

HOW TO FIND A GREAT MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Checklist for evaluating your child's preschool



Hudson Country Montessori
Danbury, CT New Rochelle, NY

HUDSON COUNTRY MONTESSORI SCHOOL

44A Shelter Rock Road
Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 744-8088

340 Quaker Ridge Road
New Rochelle, NY 10804
(941) 636-6202

How To Find A Great Montessori School

Setting Up the Visits

Locate at least three schools that you would like to visit. If there is only one Montessori school in your area, visit other schools, either private or public, and use these same checklists. It is important to know that you have made your decision based on as much information as possible.

Call each school and ask about their enrollment and visiting procedures. Check the school's websites to also get information about the school's visiting and enrollment policies.

Some schools may not do initial one-on-one visits and may instead offer open houses at different intervals during the year.

One-on-one visits

When you arrange for a visit, ask each school how much time you should allow for a tour. Morning visits are recommended if you want to see a preschool classroom in action.

Open house visits

Inquire about the format of the open house visit so that you can be prepared to gather information. Some open houses start with a group meeting and a tour of each classroom, allowing for time to visit with staff and administrators.

Surprise visits

Some childcare advocates recommend surprise visits to schools. That is fine if you want to get an insight of how the school runs when company isn't expected. If you expect a tour and someone to spend an hour or more with you, make an appointment. School administrators are busy people, plus there is always the risk that, without an appointment, the children won't be in school that day for some reason.

To schedule a tour at Hudson Country Montessori School, give us a call at the following numbers:

Danbury, CT Campus (203) 744-8088

New Rochelle, NY Campus (941) 636-6202

Checklist: Things to Ask

Remember, you are asking questions for a long-term situation, not just for your child's immediate needs. You may want to bring these checklists with you, of course, or you may feel more comfortable filling them out afterwards in your car or at home. You might also be able to answer many of these questions from the school's website and brochures.

Some of these questions may appear invasive. It is better to have a long-term view of the school you select for your children. It is not ideal for your children to be pulled out of a program after a few weeks or months because you weren't aware of certain policies or procedures. It is to your advantage and the school's best interest to invest the time in the beginning to have a good match.

The school visit checklist is included at the end of this article.

To take a look at some optimal responses for the following School Visit Questionnaire, download the complete guide on *How To Find A Great Montessori School*. [Download here](#).

Let's Look at What You Discovered

You've gathered a lot of information. You might have been so well prepared about looking at schools that you've already signed up.

If you are still in the decision-making process, read on. If you've made a decision, you may want to look at the factors that helped you make your decision.

For those of you who like to have a numbering system, for each question give a 1-2-3 score to each question:

- 3 — for exceeds expectations,
- 2 — for meets expectations, and
- 1 — for does not meet expectations.

With the 60 questions on our list, a score of 180 would mean that the school exceeded your expectations on every item.

Scores between 180 and 120 show that a school exceeded or met your expectation on most things.

A score below 120 indicates you have areas of concern.

A score of 60 or below shows that the school was a dismal failure in your opinion.

You'll probably be pleased with a school with scores between 120 and 180.

Please note that this scoring is subjective in the sense that value is given based on whether you think the school met your expectations. Another person may get a very different score for the same school, so I wouldn't necessarily compare scores but instead compare findings. The questionnaires might lead to some interesting discussions of differences, such as, "Why did you think the school building was not in good repair?" and so forth.

Note that the longer a school has been established, the higher likelihood of certain policies being established and well thought out. Smaller programs and schools may not have as developed a structure or policy as older and larger schools, but they may offer a more personal setting for your family.

School Visit Questionnaire Scoring

180	Indicates that every aspect of the school exceeded your expectations
180 - 120	Indicates that all aspects met your expectations
120 - 60	Indicates that many aspects of the school did not meet your expectations

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School Visit Questionnaire

Name of School: _____ Date: _____

Tour given by: _____

General and Pre-School Questions

1. What's the daily routine?
2. How many children in a classroom?
3. What is the age mix? What is the mix between boy and girls?
4. How do you ensure that the children have a three-hour work cycle?
5. What type of training do teachers have? How many years experience does each teacher have?
6. What is your policy about sick children?
7. How are birthday and holiday celebrations handled?
8. What is the school's discipline policy?
9. How does staff handle a biting incident? Hitting incident? Name-calling incident?
10. Do you have an anti-bullying policy and training? All staff trained?
11. What is the school's attendance policy?
12. Is there a copy of the Parent Handbook available?
13. How accessible are teachers and other staff members?
14. How are parents informed of a child's progress? Learning difficulties?
15. What steps are taken if a child starts to lag behind his or her peers?
16. What if my child needs to have more challenging work?
17. How are parents involved in the school?
18. How does the application process work?

Elementary Questions

1. When do you know a child is ready to move into your elementary program?
2. Is your elementary a Montessori program or more traditionally based?
3. Are elementary teachers trained?
4. Is homework assigned in elementary?
5. How are the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic emphasized?
6. How do the lessons in elementary provide a rich content?
7. How much physical activity do the children get per day?
8. Do you have an outdoor classroom? How is outdoor time handled?
9. Are there any after school activities?
10. Do elementary students take standardized tests, such as the Iowa Basic Skills, Stanford, etc?
11. How do the elementary students perform on the standardized tests? Do you have written documentation that you can share with me?
12. How does the school encourage creativity? At the preschool level and elementary?
13. Does the school have a program for 12 to 15 year olds? If not, where do the children go?
14. Does the school have plans to establish a junior high program?

School Management Questions

1. What do you think are the school's strengths? What do you consider to be the school's weak points?
2. What Montessori professional standards does the school follow, AMI, AMS, MACTE, IMC or other? Does the school administrator have commitment to Montessori practices?
3. How is the school structured?

4. If the school is board-governed, how are board members selected?
5. How is policy adopted?
6. How are grievances handled?
7. What kind of staff turnover rate does the school have? How long has the present director been involved with the school? The previous director?
8. How does the school ensure that they have trained teachers?
9. What training do classroom assistants have?
10. Does tuition cover all expenses of the school?
11. Is there fundraising? How is that done?
12. Does the school offer financial assistance? If so, how does that work?
13. What would you say is the overall philosophy of the school?
14. How do you think a parent can best help the school community?

Overall Impressions

People

1. Did the staff answer your questions in a polite, friendly and informative manner?
2. Did staff seem genuinely interested in your family? Did you meet the school director? Do you feel you can approach the director with concerns, if necessary?
3. Are all teachers Montessori trained? Is the school director Montessori trained?
4. Are there specialists for art, music, foreign languages, and so forth?

Classroom

1. Did you see inside a working classroom?
2. Did the children appear to be actively engaged in their work?
3. Did the three-to six-year-old classroom seem calm and orderly?

4. Did the elementary classroom seem noisier and more active, with children engaged in small group (two to six children) activities?

School

1. Were the classrooms clean, attractive and well-lit?
2. Were the bathrooms clean?
3. Were the outdoor areas attractive and safe, with a variety of activities?
4. Is the building in good repair?
5. Are there assigned areas to observe classrooms?
6. Was there anything that just didn't feel right to you?
7. How would you describe the school's overall atmosphere?

Other Comments

Adapted from *Understanding Montessori: A Guide For Parents*. Reprinted by permission of the author

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