

The Overwhelming Reason Parents are Choosing Charter Schools

In their book "The Public School Advantage: Why Public Schools are Outperforming Private Schools" Christopher and Sarah Lubienski shared their rationale of why parents should have the sole responsibility of choosing the appropriate school for their children.

- Parents know the strengths and weaknesses of their children best and will act in their children's best interest
- Families are interested in reinforcing their values in their children, and will look for schools that accommodate the values they practice at home
- Parents are proxy consumers for their children in school, and when parents make the decision, it only strengthens the institution of the family; and
- Parents tend to place the best interests of their children at the forefront of their concerns

When considering a school for a child, location is often the first consideration. However, when parents are allowed to enroll their children in a school outside of their home district, parents have been known to travel close to an hour for the school that they feel fits their child. Also surprisingly, test scores do not carry the weight you would expect in a parent's decision making process. In a recent study, test scores actually came in sixth among reasons parents choose a school, coming in just behind quality teachers.

So if it not about location, test scores, or quality teachers, what is it? Overwhelmingly, parents say that it is simply about being the appropriate 'fit'. When children enjoy going to school and are engaged in meaningful learning, that's what really makes parents happy. Parents want their children to be motivated and to have solid relationships with their teachers and classmates.

Educational options, such as charter schools, are not anti-traditional school, they are pro-children and have as its core a fundamental principle: One size does not fit all. Because charter schools have a certain degree of independence that allows them to offer specialized courses and use different approaches to learning, many times they are able to offer the unique programs that students need in order to feel that they fit in. Just as no two snowflakes are alike, so too does each child have his own unique interests, talents, skills, and abilities. The most important consideration is finding a school that fits their child and his or her unique needs. Instead of fitting the child to the school, parents want the school to fit the child. Too much of the "one size fits all" approach has resulted in students losing interest in learning, and becoming bored, frustrated and disappointed with their school experiences. That is not a good formula for being happy or having an engaging academic experience.

Choosing a school is really a life-altering decision for families. It's an investment in time today and much more for the future. By having the charter school option, parents in our state have been empowered to select the environment that works best for each child—because no single school, no matter how good or convenient, can meet the distinct needs of each and every young student in Pennsylvania. Across the state there is a great deal of variation in curriculum, and there are good, and bad, examples out there, but for informed parents willing to do research, choice represents a chance to find the right educational experience for their kids. Parents know that what their children learn matters!



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