

Why Private School?

by Robert Kennedy

Is private school right for your child? Learn about the things you should consider and the unique benefits of a private school education.

The question of how to educate a child is one of the most important a parent can ask. A basic choice that many parents struggle with is that of public vs. private school. Parents do not want to take on unnecessary expenses if they will not ultimately benefit their child. After all, many public schools do an excellent job of educating students. But while it is true that public schools do not have tuition costs (and a private school can run, on average from 12,000 to 30,000 dollars a year), the benefits of a private education can still far outweigh the costs depending on the local options parents may face. Students who attend private schools can be more academically challenged, exposed to clearer value systems, given greater access to teachers, and may simply feel safer than local public school options. If you do decide to pursue private schooling for your child, start the research process early. Admission to private schools can be competitive, and finding a school that is a perfect fit for your child where he or she will be also be accepted, may take some time.

A Higher Bar

A major advantage to private education is that your child will likely be challenged to a higher academic standard. Private schools can be more academically rigorous than public schools, and private school students may have to meet more criteria to keep up their grade point averages. According to The Condition of Education 2001, from the National Center for Education Statistics, "Private high schools typically have more demanding graduation requirements than do public high schools. Compared with public schools, private schools required more coursework (in 4-year high school programs)."

More can be expected of private school students in terms of quality of work, course workload, and special requirements such as community service or Arts participation. In some schools, what would normally be considered extracurricular activities, are prerequisites for graduation, which ultimately round out students' high school experience. The push to meet this higher standard often results in a greater level of student performance. In a recent NAEP report, it was found that "Students in private schools scored significantly above the national average in grades four, eight, and twelve. As the report put it, 'Performance results in 2002 show that, at all three grades, students who attended nonpublic schools had higher average writing scores than students who attended public schools.'" In general, a student given the opportunity to attend a private school will most likely reach a higher level of academic achievement.

Student Teacher Ratio

Private schools also tend to focus on controlling their class sizes. The NCES Schools and Staffing Survey found that, "Private high schools on average are less than half the size of public schools. In central cities, for example, the average size of a private high school is 398, compared to 1,083 for a

public school.” Students of private schools may have more opportunities to form relationships with their teachers, which can lead them to greater academic success. In such cases, a student is given help for his or her specific academic problems, which can allow the issue to be resolved quickly and correctly. Once any issues inhibiting a student’s progress have been addressed, the child can go on to achieve at his or her highest level.

In [The Condition of Education 2002](#), it was found that “Placing students in small groups tends to foster close working relationships between teachers and students, thus enhancing learning, particularly among at-risk students and those in the early grades.” Also, small classes allow the teachers to have a better sense of who your child is, and what his or her specific strengths and weaknesses are. Your child will also have more opportunities to speak up and participate in class discussions. In addition, students may be offered office hours during which the teacher will be available. Students who have worked closely with their teachers are less likely to feel intimidated about using such time to actively seek help from their teachers directly.

Exposure to the Arts

Private schools have the ability to create their own curriculum. Although they must ultimately prepare students with the same basic course as any other school, private schools also have the option to add various elements to their programs. Private school administrators often develop programs that emphasize the Arts, perhaps more so than local public schooling options. Schools may choose to produce elaborate plays and musicals, giving students unique opportunities to explore their talents and express themselves.

Government regulations on public schools prevent them from spending more than a certain percentage of school funds on the Arts. Private schools, however, are not subject to the same regulations, and they have more freedom to develop and expand these programs as they wish. Some private schools may even offer filmmaking or video production courses which are opportunities normally reserved for college students.

Potentially More Funds

The tuition that you and the other parents of a private school contribute often will go toward developing and funding special programs that would be restricted in public schools. The school may be able to offer other activities such as special field trips that reinforce the school’s curriculum. Such trips can give your child opportunities to form close friendships and build independence. The school may have more funds available to provide supplies to student-run clubs.

A Push Towards College

Private high schools can instill their students with the expectation of attending college. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, “Fourth Follow-up” (NELS: 1988/2000) show that, “Students who had attended private school in 8th grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor’s or higher degree by their mid-20s (52 versus 26 percent) and far less likely to have had no postsecondary education.” With college as a focus, students can be more goal oriented, and often elements of the schools curriculum will be specifically aimed at preparing your child for college. Many private schools are even referred to as “college

preparatory”. Private schools often encourage their students to take an active role in their own college admission process. Students may be given more access to information about college options, and they may be made more aware of the requirements they must fulfill to qualify for a specific school.

Community Service and a Sense of Values

Private schools often put a major emphasis on personal values. When choosing a private school for your child, it is possible to find a school that incorporates many of your own values into its everyday curriculum. Private schools often have honor codes and stricter behavioral standards that help students develop into mature adults. According to The Condition of Education 2001 from the National Center for Education Statistics, “At private schools, a greater percentage of children had parents who were very satisfied with order and discipline than with the school or teachers in 1999.” Parents are often given more say in school policies at private schools.

Many private schools require that their students complete a mandatory number of community service hours. This not only provides the obvious benefit of instilling a sense of respect for the community and the importance of making a contribution to society, but it also happens to be something colleges especially favor. Students may also find possible career options while fulfilling this service requirement such as political involvement to aid the community or counseling for endangered teens. Community service experiences teach students that education goes beyond the walls of the school and that it sometimes requires action and initiative

Discipline and Safety

Beyond the fact that smaller classrooms are by their very nature easier to control, most private schools put special emphasis on discipline. Even if your child does not have discipline problems, disruptive peers could take away from your child’s valuable learning time. The Condition of Education 2002 states that, “Private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to say that they had a lot of influence on setting student performance standards (63 versus 38 percent) and on student discipline policy (48 versus 30 percent).” The push for discipline in private schools teaches children self control, which will ultimately be a requirement in college where the student will be far more responsible for his or her own attendance, and achievement. Also, stricter disciplinary policies mean that any major problems will be handled and eradicated quickly. Typical crimes that plague public schools are less common at private schools. The School Crime and Safety Report found that, “Students in public schools (37.3 percent) were more apt to see hate-related graffiti at school than their counterparts in private schools (16.8 percent).”

About Teachers

Because teachers at private schools are not required to earn the same certifications as public school teachers, some parents worry that the teachers are not as qualified. This is not necessarily true. Private schools must maintain their reputations and create positive word of mouth to survive. Toward this end, private schools are generally very selective about who they place in front of their students, and they choose educators with training specific to the subject they will be teaching.

A Community in Itself

When you decide to enroll your child in a private school, your family becomes part of a network of families with the same goals. Parents at private schools are more involved in the lives of the students and various school events. As a parent, you may have the opportunity to connect with other parents to discuss the lives of your children. Such relationships allow parents to learn from each other and support each other. The students also benefit from the community atmosphere of private schools. The very specific personalities of private schools often lead the students to have a strong sense of pride and loyalty to the school and its community. The student may also benefit from affiliation to the school far beyond graduation day. Many private schools have alumni mentoring programs that connect older alumni with newer ones. Recent graduates may find internship opportunities with alumni who have been working in their field of interest.

Every Family is Different

Despite the numerous benefits of private schooling, it must be said that private school is not for every child. Some children would benefit from the diversity a public school can offer. Some parents would prefer their children to be more focused on the core subjects rather than the arts and extracurricular interests. And, of course, the financial burden that a private school brings is considerable. No student is exactly the same as another, and only a parent can know what the best option is for his or her child. Any child, whether in private or public school, will need the active participation of his or her parents in order to achieve true success.

School Choice

The major advantage of private schooling is choice. Rather than sending your child to a public school that is required based on geography, now you have opened up a selection of several schools that may have very different educational styles and emphases, simply because you are deciding on private education. Every private school has a unique personality, and with a little research, certain schools will emerge from the pool as having more features than that will benefit your child.

Perhaps the school is affiliated with your family's religious faith, and your child can be given a religious education along with his or her core studies. Perhaps the school emphasizes writing, or it pushes self-expression. With the vast variety of private schools available, it is easy to select a school that will help your child to shine and develop the values you find most important.

CONCLUSION

No choice can guarantee that your child's formative years will go smoothly. Parents should always remain highly active participants in the education of their children. Still, in the interest of giving a student the most advantages and opportunities, possibly private school can be an attractive option. Private schools can reduce worries about safety, increase a child's exposure to discipline, offer reduced class sizes, and offer a good environment for high academic achievement. In many cases, a private school can prove to be much more than that, providing a community environment for your family and special opportunities that your child would not have otherwise.