

## **Parents' Schooling Decisions for their Children**

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### **Abstract:**

Choosing a school is an important decision that all parents are forced to make for their children. It is interesting to observe parents who have strong beliefs in the importance of public education and yet choose to send their children to elite private schools. There are many dual career couples that face the issue of providing care for their children, while maintaining their demanding work life. With the limited affordable, quality options that are available, it is no surprise that they have discovered that choosing elite private schools serves as a practical alternative to traditional forms of child care.

### **Introduction:**

Hypocrisy is interesting. In my observations of American society, I notice that there are often disconnections between what people say and what they do. Where I see this the most is in parents' schooling decisions for their children. While many parents admit that they believe strongly in the importance of a public education, they end up sending their children to elite private schools. My goal was to get to the root of the hypocrisy I was witnessing in parents schooling decisions for their children. What situations or contexts lead people to act in ways that contradict their beliefs?

In the initial phase of my research, I interviewed ten parents about their schooling decisions. I chose to focus on parents who sent their children to Moravian Academy, a local elite private school, for at least part of their educational career. After analyzing these results, I quickly realized the need for follow ups with seven of my original participants. I e-mailed some questions to these parents and I interviewed two new parents as well. All of these parents were part of dual career couples and in one instance, a single mom with a career. It is important to study this class of people because they are extremely powerful and influential to the future of society.

Through my research, I identified a pressing issue that strongly influences parents' schooling decisions for their children, particularly in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years: child care.

### **Results:**

There are three main factors that contribute to parents' schooling decisions for their children:

#### **1. FULL DAY CARE**

- "My schooling decisions were also affected by the fact that I do work, you know? Therefore half-day kindergartens weren't really an option" (Denise).
- "We chose this particular pre-k because it was a full day program, which is really unusual for pre-k. And because both parents work, that was an issue" (Melissa).

#### **2. TRANSPORTATION**

- "What makes it hard for parents is that kindergarten is only two and a half hours. So by the time you get your child dropped off, you literally have time to do maybe an hour and a half work and you have to turn around and you have to pick them up" (Jennifer).

#### **3. QUALITY OF CARE**

- "The thing I thought most about was getting them in an environment where I really thought they were being challenged and stimulated" (Denise).

**Conclusion:**

With the rising expense of quality child care, and the lack of full day public schooling for both pre-k and kindergarten, it is not a surprise that parents are looking for alternative options. Dual career couples are on to something. Why shouldn't parents give the best that they can to their children?

I have concluded through my research, that parents are using elite private schools as alternate forms of care for their children. The main factors that contribute to this decision are the availability of full day care, not having to worry about transportation from site to site, and the quality of care that is offered at these institutions. In addition, I highlight that parents whose household income is more than \$100,000 a year, typically will continue their child's education at the elite private school after the need for their attendance for the initial reasons has dissipated. Those parents who reported a household income of less than \$100,000 purely use Moravian Academy for the alternative form of full day child care at the pre-k and kindergarten level. While they would like to keep their children enrolled in private school if finances permitted, they decided to pull the children out and send them to the local, free public school.

The results of this study fill a gap in current research and literature. It is my hope that more research will be done in this area in the future to further understand if this is something that can be more generalized beyond this small sample.