



CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ADMISSIONS RESOURCE

In the wake of recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on marriage and the growing number of states that have radically redefined marriage, many Christian schools have sought guidance on how prepare for and address same-sex behavior, sexual identity confusion, and cross-dressing issues that arise in the student admissions process.

This document is intended to guide your Christian school through a proactive evaluation of its governing policies and admissions procedures, and then provide you with step-by-step suggestions on how to deny a student admission if that becomes necessary. The goal is to bolster your school's constitutional and statutory defenses should it face a lawsuit for discrimination. We trust that the information below will help prepare your Christian school to face today's challenging culture.

CORE AREAS CHECKLIST

There are three main areas Christian schools should proactively evaluate and strengthen before they are confronted with these types of issues.

1. Bylaws and Governing Documents

Bylaws and governing documents establish “non-negotiables” for the school. A Christian school should ensure that its bylaws and governing documents contain language clearly identifying it as a religious organization. This will enable the school to take advantage of possible exemptions in federal, state, or local laws for religious entities. A school should not think that it is “self-evident” that it is a religious organization simply because it identifies itself to the public as a Christian school. Rather, concrete steps, such as the ones recommended below, should be taken to clearly establish that the school operates as a religious organization.

The following statements should be included in the school's bylaws. But if that is not feasible, then these statements should be passed as policies that apply to the school's daily operations. The particular language used in each statement is not as important as the fact that these statements exist in the school's governing documents. Each school should tailor the language to suit its own theological beliefs and practices.

- Include a statement of the school's religious purpose and mission. This should specifically include:
 - A message the school wants to communicate to the outside world. For example, a school might see its purpose, in part, as being “to share the knowledge of life in Christ Jesus with our community” or “to be a true representation of [denomination] doctrine to the world.”
 - A desire to partner or associate with people who will further the school's religious purpose and mission. For example, part of the school's purpose and mission might be to



associate with like-minded teachers, parents, and students to communicate the school's message to the world and train the next generation of Christian leaders.

- A church or religious denomination affiliation (if applicable).
- Include a statement of religious doctrine or belief that includes statements on the following issues:
 - Statement concerning the Bible as the authoritative and final standard for belief and conduct. Identify a governing body (e.g. board of directors, supervising pastor) that is the sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture for the school.
 - Statement concerning marriage, including its definition by God as the life-long covenant between one man and one woman, and that all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage are sin.
 - Statement concerning gender, including that God immutably creates each person to reflect His image as male or female.
- Include a statement that each employee must sign affirming that they have read the school's mission statement and statement of religious belief, are in agreement with these policies, and are willing to abide by them. Ensure that the school retains any signed statements of agreement as part of the employee's permanent record.

2. Admission Procedures

Each school should have a well-defined admissions procedure that includes clear statements that the school is a religious organization, and incorporates several "circuit-breakers" in the admissions process. These "circuit breakers" will allow for an independent evaluation and appropriate response if the school is confronted with an application indicating a lifestyle or belief system inconsistent with the school's religious beliefs.

- Information Packet
 - Include a clear explanation of the school's religious purpose and mission, and its religious beliefs.
 - Include a list of admissions criteria that the school uses in evaluating prospective students, especially spiritual and behavioral criteria.
 - Include a request that the parents and student read the Student Handbook, and proceed with the application process only if they are in agreement with and willing to abide by the policies in the Handbook.



➤ Application

- Include a section for “biological father” and “biological mother,” and the status of the parents’ relationship (i.e. married, divorced, deceased, never married), as well as an “alternative family information” section for step- or adoptive parents, or guardians.
- Include an agreement section for parents (and students in grades 7-12) to sign that they have read the Student Handbook, they have discussed the Handbook with their student, and both parents and student certify their consent and submission to all policies in the Handbook. Ensure that the school retains any signed statements of agreement as part of the permanent record of the student/family.
- Request a copy of each student’s birth certificate. This can be used to verify birth gender, age, and citizenship (if applicable).

➤ Interview

- If practicable, conduct a personal interview of all new student applicants and their parents, and use it to gain insight into family dynamics, faith background, behavior, and so forth.

➤ Notice of Admission or Denial

- Admission or denial of admission to the school should be communicated to the applicant in writing. Ensure that records of admission and/or denial are retained for an appropriate period of time.
- A school is not legally required to communicate the reasons for its denial of admission, but there may be instances where it is appropriate to communicate this information. If a school determines that it must deny admission due to a student or parent’s lifestyle that is inconsistent with the school’s religious beliefs, it is always best to seek legal advice prior to issuing the written denial.

3. Student, Parent, and Teacher Handbooks

All handbooks should reinforce and build upon the religious foundation established in the school’s bylaws and governing documents. The handbooks should:

➤ Include the school’s religious mission statement and statement of religious beliefs.

➤ Include a Christian code of conduct, grounded in the school’s religious beliefs.

- The code should address: (1) identifying and dressing in conformity with one’s biological gender; (2) using the restroom that conforms with one’s biological gender; and (3) abstaining from all sexual conduct outside the life-long union of one man and one woman in marriage.
- The code should also address non-sexual behaviors such as cheating, stealing, respect for authority, and so forth.



- Include a warning that failure to comply with the expected standards of Christian conduct will subject the student or teacher to potential disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Clearly distinguish between the sin of a struggling believer and unrepentant sin.
- Include a warning that the Handbooks are subject to change without notice by decision of the school's governing body.
- Include a written agreement statement to be signed by the parents (and students in grades 7-12) stating that he or she has read, is in agreement with, and is willing to abide by the established standards of the school as outlined in the Handbook. Ensure that any signed statements of agreement are retained as part of the permanent record of the student/family.

STEPS FOR DENYING ADMISSION

For Christian schools that are faced with an admissions inquiry or an application for admission that the school needs to deny due to sexual preference, sexual-identity confusion, or cross-dressing issues, here are suggestions on how to proceed:

1. Follow the School's Admissions Procedures

Each school should follow its stated admissions procedures. If the school has incorporated the suggestions listed above, the admissions procedures should include several "circuit breakers" such that the denial of admission will not come as any surprise to the student or parents.

2. Deny on a Neutral Basis

If there is a neutral basis on which to deny the application, such as lack of space, incomplete or false application, etc., that should be the reason given. This avoids the need to expressly deny the student on the basis of incompatibility with the school's religious beliefs.

3. If There Are No Other Options, Deny on a Religious Basis

But if it is not possible to deny the student admission on a neutral basis, the school should clearly communicate that the denial is based upon incompatibility with the school's religious beliefs. The school should be able to point to its bylaws, statement of faith, mission, or other policies that make clear the school's religious beliefs concerning marriage and human sexuality.

Carefully craft the language of a denial. Some suggested language includes:

- "The application demonstrates that the student is unable to unreservedly affirm the school's Statement of Faith and comport with its religious values."
- "We cannot accept the application because this student is unwilling to abide by the school's standards of Christian conduct."



But above all, avoid any demeaning or insulting language. Be charitable and compassionate, but firm in the denial. If the school chooses to issue the denial in writing, it is always best to seek legal advice first.

It is our hope that these guidelines will help you structure your school to meet today's challenging culture. Alliance Defending Freedom is ready to assist and defend your right to operate as a Christian school. These guidelines are general in nature and are not intended to provide legal advice. If you need legal advice concerning your particular situation, please contact Alliance Defending Freedom at (800) 835-5233 to have an attorney review your situation.



APPENDIX A

SAMPLE BYLAWS LANGUAGE

The following are provided as examples only. There is no “magic language” in any of these areas that should be copied verbatim. Rather, each school should incorporate its own language and tailor each document to the needs of its specific educational program.

Sample Statement of Biblical Authority

The statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our faith. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of school doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our [governing board, supervising pastor] is the school’s final interpretive authority on the Bible’s meaning and application.

Sample Statement on Marriage and Sexuality

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one’s biological gender is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that term “marriage” has only one meaning and that is marriage sanctioned by God which joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has prohibited intimate sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography, and attempting to change one’s biological sex or otherwise acting upon any disagreement with one’s biological sex) or advocacy of sexual immorality, is sinful and offensive to God.

We believe that in order to preserve the mission and integrity of the school as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the students and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by the school and all person who attend the school should agree to and abide by this Statement on Marriage and Sexuality.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the policy of this school.



APPENDIX B

SAMPLE ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

Sample Introductory Letter to Prospective Parent

Dear Parents:

Thank you for your interest in our school. We have adopted an admissions policy that opens the school to families who are like-minded spiritually, who are supportive of our philosophy, objectives, and standards of education, and whose children meet our enrollment standards. Our purpose is to serve families who desire not simply a private education, but a distinctively *Christian* education for their children.

Before applying for admission to our school, please read the Student Handbook provided in this introductory packet. The Student Handbook will introduce you to many of the school's policies, procedures, and expectations for both parents and students.

The first several pages of the Handbook explain our religious purpose, mission, and beliefs. This school unashamedly believes, teaches, and practices a literal interpretation of the Word of God. If you do not agree with our religious mission and beliefs, enrolling your child in our school will likely cause him or her confusion. For example, if a question regarding biblical lifestyles arises in chapel or your child's classroom, the teacher will answer from a biblical viewpoint consistent with our mission and belief statement. If your beliefs and lifestyle choices are not in agreement with our doctrinal stance, that answer will likely create conflict in your child's heart and mind. This internal conflict could drive a wedge between you and your child, cause your child to negatively judge you as a parent, or force your child to choose between our teaching and what he or she learns at home. We respect your desire to place your child in the best possible learning environment, but if you are not in full agreement with our doctrinal positions, it will be best for all concerned if you do not enroll your child at our school.

Biblical principles are integrated into every subject taught at our school. Our staff is committed not only to academic excellence, but also to teaching students how to apply the truths of God's Word to every aspect life. If you are in agreement with the teachings of God's Word, this school will complement the beliefs and ideals your child is taught at home. We look forward to partnering with you to educate your child in God's truth.

Sample Standards for Evaluating Prospective Students

A. Spiritual Considerations

1. Personal Christian commitment of parents and student.
2. Willingness of parents and student to be supportive of the school's Christian philosophy of education.



3. Willingness of parents and student to support the administration and faculty in carrying out the goals and programs of the school.

B. Behavioral Considerations

1. History of acceptable citizenship in previous school experience.
2. Agreement of parents and student to abide by the behavior standards established by the school.

C. Academic Considerations

1. Documented record of acceptable grades in previous school experience.
2. Acceptable scores on achievement tests.

D. Personal Considerations

1. Student's special interests, talents, and skills.
2. School makes no distinction in its admission policy on the basis of race, color, or national and ethnic origin.

Sample Handbook Agreements for Parents and Students

Parents: Please read the following statements carefully and sign below to indicate your agreement.

I hereby affirm that I have read the Student Handbook and discussed its policies with my student. I certify that I consent to and will submit to all governing policies of the school, including all applicable policies in the Student Handbook.

I understand that the standards of the school do not tolerate profanity, obscenity in word or action, dishonor to the Holy Trinity and the Word of God, disrespect to the personnel of the school, or continued disobedience to the established policies of the school.

I understand that the services of the school are engaged by mutual consent, and that either the school or I reserve the right to terminate any or all services at any time. Admission to the school is a privilege, not a right, and admission for one school year does not guarantee automatic admission for future school years.

Signature of Father

Date

Signature of Mother

Date



Students in Grades 7-12: Please read the following statement carefully and sign below to indicate your agreement.

I hereby affirm that I have read the Student Handbook. I certify that I consent to and will submit to all governing policies of the school, including all applicable policies in the Student Handbook.

I understand that admission to the school is a privilege, not a right, and that any behavior, either on or off campus, which is not consistent with the school's standards could result in the loss of that privilege.

Signature of Student

Date



APPENDIX C

SAMPLE STANDARDS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Sample Introduction to Standards of Christian Conduct

Students at this school are expected to display positive Christian character traits. This is the overriding principle relative to all the rules for student behavior. Every effort is made to guide the Christian student to live each day in such a manner as to manifest both his love for and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Students, by virtue of their enrollment, agree to live within the framework of the school's standards of conduct. Agreeing to these standards obligates the student to assume responsibility for honorable adherence to them while under the jurisdiction of the school. This is a matter of integrity.

It is our policy to involve the parents of our students when there is a continued difficulty at school or related activities. Consistent support of the faculty and administration by parents, both publicly and in private, is greatly appreciated and is of great importance in our work of teaching and training children and young people.

Any behavior, either on or off campus, that indicates a student has little desire to live a life honoring to God, or any conduct that gives evidence of disregard for the spirit of the school standards, is sufficient cause for disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion.

Faculty, staff, and students are expected to operate within the rules and policies of the school. While individual teachers may have additional classroom policies, no one has the authority to give students permission to violate the written rules and policies of the school. While rules and policies are occasionally changed for good reasons, everyone is expected to follow all rules and policies as long as they are in place.

The school generally follows the discipline procedures contained in this Handbook. However, there are circumstances in which the school administration may determine that it is appropriate not to follow progressive discipline steps. In cases in which a student has engaged in egregious, immoral, or other unacceptable behavior, the school reserves the right to suspend or expel the student immediately.

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