

1. School choice and the paradox of privilege.

- The term privilege gets thrown around a lot these days. What does it mean? One definition is the degree of control you have over your life – that is, having choices. So, being in the position to make a choice about schools is, by definition, a privilege.
- The paradox of having choices is that we worry about making the right decision! *Is it a “good” school? Is it the “right” fit? Is it the “best school for my child”?*
- The problem with this framework is that it suggests that there is a “right” choice – and that any other choice is wrong or demonstrably inferior.
- *So what’s the alternative?*
 - Consider the proposition that, while your child’s education is important and your role in your child’s social and academic development and life outcomes is huge, *your choice of school is not the most decisive factor in determining your child’s life outcomes.* [Only about 20% of a school’s average test scores, for example, are determined by school-related factors, like the pedagogy or quality of instruction. And of course, test scores are only one measure of outcomes!]
 - Consider that education is not a commodity, like organic peas or an electric car, but a public good – something that doesn’t just allow our child to make a good place for him or herself in society, but actually **makes the society** that our child will take his or her place in.
 - Consider that the choice of schools is just one of many steps, many elements, in your child’s educational journey, and that what matters more than this choice is how you take that journey together.

2. What does it mean to be a good parent?

- “Passing on most deeply-held values” vs. “giving my child every advantage”
- Reflection: what are the values that I want to pass on to my child?

3. What does a values-based approach to looking at schools look like?

- First, articulate and discuss your values.
- Second, approach looking at schools with an open mind. The air we breathe as privileged parents tends to be clouded with judgment and other people’s perceptions (and misperceptions). YOU DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT A SCHOOL IF YOU HAVE NOT VISITED IT RECENTLY, and EXPLORED IT WITH AN OPEN MIND.
- Third, remember that what your child experiences and learns is going to be processed with your guidance, through the lens of your shared values; the only way to pass on your values is to live them, and living them means testing them against messy reality.

"What Do I Really Want from My Child's Education"



PASADENA EDUCATION NETWORK

When you think about your child's education, at some level you are not just thinking about kindergarten and what that first day (and first few years) of school will be like. You are also thinking about how you want your child to grow up – what skills will she need, what experiences will enrich his life, what character traits and values do we want these little people to develop on their way to becoming adults?

What values do you want to pass on to your child?

Write down one thing that you want your child to *experience* in [elementary] school.

Experiential goals have to do with the process: what is my child's day like? Routines, experiences he/she might not otherwise access, relationships with peers and teachers, etc.

Write down one *outcome* you want your child to get from his or her education.

Outcomes are the end result of the process: academic achievement, specific skills acquired or mastered, character traits and values developed, opportunities going forward.

What are you afraid of?

When you think about your child starting school (and in particular about figuring out which school), are there any specific fears or negative images that come to mind?

What strengths does your family bring to guide your child's journey?

The quality of your child's educational experience and outcomes will depend in part on the school(s) s/he attends, but also on how you as a family (parents, children, others) navigate that school experience together.