

# 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

:                       AM                       PM

\_\_\_\_\_  
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

## Meet With the Principal or Program Director

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 teacher use a well-known, quality, pre-k curriculum to guide what is taught?  
 Yes     No  
  
If yes:  
Does the curriculum prepare children for kindergarten based on the state standards for school readiness?  
 Yes     No  
  
Does the curriculum take into account the various learning styles, cultures, disabilities, and languages of the children and their families?  
 Yes     No  
  
Does the curriculum provide opportunities for the children to explore topics in detail and in multiple ways?  
 Yes     No
17. 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
18. Do children have outdoor unstructured playtime every day, except when the weather is extreme?  
 Yes     No
19. Does the class take at least two field trips a year?  
 Yes     No
20. Do activities change regularly so the children have a chance to learn new skills?  
 Yes     No

## Look for Yourself

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

