

How
To
Choose
A Preschool

A short guide presented by



Introduction

We understand that choosing a preschool for your child can be overwhelming. Even the big chain day care centers typically cost as much as a used car, each and every year, and a really good preschool can be even more. Beyond these financial considerations, most parents worry whether their child will be happy at a school and whether he or she will get the academic enrichment the school promises. We hope this short guide can help you to evaluate your options.



Some Categories of Things to Consider



Teacher qualifications

Are the teachers properly trained? Better classrooms will have teachers who have been certified by an accrediting body, for example real Montessori teachers must be certified by [MACTE](#). Some

preschools require their teachers to have degrees in Early Childhood Education. In weaker classrooms, the teachers may only have the minimum amount of training the law requires, often as few as 80 hours.

Teacher Experience and Turnover

Teachers get better with experience, and students suffer with too much turnover. Better schools will have more experienced teachers mentor newer teachers and support them with additional training and feedback. Weaker schools have much more frequent staff turnover.

The newest teachers (who may have little work experience of any kind) are given inadequate support.



Child Centeredness

To understand the world of the child it can help to get down at

their level. What does it look like? The world is built for able bodied, tall adults, and can seem imposing and difficult to a young child. A preschool should be child-centered, with tables, chairs, door handles and windows all at a child's height. Pictures should not be hung so high that a child can't appreciate them. When appropriate, adults should sit or crouch down when working with children. Children's opinions and interests should be taken into account.

Classroom stability

Your child should know what to expect on a given day. Your child should be in the same class with the same friends, every day. Except on those rare absences when a staff member is ill, he or she should find the same adults in the classroom.



We've seen plenty of schools where this is not true: schools where staff to child ratios are kept at the legal minimum, and on any given day the children may be unsure who will be working with them or what room they will be in.

Classroom appearance

When you visit a school, ask your self – is this a classroom where I would want to spend hours every day? Children are very sensitive to their environments. Inexpensive daycares tend to be loud, with their walls plastered with posters and artwork. Toys will litter the floor, or be placed haphazardly around the room.



According to the [American Montessori Society](#) you should look for a classroom that “is clean, well-organized, and inviting, with soft

colors and uncluttered spaces that help children feel focused and calm. Instead of desks, you'll see spaces suited to group activity, and rugs and couches where a child can settle in alone." A good preschool classroom will have different curriculum areas laid out, so that learning materials are grouped according to what they are used to teach. We recommend you look for spacious rooms with natural light. We prefer materials and furniture made out of wood or using more neutral colors, rather than littered with brightly colored plastic.

Flexibility

Children have different interests and strengths. Does the preschool require all children to perform the same actions at the same time throughout the day? For instance, in some



daycare centers children must all make the same craft project at the same time. Or everything is done by group lesson, so children who know their alphabets must say the ABCs alongside children who are not yet readers. What if your son or daughter is cranky that day and needs some special attention? Better schools will understand that each child as an individual and endeavor to give them choices where possible.



Kindness

Better preschools treat children with respect, and in turn these children treat each other with respect. Parents who have only seen the anarchy of daycares are often shocked when they see how young

children behave in a good school. Voices are kept lowered, children and adults are kind to each other, and children work together in a calm and respectful manner. When disagreements arise, teachers do not snap at children or tug at them harshly, and children do not punch or kick. In Montessori we teach emotional intelligence with our “peace curriculum” that helps children to understand each other and resolve disputes without adult intervention.

Long Term Plan

Children adjust well to changes. We’ve seen many children, including our own, successfully adjust to traditional elementary schools after years in a Montessori preschool. If it is your goal to minimize school changes in the future, you may wish to look only at schools that offer Elementary, Middle School or even High School programs. On the other hand, making new friends gives older children a change to grow and reinvent themselves. Ultimately, you know your child and are best prepared to figure out if a school fits into your family’s long term plan.

School Philosophy

Although we firmly believe in the Montessori method, there are many wonderful schools that follow other approaches, for example Waldorf or Reggio Emilia. What good schools have in common is that they understand that children learn through exploration and discovery, rather than by having facts drilled into them. In educational



philosophy, this is called “constructivism”, and it has been born out by numerous scientific studies. If a school can’t articulate its philosophy, give it a hard pass. Likewise, if its philosophy is memorization of everything (for example, “whole language” reading rather than phonetics) then this is probably not a good choice for your child.



How do you feel?

Sometimes a wonderful school just isn’t right for your family. Sometimes the best academic environment isn’t the best emotional fit for your child. We recommend touring each school twice, first without your child if at all possible, and then once with your child. How did it go? Did he or she like the school and have fun? Was the administration friendly? Did you feel welcomed and happy in that environment? We do not recommend discounting these feelings. This does not mean that great schools don’t have off days, or that feeling some slight discomfort should outweigh every other choice. Treat these feelings as a piece of evidence.

Rating systems

Many states have systems where the government helps to rate a school. For example, in North Carolina we have the STARS system. We do not recommend you pay much attention to rating systems for four reasons:

- 1) They are usually based on outdated systems (such as ECERS-2) which penalizes schools for things they may



not choose to possess, like dress up clothes or number of scissors per classroom.

- 2) Getting rated is an optional process that schools may elect not to go through for many reasons, including cost.
- 3) Ratings systems often undervalue teacher qualifications, for example equating 80 hours of in-service training with a year long effort of getting a teaching certificate.
- 4) Ratings systems usually don't take child psychology into sufficient account. For example, according to some QRIS systems, a noisy, messy classroom which is decorated chaotically may still receive the highest scores. Another example is that ratings systems don't usually factor in the classroom stability or turnover that we discussed earlier.



We hope you found this document useful.

For more information about Renaissance or to schedule a visit:

WWW.RENAISSANCESCHOLARS.COM

610 Nottingham Drive

Cary, NC 27511

(919) 439-0130

CaryMontessori@gmail.com