

Finding Quality Child Care

Finding a Quality Child Care or Early Learning Program

Research shows that children who are in quality child care and early learning programs when they are young are better prepared for kindergarten with better reading skills, more math skills and larger vocabularies.

Grow NJ Kids, New Jersey's Quality Rating Improvement System, is working to raise the quality of child care and early learning across the state of New Jersey.

For parents, it provides information on selecting a quality provider to help them make the most of their kids' early learning opportunities.

For child care and early learning programs, it provides resources that help them raise their quality and continuously improve their program.

There are many types of child care or early learning programs to choose from. Some are in a school, others in a child care center or in someone's home.



Home-Based Settings:

Family Child Care

This type of care is provided in someone's home. In New Jersey, a provider can care for no more than five children, plus a maximum of three of their own children. Home providers can choose to be registered, which means they meet the basic safety and programs requirements established by state law. This registration also allows these in-home providers to accept payments from families participating in government-subsidized child care assistance programs.

In-Home Care

In this type of care, a person comes to your home to care for your child. This provider might offer other services such as light housekeeping, starting or making dinner or driving your child to lessons or play dates. Although you may use an agency to find such a provider, they are neither regulated nor licensed by the state and cannot participate in Grow NJ Kids.

Center- and School-Based Settings:

Child Care Centers

Licensed by the state of New Jersey, these facilities are inspected every two years and must meet basic health, safety, program and staffing requirements. They can care for six or more children from the age of 6 weeks to 13 years. There are many types of licensed child care centers, including but not limited to infant/toddler programs, early care and education programs and school-age programs. Licensed centers also may choose to meet more rigorous, research-based or accreditation standards. (There also are license-exempt centers, such as programs that are part of a public school district or private school.)

Head Start & Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start programs support the mental, social and emotional development of children from birth to age 5. In addition to education services, programs provide children and their families with health, nutrition, social and other services.

School District Preschool Programs

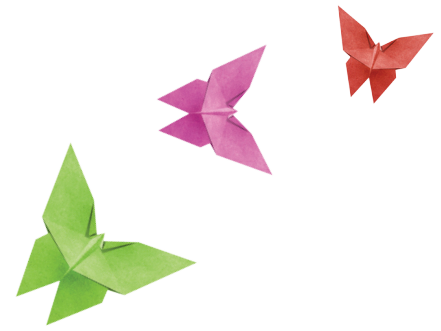
School districts provide research-based preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds, that may be located within a school district site, a private provider or a local Head Start agency.

Special Services School Districts

These districts provide options for preschool students with special needs and were developed to address the educational and developmental needs of children ages 3-5. Typically, these districts are comprised of three types of classes: classes that educate 4-year-old students who have special needs in the same classroom as those students who do not have special needs; preschool classes for students with Individualized Educational Programs and the need for smaller groups sizes and more individualized programming; and classes with highly specialized instruction for students with autism and students with hearing impairments.



When visiting a child care or early learning program, there are questions you can ask to help you determine which program is best for your child and family. These questions are based on indicators of quality that are embedded in the Grow NJ Kids standards.



Safe, Healthy Learning Environment

- Is there regular communication between program staff/teachers and parents? How is the information communicated (email, phone calls, letters sent home with child)?
- Is the space clean?
- Do you see staff and children washing their hands before and after meals and diapering? Is the facility safe and secure?
- Is the outdoor play space safe, clean, free of litter and broken glass?
- What meals are provided by the program? Are children allowed to bring their own food for religious or dietary reasons?
- Does the program have an oral health or a tooth brushing policy?
- Does the program check the children's eyes, hearing, teeth, and growth by providing screenings?
- Does the program support breastfeeding (breast milk storage/place to breastfeed)?
- Are children of different ages cared for together or are they grouped by age?
- How are children supervised during different situations (sleep or outside play)?

Curriculum and Learning Environment

- How many children will be in your child's class/group? What are the ages of the children in the classroom/home?
- Is there a daily schedule?
- Does the daily schedule incorporate both indoor and outdoor play opportunities?
- Do you observe positive, warm and nurturing teacher-child interactions and conversations while in the classroom/home?
- Do you see children interacting with each other?
- Do the children have access to books and other materials?
- Are the children read to each day?
- Does the program use a research-based curriculum (age appropriate for infants and young children)?
- Are children given "free play" time (For example, are children allowed to choose the book they'd like to read or what activity they'd like to do)?

Family and Community Engagement

- Does the program have an open door policy? Are parents allowed to visit at any time?
- Does the program make community resources (events, information regarding services) available to families?
- Does the program embrace your child's home language in the classroom/home and/or in the materials being used?
- Does the program share information about activities/lessons being worked on so parents can reinforce at home? For infants, is there a daily log?

- Does the program have opportunities for parents to volunteer in the classroom/home?
- Does the program offer parent workshops?
- Does the program have a parent council or parent group?

Workforce/Professional Development

- What is the education level of the staff?
- How long have the staff been employed with the program?
- What types of trainings do staff attend each year?
- How many staff have received Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid training?
- If the program uses a research-based curriculum, have the staff had formal curriculum training?

Administration and Management

- Does the program have a current child care license or family child care registration? (If applicable, as some school district programs are not required to have a child care license.)
- What is the tuition/cost? Other fees?
- Does the program have a parent handbook that outlines policies and procedures including child illness/sickness, emergencies, discipline?
- Is the program director on site during operating hours?
- What is the daily child check-in and check-out policy when dropping off and picking up your child?
- Is the program enrolled in Grow NJ Kids?

