

## School Choices

Dr. Bob Stouffer, principal of Oskaloosa Christian School in Iowa, wrote in the last issue of *Christian School Comment* about how students can experience spiritual abundance. In this issue I've invited him to share helpful pointers that come into play when you, as a parent, choose a schooling option for your children.

When I was a public school teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal, I wondered why anyone would consider homeschooling or nonpublic schools. I came to understand a much different perspective as a Christian school superintendent. My personal bias is definitely for Christian education, but I also understand that not every student is made for Christian schools. Our first daughter, Molly, was an ideal fit for Christian school. However, our daughter Hannah, although she spent her first nine years in my Christian school, struggled in our environment; she ultimately thrived in a public high school.

As I hope you have read in the last two issues of *Christian School Comment*, I am a strong believer in parents alone making the decision that's best for each of their schoolchildren. The basic choices are public schooling, homeschooling, and Christian schooling. And each parent will answer to the Lord for these choices. In Deuteronomy 6:1–9, the Bible gives clear responsibility for both teaching and discipling first and foremost to the parent.

So what are you, the parent, to do with the decision for each of your students? Let's pursue answers with *if-then* propositions.

### Homeschooling

"If you are undecided about whether to homeschool or enroll your child in a Christian school, try homeschooling first. Our Christian school door is always open. We'll leave the light on for you."

This was my statement as a Christian school superintendent to a mom sitting in my office one day. That wasn't the first time I'd made that comment, and it probably won't be the last. Why would a Christian school superintendent encourage a prospective parent to homeschool her child rather than enroll her in my Christian school? Because homeschooling is the best choice for some students.

If homeschooling is your choice, then throw yourself wholeheartedly into the education and spiritual formation

of your children. Don't be laissez-faire, but don't be Attila the Hun either. The world is your oyster; your children can basically learn anywhere and at any time. But the desire to be a homeschool teacher does not a great teacher make. Do you have the gift of teaching? Home educators must be knowledgeable about educational methods, including the assessment of student learning. How do you know that your children are actually learning what they should learn at each grade level? A student can earn a grade but have absolutely no real-world competencies.

### Public Schooling

If public schooling is the avenue for any of your children, then you will need to be extremely hands-on about curriculum, teacher worldviews, book content, extracurricular activities, and friends. Too many Christian parents become completely hands-off when their kids enroll in public schools, and then they wonder why their students drift into nonbiblical worldviews. It is possible for Christian students to be salt and light in public schools, but frankly, such are rare children indeed. Christian kids must be well grounded in the Word of God *and* be willing to stand up for their faith. Such witnessing can be done, but not without the consistent involvement of parents.

### Christian Schooling

If Christian schooling is your route of choice, then the same rules apply as with the public schools. Just because a Christian school has *Christ* in its name doesn't mean faith is a strong component of the educational program. Expect first-rate academics *and* make sure the school vigorously disciplines students. The Christian school should also mark "biblical worldview integration" as a key distinctive of the programming. A school without Christ as first love and the Bible integral to every program—in the classroom and with extracurriculars—is not teaching the full truth about God's world.

We so frequently stereotype all three of these educational options. Some people believe that Christian schools don't offer academic rigor. Others believe public schools are complete dens of iniquity, with no light shining. Still others believe homeschool families are out of touch with reality. Nothing could be further from the truth on all counts. There are bad Christian schools, bad public schools, and bad homeschools. But let's not overgeneralize.

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And let's be gracious about the choices parents make. We too often look askance at parents for their choices. We whisper. We think less of certain people. We actually can be downright mean-spirited about others' decisions. I know, because I was when I worked in public schools. But I am not to judge a parent's choice of education. All parents will one day stand before the Lord and be held accountable for those decisions.

Are you more confident about your decisions after reading my position? If so, I have accomplished one of my objectives in this column. But I am certainly not the definitive source for this important decision making. *The* definitive source is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit should guide your decision with each child. Seek an intimate, personal, abiding relationship with Christ. Don't seek to justify a decision that is outside the Father's will. Submit to His Holy Spirit's leading for educational choices for your children.



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