



School Choice is about doing What is Best for Your Children; It's not about Public Charter Schools Vs. Traditional Public Schools

By Shawnta S. Barnes - January 24, 2019

In my recent article, "[What is Happening in Catholic Schools](#)," I wrote about a letter I received at a Catholic school my sons attended for PreK-4. Some readers felt like I left them with a cliff hanger by not explaining what happened after my husband and I received the letter and other

readers, who knew what happened and the choice we made afterward, thought I should explain especially since this is National School Choice Week.

According to the National School Choice Week website, “NSCW recognizes all K-12 options, including traditional public schools, public charter schools, public magnet schools, private schools, online academies, and homeschooling.” Having options for your child is what gets lost in the school choice conversation. Most school choice conversations turn into a debate about traditional public schools versus public charter schools. Because of this debate, I even have to put the word public in front of the words “charter schools” when I write because some people will not accept they are public. Teachers are known for saying, “We must do what is best for kids,” but when parents do the same for their children, it is questioned.

My sons were pitted against each other at a preschool run by a traditional public school when they were in PreK-3. One was repeatedly called evil which implied that his brother was the good one. This led us to look into private school options for PreK-4, and we chose a Catholic school. Neighbors had praise for the school, and I was impressed by the teaching abilities of the woman who would become our sons’ teacher. A bonus was she had triplets in her class when I observed her. As a parent of multiples, make no mistake, some educators have no clue how to appropriately work with multiples to ensure they are developing their own identities. Yes, this can be done whether they are in class together or in separate classes. As a multiples parent, I am a huge advocate for allowing parents to decide whether their children should be in the same class or different classes. Although we split our children up in PreK-3, we decided to put them together in PreK-4.

Unfortunately, my son who was called evil was not adjusting well to PreK-4. About a year later after PreK-4, my son shared, “I just thought I was a bad person and that my brother was the good one.” Words have a lasting impact. Even though he couldn’t articulate how he felt then, we could tell damage had been done by the environment he was in during PreK-3. I went into educator mode and started collecting data, which included what I shared in my previous article:

Right before winter break, my husband and I reached out to the special area teachers to see how our sons were doing in special area classes. All the teachers responded, but we were appalled by the response of one teacher we had never spoken to before; we had spoken to the other special area teachers on a few occasions. This teacher we had never spoken to, who touted three decades of experience, wrote us a six-paragraph letter about how he felt about my sons. In the letter, which I still have, the teacher said my children were “powerfully negative entities.”

The only blessing was my sons didn't see those words. Before we could address that letter, we had a decision to make. The principal had asked us to consider looking for a new preschool for both our sons. This made my husband and me angry because one of our sons was doing fine and he loved his teacher. He talked about her every day. He even pretended like he was at preschool at home and reenacted games she taught them at school. We decided to fight. I told my husband that we have no rights at a private school. I knew the principal could do whatever she wanted, but I believed I could make the case for allowing one of our sons to remain at the school. The school had made it clear that they were going to expel our other son, which is why the principal recommended we look for another preschool or as some in the education world call "counseling us out." We had to make a choice. We had to do what was best for our children, not what the school wanted. We decided to leave one of our sons at the Catholic school and switch our son that was struggling to another preschool. This turned out to be the right decision.

After we unenrolled one of our sons, the principal responded to us about the letter that the special area teacher wrote:

Mr. and Mrs. Barnes,

First off, Happy New Year to you both. I hope 2016 is a wonderful year for you. Thank you for sharing the letters written by the special area teachers. After reading them, I too am alarmed by (the teacher's name) write up. Communication is key to a successful education. I will speak to all the special area teachers regarding a biweekly update about (son's name) progress and how he is acclimating to the different learning environments.

We chose to send our other son to a small private Baptist preschool where he thrived. The teacher told us that he needed a lot of one-on-one attention to rebuild his confidence that was shattered, and that's what she gave him. She also noted that he needed to be challenged and that he found reviewing simple concepts boring. She started working with him on kindergarten and first-grade skills, and he loved this. He was able to enter that school with a fresh start. Because I dropped him off at preschool and my husband dropped his brother off at his preschool, students didn't know he had a twin brother until the end of the school year.

School choice is about making the best decision for your children even if it makes no sense to anyone else. Everyone did not support our decision to send our boys to two different preschools during the second semester of that school year. Some people thought we should have moved both of our sons out of the Catholic school, but we believed our sons had a good

Catholic preschool teacher. One of our sons just needed a different setting, and it is okay to acknowledge that a setting worked for one of our identical twins and not his brother. There was no reason to disrupt the learning of our child who was thriving. When you think of school choice, please move beyond the traditional public school versus charter school debate. School choice is more than that and I hope by reading my story this point has been illuminated. I also hope you will not judge parents. Choosing a school is hard enough and dealing with judgment just makes it harder.