

**For Immediate Release**

**For More Information Contact**

Marcia Opal, Principal

630-462-5010

[mopal@stmichaelcommunity.org](mailto:mopal@stmichaelcommunity.org)

**The ABC's Of Preschool**

*Curriculum Expert and Local Principal Advises Young Parents*

**November 17, 2010 – Wheaton, Illinois-** If you are a parent getting ready to send your child to school next year, chances are you are already weighing your options. Choosing a preschool for your child is exciting, but also daunting.

St. Michael Parish School Principal, Marcia Opal says of the decision, "Of course, you want your child to have the best beginning at school. We know parents want to make an informed decision. The question is, 'what questions do I need to ask?'" A curriculum expert, Mrs. Opal is an Adjunct Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Lewis University. She suggests parents consider the following when choosing a preschool.

**☐ Does the look and feel of the school appeal to you?**

Your intuition is a telling factor in considering a preschool for your child. Take seriously your gut feeling about a school. Do you and your child feel welcomed? Does the setting look clean and safe? Bright and warm? Is there a positive, upbeat atmosphere?

It is important for you to feel good about where your child is spending his or her preschool days. And, it is important for your child to want to go to preschool. As you visit your school options consider the school's appeal. Do you think you would have liked to go to preschool there? Can you imagine your child thriving there?

"Nobody knows your child the way you do," says Judi Gilles, Program Director of Fruit & Flower, a preschool in Portland, Oregon. "So you have to be able to picture your child in this setting and make sure your child will be comfortable and you will be too."<sup>i</sup>

**☐ Does the school make learning fun? Will it foster a love of learning?**

Esther Boylan Wolfson, Director of Early Childhood Development Center, claims, "A child's pre-school experience lays the foundation for future learning. Academic skills are important, but not nearly as important as the attitude and love the child acquires towards learning and exploring the world around him."<sup>ii</sup>

Learning should be fun! And in preschool, much of learning is accomplished through pretend and play. Are there preschool-age toys and materials available for the children? Do you see organized "centers" where children can spend time doing things like building blocks, playing kitchen or working with play-dough? In addition, is there ample space for the children to work as a group, with areas for reading and working at tables? What kinds of things are on display in the classroom? Are the walls lined with both things made by students and learning materials that are attractive to children? Do the children you see seem happy?

**☐ Do the values of the school support your values at home?**

Parents and school should ideally act as partners on behalf of your child's growth and development. Knowing that the school your child is attending will support and reinforce your

expectations for your child, and also the values you are working with your child to uphold, provides a more fluid relationship between home and school for both parent and child.

□ **Does the educational philosophy suit you and your child?**

A leader in education, Dr. Diane Levin, had this to say in her book, *Remote Control Childhood?* :

“When choosing a school for a young child, look for an environment that engages children in learning in active, exciting ways, and helps them feel enthusiastic and positive about mastering new skills and ideas. Schools should treat children as whole people. They should be places where kids will feel positive about learning and develop positive social relationships with peers. School should be a place that encourages children to appreciate both similarities and differences among people. Most importantly, school should be a place where play is valued and children are given many opportunities to explore new ideas through play.”<sup>iii</sup>

What are the goals of the preschool program you are considering? What is the educational philosophy? Is what you are hearing or reading about the program heartening?

Looking at the educational philosophy, consider what your child’s day will be like. Is there a balance of structure and free playtime? Does the school have special traditions or celebrations?

“As the Principal of a Pre-K – 8 School,” said Opal, “I see every day how important a child’s foundation is. So often, educators simply focus parents' attention on the academic tasks of gaining knowledge. Arguably, it is even more critical to consider the emotional, social and spiritual foundation one's child is acquiring. These are the things that shape 'who' the child becomes and 'how' they think and behave, in addition to simply 'what' they know.”

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<sup>i</sup> [www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/choosing1.html](http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/choosing1.html)

<sup>ii</sup> [www.wholefamily.com/aboutyourkids/bridge\\_pages/school.html](http://www.wholefamily.com/aboutyourkids/bridge_pages/school.html)

<sup>iii</sup> *Remote Control Childhood?: Combating the Pressures of Media Culture*, Diane E. Levin, 1998