is a guide for finding that information. A plethora of sources online purport to be the primary source for school information, but very few will actually tell you whether an individual home is in a particular district. Even more disturbing, some of them will attempt to give you that information without being particularly accurate in their results.

School districts' maps are confusing. The boundary lines can look like a set of streams running back and forth through a city. They have nooks and crannies that seem geographically implausible, but to disregard them would be foolish.



Some real estate-related sites attempt to match the nearest school to the nearest house, but this is a dangerous way to make a determination. Relying on the proximity of a house to a neighborhood school is one of the most common mistakes made by homebuyers.

To add more uncertainty, school district boundaries can change every year. There are some websites that attempt to integrate school boundary maps into their logic, which is a good start, but they can't be up to date with every district in every city, nationwide, on a year-round basis. Even local homeowners with children in the schools, the people closest to the situation, can be caught off-guard when a district map changes. When people say "All real estate is local," they're particularly correct when it comes to school districts.

What, then, is your best method of verifying a home's designated public schools? Try the actual real estate listing first. This isn't a foolproof solution, but real estate agents have almost always asked the homeowner in which district their home resides. The homeowner is usually one of the most-informed people you can rely upon. Most of the time, when a real estate listing indicates a

school or school district, the homeowner and their REALTOR® have verified this information, as it could create future liability if they disclosed it incorrectly.

Don't let that stop you from going straight to the source, however. When you're serious about a particular property, call that school district directly and verify the home is indeed part of their territory. Make sure that the individual schools you want are specifically designated for that home. Don't rely on a map that could be outdated.

Take it even further and ask the district staff if there are any upcoming plans for redistricting, discussions of future redistricting, or policies in which students from some areas are bused to other districts. If there are, there will be notes from previous meetings you will want to review, and future events you may want to attend. You could ask your REALTOR® to do some of this research for you as well, but make sure you personally verify it to your own satisfaction.

The last home I purchased was in a tiny, outlying appendage of a school district boundary map. While scores aren't the only way to judge a school's value, my home's designated elementary school was rated as a "10." Just over a block away, the designated school was rated a "5." The value of the real estate I was purchasing was significantly greater because of its connection to a school community that placed a lot of emphasis on education.

School districts matter. Whether or not you have school-age children, the schools that are accessible based on your home's location give significant weight to the home's value. "Buyer beware" has always been a pragmatic mindset for house

hunters, and it applies particularly to investigating school districts. Don't trust the first source you bump into. Your investment is significant, and the financial consequences require that you go directly to the source for school district information. In doing so, you, and your REALTOR®, will feel more confident and secure about your decision to buy.