

Ten Signs that You Need to Find a Different Kind of Education for Your Child

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Many parents do not realize that the education world has changed drastically since they were in school. Back in those days, schools were smaller, class sizes were smaller, dropout rates were lower, violence in school was almost unheard of, teachers were not terrified of showing affection to the children, or of teaching and discussing moral values. Even through rose-colored glasses, we know that school back then was no picnic, was far from perfect, but at least the teachers and usually the principal knew every student by name at a minimum, something which is not necessarily true today. Because our public school system has now considerably deteriorated, many parents, teachers, and individuals have taken it upon themselves to create public and private alternatives to that traditional system which is definitely failing. It is important for parents to know that they now have choices, alternatives to the neighborhood school. How do you know that it is time to look for another educational approach for your child? Here are some of the signs:

- 1.** Does your child say he or she hates school? If so, something is probably wrong with the school because children are natural learners. When they're young you can hardly stop them from learning. If your children say they hate school, listen to them.
- 2.** Does your child find it difficult to look an adult in the eye, or to interact with children younger or older than they are? If so, your child may have become "socialized" to that very narrow group which many children ordinarily interact with in most schools, and may be losing the ability to communicate with a broader group of children and adults.
- 3.** Does your child seem fixated on designer labels and trendy clothes for school? This is a symptom of the shallowness of the traditional schools' approach, causing children to rely on external means of comparison and acceptance, rather than deeper values.
- 4.** Does your child come from school tired and cranky? This is a sure sign that their educational experiences are not energizing but are actually debilitating.
- 5.** Do your children come home complaining about conflicts that they've had in school and unfair situations that they have been exposed to? This is a sign that your school does not have a proper process for conflict resolution and communication.
- 6.** Has your child lost interest in creative expression through art, music, and dance? These things are generally not encouraged in the traditional system today and are not highly valued. They're considered secondary to the "academic" areas. In some cases, courses are not even offered in these areas any more. This tends to extinguish these natural talents and abilities in children.
- 7.** Has your child stopped reading for fun, or reading or writing for pleasure? Are your children doing just the minimum for homework and going off for some escapist activity? This is a sign that these spontaneous activities are not being valued in their school and another sign that they are losing their creativity.
- 8.** Does your child procrastinate until the last minute to do homework? This is a sign that the homework is not very interesting to, is not really meeting his or her needs, and is tending to extinguish their natural curiosity.
- 9.** Does your child come home talking about anything exciting that happened in school that day? If not, maybe nothing exciting is happening for your child in school. Would you want to keep working if your job was like that?
- 10.** Did the school nurse or guidance counselor suggest that your child has some strange three lettered disease, like ADD, and that they should now be given Ritalin or some other drug? I suggest that it is more probable that the school has the disease, EDD--Educational Deficit Disorder, and time to get your child out of that situation!

If your child has exhibited several of these characteristics, it is time for you to start looking for an alternative. In most

parts of this country today, there are many options to choose from. For example, 30 states have now enacted legislation which allows groups of parents and teachers to create charter schools, schools which are not stuck with having to fulfill the myriad of state regulations but can create their own individualized approach. Four years ago there were only five of these charter schools in the country. By the end of this year there will be more than 1000 of them! Also, there are 4500 magnet schools throughout the country, public schools which specialize in a an area of expertise, and draw students from a wider area.

In most communities there are many private alternatives quietly offering a different educational approach. For example, there are over 4500 Montessori schools based on the experiential approach designed by Dr. Maria Montessori, and hundreds of Waldorf schools which puts equal emphasis on traditional academics areas and the arts. There are hundreds of independent alternative schools, many emphasizing participant control with parents and students taking responsibility for their own educations.

Many public school systems have a variety of alternative programs within their systems. These are divided into two general approaches: 1. Public Choice; those programs which are open to any student in the community. Sometimes they are called Schools Within Schools. 2. Public At-Risk; those programs for children who have had a variety of problems coping with school. These programs run the spectrum from helpful to dumping ground. Examine them closely before making a decision to enroll.

Parents of over a million children in this country have checked off "none of the above" and decided to teach their children at home. It is now legal in every state and does not require teacher certification. Homeschooling has taken a variety of approaches. Some try to create "school at home" with a fairly standard curriculum, the main difference being that they can teach it one-to-one with their children. Some families have signed up with a curriculum which has been designed by an umbrella school. This school will help the parents with the curriculum and in some cases, grade homework, providing a basic curriculum for the parents to follow and helping with any report forms that are necessary. A third approach is one which is called "unschooling." In this case the parent bases their educational approach on the interest of the child and builds on that rather than a pre-set curriculum. It could be said that in some of these cases they design their curriculum "retroactively," keeping records of the activities throughout the year and at the of the process dividing the experiences into the appropriate subject area.

Overall, since most states require some form of testing of homeschoolers, it has been shown that remarkably, as a group, they average in the 85th percentile compared to the 50th percentile of the average public school student. There are now so many homeschoolers around the country that virtually all homeschoolers are part of some kind of homeschool group. Some of these groups have coalesced into homeschool resource centers and some of them will operate as often as four or five days a week. Generally, colleges have discovered that homeschoolers make such good students that they welcome homeschooling students to apply to their schools. As more and more parents become aware of these choices and as they make these choices, we hope that the system will evolve into one which meets the needs of an increasing number of students. Meanwhile, don't wait for that system to change. Take responsibility for your child's education. Find out what your choices are and choose what is best for your child.

None of these signs by themselves should be taken as a reason to panic. But if you have noticed several of them, you should certainly explore educational alternatives.

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