

Why One Mom was Right to Shun Her Child's Perfect Attendance Award

Rachel Wright [made waves](#) on Facebook last week when she announced that her son J.J. had received an award for perfect attendance during the preceding school year. Contrary to what one might think, the waves were not the result of a proud mother bragging on her child. Instead, they were the result of a mother who refused to allow her son to accept the reward.

As Wright explains, perfect attendance should not be rewarded for several reasons, including the fact that a child has no control over the health or transportation which enable him to accrue such a record. Praising perfect attendance, Wright said, “sends the wrong message to kids,” and devalues those who can’t attend due to disabilities.

Wright’s words – particularly on the message school attendance sends to children – were oddly reminiscent of those uttered by 20th century author and philosopher Ivan Illich. In his 1971 work [Deschooling Society](#), Illich questioned the motives of the compulsory education system, suggesting that society’s acceptance of regular, obligatory schooling is severely damaging to children:

“Classroom attendance removes children from the everyday world of Western culture and plunges them into an environment far more primitive, magical, and deadly serious. School could not create such an enclave within which the rules of ordinary reality are suspended, unless it physically incarcerated the young during many successive years on sacred territory. The attendance rule makes it possible for the schoolroom to serve as a magic womb, from which the child is delivered periodically at the school days and school year’s completion

until he is finally expelled into adult life. Neither universal extended childhood nor the smothering atmosphere of the classroom could exist without schools. Yet schools, as compulsory channels for learning, could exist without either and be more repressive and destructive than anything we have come to know."

Illich's statement brings one of today's disturbing problems into sharper focus, namely, the issue of protracted childhood and the inability to grow up. Many of today's young adults are unable to perform the basic tasks and responsibilities which have generally come with maturity and age. Is it possible this "[adulthood](#)" crisis is the direct result of our compulsory education system? By demanding and rewarding continual attendance, has the education system raised recent generations in an incubator ill-equipped to handle the real world once they come of age?

Image Credit: [U.S. Airforce](#), Airman 1st Class Blake Mize (cropped)