

**A PARENT'S GUIDE TO EDUCATION
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

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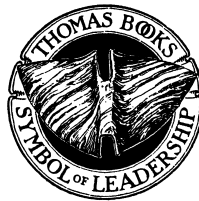
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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO EDUCATION IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

A Matter of Choice

By

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*This book is dedicated to children everywhere . . .
and to those who love and nurture them.*

PREFACE

Greeting his pupils, the master asked:

What would you learn of me?

And the reply came:

How shall we care for our bodies?

How shall we rear our children?

How shall we work together?

How shall we live with our fellow men?

How shall we play?

For what ends shall we live?

And the teacher pondered these words, and sorrow

was in his heart, for his own learning touched not these things.

“Principles of Education” by J. Crosby Chapman and
George S. Counts (1924)

This passage appeared in an educational textbook written by Chapman and Counts in 1924. It expressed the concerns of educators in an era that followed World War I and how the schools were to deal with America’s youth. The authors defined education from a unique perspective. “Education used in its widest sense must include all those changes from birth to death which are wrought in the individual by the process of learning. Whether these changes take place in extreme infancy or old age, whether they occur in the home, in the school, or in the market place, is a matter of no consequence—they are all essentially alike in form and must be included in the term “education.”

The importance of education has been a major societal concern for centuries from ancient times to the present. There have been many attempts to define education and its vital role in the development and improvement of each generation to its fullest potential. Cremin defined education as “The deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort.” Many other definitions of

education have been offered, most of which are acceptable in terms of aims, purposes, and practicality.

The concerns expressed by parents during the latter part of the twentieth century were not over definitions of education but were directed toward placing theories into practice and goals into realities. The dramatic increase in parental concern regarding the importance of education in the lives of their children was the prime motivation for the writing of this volume.

Parents of the twenty-first century are presented with several options and choices concerning the education of their children. This book attempts to present those options and alternatives available to parents objectively with no attempt to influence or recommend any particular course of action to be taken by them.

The work is the result of a study of the status of education in the United States since the turbulent 1960s to the start of the third millennium. Its purpose is to assist parents in their efforts to provide their children with the best education possible, giving consideration not only to school settings but to those areas that are closely related to child rearing and the educational process. The important role of parents and teachers are discussed as well as such topics as curriculum and instruction, measuring educational progress, discipline, homework, tutoring and mentoring and the financing of education. Other topics consider the future of education and the important trends that appeared on the educational scene as the new century began.

Of interest to parents may be the inclusion of resources and contacts for parents to assist them in the pursuit of their goals. These are presented within the chapter being discussed where they are more accessible. Parents are advised to be aware of changes in rules, regulations, and laws that might affect their decisions. These changes are frequent and are a consequence of new legislation, trends, and recent findings of educational research.

The recurring theme throughout this book is the role that the parent plays in each aspect of the topics presented. The parents are constantly reminded that they are key partners in the educational process with opportunities for input and decision making and an important voice in matters pertaining to the education of their children in the dawn of a new century.

A.M.M.

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Chapter 1

WHY CHOICE?

Why do parents seek alternatives for educating their children and what are the root causes that underlie the dissatisfaction with our schools that motivate parents to find better ways to educate their children?

The movement towards alternative schooling had its beginnings in the turbulent 1960s when the idea of choice began to gain popularity. The prime movers of this trend were parents who expressed concerns over the status of education in America's schools. These concerns centered upon academic, social, emotional, religious and moral growth and development. Parents began seeking a quality education in safe and orderly environments. They began to consider such alternatives as private and religious schools, charter schools, and home schooling. Vouchers were another consideration as parents sought ways of financing education.

Schools were under extensive scrutiny in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Parents were seeking alternatives to traditional approaches that would match the special abilities and interests of their children. There were also philosophical and ideological differences that caused parents to seek other settings.

There were several reasons why parents took the initiative to explore school choice and its many options. Some of the more frequently mentioned reasons and motivations expressed by parents for pursuing alternatives included:

- Dissatisfaction with school systems that parents felt were teaching to the masses rather than to the individual.
- Overcrowding of schools and increasing enrollments resulting in larger class size and inadequate facilities.

- Poor performing schools that were not placing enough emphasis on basics and academics.
- The secular nature of the public schools that were in direct conflict with religious beliefs.
- The lack of a challenging curriculum and enrichment programs for those children with exceptional talents.
- Schools were not addressing character education and the teaching of values.
- Programs for the special needs child were either weak or lacking. Not enough remedial programs were being offered for slower children.
- Parents felt that the schools were too rigid and inflexible. There was little opportunity for input and a voice for implementing change.
- Schools were too lenient according to many parents. They lacked discipline, structure, and were poorly organized.
- A number of parents expressed concerns over school safety and the lack of a secure environment.
- There were concerns over teaching methodology and the approaches to instruction used by the school district. Parents were interested in methods that addressed individual learning styles as opposed to large group instruction.
- The amount of time devoted to instruction was questioned by many parents who felt that there should be a longer school day and a longer school year.
- Too much state and federal government intrusion was listed as a reason that some parents sought alternatives. They desired to be free of governmental control over their children's education.
- Poor facilities and lack of modern facilities caused parents to look to other settings that were updated and better prepared to meet the needs of a technological age.
- There were a number of parents who felt that they did not have a role in the educational process and were not afforded opportunities for partnership.
- A deep concern for preparing their children for the future was a significant reason for parents to seek alternatives. They felt that the schools were weak in secondary education and in college preparation.

- Parents were dissatisfied with test scores on local, state and national levels. The academic performance of the schools was a source of disappointment

The reasons for the advancement of school choice as outlined above represented real concerns of parents and they have acted accordingly. Their cause was enhanced in 1983 by a report titled, “A Nation at Risk,” by the United States Department of Education, through the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report stated that American education was being eroded by a tide of mediocrity. The report called for higher standards and a more academically-oriented curriculum. Schools were still using traditional approaches based on a monolithic sameness that evolved out of an industrial age with students poorly prepared for the technological age. This landmark report helped to focus and intensify a vigorous movement for the reform of American education.

The direction of education in the third millennium will be largely determined by the successes attained by the alternate paths that were taken during the latter part of the twentieth century. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that school choice is working. There has been increased parental involvement on all levels. Schools have introduced programs such as “site- based management” which features significant parent participation. Through this program parents have become an integral part of school planning especially on committees that address educational improvement.

Advocates of school choice report that programs have become more innovative and motivated and they have attained a sense of ownership in their children’s education. They further state that parents have been instrumental in fostering educational reform and have improved the quality of education.

Opponents of school choice argue that money is siphoned off public school budgets and have caused the loss of state aid due to decreasing enrollments. They accuse the school choice movement of abandoning the public school system.

Parents in the third millennium will face many challenges in their efforts to provide the best possible education for their children. There are many choices available to parents that will assist them in carrying out their important responsibilities as facilitators and partners in the educational process. These choices will be discussed in the succeeding