THE PROS OF PAROCHIAL SCHOOL EDUCATION

- Parochial schools have a more stable enrollment with many long term students. Most of these students start their parochial school education in kindergarten or first grade, and attend through grades 7 or 8. Some even continue on to parochial secondary schools. This allows children to form long term friendships with other children who have similar backgrounds and values. The continuity of both people and place creates a very stable environment for children, which in turn gives them a feeling of security. At a parochial school, children feel as if they are part of one big family, with everyone knowing everyone else.

- Parochial schools offer a higher level of education. Tight budget restraints don't allow a wide assortment of fun classes, but what is being taught is taught well. Many parochial school children rank quite high in standardized testing, do well in high school and eventually go on to college.

- Because parochial schools do have budget limitations, teachers and parents actively seek extracurricular activities for the children to participate in. Parochial school kids compete in state wide science and history meets, Art competitions, Geography Bees, State Chess tournaments, and more. Parents will also step in to help coach after school basketball, baseball, T-ball, Y-ball and volleyball teams.

- Parochial schools also have a higher level of parental involvement. Parents are willing to pitch in and help organize dinner auctions, school carnivals, chili feeds, community service and all those extra curricular activities noted above. Parents also arrange engineering and science workshops, drama clubs, 4-H meetings, and Boy & Girl Scout clubs. Unlike the public school teacher who told me to "butt out" when I indicated I'd be tutoring my son in reading, parochial school parents are encouraged to become partners in their child's education.

- Parochial schools encourage modest dress with some schools even requiring uniforms. Uniforms erase class distinctions, and allow children to focus on their education instead of trying to impress friends with their designer clothes or low slung jeans.

- Religious education and religious environment is the primary reason most parents send their kids to parochial school. A religious environment that emphasizes respect, kindness, reverence to God and benevolence to others is important to many families.

THE CONS OF ATTENDING PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

- Even though parochial schools do offer discounts and need-based grants for parishioners, attending parochial school can still be quite costly. In our community, parochial elementary school tuition ranges between $2500 to $4500 a year. School supplies, sporting uniforms, school uniforms, field trips, hot lunch, and more can add another $600-$2000 a year to the cost. And this isn't all the costs one might expect. For out of the area sports tournaments, ski trips, science and engineering camps, and academic competitions, parents are also expected to pony up entry fees and travel expenses for their children. In all fairness, I might add that at our school, there's also plenty of low cost or free extracurricular activities that kids can participate in.

- While parochial elementary schools teach at a higher level than their public schools counterparts, they cannot offer the wide range of classes available in a public school education. For foreign language classes, drama, orchestra, fine arts, home economics, wood shop, GATE, accelerated
math & science classes, and other advanced courses, students and parents must look at other resources.

- Many parochial schools don’t offer a bus service which means parents must drive to and pick up their children from school. For families living 30 or more minutes away, this can create a bit of a logistical problem.

- With the small student bodies that are so characteristic of parochial schools, students are often stuck with the same group of classmates from K all the way to 8. This works fine as long as everyone has the same interests and gets along, but makes it impossible to break up a bad "class dynamic" when it happens.

**PRO OR CON DEPENDING ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE**

There are certain characteristics of a parochial school education that can be either a positive or negative experience, depending on a parent's perspective.

For middle class families feeling the crunch of hard times, all those spendy extra curricular activities can get quite costly. And in each class, there's always a few kids who can't afford the hot lunch program, out of state basketball tournaments, or class ski trips. Some parents see this sense of elitism as a negative. And what about our family? Over the years, we've had to make choices as to what activities our kids could participate in. While we tried to participate in as many as was financially feasible, many times we had to say "No." Was it hard on our kids? Sure it was, but then real life means we don't get everything we want. At a fairly young age, our kids learned a valuable lesson in setting goals and priorities; lessons that they took with them on to college.

Whether a child attends a private or parochial school, or even a public school for that matter, there will always be "the haves" and "have nots." How your child handles these economic differences depends on how you as a parent will handle these issues.

**POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS**

Some parents believe that parochial school kids aren't as exposed to a culturally and socially diverse groups of kids as they might in a public school. They also believe that parochial school kids also tend to be somewhat protected and insulated from real world issues.

This is one of those generalisms that doesn't apply to all parochial schools. While this may be true of a posh parochial school in a trendy city, the parochial elementary schools I've seen are as culturally diverse as the United Nations. And, one of the benefits of having the smaller class sizes is that parochial school kids have the opportunity to share those cultural differences in many different ways. As far as being insulated from real world issues, this also is a generalism that doesn't apply to all parochial schools. Most Catholic elementary schools for example, require the older students to perform a certain amount of community service. These children are exposed to a wide range of social issues, and organize food drives for the poor, serve in soup kitchens and food banks, and collect diapers and toiletries for local women's crisis centers.

Attending a parochial school has both it's positive and negative points, and all these pros and cons are ones that families should consider before making that financial commitment. While a parochial school education isn't for everyone, in our case it was an overwhelmingly positive experience and certainly the right decision for our family. *(C. Jeanne Heida, Yahoo! Contributor Network)*