



Maintaining a Healthy Perspective in Search for a Private School

Over the last few decades, Dallas has grown into a highly successful, internationally renowned city known for its leading edge, “we’re number one” philosophy. The city has benefited from this phenomenal growth and drive in many ways. However, there are some negative consequences of this success that can have a particularly dramatic impact on children. Our drive to win, succeed and be the best has been foisted upon the children – even very young children - in a way that is of concern. The following is a reflection on this issue...

It is absolutely understandable why a parent would feel anxious about the private school admissions process in Dallas. There are too few large private schools for the number of people seeking admission into them. An internal sense of panic can be felt. However, my concern is for the children and the end result of this “panic and anxiety” on them.

Too often, parents pursue the admissions process with preschool – grade 12 institutions with the notion that they are settled for 12+ years and won’t have to address this question again until college. However, statistics indicate that only 25% of students in Dallas graduate from the school in which they started as a young child.

To take this point one step further, there are many good reasons for a child to experience different schools in their career as a student! A new environment gives the child a totally new beginning. A new school gives a child a chance to make new friends, to “find himself” in a new setting, and to re-invent who he gets to be! If they are in the same environment and that is all they ever know they can get complacent. To illustrate, I recently spoke with someone whose son transferred from a small country school into a prominent large private school at the 8th grade level. At the end of the school he won three awards. Three awards...new kid...new school! Was he so much “smarter” than the other students? I doubt it! I think the new environment spurred him on to do his best!

As director, I have an opportunity to talk with parents of children at many age levels. It is interesting to talk with parents whose children have been in their “dream school” for a few years. In several cases, it wasn’t the best choice for their child. In some cases it took only one year to realize this; in other cases, several years. Once that realization really sets in, however, their focus quickly turns to “how can I re-create for my child a school experience where my child feels success?” “My child needs to be in a nice school that is simply going to provide a caring learning environment – one that suits my child.” Their attention refocuses to their child’s happiness and sense of self.



I would much rather see a child in a good, solid elementary program in which the child feels success rather than in an academically more intense program where the child may struggle, feel he is not very competent, or even feel stupid. How a child perceives himself follows him for an entire life. These early perceptions shape a person's feelings of satisfaction in life. One's willingness to step out and try something new is often contingent upon how safe it was to make a mistake and experiment as a child. A child has to feel it is okay to make a mistake if he is going to be willing to risk creative thinking "outside of the box." Let's make sure our children feel it is okay not to perform at 100%.

Small children don't need a school with all the bells and whistles. They need an environment that gives good, solid basic skills, and teachers who inspire a love of learning and feelings of success in your little one. There are many smaller private schools in Dallas that will give your child the excellent foundation he/she will need to be academically successful and to feel a sense of personal competence.

If you are going through the testing process at one or more private schools let your child know what will be going on...and relax. If you are anxious, your child will know it! If your child isn't accepted, go through the review to find out if there were specific concerns, but let it be okay. If a child senses a parent is unhappy or disappointed, he will blame himself for making you sad. Or he may possibly feel he is not good enough. It's your love of, belief in and respect for your child as a valued person that sets the foundation for their future.