

Five Ways to Avoid the 'Planned Mediocrity' in Schools

It's been one short year since parents suddenly found themselves the chief overseers of their children's education due to the pandemic.

"Short" isn't the word to describe it, I can almost hear many parents retort, relief in their voices as they realize that soon they will be off the hook, for the responsibility of their child's education will be back in the hands of the experts at school.

But before you rejoice, let me suggest that things have changed in the past year. No longer are parents clueless about what their children are learning, how they are learning it, or what approaches to learning work best for each child. Parents have seen it all, and therefore have little excuse to go back to the autopilot mode of pre-pandemic days. They are now the experts who have even more awareness of what's best for their children.

Despite this experience, many parents still feel inadequate in comparison to the official "experts" who fill the classrooms and administrative positions in today's schools. What right have parents to speak up when the experts appear to be in error, or how do they even know what things to look for to evaluate the type of education their child is receiving?

It's into this arena that the advice of Mortimer Brewster Smith comes to our aid. In his 1954 book, *The Diminished Mind*, Smith expounds on the "planned mediocrity" present in public schools and coaches parents on how to counteract this trend for their children. He offers the following five bits of advice.

Examine Textbooks

Many textbooks are poorly written, Smith notes, and in trying to make their content appeal to children, the authors discourage mastery, dumbing down the lessons, which in turn makes the material “distasteful” to the student. Parents should carefully observe the types of books their children are studying and not be afraid to complain when it becomes apparent that the content is sub-par, even if “the professionals” become furious at such a challenge.

Watch for Propaganda

Parents should also be on high alert for “the textbook which propagandizes for the author’s own social convictions,” Smith writes, a practice which extends beyond mere schoolbooks in today’s “woke” culture. A primary way to recognize propaganda is to note whether a lesson presents facts or if it advocates opinions. Children will be able to form their own viewpoints when they get to adulthood, explains Smith, but only if their minds have been first filled with facts rather than politically correct opinions.

Don’t Be Fooled by Fluff

Many schools—particularly colleges—use superficial perks to attract attendance at their institution. Looking past the climbing wall, the trendy student center, or the eco-friendly cafeteria to the heart of what schools are actually teaching will go a long way in making sure your children don’t matriculate fully entertained, but with an empty head.

Be Wary of Experts

The definition of a good school is often defined by educationists themselves, writes Smith, and “the educationist is almost never an authority in a particular subject, only an authority in how to teach it.” As such, Smith cautions parents to be wary of those in the ivory towers who simply pat

themselves and their fellow educationists on the back, using their own standards to define what makes a good school. Know what the school teaches and draw on a number of sources before concluding that a certain school will give your child a high-quality education.

Be Vocal

Lastly, Smith encourages parents to not simply sit on the sidelines, but get involved, not only in the child's school, but also at the political level. "If these [education] committees were made aware of the fact that some reasonable people hold a viewpoint ... at variance with the official one," Smith writes, "they might be less prone to recommend legislation that entrenches the power of the education lobby."

All of these points, of course, add up to overall individual action and responsibility on the part of parents. This is the "last desperate remedy," writes Smith. "Not until individual man rebels against mediocrity, spiritual illiteracy, and group subservience will our unique experiment of universal education become once again a bright hope and promise in American life."

Parents may not feel like experts when it comes to their child's education, but the love, care, and concern they have for their children make them much more of experts than they give themselves credit for. Do your research. Keep your eyes open. Go with your gut on what's best for your children and they will be on the path to intelligent, but commonsensical, adulthood.

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