Finding High-Quality Pre-K

Checklist

This checklist is designed to help families select the right pre-k program for their children. It includes the program qualities and components that research says are most important for a child's growth and development. It does not cover either basic health and safety standards that all licensed programs must meet and which vary by state or whether nutritious meals and snacks are provided.

Use the checklist when interviewing the school principal or pre-k center director and as a guide for your observation of the pre-k classroom. To find the best available pre-k program, you may need to visit two or three centers. Remember, this is only a tool to help guide your decision. You know your child best; so, ultimately, you must decide which program will best prepare your child for school.

Before You Go

Ask the school, or look on the school's website for a copy of the program's learning goals, discipline policy, and other information.

Ask yourself:

1. Do the program's stated goals match my own goals for my child?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Do the goals address all areas of my child's development: social play and control of emotions; language skills; familiarity with letters and numbers; science, art, and physical development?
   - Yes
   - No

3. Am I comfortable with the discipline policy?
   - Yes
   - No

Pre-K Program Information

- Name of School or Center
- Address
- Contact Person (Director / Teacher / Principal)
- Phone Number
- Date of Visit (Month / Day / Year)
- Time of Visit
- Days / Hours of Operation
- Cost (if not funded through state and local funds)
- Deposit
- Holiday Schedule
- Government
- School
- Other
- Program Schedule
- Half Day
- Full Day
- School Year
- Year Round

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Ask these questions:

4. Does the program have a state license, or if not, is it exempt from state licensing because it meets the school district’s standards instead?
   - Yes
   - No

5. If the state has a quality rating system, does this program have the top ranking?
   - Yes
   - No
   - N/A

6. Is the program accredited by a national, regional, or state accreditation entity such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the American Montessori Society?
   - Yes
   - No

7. Does the lead teacher have a bachelor’s degree?
   - Yes
   - No

8. Does he/she have certification in early childhood education?
   - Yes
   - No

9. Does the classroom aide have specialized training in early childhood development?
   - Yes
   - No

10. Have the majority of the teachers been at the program for at least three years?
    - Yes
    - No

11. Do the teachers participate in 12 hours or more of in-service training each year?
    - Yes
    - No

12. Is there a system for helping teachers improve their teaching expertise?
    - Yes
    - No

13. Is there at least one teacher for every 10 children?
    - Yes
    - No

14. Are there no more than 20 children in a class?
    - Yes
    - No

15. Does the room have separate learning centers (reading, art, dramatic play, writing, blocks, etc.) with interesting equipment and materials to encourage learning?
    - Yes
    - No

16. Does the program use a well-known, quality, pre-k curriculum to guide what is taught?
    - Yes
    - No

If yes:

17. Does the curriculum prepare children for kindergarten based on the state standards for school readiness?
    - Yes
    - No

18. Does the curriculum take into account the various learning styles, cultures, disabilities, and languages of the children and their families?
    - Yes
    - No

19. Does the curriculum provide opportunities for the children to explore topics in detail and in multiple ways?
    - Yes
    - No

20. Does the class follow a daily routine that offers a variety of activities throughout the day (i.e., art, make-believe play, outside play, reading, and science activities)
    - Yes
    - No

21. Do children have outdoor unstructured playtime every day, except when the weather is extreme?
    - Yes
    - No

22. Does the class take at least two field trips a year?
    - Yes
    - No

23. Do activities change regularly so the children have a chance to learn new skills?
    - Yes
    - No
21. Do teachers have access to trained professionals such as a social worker, mental health consultant, and/or behavior specialist to help children who have challenging behaviors or attention problems?
- Yes  
- No

22. If a child has a disability or special needs, does the school provide accommodations and support?
- Yes  
- No

23. Are parents welcome to drop in without making an appointment?
- Yes  
- No

24. Does the teacher have face-to-face or phone contact or provide regular e-mail or written reports with parent(s) at least twice a month?
- Yes  
- No

25. Does the program hold parent/teacher conferences at least twice a year?
- Yes  
- No

26. Does the school have a number of ways for the parent(s) to be involved and help their child at home? (i.e. a school newsletter, classroom volunteers, family events, book or toy lending library)
- Yes  
- No

27. Does the teacher keep the parent(s) regularly informed of the child's progress and school activities in a language they can understand?
- Yes  
- No

If yes, how often?
______________________________ times per ____________

If the teacher does not speak the family's language, how do they communicate?

Spend at least an hour in the classroom.

Ask yourself:
28. Do I feel welcome?
- Yes  
- No

29. Are the teachers warm and caring with the children?
- Yes  
- No

30. Do the teachers handle problems and conflicts in a positive manner?
- Yes  
- No

31. Do teachers have one-on-one conversations with children?
- Yes  
- No

32. Do teachers work with children individually and in small groups of three or four?
- Yes  
- No

33. Does staff show acceptance and respect to all children regardless of culture, race, language, or disability?
- Yes  
- No

34. Do the children appear to be happy and engaged in activities?
- Yes  
- No

35. Do the children have opportunities to select what they want to do at times throughout the day?
- Yes  
- No

36. Are the children talking and interacting with each other?
- Yes  
- No

37. Do the children seem to be working well with one another (sharing, playing cooperatively, and taking turns)?
- Yes  
- No
38. Do you see evidence that the teachers use a variety of methods to teach letters, numbers, shapes, and new vocabulary words?  
- Yes  - No

39. Does the classroom have a library with a variety of books and other reading material?  
- Yes  - No

   If yes, are the books in good condition and attractively displayed?  
- Yes  - No

   If yes, are there books in the appropriate languages for the children who don't speak English?  
- Yes  - No

40. Do the teachers encourage hands-on learning such as learning science concepts with water and sand or math through cooking?  
- Yes  - No

41. Do the display areas on the walls contain children’s artwork, writing samples, and photographs of class projects or activities?  
- Yes  - No

42. Are the furniture, playground equipment, and toys age appropriate, clean, and in good condition?  
- Yes  - No

43. When the children are outside, are the teachers engaged in and encouraging the children’s play?  
- Yes  - No

44. Does each child have enough room indoors and outdoors to move around without interfering with other children’s play space?  
- Yes  - No

One of the best ways to decide whether this program is right for your child may be to talk to other parents who have enrolled their children in the program. Ask for phone numbers or email addresses of some of these parents as references.

Notes

For more information on high-quality pre-k please visit www.preknow.org.