

Educating the Next Generation Goes Beyond Minimum Standards for Students: The Importance of Passing on an Understanding of Our “08” Status to State Officials by Pastor David Stratton

Many years ago philosopher George Santanyana said, “Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat its mistakes.” One of the artifacts of our Christian school treasury-bin is the golden nugget of the weighty price that was paid by heroes of a day gone by, granting us an umbrella of protection for our schools in existence today. However, because the storm clouds of the 70’s have passed, few remember that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” Unfortunately, clear skies have recently given way to ominous thunderings as state officials have made intrusive demands in violation of the spirit and intent of our ‘08’ protection.” But what is the meaning of “08”? How did this all begin here in Ohio? Let’s pause for a moment, take a look back, and see if we can learn from our history.

Over thirty years ago, on December 12, 1975, leaders of our Christian school movement met in Columbus with members of the State Board of Education in a meeting arranged by Gov. James A. Rhodes four days after a crowd of some 10,000 Bible-believing Christians rallied on the Statehouse lawn in protest of litigation that threatened to take children away from their parents because those parents had their children in church-operated Christian schools not chartered by the state. By that point, the decisions of two lower courts had already gone against fifteen parents in Darke County where local officials had already declared their youngsters truant. Incensed believers from across the state rose up in overwhelming numbers to support Rev. Levi Whisner, a spiritual warrior, who would not compromise his convictions or give in to the state’s threats and intimidation against his people. Months later, on July 28, 1976, the Ohio State Supreme Court overturned the earlier court decisions in a landmark case called *Ohio v. Whisner*. In this upper court’s findings, it judged the state’s educa-

tional minimal standards as “suffocating,” and further noted that total compliance “eradicates the distinction between public and non-public education.”

Meeting that same year in Edinburgh, Scotland, delegates to the World Congress of Fundamentalists passed a resolution regarding “The Family and Education.” In it the delegates noted “the increasing pressure” which was coming upon pastors “to surrender those freedoms.” The resolution “calls on all believers everywhere to vigorously oppose all legislation or pressures from governments that consider it to be their right to limit or usurp the rights of parents by replacing the family with the state...and to oppose such control even unto death in obedience to God’s Word without regard to consequences.”

God used such strong convictions on the part of His servants of an earlier day to provide a tranquil harbor for Christian schools to practice their Biblical philosophy of education. Consequent to the Whisner mandate, state bureaucrats were ordered to sit down with representatives of Christian Schools of Ohio and find a way to respect their beliefs.

Many meetings later, agreement resulted in a new section of the Ohio Administrative Code called Section 3301-35-08, which recognized as legitimate “non-chartered, non-tax-supported schools” so long as said schools agreed to notify parents basic minimum standards were being fulfilled (standards such as length of school year, length of school day, teacher qualifications, courses of study, compliance with local health and fire safety, etc).

The uniqueness of this “08” status comes with the challenge that each time a new generation of public school officials arrives on the scene, they must be

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brought up to speed by BCSA officials. We might liken our situation to the children of Israel in Exodus 1:8, where we read, “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph;” but we would change the narrative to read, “Now there arose a new superintendent of public education in Ohio who knows little or nothing of the legacy of our administrative code protections under the ‘08’ status.” This cycle has been repeated through the years, and appreciation needs to be rendered to Pastor Dale McCallister of Zanesville, Pastor Keith Hamblen of Lima, and Pastor Tom Coffman of Columbus for the investment these men have made to “sell our program and its history” to those officials.

Unfortunately, at the beginning of this school year, state officials notified BCSA schools of much more intrusive reporting demands. Phone call after phone call followed in an attempt to find a solution, but state officials appeared intractable. If the required new information was not forthcoming by September 30, (they said) students in BCSA schools were liable to be declared truant.

For some veteran pastors and Christian educators, skeletons of the mid-1970s—long thought to be buried—began to be resurrected in our minds as shudders proceeded in our hearts. Believers across the state besought the throne of heaven for a miracle. Meanwhile, Pastor Hamblen contacted Ohio State Senator Jim Jordan after all other remediation attempts had proven unsuccessful. Senator

Jordan’s office went to work, Christians intensified their prayers regarding these matters, and the Almighty answered those prayers in a wonderful way. On September 26, Pastor Hamblen received a call from the Office of Legal Counsel for the State Board of Education agreeing to allow BCSA schools to continue reporting to their parents as they had previously done for so many years under the “08” protections.

Christians across the Buckeye State breathed a collective sigh of relief, but were reminded once again of Edmund Burke’s famous aphorism: “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty!” Praise goes to our great God above who reminded us through these challenging circumstances of a timeless truth found in Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.” God gave a great victory! May we be found vigilant watchmen at the gates with trowel in one hand, and sword in the other, “Building and Battling” until Jesus comes! ❧

Additional insights:

❧ For a better understanding of Ohio’s educational victories, read *Ohio’s Trojan Horse*, by Mr. Alan Grover. Originally published by Bob Jones University Press, this strategic summary of the battle for Christian schooling is sure to open your eyes to the great battles that have been fought and the resulting blessings that we have available to us. Used copies are available online (google.com).