

*Excerpt from*

**HOW TO START A  
PRINCIPLE APPROACH<sup>®</sup>  
SCHOOL**

*Wisdom from the administrator of a  
Foundation for American Christian Education  
demonstration school*

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## Introduction

Starting a Principle Approach® school is a wonderful adventure that, with the Lord's anointing and blessing, will be tremendous blessing in the lives of countless students, parents, grandparents, and community members; however, as is true of any endeavor that is worthwhile, **it will not be easy**. The Pilgrims faced many potential difficulties and trials as they wrestled with the decision to leave Holland and come to this new barren land. William Bradford, governor of the Pilgrims, recorded the words of those who eventually prevailed:

It was answered, that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate; the difficulties were many, but they were not certain; it might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others by provident care and the use of good means, might in a great measure be prevented; and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne, or overcome.\*

As you can see, the Pilgrims believed that there was a part that God had in this endeavor and there was a part that they had. They had to see through “provident care and the use of good means” that many of the potential problems were prevented. The following guidelines have been written to help you in this process. It is our sincere desire that these guidelines will assist and guide you in such a way that you will be able to start and operate an excellent Principle Approach school, while avoiding many of the problems, difficulties, and mistakes that are often part of a new school.

The steps that follow are not necessarily sequential, but they all have to be addressed in order to successfully begin a new school. If converting from a traditional school to a Principle Approach school, some of these steps may already be in place; however, you will need to test the basic assumptions behind everything that you do. The philosophy of the Principle Approach impacts every aspect of the school, causing you to rethink many of your current assumptions and practices.

### The Decision to Start a Principle Approach School

Following are some practical steps that will enable you to start a Principle Approach school. Since we have had twenty-three years of a “learning curve,” there is no reason you need to repeat what we had to learn the hard way! Therefore, the outline of our presentation will follow what we believe are the most common pitfalls.

#### Pitfalls

1. **Leadership**—There is a lack of visionary leadership.
2. **Inspiring a Community**—There may be visionary leadership, but the vision is not being properly communicated to the constituents.
3. **Governance**—The school is not properly governed; the board is not operating as a school board should to ensure success.
4. **Funding**—The school is under-funded, producing a host of problems such as a low salary scale, inferior facility, poor programs, and inability to train, equip, and retain faculty.
5. **Philosophy**—The school falls into legalism. Policies and procedures need to be based upon Biblical principles rather than previously learned principles assumed to be Biblical.
6. **Planning**—The school attempts too much too soon, or plunges in without the proper thoughtful planning.
7. **Results**—The product that is being promised to students and parents is not being delivered.

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\*William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620–1647*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, 27.

**LEADERSHIP AND INSPIRING A COMMUNITY:** These resources will inspire your leaders and community to catch the vision.

- ✦ Purchase *The Noah Plan*<sup>®</sup> *Self-Directed Study* and the seminal works on the Principle Approach<sup>®</sup>, *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History: The Principle Approach* by Rosalie Slater and *The Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America, Vol. I: Christian Self-Government* by Verna M. Hall. Complete this nine-lesson study either individually or with your steering committee.
- ✦ Study the material on the Web sites of StoneBridge School ([www.stonebridgeschool.com](http://www.stonebridgeschool.com)) and the Foundation for American Christian Education ([www.face.net](http://www.face.net)). Obtain a copy of the Foundation catalog and the StoneBridge School catalog.
- ✦ Visit StoneBridge School, the national demonstration school for the Foundation for American Christian Education.
- ✦ Talk personally with Carole Adams, executive vice president of the Foundation, Max Lyons, head administrator of StoneBridge School, or Art Ricciardi, director of the Foundation's Institute.
- ✦ Attend the Principle Approach Seminar sponsored and conducted by StoneBridge School every year in February. This event is conducted on a Friday evening and all day Saturday.
- ✦ Attend a "Pathway to Biblical Liberty" Conference sponsored by the Foundation.
- ✦ Attend the three-day StoneBridge Model Seminar.
- ✦ Purchase and study some of the audio or video tapes that have been produced by StoneBridge School:

***Guardians of the Next Generation***—This thirteen-week course was videotaped live as it was taught at Kempsville Presbyterian Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. An excellent resource for beginners in the Principle Approach, the package contains the thirteen sessions on DVD or VHS and audio-cassette in addition to eighty pages of lecture notes that follow each presentation. This resource can be used in a wide variety of settings including:

- ✦ In-servicing teachers and staff
- ✦ Adult Sunday school class
- ✦ Christian school parent education
- ✦ Christian school board member training
- ✦ Education of a pastor on the basics of the Principle Approach

***Results of the Principle Approach*** by Jim Arcieri, on videotape. This teaching by the headmaster of StoneBridge School explains the results that have been obtained in the national demonstration school.

***The Principle Approach Model of Education*** by Jim Arcieri, on videotape. Mr. Arcieri teaches the basics of the philosophy of education known as the Principle Approach. It is excellent for those who are beginners in their understanding of the Principle Approach.

***Developing a Biblical Worldview Using the Principle Approach***—This is an audiotaped presentation of the 2003 Principle Approach Seminar. This is an excellent series for beginners, as well as those who desire to learn the Principle Approach to teaching various subjects. The titles of the nineteen sessions are:

1. The Principled Family
2. Special Days and Christian History Field Studies in the Curriculum
3. Now More Than Ever—The Pressing Need for the Principle Approach

4. StoneBridge Student Speeches
5. The Principle Approach® to Teaching Art
6. Teaching Mathematics Using Biblical Methods
7. The Founding Fathers on the Nature of Man
8. Approaching the Study of Science from the Creation Principles of God
9. Application of the Notebook Method within the Study of *Ray's Arithmetic*
10. Communicating Biblically
11. The Principle Approach Library
12. Teaching the Principle Approach in Kindergarten
13. Teaching Classic Literature with the Notebook Method
14. The Principle Approach to Teaching the English Language
15. Biblical Worldview 101
16. 4-R'ing Contemporary Issues
17. The Principle Approach to Teaching History
18. The Bible as Primary Reader
19. The Principle Approach Model of Education

#### **FUNDING: Developing a Business/Ministry Plan**

Is a Christian school a business or a ministry? It is both! It is accurate to say that every Christian school is a business of ministry to Christian families. Many assume that a Christian school is a ministry and therefore does not need a business plan or need to focus on being run by sound business principles. Every Christian school needs a business/ministry plan, that is, a plan for how to begin their business and stay in business. The hard reality is that many schools languish without such a plan, and many schools with wonderful vision and excellent faculty members go out of business due to lack of a solid business policies and procedures. Many Christian schools are **under-funded** and this produces many problems, among them:

- ✧ Proper faculty training and development cannot be funded and therefore does not happen.
- ✧ Faculty salaries are not at acceptable levels. As a result, morale is low and teacher turnover is high. The academic program suffers as a result.
- ✧ Facilities suffer and capital projects cannot be done.
- ✧ Programs cannot be funded, resulting in a compromised or “bare bones” curriculum.
- ✧ The pressure is on to place more children in each class than is appropriate.
- ✧ Student enrollment acceptance is based on financial need of the school rather than the fit of the student and family with the school mission.

There is a solution and it is basically two-fold. A solid business plan should take into consideration:

1. Tuition must be set **as close to market levels as possible** while still covering the true cost of operating the school. And,
2. The school must **aggressively and actively seek philanthropic dollars** each year in an annual fund not to exceed ten percent of the budget.

Let's examine these one at a time, first the subject of setting tuition rates. It is our conviction that we need to set the tuition at the highest possible rate. We should not set tuition rates so they can be as affordable to as many families as possible! A concern for low-income families is proper, but the way to make Christian education possible for them is to establish a **need-based financial aid program**.

We believe these convictions are consistent with the principle taught in Galatians 6:2,5 that, "For every man shall bear his own burden," and "Bear ye one another's burdens." In other words, we should all bear our own burden by paying what is necessary to educate our children; and we should bear others' burdens by helping those who may not have all of the financial resources to do so.

Tuition rates should be set as high as possible so that you have the resources to offer an excellent program. If there is more than one Christian school in your area, yours should be one of the highest priced Christian schools. If there are no Christian schools in your area, you should endeavor to be at least in the low end of the price range of the private schools in your area. You may think that parents will not pay the tuition rates that I am suggesting. If you are delivering a quality product, they will pay what you are charging, because people in general are willing to pay the cost of an item if they perceive the value of the item to be more than the cost. If you follow the guidelines that I am suggesting, and do it "heartily as unto the Lord," you will have the financial resources to deliver an excellent educational product, and in turn, parents will be willing to pay the tuition to obtain this excellent education for their most precious children.

If you are raising funds outside of tuition dollars, the general rule of thumb is that no more than eight to ten percent of your budget should be expected from all fundraising. In other words, tuition should be set as close to possible to the cost of operating the school. There are possible exceptions, but this rule of thumb is nearly always applicable and has been borne out in the experience of thousands of Christian and private schools over decades.

The second **non-negotiable in the funding of your school** is the seeking of dollars outside of tuition and fees. Every Principle Approach® school needs these types of dollars! If you are attempting to fund the type of educational program that we are advocating on tuition dollars alone, you are doomed to failure! It cannot be done, so there is no reason to try! Every school needs monies to fund capital projects (buildings, library, science labs, equipment, etc.) and every Principle Approach school needs the extra funds that it takes to implement this program.

If this is true, then what steps do you need to take? First, you need to develop an aspect of your business plan that includes the rationale and methods for raising money beyond tuition dollars. Someone in your organization needs to have the responsibility for fundraising. Many schools ask the headmaster to be this person. The headmaster does have an important role in fundraising, however he needs to be teamed up with an excellent development director. Boards should not assume that the headmaster is the sole fundraiser. The headmaster's role in fundraising includes making contact with key potential or previous donors. He should always be involved in the request for funds from "mega donors" and, in general, sets the tone of effective fundraising. However, the person who does the daily work of development including fundraising needs to be a person hired, experienced, trained, and equipped for this important function.

Often a new school does not feel that it has the financial resources to hire a director of development. If this is the case, you could begin with a person who does development work as part of his job description and as the school grows he works into a full-time director of development. We need to understand that there must be an initial investment in development and fundraising, and that within a short period of time, this department will be paying for itself, and then eventually producing much more in return than is expended.

An excellent resource for the philosophy of funding a school and many other topics is *To the Point: Practical Strategies for Private School Leaders*. Independent School Management produces this newsletter, and they publish other publications and resources that are worth considering. Contact them at 1316 North Union Street, Wilmington, DE 19806-2594, or on the Web at [www.isminc.com](http://www.isminc.com).

# Philosophy

## Producing the Results: Faculty and Staff Training, Supervision and Evaluation, and Professional Development

Let me get right to the point: in the Principle Approach® school, the headmaster must **ensure that his school delivers the results** promised to students and parents by developing **master teachers**. To do so, he must be a superb mentor. He, and any principals or other administrators in the school, must make one of the highest priorities the areas of supervision of instruction and professional development. These are areas that often are at the bottom of the “to do” list in Christian schools, but **they cannot be** in the Principle Approach school. One reason for this is that, according to God’s Principle of Individuality, every teacher that is on our faculty is unique and has a particular set of gifts and talents. God wants that person to be brought to his fullest potential in Him, and his gifts to be brought to their fullest possible expression. It is His desire for each faculty member to be brought to the level of a master teacher, a Christian scholar. This goal will be attained by the serious, long-term mentoring from the headmaster, principal, or another master teacher. This will only take place as those in leadership take seriously the task of supervision of instruction and professional development, so that every faculty member is on a continuum of growth.

An excellent professional development program is one of the benefits of the Principle Approach for the faculty. Instead of the process of education being looked at solely from the standpoint of what the teacher is doing for the student, we look at the process as developing the teacher, who in turn develops the student and other teachers. As 2 Timothy 2:2 states, “ And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” The Principle Approach is for the growth, development, and edification of the teacher first, and then the student. The teacher is not someone who comes and gives of himself to the students and then goes home. Christianity involves the discipleship of each member of Christ’s body and the reality is that we can only give out and minister to others as God has given to us and ministered to us, causing us to grow and develop in Him.

In light of these realities, at StoneBridge School we have developed a Professional Development Program that is unique in Christian education. It is fully funded with monies available for books and materials, seminars and conferences, a salary for the professional development director, and Principle Approach training sessions. Each teacher is placed in the Professional Development Program and is working toward becoming an Associate Master Teacher, and then a Master Teacher. The Master Teachers continue to grow as they are expected to mentor others, write curriculum, and teach at Principle Approach training programs. The details of this program are available from the school upon request.

These are recommended resources for further study on the topic of training, supervision, evaluation, and professional development:

- ✦ Foundations and Applications Courses conducted by the Foundation’s Institute
- ✦ The annual Principle Approach Seminar conducted by StoneBridge School each winter
- ✦ *The StoneBridge Standards: Essential Practices that Produce Principle Approach Results*, available through StoneBridge School
- ✦ The StoneBridge School Professional Development Program
- ✦ *Faculty Manual*, published by StoneBridge School

## Strategic Planning

One verse that has meant a lot to me as a Christian school administrator is Proverbs 16:9, “A man’s heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps.” Some people feel that planning is antithetical to being led by the Spirit. I think that they are two equally valid and often complementary aspects of the Christian life. In the Principle Approach® we teach and learn how to “think governmentally.” There are three aspects to this: we plan, we do, and we judge (or evaluate). Often unconsciously, we all employ each of these functions daily as we go through the various activities of our lives. For example, right now I planned what I was going to write by making an outline, thinking about the topic, gathering resources and talking to others about this topic. I am doing the writing as I sit at my computer. I will judge my work by proofreading, and revising. I will have others judge this work as well and I most likely will revise what I have done based upon their judgment.

Consider the importance of planning as taught by Jesus, not to just His disciples, but to “the multitudes.”

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

(Luke 14:28–31)

Planning is a critical component of all that we do. Unfortunately there are many who do not plan properly. They simply just begin to execute a task without giving it much thought. The results are predictable, a tower that is half built or a war that is lost. If I wrote this book without planning, it would certainly show in what I produced. Leaders in the Principle Approach have to be careful planners, in order to produce the fruit that is needed. This is pioneering work, and we do not always have a trodden path to go down. This is all the more reason to take the needed time to plan.

At StoneBridge School, we have a planning process built into every aspect of the school. For example, our faculty plans their next week’s work and communicates to students and parents on a weekly “goal sheet.” This vital document indicates what will be studied in each course that week. It also tells what homework assignments will be expected. Producing individual goal sheets for each class each week requires a great deal of energy and effort, but is well worth it as a tool for proper planning for teacher, parent and student, and principal. Another example is that the administrative team meets to plan (and judge) each week. They review and see how they are progressing toward implementing each individual department’s and the school’s overall Strategic Plan. This plan, which includes both one-year and long-range goals, was written by the administrative team, and reviewed, revised, and approved by the board. It serves as a guide to keep us performing our mission, and working toward attaining our ultimate vision.

These are recommended resources for further study on the topic of strategic planning:

- ✦ *Christian School Strategic Planning*, available from the Association for Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI is on the Web at [www.acsi.org](http://www.acsi.org).
- ✦ *Strategic Planning for Independent Schools*, by Susan C. Stone, published by the National Association of Independent Schools, ISBN 0-934338-58-2.
- ✦ *Strategic Planning for Christian Organizations*, by Guy S. Saffold, published by Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges.

The following four topics will be addressed in an upcoming expansion of this guide. For now I will list some of the resources that would be valuable for you to obtain and study:

**1. ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOL: Ensuring Successful Teaching and Learning of Each Child**

Recommended Resources:

The StoneBridge School Planting Package

**2. Advertising and Publicity**

Recommended Resources:

Sample model video and script available from StoneBridge School

**3. Working with Parents as Partners**

Recommended Resources:

*Principle Approach*® Educational Resource Tapes from StoneBridge School

*Family Manual* from StoneBridge School

**4. GOVERNANCE: Principles for Establishing and Operating a Board**

Recommended resources:

*Boardroom Confidence* by Bobb Biehl and Ted Engstrom published by Questar Publishers, Inc., ISBN 0-945564-53-8.

*Reinventing Your Board* by John Carver and Miriam Mayhew Carver published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., ISBN 0-7879-0911-4.