



School Options

By Judy Arnall

It's called August angst. Sometimes it begins in April. It's the times of the year most parents think about the Fall education options for their children. Just as not everyone is suited to be an entrepreneur or employee for a large corporation, not every child is suited for group learning for their formal education. It's great that our government is offering so many choices for children and their parents.

The cognitive development of school aged children is concrete operational – they learn based on tangible representations of what they know and experience. Experiences and knowledge is very black and white for them. When they begin puberty and enter into the world of adolescents, they are granted their abstract thinking skills and can delve more into the world of grey when they are in junior high and high school. The Alberta Program of Studies, which the government sets forth as learning outcomes, reflect the cognitive capabilities of these age divisions. As the learning outcomes are the target and must be offered by all educational institutions in this province,

the methods and manner to reach those targets are decided differently by every school, school board, and parent choosing the later in how to meet the targets.

As parents wonder what type of education is beneficial for their child, they can again take into account their child's gender differences, temperament and personality, and learning styles. Schooling options include public school (that offers a myriad of religious, sports, philosophical, language based programs) private school, (same menu), Correspondence school, homeschooling (again a number of philosophies and styles) and online course. The law set forth by the Alberta Government is that every child that is six years old by Feb 28 of the year must be enrolled in an educational school or board in the province. Kindergarten is still voluntary however, 95% of children attend.

Public School- Generally, this is the Calgary Board of Education. The largest school board in Calgary with over 200 schools and 100,000 students. This is the default school. The Calgary Board of Education has to accept everybody. The Calgary Catholic School Board is often viewed as a public school due to its size of over 100 schools and over 50,000 students, but can be interpreted as private because not everyone is eligible to go. A student must be baptized Catholic or have one parent with a baptismal certificate to attend. Within these two boards, there are many options for specialized learning.

Private Schools – Often viewed as schools for the rich and elite, but the reality is that many parents make financial sacrifices for having their children attend. Tuition, books, transportation and field trips are all charged to the parents and many have a waiting list and entrance exams or interviews. Correspondence Schools – generally, all schools offer correspondence courses, available from Learning Resources, but one can also take the courses directly from the correspondence school called ADLC, Alberta Distance Learning Centre. Courses are structured in module books and assignment books as well as exams. They are heavy on writing and reading assignments. If a student does every exercise and quiz and exam, they will be in the top 5% of the province for acquiring the whole course. In comparison, teachers in school generally cover about 70% of the Alberta Program of Studies.

Homeschooling – Requires registration with a willing school or school board in Alberta. (Doesn't have to be Calgary). Homeschooling styles run the gamut from school-at-home which is heavily adult delivered curriculum to Unschooling, which is heavily child directed learning. Every style is legal and protected by the Home Education Policy. Every school board offers similar programs. Programs available in homeschooling are on a continuum where it's 100% parent directed (commonly known as Traditional) which means the

parent is entirely responsible for the planning, delivering and evaluating the program, to a 90% teacher/10% parent-directed program. If its 100% teacher directed program, it's school. Not homeschooling and is not counted in the homeschooling statistics. A blend of teacher directed and parent directed divides the duties of who is responsible and is not directly determined by the curriculum used. Definitely, the teacher directed portion needs to be delivered by a certified teacher in the province and because it's so, they need to follow the Alberta program of Studies. On the parent directed portion, the parents can choose whatever style suits them, whether unschooling or school at home or anything in between. Many school boards shift the teacher directed portion (namely the delivery of the program) on to the parent to deliver, but retain the planning and evaluation of the program. It's critical for the parent to remember that the province doesn't expect the parent to be responsible or accountable if their child is not accepting instruction from the parent on a teacher directed (commonly known as aligned) program.

Online – Online is not homeschooling. Until an online program is officially marketed for parents to deliver, online courses are usually developed by educational institutions. Online is teacher directed and offered through many public, and private schools and boards. Online courses can be part of a homeschooling program in the teacher directed portion of a blended program.

So, after knowing all the options, which type of education fits best with your child?

Gender

In terms of gender, boys still are more active and competitive at the age of 6 to 12 years. They taper off quite a bit in the activity department of teenhood and many channel their energy into organized sports. Because of their energy and activity levels, schools are not very boy-friendly. Being made to sit for 6 hours per day is hard for boys than girls. Girls tend to value more collaborative approaches on projects than boys who prefer to compete, so schools that take these differences into account are quite good. Boys also prefer non-fiction reading. More boys are homeschooled than girls because of the curriculum choices that are flexible and they don't have to participate in circle time.

Temperament and Personality

Active, intense, persistent spirited children prefer a school environment. Certainly, extraverted children love the social and stimulating environment that a school can offer. Introverted children may prefer the quieter, non-structured home environment of homeschooling, enabling him to schedule outings and social events on their own calendar rather than having it imposed on them everyday.

Spirited children are often more mature beyond their years and find it difficult to accept instruction or structure imposed on them. They really need to be in the driver's seat of their education and unschooling (an student led approach to homeschooling) may be a better fit.

Learning Styles

Visual learners do well with school, correspondence and online. There is lots of reading and watching videos and it suits them. Auditory learners have much difficulty with online and correspondence. They do better with the teacher talking in the classroom or online classes offering illuminates (asynchronous whiteboard technology). Kinesthetic learners do well with Montessori, Waldorf, or public school or homeschooling. They do not work well with online, or correspondence.

Age

Most children aged 6-12 are suited to public school, or homeschooling, Teens tend to want more peer connection on a daily basis rather than on a two or three times a week basis and may want to attend a school for the high school years.

In families with more than one child, it may be necessary to offer a range of schooling options to fit each child. It's not unusually to find a family where one child is attending high school traditionally, another is doing online and another is doing a blended homeschooling/correspondence course program.

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning *Parenting Speaker*, and Trainer, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling, "***Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery***" She specializes in "**Parenting the Digital Generation**" www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766 jarnall@shaw.ca

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