



National Association  
of Episcopal Schools  
*Excellence Through Association*

## **The Idea of an Episcopal School**

*Oregon Episcopal School*

Episcopalians, like all Christians, believe that our life is founded on the life of Jesus, and that as a Church we are called to offer the redeeming love of God in Christ to all people. Episcopal schools are a concrete expression of the Church's care for young people and their families, and of the belief that God calls us to love all God's children.

Despite a long-standing tradition of church schools in the Anglican Communion, the identity of such schools and the nature of their relationships with the Church continue to be re-examined and redefined. The variety of Episcopal schools—ranging from parish day schools that are a direct outgrowth of church mission, to independent boarding schools with only the loosest connections to a diocese—almost defies attempts to define them. The diverse religious backgrounds and cultures of their student and faculty populations raise constant questions of how closely tied they can and should be to the Church, and all Episcopal schools must struggle with the question of what it means to be “Episcopal.” Particular issues may range from qualifications for board and head, to religion curriculum requirements, to participation in school worship.

What Episcopal schools, like other schools, strive for, teach, believe, emphasize and cultivate, must always grow out of present needs and look forward to the demands of the future. But Episcopalians have always treasured their particular traditions, and it may be that the principles embodied in the history of the Church in this country and its roots in England might help clarify the mission of a school that calls itself Episcopal. The points that follow are an attempt to provide not an exhaustive system of such principles but the framework for a discussion and clarification.

**An Episcopal school is comprehensive and inclusive.**

One of the principles of Anglicanism since Queen Elizabeth I imposed her version of diversity on squabbling Church factions is that there is considerable room inside the Church for differences of practice and even differences of belief so long as there is agreement on the fundamentals. In the Church of England today one finds as broad a range of beliefs and practices as one is likely to find in any national Christian church. This comes partly from the fact that the English Church is a national church, identified with the whole nation and the state and therefore expected to see the whole population as under its pastoral care. But even the Episcopal Church has survived differences among its members that would have divided other denominations. Slavery, for example, was a deciding factor in the breakup of several major Protestant denominations into northern and southern branches. No such split occurred in the Episcopal Church.