



On Our Mission Together

What Does It Mean To “Partner With Parents”?¹

Partnership Involves Share Values

In the last few years, many parents have had the unfortunate suspicion that their child’s government school education has been about more than mere facts and skills. [In some cases](#), the instruction has extended well beyond that charming old notion of the “Three Rs,” which we used to expect in the classroom. With a growing conflict between government schools and parents, the response has been a kind of national uprising. We’ve seen the effects of parents standing up for their kids in [Virginia](#), where “parental outrage drove Republican businessman Glenn Youngkin to victory over Democratic former governor Terry McAuliffe,” who sealed his political doom when he stated that [parents should have no say](#) in the education of their own kids.

The scandals of sexualized books or the ideas of “CRT” in the past few years were not the first objectionable materials presented to students of state schools. Some may remember the “sex ed” courses neatly tucked into mandatory “Health” Classes back in the 1990s, or the push for contraception and “safe sex” practices first marketed throughout the government schools. But some believe the problems go back much further than that, and it’s not so much about what was added as it was about what was taken away. As Pete Hegseth and David Goodwin argue in *The Battle for the American Mind*, many concerned parents simply believe that “the problem in our schools is what is being taught. It’s not. *The problem is what has been systematically, if quietly, removed*” (50). Long ago was Scripture removed from the curriculum. Long ago was prayer banished. Long ago were Christian catechisms taken out. How did this happen? The answer to that question is complicated and beyond the scope of this article. (One should simply read Hegseth and Goodwin’s book.)

Obviously, not all parents and teachers in the government school system are bad or even remotely supportive of everything that is taught. Many of us have friends and relatives who teach or lead in the government school system, who are trying to make a difference for the public good. Many of us can point to those districts where the rot hasn’t much affected them. But even if a particularly stout-hearted Christian activist comes along to fix the broken parts of secular state education, the effect is often to kick the same metaphysical can down the road.

¹ *The following is a series of articles written by Devin O’Donnell and the administrations of The Oaks to edify the culture at The Oaks and help parents.*

This is because education has to do with values, and a partnership between parents and schools can only be as strong as the values and beliefs they both hold in common.

Government education is said to be secular education. But consider how the secular world differs with what Christians hold to be sacred. Where we as Christians want to preserve the family and strengthen it, secularism wants to drive a wedge between parents and students and disintegrate natural attachments and loyalties. Where we want to teach the Bible and foster a love of God's Word, progressive secularists want to ban it from public space entirely. While we want to protect our kids from porn, progressives want to expose them to it in our public libraries. Where we want to uphold chastity and marriage, proponents of secularism promote expressive sexuality, abortion, and divorce.

An Old Greek Word That Explains A Lot

In light of all this, it's not surprising to imagine why some parents might even find it difficult to imagine a positive relationship with their child's school, one that is not characterized by antagonism and something like cold war spy craft. This is because it seems almost a given now that a government school is simply something we must put up with in order to gain the benefits of something called an "education" for our children. The idea that parents and teachers could have a healthy partnership, that they both might work together in a shared vision of handing on to their kids what is good, true, and beautiful—this sounds even more absurd. But to those who have been laboring in the fields of classical Christian education, the partnership with parents is not a happy coincidence but an intentional part of who we are. For a school like The Oaks Classical Christian Academy, that view of partnership is built into our mission:

The Oaks exists to partner with parents who seek to graduate classically educated young men and women who glorify Christ, shape culture, and shine the light of God's truth in every endeavor of life.

By "partner," we mean an agreement where the school and parents work together joyfully to educate children in the *paideia* of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Although difficult to translate, it's important to understand what this Greek word really means. For the antique world into which Christ was born, "paideia" was a term describing the program of education for the Greeks and Romans. But it was a supercharged word, denoting things far beyond classes and books, where students were enculturated into a way of life. This is why Paul tells fathers to bring up their children in "the training [*paideia*] and admonition of the Lord." One of the ways parents at The Oaks accomplish this is by disciplining them according to the standard set forth in Holy Scripture and in agreement with the methods and protocols established in the Parent-Student Handbook.

This relationship is demonstrated in that old Latin fragment, "*in loco parentis*," which does not mean that parenting is a crazy job but that the school stands "in place of the parent." While today's government schools are seeking to remove parents from the educational process and weaken that relationship, The Oaks wants to strengthen the partnership. The stronger and more united the partnership between parent and school, the more blessed students are likely to be. For students to transform into the mature Christian humans we want them to become, they need a consistent Christian culture.

This can play out in many ways. When, for instance, a child is corrected for the third time by a teacher, the parent's commitment to the mission means they will support that discipline appropriately in the home. But this partnership extends well beyond merely responding to correction in the classroom—even beyond parents responding faithfully to the feedback of poor marks or lack of academic progress. Faithful and charitable communication between parents and teachers is good too, but the partnership between school and families assumes that we possess a set of shared values, the foundation of which are the policies and principles spelled out in the Parent-Student Handbook. Agreeing on these things is just the beginning.

What else does this partnership indicate? What else does it look like? It involves parents working on their own to cultivate Christ-like virtue in their children. It looks like families holding the same standards of behavior in the home that are upheld in the classroom and in the halls. It looks like parents encouraging their children to take responsibility for themselves and at an early age develop what some have called an “anti-fragile” resilience. It looks like parents who are mindful that boys and girls are different and that they live out their gifts and calling in embodied ways. It looks like families in the home cultivating a sense of reverence for what is holy and pure, as well as giving deference to old things. It looks like families ordering their lives around regular worship and regular meals together, where the church and the table form two poles of orientation in the world. It looks like families engaging in the formative practices of prayer and reading God's word, so that children can themselves receive the same faith that was handed down to the saints (Jude 1:3). If we can be aligned in these critical ways—knowing that we are all sinners and that both family and school will miss the mark—then what we will produce is a culture that reflects the glory of God.

Partnership Around the Good Life

What we have described here is simply a collage of what The Oaks means by “partnership.” It is a little word that signifies deep things, and it's important to remember that this partnership is under attack today, especially in government schools, whose primary objective seems to get parents out of the way rather than to work with them, support them, and honor them. Why is this the case? It has to do with one's vision of the good life, and as Hegseth and Goodwin note, “A person's ‘vision of the good life’ is driven by something called *paideia*” (45).

What is “the good life” for a Christian? Is the basic unit of society the individual or the family? Can we imagine such a thing as a “Christian culture,” or can we only think in terms of a Christian “*subculture*”? These are questions that “*paideia*” answers. It is *prior* to education, the metaphysical environment in which all the math and letters and curricula have their being. (This is why, for instance, someone can now make the assertion that Math can be “racist” or that the statement “2+2 makes 4” bears the vestiges of “white supremacy.”) What this means is we live in a strange world of rival “*paideias*.” But we must recognize they can't all be right.

The joyful union of parents and educators instructing children in the “*paideia* of the Lord” is what God requires of us (Eph. 6:4). And it is a beautiful thing! We have the opportunity to orient our lives and schooling around God's word. We should want the Christian culture for our kids. But this partnership is only the first step in our mission. If we are partners in this work, where are we going together? This brings us to the next theme in our mission statement.