

The following article was printed in the editorial section of the July 14, 2007 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. It speaks very highly of St. Thomas Aquinas Academy. We wanted to share the "Good News in Education".

When School Choice is Your Choice

I can already picture the teary goodbye when I send off my first born to kindergarten this fall. It's inevitable that kids grow out of the romper room and into the classroom.

If you've read my past articles you'll know that I'm not a fan of public schools and have benefited from 12 years of Catholic schooling. So, it's no surprise that we've enrolled our son in St. Thomas Aquinas Academy – our parish grade school.

But it'll cost us. Not just spare change either – but enough to pinch. So already we are wondering "will it be worth it?"

Well, we've long heard complaints of lacking academic standards, an absence of value lessons and lots of PC secularism going on in public schools. Coupled with the rapid decline of discipline in recent years, even 5 year olds are more prone to disrespectful outbursts than in the past.

But this article isn't about MPS problems, the reasons for those problems, or solutions for the problems. This article is about the school choice that each parent must make with a discerning mind when enrolling their kids in school.

The Milwaukee School Choice program is up for expansion if the budget taken up by the Republican State Assembly passes.

I've never understood why lower-income residents particularly have not clamored for wide expansion of the program.

But politics, as usual, prevents doing what is truly in the best interest of ensuring maximum success for as many kids as possible.

This is why we as parents must take matters into our own hands.

The frequency of parental complaints about public schools with little investigation into feasibility of private schooling has perplexed me. The reason private school is taken off of the table is the cost – "it's too expensive!" they say.

Why save money for a college fund if the first 12 years of schooling are in the stink hole? I'm convinced the fundamental years are much more crucial than the final four.

I'm from a middle-class family of seven kids. To manage private schooling my parents sacrificed a lot during our primary years, and for high school, my sisters and I paid our own way. Twenty years ago that was roughly \$1,100.00 per year – all earned by me at \$1.00-\$3.15 per hour.

It wasn't fun. It was doable. It was worth it.

When we went for pre-registration screening for my son with his teacher-to-be, I had my hands full with papers, toddler, and infant. As I tried to figure out which door to use, I saw a young boy rush from a car to an entrance at the building's far end. It was after 8:00am, so he was evidently late for school.

"Ah ha" I thought, that must be the way to the school office. As my little parade came within feet of the entrance, suddenly that same young boy appeared and held open the door for me. He said a polite "good morning" then rushed off as I said "thank you" to get where he likely should have been 5 minutes earlier.

In fact, the polite, orderly, disciplined manner of every child we encountered that morning impressed me much. The curriculum and school philosophy impressed me even more.

Now, is this sort of stuff happening at other schools public or private? Yes, maybe; but maybe not.

All I know is that it did happen at the school choice we've made for our son.

And will it be worth it? Will it be worth the money we invest?

If first impressions mean anything, then the answer is emphatically, unequivocally: *absolutely*.

Vivian Roe

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