

This past Saturday The Chagrin Valley School (CVS) hosted a craft fair and fund raiser in Chagrin Falls. It was a wonderful affair attended by creative, caring, and compassionate supporters. The energy in the room was very positive and inspirational. As families came in throughout the day you could hear soft talking and laughter as volunteers, vendors, and patrons discussed interesting and creative products and ideas. This grassroots event was originally planned to help The Chagrin Valley School grow appreciation, awareness, and resources. Unfortunately, much of the money raised will now go to legal costs to pay for The School's struggle with The Town of Bainbridge and it's Fire Department: An entity with virtually unlimited financial resources and time.

I imagine many of those who have been following this story are a bit confused about what exactly is going on. Much of that confusion centers on what type of "school" the Chagrin Valley School exactly is. CVS is a Democratic School, as in democracy, not to be confused with any particular political affiliation. The school does not operate as a traditional school, Montessori or Waldorf like school. Staff and students are treated equally with each individual having one vote. The only authority is that granted by "the consent of the governed". Kids at The School learn as a by-product of social and independent experience rather than through coursework. Students are trusted to take responsibility for their own lives and learning, and for the school community. As such, children are free to choose their own activities and their own curriculum. As one can imagine, much of that learning comes in a play based form. Many parents who are reading this remember the time when "play" meant impromptu hang outs with other kids (some friends and some not) without the intervention of parents, teachers, and chaperones. The opportunity for them to develop interests and passions through their own creativity and imagination without adult influence. The chance to succeed and more importantly fail on their own. A time when emotional skills were established to help deal with conflict resolution. Imagine how efficiently and fairly this issue between The School and the town of Bainbridge would be resolved if both were students at The School.

Many people might ask, that's great but The Chagrin Valley School is for what "type" of student? The answer is: The school is for everybody and anybody who believes in this model of education. It is for families and students who trust their children to rely on their own agency and inborn drive to learn and develop at their own pace.

It's because of this educational approach that The Chagrin Valley School is not built and structured like a traditional school as the Town of Bainbridge would recognize. The only aspect that children in general lack is experience. CVS is a scaled down environment where children can practice life and gain the experience necessary to become adults comfortably functioning within a democracy.

Chris Courtiol  
Chagrin Falls

