

What to Think About When You Are Thinking About Choosing a Preschool

By Jen Lahn, director, Jewish Preschool on Sardis

It's the time of year when you as parents will choose the best setting for your children to begin their educational journey. A child's preschool experience lays the foundation for future learning so when choosing a preschool, it's important to select one that is the best fit for your individual child. What philosophy and style of teaching will work best for your child? What are your child's needs? In essence, you want to choose a preschool where your child can thrive and he or she will be nurtured each day—a place where their uniqueness is celebrated.

Below I will share some important areas to consider when choosing a preschool. Make an appointment to visit the schools you are considering – ask questions, talk to teachers and administrators, consider the physical environment and the overall “feel” of the preschool.

1. Consider the educational philosophy of the school. Ask the Director about the school's philosophy on early childhood education. Does the school follow a specific curriculum? How do teachers individualize the day to meet each child's needs? Some preschools focus heavily on academic skills and consider social and emotional development as secondary. How

does the school meet the needs of the whole child? Are letter and number skills taught methodically or do the teachers tailor the program to each child's developmental ability and interest?

2. Is the school accredited or licensed? Does it follow a clear set of guidelines and rules so you as parents will know what to expect? How often is the program assessed and what is the purpose of the assessment? Part of any formal or informal assessment should include the teacher quality and style of teaching. Are the teachers experts in early childhood development? Do they have degrees in this field? When you visit a school, observe the teachers as they interact with children. Do they approach the children with a warm and caring tone? Do the teachers interact with and facilitate play or are they directing the children from afar? Do the teachers respond to each child as an individual or do you hear rote and rehearsed answers?

3. Staff:child ratio is an important factor. How many teachers are responsible for the children in each room? What is the maximum number of children in the classroom and how many teachers will be assigned to each age group? Of



Making friends at the Jewish Preschool on Sardis.

course the fewer children a teacher is responsible for, the better able the teacher is to respond to individual needs. Teacher turnover is also an important indicator. Ask the director about this to get a baseline. This will give you information about the working environment and let you know whether the teachers feel appreciated and happy. Happy teachers typically have happy classrooms.

4. The physical environment of the school needs to be considered. Ask to see the outdoor play area. Do the different age groups play outside together or do the younger children have their own space? Is there sufficient space for the children to run, jump, play with balls, and work on large muscle development? Is the equipment in good

condition? Are the classrooms spacious, clean and bright? Are there ample materials for all of the children in the class? Does the room look organized and inviting for your little one? You should see specific areas of play referred to as “centers” and they should be full of materials that are fun for the children. There is no reason for the children to know that they are working on some serious skills when they are building with blocks in the block center, or exploring the free art materials in the art center.

Most importantly, rely on your “parent gut” (as I like to refer to it). All of the points that I outlined are important, but above all, the school must “feel” right to you. You need to

feel confident that your child will be cared for and that your needs will also be met. If you have questions or concerns, will you be comfortable asking them? Trust your instincts in this process.

I invite you to visit The Jewish Preschool on Sardis and enjoy a private tour of our program. At JPS, we are committed to meeting the needs of each individual preschooler while working closely with the parents to successfully meet the developmental milestones for their child. I am available to answer your questions and would love to meet with you to show you our classrooms and program. ✧



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Pictured are Mark and Amy Vitner (Board President of the Charlotte Jewish Preschool) with their children Eli (CJP), Saul and Sylvia (both at CJDS).

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