



Preschool Selection Guide for Parents of Young Children

These guidelines grew out of many conversations we have had over recent years with parents of young children as they think about how to select the best preschool or early education experience for their child. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool's experienced staff would be happy to discuss its approach to early childhood education. Please contact Kelly Perez, Preschool Director, at 773 665-8052, ext. 120 or visit our website at www.smartlovespreschool.org.

Initial considerations

- Does the school follow a specific educational philosophy? Parents might want to gain some familiarity with the school's philosophy to see if it makes sense for their family.
- Is the school a daycare facility or is it a dedicated preschool? What is the main focus of the facility?
- How long are the school days? Consider how long of a school day you feel is best for your child.
- Does the school require your child to be a certain age by a certain date in order to attend? Can your child begin as soon as he or she reaches the program's minimum age?
- Does the school have an application deadline or rolling admissions?
- Is your child required to be toilet trained when he or she starts school? Consider your child's readiness for toilet training if it is required.
- What is the cost of tuition? Is financial aid available?
- Are parents expected to make financial contributions outside of tuition? If so, how significant are the additional contributions and how much pressure is placed on parents to donate?

The school's approach to education

- Does the school meet curriculum and early childhood state standard benchmarks?

- Does the school focus on teaching children specific knowledge or inspiring the love of learning?
- How is play incorporated into the learning process?
- How much time is spent by the children sitting and listening to a teacher versus engaging in hands-on activities?
- Are there specific times for exploring language, math, science, art, music, social science, drama, and physical activity, or are they incorporated naturally within activities?
- Are the same teachers with the children throughout the day?
- Over the course of the day, how many transitions are there for the children (e.g. arrival, circle time, outside play, snack, dismissal) and how are they handled by the staff?
- Are outdoor activities offered? When children are outdoors, do teachers mainly act as supervisors or do they stimulate outdoor games and interests?

The school's staff

- What are staff qualifications?
- Is training offered to staff?
- Does the school support staff efforts to pursue continuing education opportunities?
- What is staff turnover like?
- Is the staff supportive of one another?

The school's approach to social/emotional health and discipline

- What is the school's orientation process? How long can a parent/caregiver stay with the child?
- If the preschool has returning children, how does the school incorporate new children into the program?
- How does the staff prepare children for transitions throughout the day? If a child has difficulty making a transition, how does the staff help the child?
- Are children involved in the process of rulemaking?
- How are rules expressed to the children?

- How are children disciplined?
- How does the school handle physical aggression from children such as hitting or biting? How is it handled both with the children and the parents?

The parent experience

- Does the school offer parent support/education?
- Are there events for parent socializing?
- Are there opportunities for parents to get involved?
- How does the school communicate with parents? How freely?
- How frequent are parent teacher conferences and how available are staff to parents?
- Are parents allowed to communicate with teachers through email?
- Does the preschool offer any help to parents when their children transition to elementary school?
- If the preschool follows a specific educational philosophy, how does the school help parents transition their children to a new school that follows a different approach?

The classroom visit

- One very important guide when looking for a preschool is how your child enjoys the classroom visit and the impression you receive from the children and teachers in the classroom community.
- Do you believe that your child would feel happy and confident there?
- Does the classroom look clean? Safe? Are there engaging play areas?
- Is the staff fully engaged with the children? Did you get a sense of joy from the children and the teachers' interactions with the children?
- Are teachers flexible and supportive of children's learning interests and stimulating as well? (Do teachers engage the children by asking "I wonder..." rather than saying "This is what we're doing.")
- Are the teachers compassionate with children's feelings or do they focus on managing behaviors? (Telling children what to do frequently instead of mainly modeling.)

- Does the learning feel unpressured and positive?
- Does the school day feel unhurried or like children are being rushed?
- Do you feel the teachers have a strong understanding of each child and that their interactions are warm and positive?
- Do you feel the teaching staff spends some time with each child in the class either one-to-one or in small groups?
- Are snack and mealtimes unhurried and enjoyable? Do the teachers eat with the children?
- How much choice and creativity is involved in classroom activities and do the activities seem inviting and stimulating?
- How are trips to the bathroom offered to children? Are all of the children taken to the bathroom at one time? Are the children free to use the bathroom when they wish?
- If the children need guidance, do the children turn to the teacher for comfort or soothing?
- Do the children seem to know what to expect in their day and demonstrate confidence and competence in what they can do with each other and independently?
- How are arrivals and dismissals handled? Do the children make the transition comfortably? Is the process organized and safe?