

My name is Amberly Jackson. My husband Ned and I have 2 children at Covington Latin, Diane is a Freshman and Mac is a Prep. My husband and I often joke about how 2 kids can come from the same gene pool, exist in the same house, and be so different! I say this because we experienced two very distinct journeys when it came time for each of them to further their education after elementary school.

I should first mention that my husband, who teaches at NKU and I consider ourselves absolute snobs when it comes to our kids education. We sent our kids to the public elementary school in our district because it had a great reputation and even better test scores. However, we knew this would not be the case when it came time for them to move on to middle school and high school so we just figured that we would relocate to a better school system.

Our Kids

As I mentioned earlier, our kids have very different personalities when it comes to school and so their experiences have been quite different.

Our daughter, the oldest by 364 days, proved early on to be a perfectionist. She is one of those people who sees something and if she wants it, goes for it. Obstacles only tend to make her determination greater. Her drive to succeed and her ability to focus made her a model student. She worked hard and did well. She was never the top of her class, but she was in the top percentile. Our struggle with her became about the challenge. Some teachers recognized that she needed more and they gave her separate curriculum, others saw her as being nosey and had to reprimand her for being in other peoples business. We realized then that in order for her to grow and excel in school, she was going to have to be in an environment where she could see people and things bigger than she was so that she would always have something to work towards.

When she was half way through her 5th grade year, my husband and I started to panic. We were no longer in a position to sell our home and move to a better school system so we started thinking about paying tuition to other schools. We then listened to a neighbor talk about Covington Latin. Her son was in his second year and loved it. I knew of the school, but my recollection of the school was that only incredibly intelligent boys attended and we are not catholic so I never thought it was an option, and then I heard that the school had become co-ed and that you did not have to be catholic to attend. My husband and I began our research. We looked through the website and familiarized ourselves with the faculty, staff, curriculum and mission. It all seemed to fit. We started discussions with our daughter. At first she was intimidated at the thought of skipping grades. She had never heard of anyone who had done this. We started a dialogue with Mr. Goodmonson and our neighbor invited us to attend CLS events. The students we encountered all seemed to be normal, healthy, relaxed, kids so the enormity of it all seemed less intimidating to our family.

We attended the open house and when Mr. Barczak spoke, we felt as if he was talking directly to us when he discussed the difference between mainstream education and the boundaries restraining its students and the curriculum at CLS. He spoke about how mainstream curriculum teaches down to the lowest performers in a class, thus changing the habits of everyone else. In the studies he cited, he spoke about how excellent students in a normal class stopped pushing themselves once they reached the highest level offered in the class. If you were at an A, there is no where else to go. Covington Latin, in contrast teaches up. They teach curriculum that pushes even the top students in the class, thereby motivating students like our daughter to want to pursue greater heights that she sees others achieving. Wow, that was pretty exciting and it was in line with every thought my husband and I had about how education should be designed.

As much as we wanted CLS to be our choice, we knew that our daughter had to feel the connection as well. So after the speeches were given at open house, we went on a tour of the school. We visited several classrooms, met teachers and other parents, alumni and found ourselves enveloped in the passion that everyone had for this school! We just never expected that everyone would love their school so much and boast so openly about the incredible things accomplished here, luckily though, we did and it was amazing! When we left the school that day not only did Diane want to enroll and be a part of the CLS experience, but my husband and I wanted to as well!

Once Diane began at CLS, it was time to start the educational search all over again for our son. Our son is an unbelievably bright boy who never had to work for his grades. He can often hear something and retain it forever, which amazes me because it is not a gift I have! He scored similarly to our daughter throughout elementary but he did it with little or no effort. I don't believe that he brought a book home to study at all in his 5th grade year and I think the only homework he ever had was his science project. Our biggest concern for him was that we did not believe that he knew how to push himself or truly study. We worried that if he floated through middle and high school, doing just what he needed to get by, would he be prepared for college and ultimately life? Our other concern with the environment he was already in had to do with the arrogance and importance of sports over academics. I will never forget being at an end of the year graduation ceremony that lasted just over an hour. The Mom of a boy whose son was a "star football player" was furious with the school administrators for making her son sit through an hour of academic awards. She said, we don't make these kids sit through our sports banquets, why should we have to sit through this junk!

When we began our search, our son was adamant that he did not want to follow in his sister's footsteps at Covington Latin. His one and only year of elementary without his big sister in the school proved to be an awakening for him in many ways. He began trying new things, taking initiative which he had been slow to do and he took a leadership role in his class. He wanted to go to the middle school in our district with his friends. Since he was thriving by "not being in his sister's shadow", we considered that maybe another school was the best decision for him. We talked about a variety of different options and in all honesty, I don't think he thought he was as smart as the kids at CLS at that time.

During our discussions, Mac was invited to a couple of Latin School events. He got to know some of the kids and, as he did, came to the same realizations that our daughter did: he had a lot in common with these kids. They had similar values, likes and goals for the future and he started to feel the connection. He started to believe that he was no different than they were and that the education at Covington Latin was one of the reasons that these kids were so intelligent and driven! Like our daughter, the passion he felt from the CLS community at the open house, pushed him to take the next steps. He shadowed a student for a day, took the test and once he knew that he placed where he needed to on the exam he was adamant that he wanted to go to Covington Latin in his 6th year of school!

Our experiences at Covington Latin have been everything we hoped for. The needs of each child have been and continue to be met. Our daughter has witnessed achievements by fellow classmates and has pushed herself to follow them. For instance, Diane did not make honor roll the first quarter of her prep year and a couple of her friends did. She secretly set her mind to make the necessary grades as she saw her friends receive their certificates. After the assembly some of her friends told her that next quarter, she would be up there too- and she was! One of her new friends has unselfishly helped her in math, a subject that she has needed a little more help with to reach the level of the rest of the class. It is amazing to see camaraderie such as this at an age when competitiveness and insecurity often drives behaviors. I love seeing the difference most notably for me in the writing abilities and the vocabulary. When I read her papers or listen to her speak, I am amazed at her growth and that she has only been here a year and half.

Our son has also grown tremendously in the short time he has been at CLS and while the lessons of learning to study and work hard have not been easy, he has finally learned that when he comes home from school each day, rather than playing or watching television, he works on his studies. He is learning to ask for help when he does not understand a subject matter, he is learning to organize himself in a way that will allow him to truly understand material and he is learning to be proud of his mind and abilities in the classroom! Another great bonus is his history lesson that he receives in religion class. Not being catholic, he is fascinated by the cathedral and mass and constantly comes home with new information about the church and its history!

Throughout our journey, the best part of this experience is that our kids are both healthy, happy, thriving kids. They both play sports for CLS and outside of school, they both have healthy social lives with new and old friends and they speak often about the possibilities of where they are going to go to college and what they are going to do with their lives. I am impressed by the parent and alumni community. It is a wonderful thing to meet parents and say over and over, wow, they have the same kind of family values that we do! It is an easy place to make friends for the children and parents alike when everyone is invested in the Covington Latin experience!

As parents who believe that education is one of the greatest gifts we could give our children, the decision to send our kids to CLS is something that my husband and I are thankful for every day.