

# Christian Schools: Is Your Investment Worth it?

By Michael Z. Zigarelli, PhD

As the dean of a business school, I tend to think in terms of return on investment, or ROI in my world. So when my wife, Tara, and I considered shifting our four elementary-age kids from public school to Christian school, one of my first thoughts was, “What’s the return on investing in a Christian school?”

Perhaps you think that way as well, and you’ve asked questions like these:

- What’s the real value of a Christian-based education?
- Should we spend money today that we could earmark for college?
- Is a Christian school really worth its price tag?

In our case, the price tag before us was daunting. When we did the math, we realized we’d be making a commitment to a six-figure expense through twelfth grade—about the same cost as a couple of college educations or the principal on our mortgage!

Most business professors don’t get paid as much as the executives we teach, so I admit that it was tempting at that point to stay with the status quo, especially since the public schools in our district were pretty decent. Compared to our local Christian school, there wasn’t a huge gap in SAT scores or college entrance rates. So why not just save the money and rely on home and church for values education?

Frankly, we concluded, values education through home and church would simply not be enough for us. Kids, like adults, often adopt the values of their peers and their teachers, and we saw signs that this was already starting to happen. We were diligently pouring ourselves into our kids’ lives at home, training them up in faith and virtue to the best of our ability. But seven hours a day, five days a week, they were being reeducated, marinated in a secular worldview that was competing for their precious, malleable minds.

Like so many parents, Tara and I want our kids in a safe, nurturing, academically challenging environment (with small class sizes). That’s certainly a big part of the ROI for Christian schooling. But the other bottom line in Christian schools is character development: renewing children’s minds so they’re God-centered rather than self-centered when making decisions.

Someday—someday too soon—our four kids will be making those decisions without consulting us. Tara and I want to help them do so now by shaping their hearts to love God. This is the most important responsibility God has entrusted to us, so we can use all the help we can get—seven hours a day, five days a week.

That’s why we selected a local Christian school for our kids. It’s a school with caring, experienced teachers; a school with terrific facilities; a school with small classes and a big commitment to academic excellence; and most of all, a school that nurtures our kids’ spiritual lives without being legalistic about it. Though the financial pressure is sometimes great, the ROI— well-educated kids who genuinely love God and neighbor— is far greater.