

Children's School Help with Making School Choices

October 15, 2010



School choice decisions are really a MATCHing process.

Our staff can help in the process by:

- **suggesting issues to consider,**
Feel free to customize the attached issues document for your family's priorities.
- **providing information about schools, and**
Stop at the office to request information from the schools you are considering.
- **discussing your child's development.**
The November conferences are opportunities for the teacher and parents to discuss their views of the child, which will help parents choose a school whose program will best meet the child's needs. Feel free to make an appointment with Dr. Carver if you need additional consultation.

For families applying to private schools that require recommendations, the teachers review their conference reports in January, make any modifications to reflect changes since November, and then submit them to Miss Hancock for mailing to the relevant schools. Parents must submit a release form for each school to which the conference report needs to be sent. (These forms are generally provided by the schools and occasionally sent to us directly by them.)

What we cannot do, however, is make the match for you, because that is a matter of values, priorities, resources, and life circumstances that are unique to each family.

Above all else, remember that you are making choices among excellent options for talented children; there are many schools in which they can excel.

Issues to Consider When Choosing a School for Your Child

Prepared by the Children's School Staff, Fall 2010

Focus on the MATCH between your child, your family, and the school rather than seeking an absolute best choice (i.e., one school that would be best for all children in all families). **Take a BROAD, LONG-TERM VIEW** including your priorities for future years' programs as well as other children in the family so that you can avoid multiple school changes and placements of siblings in too many different schools.

Use the following **list of characteristics** as a catalyst for considering your own priorities for your child's education. We have left space on the left for you to indicate these priorities and space on the right for your general notes. We have also prepared forms for additional note-taking about individual schools when you talk with their representatives, read their literature, visit their campuses, and talk with parents of other children who attend the school.

Philosophy

_____ •Academic, Social, and Physical Goals (*consider stated priorities as well as implicit priorities, i.e., space, time, and money allocations*)

_____ •Abstract (theory) vs. Concrete (hands-on) Experiences

_____ •Standardization vs. Individualization

_____ •Competition vs. Cooperation

In the categories listed above (as well as others throughout this document), **appropriate BALANCE is the key !!*

_____ •School Policies (*e.g., dress, behavior, etc.*)

_____ •Discipline

Admissions Criteria

_____ •Age Cutoffs (*NOTE: Pittsburgh Public Schools are now aligned with most others but the Children's School maintains its cutoff of 12/31/10 for Kindergarten in Fall '10*)

For Most Private Schools & Public Schools:

Children must be 5 by 9/1/11 to enter kindergarten in Fall 2011

Children must be 6 by 9/1/11 to enter 1st grade in Fall 2011

_____ •Readiness Assessment Used

Many of the private schools use individual and/or group screening. Most of those are concerned primarily with social skills and communication, though some basic academic skills are being considered also. When discussing these "visits" with your child, we'd suggest a low-key approach, such as, "We're going to visit a new school today. I'd like you to listen to the teachers and follow the directions, just like you do at the Children's School. You'll have fun at this school too. Maybe you can make some new friends."

_____•Grades Available (K-8, K-12)

Schools that continue through high school have the benefit that you're not forced to make a school change mid-way, but sometimes such change is a positive step. Be sure you consider when and how much the older and younger children interact (e.g., on the bus, in the library, on the playground) and, therefore, influence each other.

Staff (teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, etc.)

_____•Leadership / Vision (consider how comfortable you, the staff, and the students feel with the leaders, their practices, and their goals)

_____•Who Plays What Roles? (consider who has a voice and who has responsibility for curriculum, policy, discipline, etc. - administrators, teachers, parents, students?)

_____•Teacher/Student Ratio (consider aides and volunteers too)

_____•Training (initial and continuing professional development)

_____•Individual vs. Team Teaching

_____•Approach to Handling Special Needs (consider both additional help and additional challenge your child might need)

_____•Connection to Current Research

_____•Communication with Families
(consider newsletters, conferences, visits, PTO meetings, etc.)

Program (again, look for BALANCE)

_____•Required vs. Elective Courses

_____•Mixed Grouping vs. Ability Grouping (Tracked)

_____•Separate Subjects vs. Themes across Subjects

_____•Emphasis on Independence, Cooperation, Creativity, and Critical Thinking

_____•Reaction to Student/Parent Input and Concerns

_____•Nature of Assessment

_____•Courses Offered / Curriculum (consider who has access to which)

_____•English, Social Studies, Math, and Science

_____•Foreign Language & Culture

_____•Health/Sports/Movement/Dance

- _____ •Art/Music/Theatre
- _____ •Additional Courses: Computer, Psychology, Politics, etc.
- _____ •Social Skills/Values (*consider both the explicit and implicit messages*)
- _____ •College Admissions Record

Diversity (*staff and students*)

- _____ •Gender
- _____ •Economics
- _____ •Race & Culture
- _____ •Religion

Resources

(consider people, space, and equipment, consider access policies, and consider funding for the future)

- _____ •Class Size
- _____ •Classroom Size / Atmosphere
- _____ •Supplies (*texts, subscriptions, science, art, drama, etc.*)
- _____ •Library
- _____ •Tutoring / Gifted or Special Education Support
- _____ •Referral for Special Services
- _____ •Cafeteria
- _____ •Gym, Auditorium
- _____ •Technology (*television, computers, video & audio recorders, digital cameras, etc.*)
- _____ •Playground, Playing Fields
- _____ •Neighborhood Resources (*community facilities that are within walking distance*)
- _____ •Financial Aid
- _____ •Safety

Family Impact

_____ •Tuition & Fees

_____ •Schedule (*drop-off, dismissal, extended day, holidays*)

_____ •Transportation (*if bus, what ages of students are together?*)

_____ •Distance from home to school to friends' homes (*consider play dates, birthday parties, etc.*)

_____ •Parent Participation in the School (*consider encouragement, expectations, and requirements*)

If you are planning to volunteer in the public school classrooms, you may want to apply for both the Criminal Background History and Child Abuse History clearances the summer before your child begins school.

School:

Philosophy:

Admissions Criteria:

Staff:

Program:

Diversity:

Resources:

Family Impact:

Philosophy

- Discipline
- Abstract vs. Concrete Experiences
- School
- Standardization vs. Individualization
- Competition vs. Cooperation
- Academic, Social, and Physical Goals

Admissions Criteria

- Age Cutoff
- Grades Available (K-8, K-12)
- Readiness Assessment Used

Staff

(teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, etc.)

- Leadership / Vision
- Individual vs. Team Teaching
- Who Plays What Roles?
- Handling Special Needs
- Teacher/Student Ratio
- Connection to Current Research
- Training
- Communication with Families

Program

- Required vs. Elective Courses
- Nature of Assessment
- Mixed Grouping vs. Ability Grouping
- Courses Offered / Curriculum
- Social Skills/Values
- College Admissions Record
- Separate Subjects vs. Themes across Subjects
- Reaction to Student/Parent Input and Concerns
- Emphasis on Independence, Cooperation, Creativity, and Critical Thinking

Diversity *(staff and students)*

- Gender
- Economics
- Race & Culture
- Religion

Resources

- Class Size
- Classroom Size / Atmosphere
- Supplies
- Library
- Referral for Special Services
- Cafeteria
- Tutoring / Gifted or Special Education Support
- Gym, Auditorium
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Family Impact

- Tuition & Fees
- Distance from home to school
- Schedule
- Transportation
- Parent Participation in the School