



Photo by Suzi Issa

Cole Haynes, 3, is a winner in Cy-Fair Magazine's Cutest Kids Cover Contest



Minh paints at Bear Creek United Methodist Church School



Seniya at Primrose School

Photo by Jason LeHecka



Clint, Evan, and Sophie at Building Rainbows Day School

THE WELL-ROUNDED PRESCHOOLER

Finding the perfect fit for your child's academic, emotional, and social development

Written by Leigh Ann Mitchell | Select Photography by Suzi Issa

THE FIRST YEARS

of schooling lay the critical foundation for a child's education. Basic academic and social skills are learned, and early friendships begin to form. When considering preschools, Cy-Fair parents seek the best education for their cuties.

Luckily, our area has some of the best opportunities for children to blossom into a well-rounded preschooler.

Balancing Play and Academics

In the past, some preschools have focused on academic learning, while others have taken the learning-through-play approach. For many parents, they considered finding a blend of the two a deciding factor.

In today's preschools, that blend is more widespread than one might think. "There is a common misconception that there is a play or academic choice parents must make," says Steven Sandweiss of Building Rainbows Day School. "Scientific research supports the theory that children are learning through play. In fact, there are certain executive functioning skills – organization, memory, emotional control, planning, and goal-setting – that children develop through pretend play that researchers agree cannot be learned in any other setting."

Through play, children learn how to use their own creativity to role-play with others, solve problems, communicate, create art and music, and so much more. "Children need a variety of hands-on learning experiences to develop an understanding of basic academic concepts," says Laurie Mattingly of Bear Creek United Methodist Church School. Many preschools, like Building Rainbows and Bear Creek, have developed curriculum that balance both play-based learning and academics.

According to Debbie Anders of Primrose Schools, their school follows a curriculum that places special emphasis on a balanced, developmental approach to early childhood education. This includes literacy instruction and hands-on learning activities that build an understanding of science and mathematics. Lessons also integrate computer technology to support learning and the development of confident, happy children. Their curriculum balances child-initiated and teacher-directed activities with learning, character development, and play.

The Importance of Early Education

Preschool is, of course, optional for children, but with high standards in Cy-Fair ISD elementary schools, parents are seeing the importance and value of early childhood education. "More and more

William at Building
Rainbows Day School



Paul and Jackson at
Primrose School

A well-rounded preparation in basic concepts and social skills is essential to their children's success as they enter elementary school and beyond.

- Debbie Anders, Primrose Schools

parents are recognizing the importance of school readiness," says Anders. "A well-rounded preparation in basic concepts and social skills is essential to their children's success as they enter elementary school and beyond."

With standards for students constantly rising, being ready for school means more than knowing the alphabet or shapes. It means having good critical thinking skills, the ability to use mathematical concepts, knowing how to play fairly and how to share, and even showing self-control. "Research confirms that a focus on academic skills alone is not sufficient to ensure children's success in school," says Anders. "They also need nurturing guidance and attention to every aspect of development in the early years, so they can develop compassion, confidence, and a love of learning, in addition to competence in reading and math."

"Over the years, we have maintained close ties with teachers and principals in our local area school districts," adds Sandweiss. "The number one skill they say they wish children would learn before coming to kindergarten is the ability to listen and function in a large group setting." Building Rainbows makes sure students participate in large and small groups, as well as individual activities. Students are taught how to resolve conflicts by talking about issues and by respecting themselves and others. "When our children leave Building Rainbows, they are strong, confident, creative thinkers that welcome learning and meeting new people," says Sandweiss.



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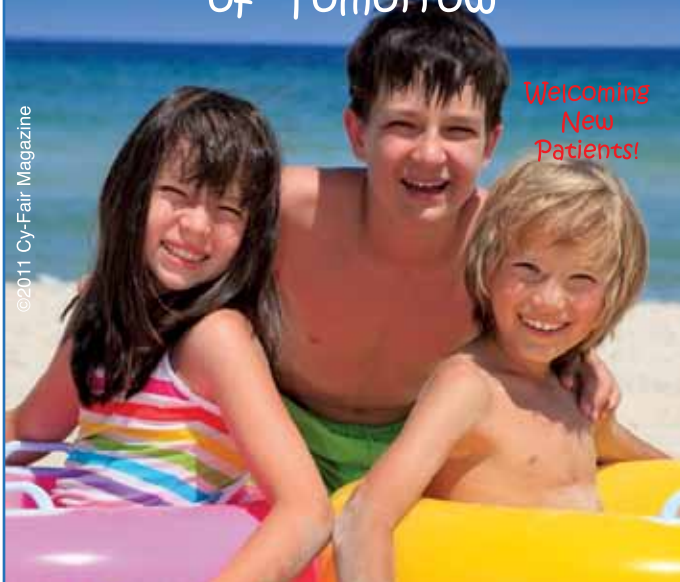
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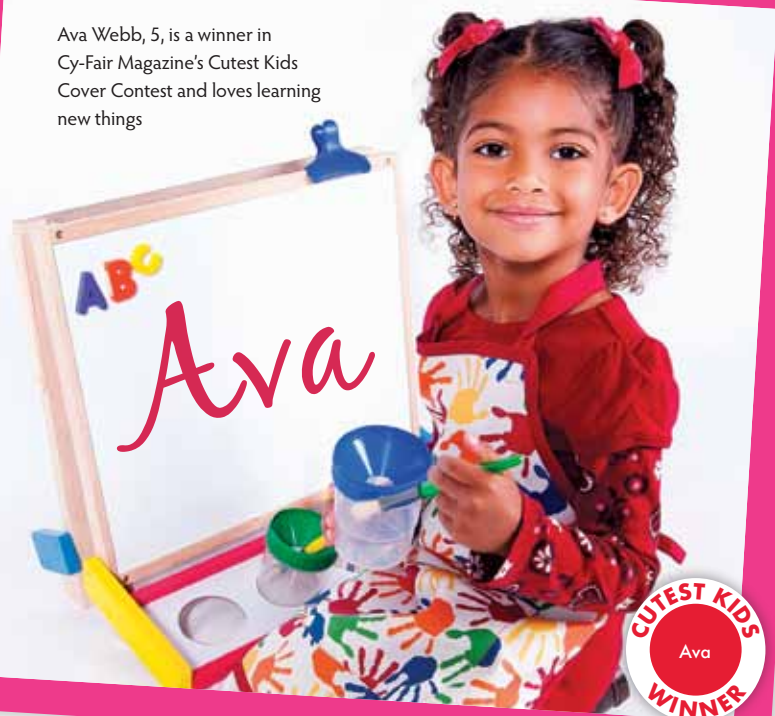
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Ava Webb, 5, is a winner in
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Finding the Perfect Preschool

So how does one find the perfect preschool for their cutie? It's important for parents to know what kind of environment their child will be in and how they will be prepared for kindergarten. Verifying that a school is registered, licensed, and accredited also proves crucial.

Cy-Fair mom Dawn Han says when she and her husband began the search for a preschool for their three daughters, Liên, Mai, and Lily, they prioritized their search criteria. "We were looking for social skills first, academics second, and faith third," she says. "As a stay-at-home mom with my first child, she only had interactions with other children at the library and Children's Museum of Houston's Tot Spot. We knew she needed more than that. When I went back to work, I was looking for academics first. You can't replace the social and academic skills learned in a quality preschool."

Sandweiss advises that parents should look for a place where they feel comfortable sending their children and where their children feel at ease. Parents should use resources like the Department of Family and Protective Services' website, which provides current reports regarding individual preschools and childcare centers. Visit the preschool's website, too, and see if the beliefs and philosophies of the preschool match your own. "Ultimately, parents need to look at their child and decide what is best for that particular child," says Sandweiss.

"Parents should look for a community of learners where the child is respected and encouraged to grow in an age-appropriate manner," advises Mattingly. "In addition to a positive learning environment, look for a clean, secure facility and an environment that encourages parent participation."

Tips from a Preschool Pro

Perhaps the best thing a parent can do when seeking a preschool for the first time is simply talk to friends or family who have already been through the process. "Talk to other parents in your area," says Han. "Talk to people at church, the library, or even the grocery store. You need to have a warm, fuzzy feeling about the school and the teachers. Show up unannounced to check the school out. I never had a school tell me that they couldn't show me around. Also, highest price doesn't always mean highest quality."

And, Han adds, make sure you understand the timeline to register, policies, procedures, and even parental expectations. "Register early," she advises. "You may need to register in March or April for the fall. Spaces fill up fast." **CFM**

LEIGH ANN MITCHELL is a graduate of Southwest Texas State University with a degree in biology and a minor in English. After seven years as a middle school science teacher, she is now a stay-at-home mom living in the Cypress area.

THE IDEAL AGE

To Start Preschool

Schools recommend their ideal ages and time frame of when to start the enrollment process

Primrose Schools

Ideal age: 3
Registration period: February through March
Prerequisite: Must be toilet trained

Building Rainbows Day School

Ideal age: 3 for preschool, 4 for prekindergarten
Registration period: Mid-spring
Prerequisite: Must be toilet trained

Bear Creek United Methodist Church

Ideal age: 3 to 4
Registration period: February through March
Prerequisite: Must be toilet trained



Jason, Evan, and William at Bear Creek United Methodist Church School

See Preschools Advertising in This Issue:

Bear Creek United Methodist Church School

16000 Rippling Water Dr.
Houston
281-463-2330 *See ad on pg. 80*
bearcreekumc.org

Building Rainbows Day School

13922 Schmidt Rd.
Cypress
281-890-7498 *See ad on pg. 29*
buildingrainbowsdayschool.com

Children's Lighthouse

8525 Queenston Blvd.
Houston
281-500-8060 *See ad on pg. 92*
childrenslighthousecypress.com

Primrose School of Copperfield

15550 Ridge Park Dr.
Houston
281-858-5600 *See ad on pg. 114*
primroseschools.com

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School

6646 Addicks-Satsuma Rd.
Houston
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seascatholic.org