

Christian Parents are Fundamentally Selfish – Good!

Because the Christian school is so respectful of the parent and the parent’s role, it is difficult to get a sense of the true relationship between the parent and the school. A typical statement is as follows (taken from a real school):

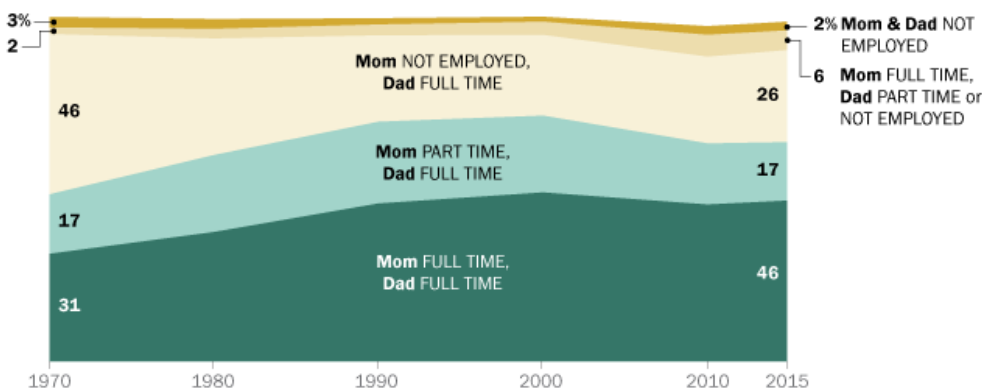
We believe the Bible establishes the parents as the primary educators of their children. Parents must be the primary teachers of their children in such basic skills and character qualities as listening attentively, giving prompt obedience to authority, showing respect for others, maintaining personal integrity, exercising appropriate self-control and completing all assigned work in a timely and quality manner. While the school can do much in working with the parents to help develop these qualities, they are considered primarily in the realm of parental responsibility, and they must be reasonably present in the children if the home/school partnership is to be successful. We view the role of (the) Christian School as assisting parents by providing an educational program that will reinforce the Christian emphasis of the home as well as providing a formal academic and vocational education from the preschool through secondary school levels. This is a Biblically rooted partnership, in that the Hebrew words for parents (horim) and for teachers (morim) both pertain to the task of teaching and instruction. Thus, Christian school teachers are seen as coming alongside the parents and working to accomplish the common goals of Christian education.

It is not CSM’s desire to either argue with or negate these kinds of statements. We have no alternative Scriptural vision. It is our experience that this is not how it works out in practice. While we may be sorrow about this, the reality of parents and the school is very different:

- both parents work

In Nearly Half of Two-Parent Households, Both Mom and Dad Work Full-Time

% of couples, by work arrangement



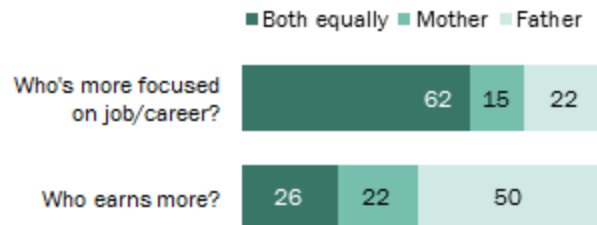
Note: Based on employment status in the prior year among male/female married couples with at least one child younger than 18 in the household. Both married and cohabiting couples included since 2010. Data regarding cohabiting couples unavailable for earlier years. Other work arrangements not shown; same-sex couples are excluded.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1970-2015

- the father doesn't always make more money (in 2011, 15% of households with young children were comprised of a wife who out-earned her husband); generally, each feels equally committed to career

When Both Parents Work Full Time, Most Say Neither Career Takes Priority

% of parents in households where both parents are employed full time saying ...



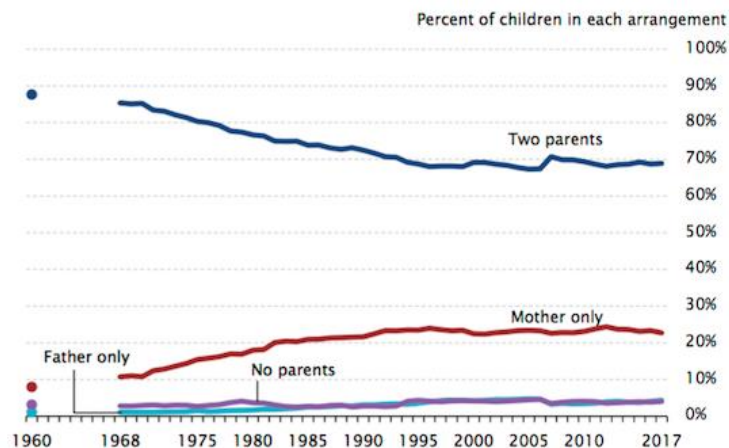
Note: Based on respondents who work full time and are married to or living with a partner who works full time and is the parent of at least one of the respondent's children (n=531). "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, Sept. 15-Oct. 13, 2015. Q95,96

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- an increasing number of families are led by a single mother or father

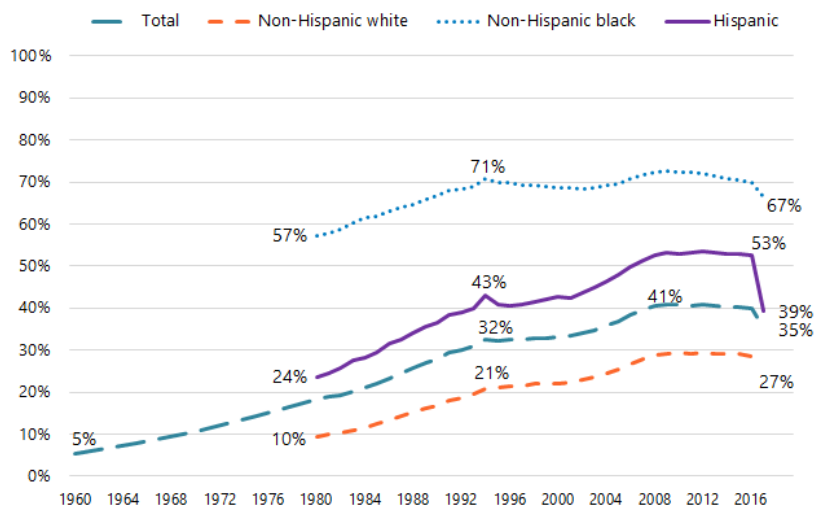
Living arrangements of children: 1960 to present



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1960, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1968 to 2017.

- a increasing number of children are being born to single mothers

Percentage of All Births that Were to Unmarried Women, by Race and Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1960-2017



Sources: Data by race and Hispanic origin for 1980-1989: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2014). Health, United States, 2013 [Table 5]. Hyattsville, MD: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nus/previous.htm#tables>. All other data for 1960-1999: Ventura, S. J., & Bachrach, C. A. (2000). Nonmarital childbearing in the United States, 1940-1999 [Table 4]. National Vital Statistics Reports, 48(16). Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr48/nvsr48_16.pdf. Data for 2000-2006: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2002-2009). Births: Final data for 2000-2006. Hyattsville, MD: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/nvsr.htm>. Data for 2007-2017: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2018). CDC

childtrends.org

These social changes and trends mean that the Christian school must deal with what is, not what might or should be. There is, indeed, a strong historical argument that these are all long-term trends that we have ignored for too long.

The Christian school cannot depend on the family for the attitudes, customs, worldview, faith commitment, moral values that it espouses. In one school we surveyed, fully 28% of the families admitted they never went to church even though they had to sign a statement of faith and church membership on admittance to the school. Families are split by theologies, political positions, economic strains, dysfunctional relationships.

Not only is the family not the dominant partner, it is not even an equal partner. Whether looking at prosperous families or families in poverty, parents are trying hard (think of your own experience!), working hard, and fearful of the future in an age of headlines such “Helping Children Cope in the Age of School Shootings”. Our schools are locked down (in the United States though not in Canada) and we employ armed guards to walk the corridors. Parents come to help, not to be partners in the education of their children. They expect us to do that job – including morals, attitudes and the rest. They certainly want the school to reflect their own beliefs and belief/value systems, but the school is where it is going to happen. And by the time the child has become a teenager, in most of our schools most of the time, the school dominates family life controlling the teen’s waking hours through school, homework, and extra-curricular activities. Think baseball or volleyball season.

This is not intended to be a statement of “good” or “bad”. It is intended to look squarely at the situation in most of our schools. We are in charge. And even as we complain about the workload, we like it that way. At least, we make no genuine attempt to change it.

This means that we can also be highly realistic about the relationship we have with our parents. They are not fundamentally on 'our' side; they are not a member of 'our' adopted family qua school; they are not here to make us succeed; they are not paying tuition because it feels good. Our parents are here for one reason only – they believe it is good for their children. On that base of understanding, the school can have a fantastic relationship with the parents. Unfortunately, we find schools find themselves constantly disappointed and even cynical about parents because they have unrealistic expectations of them. If we just accept them as selfish, interested primarily in their children, we will get along much better.

Selfish has a bad reputation. Proverbs 18: 1 reads “An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels.” Philippians 2: 3 reads “in humility, value others above yourselves”. That’s not what we are talking about. We just recognize that the family is a special place like no other, and that the connection between the parents and the school is through the child. We also recognize that the family is under stress and that the school can be a strong support during the children’s formative years. Often, indeed, the school is a stabilizing influence for its families, akin to what the church used to be. It is where many parents find their friends and where they find opportunities to socialize both in their children’s activities and in meeting with each other outside the school.

Parents should be focused on their own children. No-one else is going to be, at least not in that 24 hour, 365 days a year way! We shouldn’t expect their attitude to be altruistic. We should understand their desire for the good of their children – insofar as we are able to deliver on our mission promise, the parent will support the school wholeheartedly, giving generously in time, advocacy, and money. We should also understand that when we do not deliver on that promise, the parent will stop supporting the school. This is most obviously evident after the child graduates.

With the child as the fulcrum of the parent/school relationship, we can have great confidence moving forward. For most children, most of the time, the school will do a great job and the parent will be happy, grateful, and generous. Occasionally, the school will not do so well and there will be a ‘divorce’ with varying degrees of acrimony. It’s not personal. It’s because the parent is selfish about their child.

We advise therefore that our Christian schools continue to hope for the ideal represented by the statement at the beginning of this article. We advise the reality as well that religious, social, and economic trends place the school as the dominant partner in a child’s upbringing during school age years, even as we acknowledge that the parent is still the key relationship for the child. The parent is relying on us. We advise that our relationship with the parent is based on the child-fulcrum and that we can expect a great relationship only and as we fulfill our mission promise. Our relationship is year to year, even month to month. We can have great confidence in our parents to do what’s best for their children, whether or not it’s good for the school. Then we won’t be disappointed at “lack of support” or “engagement”. We advise that our attempts to engage the parent’s support should be focused on and through the child whether it is in volunteering, giving, or serving. Then the ‘selfish’ parent will be our best supporter.

CSM Mission: For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students

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Membership: \$7.87 month

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 \$12,775. 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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