

What Makes A School Traditional? Developmental? Progressive?

Description



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This post is an excerpt from my remarks at a recent preschool speaking event. One of the first “and most important” things to do is figure out the [type of school](#) that’s right for your child. Sometimes a school is a mix of several philosophies (you’ll see a few schools listed in several categories

below) or itâ€™s not clear to you what [type of school](#) it is from a website or a tour. Most L.A. private elementary schools are a hybrid/mix of educational philosophies. *This is not an exact science, but more about the way each school adheres to a particular philosophy or combines several philosophies.* For example, you might see a progressive school with a developmental approach to teaching. Or, you may see a traditional school that incorporates a developmental approach in the classroom. But, if a school doesnâ€™t seem to have a clear philosophy that can be understood and explained, ask questions! And, there are [clues you can look](#) for to help figure out what kind of school it is. Your goal should be for your child to attend a school that offers a learning environment where he/she can thrive and one that you truly believe in. â€” Christina

While every school is different, here are some of the characteristics that can help you identify the type of school:

Traditional: (Examples: John Thomas Dye, [Viewpoint](#), Carltorp, Brentwood, [Pilgrim](#), St. James, St. Brendan, Curtis, [Steven S. Wise](#), Campbell Hall, Village, Mirman, [Chandler \(Pasadena\)](#), [St. Matthews](#)), Catholic Schools tend to be traditional

- Similar to the public schools many of us attended as kids
- Academic achievement is the core philosophy
- Structured schedule
- Teacher centered-not kid centered
- Kids expected to meet academic milestones by certain time (reading by mid-year kindergarten)
- More homework, more multiple choice tests, quizzes
- Fewer group projects
- Teacher directed work, not kid directed
- Classroom setup usually has teacher at front, desks facing front of room
- Grades start early
- Lots of memorization
- Competitive sports teams
- A focus on good character and values
- Uniforms

Developmental: (Brentwood, [Turning Point](#), Echo Horizon, Oakwood, Lawrence, Campbell Hall, Temple Israel, St. Markâ€™s (Altadena), [Willows](#), Center For Early Education, Westside Neighborhood School)

- Kids develop and learn at their own pace, eventually all arriving at the same academic milestones (reading for example). That is celebrated, not discouraged.
- Kids are not competing with each other to see who can read first or memorize multiplication tables first.
- Kids can help each other learn, not just teacher directed learning
- Big concepts and ideas are taught, not a ton of detail/memorization

- Integrated curriculum—what's happening in science relates to language arts, etc.
- May or may not have uniforms

Progressive: (PS#1, [Wildwood](#), Pasadena Waldorf, [Westland](#), Children's Community School, Oakwood Elementary, [Seven Arrows](#), Willows, [Sequoyah \(Pasadena\)](#), [Waverly \(Pasadena\)](#), Center For Early Education, [Lycée International de Los Angeles](#), [Walden, Pasadena](#))

- Child-centered learning, kid-initiated projects
- Concepts like sharing, creating, caring
- Engaging kids with the world around them
- Rejection of memorizing big amounts of information
- A whole child approach—social, emotional and academic have equal importance
- Lots of group projects, discussion and debate
- Kids work at tables grouped for 4 or 6 kids
- Very little homework, few worksheets (if any)
- No grades until MS or even HS (or not)
- Lots of expository writing
- Play-based in preschool and kindergarten
- An emphasis on field trips for real-world learning
- A focus on the arts
- A de-emphasis on standardized testing
- Kids working on creative projects with their hands using wood, paper, found objects
- If there are uniforms, they might be a t-shirt

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2. traditional and developmental schools
3. types of L.A. private elementary schools

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Author

admin