

Sarah L. Keller's Personal List of Parent / Kid Resources in Seattle

Welcome to the University of Washington. I'm a Chemistry Professor, Associate Dean for Research Activities for the College of Arts and Sciences, and also a parent of an elementary-school child. I am more productive in my research when I don't have to worry about my child; I like being confident that she's doing her own interesting things each day. The UW maintains an extensive website with work/life information, including child care, temporary care for kids who are mildly ill, and lactation stations (www.washington.edu/admin/hr/benefits/worklife/index.html).

My list below is slightly different; it represents resources that I know about personally, or that have been recommended to me directly by a friend or colleague. At present, it applies only within the Seattle city limits (not to suburbs, e.g. Shoreline, which has a well-regarded school system), and contains few resources for kids beyond elementary school. Of course, the list represents only my own views, not necessarily those of my department, college, or university. Your departmental colleagues are also outstanding resources. I've been bowled over by the generosity of my colleagues, whether in finding time to discuss school options, or in sharing hand-me-down children's furniture and clothes. Seattle is a wonderful place to raise kids, and UW faculty have formed a network of parents who value their kids' curiosity and creativity.

– Sarah

CHILDCARE/DAYCARE:

Childcare is offered at MANY excellent places in Seattle. I'm going to tell you about only a few.

There are three UW-associated facilities near campus. The waiting list for the nearest center ("West Campus") is very long, currently > 2 years, probably closer to 3. My child was at West Campus and we loved it. The other centers have shorter wait lists. Wait list applications are here: www.washington.edu/admin/hr/benefits/worklife/childcare/childrens_ctors.html

There is also a place very close to campus in the University Village Shopping Mall, called Bright Horizons. I have not (yet) heard a lot about this place. Here is their website: <http://child-care-preschool.brighthorizons.com/wa/seattle/uvillage>

Many faculty are enthusiastic about University Temple daycare (www.utemple.org/utcs.html). This facility accepts children older than 1 year. The wait list is roughly 1 year the last time I checked. The good news is that they are just a block away from campus - you can easily walk there. The school is secular although they use a church space.

I have a colleague in astrophysics who lives near Interlake Child Care and is enthusiastic about it. Here is their website: <http://interlakechildcare.com/>

Another colleague was happy with the University District Children's Center a few blocks northwest of campus at 5031 University Way (www.udccenter.org).

Also see the note in the next section about UCDS.

PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

There are three private schools that have reputations for the very highest academic standards at the elementary school level. Faculty rave about all three. All three are highly competitive and accept only small classes. The first is UCDS (University Child Development School), which goes through 5th grade. The easiest entry point is at preschool (which begins at age 3, I believe). The second is Seattle Country Day, which begins at kindergarten (age 5). The third is Evergreen, which also begins at kindergarten. There are also many other fine private institutions, and my academic colleagues have been pleased with the experiences of their kids at many schools across Seattle. Names of two that I happen to recall among my Chemistry colleagues include the Spruce Street School and the Bush School.

If you are paying for child care for a kid up to 13 years (I think), you are eligible for the UW dependent care assistance program, which allows you to pay some of your childcare costs with pretax dollars. Before kindergarten, it covers daycare. After kindergarten, it covers after school care and summer camps. It is easy to enroll at www.washington.edu/admin/hr/benefits/worklife/dcap.html. You have a choice to either opt for this or the IRS tax break for child care, but I believe that you cannot do both. See here: www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p503.pdf.

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Elementary schools within the Seattle Public School system have a wide range of personalities and styles (e.g. project-based vs. Montessori vs. traditional, K-5 vs. K-8). Some schools have in-house before- and after-school programs, and some don't. The district has multiple education tracks – none of which are static. There are opportunities to change tracks. Here are the tracks for grades 1-8:

1. The APP (Accelerated Progress Program) nominally accepts students in the top 2%. Students are bused from all over the city to one of two APP schools. Information is here: www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=230107

2. The Spectrum Program

The Spectrum program nominally accepts students in the 87th percentile and above. Spectrum classrooms are available in many local schools. Otherwise, students take a bus to a different school. My brilliant colleague Tom Daniel (who is a member of the National Academy of Sciences) was thrilled with his daughter's experience in her local Spectrum program. She is on her way to Cornell for college.

3. Advanced Learning Opportunities

Students are given the opportunity to pursue advanced work within their regular classroom.

4. General Education

This program applies to students who have not chosen to enroll in programs 1-3 above.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION:

Seattle Public Schools has a bilingual program at John Stanford International School, (<http://stanfordes.seattleschools.org>) and perhaps at other schools too. As I understand it, half of the classes are taught in a second language, either Spanish or Japanese. There are two ways for your children to end up at John Stanford. The guaranteed method is to live in the school's neighborhood (the catchment area). Another option is to request the school during the yearly enrollment period; the probability of being accepted likely changes from year to year. To find catchment area boundaries, use the following website and search for Stanford under elementary schools: <http://district.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=224273> Alternately, here is a map of the John Stanford catchment area: http://district.seattleschools.org/modules/groups/homepagefiles/cms/1583136/Image/maps/boundarymaps/Hamilton_Adopted.jpg

There are many preschools that offer instruction in second languages. The Children's Center at Burke Gilman Gardens (www.tccbagg.com) offers Japanese and Spanish. La Escuelita (www.laescualitaschools.com) offers Spanish. I have colleague who is enthusiastic about a French immersion school called Les Gamins de Paris for kids of age 0-5 that is located close to UW. It is run by Ines Pechmagre at 2740 Montlake Boulevard East, Seattle, WA 98112-9072. I get the feeling that this place is quite small, but I haven't verified my hunch. Try a quick online search and I'm sure you'll find other options as well.

HOW TO FIND A HOUSE (AND A SCHOOL DISTRICT):

A handy website for getting a feel for what housing prices are in Seattle is the Windermere site here: www.windermere.com. You can also try redfin.com.

If you know the address of a house you might be interested in buying, here is a program to tell you to which school your children would be assigned as a default: www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=172265

SUMMER CAMPS:

There are summer camps available for children at institutions all over the city. You can find many of them with a simple online search of "summer camp Seattle". Many faculty take advantage of summer camp here at UW. Here is the website: www.summer-camp.uw.edu/

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:

There are so many kid-friendly activities within the city of Seattle that my family is never able to do them all. I have not found a website that lists all activities I like to do with children in Seattle, but the following one is a good start: www.grandparents.com/gp/events/seattle.html

A few that I like best are the Center for Wooden Boats (<http://cwb.org>), the fish ladder at the Chittenden Locks (www.seattle.gov/tour/locks.htm), the Aquarium (www.seattleaquarium.org), the Zoo (www.zoo.org), the Science Center (<http://pacificsciencecenter.org>), the Children's Museum (<http://thechildrensmuseum.org>), and, in the middle of winter, the warm swimming pool at Mountlake Terrace (www.cityofmlt.com/cityServices/recreation/indoorPool/indoorPool.htm).

Something that I love about Seattle is that my family can suddenly decide that we'd like to play on a beach or go on a hike (or both!) and can quickly find ourselves lobbing rocks into the Sound at Golden Gardens, Discovery Park, or Carkeek Park. If you'd like to go further afield, use the Washington Trails Association site (www.wta.org) to help you select a hike and to provide the latest update about the condition of the trail.

Seattle is known for its music scene, and is home to a more than a couple rockers who grew up, had kids, and realized that most kid-music is insipid. So they started writing and recording children's music that makes parents smile too. They often host free shows. You can find a few "kindie music" bands here: www.kindiependent.com/. Also check out Seattle's music festivals of Folk Life (www.nwfolklifefestival.org), Honk Fest West (<http://honkfestwest.com/>) and Bumbershoot (www.bumbershoot.org), particularly the Youngershoot Kids' Zone. The first two festivals ask for only a donation, the last one requires tickets.

One of my personal favorite places to take my child is the Seattle Asian Art Museum on Capitol Hill. On the first Saturday of almost every month, the museum is free to the community and offers art projects for children. A common early spring theme is the lunar New Year. There are lion dancers, drumming, and kung fu exhibitions in addition to the art activities, which might be printmaking, mask making, puppet making, origami, sketching, painting, or card making. (Parents are welcome to make art too). The Wing Luke Museum hosts a similar free event called the "Family Fun Day" on nearly every third Saturday of the month.

The most serious challenge that arises from having so many options of fun things to do is that when we ask our child whether she wants to do Option A or Option B or Option C, she says "I want to do them all!" Well, don't we all? At the very least, UW and Seattle are places in which parents can "have it all" and find happiness within their careers and their families.

I hope this is helpful,
– Sarah

Last edited 23 April, 2012.