

**Fire Your Boss!  
The New Office  
Democracy**

BY MICHAEL BLANDING

**The Strange Saga of  
Charles Laquidara and  
the Cult-Buster**

BY CATHERINE ELTON

**They're Baaack!  
How College Kids  
Ruin the City**

BY JOE KEOHANE

**FALL STYLE**  
Shopping the New  
Natick Mall, Great Finds  
from Our Favorite Stores,  
and Men's Leggings—  
Hot or Not?

SEPTEMBER 2007

# Boston

## The Best Schools

**Gotta Start 'Em Young!  
Why It's Never Too Early to Stress About  
Your Child's Education**

PLUS

**THE HUB'S TOP PRESCHOOLS**

bostonmagazine.com | \$3.99



# Junior Achievers

The anxious parent's answer-filled guide to the Hub's finest preschools.

BY KEVIN ALEXANDER

SEPTEMBER 2007

Not so long ago, in what was a gentler, more forgiving era, the good children of Boston didn't face their first make-or-break interview until they were fully formed college aspirants, or at least looking to sew up a spot in the prep school of their choosing. Now, the decisive moment happens a bit earlier. Like at, say, about two, two and a half years old. The initial steps to that Harvard diploma (or rejection slip), many parents are convinced, are taken in preschool, and so wherever their little one enrolls... But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Because before they enroll, obviously, they have to get in.

Mind you, we're not endorsing this trend. That said, it seems to us that when it comes to your kid's education, the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em mindset is the only real option. And we also know that intensive school shopping, the kind where you go out and size up the place in person—the kind that, if you were looking instead at quaint liberal arts campuses with your preternaturally beatific teen, might almost be soothing—is anything but easy when you've got a tyke in tow (or terrorizing the sitter at home). From that perspective, the choice of what to make the focus of this year's Best Schools guide was clear.

We started by chatting up eminent early-education experts, school directors, teachers, and plugged-in parents, asking them how they'd pick a preschool. Thus enlightened, we scoped out the nominees, scrutinizing the play spaces (were they spotless?), the learning spaces (were they stimulating?), the faculty (how much turnover?), and the curriculum (was a defined educational mission in place?). We played in the sandboxes, sat in on story time, and tasted the paste in classrooms across the region.

A few more notes on our methodology: Though concentrating on preschools—which means a student body between the ages of 33 months and five years old—we also made room for some exemplary pre-K programs that cater solely to four- and five-year-olds. And while there are a number of fine preschool classes in larger daycare centers, we decided to include only preschools (whether standalone or attached to an elementary school) that follow the academic calendar, keep hours close to a typical school day, and make teaching their primary purpose.

Blessed as we are around here with academic powerhouses at every level, we weren't surprised by the quality of what we found within those parameters. But the breadth of it all blew us away. Whether you're seeking the perfect place for a free-spirited little scientist or a structure-loving budding musician—or another type of pint-size scholar entirely—here's where you'll find it, along with some tips on what those admissions officers will be looking for.

### **Cambridge-Ellis School**

*80 Trowbridge St., Cambridge, 617-354-0014, [cambridge-ellis.com](http://cambridge-ellis.com).* Cambridge-Ellis excels with its arts program and even has an artisan-in-residence to work with both kids and teachers. It also offers after school language classes in English, Spanish, French, and Mandarin—and if Mom and Dad are feeling left out of the learning, there are parental workshops on topics ranging from sibling rivalry to child behavior management. **Facilities:** Six classrooms in a historic brick building near Harvard Square that was updated this summer. **Educational approach:** Emergent, developmentally based. **Student-teacher ratio:** 4-1. **Programs offered:** Half and full day, with an extended-day language program option. **Tuition:** Half day, \$11,250–\$12,500; full day, \$14,500–\$15,750. **Language program:** five days, \$5,500; three days, \$3,500; two days, \$2,500. Scholarships available.

**Admissions:** Applications due February 28; decisions made by March 10. Parents tour the school and meet with the director or assistant director. Preference is given to children of alumni and minority families. **Waitlist:** Yes.