

CHECKLIST FOR EXCELLENT EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Finding the right early childhood program can be confusing and overwhelming. Creating a wish list of what you hope your child will learn and experience is a great way to start. Do you want your child to: Play well with others? Learn to share? Gain confidence? Become a great reader? Be creative? Enjoy school? Develop good habits?

When you start thinking about what you envision for your child, it can make the process easier. The following checklist aims to help you make the best early childhood program choice for your family.



Characteristics of an excellent early childhood program:

- Teachers are highly qualified with four-year degrees and they participate in ongoing professional development.
- The classroom environment is creative, inviting and clean. The room is well-equipped with sufficient materials that are organized and accessible to children. It is adapted to the needs of children and is set up for a wide range of activities that support learning.
- The curriculum fosters all areas of a child's development – cognitive, emotional, language, physical and social – and is aligned with Illinois Early Learning & Development Standards.
- The program uses effective teaching approaches that are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate for young children.
- The group size and student to teacher ratio allows for individual attention.
- Teachers promote positive relationships with children; they are responsive and nurturing. A classroom community is developed where children gain confidence and self-esteem and are given supportive approaches to problem-solving.
- Open communication exists between teacher and parents; information is exchanged about children's development and learning. Ongoing assessment of children's progress is provided.
- The principal and teacher are available via phone, email and in-person meetings.
- The daily schedule allows for small and large group learning, structured and independent activities, small and large muscle play and quiet time.
- Children are engaged in their activities, participating with teachers and each other; they are confident, happy and comfortable.
- The early childhood program is part of an established setting for learning, and an integral part of the elementary school, not just an "add-on."
- Children have access to enrichment programs such as computer, music, gym and art.
- The building and the classroom are safe and secure; a system is in place for supervision at all times.
- The school community is family oriented and encourages parents to be involved. Collaborative relationships with parents are established and maintained.
- Students are welcomed into a community of faith and children begin learning about character building and caring for others.
- The school builds relationships with neighborhood organizations and connects families with community agencies and resources.
- There is a seamless plan in place for transition into kindergarten and first grade.
- The early childhood program is an essential part of a PreK – 8th grade elementary school, which is recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education.

