



Cade Needham, 5, is a winner in Katy Magazine's Cutest Kids Cover Contest



Amelie and Raegan during recess at A Child's Reflection



Tito at St. Peter's Early Childhood Development Center



Angelo and Hailey at The Learning Experience

THE WELL-ROUNDED PRESCHOOLER

Finding the perfect fit for your child's academic, emotional, and social development

Written by Natalie Cook Clark | Photography by Suzi Issa

THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

build a critical educational foundation and represent an important step in both a child's and parent's life. "It is huge, especially for first-time moms, because they are both part of this bigger thing,"

says Katy mom of four Christina Hergenrader.

When considering preschools, many parents seek a program that combines the best of both play-based and academic learning. Luckily, there are many options in the Katy area that can help children blossom into well-rounded preschoolers.

Balancing Play and Academics

When the Hergenrader family researched preschools for their oldest daughter Catie, who now attends kindergarten at Williams Elementary School, they looked at teacher-to-

student ratios and what programs the schools offered. "I wanted a program that would emphasize the whole child," says Christina.

While older students often focus on academics, preschool-age children can learn much through pretend play. Skills like organization, memory, emotional control, planning, and goal-setting can all be learned through meaningful hands-on activities. "Play is a child's work," shares Nicole Istre, owner of Katy Early Childhood Enrichment Center, adding, "Our degreed teachers carefully base their lessons on age-appropriate activities where children can enjoy play, while they are engaged in learning."

Blending in academics to a child's early education can help them build on basic skills they have learned through play, while preparing them for kindergarten and beyond.

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TJ, Braden, and Drew at A Child's Reflection



“Children need a balance of both [play and academics] at the preschool age, as they are learning through all five senses all the time.”

—Wanda Flores, center director at The Learning Experience

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Many preschools like A Child's Reflection offer a variety of academic classes, ranging from music and Spanish to a fitness class that emphasizes healthy eating. “The activities that are provided in our classroom on a daily basis are designed to help develop skills such as respect, independence, creativity, empathy, conflict resolution, the ability to get along with others, the establishment of friendships, trust, and much more,” explains Amber Herrmann, director of A Child's Reflection.

Finding a preschool that offers a mix of play-based and academic learning opportunities is easier than one might think, with many preschools mixing in play and activity centers to teach academic concepts. “Children need a balance of both [play and academics] at the preschool age, as they are learning through all five senses all the time,” shares Wanda Flores, center director at The Learning Experience.

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

Even though preschool is optional for Texas students, the right program can help prepare your child for the high standards they will face in Katy ISD elementary schools. Many preschool programs like His Kids at Second Baptist



Church's West Campus strive to provide opportunities for social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development, and in some cases spiritual growth, to ensure students are ready for kindergarten. "We reference the Katy ISD curriculum to ensure we are meeting or exceeding the standards recommended for children entering kindergarten," shares Heather Peterson, director of the His Kids program.

Kids 'R' Kids bases their curriculum standards on those established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "With the credentials and standards in mind, the curriculum covers all aspects of the Texas School Readiness program," explains Sue Lyle, the curriculum coordinator and assistant director at Kids 'R' Kids in Katy.

At the Early Childhood Development Center at St. Peter's United Methodist Church, educators use a creative curriculum to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten and give them a good start spiritually, cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. "The creative curriculum incorporates 38 objectives for development and learning, which are aligned with the revised Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines," shares Lee Bennett, assistant director for St. Peter's ECDC.

A good preschool program will help prepare your child for kindergarten in many different ways, ranging from having good critical thinking skills and knowing mathematical concepts to knowing how to play fairly and showing self-control. "The ability to socialize with children their own age is a huge benefit for a child going into the public school system," says Herrmann.

What's Best for Your Preschooler?

Before attending preschool, children should have an opportunity to meet with their teacher before their first day of school. "Parents should let their children know what to expect from drop-off until pick-up," advises

Joey and his teacher at Katy's Early Childhood Enrichment Center



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Flores. “The more the child knows, the more confident he or she will feel.” While all children are different and develop at various rates, she says the earlier they begin preschool, the easier it often is for them to adjust.

Herrmann says she likes to see children enter preschool between 12 and 15 months of age. “Anytime you introduce your child to a new environment, there will be a period of transition that will occur,” she shares. “For preschool, children need only to be exposed to colors, numbers, and letters. A child that is eager to learn is really all that is required.”

Even though your cutie may attend school all day, it is important that their learning continues at home, too. Istre encourages parents to use the learning tools given to them by their child’s preschool teacher. “It always helps a child academically to have the home as an extension of the classroom,” she explains.

A Good Start to Learning

Katy is full of many different and wonderful options for your little preschooler. Since each child develops differently, there isn’t a set age for starting preschool. Parents can and should start setting a routine and schedule at home, though, to set a good foundation for the preschool years. “If a child is familiar with routines, they will adjust very quickly to the routine set in their classrooms,” explains Peterson.

Even though selecting a preschool can sometimes be overwhelming, Katy parents can start by identifying their child’s educational needs and the type of environment where they will learn best and thrive. “Preschool is really what you make of it, as long as the right foundations are there,” shares Hergenrader. **KM**

NATALIE COOK CLARK enjoys freelance writing and sharing stories from her hometown of Katy.



KATY PRESCHOOL GUIDE

A Child's Reflection

875 S. Fry Rd.
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See ad on page 84

British Private Prep School

25935 Cinco Terrace Dr.
281-394-7737

1635 S. Fry Rd.
281-828-2000

See ad on page 37

Children's Lighthouse

26051 Kingsland Blvd.
281-392-2211

23060 Westheimer
281-395-4466

Childtime Learning Center

22022 Highland Knolls
877-624-2602

3170 N. Fry Rd.
877-624-2602

CrossPoint Christian School

700 Westgreen Blvd.
281-398-6464

Faith West Academy

2225 Porter Rd.
281-391-5683

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Foundations Academy

20817 Westheimer Pkwy.
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Grace Preschool

Grace Fellowship UMC
2655 S. Mason Rd.
281-646-1903

His Kids

Second Baptist Church
West Campus
19449 Katy Fwy.
713-365-3401

See ad on page 72

Katy's Early Childhood Enrichment Center

25403 Kingsland Blvd.
281-693-1999

See ad on page 122

Kids 'R' Kids

25950 Cinco Ranch Blvd.
281-392-1370

24007 Franz Rd.
281-347-5444

19814 Keith Harrow Blvd.
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2402 Westgreen Blvd.
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Sugar Creek Montessori School of Katy

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The Goddard School

24025 Cinco Village
Center Blvd.
281-392-1912

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Tiger Land Childcare Center

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The Learning Experience

21418 Kingsland Blvd.
832-321-4418

See ad on page 41

Lyla at the Early Childhood Development Center at St. Peter's United Methodist Church



If a child is familiar with routines, they will adjust very quickly to the routine set in their classrooms.

-Heather Peterson, His Kids program director

Avery and Jocelyn at The Learning Experience



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