

Selecting a Quality Preschool

One of the most important decisions that we make as parents for our young children is selecting a high quality pre-school program. Each year in November, the Schools Committee of the South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race sponsors a pre-school open house that provides the opportunity to thoughtfully explore many local options in one evening– and to hear a presentation on what to look for in a pre-school.

Preschool experiences have a significant impact on our child’s social, emotional, and academic development, all so critical in this challenging world. The quality of such experiences has the potential to provide advantages, and/or disadvantages, that linger on past kindergarten, into later elementary school years. This was reflected in the successful national Headstart Program was created in the 1960’s to address an achievement gap in the early years and to provide readiness for later years. At the present time, New York City has chosen to put its resources into public preschools.

In Maplewood, South Orange, and the surrounding communities, we have many childcare and early education providers who are caring for and educating our young children. The programs in these pre-schools and day care settings vary greatly in their approaches to childcare and to early education.

We all want our children to achieve in school. We are concerned about their social and emotional well-being. We want them to develop a disposition for enjoying learning. General language and knowledge acquisition are also hallmarks of early pre-academic development. High quality programs work with families in this spirit. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the world’s largest organization working on behalf of young children, supports play-based learning with limited direct literacy instruction, since this approach appears to be the most effective in helping children develop an eagerness to participate actively in their own learning.

As we consider what is best for our children, use this opportunity at our Preschool Open House to look beyond the marketing materials. Ask questions and arrange a visit to the early childhood environments. The National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests looking for the following:

- Make sure the provider focuses on children.
- Notice how separation between child and parent is handled.
- Watch to see the interaction of children with other children and adults.
- Ask how long teachers and staff have been with the program.
- Ask how information and concerns are communicated to families.
- Ask about child to teacher ratio.

Look for the upcoming Annual Preschool Open House date in our events listing. At the open house, families can meet with many of our local pre-schools and day care providers who will have tables of information and people to answer your questions. As you see the many alternatives for your child’s school or care giver, think about the quality of the child’s preparation for future schooling experience– and think about your child’s happiness, well-being, and general progress.

Lisa Novemsky, Ed.D., a long-time member of the South Orange Maplewood Community Coalition on Race Schools Committee and recently retired from the faculty of Education at Brooklyn College, is a resident of Maplewood. Her children attended and grandchildren currently attend the South Orange Maplewood School system.

Below are some online resources to read about choosing a quality preschool collected by the Committee.

<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSDAP.pdf>

Long comprehensive statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

<http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/1.pdf>

http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05_03_05.pdf

Look at Box 1 on page 121 to see what appears to be developmentally appropriate in early childhood education.

<http://www.illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/preschoolchoice.htm>

A five tips sheet to make it easy to look at programs.