The HNC “Selecting a Preschool” survey is intended to help you as you research and evaluate the variety of preschool options available in Hingham and surrounding communities to find the best fit for you and your child. In the survey, we have summarized pertinent information about programs in Hingham and nearby. Don’t panic! There are generally enough spaces to go around. Many families apply to multiple schools. All schools maintain waiting lists. It may take some time to shake out, but ultimately most families are offered a space in a desired program by June, or even as late as August.

This survey is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the preschools in the area. While it is fairly comrephensive in listing the Hingham preschools, many preschools in surrounding towns chose not to be included, and there are many other quality programs that have served Hingham residents in the past. Ask around; you may find the best match for you and your child through word-of-mouth.

We hope that the survey will answer many of your questions. We encourage you to visit the schools. Most schools schedule open house sessions which offer an opportunity to meet the director, teachers and parents, listen to presentations on the school philosophy and programs, ask questions and see the space. Many schools also welcome visits with your child so that the child may see and respond to the space. It is helpful to see the classrooms in daylight and under conditions of routine activity. The visits must be scheduled to avoid disrupting ongoing classes.

All the schools are dedicated to supporting a positive first school experience for our children. Remember, the most important consideration in this process is to find a program that is a good fit for your child and your family. Everyone’s needs vary. For example, although you may like the idea of a cooperative school, if both parents have inflexible work hours, it may be hard to fulfill the parent helping commitments. In addition to the facts and figures that differentiate the schools, there are many intangibles. It helps to visit the schools and to talk with parents of current students. The schools will be able to furnish parental references upon request.

**School Format/Philosophy**

**Montessori:** The Montessori program is based on an education philosophy developed by Maria Montessori**.** Montessori programs are typically five day per week, multi-age formats.

**Traditional:** Traditional preschool programs are semi-structured, offering children encouragement and choices based on their interestes and abilities.

**Cooperative**: Cooperative preschools are similar to traditional learning formats with an emphasis on positive social interaction and flexible, experienced-based learning. In addition, parents are required to be actively involved in all aspects of the cooperative schools, from helping in the classroom monthly to serving on the board.

**Integrated:** Hingham Public School Integrated Preschool is an integrated program for typically developing children and those with special needs.

**Daycare:** Many of the traditional daycare centers in the area also offer preschools. Several of the preschools within the survey do have daycare options for infants through preschool. Further, these schools have extended day options offering parents flexibility with their schedules.

**Playschool:** Playschool programs provide a first “school” experience to children for 1 or more days per week.

**Age Eligibility**

A child must be five years old before September 1 of a given school year to be eligible for Kindergarten in the Hingham Public School system. Many preschool programs are structured as two year programs to prepare children for Kindergarten, and therefore require that applicants be three years old before September 1.

Within the survey, the schools have identified whether they accept students younger than Age 3 and whether they have a toddler program.

**Application Process**

All schools give priority in the registration process to returning students and siblings of present and past students. After determining how many openings are available, registration is open to new students. Most Hingham schools prioritize Hingham residents. Some enroll on a first-come, first served basis and others through a lottery or drawing in which all applications are treated as though they are received on the same day and then drawn by chance to fill open places. The same process builds waiting lists.

**Number of Days per Week**

There is a strong probability that at schools with both 2-day and 3-day options, most openings available to families not already in the system for three year olds will be in a two-morning program. If you think your child is ready for more time in school, ask to see if there is an option to create a third day thorugh Extended Day programs at some of the schools.

**Common Concerns**

**Toilet Training:** The law in Massachusetts requires preschools to accept children regardless of whether they are toilet trained. If you are close, but having minor difficulty, most schools will be willing to work with you to accomplish your goal. Call them early for suggestions. Ask your friends and family for advice. Mony of us have struggled; you are not alone. On the flip side, if your child is not toilet trained by the time you are shopping for preschools, it pays to ask questions when you visit the schools. There are no safe assumptions about toilet training, even if your child will be one of the oldest in his/her class. Some schools will hold the student’s slot open but not allow the student to attend class in diapers or pull-ups; others will allow the student to attend, but may call the parents to change a diaper if necessary.

**Allergies:** All schools are required to have health policies and procedures per the Office for Child Care Services and other licensing/accreditation authorities. Many have first-hand experience in dealing with allergies, including potentially life-threatening reactions to peanuts, bee stings and other allergens. Note that if your child has not yet tried certain foods or been stung by a bee, you may not know if you will be affected. Even if your child has no allergies, a school’s policy may require you to make modificaitons in what your child eats at school or brings for a snack. Ask when you call or visit the schools, and make sure you are completely comfortable iwht the school’s policy and how it could affect you and your child.

**Twins-or-More!** Most, if not all, schools have priority placement for twins or more. If one sibling is admitted, all others will be place.

**Affiliations:** Although some schools are physically located in local churches, most operate independently.

**Questions You May Want to Ask at Open Houses/Visits**

* What sets your school apart from other preschools? What makes your program unique?
* What is the teacher turnover, and what are the staff qualifications?
* How is the staff/parent interaction facilitated? How do you learn about a child’s day or progress? Is there a memo board? What are the opportunities for parent involvement?
* What is the school’s philosophy and level of structure, and what is the approach to discipline?
* How much emphasis is put on academics in the curriculum, and how much on social development?
* What is the school population? How many children per class and what is the gender balance?
* What is the cost?
* How are sensitive issues (eg. faith, death, bias, etc) handled at school?
* Are snacks or food shared? If a child in the class has a known food allergy, are those foods allowed in the classroom?
* Can you observe a class in session (both prior to registration and/or once the child is enrolled and in session?)
* Is there a class list available in advance? It is nice to know in advance who will be in your class in order to arrange summer playdates to ease the transition into that important first school experience.

**Schools Included in this Survey**

Bright Horizons at the Hingham Shipyard

Circle Time / Write Time

Derby Academy

Dolly’s Nursery School

First Friends

Hingham Nursery School

Hingham Public Schools Integrated Preschool

Inly School

JCC Early Learning Center

Kids In Action - Hingham Public Schools

Miss Donna's Place

The New Nursery School

Old Colony Montessori School

Pre-School Playmates

The Ridge Hill School of Norwell

Saint Paul School

Seaside Montessori

South Shore Conservatory of Music

Su Escuela Language Academy

Sweet Relief

Wilder Memorial Nursery School