A Parent's Guide

Six Questions to Ask When Choosing a Preschool
What is the philosophy of the school?

Q1

Does the curriculum allow for student choice? Does the staff meet the needs of the whole child: mind, body, and spirit? Is there a focus placed on differentiated education and meeting the needs of the child as an individual?

There are many philosophies of education and you will have choices when choosing a school for your child. Traditional education has been the standard that many parents are familiar with, and is likely what they experienced as children. Especially if traditional education is not a fit, it is important that you learn about the curriculum and the beliefs of the staff and faculty.

Jeanine Cambra, Executive Director at Early Education, Inc. says, "Parents must be connected to the curriculum and the staff. The school parents choose for their children has to fit with their lifestyle and goals they have for their little ones."
How does the school communicate with parents?

The school you choose should have open lines of communication. As a parent, it’s about making connections, being heard, and teachers including you in the education of your child.

Families should be welcomed and encouraged to bring questions, comments, and concerns to teachers and staff and should be able to communicate in a variety of ways. Are you able to speak with teachers on the fly for a minute or two, can you schedule a meeting that may take a bit longer, can you call, can you email? Does the school actively communicate with parents in a variety of ways? There should be weekly communications about the progress your child’s class is making in the curriculum, student progress, and goings-on at the school.

There should be individual progress meetings during the year where there is dedicated time to speak about the gains your child is making throughout the year. Does the school offer a forum for parents to come to the school in a social way to get to know teachers on a deeper level?
Does the school support your lifestyle and family values?

Q3

The school that is the best match for you, your little one, and your entire family should be an extension of your family beliefs and values.

Is it important that religion be part of your child's school experience?

Do you live a healthy lifestyle and want organic snacks and an eco-friendly school?

Do you support independence and creativity and want a school that allows for exploration?

The school that is the best fit builds on what you do at home and helps to build a deeper connection to your lifestyle and family values.
What are the qualifications of the staff?

Q4

The teachers should be state certified to work with children in preschool. If you are looking at a school with a specialized philosophy, like Montessori or Waldorff, staff should also have further training and be certified in the philosophy that fuels the ideals of the school.

Additionally, staff should engage in regular professional development, and should be first aid and CPR certified.

Does the staff place an importance on growing professionally? Do they attend conferences, online trainings, in-house trainings, engage in book studies, and continually learn to improve their knowledge, understanding, and skills in educating preschoolers?
What does a daily schedule look like?

Q5

It's important for your child's school to have a prescribed routine that includes uninterrupted work periods, time for snacking, napping, fine and gross motor skill building and socialization. All of the activities listed are important for the physical, neurological, and social development of preschoolers.

Having a predictable routine allows children to feel safe as they know what to expect and what comes next. Routines are like instructions that help children complete a task and also provide the repetition necessary for learning.
Words like *guide*, *redirect*, and *positive choices* should surround any discussion about student behaviors at school.

Preschoolers are continually learning how to interact in the world and make sense of things around them. This means there will be mistakes and it should be the philosophy of the teacher that students need gentle support to learn how to make a more positive choice next time.

Teachers should also model positive behaviors in school and be the role models your children will learn from as they embark on their early start in life.

It is also important for teachers to support and model conflict resolution skills for peer relationships. Does the school provide guidance for children to work out minor disagreements together? Is there a support for students to voice their concerns, be heard, and find resolution to a situation that is important to them?
Choosing a preschool is an extremely important and individual decision that families make. Being informed is an important step in making the right choice.

The questions in this guide may be only the starting point.

Before you head to the school, take a look at the website. Ask to speak with current parents for referrals, meet the staff who will be working with your children, and ask the questions you need answered in order to feel 100% sure you have made the right decision.