

**A Fox in the Henhouse:  
A First-hand View of  
Parent Partnership Programs  
By Dawn Perkins**

***REALITY HIT***

“Mom, can we get the acrylics TODAY?” my 13-year old asked for the twentieth time this year.

“No... well, maybe. We’ll see if we have time. When will you actually *paint*?” I replied. “Mom!” she sighed and threw up her hands in frustration, shaking her head as she walked out of the room.

She just loves to paint, and she’s talented, too. I just wish we had the time to let her do what she loves so much. It seems like all we do these days is run around. From an appointment, to school, back home again, only to dash out the door once more. It didn’t used to be this way. When we first began homeschooling, we were home nearly all the time. We had the luxury of time, and the pleasure of enjoying that time together. Sure, we took field trips, participated in a co-op, and did all the normal family errands, but we were home for that time we needed for schoolwork. Since we joined a “Parent Partnership Program” (PPP), our time has simply disintegrated. We had five years of traditional homeschooling, and we have had five years of this pseudo-school education. My view of both has changed drastically.

It is my experience that public education’s involvement in homeschooling is harmful to the homeschool family. Parent Partnership Programs foster dependence on the public schools. When we first began with our local PPP, I didn’t see this. I was home schooling our two daughters, then in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, and I was more than happy to hand off some of the teaching to someone else. Where else could they take Spanish? Or music? It wasn’t as if we could afford music lessons or tutoring. I saw these extra classes as just that: extra. I was still teaching science at home, but they were getting extra at the school, and that was fine with me. Besides, they “only” went to school for 2 ½ hours twice a week.

Five years later, our youngest daughter was still attending 2 ½ hours twice a week, taking Spanish, “Literacy”—a sort of language arts class aimed at passing the WASL exam, Art, and Middle School Science. They used to have a Literature/Writing class but it was scrapped in exchange for this Literacy class. I was no longer teaching literature or science. We didn’t have time for art, either. These are no longer extra classes: they became necessary to my daughter’s education. The difference between 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade is enormous, as was my feeling of inadequacy at teaching such things these days.

I began to see that this is not a “partnership” between school and family but more of a burden preventing us from doing what it is the Lord called us to do so many years ago. It has been such a gradual change, yet it seems to be so deliberate in it’s method that when I

realized it I didn't know what to do about it. To make it even worse, I reached the point where I really didn't know if I WANTED to do it any more. I prayed and prayed, asking the Lord how we got into this position. The answer came clearly, and loudly. We allowed the public school program to take over our children's education. We put a government-funded entity in the place where God was supposed to occupy.

### ***HOW WE BEGAN***

When we began homeschooling in 1998, our oldest daughter had just turned 6. Someone lent me a copy of Ray Ballman's *The How & Why of Homeschooling*. I read it over a weekend, and knew by Monday that God Himself had orchestrated the whole thing. I pulled her out of kindergarten in February, after discovering I had already been homeschooling her half the day, and she was doing better at home than at school. My husband thought I was crazy, but he went along with it. He became supportive over the years. Paige and I finished Kindergarten together, with her learning to read, struggling to understand the concept of zero, and spending many mornings perusing the homeschool section in the local library. We also had a 3-year old daughter, Jenna, and my husband had a 7-year old son whose mother was homeschooling him at the time as well.

That fall, I ordered curriculum, registered our then 4-year old for preschool, just for fun for her, and we began a new year. Within two months, I was also teaching my stepson every day as well. The kids and I had such a great time together! We loved homeschooling. We did unit studies using Konos curriculum. We took field trips with our homeschool group, participated in co-op classes every Friday, and read hundreds of books on dozens of subjects. When we added Jenna as a kindergartner the second year, she jumped in and loved it as much as the other two kids did. I only taught my stepson for two years, but they were wonderful years that we all remember fondly. When Paige was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and Jenna in 1<sup>st</sup>, I became overwhelmed by life, and I put the girls in school for a week. Just one week. They remember it as the week Mom lost her marbles. Life was so busy, but a wise homeschool mom gave me advice which I clung to: "You have to be HOME to home school". I protected our homeschool times. I didn't get on the computer or answer the telephone before noon. We didn't schedule dentist appointments or yard work or visitors before lunch. That was our time.

The following year, a friend and I discussed the pros and cons of letting our kids participate in a new public school/homeschool program, and I actually talked her out of it. The next year, in the middle of the year, we both decided to try it. The director of the PPP went to our church, and her husband was a pastor for a church in a nearby town (but was on extended medical leave.) She had almost total control over what was taught and who did the teaching at the school. Her teachers were hand-picked. No evolutionary teaching ever crossed into the student's hands. It seemed to be a blessing, and I was happy to have it. The school has grown from 45 children to over 150, and this is no longer the case.

## ***THE TRAP***

We added two more children to our family through foster adoption in 2000 and 2002. My intention was always to homeschool them, at the very least, until they were high school age. At this time I was driving the girls to the PPP two mornings a week, they took swimming at the Y two afternoons a week, and our new baby had in-home OT/PT two days a week, on top of leaving for parent visitation two afternoons a week. Our lives became so busy that I didn't have time to do our normal everyday school work. Time just seemed to get away from us.

As this baby and then the next grew, we continued with the PPP, but my friend and I taught science to our kids together. Neither of us felt that they were getting enough depth at the PPP, so we met every Friday. It brought back those relaxed, fun times to me, and made me see how rushed I always was. I spoke with my husband the next summer, about NOT doing the PPP. By this point he thought it was necessary and thought the girls would be missing out if we didn't go to it. I wasn't sure he was wrong, because I had come to depend on those classes, but I felt so pressured. I was beginning to give up.

For the past few years I have made that twice weekly drive to and from the PPP, plus added another day when both of our boys also began homeschooling and attending there once a week. We drove three times a week to speech therapy & OT appointments, plus once a week for gymnastics, until recently. I reached the end of my abilities, the end of my living in the car and giving my youngest sons the short-end of my time for school. I have reached the last of my neglecting their education and giving them less of my time than any of the other kids ever received. I put them both in school full time the end of April 2008. I kept Jenna home, to finish up her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year.

I knew this isn't what the Lord wanted for our family, and I didn't know how I could change it. I got burned out with running around, tired of arguing with my husband and my children. I just got tired. We did homeschool over the summer, and things went very smoothly. We enjoyed our summer together. My husband doesn't want us to shift the kids back home again, after being in school. He's afraid we have made too many back and forth changes, although even he knows that our sons are better off at home. We now have 11<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup> graders in school.

## ***SHOW ME THE MONEY***

Homeschooling can be expensive. Let's face it: Curriculum costs MONEY. Back when we first began homeschooling, we really didn't have any money. When I realized God was calling us to homeschool our daughter, my first thought was HOW do I get books? I scraped together \$70 and I purchased a whole set of literature based curriculum and a Bible Study Supplement. We used that for Kindergarten, along with some flash cards and teddy bear counters for math, and a \$3 used copy of *100 Easy Lessons*. Kindergarten was easy! That \$70 was hard to come by, let me tell you. When we were ready to begin first grade, I knew the curriculum wasn't going to work for the long term for us, and wanted to jump into a very meaty, expensive unit study curriculum. How did I buy it?

Used, of course! VegSource's Homeschool Swap was my mainstay for all 10 years of our homeschooling. I must have recycled that same \$70 three or four times the first few years. Buying used curriculum, and selling what we were done with were the only way to do it.

I knew that God called us to homeschool. I also knew that because He did, He would provide for our needs. The Lord always made sure we had what we *needed*. We didn't have fancy science kits, or a field microscope, or those neat Lauri puzzles for my preschooler, but we had our curriculum, paper, and pencils. I covered every purchase with prayer, and every for sale ad with the same.

When my friend and I were looking into the local parent-partnership program within our school district, we were both very excited to find out that they would reimburse us for curriculum purchases. That meant so much, on so many levels! It meant science kits, art supplies, and curriculum which had always been out of our price range. NEW curriculum! We were told that the reimbursable materials had to be 'non-sectarian in nature', meaning not from a Christian publisher. That was okay, as *Saxon Math* and *Shurley Grammar* were both considered non-sectarian, and that was what we were both planning on buying.

We received \$330 per school year (reimbursed from receipts turned in) per child, and in exchange we just had to turn in the unused books when we were finished with them. We could pass them on to siblings, as long as we stayed in the program, and then turn them in when we are finished. This sounded like a great deal to me! Prior to this I didn't spend \$330 in an entire school year, period. Now, I was looking at all sorts of ways to spend every dime of that \$330 (times 2) since it was there for me to use. I stopped praying over my purchases, and didn't need to sell much because it belonged to the school. I didn't worry about the money, because it was ever-available. And God wasn't needed in this process, because we now got money from the school. Little did I realize what a dangerous place I had put us in.

### ***REGRETS***

This is not how I wanted our homeschooling to end. I loved it. I still love it. Parent Partnership Programs are not partnerships, rather they are dictatorships. They offer you "help" in the form of classes and money for curriculum, but in exchange you lose that precious time with your children, and you have to account for everything you do, or don't do, with them. You begin to take what they offer because, "Well, it's free!" Gymnastics, art, swimming lessons, extra classes.... And the next thing you know, you're yelling out spelling words from the front seat of the van while your child is saying "Mom, slow down, I can't write!" There are other reasons why PPP's are a bad thing, but this, to me, is the closest to home it can ever possibly come. I can not get back that lost time, and may never get back my husband's support of homeschooling. Had I known what the consequences would be for our family, I never would have signed my children up. There is nothing truly FREE but Salvation in Jesus Christ. Homeschooling is heart work. My heart is still there, wishing for things which may never be again.