

12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century

by Vryhof, Brouwer, Ulstein, and VanderArk, 1989 – book out of print

1. Clarifying and Applying a Statement of Mission

The Christian school's mission is clarified to shape all curricular goals and day-to-day practices. Parents, staff, and students discuss frequently and confirm by consensus the school's goals. They rephrase and restate from time to time the biblical rationale for the school's statement of purpose so that it makes sense to each new generation of teachers, students, and parents. School structures – administrators, boards, committees - are in place to keep practice in line with mission.

2. Developing an Optimistic Theo-Centric Worldview

The Christian school community stresses the restorative power of God's grace in individual lives and within the world community. In an age of cynicism and hopelessness, Christian school people focus on redemption, restoration, and "shalom" – as seen in history, as depicted in literature, as celebrated by the church. Because grace transcends the balance-sheet approach to life, cooperation comes before competition, service before self-interest.

3. Cultivating Christian Discernment

Trusting the Holy Spirit's guidance in the students' lives, the Christian school community offers opportunities and fosters responsibilities to exercise discernment – the making of informed Christian choices based on God's Word. The concepts of stewardship, justice, and compassion are translated into practice. When students choose poorly, teachers nurture and provide guidance; they do not simply punish or criticize.

4. Fostering Cultural Discretion

The Christian school experience preserves in students the ability to feel and express the full range of God-given emotions – wonder, shame, passion, and joy. Christian schooling insists there is meaning in life to discover and important cultural choices to be made. In the face of "future shock," sensory overload, and the resulting boredom, it protects students from becoming "flat-souled people."

5. Preparing for and Participating in a Changing World

Christian school teachers and students take the future seriously by confronting the realities of how and where and with whom students will spend their lives. As enormous changes continue in the twenty-first century – environmental threats, social upheaval, technological wizardry, economic restructuring – the Christian school experience equips students not only to live in such a world but also to transform it to reflect the coming of Christ's kingdom of love, restoration, and "shalom."

6. Addressing Real Problems and Generating Real Products

The Christian school curriculum is designed to address real problems, and its students are prepared to generate real products. Christian school students become "change agents" who will be the salt of the earth, people who will penetrate the status quo, object to injustices and failures, and work for Christian alternatives.

7. *Preparing for Later Vocational and Educational Opportunities*

In the Christian school, students learn a core knowledge base and develop essential life skills. The core knowledge base includes the story of God's people as found in the Bible and church history, the central realities of the natural world, the basic expressions of the larger culture, and a sense of history – all seen through “the spectacles of Scripture.” In our Information Age, the essential life skills include reading, writing, mathematics, communication through various media, finding and critically processing information, and independent learning.

8. *Attending to Each Student's Individual Development*

The Christian school pays attention to and affirms each student's developmental level. This approach focuses on a student's physical, emotional, intellectual, social, aesthetic, and spiritual growth process, not his/her rung on the K-12 ladder. Pedagogy is first of all effective and meaningful for the student, not convenient and manageable for the teacher.

9. *Providing Variety and Connections to Real Life*

The curriculum in the Christian school reflects the diversity, complexity, and richness of God's world. These facets are engaged, explored, and celebrated by teachers and students. As a “community of scholars,” they examine different ages, cultures, geographical areas, beliefs, and lifestyles.

10. *Promoting Christian Community*

The Christian school is a community in the Biblical sense. Covenant, not contract, builds community in the Christian school. Community will not arise if people are simply trading money for services. Trust and cooperation characterize student, staff, and community relationships. The key principle of community – Christian love in action – means worshiping, sharing, counseling, encouraging, and celebrating with Christian joy and hope.

11. *Recasting the Teacher's Role*

The Christian school curriculum allows for teacher strengths and artistry to be fully utilized. The teachers are facilitators, guides, coaches, and models at several levels; they are not simply dispensers of knowledge. They are worthy faculty members - curriculum creators, community members, change agents – as well as good teachers.

12. *Facilitating Change*

The Christian school community continuously seeks a more excellent way by planning and structuring for change. This effort requires time, money, and good communication. Administrators provide leadership and teachers have ownership. Worthy ideas are kept under discussion by all involved. Commendable practices are emphasized; undeserving ones are de-emphasized. While those seeking change allow others to save face, those skeptical of change allow the more daring to take risks. Trust is built on the idea that the Spirit speaks through the Body of Christ and not just through a single interpretation by one person or a few.