



# How to Choose the Right Kindergarten Program



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Finding the best school to kick off your child's primary education is equal parts exciting and nerve-racking. You then throw the challenges of today, and it can tip the scales to downright stressful. We're here to help with 12 tips for finding the right kindergarten program for your child.

**Looking for a more methodical approach? (We see you type-A's, and we love you.) Check out our Kindergarten Search Report Card on the last page to help see which school makes the grade for your child.**

## 12 Tips for Choosing the Right Kindergarten Program

### 1 Your Child's Needs

Make a list of your child's needs. Hands-on play? Rigorous curriculum? Flexible, personalized learning? Structured schedule? Interventions to succeed? See how that aligns with the school's learning philosophy and resources to gauge the fit.

### 2 Teacher Enthusiasm & Attitude

All teachers are amazing; we know that. Look for a school with teachers who love what they do and find joy in growing and learning as professionals as much as they do in teaching. Ask about their (and the district's) approach to professional development and what level of certifications staff have district wide.

### 3 Fun Learning Environment

Learning should be fun. And, to boot, most learning at the kindergarten level is done through play. Take some time to visit the playground, the gym, and the art classes. Are people smiling? (smiling is our favorite). At the early childhood level especially, a happy learning environment is often a productive one.

### 4 Safety Protocols

Your child is your heart on the outside of your body. You want to choose a school which you feel safe sending your child. Look for things like secure entrances/exits, volunteer and employee background screening, and anti-bullying/harassment programs.





## 5 Social-Emotional Development

School isn't just about math and reading. Educators are there to educate and support the whole child. Whether you call it soft skills or social-emotional learning, you want to feel out how intentional the school's approach is to teaching your child self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. These skills are essential to every area of life and are important to consider.

## 6 Family Communication

Communication is key. Take a look to see how the schools communicate with families on what is happening district-wide, in the classrooms and with individual students. Is it a two-way or one-way street? Are they accessible? You are all in this together, so it is important you feel in the know.

## 7 School Community

While your child will be impacted day in and day out by the classroom teacher, it is important to feel at home in the school community at large. Take some time to think about what is important to you. Are you looking for a diverse school community? A school with a religious component? Tight-knit, like a little family?

What afterschool programs and events are available? Meet the principal, chat it up with the Parent-Teacher Organization President, and follow the district or building on social media to get a feel for what they celebrate and share. How does this fit your family's needs?

## 8 Volunteer & Grown Up Involvement

What level of involvement are you looking for at your child's school? Some have volunteer hour requirements. Some meet families wherever they are with how involved they want to be. Check with the teacher and principal to see their philosophy and figure out which one fits you and your family best.





## 9 District Goals & Vision

You don't want a district who is like Phoebe from *Friends* ("I don't have a plan. I barely have a pla!".) Take some time to talk to the principal or superintendent about the district's long term goals for each school and the district as a whole. Are they forward thinkers? Do they have updated technology, and how do they use it in the classrooms at all levels? Are their facilities being maintained? While it does not directly impact your child's learning as much as say number two on our list, it is wise to take it into consideration.

## 10 Location Considerations

Location is not the warm and fuzzy side of picking a school, but it surely is practical. The logistics of getting your student to and from school while balancing the rest of your family life is important. If you are a school of choice family, consider the timing of getting to the closest in-district bus stop or dropping off or picking up your child. Is before- or after-school care offered to help make it work? Furthermore, is building relationships with children from your neighborhood or the town you live in important to you? Would you want your student to participate in extracurricular activities in the community you live or the community they attend school?

## 11 Lifetime Learning Potential

Yes, you are choosing a kindergarten program. You might be getting teary-eyed thinking of your child walking into the school for the first time, and here we are making you think about them walking across the graduation stage. We're sorry. Forgive us. However, a majority of students attend the same district K-12, so you want to make sure you like what you see at the middle and high school level. Graduation rates, top colleges graduates attend, alternative programs available, extracurriculars and athletics offered are all things to take into consideration, especially if you are having a hard time deciding between two kindergarten programs.

## 12 Inclusivity & Support

When it comes to teaching our children to celebrate and accept themselves and everyone else, no matter if they look, talk, walk, or act the same, schools play a huge part. There are benefits to all when students of all abilities are part of a learning community. Whether your student needs special education services or not, ask if schools take a push-in approach, where students receive services while in a traditional classroom, or a pull-out approach, where students are taken out of the classroom to receive services. Learn what services are available and if they are in-house or not. Robust in-house services offer much more flexibility for students and families.



# My Kindergarten Search Report Card

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

	SCHOOLS			
IMPORTANT FACTORS	Whitmore Lake Public School			
Your Child's Needs				
Teacher Enthusiasm & Attitude				
Fun Learning Environment				
Safety Protocols				
Social-Emotional Development				
Family Communication				
School Community				
Volunteer & Grown-Up Involvement				
District Goals & Vision				
Location Considerations				
Lifetime Learning Potential				
Inclusivity & Support				
Overall Kindergarten Fit				

## Grading Key

- A: Nailed it! Exactly what we are looking for.
- B: Good Option. Solid.
- C: Eh. It could work.
- D: Not so much.
- E: Heck to the no.

