

# Thinking Critically About School Selection

## A Christian Parents' Guide

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### Who's in charge?

United States law requires school attendance by children in all 50 states, leading many to conclude that the U.S. government owns the responsibility for educating America's youth. Some suggest that the Church should fulfill this fundamental obligation. However, the Bible is very clear – in both the Old and New Testaments – **God assigns the primary responsibility for educating children to parents.** So Mom and Dad, you have a critical “homework assignment”, and it's not optional. Consider:

#### *Proverbs 1:7-8*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

#### *Ephesians 6:4*

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Note the phrasing and tone of these verses. They are not mere suggestions; they leave no room for negotiation. Rather, parents are given clear responsibility for the education of their children – not by the U.S. government – but by God himself.

In addition to being taught a full program of rigorous academics, children need to learn who God is, and how we, as human beings made in his image, are to relate to him. Children must learn the truth about God and how He has revealed himself through the wonders of his creation, the instruction of his Holy Word, and the example of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Ready to take charge? Read on.

## Decisions, decisions...

No one except God loves and understands children more than their parents. So, Mom and Dad, you are the local experts on what's best for your child. However, to make wise educational decisions, you need specific information about local schools and teachers. You also must think critically, prayerfully, and Biblically about how to prioritize the many details you gather.

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***Making a wise school selection requires  
specific information, critical thinking, and prayer.***

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As you gather credible and relevant details on the host of available school options, you may decide that "home school" is your best choice. Most families, however, tend to rely on established schools with professional teachers to fulfill their educational needs. If this describes your family's situation, my hope is that this booklet will help you think critically, prayerfully, and Biblically as you seek God's will.

## In the beginning...

Making fully informed school decisions can be a real challenge, especially today with so many competing options: Christian schools, home schools, private schools, virtual schools, charter schools, public schools.

How should parents decide which school features they will give highest priority: academics, athletics, faculty qualifications, curriculum, Biblical truth, teaching philosophy, co-curricular options, etc.? How about issues of location, facilities, safety, and cost?

Whew! Even with the speed of Internet searches, the task of completing a thorough study of all relevant school details could easily end in frustration or information overload – or both. So, exactly how should Christian parents begin, and then prioritize? Consider Solomon’s practical advice:

### [Proverbs 9:10](#)

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

The Bible declares that wisdom and understanding begin with the fear and knowledge of the LORD. Yes, at the outset of this educational “journey” Christian parents must assemble and rank many competing details before selecting a school. However, parents who begin by insisting that their children be taught the truth – about God and all of creation – can be confident they are on the right path. Then throughout the journey, as home, church, and school each fulfill their unique yet complementary duties, parents can expect Godly wisdom and understanding to take root.

Sadly, we now live in a world where many schools expel God from the classroom, deny the reality of his existence, and boldly reject the authority of his Word. So, Christian parents must either eliminate atheistic institutions from consideration, or face the daunting challenge of regularly discovering – and correcting – the false teachings that these schools substitute for truth.

When parents begin this educational journey by compromising truth in education, the battle for the hearts and minds of their children is all but lost, (**and make no mistake, a fierce battle is underway**). For students to acquire Godly wisdom, they must be taught to understand the world the way it really is, to accept what is actually true, and reject that which is false. They must learn to see the world clearly – with 20-20 vision.

## Seeing clearly...

A “worldview” may be described as a person’s basic beliefs about some of life’s most significant issues: Does God exist? Where did I come from? Is there any real purpose to my life? What will happen to me when I die? Important issues indeed! Please note:

- 1) Everyone’s worldview affects their aspirations, attitudes, and actions;
- 2) All thinking persons have a worldview – even if they cannot define it or articulate it clearly;
- 3) Despite bold assertions, no worldview is religiously “neutral” – it will be either theistic (God-centered) or humanistic (man-centered).

Children start developing a worldview in grade school, during their most intellectually and morally formative years. Parents, expect your child’s worldview to mirror the philosophies and belief systems of their most influential teachers. Scripture verifies this:

### **Luke 6:40**

***... everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.***

The weight of this truth becomes evident when we do a little math. Children receive intensive training in the worldview of their school for 6 - 7 hrs/day, 180 days/year, for 12-13 years. Throughout these most impressionable years, teachers will steadily and persistently shape your child’s heart and mind – teaching from a worldview that is either theistic or humanistic. So before delegating this 13,000 - 16,000 hour worldview training assignment to a public school system that is openly atheistic, consider the beliefs your child will be taught – and the temptations they will face when you are not around to advise, correct, or protect.

## The principal's principles...

Every school has a unique philosophy and curriculum largely driven by the worldviews of the principal and local school board. In public schools, the federal and state governments step in to further constrain what will – and what will not – be taught on topics such as:

- + **PHYSICS:** origins of time, space, matter, energy
  - Intentional creation or complete accident
- + **HISTORY:** beliefs of the U.S. founding fathers
  - God fearing or atheistic? Religious or political?
- + **SOCIAL STUDIES:** same sex marriage; right to abort
  - Forbidden by God or choose what works for you?
- + **BIOLOGY:** sexuality; human reproduction; cloning
  - Humans have moral obligations or “anything goes”?
- + **ETHICS:** embryonic stem cell research; euthanasia
  - Do the ends justify the means? When? Says who?
- + **RELIGION:** existence of God; absolute truth; eternity
  - Legitimate topics or ban them from the classroom?

The harsh reality is our government schools teach **scientific naturalism** and numerous other beliefs and values that are staunchly anti-Christian. Jesus said, *“He who is not with me is against me...”* leaving no middle ground; no “neutral worldview”. So before selecting a school for your child, carefully investigate the principal’s principles... then disqualify schools that actively contradict Biblical truth. Why? Because when atheistic teaching displaces the truth, it not only dishonors and displeases God; it inevitably distorts and deceives – since it is, in fact, false.

Whenever the truth is compromised by false teaching knowledge is diminished. Yet sadly, false teaching abounds in public schools and in many school textbooks.

**Physics** texts avoid all evidence of creation and then defy Biblical truth, violate the Law of Cause & Effect, and ignore common sense by asserting that the universe somehow exploded itself into existence.

**History** classes typically ignore the teachings and prophecies of Jesus – the most important person ever born.

**Social Studies** lectures and recent textbooks routinely characterize traditional and “alternative” life styles as equally valid.

**Biology** texts define humans as evolved animals, rather than beings made in God’s image with eternal souls in need of redemption. What more could be at stake?

Here’s a question that strikes at the heart of the issue:

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***What will my child be taught in school about:***

- ***God***
  - ***Creation***
  - ***Right and wrong***
  - ***The future***
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God expects children to be taught the truth in every subject. That requires seeing all of life with a Biblical worldview. Rigorous academics – no matter how thorough – will miss the mark if the reality of God is denied. Conversely, simply augmenting a secular academic program by adding a religion class – no matter how true – will also fall short. Students need a challenging, comprehensive academic curriculum, built on a foundation of Biblical truths and principles.

**Christian education teaches students to understand  
and live all of life with an eternal perspective,  
while maintaining a daily, personal  
relationship with Jesus Christ.**

## Teachers – heartbeat of the school

Parents gain invaluable insight when they get to know a school's faculty. Teachers are the school's heartbeat, its pulse. They are also among the most influential role models in students' lives – forming significant relationships and lasting impressions. Therefore, it's vital that parents understand both the academic qualifications and the worldviews that teachers bring into the classroom. Note how they interact with students, with each other, and with administration. Great schools have teachers who, in addition to showing an obvious passion for their subject, exude a genuine love for children. Look, too, for healthy mentoring of new teachers by experienced faculty. Choose carefully and prayerfully; you are selecting teachers - and role models - who will profoundly influence your child's heart, mind, and soul.

## Learning the ropes...

New schools can be intimidating and confusing – for both students and parents. New Family Mentoring Programs help everyone get involved and feel included more quickly. Great schools routinely recruit experienced families to proactively enroll, involve, and mentor those who are new, to everyone's benefit.

Then the best outcomes result as the right balance is maintained: schools providing dedicated professional teachers, while offering parents – who still own the primary responsibility for training their children – plenty of ways to stay fully engaged. Yes, “learning the ropes” is challenging for parents; but it's vital for students.

## Where's the truth?

In the wake of the 2002 "No Child Left Behind" Act, most public schools now claim to deliver "excellence"; but some troubling statistics\* suggest otherwise: only 67% of all public school students entering ninth grade now graduate with a regular diploma 4 years later; U.S. competence in math and science now lags a host of other countries as our SAT scores continue to slip. The sad truth is our nation's public schools lack real academic rigor, despite bold claims of excellence and an abundance of "A" report cards.

Meanwhile, many secular private schools actively promote their broad curricula, high SAT scores, prestigious college acceptances, and significant athletic achievements as key distinguishing assets. Interesting as these assertions often are, Christian parents must not allow them to overshadow the most critically important characteristic targeted by the following question:

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***"Does this school embrace, or avoid, Biblical truth?"***

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Wise parents understand that they will answer to God for their children's training. So, they must staunchly reject attempts to compromise either **Biblical truth** or **academic rigor**. Until students learn to see all of life with a Biblical worldview, Godly wisdom will remain elusive. Similarly, without real academic discipline – guided by qualified teachers – student knowledge will remain deficient. So Biblical truth and academic rigor must both be held as non-negotiable – a child's heart, mind, and soul are far too precious for bartering. Thankfully, there are great schools that really do deliver Biblical truth in an environment of academic rigor. Seek them out... they're worth the effort!

\*See *"Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis"*

## **“We deliver...”**

Most schools are rightly proud of the role they play in educating students and are quick to point out positive attributes and outcomes. Accreditation is often among these noteworthy attributes. While no guarantee of success, accreditation does offer positive signals to parents attempting to identify the best schools. Ask about the standards used by the accrediting agencies. Learn about the philosophy and frequency of their accreditation process. Find out what additional methods the school’s administrators use to evaluate teaching effectiveness. Are they content with being “good” or are they consistently striving to become “great”?

Beyond fully accredited academics, taught in the context of Biblical truth, great schools deliver a host of extra-curricular options. Because opportunities in athletics, performing arts and creative arts are invaluable elements of a well-rounded education, look for schools with experienced coaches and artists who have the requisite passion and talent. How many students participate? Are some involved in multiple activities? Look for a culture that encourages broad student participation amid a tradition of high achievement. Great schools deliver both.

## **Actions have consequences...**

Great schools have a well-written conduct code that defines appropriate student behavior – without overly suppressing normal, youthful exuberance. Fairness, clarity, and consistency are good watchwords for an effective conduct code. Look for thoughtfully written guidelines with firm, but fair, consequences for infractions. The intent here is to ensure that school remains a safe environment, conducive to learning for all.

## Money matters...

No matter what school you select, there are significant, long term implications: academically, spiritually, and financially. So, wise parents resist the temptation to focus solely on tuition, or treat education payments simply as costs... in fact, they are investments. When “cost thinking” replaces “investment thinking” poor decisions can result – often with unpleasant consequences. For example, if a child is injured, no loving parent reacts by comparing costs for a doctor visit or a prescription. A child’s physical well-being is at stake – so getting the right outcome (rapid diagnosis, treatment, and recovery) far outweighs the burden of visits to the doctor or the pharmacy.

So it is when a child’s educational and spiritual wellbeing is at stake. God places such great emphasis on wisdom and obedience that parents must invest as necessary toward achieving the outcome He requires.

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***Securing Godly wisdom for your child is the most  
Important investment you will make as a parent.***

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Consider Solomon’s advice:

***Proverbs 4: 5, 7***

***Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.***

For many, financing Christian education will require significant life-style adjustments and sacrifices. So, Mom and Dad, trust that God will bless those who prayerfully seek to obey his Word. Also note Jesus' advice on prioritizing with an eternal perspective:

**Matthew 6:20-21**

***... store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

## Spiritual fruit...

It often takes time to realize returns on an investment. This is true for Christian education, as well as stock portfolios. One key difference is that **God guarantees returns on investments we make in his kingdom**. As the Psalmist says, those who delight in the Lord are:

**Psalm 1:3**

***... like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season.***

Using this tree metaphor, Christian education "plants" students firmly in the soil of Biblical truth, steadily "waters" them with streams of challenging academics till they "blossom" in knowledge of, and love for God, his creation, his Word, and his Son. Thus rooted and nurtured, students "yield" Spiritual fruit – fruit that lasts:

**Galatians 5:22,23**

***... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...***

## In conclusion...

God's "homework assignment" for parents is to train their children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. It is indeed a big assignment. But make no mistake; it is not a mere suggestion – it's a clear mandate:

### **Deuteronomy 6:5-7**

***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.***

God expects Christian parents to plant and nurture his Word in the hearts and minds of their children. This is best accomplished in settings where home, church, and school all teach God's truth with clarity, harmony, conviction, and consistency. Once this happens, parents can trust God to deliver the long-term benefits He promises to parents and their children. His blessings are indeed priceless:

### **Proverbs 22:6**

***Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.***

Mom and Dad, throughout this educational journey, pray for your child's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth toward maturity. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your child's heart as they learn, and faithfully apply, God's truth to all of life – embracing a Biblical worldview that is consistent, coherent, compelling, and winsome. Then, fully trained, both academically and spiritually, they can go forth as "salt and light" joyfully living out the Apostle Peter's exhortation:

### **1 Peter 3:15**

***... in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.***

Mom and Dad, commit to staying fully involved in your child's life – especially during their intellectually and spiritually formative years. Here's the goal:

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***Instill in your child both Godly wisdom and academic understanding.***

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Then you can be confident that as students graduate, having been taught Godly wisdom in an environment of academic rigor, they will be well equipped to face the demands of college and career. They will also know the answers to life's most important questions (p.4). Godly wisdom and academic understanding make a truly unbeatable combination!

Finally, Mom and Dad, when the journey is over and your "homework assignment" is complete, you may find yourself echoing the Apostle John's words:

**3 John v. 4**

***I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.***

May this be your family's experience and testimony.

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**Suggested Reading**

J. P. Moreland: ***Love Your God With All Your Mind***

B. N. Shortt: ***The Harsh Truth About Public Schools***

N. R. Pearcey: ***Total Truth - Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity***

A. E. Greene: ***Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education***

Douglas Wilson: ***Excused Absence***



# WILMINGTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

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ours is good for *eternity*.

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