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Why We Send Our Children to Public Schools: Advantages and How Your Children Can Thrive

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Are you deciding where your children will attend school or considering a change? Years ago parents had limited school options. But today's education choices abound, each with advantages and disadvantages. Here's my perspective as a longtime public school educator and mother of two adult daughters.

Diversity in a Changing Society

In the public school system, children experience diversity that prepares them for our rapidly changing society. Brian Sanders chose public schools for his three daughters and notes, "I attended public school. I liked the diversity. I wanted that for them." Mother of two boys, Christie Berlin says, "I want my kids' schools to represent the diversity we see in our community and state."

Free Education

Another benefit of the public school system is that all children are given a free education where their uniqueness is valued. Ensuring this requires parental involvement, however. Sanders says, "We chose our kids' elementary teachers deliberately. Stay involved. Observe teachers. Talk to parents. Ask, who is the best teacher for my children's learning style? Who will challenge them in creative ways? We requested specific teachers and got them."

Friends questioned Berlin's decision. "You're going to let your kids go to that school?" She explained, "It was as if rich, Caucasian schools were better than schools with diverse students in the hood. I felt offended." Berlin advises parents, "Pray and listen to God. Don't let friends determine your schooling choices."

Inclusive Environment

The next advantage is that children learn in an inclusive environment: from special needs children to typically developing children to gifted children. Mother of two, Brittany Thayer comments, "My son attends a school with children who have physical disabilities. He sees kids in wheelchairs and leg braces. To him, it's normal."

Berlin's sons also benefited from inclusive schools. "One son needed more one-on-one assistance while my other son needed more challenging classes; the private schools didn't offer gifted classes. Both my sons were helped and challenged in public schools."

Quality Education

The fourth advantage is that public schools provide a comprehensive, quality education offering electives, languages, and Advanced Placement courses. During Sanders' sabbatical, he sat side-by-side with public school elementary teachers and observed how they taught math. "I saw highly skilled teachers whose teaching aligned with my beliefs about teaching math: teach math using concepts and manipulatives."

Sanders noted, "I wanted my kids to acquire the knowledge they'd need to live and work in the world and not be secluded from society."

Berlin added, "Parents shouldn't be afraid of public schools. They often get a bad rap."

Unexpected Opportunities

Local schools can provide an unexpected opportunity. Children get exercise by walking or riding their bikes to school. Thayer explains, "I walk my son to and from school. We see the same people. It gives us a sense of

community.” Some parents meet neighborhood parents and carpool. When my daughter carools she asks the kids for prayer requests; then she prays.

Thayer says, “I drive less since my son’s friends live close and he can hang out with them. He’s often on the same sports teams and extracurricular activities with neighborhood kids.” Intentional parents can create occasions to know their children’s neighborhood friends and parents or caregivers.

Help Your Kids Thrive in Public Schools

Christian kids can flourish in public schools. With biblical training, guidance, and active engagement, public schools may be an excellent choice for your children. Here are five ways you can help your children thrive in public schools.

• Invest in Education

One way to help your children succeed is through volunteering. Children blossom when parents (and grandparents) invest time in their education. Berlin shares, “We were very involved during elementary school. I was a room mother and classroom helper. My mom helped too. My boys have fond memories of us helping. I noticed that some students didn’t have parents who helped them feel supported at school. I tried reaching out to them.”

Parents support their children’s values and beliefs through conversations with students and staff. Even with a busy schedule, Sanders makes time to work as the marching band’s Equipment Chief. He explains, “By being there on a regular basis we can encourage and talk with the kids.”

• Fill in the Gaps

A second way to help is to fill in the gaps left by families who have chosen not to attend public schools. Who will share God’s love and speak truth when opportunities occur? I help in my two oldest grandchildren’s classes. I asked the children about their favorite holiday. When my first-grade granddaughter said, “Christmas, because it’s Jesus’ birthday,” I affirmed her belief and helped her expand it. Thayer adds, “Our public schools do better when families stayed involved.”

- **Decision-making Skills**

Another way to help is to train your children about biblically based decision making. Help them discern truth. These skills help students filter their beliefs with differing perspectives. Berlin states, “Kids are going to face people with different thought processes and beliefs. They’ll meet people they don’t like or disagree with, just like they will in the real world. It’s my job to teach character and biblical foundations that counter these differences.”

Sanders notes that dealing with inappropriate language may be a greater challenge for kids in public schools. In addition he was surprised when his senior daughter was required to sign a prom pledge that she wouldn’t dress or dance inappropriately.

- **Support Christian Educators**

The fourth way to help your kids is to support Christian educators in public schools. Parents will discover strong Christians among the staff. Sanders says, “Our kids ended up with lots of teachers of faith. You’ll also find teachers who demonstrate integrity.”

- **Equip Your Children**

Finally, equip your children to share their faith. One misconception I hear is, “You can’t pray in public schools or share your faith.” Students shouldn’t leave their beliefs at the doorway. Their values are a part of their lives. Students can communicate their faith in respectful ways and influence others. Parents’ modeling and guidance can strategically assist them in integrating their faith.

Sanders and I intentionally chose to teach in public schools to be light in a dark world. Christian teachers can reinforce students’ beliefs and nudge them toward opportunities to take a stand.

“My boys are overtly Christian,” says Berlin. “They didn’t have problems stating their beliefs. When my oldest son was ridiculed for his purity ring, his teacher stood up for him. He said, ‘We’re all privileged to know him because he stands up for what he believes.’ As a second grader, my younger son wore a cross and asked kids, ‘Do you believe in God?’”

Sanders summarizes his thoughts on public schools. “My girls are well-rounded. They are ready for what comes next. My oldest daughter is doing well at college. One graduates this year. The youngest is doing well too.”

Be assured, our children can be prepared to live out their Christian faith when they leave home for college, vocational school, military service, or work. The reason? With parent involvement and biblical training, our children have practiced integrating their faith for 13 years within a diverse environment—the public school.

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