

Top Five Tips . . .

3. The teaching faculty is where “the rubber meets the road.” It is important to recognize that maintaining a low teacher-student ratio is integral to student success. Mr. Ryden says that “the teaching faculty is where the rubber meets the road” and he works diligently to keep tuition low while providing small classes and highly trained instructors. One way to accomplish this is through staffing assignments. For example, instead of hiring multiple college counselors, Geneva School has one and requires administrators to “wear many hats.”

Additionally, Mr. Ryden teaches seventh grade logic. This means that he gets a firsthand view of the needs of his teachers and can quickly respond to their needs. This also keeps Mr. Ryden’s teaching skills sharp and serves to ameliorate any philosophical divisions between the teaching staff and school administration.

4. Work to empower teachers. A teacher who feels empowered about his or her job is more likely to be able to solve problems on their own without the need of school administration. This saves work and spreads the leadership responsibilities around to different parts of the school. This is “distributed leadership,” not a division of labor, and can assist the school administrator in handling the various complex tasks of school leadership.

One of the unique challenges in administering a classical school is the dearth of teachers experienced in classical education. To counteract this need, Geneva School developed their own “in house” professional development program. Called “Geneva Institute Faculty Training” (GIFT), this program is designed to improve

teaching ability and educate new faculty on the skills they need to teach within the classical tradition.

5. Live out your theology. This is more than a tip, it is a requirement. Everything that is done at a classical and Christian school should be focused on the glory of God, our Creator, and His Son. The mission of Geneva School is “*to provide a classical education from a biblical worldview, to equip students for a lifetime of learning, service and leadership to the glory of God.*” This mission permeates the entire school.

Geneva School is a classical and Christian school and the faculty and administration strive to live out these principles every day. Each morning, the staff begins the day with a devotional, and accountability and responsibility are taught to students from a biblical perspective. Mr. Ryden says it is important, especially when dealing with teenagers, not to be a hypocrite. He says that nothing “turns off” a teenager faster than the feeling that an adult is hypocritical about his or her Christianity.

The task of being a successful school administrator is challenging, but it can also be rewarding. Running a classical and Christian school brings with it a unique set of challenges not seen in other traditional private schools or secular public education. However, a dedicated administrator, like Brad Ryden, who seeks to serve his subordinates and wants to see them succeed, can have an enormous positive impact on the lives of young people.

On Chess and Classical Christian Education

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Classical and Christian education is a three-stage process spanning the entirety of a kindergarten through twelfth grade education with the purpose of nurturing and forming biblically minded and well-educated students (utilizing the great books of the Western world as a curriculum). The first stage of the classical progression—the grammar stage—begins in kindergarten and terminates roughly in fifth grade. Students in this stage are especially apt to memorize and are encouraged to commit many facts and premises of literature, history, grammar, poetry, arithmetic, science, and Bible to memory. The logic stage roughly spans grades six through nine and (as students of this age seem by nature particularly apt to argument) has an emphasis upon linking the facts so committed in the grammar stage to practical utility through the use of formal argument. Finally, the poetic stage, roughly spanning the balance of high school, is a time in which most students feel a natural yearning for self-invention and self-expression, and are encouraged to draft and defend properly factual (grammar level) and properly reasoned (logic level) arguments in aesthetically appealing forms.

As is maintained above, classical and Christian education beyond the grammar level is founded upon the notion that clear, precise, and rigorous thought is a more important attribute of student achievement than the memorization or regurgitation of facts. And perhaps no intellectual activity demands, for that matter,

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the alacrity or logical prowess that the game of chess demands. Keen foresight with a reasoned inhibition to threat; poise, patience, and prudence in the attack; and a deep exercise of every neuron of intellectual ability are all required to be a good, or even a fairly good, player of chess. It is little wonder that classical Christian schools gravitate toward chess as an extra-curricular activity, as it would be a shame to eschew such a tool and art in the formation of children who otherwise engage the balance of the Western mind and soul.

Each game of chess, no matter how executed or how contrived, possesses three main stages of development. The opening (comprising the first 5–6 moves of each game) is the time in which forces are massed and initial positions taken. The midgame (usually comprising the next 20–30 or so moves) is the time in which strategies used in support of the opening lead to strategic conclusions and positions of defense and offense form. Finally, the endgame, comprising perhaps the last 10–25 moves of each game, is a time of intense creativity on the part of both players, as they dodge and desist the final, deathly conclusion—checkmate and victory for the foe. It can be maintained that the three stages of the chess game correspond, at least roughly, to the three core stages of a classical Christian education (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), and that the modes and themes of these stages largely mirror the modes and themes of the classical model.

Like the content in the grammar stage, openings and their variations must be exhaustively memorized to

with its mechanical, plodding, and possibly underwhelming evolution of positions and expectations. Finally, as in the poetic stage of

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produce a quick repertoire of effective countermeasures against the early aggressions of the other player. And it is no wonder that grammar-level students delight so much in constructing the great historical openings of the game: the Ruy Lopez, Queen's Gambit, Sicilian openings, Four Knights opening, Vienna, Catalan, etc. Such students can, with sufficient care, be made to appreciate the benefits of having a ready knowledge of openings. Masters as well learn chess openings from their masters in a classical manner, first beginning with the openings and progressing to the more reasoned tread of the midgame, in which the advantages stored and garnered before effloresce, in the hope of each player, into a distinct numerical or positional advantage. The midgame, like the logic stage of classical Christian education, stresses effective strategy. The midgame requires an unceasing attention to detail and a boundless enthusiasm to "think ahead" and reason through the complex and far-reaching consequences of long-term goals. It is no wonder that logic-school students excel so masterfully at the midgame,

classical Christian education, the endgame stresses elegance instead of raw force, and masters have been known to delay inevitable checkmates just to ensure that the end of the game is "beautiful"—that is, completed in the most concise possible way, with the least "out-of-the-way" maneuvering and the fewest pieces possible. As in rhetoric, chess is a game of persuasion—both of oneself and the other player—that the conclusion is, in fact, not inevitable. To mind come a million ideas of how the game could have changed, how it could have been cleaner, and (for the defeated) what might have changed the denouement.

Chess should be an integral portion of a balanced classical Christian curriculum, not for the least reason that the game parallels classical Christian education in all of its stages, and uniquely reinforces these stages. At Paideia Academy, the chess program is alive and well, and we invite you to explore this unique and difficult program at your convenience.

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