

Which School is Right For My Child? That depends...

What do you call someone who talks endlessly about schools? If you answered, 'a mother', you would be correct. We are not hard to spot. You see us all over town, sharing a breakfast, having group coffee. Inevitably our conversation turns to talk about our children's school.

We fret about the level of education in Los Cabos. Is the school truly bilingual? There is too much homework. Not enough homework. Are the teachers qualified? Why is there no variety offered for after-school activities? Why are the private schools so expensive -- the public schools too crowded?

These conversations or similar ones start when our kids enter pre-school. We debate in true Yin-Yang fashion the benefits of living in a resort town, versus the uncertainties about schools. Some moms have turned words into action and bravely launched their own school. The motivation is often centered around an educational plan suited to one that their own children would thrive in. Many of us have benefited from their strong-mindedness and determination to provide alternative options.

Our critiques accumulate and peak in February when schools issue their re-inscription costs and the next years monthly tuition fees. More breakfasts and coffee gatherings are organized and the burning question we all ask each other is. "Are you going to stay at the school? Is it worth it?" Does it fit my child's needs?

The good news is that Los Cabos has more choices than when my son first started school in 1995, at the tender age of one and a half years. Off he went each morning, in full uniform, plaid shorts, crested polo shirt, white knee socks, shined black shoes. He carried a Barney lunch pail in one hand and a plastic diaper bag in the other. This was *Maternal Uno*. By *Maternal Dos* he was out of diapers and learning colors and numbers. Kinder 1, 2, and 3 followed. Five years of school before graduating to grade one.

He never seemed to mind. We lived in a neighborhood where the average age was sixty, so school provided playmates. I kept watch on his stress level and always let it be known if I thought the school was going overboard with too much learning and not enough - I'm a little kid - time. Did voicing concerns make a difference? Not really.

When my son entered "big" school, I had two choices. I picked the wrong one. I went where all my, mother friends, were sending their kids. The warning signs were in front of me. He had to write an exam to enter the school. Over coffee, I groused, "For pete-sake our children are entering grade one, not applying to University." This is standard procedure, I was told. He failed the exam. The director said she would make an exception and inscribe him, if I were to enroll him in tutoring. What were my choices? I agreed. The tutor was her daughter. Once he was integrated into the school for a couple of months I courageously risked expulsion and cancelled the tutoring.

The list is long and personal as to why the school wasn't a good fit. By grad five when I couldn't sip one more cup of coffee as a disgruntled mom I went in search of a new school. This time I was better prepared. I had my check list.

What was the school attitude? Did they encourage parent participation? If my Spanish faltered, could they communicate with me in English? What type of amenities existed; like a school library? Were computers available for all students? What about the academics, the teaching methods? How is progress measured? Is artistic expression included in the curriculum? Does the school rely solely on test scores? My wish list was long.

I should mention, comparing what we pay here in paradise for private school fees and to what a parallel school in Mexico City pays, is often the catalyst to our morning coffee debates. There is solidarity in our belief, we're paying more than our counterparts and getting less. But we have fresh air and beautiful beaches and more tranquility. It is all about finding a balance. Yes?

Knowing this, my expectations weren't so high as to think everything on my list was guaranteed to be found. I was looking for close not ideal.

The best fit for our family was found in El Colegio Mission. The school's attitude, philosophy and values matched our own. They encourage parent involvement and recognize this as a positive impact on student achievement. The teaching method focuses on cooperative learning. The class sizes are small. Individuality is embraced and independent thinking encouraged. The library is pocket-sized but growing.

In the four years our son attended Mission before graduating from secondary, the mothers and I shared many breakfasts. The conversation were just as lively and passionate as the ones from the previous school. They were also proactive giving feedback and support to the school. Even, if the school didn't act on every one of our suggestions, it was clear the ideas were considered.

Our family was fortunate to find a good fit. Our son learned skills that are serving him well, now that he has started high school in Canada. Sending him to boarding school was emotionally and financially one of the hardest decisions we've ever made. Knowing we've been able to open a door with limitless opportunities for him to learn and grow in an academic community not available closer to home makes us doubly fortunate.

You can still find me having coffee with the moms of Los Cabos. Talking endlessly about schools. Working, as advocates for our children's education, to help to raise the level of education in our community.

If you are looking for a school for your family, Cabo now offers more choices. Some, not all of the schools have websites, here are a few of them. You are also welcomed to join us for a coffee and jump in on the school conversation.

elcolegiominmission, CEPicacho.com, InstitutoPeninsular.edu.mx, amaranto.edu.mx,
ColegioElCamino.com, Instituto Baldor.com, InstitutoPeninsular.edu.mx. Instituto
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