

August 2008

Dear Parentteacher:

(Reading time :10 minutes)

Enrollment for 2008-09—To re-enroll a student, it is necessary to send an application *each year*. It is important to do this at the **BEGINNING** of the school year. Enclosed in this mailing are applications and an initiation form for the 2008-09 school year. Be sure that the applications you send are complete, including educational plan. [When you submit enrollment applications for high school students, be sure to include specific *course* names for high school subjects (along with the specific titles or publishers or a description of the program)]. Incomplete applications will be returned to you, delaying or even preventing enrollment.

If student will be going to another school for 2008-09—please allow 2 weeks when requesting transcripts.

Avoid Pitfalls—Imagine the consequences if a person receives a renewal application for auto insurance but waits until a year has nearly passed before sending it in. The insurance company may permit late registration, but the customer would have no coverage for most of the year. In a similar way, the time to re-enroll is at the **BEGINNING** of the school year. Now is the time.

Grade/Attendance Reports—The "target date" for sending final grades was June 30. The grade forms were sent to you with your confirmation of enrollment letter. It is time to pull out the form on which you recorded first-semester grades and add second-semester and final grades, as well as days of study and the date semester ended, and sign. (THIS LETTER IS BEING SENT TO ALL FAMILIES, EVEN THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY SENT IN FINAL GRADES. Therefore, it is not necessary to call if you have already sent in your grades.)

Please note that grades for a high-school student who does a course this summer should be reported on a separate Grade/Attendance Report marked "Summer 2008."

Who's Teaching at Your House?—Gateway's program of home education is designed for parents or guardians to teach their own children. Home-educating parents may utilize a tutor or group class for a specific subject, but these are not to take the place of home education. Beware of sending your child to a "school," which says you must make a pretense of home education and register with Gateway to make it legal.

Seminars—"A Good Start in Home Education" (Typically held monthly). Next offered 10 a.m. till noon on **Sat., August 30, 2008** at Gateway. The seminar will include:

- The importance of a right foundation
- Turning the hearts of the children
- Minimizing frustration & discouragement
- Working with learning styles
- Curriculum as a tool—not a tyrant
- The importance of wise counsel
- Lifestyle of learning
- Questions & Answers

"Teaching High School at Home" (Typically held about four times a year). Next offered 1 p.m. till 3 p.m. on **Saturday, August 30, 2008** at Gateway. Check Gateway website for updates and directions. Seminar contents:

- High-school credits
- Resources for challenging courses
- Foreign languages
- Preparing for college
- Advanced math courses
- Questions & Answers

E-mail Considerations—In order to prevent infection by viruses or worms, we do not open e-mail attachments. Also note: We do not accept applications or grade forms by e-mail.

From the Heart—Home Education: What is it? We can easily be absorbed with the trappings of education—the things that would be turned in to a teacher for grading: assignments, workbooks, spelling tests, book reports, math worksheets, etc. This emphasis on "schoolwork" might stem from the fact that such things are more easily measured than conceptual understanding. Is it possible to diligently tend to the insignificant and yet miss the essential? Traditional methods seem to focus on documenting or proving what has been done with an

emphasis on terms and their definitions. In contrast, conceptual understanding can be difficult or impossible to measure. A student might be able to memorize " $\pi = 22/7$ or 3.1415926535 " . . . and even use it in an equation such as $A = \pi * r^2$, without really understanding the meaning of π . Likewise, one might be able to write or recite a definition, yet have little understanding. Is real success in education best measured by completion of every lesson, finishing the curriculum, working every problem? Doing things "by-the-book" can result in majoring on minor things to the point of missing what really matters. This can be a hollow success.

Without the recognition that some things are truly more important than others, students are forced to slog through the humdrum. Some lessons are so important that they should take priority over others, even to the point of omitting or delaying things routinely included in a traditional grade-level curriculum. The conventional approach to education tends to put the cart before the horse, making the student memorize things for which he has no use or interest. It forces him to learn the answers to questions he doesn't even have, while those he does have are left unanswered and treated as insignificant.

As a home educator, it can be difficult to ignore the nagging idea in your head that certain things are "supposed" to be learned by all children in this particular grade. What would happen if you did not keep up with the public school Joneses? The persistent problem of schooling is not knowing the real goal of education. Is your understanding of education stuck in a rut? The Scripture says, "Without a vision the people perish." For many children, education has little life. Its pulse is feeble and its breathing labored. "Life support" is the only thing that keeps it going. Parents see limited educational options. Some veto the classroom approach, but having no better plan, hope their children will learn simply by the passage of time. Others copy the classroom model, trying to follow textbook publishers because they are the "experts." They have experience at teaching masses of children who are kept herded together in classrooms, synchronized by the ringing of a bell. They certainly know the best way to educate the generic child. Some invite you to pop your kids into the DVD player to soak in video of an expert schoolteacher. But what if you don't have a generic child for whom the traditional curriculum is designed?

Contrast the classroom approach with the way your children learn things in your home (even before school age). When teaching your child what a tree was, how long did he have to study the definition before it was mastered? Did you say, "OK, Johnny, let's try again. You left out a phrase: 'usually elongate main stem.'" Now write the definition ten times on your lined writing tablet."? Of course not. Keep a fresh perspective. Expose yourself to new information about the learning process. Changing your expectations about what is acceptable and possible can be the key that unlocks the door of learning. If you don't come to grips with unrealistic expectations, it is easy for both parent and student to get frustrated. Our culture is totally unrealistic about what to expect from children. We have created an unwillingness to take risks and to enjoy the process of learning.

Try to use the amazing, the awesome, the peculiar, the interesting aspects of God's creation that invite children to learn. Remember, "Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the kindling of a fire." Simple things can be taught in ways that are interesting and even exciting. I've seen children (and adults) wide-eyed as a bottle of water freezes instantaneously before their eyes. Let your children see or hear or meet those with a passion for a particular aspect of learning. Invite them to see the world through fresh eyes. Fill the mind with the kind of ideas that provide inspiration. Learn some short-cuts to provide inspiration in the area of math. Some would respond, "When is a student ever going to need to multiply a two-digit number by eleven, or find the product of two teen numbers?" Yes, it might be a rarity, but you probably have utensils in your kitchen that are only used to slice eggs, or to core apples, or to press garlic, or to peel potatoes, or to cut pizza. Similarly, a man might have a device in his toolbox whose only function is to put a straight chalk line across a surface. In fact, a man skilled in his work understands the value of

having the right tool for the job even if it is a small or occasional task. Look at the value of teaching the appropriate lesson at the right time. John Gatto described a school which claims to teach all the math a student would learn from K through grade 12 in an aggregate of eight weeks. The key is that lessons are not taught unless and until the student expresses a desire, an interest and a need to learn. Now that is one way of getting the life and the power of the horse to propel the cart. Challenge a child to grapple for the precise word to fill a given blank or to describe a particular situation. Teach the student how to find the answer to his current question. I like to see children so fascinated by a historical account, or a science experiment, or a math shortcut, or the origin of a word that their learning is propelled or even catapulted forward.

When it comes to education, I'm not sure who invented the box, but again and again, thinking outside of it seems to be a good idea. I cannot help but agree with John Gatto, former New York Teacher of the Year, "If you want to know how to do education effectively, look how the schools do things and try something different." Some of the most important lessons can't be put on a report or given a grade and credit, but their value goes far beyond a good GPA or ACT. Once again, my plea is for relevance in education. The right lesson at the right time is one of the best teaching tools. Education is much more than the sum of measurable parts. Emphasize context rather than content. Above all else, seek understanding.

Watching daily at the gates of the Master Teacher,

Greg Stablein