Alexander Satterfield won second place in Katy Magazine's Cutest Kid Cover Contest

# Just Right for Me

How to Find the Perfect Preschool Fit for Your Katy Kid

Written by Kenzie Stanfield and Katrina Katsarelis Select Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

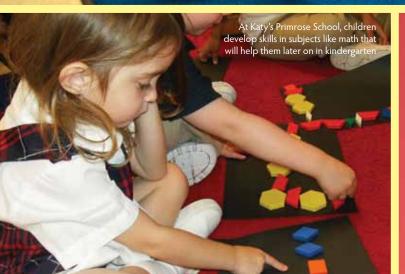
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Each winter, parents across Katy begin the painstaking process of researching, registering, and enrolling their sweet tykes in local preschools. This busy time is sometimes referred to as February Frenzy — the month when many preschools and centers begin the enrollment process for the upcoming school year. Parents across Katy and the U.S. are rounding up information, visiting centers, getting on waiting lists, and researching admission requirements. Although it seems daunting, there are some basic steps to follow to help make preschool selection process a bit easier.

#### **Know What You Want**

First, start your search early and begin thinking about what type of preschool will best fit your family's needs. Whether you prefer a traditional academic preschool, a faith-based Christian preschool, a childcare/preschool center, a Montessori program, a languageimmersion school, or the newest of all, a hybrid methodology preschool, it's important to narrow down your search. Will you want a preschool with enrichment activities such as gymnastics, foreign language, dance, computers, and science programs? Or do you require a center that caters more to busy families with extra services like on-site meals or extended hours? Knowing what you want is an important first step.

### **Get Referrals**

Once you determine your family's needs, it's then time to find preschools that align with the needs of your child. This might seem overwhelming because there are so many to choose from, but talking with other families can definitely make it easier. Susan Jureka, mother to five Katy kids, says that word of mouth was critical to her decision to enroll four of her children at Tiger Land childcare center. Since Jureka is a Katy teacher, her initial need for childcare with a smooth transition into preschool made Tiger Land a perfect fit. Stephanie Bogue's experience in finding just the right preschool for her daughter, Lorelie, was similar. She relied on neighbors who recommended a local preschool in Cinco Ranch. "Since we moved to Katy from out of the country, we relied on what people around us were saying," she says.

#### **Ask About Accreditation**

There are only a few centers in Katy that have received accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This well known organization issues accreditations based on a long list of criteria. Schools voluntarily undergo a lengthy process and must pass numerous education and quality standards in order to receive accreditation. Katy's Early Childhood Enrichment Center is one of a small handful of accredited programs in Katy, according to NAEYC.org.

#### **Observe the Classroom**

Once you've narrowed down your list, it is important to visit each one you are considering. "We encourage parents to try to visit during active classroom activities, so that they can see the classrooms in action and to see how the kids interact amongst themselves and with the teachers," says Steve Sandweiss, owner of Tiger Land childcare Center.

Visiting the school allows you to see if the preschool is a good fit or not. "It's one thing to hear about our school, but it's a totally different

thing to see it first hand," says Zafar Amin, co-founder of Katy's Imagination Campus. Some schools have open enrollment, while others begin the process for new students in late winter, typically in February. The earlier you visit schools, the better.

### **A Foundation for Learning**

Once you find a great match, rest assured the time and effort you put in doing your research upfront will be well worth it. Parents across Katy concur that preschool is an excellent stepping stone for transitioning into "big school". If you find the right facility, your child will learn many things including social skills, how to take turns, how to make friends, and the academic fundamentals to take her successfully into kindergarten. "My daughter was so academically prepared to enter elementary school that it allowed her to make a smooth transition emotionally," says Bogue. "The love and encouragement given to my kids from their teachers at CrossPoint has assured me that we are right where God wants us," says Vickerman.

After all is said and done, hopefully you too will look back, as Jureka has, and know you made the right decision. "I have really loved having my kids at Tiger Land," she says. KM

KENZIE STANFIELD is a mother of three and wife to her high school sweetheart, Dusty. She is a freelance writer for Katy Magazine and loves documenting life and encouraging others through her family blog.

KATRINA KATSARELIS is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Katy Magazine. Prior to starting the magazine, she wrote many parenting, family, and preschool articles for publications across the U.S.



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# Ready or Not?

How to tell if your Katy kid is ready for preschool.

## Is she independent?

- Has she spent time away from you?
- - Can she work on projects on her own?
  - Is she ready to participate in group activities?
  - Is she used to keeping a regular schedule?
  - Does she have the physical stamina for preschool?



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# **15** QUESTIONS TO ASK

To save a lot of legwork, you can weed out a lot of facilities by asking key questions by phone. When you call, ask to speak to the director and pay attention to how the preschool staff and administration treat you. First impressions can be great predictors of your future satisfaction with the site. Here are some questions to get you started.

- 1 Do you have openings on the the days and hours I need?
- 2 How long has the director been at the center?
- **3** What credentials does the director hold?
- 4 What training and ongoing education is required for the staff?
- 5 What forms of discipline does the center use?

- Is there an open door policy?
- 7 Is the center accredited by any agencies?
- 8 What is the cost of registration and tuition?
- 9 What is the student-toteacher ratio?
- 10 Tell me about my child's class/teacher.
- **11** What curriculum is used?

- 12 What is the age range of children in the class?
- **13** How many students/ teachers will be in the class?
- 14 What is the size of my child's classroom (dimensions)?
- 15 Are enrichment or extracurricular activities offered?









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