

3 ESSENTIAL TIPS

FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD



SPECIAL K-12 EDITION

3 ESSENTIAL TIPS

For Choosing The RIGHT School For Your Child

Inattention.

Boredom.

Too many students.

Lack of values.

Bullying.

Apathy.

Poor Curriculum.

Low Standards.

There is no doubt that you have had some of these concerns as a parent or know a parent who has. In the age of Common Core and ever more restrictive college entrance standards, what control do you have to influence your child's educational upbringing? Even more, what is a charter school anyway? Private school? What's the advantage when my child can go to school for free down the block?

There are so many questions stemming from the initial issue. What's going on in our school systems when so many parents experience concerns? It seems that their hands are tied. Policy is handed down from legislators, often-times with little concern for its implementation, let alone how parents will receive the mandates.

All parents want a quality education for their children that prepares them for their future and develops good study habits, self-discipline, strong critical thinking skills, and effective verbal and written communication skills. But how can you ensure that these hopes for your children are met when there are so many concerns and red flags in today's education system?

So what do you do?

These **3 ESSENTIAL TIPS** will assist you in choosing a school for your child that aligns with your worldview and provides the best environment for your child.



ESSENTIAL TIP #1

Know your WORLDVIEW and what WORLDVIEW your child will be taught.

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW

Author, James Smith, said...

“[...] every education is rooted (Latin: radix) in some worldview, some constellation of ultimate beliefs” (2011).

A worldview is defined by Dictionary.com as “a comprehensive view or personal philosophy of human life and the universe” (Weltanschauung, 2017). According to Smith, all academic endeavors are rooted in a particular philosophy of the world and its origins, that is where the world came from. This is critically important to understand because a worldview creates a system of beliefs. It is these same beliefs that permeate a curriculum and educate its pupils. All stakeholders may be involved in shaping the worldview taught

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by a curriculum, especially teachers who are tasked with the final instruction of the curriculum to the student.

This is important because the beliefs presented within a curriculum drive perception and decisions and shape the worldview of the student. In other words, the worldview the student is taught is likely the worldview he or she will adopt. Dr. Glen Shultz states that beliefs shape values and values shape actions (2003). Even Adolf Hitler understood this when he said, “Let me control the textbooks and I will control the state.”



THE *MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ASK*

Perhaps the most important consideration for parents is to ask:

“Does the school’s worldview align with our family’s worldview?”

This is why James Smith continues...

“Therefore, it’s important that the education and formation of Christians be rooted in Christ (Col. 2:7)—rooted in and nourished by a Christian worldview across the curriculum” (2011).

Dr. Christian Overman identifies five key areas a worldview addresses (2006):

1. **God** - Who or what will be my ultimate authority?
2. **Creation & the Material World** - What comprises reality?
3. **Humanity** - Who am I?
4. **Morality & Behavior** - How do I determine right from wrong?
5. **Purpose** - Is there a reason and purpose for all things?

The five areas are key when deciding what worldview your child’s school represents.

What the school believes about these areas is what will be taught in the curriculum and classroom and reflected in all other aspects of the program.

**GOD
CREATION
HUMANITY
MORALITY
PURPOSE**

A worldview may not be readily visible in every aspect of an academic program. However, it is always there and always influencing the program. Neil Postman writes that “behind every educational effort is the pursuit of a god, or gods” (1996). Since beliefs shape values and values shape actions, a worldview will influence every aspect of a program, from direct instruction and curriculum to student expectations and how correction is handled.

This is why Josh McDowell summarizes this idea by stating :

“The ideal way to help our kids not only to reject the postmodern worldview but also embrace deepened Christian convictions is to align church, home, and school into a unified whole that arms our children with the truth and protects them from distortions” (2002).

Other important questions for parents to ask about worldview include:

- What view of creation does the curriculum represent?
- What are the school's requirements in regard to meeting state mandated social teaching, such as gender identity and alternative lifestyles? Is the school required by law to represent these issues?
- How will we address these issues at home if/when they are taught at school?
- Does the school and curriculum reinforce the values we are teaching in our home and at our church?
- Does the school present opposing sides of issues or hold to an isolationist position?
- What impact will this have on my child (positive or negative)?

ESSENTIAL TIP #2

Know for sure if your child's school will help him or her to realize his or her future GOALS and fulfill his or her CALLING.

All parents have goals and aspirations for their children. However, not all schools are equipped to help your child get the best start towards his or her future. With cuts in the public educational system and ever increasing and unavoidable costs from increased enrollment and inflation, there has been an unfortunate and detrimental cost to students and their goals. There are a few key areas that impact this more than others.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is the “stamp of approval,” so-to-speak, when it comes to certifying, or validating the quality of academic program offered by a school or school system. Accreditation agencies are traditionally neutral, third party organizations that analyze and critique a school's program against a rigid set of criteria to determine the quality of the program offered.



Some accreditation organizations are less prestigious than others. Therefore, it is important to know what accrediting organization validates your child's education. Whereas there are varying degrees of accreditation based upon the accrediting organization, it is important to look for schools that have a solid history of advanced accreditation and demonstrate the practice of implementing effective school improvement plans.

Areas that can impact accreditation are student-teacher ratios, quality and broad acceptance of the academic program, library and information systems, communication and inclusion of the greater school community, feedback from students and parents, as well as school governance, financial solvency and accountability.

COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM

Course Of Study & Curriculum

With the exponential increase in college applications, college and university acceptance has become incredibly competitive. Most colleges and universities have minimum entrance requirements that must be met but that do not guarantee acceptance, particularly schools in high demand, like state university systems. The course of study a student must take to meet these entrance requirements must be carefully considered to ensure a competitive edge when applying to schools of choice.

Your child's school should provide a course of study that allows him or her to apply to any college or university he or she would like to attend with the best opportunity for acceptance.

Additionally, the curriculum should reflect the school's mission, vision, worldview, and commitment to academic excellence and represent a research based methodology. A strong curriculum in core subjects is based on what is proven and what is known to work, not necessarily what is trendy and popular. Results should be the decisive factor in determining the success of a curriculum and instructional program.



Questions to ask include, does the school...

- Utilize curriculum that supports my family's values and morals?
- Analyze their efforts with empirical data and assessment to ensure student success and instructional improvement?
- Meet the needs of today's demanding workforce through STEM education?
- Offer state university approved high school courses?
- Offer opportunity for honors credit?
- Provide opportunity for advanced placement courses (AP)?
- Offer opportunities for academic success outside of the classroom, co-curricular opportunities?
- Allow for a more rigorous course of study through both curriculum and course offerings?

College Guidance Counseling

With a more competitive college/university environment comes the ever more important topic of college guidance counseling. A school may have quality accreditation, an approved course of study, but what does the school do to assist students with:

- Developing a college-going mindset from an early age?
- Determining what course of study he or she would like to pursue in higher education?
- Monitoring academic progress to ensure accessibility to the student's academic, college, and career aspirations?
- Staying engaged in a long-term preparation schedule for college application?
- Preparing for college entrance exams?
- Locating a college or university that fits with the ideal program?
- Planning financially for the expense of higher education?
- Seeing their higher education through to college graduation?

Unfortunately, in most public schools, funding cutbacks and increased enrollment have caused college guidance counselors to be spread too thin and have too many students to accomplish what needs to be done. Many of them see a student one time per year or even less. This is not enough assistance to accomplish all that needs to be addressed.

A successful college guidance program should have a plan for accomplishing all of the bullet points above and assist students in obtaining as much financial benefit and assistance as possible for college.

When it comes to college guidance counseling, it is important to know that your child will:

- **Be systematically prepared for selecting and applying to colleges and universities.**
- **Meet the criteria needed for competitive application to desired colleges and universities.**
- **Have access to important tools to assist with the college preparation and application process.**
- **Have confidence in the path of study he or she chooses.**
- **Feel prepared and ready to be successful in future academic and career endeavors.**

ESSENTIAL TIP #3

Know what the school COMMUNITY and ENVIRONMENT will provide for your child.

Think for a minute about the aspects of school outside of the academic program. If you think about it long enough, you may begin to realize that there is a lot more to school than reading, math, language, history, and science. Every aspect of the school contributes to your child's overall educational experience, from the lunch program to athletics, from before and after school care to clubs and extracurricular activities, from community service requirements to immersive learning opportunities, and, of course, there is always the overwhelming social dynamic.

All of these components (and many more!) create the school community and environment. Think about the last time you visited your favorite restaurant or coffee shop. There are probably certain components



related to the environment and community there that make you feel a certain way and gravitate towards it. The decor was probably welcoming and warm, the barista knows your order and is always nice to you, and you get something that you value. The same should be true with your child's school. Although you probably didn't have to turn in homework for a grade or cram for a test the last time you ordered your latte, like your favorite coffee shop, there are number of components that should be present to create a desirable experience for both you and your child at school.

Community

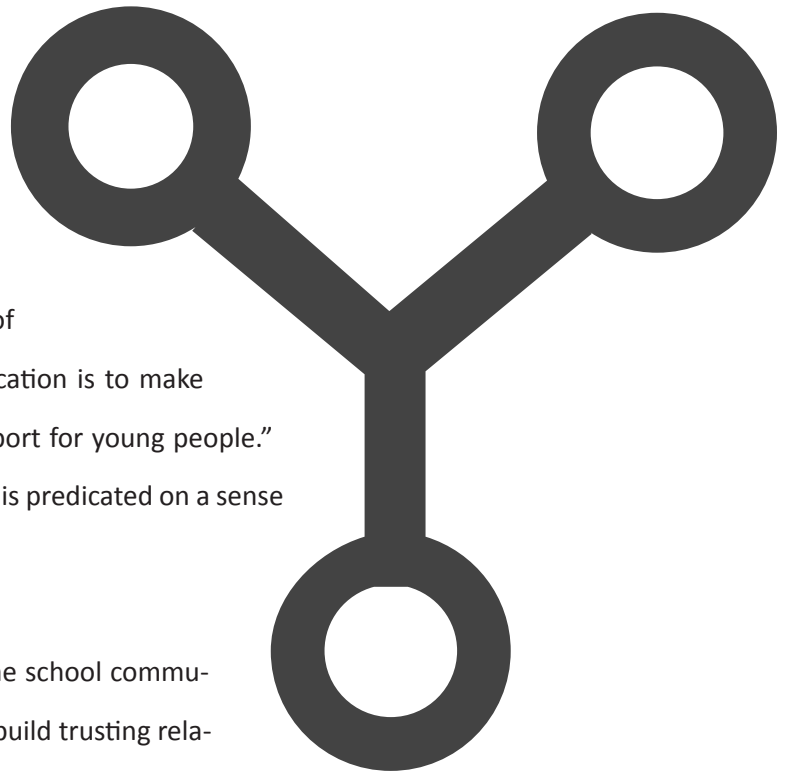
Karen Osterman, Hofstra University, defines community as a "feeling of belongingness within a group." She echoes research that calls for "one of the most fundamental reforms needed in [...] education is to make schools into better communities of caring and support for young people." According to her research, this sense of community, is predicated on a sense "of belonging, trust in others, and safety."

So the question for parents becomes, what does the school community offer to help my child feel a part of the school, build trusting relationships, and feel safe?

For many schools, the answer will be include, athletics, clubs, extracurricular opportunities, and a campus safety plan. Though these components are largely expected at a school, these components by themselves do not inherently build a sense of community.

How does the school administer these components? What are the school's goals in regard to social benchmarks? Does the school proactively engage the student with social learning?

Does the school offer these opportunities for my child to participate and experience a sense of community regardless of skill and/or ability?



Trusting relationships are always difficult for children, pre-teens, and teens to build as they mature socially. What common ground does my child share with his or her peers at school on which he or she can build lasting, trusting relationships? Will my child's peers cause him or her to struggle? Does my child's peers share our values? Will his or her peers build my child up and reinforce the values and morals I am teaching at home?

Environment

The environment of a school has a direct and immediate influence on students and their sense of community. Environment consists of much more than merely classrooms, hallways, and other facilities. The school environment is a much broader concept than most initially think. Beyond buildings and facilities, the school environment includes considerations like the presence of threats or dangers, alcohol, tobacco, drugs and paraphernalia, food service, playgrounds, safe drinking water, sanitation, overcrowding, emergency response plans, traffic safety, and even weapons. The California Department of Education includes school climate, bullying, and peer behavior as part of the definition of school environment.



In fact, a Harvard University study found that the school environment plays a critical role in student success. In fact, the Harvard study “found that students’ perceptions of school environment influenced their academic achievement directly and indirectly through the three types of school engagement” (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The research concluded that the school environment influenced students’ participation in school activities, their sense of belongingness, and even their ability to self-regulate.

In some districts, overcrowding has become the most pressing challenge faced by educators. How do schools adjust instructional practices when the teacher-student ratio climbs faster than facilities and funding can provide?

This is an important consideration for parents desiring achievement for their child. In fact, there is ample research that indicates a direct correlation between lower teacher-student ratios and student achievement (Okpala, Smith, Jones, and Ellis, 2000; Crampton, 1995; Wenglinsky, 1997).

As it turns out all of the factors that create the school environment make a dramatic impact on overall student success.

CONCLUSION

With the state of education today, there can certainly be a heightened sense of stress and anxiety when it comes to the academic upbringing of your children. Topics like Common Core, gender identity, evolution, and the rejection of traditional Christian values have caused many parents to scratch their heads and ask what alternatives exist. Making informed decisions with a commitment to providing the best opportunity is a wise step for parents seeking to help their children maximize their future potential and calling.

The upbringing in worldview is perhaps one of the most pressing concerns in the hearts and minds of Christian parents. Christian parents surveyed reported that how the school's curriculum aligns with their personal beliefs is their number one concern for their children's academic upbringing (Zeehandelaar & Winkler, 2013).

In addition to worldview, how a school prepares students to realize their future career goals and objectives as well as fulfilling the calling of God on their lives come down to a systematic approach to education that takes tomorrow's aspirations into account today. In this area, there are several components to consider when deciding if a particular school is the right school for your child and family. Accreditation, course of study and curriculum, as well as an active college guidance program are critical topics to consider.

Perhaps the most overlooked aspects of a school program are school culture and environment. In many ways these components first dictate how a student feels and integrates while he or she is at school, but more importantly and as research shows, how well a student will do at school. Issues like overcrowding, bullying, social pressures, as well as the presence of drugs, alcohol, and weapons all contribute to a student's feelings about school that impact individual student involvement in key areas.

Ultimately, these 3 ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD will assist you in identifying your educational philosophy and setting important priorities when evaluating schools for your child. Applied across the spectrum of schools, whether public/charter, private, and/or private-Christian, your search will become more focused and the most important intangible aspects of education will become clear. As you embark on your search, always seek God's guidance through prayer and peace. May God lead you to the perfect school family for you and your child.

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