

BCL ep338 Are Classical Schools Elitist? with Megan Atherton

In this flashback episode from the Base Camp Live archives, we return to an interview that addresses a common question about classical Christian education. Is this an elitist form of education? Or sometimes simply ask, is this an education for everyone? In a culture that often celebrates mediocrity, classical Christian schools pursue excellence, but not at the cost of humility and gratitude. In today's episode, we pull back the curtain to explore why this movement is anything but elitist and how it's forming a generation marked by wisdom, virtue, and grace, as well as humility.

Join us for this episode of Base Camp Live. Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation. Get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings.

We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Base Camp Live. Now your host, Davies Owens.

Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live. Davies Owens here with you. What a joy and a privilege to get to meet so many of you this summer at the ACCSNSTL conferences and have received emails and shout outs from so many of you this summer as well.

It's always a joy to connect with you. And I really appreciate just hearing your stories and the impact that the podcast has had on you over what is now eight years, which is really remarkable to have been doing this for so many years and along the way have so many of you on the journey. I really appreciate just the partnership and look forward to a little downtime here in the summer as we get ready to ramp up pretty quickly for the school year.

Again, can't believe in just a few weeks we'll be at the whole nother school year before us. And as always, just grateful for those who partner with us on the journey, individual parents. Many of you are in homeschool co-op.

Some of you are in collaborative schools, hybrid schools. Many, many of you are in five day a week, brick and mortar schools. We're all part of a growing movement.

In fact, one of the real encouraging things that I heard from a number of you at the summer conferences was just how many initiatives are happening all around the world from Asia to Africa. Brazil is a huge area right now where classical Christian education is really exploding. And so it's just encouraging.

And if you're out there listening, you think we're the only school in town like us. Well, you may be, but you're part of a really exciting and growing movement. I wanna say a special shout out to Matt Schutz, head of school at Paideia Classical Christian School in Tampa Bay, Florida, and Micah Trammell, head of school at Christ Legacy Academy in Athens, Tennessee.

Micah and Matt, thank you for listening along with your faculty and your parents and just being part of this growing movement of classical Christian education, listening to Base Camp Live and also being a part of the Zipcast family. By the way, Zipcast has continued to really enter into just this whole new season for us. It was a pilot year last year, and so many of you have been part of that amazing experience of getting to really have a community voice from your school to your families each week.

And we have a lot in store, big rollout this summer of new technology. Many, many schools are signing up and being a part of it. So if you've not joined the Zipcast experience, take a look at zipcast.media. It's just a wonderful way to encourage each other on the journey of raising the next generation.

Also in this particular episode, wanna say a special word to our sponsor, Wilson Hill Academy and the great work that they do of providing an online classical Christian school experience as well as Life Architects coaching. We are grateful for your partnership. Megan Atherton is the program director and founder of Common Sense Classical, a blog designed to help people understand a classical education.

She's really a kindred spirit with what we're doing. Her efforts trying to make classical education understandable and enhance partnerships between home and school, very much what we do here every week at Base Camp Live. Megan is a graduate of Hillsdale College and the student affairs coordinator at a K-12 classical school in Golden, Colorado.

Without further ado, let's jump back to this Base Camp Live interview. Megan, welcome to Base Camp Live. So glad to have you with us.

Thanks for having me. Tell us a little bit about your journey into classical education. Yeah, I've been in classical education in kind of some capacity for most of my life.

I was in a classically influenced is I think what they would call themselves school for high school and for middle school. I went to a liberal arts college, Hillsdale College out in Michigan. So I've just kind of been in the universe for a long time.

When I graduated from Hillsdale, I came out to Denver. Worked in a one other spot before I got back into classical ed at Golden View Classical Academy, where I work with enrollment and prospective families. My husband's a teacher at the same classical school.

So it's kind of all around us. But I recently also, the last couple of years have been in the University of Dallas master's program for classical education. Wow, you're part of this new generation that folks that actually experienced classical education as a part of your own educational journey, which is so exciting for so many of us that were kind of transplants into this world and still figuring it out.

You've come right through it. Well, I wanna jump in. There's a topic that obviously folks are listening because it was in the title of this idea of questioning.

The question is, are classical Christian schools elitist? I don't think they are, but I think it's a very real concern. And it's a very, there are points at which that can happen. Give us a sense of your perspective on that.

I know you wrote this article for Source of the Institute that is how I found you. And I'm excited to hear your thoughts on this. I actually was just speaking at a school in Seattle and had a parent come up to me and just that was actually the question they wanted to know about.

Like, what was my perspective on it? So where does this question come from, from your vantage point? What are you seeing? Yeah, yeah. So I get the question or the charge, if you will, of elitism from a couple different areas. I work with prospective families all the time.

So there's generally a question of whether or not classical education is for their child. So you kind of have that from the prospective family side of things, but there's also other schools or other educational models that make the same charge that classical education is elitist. So I think the kind of the false charges of elitism that I tend to see are things like, well, you wear a uniform.

So that makes the education inaccessible or the culture of the school inaccessible. You have a challenging curriculum that you admit is difficult. Within that curriculum, you praise and teach Western civilization and have an emphasis on the Western canon, potentially to the exclusion of some other canon or some other cultures.

And so those I don't think are signs of elitism. I think it's okay to have standards within education. I think it's okay to believe that something is better than something else.

I do see real instances of elitism within classical education. And that usually comes from like educators or administrators who are taking themselves too seriously as opposed to taking their mission very, very seriously. I see it when teachers or admin will say things like, well, classical education is the best and there's just nothing that's as good or nothing that's good at all.

And they tend to put classical ed up on a huge, huge pedestal. And obviously, I love classical education, but I would not go so far as to say that there is no good alternative. Or they'll say that, oh, go ahead.

No, I was gonna say, because I think there's a lot, we're covering a lot of ground with this and it's good just to kind of lay on the table both where this can, what's the nature of the concern. And it is interesting in different parts of the country and when I was in Atlanta and very competitive quote Christian with quotes around prep school world, there was a lot of families that would claim to be Christian would say, we want a little bit of elitism. We want something that's sort of set apart and higher quality and better.

And then you get other parts of country and it's an immediately of concern. So, it's very interesting how even what this idea of something being better than something else and we're gonna unpack this in a second. Because I mean, that's very much what classical education says

is that we actually do need to discern these things, but there's a way to do that where you can cross a line into truly being judgmental and elitist and that's a problem, but it's complicated.

But keep going, because these are really interesting. So, the uniforms can kind of trigger that, a sense of unique educational philosophy. What else is sort of you hearing? Yeah, from families in particular, families who come and visit the school, they'll see a very orderly environment.

They'll see homework on a nightly basis or a lack of technology. And usually I'll hear the phrase like, well, that's just not for every kid. And I am a huge proponent that classical education is for every kid.

Every family who is on board with the mission can find success at a classical school. So, it always breaks my heart when families say that. And I think it comes from just a sense that there's a part of it that's foreign or inaccessible to them, whether that's, like you said, like the uniforms or even classical decor, like a lot of hardwoods, not a lot of acronyms or bright, bright, bright neon colors all over the walls.

So, I think that sometimes it's an environment often at schools that it's set apart. The teachers dress more professionally or at least as professional, hopefully, as the students who are in the uniforms. And so, I think that it can be a little bit disconcerting to families to try to picture their student who's coming from a vastly different educational background, maybe never has taken notes before on any sort of formal basis, has never had to sit for 20 minutes at a time to listen to a lesson.

So, I think that that can be really disconcerting to some families. So, that's really why I wrote the article was to just to share that we have, classical education is proud of what it's doing and what it's done, but that doesn't make it inaccessible to people. And a difficult or challenging curriculum doesn't mean that every child can't access it.

That's kind of where I came from with it. And I wonder too, because it seemed to me in the last, I don't know, five years, that question, I don't remember hearing it that often. And I used to occasionally give tours at both the schools I was at.

It's always great to kind of get on the front lines and hear the questions of prospective families. And that increasingly becoming a question of concern, I think, especially from kind of the millennial Gen Z families that were coming in. And it's an interesting kind of, we talk on the podcast a lot about kind of the cultural moment and what we're experiencing, but that's sort of the, if you will, kind of the modern narrative, which is equality.

And we don't want, it's the whole, it honestly kind of bleeds in a bit from just the general cultural narrative of we don't want anybody to be better than anybody else. It's the oppressors and the victims and everything needs to kind of be the same. And even though we know from a classical and Christian perspective that we do need to discern, I think it bleeds in, maybe just to say it that way.

So then there's this concern that, well, if you do have uniforms, are you doing that because you're better than someone else? Or are you saying that someone else is not as good as you? And so it's an interesting, how do you sort that out? Because we're kind of, it's kind of like we're in the world, but we're not of it. We're kind of called to be discerning and to say that is beautiful. And I'm sorry, but that is not.

And therefore you're going to be accused probably of being an elitist if you don't accept everything as the world would expect. Yeah, just to make sure I'm understanding your question, you're asking more broadly how to handle that charge versus uniform specifically. Yeah, and do you see that as sort of a, yeah, well, no, not uniform.

I'm just saying, I'm wondering why, as we kind of set up what the problem is, I mean, it seems like the cultural moment we're in is even adding to the concern of accusations of elitism because of this, again, just general assumption in the culture that all good things have to be equal and nobody should be better than anybody else. So, and probably even a little bit of a celebration of kind of what's broken and, you know, kind of the, I always laugh, you know, you know, people spend all this money on jeans that look like they drug them behind their car because they're all torn. It's like, like everything should look kind of beat up and worn.

And like you walk into classical school and it looks very refined and like we're trying to put on airs. So it seems very opposite the direction the culture is headed just from a perception standpoint. Yeah, well, and I think, I think I mentioned, you know, that the charge of elitism or like actual instances of elitism often come from people within classical world taking themselves too seriously.

Teachers who make lessons about their performance rather than about student learning or feeling the need to alter lessons down because Shakespeare just, quote, isn't for everyone. Things like that. Those are like the real charges that I hear, but you put it in the context of all the hardwoods and it, you know, it all blends in and it kind of makes sense.

But I don't think it's bad to have something set apart. When you walk into a classical school and you have people taking their education very seriously, taking their mission very seriously. You know, I joked about the uniform question specifically, but we wear a uniform because we're doing serious work and that calls for serious attire.

There's also all these other benefits, like you don't have to worry about having the right brand names socially as a student when you have a uniform. And seventh grade parents tend to love the uniform the most because that's right around when that tyranny of fashion sets in. So, you know, there's those practical reasons too, but I wear a blazer to my job, even though I work in the front office and I'm an administrator, because I take my job seriously and because I set it apart as a place of serious work.

So I dress the part for that, but that doesn't mean we take ourselves so seriously that we can't, you know, have joy in what we're doing, that we can't recognize that we need to reach students

of a lot of different abilities and a lot of different backgrounds and we have to do that well. And my husband loves to use the example of Pony Day at Goldenview as like the most like anti-elitist thing. We bring in miniature ponies for no other reason other than they're like, they're super cute and fun and the kids love it.

And we spend an afternoon letting the kids have the ponies. And it's just, it's a weird like connection in my brain of this thing where we're, we don't take ourselves so seriously that we can't have joy and experience like things outside of just the classroom in this ultra classical decor business, but we take it seriously and we take our mission seriously. And so we act and dress and behave accordingly.

And that makes a lot of sense. I think, you know, we have such a world of kind of called, I guess it's the Disney effect where there's lots of sort of facades that are put up in that kind of a Disney world. And it's like, everybody knows that that's not really, those aren't really pirates or those animals aren't real or that's not really, you know, some turn of the century setting that they've put up.

It's just a movie set looking thing. And I think, so the world, I think we're just suspicious of things that look maybe too good to be true. And yet we're called into a world of excellence and truth and goodness and beauty.

And so we surround ourselves with these things. So I can understand where if you're not familiar with it, and I do think you're right, there is a risk of some schools maybe allowing kind of the, maybe more of the Harry Potter thing, if whatever you wanna, I'm grasping for a good cultural reference point, but you know, our school Ambrose and Boise is a beautiful English tutor building. And people would think this is just simply put here to kind of, you know, look impressive like you're trying to be Harry Potter.

I'm like, no, you don't understand. There's so much more to this education than just a facade of, you know, it's like going to Olive Garden and thinking you're having an experience of Italy. I mean, that's not the point.

It's really a lot deeper than that, so. Yeah, well, and I think, like I said, I don't wanna, I love classical education. I also think it's important to recognize like where work needs to be done.

So I do think like in a lot of ways, some classical schools don't do themselves a lot of favors with their marketing, with the way that they approach prospective families on these questions, or even in their approach in the classroom where you have teachers who, like I said, kind of before, it's more about their ability to be seen as brilliant and less about the student learning, or it's about their belief that they are immune to, like that as a school, they are immune to some of the challenges that local schools around them are immune to. And I tell families all the time, we encounter all the same stuff that other schools do. We might encounter it on a much smaller scale, but we have to deal with behavior problems and we have to deal with kids not doing their homework and we have to deal with parents who overstep or understep in our,

there's lots of things that schools have to deal with and we deal with all of that too.

Yeah, we're not, I mean, yes, we are still real humans in here running the school. And so why don't we take, I wanna take a break and we come back. I wanna get into some of those suggestions and practical things that you do both as a school to kind of counter that concern and even things we could be doing in our home, certainly like what's the role of humility? How do we teach students to be critical thinkers but not turn out as judgmental people? I mean, there's a lot of nuancing that I think we have to be intentional about.

So we are in fact not elitist. So let's take a quick break and we'll come back and continue our conversation. Hey, Base Camp Live listeners, a recent Pew Research study revealed that only 30% of millennial and Gen Z parents live within a 100 mile radius of extended family.

That means that many families are missing the wisdom and support of older generations. And more than ever, we need strong consistent school communities to walk next to us providing rich connection and helpful weekly tips. That is exactly why I created Zipcast.

Zipcast gives schools a proven platform to communicate more personally and effectively with their parent community. Imagine as a parent receiving a short weekly audio message from your school leadership, not just announcements, but real insights into what's on their hearts and minds paired with practical wisdom from national parenting and educational experts like Keith McCurdy and Justin Early along with experts on classical Christian education. We even include short testimonials and parenting tips from fellow parents all around the country.

You can listen anywhere and at any time. And now with Zipcast 2.0, schools can customize their messages even more offering a truly personal and engaging way to build connection and shared vision. If you're a school leader and not yet using Zipcast, I wanna encourage you to consider it for the 25, 26 school year.

And if you're a parent at a school that is not yet using Zipcast, take a moment and encourage your leadership to explore it. It's easy to use, affordable and effective. And in today's fast paced world, Zipcast is a proven tool used by over 60 schools this past school year to deliver encouragement, insights and connections in just 10 minutes a week.

We like to say it's about encouraging you on the go with what you need to know. Check it all out at zipcast.media to hold your spot as we have limited spaces available for the upcoming school year. I wanna take just a moment during our break and let you know about the great work that's being done by Wilson Hill Academy.

They offer a vibrant, rich and accredited classical Christian education available to families and schools almost anywhere. With a click of a button, students join master teachers and friends live online from all over the world to engage in deep and lively discussion, solve math problems, conduct science experiments, translate Latin, deliver thesis presentations and so much more. At Wilson Hill, students make lifelong friends and graduate well prepared for

college and beyond.

Discover what's possible for your family or school at wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/basecamp. So Megan, we live in a world again that insists on equality and nothing is better than anything else. And yet here we are as classical schools who kind of going in the opposite direction.

We do believe that things are true and good and beautiful, which means there's things that are false and not so beautiful and not so good. And that's a very fine line, especially with children, because it's very easy for that to become a point of pride or arrogance. So how do we create students that are critical thinkers and able to discern but not judgmental and prideful and actually elitist? Yeah, I think when I think about, I think I agree exactly with what you just said.

When I think about that word judgmental, I think it's important to consider what we mean by that. Does it mean we can't make a judgment? We can't pass a judgment because we believe that we're right or believe that something else is wrong. And I don't think that that's the mistake.

I think you're right. Classical schools inherently teach that some things are good, like courage. Courage is good.

We teach that some things are inherently bad, like cowardice. And so passing a judgment on a situation, I think is important and a big part of a classical education. But I also think that a classical classroom really positions itself well to be a practice ground for how to pass judgment without behaving judgmentally or allowing it to impact our view of a whole other person, like outside of being an irredeemable view of a person, allowing that judgment to impact us to that degree.

Classical education bases itself so much on discussion in the classroom. And I think that history is a really good example there. It's all fine and good to talk about the Reformation in a history class, right up until you look around and you realize that a third of the room is Catholic and two thirds of the room is something else.

And a teacher may or may not know who in the classroom, at least in a public school, in a public setting for public charter schools, you might have students who believe vastly different things about the nature of the Reformation. And so having those conversations in an environment that demands respect and demands proper treatment of other opinions and being genuinely open to learning something new about somebody that maybe you didn't think you had anything in common with, classical education is like a natural spot for that. They talk about so many different things in the context of history, literature, science, even the place and role of mathematics.

Those things come up in classical schools every day and it's a great practice ground for students to be able to hone those critical thinking skills without it turning them into people who just lured their opinion over other people. Well, and you know, just to footnote that, I mean,

even in a classical Christian covenant school, you have denominational differences, you have socioeconomic differences, I mean, you have learning differences, I mean, there's any, you know, welcome to being a fallen human, there's all these, anything that doesn't seem like what your world does, it's very easy to be insensitive and judgmental in a way that's not helpful. So yeah, I think this is a really important point of differentiation, and again, very counter to what the world tells us today, which you can't even make any critique of anything being different.

So talk more about what that looks like within the context of the classroom, because you're right, I think it's a perfect proving ground to figure out how do we work this out in a way that's balanced and right. Yeah, I think navigating that, I think, you know, it's exciting, or it should be treated as exciting to have different opinions and different views in a classroom. It's a place where everybody is looking to learn and to understand and to grow.

And so it's also like a good reflection of the world around you, in the sense that you can't control that other people are going to disagree with you, but we can control the way that we respond to them. I think that having teachers, A, who come from themselves, a place of humility in approaching knowledge and approaching their own understanding, but also really working in the classroom to create an environment where you can just throw out an idea. Let's just throw out an idea and see what happens.

And talk through that and navigate that together, take it to its ends, and then rope it back in. Yeah. Calling out disrespect when they see it, calling out students treating each other poorly, or not taking into consideration something that they maybe didn't see before, or asking them, even as a teacher, if there's no differing views in the classroom, maybe the teacher can be the devil's advocate.

There's a history teacher here at Goldenview who prides himself on the fact that none of his pupils seem to know that he's Catholic. And he loves being the devil's advocate and really pushing his students to not just have what they believe, but really shape the rhetoric around what they believe. You know, your opinion is only as good as your ability to explain it.

Yeah. That's kind of an approach that he takes in the classroom. It's really cool to watch.

There's a ton of student learning happening in the classroom when you watch him teach. It's really neat. Well, what I hear you saying, I mean, you know, we often talk about obviously the cultural moment, again, we're in, where there's a tendency for people to cancel each other and for critical thinking to not even occur.

This is really, again, the proving ground in our classrooms. And it's obviously more of kind of a middle high school level when you're kind of in that logic rhetoric stage, but you're really starting to create environments where there are real points of disagreement. And then how do you actually graciously and lovingly engage with one another to sort through that into the heart of Socratic discussion? I mean, I remember years ago, a student that transferred into our school that was a 11th grader, he'd been in a public school, and he just could not believe that

really any topic was okay to talk about.

There was sort of an assumption that there were taboos or trigger words or things that you couldn't say that would, you know, you had to constantly filter what you were about to say. I mean, not in terms of being coarse, but just in terms of topics in general in our world today. So I love the fact that we can engage hard issues and we can learn how to sit amongst differing opinions and not immediately feel like we need to, you know, give up or cancel or be superficial.

I mean, I think that is the heart of classical education in terms of teaching us how to wrestle through hard ideas and come out humble because of that. Yeah, when I even think of, you know, I think a lot of classical schools most have core virtues of some kind or yeah, core virtues, that's what we call it. I think it goes by a few different names at different schools too, but I don't think it's uncommon for friendship to be selected among them.

And in the Aristotelian sense of friendship, we consider that not just being buddies, not just being friends with somebody, but truly showing friendship means wanting the best for that person. And so you have to take that into conversation, peer to peer, teacher to student, student to teacher. We wanna create a culture and environment where we are demonstrating friendship in the sense that we want the best for that other person, even if we don't agree.

And we want to show them that goodwill in the midst of those kind of those hard conversations that people have, teachers have with each other, parents have with administrators. We bring that friendship and that goodwill into those conversations. And I think when you understand friendship in that way, it can really help to guide that.

I think it's a great example. Yeah, I think that's a great way to think of this friendship and the biblical idea of sort of iron sharpening iron. I mean, there's a point at which you have to really rub these metals together in the case of iron and iron to refine them.

And so there's friction, there can be difficulty, but that's what a friend does. The friend speaks the truth in love. A friend really wants you to be a better person having worked through these things.

And so that's done, again, there's humility that's part of that. Let me ask this question. You know, when we think about, you know, again, we challenge students to become the very best human that they can be in terms of their academic ability.

And so, again, as you talked about earlier, families will often tour our schools and say, gosh, you know, you guys are really asking a lot of these kids compared to the, you know, the street, maybe the school down the street. And we end up with students that actually do, you know, although we're not just pursuing college, we actually do really well in terms of college entries and higher test scores and all that. So shouldn't we help us, you know, what do you do with the question of do we, we need to take, we should take pride in our hard work and our accomplishments, but we don't want to become prideful people, which again leads to elitism.

So how do you help, you know, how do you guys discern that and help students and faculty and even parents think about the line between those two? Yeah, I think like you said, I think it would be wrong to say you shouldn't be proud of those things. You know, like it's, that's actually to a certain degree, not just to the students to ask them to work that hard and teachers too, to ask them to put that much in and then just say, well, it doesn't matter. Cause they do, they work hard and it's important.

So I like to talk about this with families in terms of, you know, how much time is it taking away and how many different ways are you honoring something? And are you honoring something above it? So a really like easy example that I talk about with families all the time, it's actually one of my tips to families who go and visit other schools is pay attention to what's on their walls. When you walk around the hallways, do you see a big thermometer with scholarship dollars raised on it? Do you see academic achievements exclusively on the walls in terms of competitions or, you know, rankings in the school? Do you see big campaigns for study sessions so that they can achieve a certain level? Number of Ivies, you know, things like that. Those aren't inherently bad things.

They're not bad things to talk about. There's a little, we have it in a subsection of our tour packet where we talk about those things. But when we think about what we want students to look at every day and to internalize as they're walking around the hallways, that's not it.

So our hallways at Goldenvue, just as an example, are filled with beautiful artwork and awards related to character, the highest awards in the school. The other side of that is, you know, how much time are you spending recognizing these things? So Goldenvue has a valedictorian and a salutatorian. We just announced them a couple of weeks ago, actually, both fabulous, very proud of them and all of their hard work.

They were separated by seven one thousandths of a decimal point, which is just insane. They worked incredibly hard. Yeah, and they were very, very close.

We honor them in our assembly. We have them stand to be recognized and give them a certificate. But at graduation, at the end of the year, it's not the valedictorian or salutatorian who addresses their class.

It's somebody called the outstanding graduate who embodies what we believe to be the ideal sentinel. And there's an entire, which is our mascot, there's an entire process of selection for that. It is considered the highest award in the school.

Similarly, we have honor roll. We have honor roll, high honor roll and perfect GPA. Those students get to stand during the assembly to be recognized for their hard work and they get a certificate.

But by comparison, our student of the quarter, who is nominated based on character by their teachers, receives a very, very fancy journal and a \$100 gift card. So when we talk about the

levels of, I mean, not that you should do everything for a prize, that's like, there's like a backwards argument there somewhere. But when we think about how much time we're spending on things, we're talking about maybe 10 minutes of an hour long assembly, the rest of which is dedicated to character recognition.

Yeah, and then what they internalize when they're walking around in the hallways. So those are two kind of like tangible things that we do and the way that we talk about it, I think is really important in classrooms too. I think it's the old adage, what gets celebrated gets valued.

So if everything is about whatever, grades or whatever it may be, that sets a tone that's very different. Well, we're gonna take another break and I wanna come back and you had mentioned earlier, I think a point I'd like to come back to, which is the concern when parents maybe perspectives are viewing a school and they're thinking it might be elitist or that's their concern. Then the question comes, is this school for everyone? Is this somehow an education just for an elite or just for my really smartest, my smartest child? And I wonder, I don't think anybody wants to enter an environment where there's going to be shame or feelings of failure or that sense of, this is a school where my child will never be good enough.

And those are real pressures, real questions. I'm curious kind of your thoughts on that as we address this really, I think very relevant question that we hear often today. So we'll be right back and continue the conversation.

Graduating can be intimidating. Life Architects brings peace to the process by guiding your student through proven pathways to discover who God made them to be and how they can reflect that identity in meaningful work. We call it vocational discipleship and it's a practice we offer one-on-one in school-wide workshops and as a consulting service to transform campus culture.

Learn more at lifearchitectscoaching.com today. All right, Megan, before the break, I asked the big question, are classical schools for everyone? And the answer is? It is, yes, which I realize is very anticlimactic. What, yes.

I could have said no and we would have gone a whole different way. Well, that would have been a much more interesting answer, but yeah, well, I mean, let's, again, the answer is yes. I mean, obviously, and I hear that question all the time and sometimes it's because I think historically, sort of classical Christian schools have been, especially with limited resources and you can't accommodate to every child depending on certain special needs.

We've done a lot of podcasts on this topic. And I think, yeah, I would agree. I think there's more breadth of what we can do to accommodate and to meet different demands.

So the point is, yes, it's not just the super brightest kids that can come to our schools. Is that what you're saying? Yeah, well, and I think I wrote down just in my notes, just a small caveat of my answer is yes, but it's more like every classical school should be for every student. With the

recognition of some of the realities that we face, just with, like you've mentioned, with private schools in particular, I would dream of a world where private schools are able to financially accommodate and have students of every learning type in the sense of disability, general ed classroom, all of those things that public schools have a little bit more flexibility to do.

So I say should in the sense of recognizing that. There are some limitations there, but no, I am very, very passionate about the fact that I believe that classical education is for anyone who wants it, for anybody who is on board with the mission. I also recognize that there are people who enroll in classical schools who are maybe not fully on board with the mission and vision.

And to that, I say, I want you to be happy in school and for your children to be happy in school. And so if you are not on board with the mission, the school will strike you as strange and the customs and our way of going about things and the way that we prioritize things will strike you as strange and may cause you to be unhappy. So that's why I say it is for everyone who wants it.

I also would add the caveat that there may be a degree of patience that is required of families when they come to a classical school in the sense that they might have to for the first quarter of their student's attendance, adjust their expectations of success or adjust their definition of immediate success. Not every student is gonna transfer to a classical school and knock it out of the park academically. We have some who do, and then we have some that it takes them a quarter to really get in and recognize like, oh, I've never had to write notes by hand before.

I've never had to close read a text before and write down annotations, like things like that, but they're just coming into a whole new environment. And I do think it is incumbent on schools to have ways of bringing those students in and helping them with that if they truly want to be for everyone and have that classical education accessible to different learning backgrounds, different learning abilities, different socioeconomic abilities and statuses there. So I think that there's a lot of room for that, but I do believe passionately that yes, everybody can be successful at a classical school.

Well, and I think that as you're thinking or as you're articulating this idea of this transition and whether that's you're coming in as a new family into this entirely new experience at kindergarten or whether you're transferred in, the bottom line is ask questions. What I love about classical education is there are actually answers. We don't just, to your point about handwriting notes, we don't do that just because we decided, I don't know, iPads are just, we're just gonna be weird and not have those things.

We actually could give you a very long list of reasons, quite researched on why we don't want children taking notes on an iPad and what happens when you write or when you learn cursive. I mean, so these are not just weird things for weirdness sake or elitist sake. They're weird because they're different from the culture, but we could give you really good reasons why we are doing what we're doing, which leads me to this next question, which is how do you think educators, even parents can help build confidence and gratitude for this form of education, which I often say on the podcast, it's that middle high schoolers in particular that are kind of

coming into their own understanding and owning their education.

So, I mean, help them lean into it, not just continue to push against it and say, this is different from the kids that go to the public school down the street from me. There's something different. Am I just weird or is this actually something I wanna be confident and be grateful for? What would you recommend there? Yeah, I can start, I'll start with the parents, which I'll give the caveat that my kids are still little.

So I don't say this with any sort of high minded, I know how to parent type of attitude here. I'm continually humbled by my own children. Because your kids are how old right now? Two and a half and almost five.

No, those are great ages. And there's a lot of folks listening, they're just on the beginning edge of that journey. And I can tell you, there's a lot of us that have come to the other side of it that would say, this is definitely the path to be on.

But yeah, how do you answer that? What do you think on confidence, gratitude? Well, for parents, I think even my four year old knows what I find important. And he knows what I pay the most attention to. And he knows what gets me applauding him and what gets me angry at him.

He's very in tune with the things that matter to me, both by hearing me talk about it and also just what I go out of my way to praise. So I would say, recognize that your kids are paying attention to everything that you say. And examine your own heart on what you're praising.

What do you find the most important? Do you find their work ethic and their compassion and their virtue, their formation the most important? Or do you find that A or B minus the most important? And so the things that you're talking about and the way in which you talk about them, are you praising the work or are you praising the result? Are you praising the process and the patients and the amount that they had to put in to achieve something or are you applauding the end result exclusively? I also think there's that age old thing that you should pay attention to how your partner treats somebody who is working for them or is a server. Somebody that is in the process of doing labor for them, how do they treat that person? Same thing with parents. How do you talk about your friends who are different than you? How do you talk about the family that has a vastly different worldview? Do you talk about them like they're less than you or do you talk about them with dignity? Which that word dignity I think in classical education is enormous and kind of leads really well into what educators do at a classical school.

Classical schools are uniquely positioned because of our emphasis on virtue and character to let students know that their intelligence is actually not the best or most important thing about them. They are uniquely situated to tell them there's so much that's interesting about you other than your ability to score a particular way on a particular test. And a natural byproduct of leaving a classical school whether you leave when you're in ninth grade or you leave when you graduate, however long you are at a classical school, you should hopefully leave that situation

believing and understanding that there are so many pathways to a dignified life and that your intelligence does not mean that you are entitled to a certain level or lack thereof of dignity.

The two are not related. You can believe that you are intelligent all you want and you might be right. You may be intelligent and you might be more intelligent than every other person in your class but that does not make you more dignified.

And that I think classical educators are so uniquely situated to teach students that lesson which is why I love it. I think it's fabulous. But parents, if they're doing that same thing at home, you've got a great recipe for success in that.

Yeah, that's a great word, Megan. I think as we close out our time and just thinking about the, just to your point, it's the everyday conversations that so often form the either elitism or humility in the lives of our children. I mean, how do you respond to, if you're talking about the neighbors down the street in the school their children are in or how do you respond to your point? Someone who chose not to go to college and maybe go into the trades, like, is that a lesser thing? I mean, it's all of these, again, it's complicated because we do wanna be, we wanna celebrate things that are truly excellent and we wanna strive for things that are hard and maybe not always achievable, but at the same time, we do it with incredible humility.

So there's a lot to this, it's a huge conversation. As we close our time, just mentioned, you did this great blog, Common Sense Classical. Tell people how to find out more about you and what you're doing there.

Yeah, Common Sense Classical was born to be a resource for parents who are interested in just a really straightforward answers to questions about classical education, either to support their student who already goes to a classical school and just learn more about some of the nitty gritty pieces of the classroom or people who have never heard of classical education before. I like to joke that it was designed for the mom who has a baby on her hip while trying to make dinner for her family and wants 20 minutes to read something. So it's really, it's situated for those who are just interested in something that's really easily approached.

Well, and you're, I mean, obviously you're speaking to the Base Camp Live world and we're all on that same journey and just trying to help make practical sense of a lot of things in the classical world that can be sometimes confusing and also just encourage us on this journey as we raise the next generation. So Megan, thanks so much for being here for the conversation today. And we will continue, I'm sure, with other topics in the future.

Thanks so much for being a part of Base Camp Live. Yeah, thanks for having me. Well, you did it.

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We appreciate you as a faithful listener. Hey, we're gonna be back again next week for another episode. Please join us.

We wouldn't want you to miss.