

Counsel on Schooling Options

Valley Bible's advice on how children can succeed in different schooling options

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper
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Over the years of ministry to children and youth, we have seen many parents avail themselves of the public schools, the Christian schools, more recently, home schooling. Each choice has its own advantages and disadvantages and our desire is to help parents and children to make the most of their chosen educational option.

We do not believe that one schooling option is best for every child. Nor are we encouraging one option in particular. Importantly, we believe that each family should make the schooling choice that they believe is best for their family without disparaging the choices of others. Romans 14 speaks of issues where there is a similar freedom of choice and instructs us not to pass judgment upon one another in these things (Romans 14:10, 13). We must pursue that which makes for peace and edification and purpose never to tear down the work of God for the sake of education (Romans 14:19-20).

We believe that children can and do thrive educationally and spiritually in each of these schooling options. Each family should ask themselves, "did we choose this option because we believe it best honors God in our family?" Once our choice is made with right motives, attention can be given to how to thrive in that setting.

We have learned that there are areas of concern in each option and if those can be managed, the opportunity for spiritual blessing increases substantially. We seek to help each family consider certain biblical values that relate to the schooling of their children. Rather than leave the discussion of schooling to advocates from each option to argue their own perspectives, here is our counsel on how to minimize the areas of difficulty and maximize areas of opportunity with each schooling option.

The approach to our counsel on schooling options

We have isolated three schooling options that are most frequently used in our church: public school, Christian school, and home schooling. Within these three schooling options, we have divided the paper into three additional areas of concern: evangelism, edification, and education. We believe that each child should be evaluated in each of these areas in determining how well they are succeeding in school, not just in their academics.

We have placed evangelism as our first area of consideration because of its central nature on the Christian life and because it is often overlooked when the topic of schooling options is discussed. Also, we mean to include parents and children in the consideration of evangelism, since parents will have certain opportunities as a result of the relationships of their children. Furthermore, when speaking of evangelism, our emphasis will be on relational evangelism, since we believe that through our individual connections to people we are uniquely positioned to minister the gospel of Christ. This then encompasses the aspect of social maturity.

By edification, we mean how each option can be used to serve the spiritual development of the child and other Christians that we may come in contact with. While our ability to edify our child depends far more on the spiritual state of the family rather than the schooling option, we can seize the opportunities to develop Christian character in our child's life if we are prepared. Also, each child should be growing in their ability to serve their fellow believers in Christ. They should be learning how to become a positive encouragement for spiritual good in the lives of their Christian peers. Parents also have the opportunity to edify fellow Christians in a schooling context.

Lastly, we will also address suggestions for the education of the child for each schooling option, since school is intended for the purpose of education.

Our advice for those using the public school option

Evangelism: Succeeding in our mission to the world

As followers of Christ, we are called to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). The great commission has no age limits or restrictions. It is imperative that all believers, including children, passionately adopt this mission. It is truly impossible to grow into maturity apart from an active role in Christ's work in the world.

At first glance, it is quite apparent that the public school option is the most abundant field for non-Christian relationships. Because of the larger proportion of Christian families using the Christian school and home school options, the public schools have become even more predominately non-Christian than our society as a whole. This provides Christians a chance to build many relationships for the sake of Christ.

However, this ample opportunity is only of value when it is recognized and cultivated. Sadly, most Christians who avail themselves of the public schools do not seize the opportunity before them of befriending the unsaved for the cause of Christ. Without an active evangelistic ministry, we miss out on a very significant value of utilizing the option of public school education for our children.

Edification: Succeeding in our ministry to the church

Some Christians have grave concerns about putting their children into a public school. Since Jesus did not ask the Father to take us out of the world, but to keep us from the evil one, we can be comforted to know that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (John 17:15; 1 John 4:4). Rather than seeing only the problems that may be encountered if we choose a public school for our child, we must also recognize and seize the opportunities that exist.

Certainly, we cannot expect that God will be exalted and truth will abound in a public school. There may be instances where the spiritual truth is attacked. This should be viewed as an opportunity to instruct and guide our child, instead of a threat to our child's faith. We believe the truth has nothing to fear from error as long as truth is not suppressed. It is the truth that sets us free (John 8:32), not the elimination of error, which is impossible short of heaven. In fact, the

importance of truth is only seen in the contrast to error. If we have a close involvement with our children and if they are involved with a church that teaches truth, the child will be in a good position to know the truth.

Another common problem comes from conflict with students, peer pressure, etc. This underscores the importance of parental involvement with the child. We must realize that difficulties will come upon our children and we must teach them how to respond to those difficulties successfully. In rare cases, the threat may be so great that irreparable harm is likely. In these cases perhaps a move from the school can be considered. But we should be careful not to miss the opportunity to help our child learn to persevere under trial, even at a younger age. This will prepare them for what lies ahead in adulthood as they appreciate the truth of James 1:2-4 “Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The truth that trials bring about spiritual good is not limited to adults. Indeed, when we encounter difficulties, we are often drawn toward the fellowship of believers in the local church. We see its importance as we seek to be grounded in the truth after observing foolishness. It is our encouragement for children to learn to respond well to trials and to develop a realization of their need for fellowship in the body of Christ, the local church.

Our mission from Christ is beyond our ministry to our family. It also includes “teaching others to observe” the commandments of the Lord (Matthew 28:20). In this realm of edification, we will encounter Christians through our relationships in a public school setting. These include children, parents and school employees. Some of those Christians will be seeking a church home and we can help them find a good church that they can learn and serve in. Some may believe errant teaching that provides us the opportunity to inform them of the truth of God’s Word. Some may need encouragement in their Christian faith or counseling in a particular situation. If we are looking, we will find many great opportunities to serve fellow believers in Christ through the public school system. Hopefully we can help them draw near to our Lord and to the fellowship of a good Bible-believing church.

Education: Succeeding in our method of learning

Since the purpose of school is education, we will consider which option will best serve our children. As each person is unique, each family is unique and hard to compare. Add to this the differences between schools and the differences within the individual schools. Therefore generalizations are more difficult to make concerning how a child will be best served educationally. Yet certain elements can be examined and each family can see how these impact their situation.

1. Efficiency

By efficiency we mean effective use of both time and money as good stewards of our Lord’s resources. Since public school is essentially free, being included in our property taxes, it is certainly efficient for us in a financial sense.

Due to the societal requirement to educate the masses, the public schools are at a disadvantage in terms of an effective use of a child's time for academic pursuit. This can be offset to a great degree by active parental involvement in the child's education. We recommend viewing the public schools as assisting us in our responsibility to educate our children for a productive life, instead of considering them to have the primary educational responsibility.

2. Effectiveness

By effectiveness, we mean how useful is the education provided? The answer to this varies greatly between schools and even within a school, depending upon the teacher. So comparison based on quality is difficult. As with the other schooling methods, the public schools can point to successes and failures.

Another reason that makes such comparisons hard is that those learning, the children, are not on equal terms. Since the chances that the average child in the public schools has of enjoying active, caring parents is less, and since studies have shown the critical nature of the role parents play in their child's education, it is rather unfair to attempt to compare the results of each schooling approach. Surely, parental involvement can increase the usefulness of the public school education and a child can be guided toward the most helpful classes as they get older. The presence of some disruptive students in the public schools increase the need for guidance for the child in order for learning to be maximized.

Encouragement: Summary of our suggestions

Our advice for those families using the public schools includes:

- Be actively involved with your child's education. View the public school as assisting you in your education of your child, not as being solely responsible for the education (Proverbs 22:6).
- Use the encounters with falsehood and distortions of truth that the child may hear from peers or even a few teachers as a teachable moment. This will help your child learn the significance of different belief systems and learn how to detect foolishness and error through application of God's Word (Hebrews 5:14).
- Use the relational difficulties that may be encountered as opportunities to instruct your child in godly character qualities, such as forbearance, perseverance, forgiveness, etc. Use these to guide them into a maturity, not merely looking out for themselves, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).
- Develop a skill in communicating the gospel through the natural relationships that occur via the public schools. Put yourself in a position to get to know other parents for this purpose. Also, help your child to grow in serving their Lord through the ministry of His Word. There are many who need Christ (Matthew 9:37).

Our advice for those using the Christian school option

Evangelism: Succeeding in our mission to the world

Because of the high involvement of professing Christians in most Christian schools, and because of the institutional Christian ministry that should exist, the breadth of our evangelistic ministry is likely to be lessened. This does not mean that it is nonexistent, however. In some ways the freedom and even expectation of Christian ministry provides a helpful setting for personal ministry, since a great many will accept the exercising of our ministry toward them as a good thing, else they would not be using that schooling option. There really are children and parents who consider themselves to be Christians but who do not understand the gospel and may actually be spiritually hardened.

If we choose a Christian school option, we must give attention to finding non-Christian relationships for our children. We believe this is where much of the good of Christian schooling is offset, when parents look to withdraw their children from relationships with the unsaved. We would highly encourage those who select a Christian school option to involve their children in some form of extracurricular activity than brings them into contact with unbelievers. These activities are prevalent even for the youngest of grade school children and will provide the development of a relationally evangelistic ministry for our children and ourselves.

Another great source of opportunities are unsaved friends of people in the church. A youth group will be a place to meet the unsaved that have been invited by church members. This provides the chance to serve with other Christians in the work of the gospel and supports the work of the church as well.

It is not sufficient to only participate in an evangelistic outreach sponsored by the Christian school. Children should learn to personally communicate Christ in a relational manner as they go through life. This is truly essential to the Christian life.

Edification: Succeeding in our ministry to the church

We have found a natural tendency for Christian school students and even some teachers in a Christian school to devalue commitment to a local church, feeling saturated with Christianity during the weekday. Our responsibility to the Lord through His church cannot be shifted to the Christian school. If students are not actively involved *relationally* with their local church during their teenage years, they have a great tendency to not become integrally connected when they graduate.

Also, some parents may send their child to a Christian school for spiritual nurturing. While a Christian school can help, it is no replacement for the role of the parents and of a local church in spiritual leadership of children. Just as public school children can be negatively influenced by the worldly values of their peers, so we must be aware that the spiritual apathy of some Christian school classmates is also infectious.

Because it is a school, its ministry is in an academic context and will come to an end. The ministry of a school is hard pressed to continue much beyond graduation. The ministry that may come from the school is best seen as supplementing the spiritual nurturing of the parents and the ministry of a good local church. We encourage being thankful for the assistance that is extended to children through the Christian school and a determination to help each child to not neglect their responsibility to the body of Christ in their local church.

In terms of ministry to Christians beyond our child, it would seem that opportunities to serve our fellow believers in Christ are greatest with Christian schools, given the greater number of professing Christians within them. Indeed, these opportunities are abundant, but once again, only to the degree we utilize them.

We should not assume all teachers, students and parents are sound in faith and growing in Christ. We should be ready to help those we encounter and a Christian school provides a ready context for ministry, since they are seeking the same goal, at least in principle.

Education: Succeeding in our method of learning

Christian schools can have an advantage in education by including a Christian world view with their instruction. While this may have little affect on subjects such as mathematics, it can make a difference in the study of most subjects, such as literature, social sciences, history, etc.

1. Efficiency

One obvious issue regarding the effective use of time and money within Christian schools is the cost of tuition. In addition to the question “can we afford a private school?” is the next question, “what is the best use of the money that God has entrusted to my family?” The answers to these questions will vary between families and between schools. The efficiency of time and the effectiveness of the education may offset the efficiency of money, which can be unique to each family situation.

2. Effectiveness

A Christian school has a decided advantage over public schools in providing useful education because it is able to select students. This eliminates some students who might be disruptive influences on the educational process. What the public schools must endure, the Christian schools do not.

Yet, the economic realities of Christian school result in some unintended consequences. One is the make up of the student body is disproportionately from the middle to upper class, due to the tuition cost. Only a significant number of scholarships being granted to those of lower income households can offset this. This may also be true for some public schools, but to a much lesser extent. We believe there is value in relating to people from diverse economic circumstances.

Another consequence results in substantially lower paid teachers in comparison with public schools. This would be a disincentive for a qualified teacher to teach at a lower paying school without an ulterior motive. Some very good teachers are willing to take a pay cut to teach in a Christian school, but the economics cannot be ignored. We suggest evaluating the quality of the staff at a Christian school and guiding them toward the setting that would increase their learning potential.

Encouragement: Summary of our suggestions

- Involve your children in opportunities that bring them into contact with unbelievers beyond the school.
- Do not assume that everyone in a Christian school is a follower of Christ. Look for the ministry opportunities that exist.
- Do not allow your local church to be supplanted by your child's involvement in their Christian school.
- Be sure your child does not fall into either spiritual apathy or spiritual elitism.
- Be sure your child is not separated from children of lower income families.

Our advice for those using the home school option

Evangelism: Succeeding in our mission to the world

If we choose a home school option, we must give substantial attention to finding non-Christian relationships for our children. Some parents who home school can be particularly susceptible to withdrawing their children from relationships with the unsaved, as there is a significant element among those who home school who actually advocate this. Some who home school are motivated by a desire to protect their children from the worldly influences that often come from children of non-Christians.

We do not believe that our desire to protect our children can negate the command of Christ to minister the gospel. Because many home school parents can increase our anxiety with stories of the difficulties that they are seeking to avoid for their children, parents who home school must be the most vigilant to ensure their family applies the Lord's commission of Matthew 28:19.

Because a majority of home school families are already Christians, the opportunity for home school children to evangelize will come mostly from other sources. Years ago there were ample opportunities in the neighborhood for most children in urban or suburban areas. Now, children are more involved in organized activities than ever and most of our contact will come in this arena. Sporting activities, music, art, drama, etc. all provide wonderful opportunities to befriend unbelievers for the cause of Christ. The flexibility that home schooling offers enhances these opportunities.

Another great source of opportunity is unsaved friends of people in the church. A youth group will be a place to meet the unsaved who have been invited by church members. This provides the chance to serve with other Christians in the work of the gospel and supports the work of the church as well.

Edification: Succeeding in our ministry to the church

While all parents should be actively involved with their children to bring about spiritual development, those parents who home-school have a greater amount of time that can be devoted to this task. This opportunity is only as good as the spiritual state of the parents and their diligence in training their children. We must seek our own spiritual maturity in order to effectively build the character of our children.

Furthermore, our fellow believers in Christ can benefit from those who choose the home-schooling option through the flexibility that comes through this educational approach. With wisdom, a child who is home-schooled can be guided by their parents to serve others in the church in special ways that children whose time is consumed by formal school activities cannot.

Many parents choose to home school their children to protect them from people they consider to be a negative influence. This attitude can lead to viewing children in the church as being a negative influence also, and even viewing the church leaders who are seeking to guide the youth in the church as a hindrance. We know that difficulties can exist in relationships even among Christians and the Scripture is filled with instances where God's people are living in immature or even ungodly ways.

However, believers in Christ do not have the option to separate themselves from the local church. Christ is building His church (Matthew 16:18), founded upon the apostles (Ephesians 2:20) who gave instruction for the establishment of local churches (Titus 1:5). Some who recognize the centrality of the local church in the Christian life and attend worship services regularly fail to understand the relational nature of the local church. The solution to the sin of forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:24-25) is not just showing up but is also "considering how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...encouraging one another." Clearly, this level of relational involvement requires that children are interacting with their peers in the context of the church, not just with adults.

A second way we can serve others who home school is to help parents and children see non-Christians as people who we should serve with the gospel of Christ, not people who we need to distance ourselves from.

Education: Succeeding in our method of learning

Like Christian schools, home schooling can bring the advantage of educating from a Christian world view.

1. Efficiency

Mankind tends to overemphasize the value of money and undervalue the importance of time. We all get twenty-four hours in a day and should look to be good stewards of our time. One of the values of a home school setting is the potential productivity for learning. What may take a class days to cover can often be digested in a much shorter time in a home school environment. Or a child who is learning a concept more slowly can receive greater attention.

Of course, this efficiency is only possible with effective instruction and good use of the resulting time gained. The home school must be disciplined to maintain its educational course or all efficiency is lost.

2. Effectiveness

The usefulness of the education in a home school context is very diverse. Because some Christians have advocated home schooling as the godly option, some other parents have been led to home school with great difficulty, both for the parents and the children. Many other parents are highly qualified to provide and assist their child through a well-rounded education. The quality of the education depends not only on the ability of the parents but on the relationship of the parents and children.

Encouragement: Summary of our suggestions

Our advice to those who seek to make home schooling an effective educational path for their children include:

- Involve your children in activities that bring them into contact with unbelievers. Children who are home schooled are strengthened by the opportunity to live out their faith among non-Christians. The importance of ministering the gospel to unbelievers cannot be overstated.
- Be sure to involve your children into the life of the church. Avoid segregating them only with other home schooled children.
- Do not think more highly of yourself than your ought (Romans 12:3). Realize when your child is poorly served by you and seek alternatives, such as from other parents or supplementing their education in other ways.
- Be disciplined. Make the most of your time for the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).
- Expand education beyond the structured home schooling curriculum.
- Enroll your children at some point in a class that requires learning in a classroom setting. This will help them if they choose to attend a university in the future.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper is to help families in whatever schooling option they choose to make the most of their opportunity and to avoid certain pitfalls. We seek to allow each person to make their own applications given their unique circumstance. We hope these suggestions will help the children of our church and even children beyond our church in their relationship with the Lord.

One way believers can serve one another is to not look down on other Christian parents who make different personal schooling choices. We should encourage others with humility, rather than feeling superior (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7) or even becoming divisive (Titus 3:10). Regardless of the schooling option chosen, it behooves each family to honor the decisions of others in this matter of freedom.

The attitude of some that believe the path of godliness lies in their schooling method has been a divisive element in churches. In this area of moral freedom, we should not only avoid judging one another (Romans 14:13), but should seek to serve the body of Christ by being a balancing influence toward unity.