

CO-OP COMMUNITY NEWS

From the Parent Advisory Council
of the North Seattle Community College
Cooperative Preschool Program



February 2007

CHOOSING A PRESCHOOL

INFORMATION COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY
DAWN CARLSEN, NSCC PARENT EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR

A child's pre-school experience lays the foundation for future learning. Academic skills are important, but not nearly as important as the attitude and love the child acquires towards learning and exploring the world around him.

The primary issue to consider when choosing a pre-school is not only the reputation of the school. There are many wonderful schools. The question is, which school is best for your child? What philosophy and style of learning will match with his or her skills, talents, and needs? What are YOUR child's needs from the school?

Where will your child thrive?

Make an appointment to visit the schools you are considering and evaluate them according to these following criteria.

Some of the areas deal with the convenience factor - such as location and hours. Others relate to educational philosophy or learning styles. The factors are not listed here in order of importance. Only you can decide what are the most important factors in your decision.

Do not let anyone (relatives, friends, the latest fad) talk you into sending your child to a school that is far beyond your financial means

or that will cause great stress due to the hours or geographical location.

1. Location

Unless there is specific reason for your child to travel a significant amount of time to go to school (e.g. special needs), limit yourself to schools in your immediate area. If possible, young children should not spend long periods of time in transit. And, while driving forty minutes to get to the "best" school, may seem reasonable in theory, in reality, when you are hurrying to work, or when another child is sick in the car, you may not find it practical.

2. Hours of operation

Check out the hours of each program. If you need coverage until three p.m., eliminate programs that end at one. Ask if the school has an "after-school" program. Know what your options will be in each location.

3. Educational Philosophy

Some pre-schools operate based on specific educational goals and criteria that are determined by a specific approach to early childhood education. Other schools do not have a specific approach but have their own personal "philosophy". If the school does not have a

specific approach, ask the director about the school's "philosophy of education." Consider the following areas:

a. Emphasis on academic skills

Some pre-schools emphasize academic skills more than others. Is the learning of letters, numbers, and concepts taught according to a child's interest and readiness, or are these skills methodically taught as a necessary part of the curriculum?

b. Parent involvement

Some pre-schools require a certain amount of parent involvement, while other schools prefer that parents "sit on the sidelines" unless needed. If you are a parent who likes to be involved, choose a school that will welcome your involvement. If you will not have time in your schedule to participate in classroom activities and trips, make sure this kind of participation will not be required.

c. Approach to child independence and individual creativity

Some schools encourage independence, while others emphasize discipline and order. Ask if the school

has a strict daily schedule and if all children must participate in each activity or if the teachers change the school routine according to the needs and desires of the children.

d. Learn about the school's teaching philosophy.

Is the school's philosophy education- or play-based? Do they rote teach the alphabet with the teacher sitting at the front of the room drilling the students or do they let the children learn through their play? Some preschools blend both education- and play-based styles into the curriculum.

Does the school stress process over product? In other words, do all of the children make artwork, which looks exactly alike? An example would be a cut out teddy bear with 3 buttons down the front, 2 eyes, a nose and a mouth all placed where they belong. Most likely, the teacher did the majority of the work on such a project. An alternative would be to stress creativity by encouraging children to create art projects on their own, such as providing them with various art supplies and letting them create whatever they desire

e. Specific approaches in early childhood education you may encounter are:

Montessori - Maria Montessori's theory of child development involves building the pre-school into a "children's house." Perhaps her most important belief was that "play" is a child's "work." In a Montessori school, children do not "play," they "work." They do not use "toys," they use "materials." Children are given the freedom to explore their environment independently and choose their daily activities.

Allows children to select work that captures their interest rather than projects selected by a teacher.

Children are encouraged to take care of themselves; go to the bathroom without assistance, prepare a snack when they are hungry, clean up their own spills.

Encourages individual progress—children learn at their own pace.

Classes are not segregated by age.

Montessori preschools can vary widely in their individual interpretation of these principles. Some Montessori schools are very structured.

Waldorf - Waldorf schools base their approach on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. The emphasis is on daily activities that relate to the "whole child." All teaching is directly connected to life experiences. Waldorf schools place an emphasis on the use of art and nature in the classroom and discourage exposing pre-school children to television and computers.

Reggio Emilia

Follows the children's interests rather than adhering to a set curriculum of academic goals

Children are encouraged to work in groups

Materials children work with are very diverse (not just paint & clay—wood, pine cones, shells)

Teachers believe children can express themselves through various visual media—not just speech

Children's work is carefully "documented" through the display of projects, allowing them to learn that their work is important, and to see progress made over time

Teachers try to encourage children to find answers to their own questions rather than giving children scientific answers

Preschools modeled after Reggio Emilia encourage child directed learning

Look for programs that are;

1. Developmentally Appropriate
2. Individually appropriate

3. Age appropriate

4. Fits the needs of each child

5. Encourages children to learn through the use of "manipulatives"—real objects

6. Children learn about topics that are "personally meaningful and interesting"—ie. language skills are improved through children's story telling

7. Teacher's goal is to learn each child's skills and help to develop them by providing challenges for each individual

8. Children are encouraged to work individually and in small groups whichever is more comfortable for them

The question that must be considered when evaluating any educational philosophy is not which philosophy is correct. All approaches have valid points. Ask yourself which approach will work best for your child. Some children flourish in a school that allows them independence to choose their daily activities. Other children, will simply be bored and "get lost" in the exact same setting.

4. Teacher Qualities and Style

When you visit a school, observe how the teachers interact with the students. Do they approach the children with warmth and caring and appear happy while doing their job? Do the teachers sit next to the children and work together with them, or do they supervise the children from afar? Once again, consider your child's needs. Some children respond best to teachers that exhibit a lot of physical warmth (kissing, hugging). Other children prefer more "space."

Observe how many adults are in the classroom, in relation to the number of children. Ask the director for information on the level of teacher training. How many certi-

fied teachers are there per child? You can also ask about the experience of the teacher assistants. Often "uncertified," yet experienced assistants can be marvelous teachers.

See if you can find out about staff turnover. Ask the director if the teachers you are observing are continuing the next year and how many years each teacher has worked at the school. Of course, on occasion, teachers move schools for personal reasons, but if each year several teachers leave, that may say something about the school.

5. Facilities

Consider the physical environment of the school. Are the rooms spacious, airy, clean, well lit and - above all - safe? Do you see sufficient space for the children and teachers to move around? Are there a wide variety of materials available for the children to use during the school day?

Observe how the room is organized. You should see specific areas for different forms of play, sometimes referred to as "centers." These areas usually include: arts and crafts, dress-up, block play, a reading corner, and activities for

children to work on individually or in small groups.

Check out the outdoor play area. Do you see sufficient space for children to run around? Is there a variety of outdoor play equipment and is the equipment in good condition and set up safely?


6. Learn about the school's discipline policy. This is very important. Will your child sit in a corner for an hour if she pushes another child? Or, after attending to the injured child, will the teacher help the children to work out their differences? Are children taught ways to solve their problems without violence? Are the children taught how to "talk it out" with others they may disagree with?

7. Observe the children in the classroom. Do the children in the room seem to be happy? Are they involved in activities that are age appropriate? Are there lots of things that they can do or are all the children sitting at the table working on the same thing at the same time?

8. Ask about the schedule. Is there "circle" time? How long is

it? Is there more than one? Are the children involved or are they just listening? Is there a gym or all weather play ground for physical activities? What is the daily schedule?

9. Your Gut Feeling

Even though this is listed as Number 8, it should also be Number One. Do not underestimate your instincts. Consider personalities: your child's, the teachers', the school's, and yours. How do the teachers treat you? Do they have time for you and your children? Are the teachers engaged in their work or do they appear to be going through the paces? If after considering these points you do not come to a clear conclusion, go with the place that "feels" the best to you. If you are unsure, go back to the final contenders for a second visit. Look around the room and ask yourself, "Will my child be happy here?" Trust yourself to make the best decision for your child. Mother or father's intuition can be quite accurate. Nobody knows your child better than you so follow your feelings. 

Your child is welcome at Wallingford Afternoon Co-op Preschool!

Thinking about co-op preschool for your little one? Wallingford has openings for next year's 4 - 5 year olds. We meet afternoons Monday through Thursday. Afternoon co-op provides many advantages over morning classes.

You'll actually have enough time for your morning rituals! AM playdates become much more convenient, and finish with the kids going off to preschool together. Those morning art/gymnastics/music classes your little one would like to join won't be a problem. Afternoon class also builds emotional and physical stamina for all-day kindergarten, and perhaps most importantly, allows your child (and you) to stay in your PJs for a lot longer!

We are located at Keystone Congregational Church
5019 Keystone Pl N (one block north of the Good Shepherd Center) 98103, Seattle WA

For more information, see our page on the NSCC Co-op website:
<http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/parented/coops/wallingford/wallingford3to5PM.html>

or contact our parent coordinator -
Wyly Astley
wyllyastley@earthlink.net
or 240-1656

*The Parent Advisory Council (PAC)
of the
North Seattle Cooperative Preschools
Invite you to a Discussion with*

Cynthia Lair

“Raising Healthy Eaters”

Thursday, March 8, 2007 7-8:30pm
Faith Lutheran Church - Social Hall
8208 18th Avenue NE - Seattle, WA 98115
This lecture is free and open to the public

RAISING HEALTHY EATERS: How do we feed our children today? Thirty percent of our children are overweight, 15% obese. The number of children with asthma, diabetes, hypertension and immune disorders has increased. Empty calorie consumption is at an alarming high. Studies show health-threatening levels of pesticides in our food. Our food choices run willy-nilly as we try to incorporate the latest findings reported by the media. But what should you feed those you love? And how can you get them to eat what's best for them? Here's help... Come learn how to:

- Define what a whole food is
- Create boundaries around food choices
- Honor mealtimes for better emotional and physical health
- Find solutions for picky eaters
- Pack healthy lunchboxes and snacks

CYNTHIA LAIR graduated as a Certified Health and Nutrition Counselor from the Health and Nutrition Program (NYC) in 1987. She has been a faculty member of Bastyr University's School of Nutrition and Exercise Science since 1994 and recently became a Clinical Associate for the University of Washington School of Nursing. Her articles have been featured in Mother Magazine, Living Without, WSYSA's Play On!, and the Well-Being Journal. Ms Lair has been an invited speaker at the Vancouver wellness show, Clear Channel's Baby Expo, UW school of Nursing, and the La Leche League convention. She has taught whole foods cooking classes at the PCC, Sur La Table, Evergreen Hospital, Pike Place Market and many other venues. The revised edition of her popular cookbook, **Feeding the Whole Family** was released in January 1998 (Moon Smile Press) and has sold over 30,000 copies. Her latest book, **Feeding the Young Athlete: Spots Nutrition Made Easy for Players and Parents** was released in 2002.

No RSVP required, but for more information, please call 789-6975

KEEPING BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS SANE AND HAPPY!

BY MARY ANN ABBOTT, PARENT EDUCATOR

THE BIRTHDAY!

Birthday celebrations for children are changing!

That's the word from "the trenches" from new millennium parents! Instead of the traditional simple, cute cake with colorful (sometimes trick) candles, a few games and gifts, the annual birth day event is being replaced by an extravaganza organized by the most creative of parents and financed by the kindness of the parents' local bank.

So, what's the creative, loving, and balance-your-budget parents to do? To what degree should the parents follow suit? How much is too much? In order to keep up with the current expectations for parties, what is a "respectable" creative endeavor? What kind of celebration fits your family values and your child? Who will be coming? How many guests? Conscientious parents wade through lots of questions while planning a birthday to honor their child!

Generally, the plan is to center the party around the birthday child. Special for **that child**. Fun! Yes, a birthday should be fun. Simple. Yes, simple; not too elaborate, but sprinkled with a few serendipitous qualities. It should have more organization than the last party attended, but not as extravagant as the one the neighbors held at the Swimming Club last year. A Pirate Party? Maybe a Bubble Party or a Dinosaur Romp, complete with a rented bounce house in the backyard. Maybe just let Chuck E. Cheese do it all. Or, young girls would love the castles and fairyland festivities included in Sleeping

Beauty, Cinderella, or Snow White parties . . . The parent mind creates!

Then, there's the finances. The party shouldn't cost too much, or should it? Some parents might consider investing a flat \$200 fee at a fun place with inflatable air slides and pizza. Will it be possible to match the southern California family who treated their nine-year-old son and friends to a day at Disneyland and then a "sleep-over" in a Disneyland hotel? Or, why not consider renting a bike track and bikes for two hours so children can race to their heart's content! Next year, maybe individual horse rides at a stable? The pressure is on . . .

Competitiveness begins to rear its head in even the most reasonable of parents. It's as if there's a social hierarchy of the birthday circuit. Honest parents will admit to a slight fear that the birthday guests (both the children and other parents) will label the party a dud, and that a weak party may damage one's "birthday-throwing" reputation. One of the most challenging areas of competition is the "take-home goodie bag," a party must. The party is not truly successful until each guest has examined the contents of the personal "goodie bag." So, with the competitive aspect quietly in mind, parents add a few perks to the party. And, then, an idea which begins as a simple event gets complicated, brings a big price-tag, and finally requires too much of the child – and the family planners.

How should a parent plan a birthday party that is satisfying? How

does a parent create a meaningful experience which fits one's family values, while sidestepping undue expectations from others? A few suggestions may help.

1. Consider your child and his/her developmental level.

There will be many birthdays ahead for elaborate celebrations. Parents do not have to use their best birthday idea for the child's second birthday. Too many activities, too much rich food, too long an event, too many presents, too many people – these all set the child up for failure on his/her birthday. The child can become overwhelmed with everything, throw negative behaviors, and end the time with frustration for all.

2. Remember that fun can be stressful.

All of us have been to a party where the guest of honor erupts into crying, or throwing a tantrum, or not listening to the parents, or just being obnoxious and generally out-of-control. A simple pre-party conversation about "gift etiquette" can prevent some unconsciously rude behaviors. Sometimes a child has just had too much pre-party planning and is done. Tip: While preparing, stick to normal family routines as much as possible, including play time, naps, and a normal bedtime. Watch out for too many junk food stops because you are on a tight schedule and don't have time to cook. Plan the celebration for a time of day when your child is best able to cope with new situations. Young children respond more agreeably when parents

stick to a regular routine and keep some predictability in daily events, especially when parents know for sure there will be some unknowns and/or surprises for the child.

3. Involve the child (and the siblings) in the preparations.

Even the smallest child can take some responsibility and do a small task. Feeling as if he/she is "helping" boosts a child's self-esteem and family identity. It's okay for some helping, even for one's own birthday. Siblings can learn how to celebrate (and enjoy) another's time of honor; the siblings will have a turn at the honored position on their birthdays. That's what happens in families: honorees each have a turn. Tip: Parents should not give in to siblings' pressure for something special, too, and end up honoring the siblings as well as the birthday child.

4. Accept your child.

Even if you do everything right, the child's excitement and anticipation of the event can put him/her into a higher emotional level; in this state, it's very difficult to get the child's attention. It's also hard to gain cooperation from the child because of the intense emotional distraction. Here, many parents feel angry, disappointed, sorry they had a party, disgusted – and more! The "sane, reasonable" work of the parents here is to not lose one's cool but to understand that parents must work a lot harder to communicate with the child and redirect behavior. The parents should hang in there!

5. Families need traditions.

When young families establish traditions, they build in comfort and security for children. What

will be your family's traditions for birthdays? One family rotates the kind of birthday celebration: one year, it's a family celebration with selected family members, not the whole tribe; the next year it's a friend celebration with the child selecting the friends, maybe even just one friend. The child selects what the friend(s) do together. Honoring established, passed-down traditions works for many families. Creating a family identity (no matter the family structure) is an important goal for family living. It's also important not to allow the ideas of others dictate your family values.

6. A final guideline: When it comes to planning family events with young child, less is better than more!



NSCC Co-op Preschool Openings for 2007*

| | Co-op | Contact | Phone |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Toddlers | Northeast | Erin Gustafson | 985-8580 |
| | Northgate Wed evening | Eileen Landay | 525-1235 |
| Pre-3s | Broadview | Ivonne DePauli | 368-5456 |
| | Ingraham | Piper Salogga | 528-1580 |
| | Meadowbrook | Judy Dauphinee | meadowbrookpre3@gmail.com |
| | Northwest | Jeanne McGrady | 706-5464 |
| | Victory Heights | Cindy Ponko | 306-9830 |
| 3-5s | Broadview | Ursula Frank | 235-9113 |
| | Latona | Jennifer Clark | 527-2817 |
| Multi-Age | Wallingford - 4-5's | Wyly Astley | 240-1656 |
| | Northgate Multi-Age | Jody Wirtz | 789-7077 |

Web Link To view current listings and for descriptions of each co-op, please go to our web site at: northseattlecoops.org
*current as of 2-9-07