

Dear New Dance Parents

As a new dance parent, choosing a dance school can be very confusing. Sharper Image Dance will provide you with fundamental guidelines on what to look for in a dance school and help you make an informed decision.

There are typically three variables when searching for a new school: location, cost and quality. To begin with, let's consider location. If location is the biggest concern, then using the phonebook should answer your questions and help make a choice. However, there are some other facets to choosing a dance school that are very important. At a minimum, you should ensure that the artistic director is qualified, certified and that unsafe practices are not taking place. Schools should value all students equally. Whether the student has professional aspirations or simply loves to dance for recreational reasons, all students should be treated with the same respect.

Quality is another important variable and usually the most confusing to new dance parents. Look for a school which has a clear and concise teaching syllabus. This tells the parents that their teacher has a logical step-by-step teaching process. If asked, the school should be willing to show it to you. You should expect no less from a dance school than you would from a small private academic school no matter what you pay for tuition. At a minimum, the artistic director should be qualified in a teaching syllabus. Their job is to ensure that proper training is taking place at the school and the artistic direction of the school is being satisfied. There are many types of teacher education programs from university programs to courses that certify teachers. Many schools entice students and parents to their front doors based on the school's teachers' professional careers. Professional dance experience is a plus for the school's director and teachers; however, teaching and dancing are two different skill sets. Make sure your artistic director and teachers are certified professionals.

In the United States, for ballet there are basically four teaching methods that you will likely encounter: Checchetti, RAD (Royal Academy of Dance), Vaganova, and Balanchine-style methods. "Classical Ballet" is a RESULT of any of these training methods, (with the exception of Balanchine-style methods, which results in "Neo-Classical Ballet") "Classical Ballet" is NOT a teaching method. Just as there are different methods of teaching a child proficiency in reading and writing the English language, there are different methods of teaching a movement vocabulary. Whole word learning and phonetics are methods of teaching English just like Checchetti and RAD are methods for teaching Classical Ballet. There is no "Classical Ballet" syllabus or method, although Classical Ballet is the goal of all the methods. Unfortunately, "Classical Ballet" has become a label that a school gives itself if it is not qualified to teach a method. Your child's dance school and its teachers should be able to tell you on which of these methods they base their daily lessons.

So now that you are aware of the different methods of ballet, there are also various methods in other forms of dance. As with Tap, Do they offer both Broadway & Rhythm Tap? Do they know the difference? Which do you want? Which does your child want? Be aware that some schools might say they offer "Rhythm Tap" because "all tap has rhythm." This is not really a straightforward answer.

We will now discuss correct level placement and advancement through a school's syllabus. Most schools, including Sharper Image Dance, place a new student in an age appropriate level for initial evaluation. There are many considerations to be taken for proper placement including evaluation of the student's strength, flexibility, coordination and ability to comprehend and follow physical directions. In addition, the teacher doing the evaluation knows what is expected of students in each level.

The final consideration for choosing a school is the cost. On the average, most schools are priced the same give or take a few dollars. Regardless of cost per class, make sure your child's school puts money back into the dance facility, customer service and teachers' pay. Dance training requires certain equipment - mainly a high quality professional dance floor, be careful of homemade or contractor installed dance floors. A floating floor or sub floor is necessary for dancers to avoid overuse injuries.

Finally, your child's dance school, from the classroom to lobby to the dressing room and out into the community, should strive to provide a positive experience in dance to all. Students should be encouraged to be courteous, inclusive of others, and to maintain a positive attitude about their goals and progress. The professional dance world is a tough place. However, this makes it even more important that dancers be trained to maintain self-confidence and to treat others as they should expect to be treated - with respect.

*Sincerely,
Sharper Image Dance*