



TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE?

Questions to help you decide if a
school change is right for your child

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There are many reasons that families make a change in where or how their children receive an education.

Many parents ask questions like these:

- Does my child's school schedule have to keep us so **busy**?
- Is my child getting enough **attention** in a large class of students?
- Where can we find a like-minded **community** of other families?
- Should the school schedule and homework load be making my child so **anxious**?
- Where can I find a **safe** environment for my child so that she can learn and thrive?
- I know my child would benefit from learning at **home**, but do I have the time and patience to teach him?

If you're asking questions like these, relax. You're normal!

We've put together this guide to help you make a great decision as you consider making a change. Whether you end up at Learnwell or not, **our hope is that you are equipped to make a great decision for your family.**



Great Questions to Ask

One of the first things you'll need to do is to find out about the viable options you have in your area. Here are some questions we recommend asking:

Public Schools:

1. **How is your public school ranked?**

In my opinion, this is not the be-all-end-all information you need. I would not change my decision based on a school ranking of eight versus nine out of 10. However, it can be a small indicator of the overall health of the school.

2. **How do parents with children currently at the school feel about their experience with the school?**

Keep in mind that you're not getting totally objective information here. But hopefully you'll be able to get a good feel for how engaging the school is for parents, and the opportunities they have to be involved in their children's education.

3. **Would a teacher at that school send her own children there?** This can be difficult information to obtain, but I would try to find a teacher to ask. Teachers have nothing to gain or lose by answering this truthfully. The answer would come down to knowledge about the overall direction of the school, the curriculum, the administrative team, overall teacher quality and morale.



4. How do I really feel about the diversity in our public school?

I'm not talking about racial or socio-economic diversity. I'm talking about parenting diversity. Some parents are fine with their young children singing along with the pop star of the moment; some really aren't. Some parents pack organic lunches full of healthy food; others need to rely on convenience foods. Some young kids get to the theater to see the latest and greatest superhero movie; others won't see anything beyond an occasional rated G flick until they're much older.

Private Schools:

There are two primary questions I would ask in evaluating a private school. Ask yourself the following:

1. **What kind of family is this school targeting?**

Every school has an ideal family to whom they are marketing. It could serve you well to research this in order to find out how your family would fit into the school community.

Particularly with private schools, you are often expected to participate in school activities and community. If you don't fit in and find your own tribe within the school, it may be difficult for your family AND signal that this could be difficult for your child.

See if you can find indicators of this in what the school highlights on social media or on its website, and talk to current families if at all possible.



2. What type of curriculum is used?

This can be a difficult answer to evaluate if you have no background in education. While always important, the importance of this answer grows as tuition decreases. You may find that a nearby private school charges a relatively low tuition rate. They may do so by using self-paced (often faith-based) curriculum with teachers who have no teaching certification or credentials.

While self-paced materials *may* be effective for some highly motivated students, they generally lack the guidance and rigor offered by an education with qualified teachers and top-notch curriculum. Not all faith-based curriculum is created equal, so it's important to know how a school's curriculum choices will be impacting your student's education

By the way, I personally wouldn't get hung up on whether the teachers possess current state certification. It's getting more difficult for those not currently teaching in public schools to have state certification. But there are many other types of certification, and it's important that most teachers possess a teaching degree and experience in teaching.



Homeschooling:

Finally, let's walk through the first three questions to ask if you're considering homeschooling.

1. Is an adult available to homeschool your child?

Mothers, fathers, grandparents or homeschool tutors can all be a part of homeschooling. The time involved with most homeschool scenarios is about half of every day.

If you have a life complicated by care for an aging parent, a farm or home-based business to look after, or your own health issues, make sure that there is an adult available to homeschool your children well. An excellent homeschool education conducted by a frazzled and stressed-out parent probably isn't the best you can offer your child.

2. Are both you and your spouse clear on your reasons for considering homeschooling?

Homeschooling isn't easy, and needs involvement and buy-in from both parents. If you aren't on the same page, you will hit some bumps along the road. I would never recommend that you homeschool unless both parents are on board.

3. Are you considering homeschooling because your church or community has implied that it is the only viable option (if you really love your child)? As an educator and a person of strong faith, I beg you to cover your ears and sing your favorite song when you hear this.



My training and 31 years as a teacher, administrator, and education consultant - as well as my strong faith and active participation in church and mission work for most of my life - all lead me to cringe at the knowledge that there are pastors, church communities, and fellow God-seekers out there telling you that they know how to educate YOUR child.

If this is your primary reason for homeschooling, I humbly ask you to reconsider. If there are other compelling reasons to homeschool, great! If not, practice smiling and saying to your mirror, "We've decided that _____ is best for Suzy next year," (or whatever you've decided) and then turning away.



Putting it Together

Here are some questions to ask that might help you put together this information and find the best option for your children.

1. What options are you or your spouse *seriously* considering?

If there is an option that neither of you are seriously considering at this time, stop turning that option over and over – take it off the table!

2. What will your days look like as a family with each of these options?

3. What are the “costs” of rejecting each option? For example, one cost of rejecting public school might be going to school with most of the other children in your neighborhood. A cost of rejecting homeschooling might be the opportunity to be your child’s primary teacher.

Sometimes examining decisions this way will help you say, “Yeah, I can live with that cost. It’s this other cost that I’m not sure I can live with.”

4. Where will your child thrive? Some questions you might ask are:

- How is your child doing academically?
- Overall, how is your child developing socially and emotionally?
- How creative is your child? Does he or she love unstructured and/or creative play?



Something to Consider

There are many ways to make these options work for most families and their children. Every year, new education models and opportunities are created! Some public charter schools operate more like private schools. Hybrid schools offer a blend of private schooling and homeschooling. Online options, public and private, are viable for older children in some cases.

If you're considering homeschooling, be aware that there are ways that you can "outsource" many aspects of curriculum selection, annual planning and pacing, and weekly lesson planning. **Learnwell** was started in 2017 to do just that in order to help families educate their children well.

For five years, we have supported families here in the US and overseas who homeschool their children. This has now become our **Learnwell Navigator Program**.

Learnwell also offers a hybrid school in South Forsyth County, Georgia. Our teachers at **Learnwell North Georgia** teach children in school two days of the week, and equip parents with everything they need to lead their children's education the rest of the week.

Find out more about Learnwell using the links below, or contact us for information about how to get started in making a great decision for the education of your children.

I wish you the best of luck as you make this decision!



Contact Us

Learnwell North Georgia

(Hybrid school in South Forsyth County, GA)

<https://www.learnwellcollective.org/>

Learnwell Navigator Program

(Home education support anywhere in the world)

<https://www.learnwellcollective.org/navigator-homeschool-support/>

Email us!

Admissions@learnwellcollective.org

About the Author

Dr. Melissa Shipman co-founded Learnwell Collective in 2017 to help families serving in missions who were homeschooling their children. She has served as a high school teacher, guidance counselor, upper school principal, and education consultant during her 31 years as an educator. She graduated with a M.Ed. in Special Education from the University of Georgia, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Minnesota. She lives north of Atlanta, Georgia with her husband and two school-aged daughters.

