

The Right Choice

Are you the type of person who thinks outside the box or are you the type of person who goes along with the traditional flow ignoring the curious thoughts in the back of your head saying, “Maybe there’s a better way”?

Years ago, when I was raising my now thirty-nine-plus-one-year-old daughter (she won’t let me say the “f” word), I was the type of person who went along with the traditional flow ignoring the curious thoughts in the back of my head about how main stream brick and mortar schools operate and whether or not they were providing a “good enough” education for my child. Granted, there weren’t many other options at the time, but it didn’t stop me from wondering.

Fast forwarding to many years later, I have a niece and a nephew—who are one year apart in age—getting ready to start school. My sister enrolled my niece—who has a learning disability—into kindergarten at our neighborhood Catholic school (choice number one). A few weeks in, the school informed my sister that they can no longer have my niece in the school because they couldn’t “handle” her.

My sister didn’t know what to do next. She decided to hold my niece back a year so she could start school with her brother. During that time, we finally started looking for answers to the curious thoughts in the back of our head about other schooling options and, after much research, discovered that it was possible to teach your children from home in the state of Pennsylvania. However, this required the parents to be trained and tested to make sure they could teach the child properly. There was also a vigorous check and balances system set in place. All of these requirements were understandable, but not something we were up to taking on.

With the deadline for both kids to be enrolled in school approaching, my sister went back to traditional thinking and ended up enrolling the kids into the local public school (choice number two).

All in all, the public school was better than the Catholic school in that they had a Special Ed program in place for my niece and my nephew enjoyed being around kids his own age.

By the time they got to second grade, though, it was becoming apparent that this option wasn't going to work out, either. Even though the school had a Special Ed program, we discovered that my niece was mostly sitting at her desk doing nothing for most of the day. Once or twice a week, a Special Ed teacher would come and sit with her, but no progress was being made with her math and she wasn't learning how to read. As far as my nephew was concerned, he was doing well with his class work, but he was getting bored because the curriculum was a little slow for him. Also, he didn't enjoy the unsupervised schoolyard time where the kids were somewhat aggressive with each other.

Again, we jumped back onto the internet in desperate hope for a better solution. And, finally, alas, another option came to us. Something that was called a cyber charter school. We learned that this was a type of online public school that had certified teachers in Pennsylvania that taught classes online in real-time.

Although there were many cyber school options—and we researched them all—we ended up choosing Agora Cyber Charter School because of the ease of enrollment and because there was to-the-point useful information that helped us to feel confident in signing up with them (The Right Choice).

After spending over 10 years with Agora, we have become very familiar with all of the benefits that public cyber charter schools offer. Here are some of the many highlights:

A Safer More Productive Environment

With the scary conditions of most of the brick and mortar schools these days, home schooling with Agora provides the peace of mind that your child is safe at home and able to concentrate on the school work instead of having to worry if they will get through the day unscathed. Learning from home also provides a distraction-free environment which helps the child focus on the work instead of what's going on around them.

Financially Beneficial

Besides the fact that Agora is tuition-free for Pennsylvania students, each student is provided with a computer, headphones a printer, text books, art supplies, science experiment supplies and anything else a child may need for a certain course. In addition, families are also reimbursed for supplies such as ink and paper. And to top it all off, there are no uniforms, shoes or special clothing to purchase.

Personalized Attention

Every student is provided with a Family Coach. The Family Coach is the liaison between the student and the school. Each Family Coach is assigned a small group of students within a parameter of where the student resides.

The Family Coach is essential to the student in that they are the first point of contact if the student has a problem or a question. They monitor the student's progress to make sure the student keeps on track and makes sure students are informed of school policy and

requirements. The Family Coach consistently keeps in touch with students and families to make sure everything runs smoothly. They are also responsible for creating social gatherings and events for the students. These are just a few of the many tasks that Family Coaches happily perform for their students. It is a comfort to know that someone is there as an advocate for your student.

The Social Factor

When some people learn that my niece and nephew are home schooled, we usually hear, “Oh, but it’s not good because how will they ever learn social skills. They will end up being a recluse or socially awkward.”

I am happy to answer those concerns by letting the person know that there are probably more opportunities for Agora students to interact socially than there are at brick and mortar schools. They are surprised to learn that we have what are known as “Agora Days Out” or ADO. These are events organized by the Family Coaches and/or the school administration and/or the many clubs you can join. They events take place throughout the state all school year long.

Some of the events may include bowling or museum visits or escape room adventures or roller skating or ice skating or movies or...the list goes on and on. These events are very successful because they give the students an opportunity to meet each other in person and form lasting relationships without distracting from their school work. It also provides an opportunity for parents and students to interact with teachers and learning coaches outside of the classroom. These events are very successful and students look forward to them.

And the coolest part about the social aspect of Agora is that they hold a prom and official graduation ceremony every year for the students.

Individual Learning Plans

Another great benefit of Agora is the Individual Learning Plans that are set up for each student based on their abilities. For instance, my nephew's skills were above his grade level so he was able to take a more advanced level of his subjects.

On the other hand, my niece with special educational needs was placed in the tremendous Special Ed program at Agora. After my sister and the school administration reviewed her IEP—Individual Evaluation Plan—my niece was placed in the appropriate classes for her learning level. She is in class with other students that have similar needs and all of her teachers specialize in Special Education and her learning has dramatically improved each year. There is diligence in periodic reviews and testing to make sure my niece is meeting all of the goals set up at the beginning of the year. My sister no longer feels lost with nowhere to turn.

Learning Coaches

A learning coach is a parent, grandparent, other family member or friend that monitors a student's progress and communicates with the Family Coach, school administrators and teachers regarding the student's needs. Learning Coaches oversee the student making sure they complete their assignments and attend class regularly. They will keep the school informed if the child is going to be absent and helps the student with their school work. Agora provides many tutorials and training information to help the Learning Coach fulfill their role as a coach.

Ease of Use

Agora's online school is set up for success. There is a log-in for students and a log in for parents or learning coaches. Live classes are taught through a program called Blackboard Collaborate and it is extremely easy to access and use. There is a technical support department that is there for any connection or computer issues that may arise. Tutorials are provided for any subject you may have a question on. Agora made their system to easy to use so that you do not waste any time trying to figure anything out.

Teachers

Every teacher that we've had a pleasure to work with over the years has been sincerely interested in the children's success. They are dedicated, patient, involved, and always there when you need them. Most importantly, though, they are skilled and accredited. One may think it is easier to teach from home instead of a classroom, but I feel it is more of a challenge because the teachers have to be very aware of making sure the students are paying attention and keeping up with the work because they are not in the same room. There is a strict adherence to policy. The quality of the teachers has always amazed me and has always stayed consistent throughout the years.

More Information

Believe it or not, I have much more to say about the benefits that we have experienced at Agora Cyber Charter School, but they have provided an easy to understand website with many resources with all of the information I provided and much more. I suggest you visit their FAQ page at <https://agora.org/resources-support/faq/> to get started. Then check out some of the other pages on the

website and I think you will be excited about giving your child a better education.

Cons

I have been going on and on about the benefits of enrolling your child in Agora Cyber Charter School, but to be fair, I must also mention the cons so that you can really make an informed decision. It's a big one, too. Are you ready? Here it comes. There are no days off for snow when you attend Agora Cyber Charter School. I'll give you a minute to recover from that news.

That's the only con I have.

Update

Just to give you an update on my niece and nephew—who, by the way, I had the pleasure of being their learning coach—my nephew graduated from Agora a year early with honors and my niece is scheduled to graduate this June. Her progress has been a blessing. She can read fluently and do basic math. She has had many classes on life skills to help her excel in life. We have discovered her love and talent at art and we have been given numerous resources to help her well into the future. She is doing far better than we could ever have imagined. Thank you, Agora!

Joan Myers,
A very satisfied customer