

From the Desk of the Head of School by Gerri Faivre



Dear Parents...

Throughout the summer my reading took me to many sources and I tried to keep notes on things that I thought were salient points about how parents look at, assess, judge, form opinions about, establish criteria by, value, and ultimately make decisions about a school for their children...either sending them for the first time or keeping them there. Here is what I collected as the most important points that parents look to find in a school they are choosing or have chosen for their children. I shared this with the faculty at the first full faculty meeting of the year on September 3rd and asked that they keep it handy and check in with it on a regular basis to help guide their daily practices and overall approach to their classroom and things/behaviors around the school on a daily basis. The Administration will do the same. I thought that it might be of interest to you, the parents, as well!

Onward we go to all good things ahead for WFS and to a cooperative, collaborative spirit at all times, in the best interest of the children in our care.

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Head of School
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How Parents Discern a Good School from a Great School



They...

- know/see that their child is challenged in school
- see that their child comes home excited
- are able to ask a lot of questions and get answers
- hear about or see that there is a plan to improve any area of academics and challenge students/faculty to do better
- see children working together on projects and how flexible the teachers are in their methods
- see how special needs are handled or met
- know/see it is a diverse school in many ways
- know/see how the teachers infuse multiculturalism into the lessons
- see and hear about an active Parents Organization that fundraises
- see and hear about classrooms buzzing with activity
- see opportunities for art, music, and play
- feel that the school is warm and inviting
- know that if they liked the time they spent there as a parent visiting, then they do want to send their child there
- realize that private/independent is not necessarily better than public, or vice versa...but that both have the potential to be either, and what they sees determines for them the school's choice
- can see that class size, large or small, fosters intimate learning opportunities

- observe and learn by experience or by word of mouth that a Head/principal is available for one on one talks...the hallmark of a good administrator. They know that even very busy administrators should listen to their concerns.
- understand how the faculty is chosen and assessed with respect to performance
- are clear as to what is in place to help faculty improve
- sense a fostering of an environment where faculty can do their best work
- see that Administrators know all the children by their first names.
- get the fact that what trumps a low student-teacher ratio is a talented teacher
- know that children should learn from and with each other, working in groups and hands on activities, which draws out natural creativity and interest and they see it happening throughout the school
- watch as teachers fit in playtime and recess every day. They know that the faculty then understands that children learn and develop emotionally through play
- see how teachers handle different learning styles and personalities
- see kindness and respect for children in every situation, even during the most difficult moments when a child is treated in an honest, fair and respectful manner
- observe faculty willing to use a new approach in order for something to work for a student
- listen carefully to the way the faculty and administration speaks for that says volumes about the school and the people in it...from listening they can discern if he/she is creative, if they adjust to the learning needs of the child. The vibe sent off by a teacher/administrator is very telling.
- note a relaxed atmosphere, but not an out of control one
- see how the children connect with the teacher in some way
- experience how the teacher works with the parents on a plan to correct a situation
- see ongoing parent involvement...running events, Library help, volunteering
- see parents committed to the school and willing to actively work with the faculty and administration
- know that if a child needs help there is a protocol, procedure, or a process in place to determine why and how
- know that specialists are available in a variety of ways
- see that the school is inclusive and made up of a diverse population.
- see that children learn about varying beliefs, attitudes, values and traditions from other children.
- know and appreciate that a diverse environment helps children develop more open minds and a broader world-view of people, events and experiences.
- see a diverse student body as well as staff and a curriculum that honors differences or some mix of all the above
- know that there are established goals for improving the school in the next year... the next three...the next five
- know that something will be done to help if a child is falling behind and that parents will be consulted with immediately
- see that small group or individual interventions are available or possible
- see the arts visible and held in a place of importance, not being cut but rather maintained or increased
- hear present parents speak highly of the school, the faculty, the administration. They don't hear that teachers are tough, but rather fair, honest, knowledgeable and that the children are central to every decision the school makes.
- see student work displayed throughout the school. This speaks volumes about a school's expectations, as too much similarity indicates only one way to do an assignment. Variation shows that children are free to show individuality and speaks to the school's appreciation of the different ways children think, learn and do.
- know that making room for creative expression is a sign of a great school.