

As a parent, I find the amazing responsibility to raise two young children to be the most wonderful challenge I could ever ask for. This challenge includes entrusting your kids to caregivers, friends, and educators whom you believe share your priorities. Almost every parent would agree that it does indeed “take a village to raise a child”. Having grown up in Cleveland and lived in several different cities across the U.S., my wife and I have searched and searched for this “village”. We now feel as if our journey back home has led us to a place we feel most comfortable raising our children, Chagrin Falls.

That journey included finding the right educational option for our kids. The Chagrin Valley School (CVS) is located on Kelly’s Working Well Farm just south of The Village of Chagrin Falls. Our kids spend much of their time outdoors playing and exploring. The school operates as a democracy, meaning that each student, along with each staff member has one vote in deciding the rules of operation. It is an environment that is safe and nurturing as well as challenging and real world. The Chagrin Valley School offers our two kids a place to self direct their own education and empowers each of them to be responsible and accountable for their own decisions.

The freedom to make ones own decisions is a right that all Americans exercise and celebrate on a daily basis. This gift is something that all parents remind children to cherish and be grateful for. Unfortunately, the children, parents, and staff of The Chagrin Valley School have been deprived of our ability to make our own decisions. Last week, the Bainbridge Fire Department, through incomprehension and unfamiliarity with our chosen model of education, took it upon themselves to withdraw our zoning to operate. They decided this for us based on their opinion of what “a school” should be. Our family, along with the other families at CVS, are now without a place for our children to play, learn, and grow. Our community has expressed our willingness and eagerness to work with the town, zoning board, and fire department to improve our facilities.

Included in The Ohio Department of Education’s definition of a “School,” is *“means an environment organized for learning to provide a community of students with the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge necessary to meet state and local performance objectives.”* As my wife and I have discovered, our children must be engaged to build their own skills and knowledge instead of spending their time preparing for standardized tests. That engagement is best when secured by our children’s personal interest and intrinsic motivation.

We understand that our model is not for everyone. In fact, we recognize that each family has the right to choose whatever option best suits them. All we are asking is for our local government to respect and honor our decision to educate our children the way we choose.

Chris and Tanja Courtiol