

Guest Blogger Jenny: A Tale Of Two Curriculums

Description

There are plenty of jarring differences between public and private school. But none, so far, have been as different as the presentation of their respective curriculums.

Recently, I attended my daughter's Mirman School curriculum night. It was a lovely evening up on that hill. A spread of finger food was laid out for the parents to nosh, before they split up into class level groups in different locales. Soon, we were regaled with presentation after presentation from each specialty teacher: Spanish, Computer Science, Art, Science, Music, Drama, and Physical Education. The presentations weren't particularly slick or practiced, but they were pretty clear in expressing specific subjects, goals, and teaching styles. Every teacher had his or her own web site, up on the SmartBoard for everyone to see in turn, listing examples of work, lists of goals, and contact information.

After an hour of this, we moved on to our individual classrooms. Sitting in my daughter's seat, I could see the supplies she proudly told me she color coded. The classroom was already festooned with interesting work, relevant art, tons of books, and, of course, a SmartBoard. And then there was her teacher, a truly old pro who communicated such joy and reverence for the art of teaching, she moved me to tears. Seriously. By the end of the two hour curriculum night, I was beyond impressed. As her stepfather put it, "All we have to do is get her there."

Compare that with last year's public school morning parents' meeting. Held at the chirpy hour of 7:30 a.m., a bunch of sleepy adults listened to the teacher talk about the curriculum for twenty minutes. Sort of, anyway. Because, honestly, what is there to say when everything is pretty much taught to the tests? She did have a Great Books program (which I think my daughter enjoyed; she rarely discussed anything academically related then). There were going to be plays. There appeared to be a SmartBoard in the class, but it wasn't in use. The teacher explained that she had managed to get the funding for the actual board and training for herself (it wasn't clear whether this was through private or public funding). The hitch: no laptop. This wonderful piece of educational equipment sat inoperable and unused (eventually, this was remedied through parent donations and a laptop was purchased for SmartBoard use).

There was a lot of emphasis placed on field trips. Now, mind you, this was a public school with fairly well-off kids, most of whom have been to the Aquarium, the Zoo, and LACMA tons of times. Later in the year, I noticed that there wasn't much connection between what the kids were learning in the classroom and the trips. And, of course, nothing got done the day before one of these trips, either. It was a well-meaning curriculum addition, but I couldn't figure out the actual value added in terms of learning much of anything new.

The definition of curriculum is an explanation of all the fields of study an institution has to offer. Mirman did that, and did it extremely well. But what it added to that is the intangible sense that my child is being cared for, enriched, nurtured, challenged, and molded into a better version of herself. And I guess that shouldn't surprise me so much, since that's part of what you're paying for at a private school. But here's the thing: we pay for public school, too, with our tax dollars, and the difference in quality of education, even down to the way the curriculum is presented, seems shockingly different.

If you are one of the parents considering beginning this crazy journey from public to private school, hang tough. There is a shining, golden, perfect carrot at the end of the complex application process. And when you sit, next year, at your child's curriculum night, you'll know just what I'm talking about.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

Tags

1. Guest Blogger Jenny Heitz
2. Mirman curriculum

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