

FOUR Things every parent should know before choosing a Dance School

If most dance schools seem to have qualified, friendly instructors, experience teaching children and a big show at the end of the year, aren't they all pretty much the same? Does it really matter which place you decide to enroll at? Yes. There are 4 main things that can make a huge difference: quality of instruction your child receives, the amount of extra work and hassles the parents must deal with and the overall enjoyment and satisfaction of being involved with a dance program. Here are the 4 things that every parent should consider before deciding on a dance school.

1. What type of dance floor is used and why is this important?

Dancers are athletes and training is very important. It is a very physical activity that requires jumping, which can put stress on the bones and joints. Most dance footwear provides only minimal cushioning support, so the shock of dance movement can place a lot of pressure on the knees, ankles, and the back of a dancer. The best way to prevent against potential injury is by choosing a studio with a professional "floating floor." A floating floor is a dance floor that rests on a system of high-density foam, to absorb the shock of jumping. A high-density foam base is superior to a "sprung" floor usually consists of a wood structure built on the regular floor.

Facilities such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Royal Academy of Dance in London, England, and Riverdance-the-Touring Show, all use floating flooring. Very few studios use professional flooring because of the expense and usually opt for wood flooring that sits directly on top of the concrete base.

ESC for the Arts' custom built floating and sprung flooring system has over 700 high density foam blocks under the floor surface. Our special flooring helps reduce the risk of injury and allows students to dance longer without getting tired.

2. What is the size of the class?

If the dance class has fewer students in it each child will receive more personalized attention, learn more and have more fun. With younger students it is easier for a teacher to maintain control over the class and make sure each student understands concepts, technique and instructions. Our smaller class sizes make sure that no fundamental concepts are being missed. A smaller class size also allows our teachers to ensure that students are not developing bad habits or improper technique.

ESC limits all class sizes. Level I classes Ages 4-5 and up are limited to just 12 students per class. 15 for adults. With ages 3-4 we limit all of our classes to a maximum of just 8-10 students per class. Because ESC for the Arts also trains high school and college interns in the arts, we also utilize interns, student teachers, and teaching assistants and co-teachers in many of our classes.

3. What are the "extras" required for performances?

Most Studios put on a year-end show. Students that perform in the show must have a costume for their dance number. Many studios may require parents to sew their child's costumes, or pay extra and the parents must find their own steamstress to do the sewing. Some studios order expensive costumes from costume wearhouses. Often costumes are inappropriate for the age group performing, and/or do not fit right. This can be inconvenient, frustrating and time consuming for busy parents who may not be able to sew, not to mention a shock to family who want to see thier children in age-appropriate costuming. Additionally, many students ask you to purchase show tickets.

It is ESC's highest priority to make sure that all of our students artistry is highlighted. We believe this should always be the focus. Costumes are often handmade by staff, and all costumes are age-appropriate, and do not overpower the growth and artistry of our students. We offer 1-2 performance opportunities per semester, which we find to be just enough. Competitions can be expensive, time consuming and stressful. We want your experience to be a good one, so we handle costumes for you. All extra rehearsals, picture day fees and extra dress rehearsals are included in tuition. ESC offers you two free show tickets to our winter showcase, plus a dvd of the show. This way as a parents you wil not be faced with any extra work or expenses.

4. Can I get immediate assistance and customer service?

In many studios the teacher or studio owner conducts classes and does the administration. By trying to do two jobs at once, the class may suffer, as the teacher has to use class time for customer services issues, or the studio may offer no customer service available if the teacher is in a class. To have a good experience it is important to choose a school that can assist with detailslike costuming or schedules, even if a teacher is occupied in a class. ESC has office staff on hand from 3:00-7:30 mondays-thursdays and 10:00am-1pm fridays. Telesupport is available so that you can get assistance within a 24 hour period during regular business hours.