

*Proposal for an Integrated  
Classical Christian School Day*

*Submitted for the consideration of the board  
of Whitefield Christian School, July 4, 1998.*

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## *Applying Sayers's Model*

The following three ideas taken from *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* by Douglas Wilson motivate our proposal:

- Every child is unique; therefore, an educational system which does not allow children to learn at different paces will not appropriately achieve the best possible education for each child.
- All knowledge is unified in the holy, triune God, and, thus, teaching of the academic disciplines should be unified and focused on the worship and enjoyment of Him.
- A student well-trained in the Trivium will be prepared for university studies roughly two years ahead of the twentieth-century American public school student norm.

These three notions are explicated below.

1.1 Dorothy Sayers, in her essay "Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning," stresses that children must not be herded through an educational system, but must be carefully attended. God gives each young student his own special talents and abilities, and each develops at the pace God has set for him. As teachers we need to be sensitive to the growth of our students. Sayers suggests, for instance, that the difference between a Poll-Parrot and a pupil in the Pert years is not the student's age. Only by careful observation can parents and teacher determine when the young scholar makes the transition from one stage to another. Jenny may enter the dialectic stage at ten, Jimmy at twelve. A school which operates by Sayers's model would group students according to their mental maturity and not necessarily by age. Indeed, British schools do not have grades as twentieth-century American Schools do; instead, they have forms. A form corresponds to a level of skill or set of material, rather than to a particular age. Students might complete one form a year, two forms a year, or a form in two years, depending on their own natural strengths, the effort they expend, and the guidance given them by parents and teacher. Thus, both a twelve and a fifteen year-old could easily attend the same form. The flexibility of the English system has obvious advantages, not only for matching every student with the appropriate level of teaching, but for adapting to unusual circumstances. The transfer student who has never had Latin instruction will not feel out of place sitting in on the Latin class he missed, for though many students may be younger by a year or two, others might be even older. All, however, will be learning at the same level and the level most appropriate. Applying this portion of Sayers's model requires an organization of the school day conducive to easy adjustment of student schedules.

1.2 Another issue of importance in Sayers's work is the integration of subject-matter. History is not disconnected from literature, nor literature from art, nor art from philosophy, nor philosophy from natural science. All are united by the queen of the sciences, theology. God created all things for His glory, so everything we learn will, if studied well, lead us to the knowledge and worship of Him. To achieve Sayers's reforms, teachers must be able to plan lessons together, unifying knowledge and focusing it on the praise and adoration of our great God. Furthermore, the organization of the school day must tend unite rather than fragment knowledge areas.

1.3 A phrase Sayers's repeats often is "the university at sixteen." She insists that if a child is properly instructed according to the Trivium--completing the grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric stages--collegiate work will pose no difficulty for him. Both long precedent and recent trends suggest that Sayers is right. Only since the late 1800s have students waited until eighteen or nineteen to enter the university. Today public schools across the country are developing programs which allow their students to earn both high school and college credit by attending local community colleges. A successful implementation of Sayers's model would begin upper school coursework in the seventh grade and complete it in the tenth, leaving the last two year for college level work. In the future, once its teachers have successfully offered eleventh and twelfth grade courses at college level and quality, Whitefield Christian School may consider seeking junior college accreditation, which would allow us to offer our students college credit.

## *Organizing the Classical Christian School Day*

2.1 By implementing a school day similar to that of the British classical schools Whitefield Christians School positions itself to successfully achieve Sayers's objectives. The school day, according to this traditional model, is divided into three divisions rather than six, seven, or eight one-hour periods. A student's day would be divided into three periods (1 hr. 40 min. each) for required courses, and one half-period for electives. Full-time faculty would teach the equivalent of three full periods daily. Full time faculty would teach three classes (approx. 1 hr. 40 mins. ea.) daily. This simplification integrates subject matter, minimizes time-consuming transitions, greatly reduces the complexity of scheduling for teachers and students, allows students to concentrate on fewer courses, rather being pulled in six, seven, or eight different directions, and increases time allowed for teacher preparation.

2.2 Current course objectives would be re-mapped to the following three divisions: Classics, Humanities, Proportion & Analysis. In the Classics division students learn Latin, Greek, and English grammar. The Humanities division includes history, literature, biblical studies, philosophy and art history. Writing taught in the Classics division is driven by an interest in form (i.e. grammar, genre, metaphor, and style), while writing in the Humanities relates to the subject matter of its course (e.g. the Magna Charta, Life on the Mississippi, a painting by Frederick Jackson Turner, or Romans 8). Proportion & Analysis includes algebra, geometry, logic, the natural sciences, music and drawing. Not only are subjects integrated within each course (e.g. logic and geometry), but instructors gather weekly to discuss integration among courses (e.g. the physics of a medieval catapult described in a Latin poem.)

2.3 Because the inflections of Latin and Greek are conducive to rapid acquisition and mastery of grammar, teachers have been teaching English grammar through Classical languages for hundreds of years. Taught alone, English grammar is a dry, tedious, and terribly perplexing subject; however, good Latin instruction accomplishes all of the objectives associated with English grammar on the way to the discovery of a new language and the ability to read the world's greatest literature in its original language. Students successfully completing the Classics sequence will have read Latin selections from ancient and medieval authors, as well as selections from the Greek New Testament and Homer's *Odyssey*. Students entering the seventh grade in 1998-99 will most likely be the first to achieve this objective, though it may yet be possible for students entering this year's ninth grade class. Please see the appendix for an example of how English objectives would be re-mapped in the Classics and Humanities divisions.

2.4 Humanities courses are to be taught on a four-year cycle by historic period. Each period will illustrate a biblical theme drawn from Proverbs and memorized. The first course, Ancient World, covers Creation to the fall of Rome, with special emphasis on the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, and triumph of the early church. Medieval World begins with early church documents and Augustine, and ends with the Reformation. American History is first taught in Modern World which begins with the Reformation and ends at the Civil War. Post Modern World concludes the sequence and covers the period from Hegel to the present. The entire upper school will take the same course simultaneously uniting the students in a common theme for the year and allowing for special school-wide, course-related events. Since every humanities teacher will be teaching the same course, but at different levels, teachers will develop the course as a team and meet regularly for preparation, planning and peer review sessions. Not only does this approach greatly improve the quality of teacher preparation, new teachers are easily trained, equipped, and integrated into Whitefield's Classical Christian program.

2.5 Since the work of the Humanities division is primarily a careful reading and analysis of texts, the primary mode of teaching in the course is oral examination and guided discussion. By asking students carefully prepared questions about their reading from an assigned primary source, teachers help students draw understanding from the texts themselves, rather than depending on passive lecture sessions. Once a week the upper school will gather to hear a prepared lecture from one of the humanities instructors. These lectures will help provide the students with necessary background information, and will further unify course themes. As Douglas Wilson has pointed out, dialectic and rhetoric students are learning to draw the facts of the grammar stage together into well-articulated understanding. Relying primarily, or exclusively, on lecture does the student's work for him, robbing him of an opportunity to learn desperately needed dialectic and rhetoric skills.

### *Steps we can take in the 1998-99 school year*

While implementing such an ambitious program in a single year is impossible, planned, deliberate steps can be taken this year to significantly improve our program, and to position us to better achieve Sayers's objectives in the following years.

3.1 Ideally, Classics, Humanities, and Proportion & Analysis would all be taught at the same time of day allowing us to appropriately move students up or down the forms at any time during the year. With our current staff, this objective cannot be met, but we can re-group our courses into the three divisions, and teach most of them as integrated courses. With the adoption and implementation of this proposal, all of the benefits enumerated in the appendix would be effective immediately. Next year, given some additional training, Humanities could be taught during the same block of time so that we can begin moving to a form approach rather than our current age/grade approach. With continued improvements in staff education, the years following could see the complete adoption of Sayers's model.

November 11, 1998

Dear Mr. Larsen,

I have prepared the following document as a look ahead into staffing, curriculum and other concerns for the upper school. These pages should provide you with a sketchy outline of my vision for how we might accomplish the terms of the proposal the board adopted this summer. As you will recall, three ideas taken from Dorothy Sayers's *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* which motivated our proposal are:

- All knowledge is unified in the holy, triune God, and, thus, teaching of the academic disciplines should be unified and focused on the worship and enjoyment of Him.
- Every child is unique; therefore, an educational system which is to appropriately achieve the best possible education for each child must allow children to learn at different paces.
- A student well-trained in the Trivium will be prepared for university studies roughly two years ahead of the twentieth-century American public school student norm.

These ideas were then related to three long-term goals:

- Integrate similar subject matter within divisions and the entire curriculum among three divisions.
- Implement a British form system through which each student progresses at a pace appropriate to his development.
- Seek accreditation as a junior college so that students, especially those in the advanced forms (roughly eleventh and twelfth grades), could earn college credit for courses taught at a college level.

The following document identifies needs associated with these goals and suggests a rough schedule for meeting them.

Respectfully submitted,

John-Mason Shackelford

cc: Curriculum Committee

*Goals for the Development  
Of Whitefield's Upper School*

*A Suggested Implementation  
of the Summer '98 Proposal*

## I. SYNOPSIS OF NEEDS

### A. INTEGRATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

#### **Humanities / Needs:**

1. Development of curricula for Humanities, Classics, and Natural Philosophy divisions.
2. Hire instructors / staff with the interest and expertise necessary to head-up these development projects. Humanities / Needs:
3. Develop four courses: Ancient World, Medieval World, Modern World, and Post Modern World.
4. Select readings
5. Prepare supporting materials: textbooks for dialectic and rhetoric forms, art reproductions and slides, selections of period music, supporting historical fiction, quiz and test bank, overheads for lecture support.

#### **Humanities / Recommendations:**

1. Hire instructors with broad liberal arts education (literature, history, philosophy, theology, etc.)
2. Begin hiring process early and bring new staff on June 1st so that new staff receives adequate training, assists in course development, and is allowed to make adequate preparations for teaching.
3. Make information regarding the Humanities program available to wider CCS community and enlist the help of schools / individuals interested in implementing and developing the program at their own schools.
4. Begin to assemble committee of profs. to produce an anthology for the program. Find funding and a publisher. Ideas for funding: Fieldstead Institute, Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Ideas for committee: Gene Vieth, Leland Ryken, James Sire, Mark Noll, George Marsden, Alister McGrath, George Grant, Mark Kalthoff, Thomas Burke, Lucy Moye, and David Jones. (See John-Mason about contacts for these orgs. & profs.) Ideas for publisher: try university presses first (some of these profs. have connections to university presses already), IVP, Good News, Canon. First prepare proposal with specific requirements & priorities, then contact benefactors and profs.

#### **Classics / Needs:**

1. Develop courses which integrate: grammar, composition, speech, logic, and literature; draw on classical sources; and employ a classical language to clarify grammar instruction.
2. Hire enough staff to meet the needs of the school.
3. Decide on Classical / Modern language offerings for the upper school.
4. Schedule Classics division courses in complete blocks (i.e. do not break a division in half splitting foreign language, grammar from composition and speech instruction). Classical / Modern language instructors integrate languages into the teaching of grammar, composition, speech, logic, etc.

**Classics / Recommendations:**

1. Use textbook John-Mason will edit (God willing) over the summer.
2. Teach Latin grammar during the fifth and sixth grade years (Ecce Romani books one, two and three), Greek grammar during the seventh and eighth grade years (Athenaze books one and two), and allow a choice of modern or foreign language (French) during the high school years.
3. If the school commits to the teaching of a modern language, it should also commit to hiring a full time modern language instructor. Currently high school Spanish students have only repeated Spanish I which is not adequate for college entrance. The college and university programs with which I am familiar require at least two years of foreign language study in the same language and recommend four or more.

**Natural Philosophy / Needs:**

1. Hire staff person with broad expertise in maths and sciences to oversee the development of this program and its courses.
2. Integrate teaching of particularly well-matched maths and sciences uniting them into a single course.
3. Employ nature study, lab, and other hands-on instruction to teach observation and ground acquired facts and skills (observations & methodical experimentation) in tangible, even productive work. Classroom instruction, esp. maths, should remain philosophical for dialectic and rhetoric students (i.e. drill should be united with more abstract instruction: number systems, etc.).
4. Develop a math / science grammar for elementary students which will adequately prepare them for upper school work.

**Natural Philosophy / Recommendations:**

1. Contact potential candidates immediately with ideas so that they may begin to ruminate and share ideas right away.
2. Continue the search for an instructor which has a developed interest in developing curricula along these lines.
3. Research nature study and integrated math / science programs.

## **B. IMPLEMENTATION OF FORM SYSTEM**

### **Needs:**

1. Continue scheduling of Humanities courses at the same time of day.
2. Schedule Classics and Natural Philosophy courses at the same time of day.
3. Observe students in present work, and prepare and document criteria for shifting students up and down forms in each of the divisions.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Begin observation and gradual implementation of form system in next year's humanities course.
2. If staffing concerns prevent scheduling divisions at the same time of day across grade levels, schedule at least jr. high divisions at the same time across grades, and high school divisions at the same time across grades.
3. Hire staff with broad interests and abilities or expertise in at least two divisions.

## **C. ACCREDITATION AS JUNIOR COLLEGE**

### **Needs:**

1. Improve quality of instruction.
2. Improve education of staff.
3. Find permanent facilities.
4. Establish reputation for quality instruction.
5. Initiate application process with regional accrediting agency.
6. Draft legal documents and decide how jr. college program will be governed.
7. Develop senior seminar courses for eleventh and twelfth grade students.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Allow time for program to mature.
2. Reduce course load to two divisions and one elective or (as an overload) three divisions.
3. Invest in education and development of staff.
4. Hire staff with M. A. level credentials when possible.

## II. ROUGH TIME LINE

- Summer 1998 Steve Barnes, Don Larson, and John-Mason Shackelford write proposal for implementation of an integrated Classical Christian school day. Includes ideas for the three divisions, and suggests future development. Board approves proposal asking that only the Modern World course in the humanities division be implemented in 1998-1999. John-Mason Shackelford hired. Course content development begins Aug. 1.
- School year 1998-1999 Parents and students introduced to three divisions. Gradual implementation of Modern World course in upper school.
- Summer 1999 John-Mason responds to board request presenting a full evaluation of the 1998-1999. Contact others in larger CCS community about the humanities program for further feedback and to gain broader interest. Hire natural philosophy staff person. Develop plan of action for Natural Philosophy program. Hire humanities staff person. Develop Post-Modern course (i.e. all readings chosen and bound with syllabus before school begins). John-Mason works with assembled team on textbook for Classics program. Board decides on language offerings in the upper school. Appropriate staff employed.
- School year 1999-2000 Teach Post-Modern World in humanities division. Begin observation, documentation and implementation of form approach in humanities division. schedule jr. high classics and natural philosophy courses at same time of day across grade levels. High school divisions scheduled at same time of day across disciplines. First implementation of natural philosophy division (i.e. as much as resources allow).
- Summer 2000 Pursue humanities anthology publishing project. Hire staff. Continue development of natural philosophy and classics division courses. Develop Ancient World course (i.e. all readings chosen and bound with syllabus before school begins). Invite other CC schools to participate.
- School year 2001-2002 Teach Ancient World in humanities division. Begin observation, documentation and implementation of form approach in natural philosophy and classics divisions. Second implementation of natural philosophy program according to that divisions development schedule.
- School year 2002-2003 Teach Medieval World in humanities division. Continue other development projects.

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| Summer 2003           | Prepare Modern World anthology for market if full anthology project is not complete. Host First Annual Whitefield Christian Training program for instructing teachers / administrators of other schools in the implementation of the three division model. |
| School year 2003-2004 | Teach Modern World in humanities division.   |
| Summer 2004           | Have building. Evaluate school. If sufficient quality of instruction, initiate accreditation process with regional accrediting agency.   |
| Spring 2007           | Award first junior college credits to students now in the fourth grade.  |