

This discussion is sponsored by:

Special thanks to the following adult learners who were the original team in putting this guide together: Sherries Oakmon, Ray Moreno and Emma Torrez. Project director: Susan Clark. 2003 update produced by EasyVoter and Literacyworks. Visit www.easyvoter.org for more information about moderating forums at your adult education program or community group.

This guide was based on material from National Issues Forums (NIF), a group that believes the public should be a part of public policy. For more information about NIF, call 1-800-433-7834 or visit www.nifi.org.

This guide was supported in part by the United States Department of Education under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian. For more information about California State Library Literacy Initiatives, visit www.library.ca.gov.



A Community Discussion Guide

What we need to decide:

Since schools cannot do everything, we need to make some choices. Of all the things we want our children to learn, which ones should be taught at school?

Here are three choices. Which one do you agree with the most?

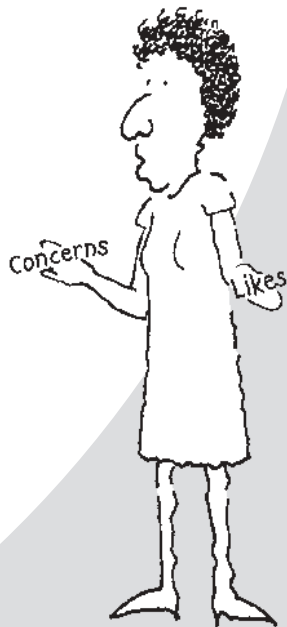
CHOICE 1 Basic Skills
Every student should learn the same basic reading, writing and math skills.

CHOICE 2 Learning Skills
Every student should learn *how* to learn by developing their own talents.

CHOICE 3 Social Skills
Every student should learn how to get along with others in their school and community.

Each choice has an idea about *What Should Be Done*. For each one, there may be things you agree with (*Likes*) and things you do not (*Concerns*).

After you discuss the three choices with others, you can come up with your own choice on page 7.



CHOICE 1

Basic Skills

What should be done:

- Teach the same basic reading, writing and math skills to every child at every school.
- Test all students to make sure they really learn these basics. Do not pass them on to the next grade until they are ready.
- Teach all kids together. Get rid of 'special' classes that can label students as slow or hard to teach.

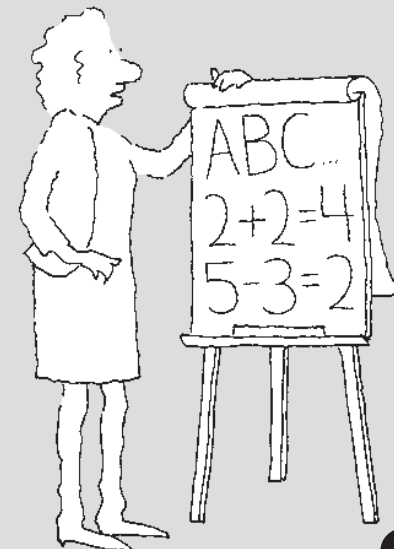
Knowing how to read, write and do math is the most important thing kids can learn in school.

Likes:

- All kids will get the basics. They will feel better about themselves and learn other subjects more easily.
- This will force the teachers to work with all students, not just the ones that are easy to teach.
- Kids won't get passed through the system.

Concerns:

- Not all kids learn the same way. They also come to school with different levels of being ready. They need teachers that understand these needs.
- Making students just memorize things to pass the tests will take the excitement and interest out of learning.



CHOICE
2

Learning Skills

Learning how to learn so they can help teach themselves is what kids need most from school.

What should be done:

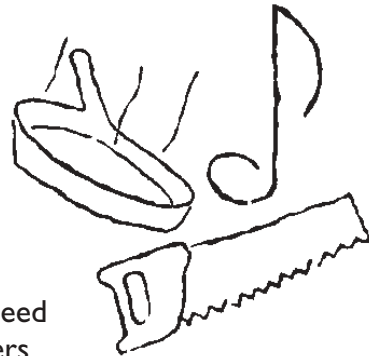
- Give kids choices. Let them study what they want so they won't drop out.
- Let teachers choose different ways to teach different students.
- Group students based on what they like and what they are good at. This will stimulate their ability to learn.

Likes:

- Because they help choose what to study, kids will be less likely to turn off or drop out.
- Teachers can change how they teach to match the student's needs.
- Students will be more confident. They can move from being good at learning one thing to trying something that is harder for them.

Concerns:

- Teachers do not have time to create a separate plan for each student. We also need standard measures to know what progress students are making.
- Kids are too young to make these choices for themselves. They also need to learn how to get along with others who learn different ways than they do.



CHOICE
3

Social Skills

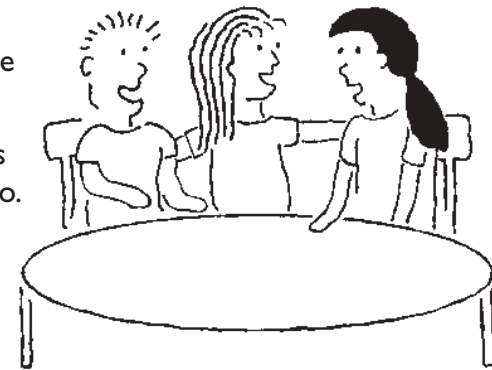
Learning how to get along with others and be responsible is what kids have to know for the real world.

What should be done:

- Teach kids how to get along with other kids who come from different backgrounds.
- Have students work in teams on projects. They will need to know how to do this for work.
- Give students projects in the community that will teach them how to be responsible.

Likes:

- If kids get along better, there will be less violence and more learning in the schools.
- Kids need to learn that rights come with responsibilities too. Many parents can use some help in teaching this.



Concerns:

- It is the parent's job to teach these social skills, not the school's. Schools should not be asked to fix all the problems in the community.
- A lot of the unrest at schools is because kids don't know the basics. That will help them get along better than anything else.



What do we want our children to get out of school?

Not any one choice is the answer. It may be part of all three choices. But we know that our schools cannot do everything for everybody.

You and others in your community need to make choices about our kids should learn.

- What do you think is most important?
- What is the fairest plan for all students?
- What is best for your community?

Only the whole community can make this decision!



Our Choice

What we think should be done:

-
-
-

Likes:

-
-
-

Concerns:

-
-
-

