

## A minority student's guide to attending an independent school

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**Rachel Woods**



### A minority student's guide to attending an independent school

Having the opportunity to attend an independent school, also known as a private school, can be an honor. But sometimes it can be challenging to adjust to for some African-American and other minority students.

Of course, the academics are challenging as well, but the social transition from a school where you were part of the majority to a school that is mostly White, can be most difficult.

At first, it's hard to get used to such an uneasy environment, but here are a few tips to help you get acclimated, if you happen to be in such a situation. This authentic advice comes from my personal experience with others and myself, being a private school student and African-American.

Be yourself. Don't have an identity crisis if you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation. If you change who you are to conform, you'll lose everything that makes you unique. Just put yourself out there, and you'll be surprised at how far it gets you. Private school is challenging enough, and you shouldn't add the pressure of trying to be someone you're not.

Find common interests. Join a team or a club, not for the type of people in it, but the fact that you like, and the rest will follow. Just because someone doesn't look or talk like you do, doesn't mean that they won't like the same things as you. If you're with people who have similar hobbies or interests, you'll make fast friends, and through it all the color of your skin

versus theirs won't matter.

Stay positive. In some cases, in school and life, others might not be used to being around minorities, and are still adjusting, just as you are. Maybe some of your classmates might not ever warm up to you, which can be typical at any school. But that's their loss. Just keep your head up and ignore those who don't want to get to know you. Spend your time with people who want to spend time with you, regardless of your race. And don't forget to branch out. Although your comfort zone may be with other African-Americans, don't be afraid of going beyond, and making friends from different backgrounds than yours. If you do, it may be a good learning experience, and make you more open-minded.

Don't be ashamed. Because you go to a private school, some people may think that you're a "geek," or are outrageously smart. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be proud that you were accepted to a great school. Don't be too proud, either. You should never think that you're better than other kids who don't attend private schools. We all have our own unique talents and personalities, and you have to embrace those differences both in and out of school. Just shrug off the people who won't stop bothering you about going to a different school, and focus on the positives in your life. After all, you are receiving a great, unique education.

Don't be ashamed (if you need some financial help). In most private schools, many students can afford its high tuition cost with little help. But if you and your parents can't, that doesn't mean you have to go to a different school. That's where financial aid comes in, and it's a great thing. If you need help paying for your tuition, don't hide it just because your friends may not. Everyone has a different situation, and people understand that private school is expensive.

There are lots of financial aid opportunities, especially for minorities. Organizations like FAME, the Fund for the Advancement of Minorities through Education, are more than willing to help your family pay for a good education. There's no reason to be ashamed. In fact, you should feel honored that you were chosen by an organization to represent them. It obviously means that they think you are intelligent and have great potential. When it comes down to it, you're there to learn, too, and you have as much a right to be there as everyone else.

The most important thing is to not be afraid of change. Take risks while you can, and take advantage of such an eye-opening opportunity. It may not be easy to be exposed to a different world than the one you're used to, but it's a worthwhile experience. When you look back on the time you spent at our school, you'll see how much it prepared you for the real world.

*(Rachel Woods is a 15-year-old intern with the New Pittsburgh Courier.)*