

NAPA MOMS EXPO 2017

Saturday, January 7th from 9AM-12NOON
Las Flores Community Center, Napa

HOW DO I CHOOSE A SCHOOL?

Contrary to what you might have heard, choosing the right school for your child is not as difficult as applying for an advanced degree.

The key to choosing the right school is going into the process prepared. Prepared? Yes, prepared with a solid idea of what you want your child to gain from his or her school experience.

Here are some helpful suggestions for choosing a school that is a good match for your child and your family, as well as information on some of the most popular types of school educational philosophies.

Step One: Think about the Basics

The best way to keep from becoming overwhelmed by the process of choosing a school is to think about how the school will fit into your daily life. Here are some questions parents should consider:

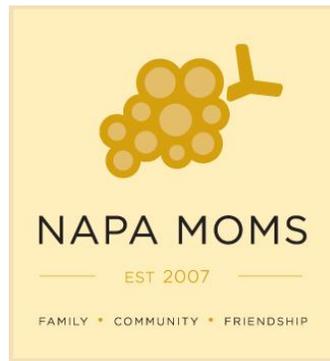
- Is it important for the school to be near my home?
- Is it important for the school to be near my workplace?
- Is it important for the school to offer childcare services in the morning, afternoon, or both?
- Am I eligible for or interested in subsidized school programs (i.e. Head Start or county/state-funded programming) that offer services such as childcare programs with a focus on providing educational opportunities?

Answering each of these questions will help you narrow down the general location and type of setting you should research. Narrowing down your choices will make the process of comparing settings easier to manage.

Step Two: Become Familiar with Common Terms

For many parents, the most confusing part about choosing schools is trying to make sense of terms such as, "Montessori Approach," "child-centered," "Waldorf Approach" and "faith-based." What do these terms mean and how can these terms help you choose a school?

Oftentimes, the key difference between settings is connected to the school's "educational philosophy." While educational philosophies are numerous and their definitions are not set in stone, we have



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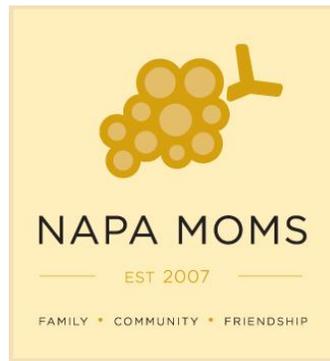
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provided you with definitions for some of the most popular philosophies.

- **The Montessori Method**
Focuses on maintaining the individuality of each child in the learning process. This method believes each child learns at their own pace and educational progress should not be rendered based upon comparing students to one another.
- **The Reggio Emilia Approach**
This approach focuses on providing opportunities for problem solving through creative thinking and exploration.
- **The Waldorf Approach**
This approach places an emphasis on imagination in learning, providing students with opportunities to explore their world through the senses, participation and analytical thought.
- **The Bank Street Approach**
This approach places an emphasis on learning through multiple perspectives, both in the classroom setting and in the natural world.

Outside of the formal educational philosophies, knowing the difference between other common early childhood terms will help you make informed decisions regarding your child's education. Below is a list of some common terms used to describe school settings. It should be noted that these terms may be used alone or in combination with one another (i.e. a "child-centered, faith-based" setting).

- **Child-centered**
This term is often used to describe settings that take the children's interests into consideration when planning activities. For example: in a child-centered setting, the classroom activities are based on the interests of the students, not on pre-scheduled topics chosen by the teacher. These settings often offer increased opportunities for children to choose activities throughout the day depending on their interests.
- **Teacher-led**
The opposite of a child-centered setting is a teacher-led setting. Teacher-led often means that curriculum and supplemental activities are implemented based on a set schedule developed by the teachers in the setting. This type of setting usually provides children with a structured learning environment.



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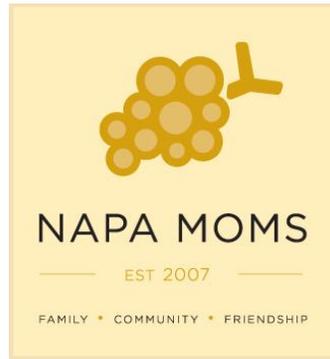
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- **Child-led**
These settings believe children learn best when they are engaged and interested in learning. Child-led settings wait for each child to initiate or ask for new activities and experiences, fostering individualized learning experiences rather than group experiences.
- **Faith-based**
This term is used to describe school programs that are run through faith organizations such as churches or synagogues, according to their faith's philosophies.
- **Co-operative**
These settings often ask parents and families to assist in the running of the school. Parents and family members may build community by signing up to volunteer during the week, or by assisting in the day-to-day management of the school as well as helping with advertising, upkeep and fundraising.
- **Developmentally Appropriate**
This term means the school plans the curriculum and activities based on activities that are appropriate for the age of the children in the class.
- **Pre-kindergarten (pre-K)**
Sometimes this term is used interchangeably with school. In general, a pre-K program is one that has children enrolled in the year before kindergarten, usually at age four. These settings are often more structured than traditional school settings.

Step Three: The Research

Once you have narrowed down the general area you are interested in researching and have a good idea of what type of philosophy would best suit your child, here are a few things you can do to help narrow down your options:

- Reach out to other parents: Ask your friends, your neighbors, your pediatrician, your older child's teacher - ask people you trust for recommendations for quality settings in your area. Be mindful to note the name of the setting and what struck this person as important to mention (low student teacher ratio, close to home, child is excited to arrive, etc.). And, the best question to ask is, "What advice do you wish you had received before choosing your child's school?" Most parents will be happy to offer their insight and advice.
- Attend the **NAPA MOMS EXPO 2017!**



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Step Four: The Visit

Now that you have narrowed down your choices and come up with two or three settings you are interested in, schedule a time to visit each setting. You can learn a lot about a setting by the way staff approach introductory visits with you and your child. During your visit ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I feel welcome here?
- Does my child seem interested in what they have to offer?
- Do the children in the setting seem happy?
- How do the adults and children interact?
- Is the setting clean and safe?

You should also come to the visit prepared with questions. Some of the basic questions parents ask are:

- What is the turnover rate for staff members?
- What percentage of the staff holds degrees in early childhood?
- How does the program handle discipline?
- What are the safety procedures for picking up and dropping off children?
- Is the program accredited?
- What are the payment options and procedures?