

I Enrolled My Private School Kids in a Public School; They're Thriving

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Parenting

I couldn't afford private school anymore, so I enrolled my kids in a public high school. They're thriving.

Essay by Kate Loweth

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The author's kids attended private school before enrolling in a public high school. Halfpoint Images/Getty Images

- I was raised in private schools, and I had my children go to private schools, too.
- But we couldn't afford a private high school, so they had to attend a public school.

- In the public high school, they have amazing opportunities and are better set for college.

I grew up going to private schools. For eight years, my daily uniform was a blue plaid jumper and blouse with a Peter Pan collar. High school loosened some of the reins with only a (relatively strict) dress code to contend with: no jeans, no shirts with slogans, and definitely no short skirts. My private school education continued through my college years at my ivy-on-the-walls East Coast school and even into graduate school. I never knew anything different.

When I had kids, I assumed I'd send them to private schools, too. It felt like the only choice, as that's what I grew up with.

When our family moved to California, and my oldest was ready to start kindergarten, we didn't even consider sending her to public school. Instead, we picked from among a few private schools near where we would be living. Uniforms made the morning hours easy, and I enjoyed the supportive community we found at our small private school.

I had to change my thinking about private schools when my kids entered high school.

Everything changed with high school approaching

As my oldest kid reached eighth grade and it was time for us to consider high school, private school was no longer an option. The tuition cost was too high, and we couldn't afford \$20,000-plus a year (plus books, lunch money, activity fees, etc.), especially considering that we'd eventually have three kids in high school at once.

We registered our daughter for our local public high school, knowing very little about it. The months leading up to the start of school were filled with anxiety as most of her classmates and friends were continuing at private high schools. I was worried she'd be starting school without knowing a single person.

Luckily, our high school had a summer program that helped with the transition, and two of her former classmates ended up going to her school as well. All of this made the transition a bit easier.

Public school was the right path for my family

I now have two kids in our public high school, and my third is joining them in the fall. While I initially felt nervous about the unknowns of public school, I can confidently say public high school was the best thing that could have happened for us.

My son would probably say the free lunches (including brunch-time cinnamon rolls!) are the highlight of public high school, but I can see many more benefits.

When signing up for electives, I learned that not only did they offer traditional options such as art and music classes, but kids could also take woodworking, metalworking, or set-building classes. My son was proud to bring home the metal toolbox he welded for his final metalworking project. I love that these options are available.

When it came time to choose a science class, I was surprised to learn that our school, in the heart of California's Silicon Valley, has its own on-site farm. The kids can raise pigs, chickens, and other animals as part of their coursework.

My kids raised a pig last year and are doing it again this year. They also participated in a community plant sale, and my son joined the school's milk-and-cheese-tasting team, which competes at regional Future Farmers of America events.

Who would have thought these would be options at our suburban high school?

The public high school is setting my kids up for success in college

For her junior year, my daughter was accepted into our high school's middle college program. This allows juniors and seniors to take their classes full time at the local community college, setting them up to graduate from high school with college credits or even their associate degree if they're especially motivated. She has no Friday classes, which allows her to work and pay for gas and other expenses.

I know my other kids will follow in her footsteps, allowing them to be better prepared for their college years.

While I never anticipated that my kids would go to public high school, I now see it as a blessing in disguise, as it offered programs we wouldn't have had access to at our local private schools.