



THE ELEMENTARY YEARS (K-6)

# Choose your child's school with **CONFIDENCE**

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Which School?



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**PUBLIC IMPACT**



# **Step Two: Chapter 3**

## ***What Does Your Child Need to Learn?***

**This downloadable PDF is an excerpt from:**

### ***Picky Parent Guide: Choose Your Child's School with CONFIDENCE***

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## LIGHT'NING LIST

### **What To Know from Chapter 3**

- **Fit Factor #1 is What Your Child Learns:** these are things about your child that indicate *what subjects and at what level of difficulty* your child should be taught.
- **The three child characteristics for Fit Factor #1:**
  - ✓ **Basic Learning Capability** = your child's readiness for learning in core academic subjects. Is your child gifted? Challenged? Or more in the middle?
  - ✓ **Other Capabilities** = your child's extreme strengths and weaknesses in other endeavors like Music, Art, Social & Leadership, Physical & Hands-on, Creativity, English as a Second Language, and others.
  - ✓ **Interests** = your child's strong interests that need to be addressed in school.
- **You can identify the Fit Factor # 1 characteristics most important for your child** by (1) Observing (2) Comparing (3) Testing and (4) Getting Smart. Start with the tools listed in Snap To It at the end of the chapter.
- **Remember, you must identify the few most important characteristics of your child** to match with schools for a Great Fit.
  - ✓ Basic Learning Capability will be a Must Have for all children.
  - ✓ Other Capabilities and Interests will be a Must Have for a limited number of children if they are *extreme* relative to other kids.

## Chapter 3

### Child Fit Factor #1: What Does *Your* Child Need to Learn?

*Jane was bored in school for years until in third grade her parents switched her to a school that raised the bar as fast as she could scramble in math, reading and writing. She bounds out of the house every morning now, revved to go to school!*



*Ben tuned out in the basics until his parents moved him to a performing arts magnet where his unusual talents and interest in music and dance were revered. His schedule booked to the gills with motivating arts activities, he now shines in the basics as well.*



*Roger, exceptionally creative in his free time and astonishing in his ability to organize and lead other young children, was deflated by the structured, just-the-facts approach of his traditional school. His parents switched him to a school where much of the learning is project-based and students are invited to design and produce works outside the traditional worksheet format. In his first month, Roger organized several kids to write a class creative writing newspaper for the weekly writing assignment. The writing of all the students involved soared as they spent large amounts of free time pursuing the activity. Roger's creativity and social leadership, already strengths, have soared as well.*

## Identifying Your Child's Content Learning Needs

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*What schools teach differs in three big ways: the level of challenge offered to individual students, the range of subjects taught, and the thinking skills emphasized.*

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As a parent, it's not always easy to know exactly *what* your child should be learning in school. Most parents know that their children need the basic subjects, but how challenging should the work be? And what subjects, topics and non-academic skills does your particular child need to learn about at school? In short, what subjects and level of difficulty will engage your child's mind and make the most of his talents?

These questions all fall under Fit Factor #1: What Your Child Learns. In this chapter, you will explore the characteristics of your child that affect what subjects and at what level of difficulty your child should be taught at school. If you explore your child's needs in this area, you will be better able to choose a school that fits your child. You will also be more likely to offer the right kind of opportunities outside of school.

There are three big differences from school to school in *what* students learn. One is the level of difficulty and pacing. In some classrooms, the whole class is working on high level work. In others, everyone's tackling simpler tasks. In still others, teachers try to get each student working at his or her own level. Different classrooms move individual kids forward at different rates as well ("pacing").

The second big difference is the range of subjects taught. All elementary schools cover the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Beyond that, schools differ in how much time they spend on everything from science and social studies to art, music, character-building, and social-emotional skills ("breadth").

The third big difference is the degree to which schools stress basic skills versus critical and creative thinking. Basic skills are things like memorized facts and dates, letter sounds and vocabulary words, repetitive math problems, and how to write a sentence with a capital letter at the beginning and period at the end. Critical thinking includes problem solving, comparing and contrasting, and other ways of *using* basic skills and knowledge. Creative thinking is coming up with new ideas and doing things in new ways, rather than the standard way.

What kind of school is right for your child when it comes to *what students learn*? Well, it depends on your child's specific needs. Fortunately, you can zero in on these needs quickly by thinking about the three characteristics of your child that make up Fit Factor #1:

- Basic Learning Capability
- Other Capabilities
- Interests

## Basic Learning Capability

*Lucy just began second grade. For two years, she has learned little in school. When she began kindergarten she was already reading at a second grade level and by the end of the year was reading at a fifth grade level, though the teachers focused on teaching letter sounds to the entire class for the year. Lucy's parents had engaged in repeated discussions with her teachers about how to challenge Lucy at school, to no avail. The teachers assured them that Lucy was "doing just fine" at school – making grade level and not misbehaving – and that the one-hour weekly pull-outs for gifted students would start later in second grade. Her parents started to feel embarrassed requesting special favors for their child. They began looking at other schools. They sought – and found – a school that monitored children's learning and adjusted the lessons upward every week for children who were ready. Lucy would be grouped with other children at her current learning level – from her own class or others – for at least half of each school day. All children at this school were organized into small learning groups with ever-changing membership, so she would not be labeled a "brain."*



*Sam, a personable and athletic first grader, was an "on target" student, his teacher said. Yet he was still struggling with reading, and his parents did not believe that this was very "on target" at all. His school had a large population of gifted students and also many who were challenged. His parents' dismay grew as they realized how little attention the kids in the middle, like their son, were getting. After no response despite several polite meetings with his teacher, his concerned parents hired a private tutor once each week (for Sam and a classmate to share). Sam's reading skills developed quickly. "Am I crazy, or is something wrong with this picture? What should I do next?" his mother asked in frustration. Assured that indeed there was something wrong, she and several other parents scheduled a meeting with the new principal. The principal, eager to improve results for all students, formed a committee to plan significant changes in the school's reading program. The resulting changes, including targeted strategies for readers at differing levels, raised reading scores for children across the board in only one year's time. Sam's parents were thrilled and stopped feeling guilty for being "pushy."*




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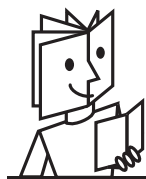
*Approach this process with an open mind about your child. A Great Fit school will make the most of your child's strengths and develop his or her weaknesses.*

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### ***Basic Learning Capability: What It Is, Why It's Important***

Basic Learning Capability (BLC) is a child's current readiness for learning in core academic subjects, before intervention by a school. It is one very important factor in determining what a child will be ready to learn at each age – and therefore *what* he should be taught.

#### **Definition**



***Capability:*** A person's readiness for performance or accomplishment in a pursuit.

***Basic Learning Capability:*** A child's readiness for learning in core academic subjects.

***“Core” academic subjects:*** Subjects that all students must master in preparation for independent adult life and further education in our society, including at least reading, writing and math.

BLC includes traditional measures of “intelligence,” which assess mental processing speed and agility in areas such as logical problem solving, comparing, and contrasting (“analytical” and “conceptual” thinking). But not that alone. An individual child may take a bump up or down in BLC based on previous *exposure to core academic material*. A “typical” child who has been offered a very rich and stimulating environment – at home or school – that encourages language and mathematical/logical development may be ready for more challenging school work in core subjects than a child who has not had much stimulation.

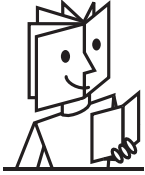
It is important to identify the state of readiness for academic work that your child brings to school, because you will want to *find a school that provides children like yours the twin joys of facing challenges and being successful in facing them*. Core academic work – reading, writing, math and the like – consumes much of school time and focus.

- ***If academic work is far too hard*** without the intensive support and unrelenting expectation for success that an academically *challenged* child needs, he will learn neither the ultimate joy of success nor how to overcome challenge (nor the basic knowledge he needs for adult life).
- ***If academic work is far too easy*** for an academically *gifted* child, he will not learn the tenacity to face and overcome challenge, since he will not encounter it until much later.

Both over-challenged, under-supported children and the never-challenged ones lose an opportunity to strengthen their intellectual gifts and reinforce good work habits.



## Definition



**Analytical thinking:** Solving problems by breaking them down into logical, orderly steps. One of the two major capabilities assessed by traditional “I.Q.” tests.

**Conceptual thinking:** Making comparisons between things not obviously related, seeing similarities and large patterns in a collection of smaller events. The second major capability assessed by traditional “I.Q.” tests.

If your child is properly challenged at school, he can make enormous progress in classic “intelligence,” increasing his thinking abilities by leaps and bounds. A child’s I.Q. may increase by 20 points or more during childhood – a *huge* change – with proper stimulation and challenge. A child can progress from one BLC category to another entirely with combined, consistent high expectations, effective teaching approaches and commitment by the child to work hard. The discipline and confidence a child gains from such an experience can last a lifetime.

Indeed, a Great School that expects much of every child – no matter where each starts – can make all the difference. This is one reason why school *quality* hinges significantly on challenging individual students of all capabilities to make constant *progress*. But we’ll get to that big point later. Meanwhile, you need to know where your child is *now* to choose a school that will offer your child the opportunity to move forward.

Most schools are designed to target children in the middle. The impact on children of low BLC – who just don’t grasp the basic facts they need – can be devastating. Not only will they not learn what is expected, they may feel bad about it and show it with angry behavior, acting up or tuning out in class. And the very high BLC child – who grasps the basics immediately and is ready to move on – will suffer, as well. He will begin to “feel different” from his engaged peers, may demonstrate bored behavior like not paying attention and not sitting still, and will not learn the tenacity that comes with being challenged to learn something new and hard. A high-quality school will overcome these challenges, but you must make sure that a school is strong in the specific ways that will fit your child right now.

Do not worry that you are limiting or pressuring your child by “pegging” her early. Think of this as a starting point, neither a cap on your child’s academic potential nor a guarantee of performance in school. We all know that motivation and hard work accompany any long-term success, and your child can bring these to the table regardless of other capabilities.



*All students can influence their own success by working hard and overcoming barriers. The right kind of challenge and support can teach your child to do just that.*

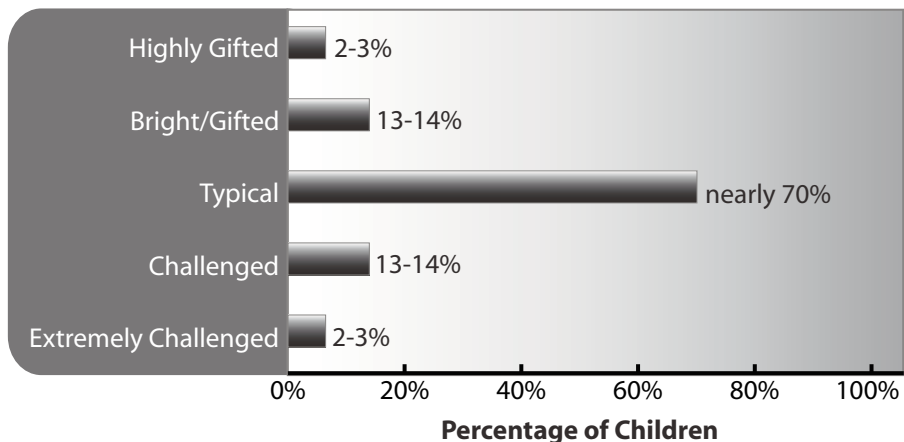
Some students just have a harder time initially learning new things, solving problems, seeing how ideas are similar and different and coming up with new ideas. Others seem to breathe in knowledge and solve problems before the rest of us even know there's problem at all. Most are somewhere in between. All students can influence their own success by learning to work hard and overcome barriers along the way. Indeed, the right kind of academic challenge and support in school can influence how well and how early children learn these lessons.

### Categories

The five categories of Basic Learning Capability are these:

1. **Extremely Challenged:** very delayed math and language; difficulty relating as peer of Typical children; I.Q. below 70. About 2–3% of children fall here. These children are included under the umbrella term “special needs” because of their learning challenges.
2. **Challenged:** consistently somewhat delayed in math and language; I.Q. between 70 and 85. About 13–14% of children fall here.
3. **Typical:** close to expected in math and language, but may be somewhat behind or ahead in some areas; I.Q. between 85 and 120. Most children, nearly 7 out of 10, will fall here.
4. **Bright/Gifted:** advanced or learns quickly in math and language; or 90<sup>th</sup>–97<sup>th</sup> percentile on achievement tests; or I.Q. between 120 and 130. About 13–14% of children fall here.

### Where Children Fall on the Range of Basic Learning Capability



5. **Highly Gifted:** very advanced math and/or language; or 97<sup>th</sup> percentile and up on achievement tests; some may have difficulty relating as peer of Typical children; I.Q. over 130. About 2–3% of children fall here.

We'd like to have narrowed these to three big buckets – On Target, Below and Above. But parents, educators and researchers who know about Extremely Challenged and Highly Gifted children will tell you that these two groups tend to be much more different from their peers academically than children even a bit closer to the norm. Those mental differences often create social challenges, too, so it's especially important to get a handle on things if your child is near either extreme.

### Viewpoint Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner, the highly regarded developmental psychologist who pioneered thinking about “multiple intelligences” in *Frames of Mind*, originally divided intelligence into seven categories. He sees the intelligences not as goals to be met, but as strengths to appreciate in their own right and to be drawn upon for teaching different children traditional academic subject matter (e.g., using music to teach math). His basic intelligences include these:

1. Linguistic – the ability to learn and use language (words), both spoken and written.
2. Logical-mathematical – the ability to analyze problems (i.e., to break problems down into parts and weigh the value of different parts), to do math, and to investigate “logically” (working through the different elements of problems in order).
3. Musical – the ability to appreciate, compose (write rhythm and pitch), and perform music.
4. Bodily-kinesthetic – the ability to use all or part of the body to create new things, accomplish goals and solve problems.
5. Spatial – the ability to understand and *use space and the objects in it* to create new ideas and solve problems.
6. Interpersonal – the ability to understand and act on the feelings, thoughts, abilities and motives of *others*.
7. Intrapersonal – the ability to understand and act on *one's own* feelings, thoughts, abilities and motives.

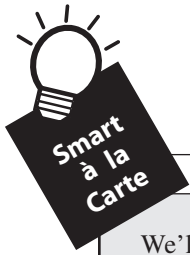
You might be wondering, “How does Basic Learning Capability compare to these seven?” BLC includes a combination of the first two of Gardner's intelligences: Linguistic and Logical-mathematical. Many of the other intelligences are part of child characteristics presented later in this chapter and the next.



### *When is This a Priority for Your School Hunt?*

In most cases, we encourage you to discard any Fit Factor element that isn't a clear, top priority so you may focus on those that are. But Basic Learning Capability is the one exception. You – and all parents – will best be able to choose the right school if you know where your child's Basic Learning Capability falls.

You may be tempted not to bother if your child is right in the middle, particularly since so many schools are designed to fit children of "typical" academic capability. But too many right-in-the-middle children miss out because their schools either have set low learning standards or, having set challenging standards, fail to reinforce basic subjects adequately and interestingly. We have heard too many parents of these children lament in retrospect that schools did not ask enough of their children or failed to drive home the basic building blocks of knowledge in reading, writing and math. Consider finding a school that fits your child's BLC a Must Have even if your child is quite the norm.



### **Take Care When Having Your Child Tested**

We'll say it here as you identify your child's needs, and we'll say it again later regarding testing for school admissions: take precious care of your child before and during testing times. All children are susceptible to stress from testing situations – the younger the more so. If you yourself are stressed about your child's testing, your child may absorb that stress and take it on as his or her own. Your child will not "over test," but she may "under test" if she's too preoccupied, tired, sick, hungry or otherwise "not herself" to show what she knows. So:

- Try a slightly earlier than usual bedtime for your child for at least a few days before tests.
- Pay special attention to your child's diet during the week prior – good nutrition, plenty of water, not too many sweets (the usual suspects).
- Make sure your child gets regular exercise.
- Schedule only one testing event in a week if possible, and never two days in a row (but it's fine to have multiple tests in one multi-hour session – discuss your child's stamina with the tester if you are concerned).
- Limit new and unusual activities to essentials in the days prior.
- On test day, ensure that your child has a healthy breakfast, plenty to drink, and healthy snacks to maintain energy.
- A hug goes much further than a lecture just prior to testing time.

## Identifying Your Child's Need

If you're not sure about your child, a simple I.Q. test is a good place to start. But if we'd meant I.Q. alone, we'd have said it. Your child's previous exposure to academic material matters, too. Your child may be ready for *more* challenging work more quickly than others in his I.Q. range if he's had a lot of academic exposure and challenge previously. Likewise, your child may need more catch-up than others in his I.Q. range if he hasn't had the same level of academic exposure and challenge.

If you'd prefer not to test – or at least not right away – you may be able to make an approximate guess of your child's BLC. Your best strategy is a process of elimination. Start with the most extreme categories and move to the center until you find one that seems best to describe your child. Children who are either Extremely Challenged or Highly Gifted will often show clear behaviors that are markedly different from others of similar age – Challenged and Bright children somewhat less so. Typical children are, well, typical in mental processing and have a better chance of just seeming to “fit in” academically and sometimes even socially.

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**Remember:**  
*I.Q. is not set in stone. Your child can learn analytical and conceptual thinking skills and increase I.Q. by 20% or more during the elementary years.*

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## When Your Child's I.Q. and Academic Skills Don't Match

If you believe, or a tester confirms, that there is a great difference between your child's I.Q. and academic know-how, you'll need to find a school prepared to nurture your child appropriately across the gap. Going for a high quality school, not just one that fits today, will be critical. If your child has had less academic exposure than most children with his mental processing capability (I.Q.), your child's school will need to guide your child *rapidly* up the ramp of academic basics rather than holding him back or skipping steps. If your child works in overdrive and seems to perform “beyond herself,” then the school will need to allow your child to continue challenging herself while watching for academic gaps and over-achiever stress.

If a very large gap shows between I.Q. and actual learning – either in an expert assessment or later school performance – you'll want to have your child checked for learning disabilities and disorders, too. This is especially true if you know that your child has had great exposure to academic learning materials and activities, either at home or in school or day care.

To get a read on all of this, check out the Basic Learning Capability section of our *Know Your Child's Needs* table, which starts on page 368.

If you're not sure after thinking it through and you feel motivated to get testing, you're in luck. I.Q. tests and those of verbal and mathematical/ logical development are some of the most refined tests available. That said, know that children are susceptible to stress from the usual burdens of growing up and even the testing situation itself – the younger the more so. Your child probably will not “over test,” but she may “under test” if she's too preoccupied, tired, sick, hungry or otherwise “not herself” on the day of the test. If test results do not seem correct to you, consider a retest. But it will be easier on you and your child if you simply take special care of your child's health and well being before the first test so your child is relaxed, undistracted, and mentally alert. For more on this, see the box *Take Care When Having Your Child Tested* on page 48.



### When Your Child's Reading, Writing, and Math Skills Don't Match

Your child may apply his or her Basic Learning Capability unevenly to academic subjects. The fact is that any specific academic work – reading, writing, math, or particular aspects of each – uses several parts of your child's brain. Your child may have particular strengths (what he *can* do) and preferences (what he *likes* to do) unrelated to the “thinking skills” assessed on an I.Q. test. Your child may apply thinking skills to any of the three core academic areas, and other pursuits, too – or not.

If your child has an exceptional *capability* in one core academic area, such as writing or math, treat your child as Highly Gifted in that subject. Seek in a school the individualized goal-setting and instruction *in that subject* that your child needs. Use the sections of the Child tables addressing Highly Gifted children to help with your hunt. Ideally, you'll find a school that challenges and nurtures the strength, while also meeting your child where he is in other academic areas. Similarly, treat a very strong *interest* in one academic area over the others as just that – a strong interest to be addressed through school or elsewhere (use the Interests section on page 55 to help).

That said, vast differences in skill and learning across core subjects may indicate a learning disability. For example, if your brilliant mathematician or chatty 7 year old child can't read, consider testing for dyslexia and other disabilities.

Identification strategies include:

- Have a straightforward I.Q. test conducted by a professional tester. The tests will differ for young and older children, and the expected results vary by age, but a qualified tester will be able to explain the specifics to you.
- Have a developmental test of language and math conducted by a professional tester, which will capture not just I.Q. but previous exposure to academic material compared to children of similar age.
- Ask your child's school, preschool or day care teachers how your child compares to other children of same age whom they have observed.
- Observe and compare your child's language to similar age children – the clarity of speech, difficulty of words used, complexity of ideas expressed, and length of paragraphs.
- Watch for behavioral indicators, especially compared to other children. Use to identify or eliminate Highly Gifted and Extremely Challenged categories, and possibly to identify or eliminate Bright and Challenged:
  - ✓ ***Extremely Challenged:*** is very delayed developmentally overall. Clearly seems “slow” to master daily life challenges, not just academic ones. Does not connect as true peer of children who seem more typical.
  - ✓ ***Challenged:*** seems slow, is behind developmental lists you've seen. But is able to get along and learns in daily life and learns ideas and skills that are repeated often in your home, at school or in child care.
  - ✓ ***Typical:*** seems close to expected.
  - ✓ ***Bright/Gifted:*** seems quick in language and math, but not so different that social interactions with more typical children the same age are challenging.
  - ✓ ***Highly Gifted:*** seems very advanced or quick in math and/or language; very mentally energetic. Always “on” compared to other children, asking many questions, concocting many new ideas, endlessly pursuing current interests. May get bored easily in big group.
- See our Resources for Parents section starting on page 354 or visit *PickyParent.com* for more assessment resources.
- ***If you get overwhelmed, aren't sure where your child falls and aren't able to get professional testing, do this:*** focus on school quality, in particular Great School Quality Factors #2 and 3 detailed in Chapter 12, to help ensure that your child's needs are met.

## Other Capabilities

### *What They Are, Why They're Important*

Because basic academic subjects are the fundamental building blocks of so much of school and adult work, it is easy for parents and educators alike to forget how much joy and success can come from other aspects of life. Music, art, athletic activities, making crafts and other work by hand, interpersonal and group relationships, creative thinking of all kinds and just being able to converse in a common language are all endeavors that bring both pleasure and function to life. Most children will gain both joy and success from having at least a threshold level of *appreciation and ability* in these areas. At the other end of the scale, children who truly excel in one or more of these areas can enjoy great success in life and work as a result.

### *Categories*

You will want to consider helping your child make the most of extreme strengths and ensure that your child has at least minimal capabilities in each of the areas listed below:

- Musical
- Artistic
- Physical & Hands-On
- Social & Leadership
- Creativity
- English as a Second Language (ESL)

Whether or not you want school to play a role in developing your child's capabilities in these areas is a personal decision (with the exception of English as a Second Language, which you really should deal with at school). But if your child has an

- ✓ extreme strength or
- ✓ extreme weakness

in one of the areas listed above, then consider making use of the long school day to address the matter.

### *When is This a Priority for Your School Hunt?*

If your child has an *extreme strength* in one of these areas (or similar one), consider how you can best help your child make the most of it. Seek a school where your child can use and develop her strength often. Like a muscle, even great talent needs to be exercised to grow in strength. But do consider your child's interest in the matter before committing too much of your child's time to one



<b><i>Capability</i></b>	<b><i>May be a Strength if your child...</i></b>	<b><i>May be a Weakness if your child...</i></b>
<b><i>Musical</i></b>	Senses, appreciates, composes, and/or performs music, including accurate rhythm, pitch, and tone.	Rarely enjoys pleasing music created by others. Rarely attempts musical or rhythmic activities.
<b><i>Artistic</i></b>	Understands and appreciates others' art; creates original works of art genuinely pleasing or interesting to others.	Rarely seems to notice pleasing works of art created by others. Rarely chooses to create art of own.
<b><i>Physical &amp; Hands-On</i></b>	Displays strength, agility, speed, balance and/or flexibility; or creates ideas or objects and solves problems very well using whole body or small muscles of the hand.	Lacks coordination and strength of either the whole body or small muscles of the hand. Unable to perform or create using body.
<b><i>Social &amp; Leadership</i></b>	Understands and interacts well with many kinds of people; or organizes and leads other children.	Shows little understanding of others' feelings or consistently communicates poorly – and unable to make friends.
<b><i>Creativity</i></b>	Thinks of new ideas and ways to do things, rather than imitating others or using "standard" methods; may apply to varying activities.	Rigidly and consistently insists on thinking and doing things the way others do them or the way they have been done before.
<b><i>ESL (English as a Second Language)</i></b>	When English is the child's second language, understands, speaks, reads and writes English at level expected of same age children for whom English is first language ("age-appropriate").	When English is the child's second language, does not understand, speak, read or write English at age-appropriate level.

endeavor. Your amazing musician may be better off letting her interest catch up to advanced abilities than spending a great deal of time exercising an ability that she doesn't enjoy using. Your stellar athlete may be as interested in academics as sports, and you'll want to take that into account. Make an extreme capability a school Must Have only if your child *actually* spends a great deal of time on it and *wants to continue* doing so.

If your child is very late or **weak** in one of the listed capabilities compared to other same-age children, then finding a school to help your child develop *at least basic skills* may be your best route. You need not enroll your tone-deaf child in a school for the performing arts (indeed, that would be torture), but you may want to find a school with a basic music program. If you've just now focused on a particular weakness and feel that after-school activities or other aspects of family life can serve to develop your child, then this may be a mere Nice to Have in your school hunt.

But if your child's weakness in one of these areas may affect not only his enjoyment of that particular skill but his ability to use his strengths, make it a Must Have. Seek a school that will make the most of the long school day to improve your child's competence. For example, if your child is already weak socially, don't starve his social skill development by home schooling (unless you take care to include group activities with a stable set of peers in the plan). Your child will thank you when he finds out as a teenager and adult how important getting along with others can be, not just for social life but also for work. If English is your child's second language, seek a school with an intensive English as a Second Language skill development program. No matter how capable she is in other areas, your child needs to be able to communicate in the dominant language of the land to make the most of her other skills.

### ***Identifying Your Child's Need***

Identification strategies include:

- Ask your child's school, preschool or day care teachers how your child compares to others they have observed. Lead teachers may have an especially good grasp of physical and social skills, creativity and ESL mastery. Consider asking more specialized teachers who have contact with your child about Music and Art, if your child's school, preschool or care center uses them.
- Behavior indicators, especially compared to other children. See the box on page 53, and go to the Other Capabilities section of our *Know Your Child's Needs* table beginning on page 368 for more.
- A straightforward test of capability by a tester qualified to test in that subject matter (Music, Art, Physical & Hands-On, Social & Leadership, Creativity,

English as a Second Language, or other area you value). In most cases, you need not take this step unless you suspect a weakness in one of these three areas: Physical & Hands-On, Social & Leadership, or English as a Second Language.

## Interests

### *What They Are, Why They're Important*

Your child's interests are a strong indicator of the kind of thinking and topics that excite his mind. This is true particularly when an interest is long-term and deeply held. For a child who has a very strong interest in a particular subject, attending a school that does not address the area thoroughly may be boring and perhaps a waste of your child's potential. Your avid young botanist, bird watcher, poet, dancer, or foreign language aficionado would be well-served in a school that addresses the interest well. The same is true for any very strong and consistent interest your child may have, whether in a traditional academic field or another – the arts, athletics, or a particular way of thinking such as creativity or logical problem solving.

Such strong interests will often coincide with unusually strong capabilities, but not always. Allow your child to be passionate about an interest without being the “best” at it. She'll learn much from pursuing an area of personal interest, even if it turns out not to be a lifelong calling. But you will have to make the reality check and judgment call about whether your child must pursue the interest *at school* – or whether you are able to provide materials and opportunity for your child to pursue the interest outside of school.

So, should you sign up your five-year-old boy who likes trucks and fire engines for truck-driving school or firefighting classes? Probably not. But *do* take delight in your child's interests, and use them to help your child prepare for school.

### *Categories*

Interests will be Must Haves for very few elementary age children. You should consider choosing a school focused on your child's interest only if the interest is both

- ✓ strong and
- ✓ unusual relative to other children.

Common types of interests include:

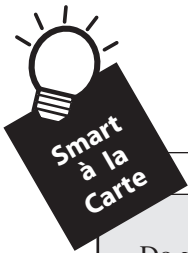
- Subjects and topics
- Ways of thinking (analytical, conceptual, creative)
- Other interests, regardless of talent or current skill (e.g., interpersonal, musical, artistic)

### *When Is This a Priority for Your School Hunt?*

If indeed your child's interest is strong and unusual, then it may be a school Must Have. If you find that your child's passion is also his *talent*, then it may rise right to the top of your gotta-have-it list. But "interests" are one school selection item that will fall away for many. If this turns out to be you, remember that there are typically many other avenues besides school to help your child enjoy and pursue special interests.

### *Identifying Your Child's Need*

- Ask your child's current school, preschool or day care teacher (or any teacher of similar-age children) what interests are typical for children your child's age.
- Ask your child's current school, preschool or day care teacher whether your child's interest is displayed in school.



### **Your Five Year Old Truck Nut: What To Do?!**

Do you really need to send your truck-crazy preschooler to "trucks & transportation" school? Certainly not. But it is easy enough for parents to get caught up in the typical passions of young children, be they "all things pink and purple" for your girl or "all things on wheels and with 'saur' at the end" for boys. In the case of the five-year-old boy who loves trucks, you need not choose a school that covers this topic. Even if the interest is long-held, it is not unusual. Many boys this age like trucks, and truck-related items certainly are used in many schools to teach reading and other basic skills. Inexpensive opportunities to use trucks for learning at home abound, as well: small truck models, ABC truck puzzles, books and other truck learning toys are widely available. Many fire stations allow visits from neighborhood children to check out the real thing, too. You can do much to support your child's current interests and use those interests to build your child's "worldly" and academic knowledge.

If you aren't sure what's typical, just ask your child's current teacher, preschool teacher, day care operator or even one who doesn't know your child at all: "what's typical of a child this age?" As a parent, you will have to make an assessment that balances all of the issues above to determine if your child's particular interests are truly important for your school selection.

- Observe and compare your child's behavior. Consider the factors below to determine whether your child's interest is strong and unusual enough to seek a school that will fit, and see the Interests section of our *Know Your Child's Needs* table, which starts on page 368:

- ✓ **Time spent:** your child chooses to spend large quantities of time on the interest, and
- ✓ **Long term:** the interest has been held for a long time (a year or more for young children, several years for older children), and
- ✓ **Will continue:** your child wants to continue pursuing the area of interest, and
- ✓ **Unusual:** your child's interest is one not shared by many children his own age (so that most schools would not address it in the regular curriculum). Ask your child's current school, preschool or day care teachers for guidance on "typical" same-age child interests. Assume that a very extreme level of interest, even in a traditional academic subject, is unusual, period. And . . .
- ✓ **Difficult to accommodate outside of school:** your child's interest is one that would be difficult for you to address at home or in extracurricular activities.



### **What To Do**

- **Refer back to your Child "Quick Think"** on page 37 to refresh your memory regarding things that really stand out about your child. Estimated Time: 2 minutes
- **Use the Child Needs Summary** on page 38 to get a quick fix on the Fit Factor # 1 What Your Child Learns characteristics. Estimated Time: 5 minutes
- **Use the Know Your Child's Needs table** on page 368 to further clarify your child's Fit Factor # 1 characteristics and the importance of each for choosing a school. You need not read the whole table: focus only on items you suspect are important for your child. Estimated Time: 15 minutes
- **Record your Must Haves and Nice to Haves** on your *Child Needs Summary* (page 38). Estimated Time: 10 minutes

*continues...*

**SNAP TO IT**



*continued...*

**Optional Activities**

- ***Discuss your child's needs*** with your spouse or other parenting partner. Estimated Time: As needed.
- ***Plan now to schedule professional testing for your child*** if you are not at all certain of which Basic Learning Capability category your child fits into. If you have narrowed to two BLC categories, you may want to consider testing. Consider professional testing also if you suspect your child may have an extreme weakness in Social, Physical & Hands-On, or English as Second Language skills. Estimated Time: 30 minutes to find a tester and schedule an appointment.
- ***Mark your calendar to ask current school, preschool or day care teachers*** about your child compared to other children. Estimated Time: 2 minutes to mark your calendar, 5 minutes to schedule time to talk with teachers, 45 minutes to talk with teachers.
- ***Make a plan to observe your child and read other resources***, as needed. For some readings on topics covered in these chapters, see the Resources for Parents section starting on page 354. Estimated Time: 10 minutes to plan; you decide how much for observing and reading other resources.

***Need more? Want more? Got more to share? Visit [PickyParent.com](http://PickyParent.com).***

## Personalized Great Fit Checklist

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- In the first blank column, list in pencil the precise names of your top child & family needs based on your *Child* and *Family Needs Summaries* (pages 38 and 110) and on your reading of Chapters 2–9 and related tables. For example, write: “Basic Learning Capability, Typical.” See a complete example on page 176.
- Check whether each of your needs is a Must Have or Nice to Have.
- In next big column, make note of the characteristics a school must have to meet your need based on your reading of Chapter 10 and related tables.
- Include specific questions to ask school principal, teachers, parents, and others (or use our *Interview Forms* on page 273).
- Make an extra copy and fill in notes for each school you consider.
- After you gather the information you need, grade each school on how well it fits each Must Have and Nice to Have item:  
**A** perfect fit    **B** very good fit    **C** halfway fit    **D** poor fit    **F** very poor or no fit

FIT FACTOR	CHILD & FAMILY NEEDS: Must Haves & top Nice to Haves	MUST HAVE	NICE TO HAVE	WHAT TO LOOK FOR and QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES ABOUT THIS SCHOOL	GRADE
<b>What Your Child Learns</b>						
<b>How Your Child Learns</b>						
<b>Social Issues</b>						
<b>Practical Matters</b>						





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