

Baristanet

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Montclair Elementary School Tours: Advice on What to Look for When Selecting a School

If you have a child who will be starting kindergarten in Montclair this September, the Montclair Elementary School tours will take place on Monday, March 18 through March 26. And in order to see all the schools, you will need to juggle your schedule to make it happen.

Through the years, we've shared our experiences with the tours, our take on the schools and the wait-it-out process.

Here is some advice from local professionals—Liz Kendall, Program Coordinator, and Professor Nancy Lauter, Ed.D, of Montclair State University's Early Childhood, Elementary Education, and Literacy Education program.

What to Look for When Selecting a Kindergarten for your Child

1. Make sure that the teachers have a substantial background in early childhood education and child development. Public school teachers should have appropriate NJ State Teacher Certification.
2. Survey the classroom to see if the physical space is clean, well organized, and provides enough room for children to move around and engage in large motor play easily. Children should be able to paint, play, move about without being cramped and should feel free to be who they are. The playground should feature well-maintained equipment and a flexible surface, not blacktop, in case of falls.
3. Watch if teachers are focusing on the unique needs of each child.
4. Check if the classroom is organized into centers that offer children a range of options each day. Centers should include, but are not limited to, dramatic play area (housekeeping area, store, restaurant, etc.), block area (large unit blocks, not only table top blocks), art/creative area, literacy and library areas, science area, and the like.
5. Ask if children have opportunities for large group, small group, and independent learning during the day.
6. Review the day's schedule to make sure it offers children a variety of group and individual experiences. Social interactions among peers should be plentiful.
7. Check if children look engaged, the materials are stimulating, and there is evidence of developmentally appropriate projects/experiences (field trips, study of seeds and plants).
8. Listen if teachers can articulate the program's philosophy of learning. Ask questions – What are the teachers' beliefs regarding how children learn? What is most important to teachers regarding what children gain from the program?
9. Note if parents/family are welcome in the classrooms at all times. Ask how often teachers communicate with parents/family and if they welcome parental/family feedback.
10. Don't forget to check if the curriculum and class reflects the diversity of the community and children are taught to value difference.

Don't forget to pick up a parent orientation packet at the elementary schools or the Montclair Board of Education, 22 Valley Road, Montclair, NJ, 07042. The packet contains information about each of the schools, including magnet theme, start and ending times, and programmatic highlights. The elementary school orientation packets will be available on March 15 at the Montclair Board of Education, and the week of March 18 at the elementary schools.

After touring, registration takes place April 22 – 25.

If you're touring this year, we want to hear your experiences too. Send us an email if you want to share. Happy touring!

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