

SCHOOL COMPARISON CHECKLIST (Pre-K/Kindergarten)

Introduction:

Finding a quality Pre-Kindergarten and/or Kindergarten should be a top priority for parents whose children are just beginning formal instruction. Several factors must be considered in choosing the appropriate facility: safety, development of social skills, and learning through play. This checklist was developed with these factors in mind.

Although many parents see a number of copied materials in classes and children sitting quietly and deem this as appropriate instruction for children at this age, in fact, it is quite the opposite. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old require a lot of movement and creativity in their learning. When visiting potential sites, these must be heavily weighted and taken into consideration.

Instructions:

1. Review this document prior to visiting any sites.
2. Write the names of the top three schools/centers at the top of page 1 and schedule visits to each of these sites. Be sure to bring this checklist with you.
3. Each site has its own column so as you are walking through, be sure to record your observations. Seeing with your own eyes is better than someone giving you the information. If something is not visible, ask questions and record your information. Following the walk-through, if there are any blank spots on this document, ask those questions and record your answers before leaving the site.
4. Although most items on the Checklist are self-explanatory, there are a few that may need clarification. These are listed here. If there are any additional questions, please do not hesitate to email edmondeducational@outlook.com.

a. **General – At least 5 of 6 of these items should be fulfilled by the site:**

- i. There should be at least one certified staff member in each class (5 classes, 5 certified staff)
- ii. Interventions: Do teachers complete any additional activities with students when s/he sees a student not making developmental progress in a particular area?
- iii. Does the school have assemblies or other activities for which families can participate?

b. **Assessments – Both of the items in this category should be completed:**

- i. Teachers should keep record of children to see their developmental ongoing progress. For example, not all children will know the letters of the alphabet at the same time. Some children may not know any, some will know just a few letters, some may know about half, and one or two may know all and can write them as well.
- ii. Some type of formal assessment (called a screener) should be used by the site to gauge students' developmental progress as well. The staff should be able to tell the parent/caregiver the name of this assessment. It should be given three times per year.

c. **Classroom Observations – At least 12 of the 14 criteria should be met by the site:**

- i. All activities should be “play-based” meaning that everything should be fun for the children. Play is the way that children at these ages learn. Children should not sit at tables for long periods of time completing worksheets. What looks like fun time for children is actually learning time for them, even when they are sitting on the carpet and discussing the weather, calendar, etc., it should be fun and engaging.
- ii. “Productive Noise” means that children should be able to talk to each other while completing activities. The classroom should not be completely silent unless children are taking a nap. Even at that time, there may be soft music playing or children quietly looking at books if they are unable to fall asleep.
- iii. The teachers should be talking to the students and having real conversations as they play. Teachers should not be doing other activities while the children are playing.
- iv. Student Work – although there may be a few dittos around the classroom, most, if not all of the work posted should be student created. This means that not all students have the same page in which they



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had to color in, but they actually cut, drawn, to create their own masterpieces. This enhances children's creativity. Look for mostly student-created work throughout the room.

- v. Learning Centers should be available for children to play. There should be a variety of centers and they should be labeled. Some that may be visible are: Dramatic Play, Science, Manipulatives (puzzles, linking blocks, etc.), Writing, Library, Blocks, Art, Technology, Sand/Water Table, and the list goes on....
- vi. Children at this age should be allowed to select the centers in which they prefer to play for the day. This fosters independence and decision-making. Often times, classes will tell students where to play which is not a benefit.
- vii. Print Rich Environment means that there should be print throughout the classroom. Not only should one see the alphabet, calendar, and student work posted, there should be labels in both English and another language, the primary language of second language learning children in the school. Spanish might be a second labeling (but there should be at least two labels). Labels might be one word or in a sentence and should be at the eye level of the children. Environmental print might also be evident (words frequently seen around town that children can easily identify i.e., Walmart, ice cream, Wawa, Rita's, etc.)
- viii. Writing materials should consist of not only pencils (fat ones for 3 year olds to easily grip) but crayons, markers, ink pens, stamps, a variety of paper, etc.
- ix. Family Style Lunch is where children assist in setting the table, serve themselves, sit together (with the teachers, and socialize while eating. Although many sites do not offer this option, it is the best option for children at this age as it builds their independence and social skills.

d. Rigor – 4 of 5 should be met

- i. Books read to the children should be a mix of fiction and non-fiction. Teachers should discuss concepts of print (reading left to right, from top to bottom, front and back of the book, etc.) and ask questions while reading to the children. Children should be able to discuss questions with their friends before giving an answer to the teacher. Not all children might be sitting "Indian Style" during reading but might be stretched out on the rug or sitting in a bean bag chair. The important thing to notice is if they are engaged (paying attention) with the text (be it fiction or non-fiction) and the discussions.
- ii. There should be a large amount of math activities going on throughout the day. Counting on, using manipulatives, clapping, singing, identifying numbers, etc., are all math concepts that are important at this age.

e. Parent Involvement – 3 of 3 should be met

- i. A variety of parent activities should be available in which to participate. Parents should be able to spend time in classes or visit classes at any time throughout the day. Going on trips, assisting with activities, and attending parent meetings should be a normal part of participation.
5. The school that has the most items listed here should be considered as the top choice. Of course the parents may consider other factors such as location or proximity to home/work, cost (if there is any), etc.

Best wishes in your search!!



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SCHOOL NAMES:	1)	2)	3)
GENERAL (5 out of 6)			
Class sizes (record student/teacher ratio) (8 to 1, 9 to 1, or 10 to 1 are acceptable ratios for 3 year olds through Kindergarten, respectively)			
% of certified staff?			
Interventions for students not making progress?			
Activities for advanced students?			
Extra-curricular activities?			
Do Teachers have familiarity and affiliation with National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and local affiliates (i.e., First Up, PA Keys, etc.)?			
NOTES			
ASSESSMENTS (2 of 2)			
Screening assessment used (write names)			
Other progress monitoring assessments used? What type? (anecdotal notes, pictures, portfolios, program assessments)			
NOTES			
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS (12 of 14)			
Desks/Tables arranged in (for) groups			
“Productive” noise in classes			
Variety of books and magazines available to students (F= fiction, N=non-fiction, P=poetry)			
Student work posted (dittos or student created)?			
How many learning centers are available? (names of centers, i.e., dramatic play, science...)			
Free choice for center time activities?			
Nap time? How long?			
Are cots/mats wiped down following nap time?			
Print rich environment? Classroom labels (in multiple languages)? Posted schedule?			



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SCHOOL NAMES:	1)	2)	3)
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS (con't) <i>(14 of 16)</i>			
Variety of writing materials available for students to use? (not just tracing materials)			
Family style lunch served?			
Nursery rhymes/fingerplays throughout the day?			
Lots of discussion (both student focused and Teacher-directed)?			
Plenty of manipulatives available? (puzzles, linking cubes, chips, etc.)			
Materials and visuals are at children's eye level?			
Gross Motor play? How much/often? Activities? Outdoor and Indoor?			
NOTES			
RIGOR (4 of 5)			
Informational Text (Non-fiction) used in activities?			
Literature (Fiction) used in activities?			
Lower and higher level questions being asked?			
Children can respond to questioning?			
Children can explain what they are doing?			
NOTES			
PARENT INVOLVEMENT (3 out of 3)			
How often are Parent/Caregiver Meetings?			
Agendas for previous meetings available?			
Additional activities are available for parents/caregivers to do? YES NO			
What are they? (Parental Involvement)			
NOTES			

