



Keeping Race on the Table: Researching Preschool Programs

Diversity is an important consideration, but it's not the only consideration.

Step 1: Write down your educational values.

Identify the criteria most important to you with the understanding that you will likely not find all of your “must-haves” in one pre-school program.

Are you interested in pre-school that is:

- Afrocentric, multi-cultural or multi-racial
- Montessori or Montessori-inspired
- Religious affiliation or no affiliation
- Small, locally owned or a large chain

Step 2: Decide what kind of learning philosophy you seek for your child.

Are you interested in a pre-school that emphasizes:

- A clearly, defined, structured curriculum
- Learning objectives that address the needs of the whole child
- Creativity and free play

Step 3: Visit the school.

Once you are at the school, look for:

- Security mechanisms (how easy is it to get inside – do you have to show ID)
- A well-kept play area (there does not have to be a lot to do, but different things to play with)
- Presence of staff up front to greet parents and children as they enter the building

Once inside:

- Look at the bulletin boards and walls (is the children’s art work displayed prominently)

Does it feel racially diverse (what do you see in the wall décor or other displays)

Are the children actively engaged in activities (what types of activities are you observing and do the teachers seem engaged with them)

In the classroom:

Does it feel safe? Do you see your child playing in the space? Would you trust the teachers with the care of your child?

Does it look visually stimulating and engaging?

Does the teacher acknowledge your presence?

Is there a posted schedule? What will your child's day look like?

Look at the classroom's library:

What kind of books do you see – diversity of lead characters (male and female and animal versus human characters)?

Are the books current?

Do you recognize any of the titles?

Look at the toys, and especially the dolls:

Do you see an array of skin colors represented in the dolls, toys and puzzles?

Examine play areas:

Do they have stations established that enable children to choose different areas to play in?

Do art materials reflect different skin colors?

Step 4: Ask lots of questions, but make your expectations clear as well.

Share a little about your child, their personality and your parenting style.

Emphasize your concern about their education, and your willingness to be a part of your child's educational preparation. Give examples of things you do at home.

Ask them how different cultures are reflected in their approach to teaching and learning (this will differ for each classroom).

Do they approach difference as the responsibility of the parent from that culture to share or do they make it their responsibility to incorporate different cultures into learning?

How will they approach math, science, reading, social studies?

Do they offer programs like arts, music, language or sports? And are there additional fees for this programming or is it included in the tuition?

Tour the classroom for your child's current age as well as older classes. You'll get a good sense of different teaching approaches that you will encounter as your child ages.

Step 5: Conduct a little more research and make a decision.

Check your state's registry for child care centers to see if there are any major violations

Google their name to see if they have been connected to any major news stories

Ask for references by speaking to the parents of currently enrolled children

Notes: