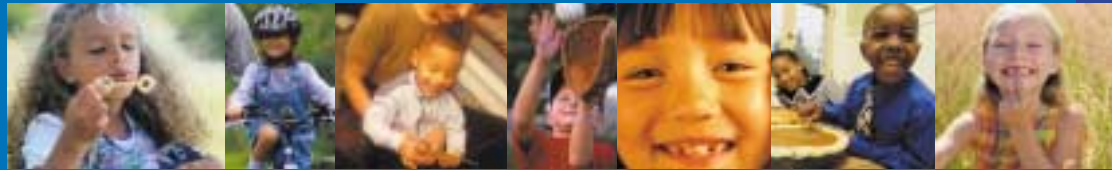


A Parent's Guide to Early Childhood Education



How to Choose the Right School for Your Family



Helping you find a model early childhood education program

If you're a parent exploring preschool and early childhood education options, you already know the task can be daunting. There are lots of choices out there and you want to make the best decision for your family.

The purpose of this primer is to arm you with the knowledge you need to do just that. You'll learn what constitutes a model early childhood education pro-

gram. You'll find out what questions to ask and what signs to look for when evaluating a school. Most importantly, you'll gain confidence about your decisions, knowing you're basing them—not on guesses or hunches—but on proven findings, developed by early childhood experts through careful study and research over the past 100 years.

Why is attending a model program important?

Model programs assure that the needs of the whole child are considered and respected in the classroom—physical, cognitive/intellectual/creative, and social/emotional. They consider each child's individual needs and contributions in planning classroom experiences. They are based in sound early childhood developmental theory, rather than borrowing the education practices found in schools serving older

children. A model program considers the family as an important part of each child's educational future.

Studies comparing early childhood programs over the past 40 years consistently show that model programs strongly respect and preserve childhood in their practice, while building a strong foundation for the future in both the cognitive and social realms.

Who developed the model program criteria used in this guide?

The criteria for model programs come from objective, unbiased sources, such as experts in the early childhood education field, university research and peer-reviewed early childhood studies. They are not criteria proposed by The Children's School, though as a model early childhood education program, we endorse and adhere to them. The primary sources for the ten criteria in this guide are:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) 2005. *NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria: The Mark of Quality in Early Childhood Education*. www.naeyc.org
- Neuman, S. B. and K. Ruskos, 2005. *Whatever Happened to Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Literacy?* *Young Children* 60 (4) 22-26.
- Center for Family Policy and Research, 2002. *Improving Early Childhood Education Through Adequate Teacher Compensation*. www.MUCenter.missouri.edu
- Saluja, G., D. M. Early and R. M. Clifford, 2002. *Demographic Characteristics of Early Childhood Teachers and Structural Elements of Early Care and Education in the United States*. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 4 (1). www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4v1/saluja.html
- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), 1992. *What Does Research Say About Early Childhood Education?* www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/stw_esys/5erly_ch.htm
- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), 2001. *Research on Early Childhood Education*. www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/topsyn3.html
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2002. *Instructional Models for Early Childhood Education*. www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/early.htm
- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). *Choosing Quality Child Care: Indicators of Quality Child Care Programs*. www.afscme.org/wrkplace/choose02.htm



How to use this guide

The next ten pages cover the top ten criteria that early childhood education experts have identified as characteristic of model early childhood education programs. A brief explanation accompanies each criterion to help you understand why it is important.

Next, we provide simple tools you can use when evaluating a school's program. There are questions to ask, things to look for when you visit a school, and warning signs to be aware of.

Finally, at the bottom of each page, a brief paragraph explains how The Children's School of Boise measures up to the criterion on the page.

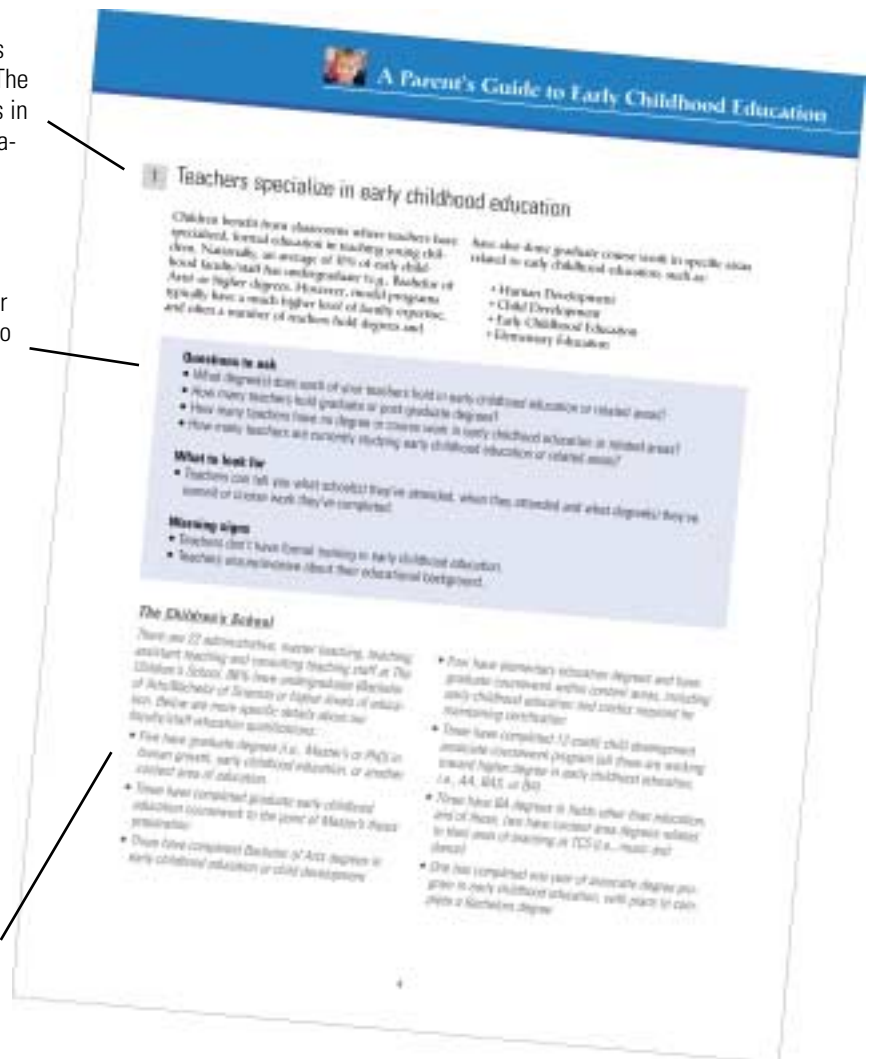
The graphic below explains in greater detail how to use this guide. Our goal is to provide you with actionable information you can put to use to make an intelligent, informed decision that you'll feel good about...for your child, yourself and your family.

The top paragraph highlights one of the criteria for a model early childhood education program, and explains why that criterion is important. These come, not from The Children's School, but from objective, unbiased sources in the field of early childhood education. For more information about these sources, please see the paragraph on page 1 entitled: "Who developed the model program criteria used in this guide?"

A second section (highlighted in blue) provides tools for you to use as you start evaluating schools. Use these to help determine if a program meets the criteria of a model program. You'll find a convenient checklist on pages 14-15 that you can print out to keep track of what you find at different schools.

- **Questions to ask:** Phone the schools you're interested in and ask these questions of the school's Director (or the person in charge of admissions). If you decide the school is worth a visit, these questions are also good to ask of teachers and others when you tour the school.
- **What to look for:** When visiting a prospective school, these pointers can help you determine whether or not it meets the criteria for a model program
- **Warning signs:** Keep an eye out for these when touring a school, as they're indications that it does not meet the standards for a model program.

The bottom section lets you know how The Children's School measures up against the specific criterion listed in the first paragraph.





1 Teachers specialize in early childhood education

Children benefit from classrooms where teachers have specialized, formal education in teaching young children. Nationally, an average of 31% of early childhood faculty/staff has undergraduate (e.g., Bachelor of Arts) or higher degrees. However, model programs typically have a much higher level of faculty expertise, and often a number of teachers hold degrees and

have also done graduate course work in specific areas related to early childhood education, such as:

- Human Development
- Child Development
- Early Childhood Education
- Elementary Education

Questions to ask

- What degree(s) does each of your teachers hold in early childhood education or related areas?
- How many teachers hold graduate or post-graduate degrees?
- How many teachers have no degree or course work in early childhood education or related areas?
- How many teachers are currently studying early childhood education or related areas?

What to look for

- Teachers can tell you what school(s) they've attended, when they attended and what degree(s) they've earned or course work they've completed.

Warning signs

- Teachers don't have formal training in early childhood education.
- Teachers unsure/evasive about their educational background.

The Children's School

There are 22 administrative, master teaching, teaching, assistant teaching and consulting teaching staff at The Children's School. 86% have undergraduate (Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science) or higher levels of education. Below are more specific details about our faculty/staff education qualifications:

- Five have graduate degrees (i.e., Master's or PhD) in human growth, early childhood education, or another content area of education
- Three have completed graduate early childhood education coursework to the point of Master's thesis preparation
- Three have completed Bachelor of Arts degrees in early childhood education or child development
- Four have elementary education degrees and have graduate coursework within content areas, including early childhood education and credits required for maintaining certification
- Three have completed 12-credit child development associate coursework program (all three are working toward higher degree in early childhood education, i.e., AA, BAS, or BA)
- Three have BA degrees in fields other than education, and of these, two have content area degrees related to their area of teaching at TCS (i.e., music and dance)
- One has completed one year of associate degree program in early childhood education, with plans to complete a Bachelors degree



2 School practices a coherent theory of education

In model programs, teachers practice and communicate a coherent theory of education, and participate in regular professional development opportunities that support an understanding and the implementation of school philosophy.

Research shows that children fare better when teachers know the philosophical underpinnings of their teaching, and make decisions about children and teaching based on this knowledge. The various decisions teachers are required to make on a daily

basis—around child guidance and classroom curriculum, for example—create a consistent foundation for the developing young child when the program philosophy is deeply understood and implemented by teachers.

An ongoing system of self-study, group discussion, and supervision/feedback around program philosophy is an essential part of professional development in a model program.

Questions to ask

- What theory of early childhood education do you follow or practice?
- What research/studies support the theory? How long has the theory been practiced?
- Is it practiced by other schools? How many? Where?
- Are there printed materials / web sites explaining the theory?
- How is your faculty trained in the theory? What kinds of ongoing education for teachers are there?

What to look for

- Different teachers can discuss the theory in a knowledgeable way.
- Different teachers explain the theory in the same way.
- Teaching behavior is consistent with the theory.
- Teaching behavior is consistent from class-to-class, age-to-age and teacher-to-teacher.

Warning signs

- Teachers don't know there is a theory of education at the school.
- Teachers take wildly different approaches in their classrooms.
- Statements such as: "we just kind of do what seems natural."

The Children's School

The Children's School practices the Developmental-Interaction theory of education in our classrooms. Developmental-Interaction is a coherent integration of developmental psychology, cognitive theory and educational theory and practice. Since the early 1900's, this approach has evolved through research and analysis at Bank Street College of Education in New York City.

Developmental-Interaction emphasizes self-discovery of the world as the most important teacher. Affective (emotional) development is seen as equally important to cognitive (thinking) development. Both function simultaneously to determine what is learned. Unifying

the emotional, cognitive, and experiential parts of growth and learning requires three essential elements in our classrooms:

- *Small groups*
- *A responsive and stimulating environment*
- *Warm, genuine teacher-child relationships*

To ensure consistent, appropriate instruction across all classrooms, The Children's School faculty meets nine times a year (about once every month except during summer sessions) to discuss teaching and child development within the framework of this guiding philosophy.



3 Optimum student/teacher ratio

Smaller group sizes and small staff/child ratios are strong predictors of the quality of the early childhood program. Small group sizes, in particular, support individual attention, positive interactions, and teaching practices that consider children's needs and how young children learn. Studies have shown that small group size is related to positive outcomes for children,

including more involvement in classroom activities and social interaction among peers.

The maximum child:adult ratio should be 10:1 for preschool children; less than that is preferable. However, if the group size is too large, program quality will not be improved by adding more adults to the classroom.

Questions to ask

- What is your student to teacher ratio?
- Does that ratio vary from classroom to classroom? If yes, by how much? Why?
- Does the ratio include parent volunteers? If so, what is the ratio when volunteers are not counted?

What to look for

- Count the number of children and adults in a classroom; then identify which adults are teachers and which are not (e.g., parent volunteers).
- Visit more than one classroom to see if the ratio is more or less the same throughout the school.

Warning signs

- More than 10 children per teacher, or, classrooms with a large number of children—30 or more—even if the ratio is one teacher per 10 children.

The Children's School

The number of children in each classroom at The Children's School is consistently less than that recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (10 children per teacher). Typically, there is one teacher for every 4–9 children, depending on the age of the children in the class.

Just as importantly, the physical dimensions of our classrooms are sized to support the group sizes we feel are best for children. This gives us the opportunity to carry-out curriculum and interactions consistent with Developmental-Interaction philosophy: teachers working alongside children to facilitate the intellectual, emotional, and experiential parts of education.



4 Stable, consistent faculty

Children benefit from stability and consistency in their teachers. Yet nationwide, early childhood programs have a higher than 30% annual turnover rate. When young children experience high rates of teacher turnover in their early childhood program, they engage in fewer social activities, less age-appropriate play with peers, and even have been shown to have slower rates of vocabulary development. Therefore,

stable and consistent adults contribute to a positive social and learning environment for young children. Model early childhood programs attend to teacher compensation and work environment to reduce teacher turnover and maintain program quality for children.

Questions to ask

- How many new teachers do you have this year? How many last year? The year before?
- How many of your teachers have been here more than two years? Five years? Ten years?

What to look for

- Teachers who know their way around the facilities.
- Teachers who readily talk about their history at the school and previous classes that they've taught.
- Teachers are comfortable and familiar with the children in their classroom, children in other classrooms, other teachers and parents.

Warning signs

- Teachers who don't know where things are in their classroom or the school in general (e.g., don't know where paint supplies are or where bathrooms are).
- Teachers who don't know standard routines (e.g., not sure who decides what snacks are served).
- Teachers who are unsure of schedules (e.g., don't know when "outside time" is or when snack time is).

The Children's School

While nationwide, early childhood programs have a higher than 30% annual turnover rate, The Children's School has had an average annual turnover rate of 8% for the past four years. In concrete terms, that averages about 1.5 teachers per year out of our staff of 20. Further, all but one of the recent resignations occurred

at the end of a program year rather than mid-year, thereby minimizing the impact on children.

The average (median) tenure of current TCS faculty and staff at The Children's School is six years, with 17 years tenure being the longest. 50% of the administrative and teaching staff have worked at the school 6-17 years.



5 The school teaches the way children learn

A model program considers how children learn in planning classroom experiences. An early childhood classroom should be a busy place. Children move around the room, make choices from materials teachers have chosen and displayed, and have opportunities for social engagement. The curriculum motivates children to be engaged; there is no need for teachers to give stickers for involvement in an activity. The choices

available in the classroom provide opportunities for children to engage at a variety of levels since, for young children, normal development occurs within a range. Teachers give attention to children's psychological safety, as well as their physical safety. Skills are embedded in meaning for young children rather than taught in a rote manner.

Questions to ask

- Can you describe a typical classroom setup? Why is it set up that way?
- Do your classrooms stay the same day to day? Or do they change? If so, how?

What to look for

- The classrooms have multiple areas that each have a different focus or activity (e.g., paint area, block area, reading area, work area, etc.).
- Children are engaged and interested in activities, yet can easily move from activity to activity or group to group.
- Teachers often sit in low chairs or on the floor to be at the same physical height as children and close to their activities.

Warning signs

- Repetitive / rote activities that are teacher-directed (e.g., practicing writing the alphabet over and over).
- Teachers "lecturing" to a group of docile children for extended periods.
- Children wandering around looking "lost".

The Children's School

Our program is based in the constructivist philosophy that says that children learn best through real experiences with real materials. Developmental-Interaction philosophy is a constructivist philosophy. Whereas constructivism is concerned with how children construct knowledge or learn, Developmental-Interaction is also concerned with children's affective selves during constructivist classroom experiences.

We provide materials, like unit blocks, that give children chances to learn sophisticated concepts like size relationships and balance through experience and play. That's because children's play is a way for them to move

toward abstraction, a necessary ability for future academic development, and make sense of the multitude of experiences that young children have in their daily lives. Therefore, play is carefully scheduled into our school day because of the benefits to young children. Our small class sizes mean that we have time to be with children during their school day—to support their discoveries, to be available to individual children in a variety of ways, and to facilitate children's social/emotional growth as well as cognitive/intellectual growth.



6 Program continuity through early elementary grades

Effectiveness for children is increased when program continuity is provided from the preschool years through the early elementary years. The early childhood years extend through age 8, yet few programs provide high quality, continuous programs from preschool through the early elementary grades. The positive effects for children are diminished when the program providing preschool and continuous classes

through age 8 does not use developmentally appropriate practices with preschoolers, but rather uses elementary teaching strategies with preschoolers. Therefore, young children benefit from teaching practices that embrace an early childhood philosophy rather than those commonly used with older children.

Questions to ask

- Does your school provide early childhood education that extends from toddlers (2-3 years old) to early elementary grades (7-8 years old)?
- Do your teachers follow the same philosophy of education as a child moves from pre-school to kindergarten to early elementary grades?

What to look for

- Consistent teaching methods across all classrooms, regardless if they are preschool, kindergarten or early elementary.

Warning signs

- Preschool program ends at kindergarten.
- No preschool or kindergarten classes that feed into the early elementary classes.

The Children's School

The Children's School serves children ages 2 to 8, giving them the opportunity to experience a sequence of mate-

rials, activities, and relationships throughout the early childhood years within one consistent philosophy.



7 Beyond an “academics-only” curriculum

Studies show that children who attend academically-focused preschools show higher levels of achievement in the early elementary years. Many families choose this type of education for their young children for this reason. These choices are especially understandable when considering the high emphasis on reading and academic testing prevalent in today's schools in the early elementary years.

However, research consistently shows that by third grade the academic differences between children who attended academically-focused preschools and child-centered preschools are gone. Children who attended child-centered preschools do equally well in academic

work in school after the primary grades. What's more, children who attend child-centered early childhood programs exhibit personal and interpersonal benefits that research shows extends throughout childhood, through adolescence, and into the early adult years.

While parents have a choice of programs in most communities, the early childhood accreditation standards from the National Association for the Education of Young Children consistently describe programs with a child-centered approach that goes beyond teacher-directed programs with a narrow academic focus.

Questions to ask

- How is academic learning approached in your program?
- How important is a child's social experience in your program?
- Can you describe ways that you support academic and social growth in your classrooms?

What to look for

- The classroom schedule gives children time to play.
- Teachers are able to tell you how children learn through play.
- The classroom is set up so that children can choose their activities for part of the school day.

Warning signs

- Repetitive / rote activities such as writing the alphabet over and over.
- Consistent and extended use of teacher-directed “drills” such as flash cards.
- Children move through classroom experiences in a large group and without choices.

The Children's School

The Developmental-Interaction philosophy demands that we educate the whole child, attending to both the affective and intellectual experiences of children in our classrooms. In our philosophy, conflict is a necessary condition for learning to occur. Therefore, we attend closely to children's experiences in the classroom where conflict occurs—in social relationships, in the exchange of ideas, and in the use of materials. We use these opportunities for facilitating conflict resolution between peers, for assessing the emotional experience of children, and in supporting the cognitive growth that is the outcome of taking on meaningful challenge.

What are the real world results of this approach? In 2005 we conducted research with our alumni students and families. The time period covered extended back 25 years...all the way to the initial founding of The Children's School in 1980. Results showed consistent rankings between 3 and 4—on a scale of 1-4 where 4 is the most satisfied—in how we prepared children for the next school in four areas: academic work, peer relationships, leadership opportunities, and creative expression.



8 Opportunities for parent education and involvement

Parents are the first and most enduring influence in a child's life. A model program supports parents in their role as parents through a variety of avenues. There are ample opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate about the classroom, the child's

development, and the child's experience in the program. There are educational opportunities available for parents. There are ways parents can get involved in the classroom, offering skills and talents unique to the parent or family.

Questions to ask

- Do you have parent education classes? What are some recent topics? How often do they occur?
- What kind of parent involvement do you expect?
- What kind of parent involvement opportunities do you provide?
- How are parent views on the education program gathered?

What to look for

- Parent education opportunities that are an established and regular part of the school's program.
- There are ways for parents to get involved in classroom activities, fundraising, or committee work providing input to policy development.
- There are established systems of communication between the school and family.

Warning signs

- Parents are asked to stay out of classrooms.
- No parent involvement opportunities exist, either in the classroom or on parent committees.

The Children's School

The Children's School hosts parent education noon and evening sessions throughout the school year. These events are led by teachers, parents, or consulting speakers. Recent topics include "Reading and Writing" taught by our Primary teachers, book club discussions around the book Unconditional Parenting, and "Growing Up Too Soon: Preserving Childhood in Today's Popular Culture" presented by Diane Levin, PhD, from Wheelock College in Boston.

Parents regularly cook, sew, support teachers in supervising children on outings, and read to children in all our classrooms.

In addition, our Parents for The Children's School organization raises money to fund ongoing school projects: teacher professional development, tuition assistance, capital improvements, and parent and community education events.

One parent each year is a voting member of the Board of Directors. Other parents lend their skills and talents as members of Board of Director committees.



9 Continuous program improvement

A model school continually strives to enhance, improve, and extend its program. Internal and external assessment is an important part of program review and improvement. A review of the program is undertaken on a regular basis and includes parents, teachers, and staff. The criteria used for review is

philosophically consistent with the program and upholds the highest standards of the profession.

Teachers participate in ongoing educational opportunities that support their understanding of children and program philosophy, and renews classroom practice.

Questions to ask

- Do you have regular, periodic evaluations of the program by objective, third-party experts in early childhood education?
- Do your faculty and staff participate in ongoing education in early childhood content areas?
- Does the school have scheduled, periodic internal reviews of practices aimed at improving the program?

What to look for

- Accreditation by a recognized early childhood education organization, with regular, periodic reviews.
- Mechanisms for ensuring ongoing teacher education and training (e.g., regular training/education sessions for teachers, grants or scholarships available for teachers to further their education).

Warning signs

- School or program lacks accreditation or evaluation by an independent third party with expertise in early childhood education.
- No established or institutionalized method of furthering faculty education.

The Children's School

The Children's School was the first private early childhood education program in Boise to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Since this first accreditation in 1989, The Children's School has participated in an ongoing process of assessment and self-study in order to maintain our NAEYC accreditation status. As part of this ongoing process, every five years we undergo a rigorous formal review by NAEYC, which evaluates our program against more than 10 program standards. Our last review and accreditation occurred in 2002 and we will undergo review once again in 2007.

In addition, the faculty and staff of The Children's School participate in individual and group continuing

education opportunities from community sources and through on-site consultations. Currently, 14% of our teachers are enrolled in undergraduate studies in early childhood education. All faculty and staff participate in monthly education evenings intended to build community, increase understanding, and improve daily practice. In addition, teachers have access to individual accounts where money for professional development is saved for their particular educational needs. Some teachers take university classes; others attend local or national conferences. There is an emphasis on both individual and full faculty development at The Children's School.



10 Leadership in early childhood education

A model school sets a standard for exemplary practice and is a leader to others. Faculty and staff are involved in the broader community in discussions of exemplary practice in early childhood education. Visitors are a regular feature of a model school,

whether they are students from the local university, faculty from other schools, or prospective parents. There is an enthusiasm about the model program in the broader community.

Questions to ask

- Do you have visitors who come to observe your program in order to improve their knowledge and understanding of early childhood education (e.g., faculty/staff from other programs, university students, etc.)?

What to look for

- There are outside observers (e.g., faculty/staff from other programs, university students, etc.) visiting the school and studying the program.
- The school's participation/involvement in early childhood education research opportunities.
- There is an enthusiasm in the community about the program.

Warning signs

- The school doesn't encourage/allow visitors to the school to learn about the educational model.

The Children's School

We welcome visitors on a regular basis from the Boise community and from around the state who know of the Developmental-Interaction philosophy and our practice, and want to observe our school and teachers in action. We regularly open our classrooms to university students and faculty for internship, practicum, and student teaching experiences.

Our teachers and director have been involved in workshop preparation and presentation at the local and national level. In 1999 our full faculty engaged in a

study of conflict resolution. Our work led us to open our doors to teachers in other early childhood programs to observe our work with children around conflict resolution; ultimately we gave input to the creation of teacher education video and materials, "Children and Conflict: An Opportunity for Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom," which is currently being offered to early childhood education programs across the United States by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Checklist for Determining Model Programs

PRINT OUT THESE PAGES AND USE THEM AS A HANDY CHECKLIST WHEN YOU MAKE PHONE CALLS OR VISIT SCHOOLS.

1. Teachers specialize in early childhood education.

Questions to ask

- How many teachers hold degrees in early childhood education or related areas?
- How many teachers hold graduate or post-graduate degrees?
- Are any teachers currently studying early childhood education or related areas?
- How many teachers have no degree or course work in early childhood education or related areas?

What to look for

- Teachers can tell you what school(s) they've attended, when they attended and what degree(s) they've earned or course work they've completed.

Warning signs

- Teachers unsure/evasive about their educational background.
- Teachers who have their degree "from the school of hard knocks".

NOTES:

2. School practices a coherent theory of education

Questions to ask

- What is your theory of early childhood education?
- What research/studies support the theory?
- How long has the theory been practiced?
- Is it practiced by other schools? How many? Where?
- Are there printed materials / web sites explaining the theory?
- How is your faculty trained in the theory?
- What kinds of ongoing education for teachers are there?

What to look for

- Different teachers can discuss the theory in a knowledgeable way.
- Different teachers explain the theory in the same way.
- Teaching behavior is consistent with the theory.
- Teaching behavior is consistent from class-to-class, age-to-age and teacher-to-teacher.

Warning signs

- Teachers don't know there is a theory of education at the school.
- Teachers take wildly different approaches in their classrooms.
- Statements such as: "we just kind of do what seems natural".

NOTES:

3. Optimum teacher/student ratios

Questions to ask

- What is your student to teacher ratio?
- Does that ratio vary from classroom to classroom? If yes, by how much? Why?
- Does the ratio include parent volunteers? If so, what is the ratio when volunteers are not counted?

What to look for

- Count the number of children and adults in a classroom; then identify which adults are teachers and which are not (e.g., parent volunteers).
- Visit more than one classroom to see if the ratio is more or less the same throughout the school.

Warning signs

- More than 10 children per teacher, or, classrooms with a large number of children—30 or more—even if the ratio is one teacher per 10 children.

NOTES:

4. Stable, consistent faculty

Questions to ask

- How many new teachers do you have this year? How many last year? The year before?
- How many of your teachers have been here more than two years? Five years? Ten years?

What to look for

- Teachers who know their way around the facilities.
- Teachers who readily talk about their history at the school and previous classes that they've taught.
- Teachers are comfortable and familiar with the children in their classroom, children in other classrooms, other teachers and parents.

Warning signs

- Teachers who don't know where things are in their classroom or the school in general (e.g., don't know where paint supplies are or where bathrooms are).
- Teachers who don't know standard routines (e.g., not sure who decides what snacks are served).
- Teachers who are unsure of schedules (e.g., don't know when "outside time" is or when snack time is).

NOTES:

5. The school teaches the way children learn

Questions to ask

- Can you describe a typical classroom setup? Why is it set up that way?
- Do your classrooms stay the same day to day? Or do they change? If so, how?

What to look for

- The classrooms have multiple areas that each have a different focus or activity (e.g., paint area, block area, reading area, work area, etc.).
- Children are engaged and interested in activities, yet can easily move from activity to activity or group to group.
- Teachers available to children, often sitting in low chairs or one the floor to be close to children's activities.

Warning signs

- Repetitive / rote activities that are teacher-directed (e.g., practicing writing the alphabet over and over).
- Teachers "lecturing" to a group of docile children for extended periods.
- Children wandering around looking "lost".

NOTES:

Checklist for Determining Model Programs

PRINT OUT THESE PAGES AND USE THEM AS A HANDY CHECKLIST WHEN YOU MAKE PHONE CALLS OR VISIT SCHOOLS.

6. Program continuity through early elementary

Questions to ask

- Does your school provide early childhood education that extends from toddlers (2-3 years old) to early elementary grades (7-8 years old)?
- Do your teachers follow the same philosophy of education as a child moves from pre-school to kindergarten to early elementary grades?

What to look for

- Consistent teaching methods across all classrooms, regardless if they are preschool, kindergarten or early elementary.

Warning signs

- Preschool program ends at kindergarten.
- No preschool or kindergarten classes that feed into early elementary classes.

NOTES:

7. Beyond an "academics-only" curriculum

Questions to ask

- How is academic learning approached in your program?
- How important is a child's social experience in your program?
- Can you describe ways that you support academic and social growth in your classrooms?

What to look for

- The classroom schedule gives children time to play.
- Teachers are able to tell you how children learn through play.
- The classroom is set up so that children can choose their activities for part of the school day.

Warning signs

- Repetitive / rote activities such as writing the alphabet over and over.
- Consistent and extended use of teacher-directed "drills" such as flash cards.
- Children move through classroom experiences in a large group and without choices.

NOTES:

8. Opportunities for parent education and involvement

Questions to ask

- Do you have parent education classes? What are some recent topics? How often do they occur?
- What kind of parent involvement do you expect?
- What kind of parent involvement opportunities do you provide?
- How are parent views on the education program gathered?

What to look for

- Parent education opportunities that are an established and regular part of the school's program.
- There are ways for parents to get involved in classroom activities, fundraising, or committee work providing input to policy development.
- There are established systems of communication between the school and family.

Warning signs

- Parents are asked to stay out of classrooms.
- No parent involvement opportunities exist, either in the classroom or on parent committees.

NOTES:

9. Continuous program improvement

Questions to ask

- Do you have regular, periodic evaluations of the program by objective, third-party experts in early childhood education?
- Do your faculty and staff participate in ongoing education in early childhood content areas?
- Does the school have scheduled, periodic internal reviews of practices aimed at improving the program?

What to look for

- Accreditation by a recognized early childhood education organization, with regular, periodic reviews.
- Mechanisms for ensuring ongoing teacher education and training (e.g., regular training/education sessions for teachers, grants or scholarships available for teachers to further their education).

Warning signs

- School or program lacks accreditation or evaluation by an independent third party with expertise in early childhood education.
- No established or institutionalized method of furthering faculty education.

NOTES:

10. Leadership in early childhood education

Questions to ask

- Do you have visitors who come to observe your program in order to improve their knowledge and understanding of early childhood education (e.g., faculty/staff from other programs, university students, etc.)?

What to look for

- There are outside observers (e.g., faculty/staff from other programs, university students, etc.) visiting the school and studying the program.
- The school's participation/involvement in early childhood education research opportunities.
- There is an enthusiasm in the community about the program.

Warning signs

- The school doesn't encourage/allow visitors to the school to learn about the educational model.

NOTES: