

## Parents and Tuition: Investment or Sacrifice?

The words we use in our schools are very important. The Gospel of John begins with the words: “In the beginning was the Word”. The word of God is called a “sword” (Rev. 1:16). The idea of communication is clearly an important Christian concept that is both abstract (language) as well as embodied (the person of Jesus). The story of the Tower of Babel is a reminder of the dangers that language can be. In our Christian schools, we must always be deeply sensitive to the words we use and the intended content/interpretation of those words.

Here, we apply this to the word “tuition”. As CSM notes in other contexts, money and Christian schools have an uneasy co-existence. There is a sense in which our schools feel that money is a secular potential evil rather than a gift of God given for us to steward. Some are unabashedly apologetic about the need to charge tuition at all using language such as:

- we try to make our tuition as affordable as possible
- we have the lowest tuition in our area

Other of our schools are more neutral in tone, stating tuition and then providing clear reference to financial aid and other ways to defray the tuition cost. Few, if any, are ‘proud’ of their tuition.

CSM suggests that tuition is a great good. The issue is not whether the tuition level is \$6,000, \$12,000, or \$24,000. None of these numbers is “high” or “low”. They are the “right” number if, as a result of charging it, the school can:

- Provide resources that allow it to deliver the mission with excellence
- Balance its budget
- Compensate its employees honorably and respectfully
- Provide a safe and optimal learning environment
- Minimize / eliminate debt
- Maintain a reserve

This is CSM’s Ox Principle.

Tuition, then, is a gift of God given to the school to steward in order to enable the Christian school to fulfill its God-given purpose – its mission. The relationship of the school to its parents is therefore neither one of apology (we are embarrassed we have to charge tuition), of supplication (we beg you to pay as much as you can afford), nor of fear (we hope our tuition won’t turn you off our school). Rather, the school presents its tuition as:

- An opportunity for the parent to invest wisely in the lives of their children
- A responsibility to ensure the child is provided excellence, safety, and mission success
- A stewardship of the present to ensure the school’s future

These ideas of opportunity, responsibility, and stewardship are powerful. We recommend that you clearly state this on your website. A statement about tuition on the tuition or admission page might read:

*Redeemer Christian School determines its tuition level annually to meet the needs of the school today and to ensure appropriate stewardship of the school's future through the Board's Strategic Plan. The Board and school's Leadership Team prayerfully consider the meaning of the school's mission and how that will come alive in the life of your child each year. Your tuition payment empowers our school to deliver an excellent program staffed by committed and expert faculty in a safe facility. We consider this to be a partnership with you where you are gifted the resources to invest in your children's future and we are held accountable for the stewardship of the resources given to us through the Board's Strategic Plan and the annual budget.*

Similarly, we recommend that you include a statement in your admission materials. Along with a descriptor of what the school offers, great pictures of students in action, validation quotes, include a simple explanation of what tuition is and how it is spent. A simple pie chart can illustrate how tuition pays for program, people, facility, and strategic future developments reflecting opportunity, responsibility, and stewardship. Along with the printed / downloadable materials, include a video of the Head of School / Principal in a short (less than 3 minute) video explaining the same thing.

In communicating verbally with current parents and prospective parents, train the person who answers the phone, the immediate contact on entry to the school, the admission staff, the teachers, and the division leadership in the use of the language of opportunity, responsibility, and stewardship. Ensure that, if currently present, the language of sacrifice is not in use anymore. A common script might be put together so that the message is always the same when the question of tuition arises. The following is an example of a possible answer to the question: how much is tuition?

*Tuition is \$6,800. It is an opportunity investment by you as parents in the life of your child. The school takes its responsibility seriously to steward your investment and provide excellence to your child. Tuition is set by the Board to ensure both present and future of the school so that your child will have an excellent education for all 8 years your child will be at the school.*

The re-orientation of language, and therefore thinking, from sacrifice to investment takes away the feeling of "loss" of money the parent might experience rather than "gain" as a result of investment. It gives everyone at the school great confidence in the school's approach to stewardship. It focuses both parents and school/Board on the outcomes of tuition rather than on the money itself. The admission and mission orientation of the school therefore become much stronger. Tuition moves from barrier to opportunity.

This is equally true for families where they cannot pay the full tuition. The same language applies to the provision of financial aid. The family invests what it can afford through a professional financial aid process and the school invests in the child to ensure access to a Christ-centered education. As CSM states elsewhere, the Christian School provides financial aid because:

- It derives from the Great Commandment
- It helps the Christian school to operate without partiality reflecting the nature of God
- It reflects the commands of God to support the child, the parent, and the foreigner

Within the context of a strategic budgeting process, financial aid is also an investment for the school, not a “loss”.

We encourage our Christian schools to speak about money with confidence. Of course, the “love of money is the root of many evils” (1 Tim. 6:10). Prayerfully considered as a gift of God for the school to steward, that same money becomes opportunity for the family, responsibility fulfillment for the school, and stewardship safeguarding excellence both in the present and the future.

CSM Mission: For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students

Website: [christianschoolmanagement.org](http://christianschoolmanagement.org)

Email: [christianschoolmanagment@gmail.com](mailto:christianschoolmanagment@gmail.com)

Membership: \$7.77 month <https://christianschoolmanagement.org/articles/CSMA-membership>

CSM is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to healthy, hopeful Christian schools. It works with Christian schools that have an average tuition K-12 under \$12,360. 10% of its revenues is tithed into the CSMA Foundation in order to assist Christian leaders and schools with advice/counsel and to fund Christian school research. We charge for consulting based on the tuition level of the individual school to make it affordable for all.

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