## Communicating Goals

## Sample Parent Letters

### **Letter #1--Beginning of the Year**

*The first letter is intended for use at or near the beginning of the school year, with the purpose of informing parents about the goals of your program and building trust. The template suggests three areas of focus, which you can adapt. First, it focuses on persons rather than abstract issues by beginning with some reflections on what drew you to science and how your work in science can be grounded in your faith. Second, it offers reflections on the ways in which you hope that students will grow in science class, focusing both on their increasing scientific understanding and on their broader formation. Third, it articulates the ethos of mutual respect within which difficult questions at the intersection of faith and science will be addressed.*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I wanted to welcome you to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ class your student will be taking this year. I am excited to be able to share some of the marvelous intricacies of creation with your student! I am grateful for all your support of your son/daughter as they work to master challenging topics. I believe that learning happens best in the context of strong relationships, and I would like to take a few moments to share with you my hopes for our learning in science class.

I was drawn to science in high school and college since it was an area where I could so clearly see God’s handiwork and care for His creation. As I studied more and more, I found myself reflecting on the absolute marvel and wonder of God’s world--we serve an awesome God! I am also very excited to be able to teach \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School. I remember a time in a college \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ class I took where the professor was so excited about the design of tiny intricacies of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; however, he never mentioned the designer. Therefore, I am so excited to be able to integrate my knowledge and excitement for learning science with my faith and my desire to learn more about God by learning about His creation. My faith draws me to study what God has made, and I believe that the study of science can lead to worship and gratitude as well as increased understanding.

Investigating creation is one way that we can learn more about God and who He is. There is a great section in the Belgic Confession, Article 2, which talks about the ways that we can know God:

*We know God by two means:*

*First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God’s eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without excuse. Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God’s glory and for our salvation.*

And another similar quote by Augustine of Hippo:

*Others, in order to find God, will read a book. Well, as a matter of fact there is a certain great big book, the book of created nature. Look carefully at it top and bottom, observe it, read it. God did not make letters of ink for you to recognize him in; he set before your eyes all these things he had made. Why look for a louder voice? Heaven and earth cries out to you, “God made me.” Observe heaven and earth in a religious spirit.*

One of our goals this semester/year is to learn more about God, ways that we can worship God in our science work, and ways to be faithful stewards and servants by learning more about creation. I hope and pray that over the semester/year we are able to grow in our knowledge of God by learning about His creation and how it works. I want to create a supportive space for students to reflect on how faith relates to science and see how they can fit together.

I will also be focusing on the virtues that are needed for us to have genuinely Christian conversations about faith and science. I would like students to consider that when we disagree about faith and science questions, we are called to exercise love, humility, and gentleness. I also want them to see that virtues such as patience, humility, and kindness to others reflect how we are called to live in all contexts, and that the practice of science is no exception. Humility leads us not to claim to know more than we do, kindness helps us to collaborate with others, patience helps us to do our work accurately, and all of these reflect Christlike character.

Our studying will include honest conversation about some of the issues where we experience tensions between faith and science, but also a look at some of the ways in which they more constructively connect. My desire is to affirm the truth and authority of Scripture while respecting the variety of views found in the community.  It would be wonderful if you were willing to extend the discussion we have in school to conversations you have at home.

Please pray for our class throughout the semester/year. Pray that we may grow and learn faithfully together.

Sincerely,

Your signature here

### **Letter #2--One or Two Months into the School Year**

*The second letter is intended as a follow-up a month or two after the first. It revisits the same three themes, this time in terms of sharing with parents what is going on in class – how you are sharing your love of science, how you see students engaging and growing, and how students are learning to maturely handle difficult questions.*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I wanted to briefly touch base with you regarding what has been happening in our biology class so far this semester/year. As I stated in my earlier letter, one of our goals this semester/year is to learn more about our God, ways that we can worship God in our science work, and ways to be faithful stewards and servants by learning more about His creation. I just wanted to share a couple ways that I see that happening already:

Our class has been talking about how we are called to seek the truth and how this calls for care and patience and not just running with our first assumptions as we look at our results from an investigation. Science can help us learn how to pay close attention to what has been made. Overall, students have done a great job of showing care and attentiveness in their lab work, and I was particularly impressed when \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I am hoping to show students that science is not just about facts and answers but about asking good questions and appreciating the beauty and mystery of creation, and also seeking to grow in character through our studies. It has been great to see students expressing a sense of wonder so far as we have started to learn about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

We have been working on how to show humility and patience with one another when we discuss scientific questions that people disagree about. I appreciate the way that students have been striving to be clear about their beliefs but have also been able to listen well to others. One of the students commented recently that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I hope and pray that over the semester/year we are able to continue to grow in our knowledge of God by learning about his creation and how it works!

Sincerely,

Your signature here

### **Letter #3--Before a Unit That May be Particularly Sensitive or Controversial**

*The third letter is an example of a letter that can be used if you are approaching a topic that you believe to be particularly sensitive or controversial in your particular parent community. Its purpose is to promote transparency of communication and respectful dialogue and to avoid parents feeling excluded and anxious.*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

In biology we are going to begin a chapter on evolution.  Our textbook takes a secular evolutionary approach, but I would like to expand this section to consider Theistic viewpoints on the origin and diversification of species.   I believe it is important that we wrestle with this section of the book for three reasons:

1. As Christians, we are not called to put our heads in the sand, but to learn as much as we can so we can be challenged and grow in our faith, be witnesses to our faith, and be able to give a reasoned account of our faith in a secular context. This includes understanding the range of views that Christians and non-Christians hold on contested issues.
2. Evolution is becoming the central, unifying theory of biology.  It is used to explain anatomy, ecology, biodiversity, biochemistry, and so on.  Research shows that students without an understanding of evolutionary theory struggle in the sciences at higher-level institutions and achieve lower scores on entrance exams such as the SAT and the ACT. Not having a grasp of the principles of evolutionary theory can be detrimental to learning and understanding biology as it is taught today.
3. Evolutionary theory can be misused in the world at large to reject faith.  Discussing evolution from a Christian perspective can prepare students for life outside the Christian school community and lessen future struggles with their faith. Former students have frequently expressed to me that this section of biology was one of the more valuable things they learned in my classroom and have encouraged me to continue covering it.

I recognize that there are a variety of beliefs concerning how God created, and it is not my intent to persuade students one way or the other.  My desire is to challenge them to think well about their beliefs concerning creation and for them to be able to articulate their views in a well-reasoned manner. No student will be graded on what position he or she takes, but rather on how well he or she is able to articulate and explain it in relation to science. My desire is to affirm the truth and authority of Scripture while respecting the variety of views found in the school’s extended community.

The most important thing you can do is to pray for us as we learn. Pray that your child’s faith ignites, grows, and matures.  Pray, too, that we have love for each other as we discuss issues that some find sensitive.  Pray that students will come away with a greater faith in God, an appreciation for His creation, and an understanding about the world around us that will enable us to be better stewards of the creation.

Sincerely,

Your signature here