

Some of the Advantages of Home Schooling a Child with Special Needs

This list comes from Barb Mulvey, former Director of PICC, and the experiences she heard from other families since May 1986.

For more information about PICC (Parents Instructing Challenged Children) LEAH a network of families currently home schooling children with handicapping conditions, call (631) 473-8315, or write to PICC at 167 Hickory Street, Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776-2117. E-mail address: piccleah@verizon.net

(1) Comprehensive, consistent curriculum

You order the materials, so you see that the curriculum follows along in a logical format and that there are no gaps in your child's learning. You can order 2nd grade reading, 5th grade math, and tailor your child's curriculum to your child.

Public schools either order one curriculum for everyone or allow the teacher to pick the curriculum for the group, as teachers change so does the curriculum. My daughter "studied" dinosaurs 5 times in 5 years, but was never taught how to read or do math.

(2) Socialization

Your child spends much more quality time with adults in the home school situation, watching how adults handle the things that come up in life.

In public school, your child will be segregated by handicapping classification and removed from the mainstream and/or put into the mainstream which is the only age segregated society we have in our country today. Students have much less time interacting with adults and tend to develop the herd mentality of their peer group.

(3) Real life experiences

Your child goes with you to the bank, to the store, to the doctor, to vote, etc. He/she learns by your example how these things work.

Public schools do role playing and create imaginary stores to teach children these skills.

(4) Everyday living skills

Are taught right in the home as necessary, as a normal part of every day life, day in and day out. A child has time to learn and practice these skills.

In public school, planning meals, doing dishes, cleaning the house, washing clothes, etc are all things relegated to a special class at a special time. If your child doesn't take that class or if he/she is absent the day they cover a particular skill, they are at a loss.

(5) Health

Home school children are healthier for two, possibly three, reasons:

They aren't exposed to every contagion that rages through the schools.

If they do start to become ill, they can receive rest, medicine, or a trip to the doctor without sending messages back and forth through school personnel.

They are less stressed out because they are not in the hyped up environment of the public school.

(6) Special Needs

Home school students with special needs can progress truly at their own speed and can take time to finish their work. You can take side trips and explore tangents that come up during your progress through a topic. Questions can be answered when they come up. (Math questions don't have to wait to math class.)

No matter what a public school teacher tries, he/she is bound by public school hours and must conform to the public school schedule (gym here, music there, lunch, etc). They cannot use the entire day and cannot indulge tangents.

(7) Individualized instruction

You have access to your child, one-on-one, 24 hours per day. You can take advantage of Saturdays and Sundays. If your child's most productive hours are outside the times when the busses roll, you can use them. You have no other students (other than family members) requiring your attention. Often those family members are resources too as the entire family invests in this loved-one's education.

Public school teachers cannot afford to spend too much time or attention on one child. If they do, that child becomes the "pet" and is ostracized by the rest of the class. As a result, public school teachers have a difficult time following through with each child. If a teacher has 6 children in a class and has a 6 hour day which she totally dedicated to individual attention, she could only spend 1 hour per day teaching each child. Now take out of each day 1 hour for lunch, time for gym, art, music, and other activities (not to mention crowd and riot control). Then add in your child's therapies (PT, OT, etc) . Now you can see the impossible task the public school teacher has and you start to understand why your child is having difficulties.

(8) Carry over of therapies

Most parents understand their child's handicapping condition and have spent many hours with doctors and therapists learning what kinds of things help enhance their therapeutic endeavors and what things hinder progress in therapeutic terms. At home, parents can see that their child is sitting in appropriate positions, doing things that will help their growth and development.

Public school teachers have many responsibilities and can find it difficult keeping track of which child is to sit which way, etc. Many parents have told me their child's public school teacher never consulted with the therapists and had no clue to their child's therapeutic needs.

(9) Discipline

Parents want their children (regardless of handicapping condition or not) to grow up to be productive members of society. In order to do that, children must learn to behave in appropriate ways, to develop good manners, to interact positively with people, to persevere when things get tough. These are all things which can be learned at home, with good role models, high expectations, and discipline.

Public schools are hamstrung by two different philosophies. The first is their low expectations based on the child's diagnosis. Public school officials tend to look at disabilities rather than abilities and tend to teach these children to give up rather than try. The result is that many special needs children get the message that they aren't responsible, they are stupid, they can't learn and they don't want to. The second philosophy is the permissive environment of a discipline neutered education system. Where there is no order and no protection, students may be subjected to ridicule by others. Many parents pull their children from public school because they are afraid their children are learning to hate learning.

(10) Joy

One of the wonderful by-products of home schooling a child with special needs comes when you have been working for weeks or months on a concept and it finally finds its way into their understanding. When that light finally goes on and your child says, "Oh, now I see!" there is just nothing like it. Remember your child's first step or first word? Can you imagine not being there when it happens? We get the same feeling when our child finally learns 7×7 is 49 and doesn't have to look in his/her multiplication tables, or reads their first sentence.

(11) Fanning the flames

When a child "loves" a certain topic, the parent in the home school can fan those flames and encourage that love of learning. The child can spend extra hours pursuing knowledge in that area. Public school officials have their canned curriculums and discourage trips "off the reservation". Your child will learn the public school way and in the form they chose, whether that form of learning is consistent with your child's learning style (audio, visual, or tactile) or not. They are also limited by time.

(12) Family values

You can do Bible study in your home school, teach your faith to your children in Biblical fashion, "Impress them on your children, talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up." Deuteronomy 6:7

When your children are in public school, you have little or no time to influence their faith. You have the hour before the bus comes (which can be chaotic) and the hours after school when everyone's exhausted and tired of structured (school) activities. For many that's the time they are heading off for after school activities. So people resort to having others teach their faith to their children (Sunday school teachers, the youth sermon in church, etc). Children learn that faith is something practiced exclusively on Sundays (a mythical something removed from the "real world") and that learning takes place on week days from 9-3 from September to June.

(13) Play time

When you home school, your child has time to be a child. Once their work for the day is done, they are free to relax and play. Children need time to be children.

When you have a child with special needs in public school and you "reinforce their learning after school," your child has very little time to relax in an unstructured way. This creates burn out & resentment. If you are "reinforcing your child's learning after school, " you are already home schooling ? after school.

(14) Hard work

It's very hard work and for beginners it's scary. It's a big step with lots of responsibility and there are many skeptics in this world. But the Lord is faithful. He will not call you to do something you and He cannot do together. You will learn as much or more than your children about His world and about yourselves. It builds character in parents and children alike as they learn mentally, spiritually, and physically together. When you face difficulties your faith in the Lord will grow as you turn to Him for guidance, grace, and strength.