

**Maximize the 5,000 new neural connections that your child formed as you read this headline:**

**Choose the right school!**

Your child's brain makes over 700 new neural connections *every second* in the first years of life. And, it is most "plastic" or flexible during these years. Choosing the optimal learning environment for your child is critical.

Each year, Hudson Montessori School partners with families looking at schools for their preschool-aged child for the first time. Given our 54 years of experience with young children, we help parents to consider important aspects that create a powerful learning environment. Recently, we created a guide for all parents based on these many conversations. It is called [A Critical Decision: A Guide to Help Parents Select their Child's First School](#).

Here a few of the questions from our guide and some of my thoughts:

1. **What is the school's educational philosophy or teaching method?** A school's educational philosophy is important to understand as you consider a school. It will drive the type of learning that occurs each day. This topic should be a central part of any tour but if it's not, I encourage you to ask a school's admissions representative how their learning philosophy helps children positively form 700 new neural connections each second. The answer should be based on research and experience.
2. **What are the qualifications to be a teacher at the school?** Your child's teacher will be the person directly responsible for helping your child benefit from the school's educational philosophy. Ask the school what qualifications are in place for teacher candidates. I would listen for things like experience with children (preferably in a school setting), a college degree, and graduate or specialized coursework in child development theory and best teaching practices, and the ability to warmly connect with children and parents.
3. **What is the teacher turnover rate at your school?** Consistency of routine is paramount to a child's success in their early years. Imagine if you were forming 700 new neural connections a second and there was no routine. Talk about a lot coming your way! With this in mind, you should ask how often teachers turnover at a school. Transitions occur for certain but you want to have information that suggests that your child's teacher is likely to have been at the school for a long time and will be there for a long time to come.
4. **Does the school offer professional development for its teachers?** Brain research is dramatically increasing the amount of information available to early childhood educators. It is important that your child's school allocates time and financial resources to allow teachers to remain aware of best practices. I would ask what percentage of the operating budget goes towards these efforts. It should be more than 1% of an operating budget keeping in mind that most schools allocate over 80% of their operating expenses to human resources costs – it's a people business, after all.
5. **Are there enrichment opportunities offered at the school?** Children can and should have exposure to age-appropriate enrichment opportunities. Ask how things like foreign language, art and physical

education are incorporated into a child's day. I would also encourage you to observe the amount of time children can play outside and the quality of that outdoor space. Time outside is important in so many ways.

6. **How do teachers communicate with parents?** This is an important decision for your child's future success and you need to be a key partner! Ask a school how and when teachers communicate with parents. I would also ask how parents are encouraged to communicate with school about concerns or desires. Lastly, if there is a concern that emerges, you may want to ask how it is communicated.

Our guide has more questions and it is a great resource if you're considering schools for your child. I'd like to get it to you! [You may click here](#) to download the guide if you're reading this online. If you're reading the paper version of the Newsletter, send me a quick email to [mvirgil@hudsonmontessori.org](mailto:mvirgil@hudsonmontessori.org). I'll get it to you within 24 hours!

In closing, I'd like to thank Hudson Preschool Parents for this opportunity to provide you this information. This organization and the service it provides is a wonderful asset to our community. And, while Hudson Montessori School has been here for over 54 years, I am new to the school and the area. My family and I moved here from St. Louis in March to join the school. My wife, Kelley, (a board member of HPP!) and I have three children— Sam, Esther and Peter. Professionally, I have been a teacher, Upper School Director, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Head of School at several independent schools in the Midwest. I have an undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt University and graduate degrees from Columbia University, Teachers College and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard. I am also in the midst of completing an administrator's certification program through the American Montessori Society. I learned about Montessori as a Director of Curriculum and Instruction at an independent school that worked with educationally underserved children. I am drawn to the Montessori approach because it is time-tested, research-based, develops the whole-child, and leads to true life-long learning.