

Father, daughter earn diplomas

Wade and Brenna Witherspoon don mortar boards for GFU graduation Saturday

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Most parents cheer from the audience at their child's graduation ceremony. Wade Witherspoon celebrated from the podium.

Witherspoon, the superintendent of C.S. Lewis Academy in Newberg, completed a doctorate in education degree at George Fox University at Saturday's commencement exercises with his daughter Brenna, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in social work.

"It's special for us — something we can always share," Wade Witherspoon said. "The fact that we were scheduled to graduate together lit a bit of a fire under me to get my dissertation completed."



"Seeing his motivation and effort in running the school and pursuing his degree really motivated me to do well in college also," Brenna Witherspoon added.

Wade Witherspoon, 48, earned his master's degree in education from Azusa Pacific University in Southern California in 1992. Prior to that, he had worked at Open Bible in Newberg and — after a stint teaching abroad in New Guinea — founded Chehalem Valley Academy in 1997, which later merged with C.S. Lewis.

"I'd wanted to be a teacher since high school and after graduating college — I attended George Fox — I was offered a job at a private school," he said. "I'd intended to work in the public school system, but I fell in love with Christian education. I'm not just interested in teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but character and moral values to make well-rounded citizens."

Despite having been involved in two private schools in Newberg, Witherspoon decided it was time to improve his professional credentials.

"My first goal was just to get my administrative license — you don't have to be state-licensed to start a private school, but I felt I needed the right credentials," he said. "I was told that if I was going to do the work, I might as well enroll in a doctorate program."

The pursuit of a doctorate also gave Witherspoon the chance to further explore his interest in character development as an educational goal through his dissertation, titled: "Character Education: Determining Barriers to Implementation."

"It's a look at how to use it (character education) in the public school system, because it's a very effective way to raise standards and manage the classroom," he said. "The main obstacle is that teachers don't feel they have the time to add it on (as a separate subject) — but it really has to be approached in a way that permeates the curriculum."

Meanwhile, Brenna Witherspoon also studied issues of self-worth and moral behavior in pursuit of her degree in social work, participating in bullying prevention programs in the Newberg school district and volunteering at a Portland homeless shelter.

"My parents raised me to use and expand on my abilities, and to be engaged," she said. "Chehalem Youth and Family Services has offered me a job and I'm hoping to work my way into a position as a case worker. It's a big deal — not many people get to use their degree right out of college."

Noting that his other daughter has begun a career in nursing, Wade added: "I'm really proud they both have chosen careers of service to others."