

Home + Church + School

What is the best way to raise children who will hold on to their faith after high school and even into old age? I believe a powerful equation is necessary to achieve that result in today's secular society. I've invited Dr. Bob Stouffer, principal of Oskaloosa Christian School in Iowa, to expound on that equation. I hope you'll enjoy his thoughts as much as I did:

Once upon a time, there was a school superintendent who wanted to offer a three-week elective at a church on the parents' role in the decision about homeschooling, public schooling, or Christian schooling. I was that school administrator. I promised to be absolutely objective and not to engage in a hard sell on those who attended. I simply wanted to raise awareness about the importance of the parents' decision, according to Deuteronomy 6:1–9. The response of the elders? No—the topic was “too controversial.”

Really?! Something as critical as the choice of education for our schoolchildren—for which each of us will be judged by God, a decision with eternal implications for parents and students alike—was deemed “too controversial”? I believe churches should avoid the elephant in the room and start talking about the importance of parents' choice for education. This does not have to be a political issue.

Today, I have the opportunity to write to parents about Christian education, thanks to ACSI President Dan Egeler. And I believe I have a unique perspective. I am a fifth-generation educator. My daughter is a sixth-generation teacher in my family! I have served as a teacher, a coach, an associate principal, a principal, a superintendent, and a school board member. I have served urban, suburban, and rural schools. I have helped train the next generation of school administrators in a number of Christian and secular universities. My first 20 years were in public schools; the past 15 have been in Christian schools. Over the years, I have also learned a great deal about home education and home educators.

When I transitioned from public to Christian school in 2000, the learning curve was steep, and I had to reprogram my mind. Christian schools are and should be *so much different* than public schools. That said, I would tell parents the following so they can make discerning, informed decisions about each of their children:

Parents—not children—make the decision about the student's education. Parents—not children—will be held accountable by God for those choices. The parent is the primary agent of a child's education and spiritual formation. The parent must never abdicate responsibility for a child's education or spiritual formation to a program, another adult, a church, or a Christian school.

Parents must recognize that a student who is very involved in church activities spends 5 hours per week on average at church. A student spends 50-plus hours a week awake at home. A student spends 35 to 40 hours a week at school and school activities.

Church + home is an important equation. (I agree with pastor Mark Holmen, the author of an excellent book by that title.) I would add an important element to this equation though: home + church + school is *the* most important and expanded partnership for children's education and spiritual formation. Why? Because the culture is full of multiple worldviews that are contrary to a Christian worldview. And when the home, church, and school reinforce the biblical worldview, it's superior to inconsistent messages across those institutions.

Some parents desire first-rate academic but not spiritual formation for their students; some parents desire spiritual formation but not academics. This is not an either-or proposition. This is a both-and. Excellent education includes first-rate academics *and* life-on-life discipline.

First-rate academics in a public school are great, but parents must recognize that it is a very rare student who can be salt and light in a public school. Bad company corrupts good character, and students are not equipped as apologists to effectively defend their faith. And we should not be surprised by that truth; many adults have great difficulty defending their faith in Christ and the gospel.

To sum up, all schoolchildren have value, no matter the parents' choice. Homeschooling is a real privilege for parents and students. Public schooling demands extremely hands-on involvement of parents. For me, Christian schooling is the preferred educational delivery system—all employees should be mature, growing born-again Christians, and schools should be striving for distinguished professionalism and excellence.

The fact that you are reading this is a testimony to your support of Christian education. I encourage you to stay with your Christian school for the long haul. Imagine the development of your child's biblical worldview from preschool through graduation!

Be the parent! Know and live out the Word of God! Pass on a biblical worldview to your children! Choose their education wisely!



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