

# **John Mathews: Education is about relationships, impacting eternity**

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John Mathews is the assistant superintendent over administrative services for the Celina Independent School District and a member of [First Baptist Church in McKinney](#). To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated educator to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

## **Background**

### **Where else have you served, and what were your positions there?**

I served as a coordinator for student services, transportation director, interim middle school principal, and middle school and high school assistant principal for the Melissa Independent School District.

Prior to that, I was a high school math teacher at North Hills Preparatory School, a charter school in Irving.

I was one of the founding teachers for Prestonwood Christian Academy, where I taught middle and high school math and middle school Bible classes.

I spent a year at Providence School of Texas in Highland Park, teaching 5th through 8th grade math.

Finally, I taught biology and chemistry at Lakewood Presbyterian School

for a year.

## **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Sunnyvale, Texas. We spent a couple of years in Abilene, but that was prior to middle school.

## **How did you come to faith in Christ?**

When my parents moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area for my father to attend seminary, we attended Lake Highland United Methodist Church, followed by Garland Bible Fellowship.

I grew up in the church. Though I cannot point to a specific event or day, I have been confident of and in my faith since about age 5.

It was during my high school years at Reinhart Bible Church in Sunnyvale that my faith really became my own. Under the discipleship of the pastor for adult ministries, Ned Amstutz, and the youth pastor, Steve Johnson, I really began to grow in my faith.

## **Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?**

- University of Texas at Dallas, bachelor's degree in biology.
- Dallas Theological Seminary, Master of Arts degrees in biblical studies and Christian education.
- University of North Texas, Ph.D. in educational leadership.

## **About education**

### **Why do you feel called into education?**

I don't know why, but I know God has called me. In *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell states: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me

fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.” I understand this sentiment. I am in my element when I am engaging students and working for their benefit, even when they do not like it, appreciate it or even notice.

## **How does being a Christian influence your work in education?**

Subtly and subversively. Educators are called into a field hostile to the gospel, especially in public education. I get to infuse my faith into what I do, and at times, God opens the door for me to share the gospel openly. The rest of the time, it is living the Christ-life in front of others. As Paul instructed the Thessalonians, we are to live in such a way that when others see us, they see Christ.

Teaching, or education, is not just a job; it is a way of life. You have to live like you believe the truth you teach.

Education primarily is about building relationships to pass information and understanding to students. I began teaching as a means to pay my way through Dallas Theological Seminary but fell in love with my students.

## **What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?**

The ability I get to have in building relationships with my students and building into their lives. As an educator, I am on the front lines of the spiritual battles of faith and truth in our culture. Now that I am in an administrative position, I get to influence the influencers, who in turn hire the teachers who influence children.

I once had a professor who stated, “I get to lead you before the throne (of God), and if we learn a little Greek on the way, I have done my job.”

The way to impact the future is to influence what is being taught, who is teaching it, and who is building relationships with the students. Our

university systems have influenced the thinking of the younger generation. It is showing up in our politics and in our public schools.

## **What one aspect of education gives you the greatest joy?**

I really enjoy working with the hard kids. On average, more than [35 percent of kids](#) are raised in fatherless homes. I get to be the positive male authority figure desperately missing in many homes.

## **What one aspect of education would you like to change?**

I would change the influencers, those folks who manipulate what we are to teach students. I also would not put so much emphasis on standardized testing. It is good to a point, but the American public school system has taken it too far.

## **How has your place in education or your perspective on education changed?**

It has changed from being a means to pay for life to a means to impact eternity.

## **Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing education.**

I predict we will continue to see an increasing struggle in our society with issues related directly to character and ethics, historically guided by biblical norms. However, with the social focus on making everyone feel good about themselves, we have highjacked morality.

Directly related to the previous statement: The social justice philosophy currently infiltrating our society is not what we think it is. It is infiltrating our education system and impacting how our children understand and

respond to the world around them, including topics of faith. It is one of the most subtly poisonous things I have seen in my life. This philosophy is not just about doing what is right by my neighbor; it promotes relativism to the extreme and denies absolute truth, absolute morality and absolute authority. I suspect we will see a significant impact on whether we will be successful in passing the faith to the next generation.

Education as we know it is expensive. I am not sure our economy will continue to be able to afford the current model.

## **What do you wish more people knew about education?**

According to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, it is the parent's responsibility to educate their children. In our society, we have partnered with teachers to ensure they learn the core subjects. But it is still your responsibility to ensure your children are brought up in the admonition of the Lord.

Parents, please do not drop your kids off at school or Sunday school and leave *all* the teaching to educators you do not know. You do not know what they believe or are teaching outside of their subject.

Public schools have taken the place of parents for most children or have replaced parents completely. Some parents have abdicated parenting to the school system. We are doing our best given the parameters required by federal, state and local education agency laws and policies.

Secondary teachers can have as many as 180 students. Elementary teachers can have as many as 120, if the grade levels are departmentalized. Most teachers truly love your children like they were their own. Educators know you entrust us with your most prized possessions. We want their best, as well.

# About John

## Why are you Baptist?

I attend a First Baptist Church of McKinney and am endorsed as a military chaplain through the North American Mission Board. I identify as a Bible-believing and practicing Christian, not specifically Baptist.

I was asked by my secretary, who was the wife of the choir director, to help populate the bass section for the Easter choir. She heard me sing to the kids one time and asked if I was in choir when I was younger. It turned out, I knew several people at the church. We have been there since.

## Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

My grandfather is the greatest example of what I imagine Jesus would be like.

Ned Amstutz and Steve Johnson showed me how to live the Christian life. They showed me it was real and that a life of service for the sake of Christ was rewarding and fulfilling. They taught me how to study and memorize scripture in such a way that it became personal.

## What did you learn on the job you wish you learned elsewhere?

It is all about relationships. It. Is. All. About. Relationships. If you take the time to build relationships, you will be able to accomplish so much more, because you will have the flexibility to get the help you need.