

How Do You Know?

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As a former Christian high school principal and head of school I pondered more than once the question that I am confident you are asking, “How do I Know?” During my years in administrative leadership I never found the answer.

Since you are taking time to read this you are likely struggling with the same age-old question, “How do I know if our school is effective in the spiritual formation of our students?” The typical Christian school recruiting brochure, parent and student handbooks, and all manner of advertising laud the excellence of the school in preparing students for life who are intellectually developed and spiritually formed.

It is quite probable that the mission and/or vision statement of your school speaks of a Christ-centered education, a distinctive that sets the school apart from the public and private school sector that are not Christian in your community. But the question remains, “How do you validate whether or not spiritual formation is actually taking place in the lives of your students?”

As a Christian educator for more than 40 years I know how to measure the intellectual development and academic progress of students. All of us who are trained educators have been well schooled in the metrics of measuring school effectiveness through all manner of testing materials. Some standardized tests even offer a Bible knowledge subtest. But are we really measuring a student’s spiritual formation or just the student’s cognitive understanding of God?

Dan Egeler, Ed.D., Vice President of International Ministries for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), writes that some would argue that the spiritual formation of an individual is clouded in a mystery and one should seek to preserve that mystery. Along with Dr. Egeler, I question this approach and wonder if rather than “preserving the mystery,” we are hiding behind a cloud of misunderstanding and uncertainty?

We all recognize that it is difficult to quantify matters of the heart, to identify and verify those virtues that comprise spiritual formation. II Peter 1:5-9 seems to suggest that there are certain virtues or spiritual development that can be measured. Peter states: *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if*

anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

While the process of how the spiritual formation of your students takes place may be difficult to define since it is a product of the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life, Peter suggests that in some ways, “*if you possess these qualities in increasing measure*” they will create in the individual a spiritual effectiveness that is observable. I propose that the spiritual formation of your students can and should be measured if the core distinctive that sets the Christian school apart is truly its core distinctive. When we engage in a process of assessment and evaluation of the things we consider important in the lives of our students or in the culture and climate of the school, then we have a starting point for identifying and preserving those things we do well and targeting those areas that need improvement. It has been said that we need to engage in measuring what matters.

Graybeal and Associates, LLC, (www.graybeal.org) has developed and tested a process known as the *Spiritual Formation Audit* with the aid of leading Christian educators and researchers. The end product of this research focuses on three domains of spiritual formation: the head, the heart, and the hands. If you would like more information (cost of the service, process details, etc.) about the *Spiritual Formation Audit*, please contact me at:

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