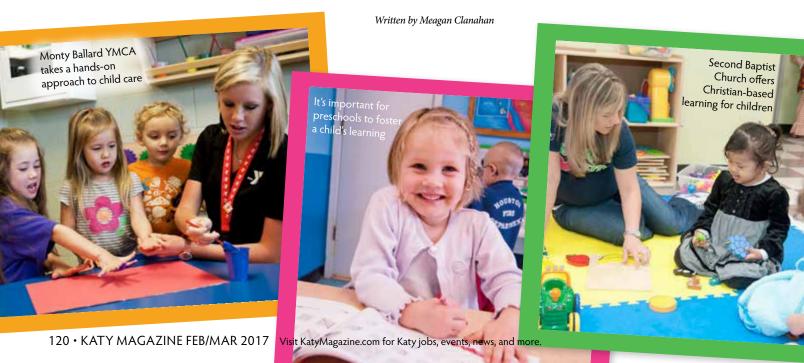


5 Tips on What to Look for in a GREAT PRESCHOOL

Katy Magazine breaks down how to find the best school for your child



Choosing a preschool for your little ones can be an overwhelming task, especially here in Katy where choices abound. Full-day or half-day? Traditional versus Montessori? Christian-based or secular? What accreditations should you look for? Let's break it down.

1. LIFESTYLE FIT

Katy offers a plethora of options for preschool, whether it be a more traditional full-time preschool for working parents or a "Mother's Day Out" setting with school ranging from three to six hours. Consider why you need this type of care: Do you need to have work hours covered or are you looking to engage your children in a classroom setting a few times a week? Katy mom Marianne Horton says, "I wanted a faith-based school with flexible day options. Carpool drop-off was also a huge plus for me." Evaluate your goals and needs and narrow down your choices from there.

2. OVERALL COST

No doubt that preschool is an extraneous expense for most families. Thoroughly check out the websites of the preschools under consideration and calculate the total cost. Most will allow monthly payments, but pay attention to non-refundable registration fees, supply expenses, and late fees. Don't be surprised if they require payment upfront for the beginning and end months. Additional expenses may include nap mats, backpacks, lunch boxes, field trip money, teacher gifts, and more.

3. SAFETY

This is typically the number one concern for parents sending their kids to preschool, as for many it's the first time the child has been out of their hands. "Primrose Schools has a digital Safe School Plan available to parents that sets out in detail plans and responses to every type of emergency," says Starla Finch, marketing director. "The plan is administered by campus school emergency response teams. Monthly drills ensure students and teachers are prepared in the event of an emergency." Many preschools also have classroom webcam options, so with a click of a mouse, you can check in on your child's day at any time. Other considerations include visitor and guest procedures, front and back locked doors, and policies on who can pick up your child.

4. THE CLASSROOM

This is where it's highly recommended you take guided tours of the preschool during normal operating hours. Beware of schools that don't offer that option, as it is important to see how the classroom functions between the teacher and the students. Additionally, "watching the teacher-child interactions is important and will certainly give you a great insight into the care being provided; however, don't forget to consider the surroundings in which your child will be all day," says Pamela Etta, owner of Kiddie Academy of Grand Harbor. "You don't want to spend your day in a

small, dark, cluttered room, so why would you make your child? Look for lots of natural light and spacious, clutter-free classrooms." Another consideration is a low teacher to student ratio. According to Etta, when the ratio is high, it can lead to teachers feeling overwhelmed, more classroom chaos, and therefore, a higher turnover of staff. Lower ratios allow for more positive interactions with teacher and child and opportunities for small group and one-on-one activities.

5. THE CURRICULUM

Research and ask the preschool directors about the particular type of curriculum they offer. You'll want to decide what particular structure you prefer for your child in advance. "The most important thing I looked for in my search for the best preschools for my children were the schools' recognition that developmentally appropriate practices are what foster a love for learning in kids. We wanted a place that inspired learning through play and creativity and not rigorous academics," shares Stefanie Heintz, a Katy mom of two. Play-based curriculum has gained traction in recent years as studies show kids perform better when they are actively learning a unit of study through play. Katy is also home to wonderful Montessori schools which combine age groups and focus on individualized learning. Some programs, such as Primrose, combine both child-led learning and traditional teacher instruction. KM

MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy mom to twin 6 year olds who have thrived in Katy preschools from an early age.

MORE RESOURCES

FOR PARENTS

- NAEYC is a voluntary accreditation process and has listings for childhood programs.
- AdvancED is a non-profit that accredits preschool and early learning institutions with thorough on-site reviews and analysis.
- CDC.gov is a website resource for parents with developmentally appropriate milestones, free materials, signs of early autism, and more.
- TXDFPS allows you to search by school to ensure that it meets all state licensing requirements to be a preschool, as well as lists any infractions.



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