



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

David Brooks, senior editor of *The Weekly Standard*, recently posed the question: “If your kid was accepted at Harvard, but you secretly thought he or she would be happier at Bennington, would you have the guts to turn Harvard down?” This is a really intriguing question, as it highlights the very reasons why we homeschool.

As homeschoolers we have said “no” to the pressure-filled meritocratic system that organized schooling has come to represent. A meritocratic system rewards achievement for achievement’s sake. It is an environment that fosters kids not to take risks because success is so important, and failure is so detrimental. Students learn that if they stick to subjects or skills they are good at, rather than those they have a passion for or an interest in, then it is easier for them to succeed. This thought process produces students who pursue professions that may make them money or bring them status, but that they ultimately don’t enjoy or that limit their ability and time to do the things they love. Organized schooling makes a great mistake by rewarding good students rather than those with a passion for what is being learned. Anyone can learn to be a good student and play the game of pleasing the teacher to get the coveted “A.” The time spent in this type of system is one in which energies are spent on obtaining that goal of perfection that everyone else defines for you. A homeschooler most likely is the one defining his or her success. To that end, they are usually more successful because they put value on their passions and interests, and they learn to live more spiritually satisfying lives doing what they love to do.

Homeschoolers study and work very hard. Their efforts are usually self-imposed and self-motivated. In cases where it is the parent who defines the goals, they at least do it with the child’s

abilities and interests in mind. In a typical school setting this usually is not the case, as kids are pushed to excel in areas they are not interested in. Consequently, kids learn to play the game of doing whatever it takes to get the highest grade, which doesn’t mean they will retain anything in the process. Homeschoolers don’t cram for tests, thereby committing knowledge to short-term memory until the test is over. Their varied interests—and the time to pursue them on their own terms—make learning long-lasting and more satisfying. In many cases the child can help craft their own curriculum, thereby giving them an ownership of it. This part of who they are is not artificially imposed.

Over the years I have spoken to college admission counselors regarding the application process. They have shared with me that they are weary of reading the applications that demonstrate how the usual high school applicant has traveled to the Himalayas, cured a fatal disease, single-handedly started a non-profit corporation, and is fluent in five languages. They are refreshed to see a person who is well-rounded and has a passion for a particular field of study, and homeschoolers are always looking for ways to communicate these strengths to colleges.

College counselors and admission people, please be open-minded. Test scores, diplomas and other trappings of what is deemed evidence of education may not actually tell you anything about an applicant. Colleges should come to realize that learning does not always

take the shape of textbooks and endless worksheets. They should evaluate a homeschooled kid not based solely on what credentials they carry, but on what they have experienced in their lives thus far. They should see the value in being educated in a way that fosters independent thought, family and life values, and the ability to find information. Colleges should recognize that homeschooled kids are already in tune with how a college environment works, regarding choosing what they wish to study and managing their own time.

Success is not the destination, but the journey. Homeschoolers can be successful in the pursuit of learning, getting into a good college, exploring career opportunities, and winning contests and scholarships. They are successful because their achievements are a part of what they are doing.

Homeschoolers strive to identify their true calling or passion, and then pursue these interests even if it doesn’t meet the typical criteria of success. These kids are different from the children who may graduate from an outstanding high school with all kinds of achievements, while still not having a clear sense of who they are or what their mission in life is. Homeschooled kids are excited by what they are doing and will truly follow their dreams to create personal success and life-long achievement.

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