



LEADERSHIP FOR FLOURISHING SCHOOLS

From Research to Practice



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Because of their biblically based philosophy of education, Christian schools ground their vision and mission in Scripture. Thus, based on the scriptural truth that God desires to bless his people and cause them to flourish (Psalm 44:2; 52:8; 72:7, 16; 92:12-13), ACSI Research set out in 2018-2019 to understand the ways in which Christian schools can flourish. Over 15,000 Christian school students, teachers, administrators, board members, parents, support staff, and alumni participated in the research via the Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI).

The results of this research were groundbreaking and yielded the first ever measure and model of Christian school flourishing. The resultant Flourishing School Culture Model (FSCM) clusters 35 validated constructs for all survey groups into five domains of flourishing: *Purpose*; *Relationships*; *Teaching & Learning*; *Expertise & Resources*; and *Well-Being*. These domains provide a compelling and comprehensive picture of the areas in which Christian schools can focus their efforts and resources in order to promote a flourishing school culture and community. The model has been externally reviewed and rigorously validated to provide leaders with statistically sound and relevant feedback for their schools.

The question remains, however, of how these findings can be utilized by school leaders to develop their own practices that lead to flourishing-related outcomes for their schools. Because the FSCI engages multiple school leaders (including heads of school, principals and other administrators, board members, and teacher leaders), it not only provides an assessment of outcomes across different leadership roles, but also enables exploration of relationships between roles, how these relationships influence outcomes, and how they contribute in positive ways to flourishing school cultures. Factor analysis of constructs for leaders—supplemented by literature-based consideration of the nature of the constructs as they relate to leadership behaviors—yields three “levels” of constructs as they relate to leaders. These are: *leader specific* constructs,

which are “embodied” by leaders; *leader directed* constructs, for which leaders are directly responsible; and *leader shaped* constructs, which leaders influence at the level of culture. While they differ in the mechanisms by which they work, all three levels of constructs are crucial for school flourishing.

The present report builds upon these three data-informed levels of leadership to identify leadership practices that promote flourishing. First, through *foundational practices*, leaders “lead by example” in modeling spiritual devotion and self-development for their teachers and students. Second, through *relational practices*, leaders promote healthy relationships not only with and among teachers, staff, and students, but also with the local community at large. And finally, through *strategic practices*, leaders pursue sound financial planning and hiring to create an environment in which educators and students can thrive. In addition to exploring these practices, this report provides two sets of self-reflection guides—one for school leaders and one for school boards—with questions that can be used individually and collaboratively to strengthen leaders’ foundational, relational, and strategic practices.

Finally, with over 100 schools administering the FSCI since its launch, the size of the research database and the opportunity to collect qualitative data on how schools use FSCI results continues to grow. The concluding section of the report shares insights from this expanding knowledge base around flourishing in Christian schools, with a specific focus on 1) top cultural strengths and areas for growth identified across all FSCI-participating schools and 2) qualitative insights from leaders on how they are leveraging FSCI results in change and improvement efforts at their schools (like strategic planning, accreditation, and new initiatives). Using FSCI insights wisely in leading schools invites the blessing of God, who promises to be the source of our flourishing: “Your fruitfulness comes from me” (Hosea 14:8b).

I. THE FLOURISHING SCHOOLS RESEARCH

How do Christian schools flourish, in keeping with their biblical philosophy of education? What elements of school culture contribute to flourishing, and do some elements matter more than others? Is there a roadmap to school flourishing that can be validated by empirical research in Christian schools? In 2018 and 2019, ACSI Research set out to understand school flourishing by exploring these questions systematically using a new research tool, the Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI). Over 15,000 completed FSCI responses were collected from students, teachers, administrators, board members, parents, support staff, and alumni at 65 school communities. The results of this research were groundbreaking and yielded the first-ever

measure and model of Christian school flourishing.

To do this, the FCSI drew upon a diverse set of inputs (i.e., educators' and leaders' practices, school programs and policies, and cultural elements) to identify and validate 35 constructs as linked to a holistic range of flourishing outcomes. These constructs were mapped onto the first empirically based model of Christian school flourishing, the Flourishing School Culture Model (FSCM). The FSCM clusters the validated constructs for all seven survey groups into five domains of flourishing—*Purpose, Relationships, Teaching & Learning, Expertise & Resources, and Well-Being*—as depicted in Figure 1 below.

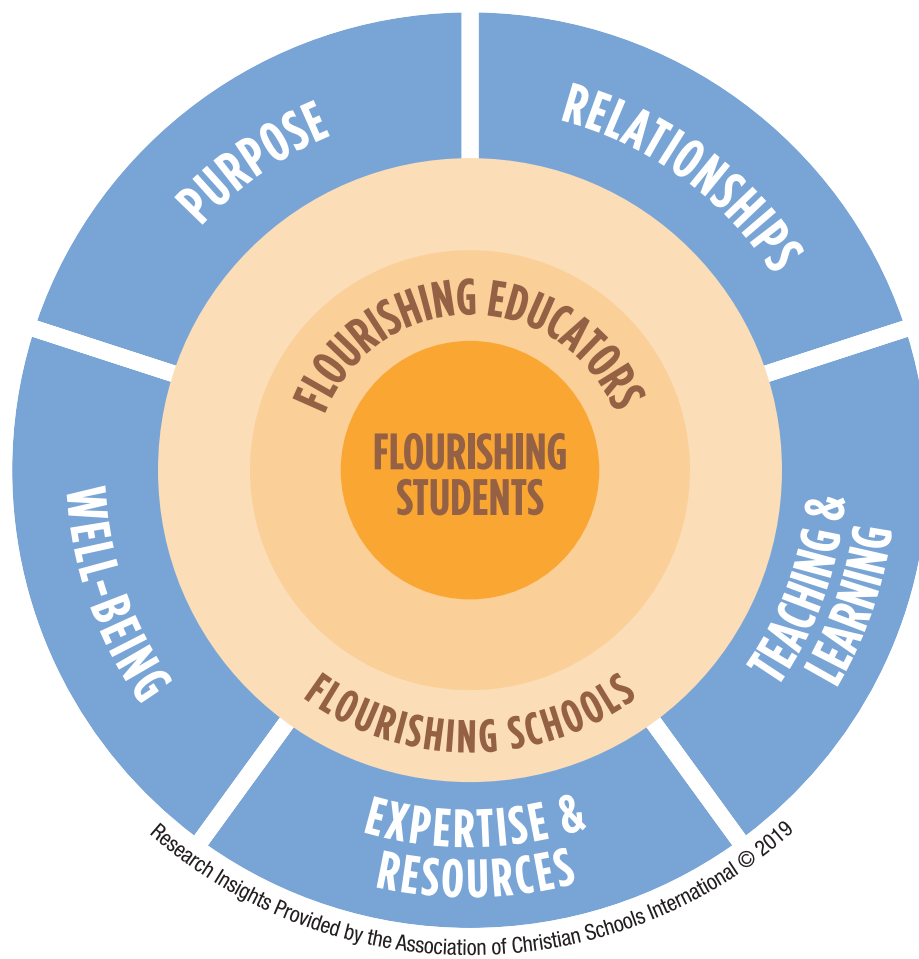


Figure 1. ACSI Flourishing School Culture Model (FSCM)

The Five Domains of Flourishing

The five domains of the FSCM are described briefly, below:

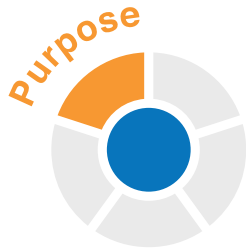
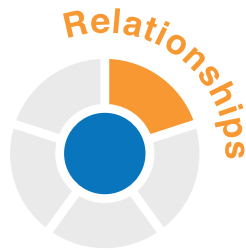



- *Purpose*: A commitment on the part of all school constituencies to the central purposes of Christian education—such as holistic teaching, integrated worldview, spiritual formation, discipleship, and family-school partnership—are strongly linked with flourishing outcomes.
- *Relationships*: Trust-filled, supportive, and authentic relationships between all school constituencies, as well as with the surrounding community, are key to flourishing outcomes.
- *Teaching & Learning*: A school culture in which educators are committed to ongoing learning and improvement is linked with flourishing not only for the school and educators, but also for students.
- *Expertise & Resources*: School and educator

flourishing is connected to excellence in educational and management practices.

- *Well-Being*: For both leaders and teachers at Christian schools, stress is a key factor that impacts flourishing; likewise, healthy living and developing resilience is connected to student flourishing.

A detailed description of each domain, with a listing of the corresponding constructs comprising each one, is provided in Table 1 on the next page. Further detail on each construct can be found in the national report *Flourishing Schools: Research on Christian School Culture and Community* (Swaner, Marshall, and Tesar 2019). Taken together, these five domains provide a compelling and comprehensive picture of the areas in which Christian schools can focus their efforts and resources in order to promote a flourishing school culture and community.

Table 1. ACSI Flourishing School Culture Model (FSCM) Domains and Constructs

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION	PREDICTIVE CONSTRUCTS
	<p>A commitment on the part of all school constituencies to the central purposes of Christian education—such as holistic teaching, integrated worldview, spiritual formation, discipleship, and family-school partnership—are strongly predictive of flourishing outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Responsibility ✓ Holistic Teaching ✓ Integrated Worldview ✓ God's Story ✓ Questioning ✓ Partnership ✓ Spiritual Formation
	<p>Trust-filled, supportive, and authentic relationships between all school constituencies, as well as with the surrounding community, are key to flourishing outcomes (e.g., between leaders and teachers, leaders and the board, families and teachers, teachers and students, students and peers, school leadership and the community, and the school itself with the community).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supportive Leadership ✓ Leadership Interdependence ✓ Family Relationships ✓ Community Engagement ✓ Mentoring Students ✓ Insular Culture ✓ Christlike Teachers ✓ Prosocial Orientation ✓ Caring Environment
	<p>A school culture in which educators are committed to ongoing learning and improvement is predictive of flourishing not only for the school and educators, but also for students. For teachers, this includes best practices in feedback and collaboration, high-quality professional development, individualized instruction, and effective and orderly classroom environments where students are deeply engaged in learning. For school leadership, this entails using systems thinking to develop a culture of improvement, which is both focused on student outcomes and is data driven.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Feedback ✓ Collaboration ✓ Systems Thinking ✓ Data-Driven Improvement ✓ Professional Development ✓ Outcomes Focus ✓ Culture of Improvement ✓ Individualized Instruction ✓ Best Practice Orientation ✓ Engaged Learning ✓ Behaviors for Learning
	<p>Flourishing is connected to excellence in educational and school management practices. Educationally, this includes hiring qualified staff and responding effectively to special needs. Sufficient school resources—as well as board-level strengths in resource planning—are predictive of school flourishing, as are (conversely) resource constraints that hinder schools from engaging in improvement processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Qualified Staff ✓ Responsiveness to Special Needs ✓ Resources ✓ Resource Planning ✓ Resource Constraints
	<p>For both leaders and teachers at Christian schools, stress is a key factor that impacts flourishing; likewise, healthy living and developing resilience is predictive of student flourishing. This domain and related constructs demonstrate that the well-being of educators and students is not a secondary concern—but rather is predictively linked—to flourishing outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stress ✓ Healthy Living ✓ Resilience

Why Flourishing? A Biblical and Educational Perspective

The vast majority of the school improvement literature and related reform efforts focuses on the academic achievement of students, measured almost exclusively via standardized testing (Hargreaves 1994; Mok and Flynn 2006; McCollum and Yoder 2011) and to the exclusion of a wide range of other important educational outcomes (character, spiritual, vocational, and so forth). This is particularly problematic for Christian schools, where academic outcomes are of prime, but not sole, importance (Sikkink 2012; Green et al. 2016; Casagrande et al. 2019; Cheng and Iselin 2020). This is because a biblical foundation directly informs the kinds of educational outcomes with which Christian schools are concerned, namely the holistic education of the student—the spirit, mind, heart, and body—reflecting the reality that students are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [they] should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

As part of the instrument development process for the FSCI and as shared in the 2019 report, ACSI Research conducted a meta-analysis of Christian schools’ expected student outcomes and/or “portrait of a graduate,” which confirmed the wide range of outcomes with which Christian schools are concerned. For the over 60 Christian schools sampled (with nationally known schools with ACSI Exemplary Accreditation and/or other commensurate sector-level recognition intentionally oversampled), six main categories of outcomes were identified: spiritual (100% of schools); academic (also 100%); community-oriented (86%); excellence (83%); impact (65%); and servanthood (49%).

In light of this range of expected student outcomes, the biblical concept of “flourishing” provides a more capacious way of understanding the mission and incarnational practice of Christian schools. Throughout Scripture, the concept of *flourishing* is used to describe a state of being—one that always results from God’s work with and upon communities

of faith. The psalmist invokes the blessing in the Old Testament, “May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children” (Psalm 115:14). This blessing echoes in the words of Jesus when He told disciples, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10b). It also manifests in Jesus’ promise, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5b). Inherent in these scriptures is a picture of how through Christ, communities of faith can flourish to the benefit of both students and educators alike. Flourishing thus provides a more expansive and biblically aligned view of the purposes and processes of Christian education.

The FSCM and School Leadership

When it comes to outcomes for students, teachers, and schools, *leadership matters*. Leaders know this intuitively, but as importantly, this fact has been demonstrated through extensive research (Leithwood et al. 2004; Marzano, Waters, and McNulty 2005; Waters and Marzano 2006; Wahlstrom et al. 2010). Effective leaders positively influence student learning (Branch et al. 2012; Coelli and Green 2012; Grissom et al. 2015; Chiang et al. 2016; Dhuey and Smith 2018), especially in schools serving high proportions of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Clotfelter et al. 2007; Seashore Louis et al. 2010; Branch et al. 2012; Cosner and Jones 2016). Effective leaders also reduce teacher turnover and promote a positive school climate (Boyd et al. 2011; Grissom 2011; Ladd 2011; Sebastian and Allensworth 2012; Burkhauser 2017; Grissom and Bartanen 2019; Leahy and Shore 2019); Sebastian and Allensworth 2012). The Flourishing Schools Research further confirms that leadership matters for the flourishing of all school constituents, as well as the school itself.

It is important to note that the Flourishing Schools Research surveyed multiple school constituencies that comprise the school community, which not only allows for assessment of outcomes across different populations, but also enables exploration of relationships between these groups, how these

relationships influence outcomes, and how they contribute in positive ways to flourishing school cultures. Factor analysis of constructs for leaders—supplemented by literature-based consideration of the nature of the constructs as they relate to leadership behaviors—yields three “levels” of constructs as they relate to leaders. These are *leader specific* constructs, *leader directed* constructs, and *leader shaped* constructs. All three levels of constructs are crucial for school flourishing, and therefore one is not more

important than another. However, they differ in terms of the *mechanisms* by which they operate and by which leaders engage them, as explored below.

Leader Specific Constructs

These constructs emerged from the research as *specific to leaders*, meaning that these are constructs that leaders *embody*. The ten leader specific constructs identified in the FSCM are defined in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Leader Specific Constructs

Domain	Construct	Definition
Purpose	Integrated Worldview	Christian worldview changes how we educate; there is no such thing as a secular sphere.
	Responsibility (Leaders)	Leaders feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.
Well-Being	Stress (Leaders)	Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time to focus on physical health for leaders.
Relationships	Leadership Interdependence	Leaders, including board members, have diverse backgrounds and are transparent about and rely on others to offset their weaknesses.
	Community Engagement	The school engages with the surrounding community and local churches, and regularly taps into community resources, including networking and resource-sharing with other schools.
Teaching & Learning	Systems Thinking	When planning for change, the potential impact on the school, the classroom, students, and the overall system are considered.
	Data-Driven Improvement	Data is used to gauge school results and effectiveness, determine goal attainment, and address problems the school faces.
	Outcomes Focus	Process does not matter if it isn't producing results, and change is distracting if it doesn't lead to increases in student achievement.
Expertise & Resources	Resource Planning	A strategic financial plan and master facilities plan is in place, and financial planning is a strength of the board.
	Resource Constraints	The school has financial resources to operate effectively; or, a belief prevails that the school could be more effective if not for fiscal constraints, and it lacks the resources needed to make changes.

Since they involve the skills and dispositions of leaders, responses to these constructs look much like an iterative cycle for professional and leadership development: reflect on and assess performance; identify areas for improvement; create a plan to resource and support improvement; and evaluate change in performance (Swaner 2016).

Leader Directed Constructs

These constructs are those for which leaders have the *most direct responsibility*, and therefore represent places where leaders can directly impact the flourishing of the school and its constituents. The ten leader directed constructs identified in the FSCM are defined in Table 3, below.

Table 3. *Leader Directed Constructs*

Domain	Construct	Definition
Purpose	Partnership (Families)	Families feel they are a part of the school’s mission, and that their child’s spiritual development requires their partnering with and being involved at the school.
	Responsibility (Teachers/Staff)	Teachers and support staff feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.
Well-Being	Stress (Teachers)	Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time to prepare for instruction for teachers.
Relationships	Supportive Leadership	Principals are trusted, teachers feel that leaders “have our backs,” and leaders empower teachers and staff to make decisions.
	Insular Culture	The school shields students from the world’s brokenness, the school is independent from the surrounding community, and/or the student body lacks diversity.
Teaching & Learning	Culture of Improvement	Guided by school leadership and focused on the future, the school is continually improving/makes necessary changes to improve.
	Feedback	Feedback on teaching practice and classroom management is given regularly to facilitate adjustments in real-time.
	Professional Development	PD is provided on-site and is subject- and role-specific.
Expertise & Resources	Qualified Staff	New teacher hires are credentialed (educationally and licensed/certified) and have classroom experience.
	Resources	Materials and resources for teaching, including technology, are sufficient, and the school building is in good physical condition.

Positively impacting these constructs will require many—if not all—of the skills that are cultivated and embodied in leader *specific* constructs discussed above. Thus, the first leadership response to these ten constructs should be to engage in the leadership development cycle identified earlier. In tandem, the following leadership behaviors serve to move the needle in positive ways with regard to these constructs:

- Working collaboratively with stakeholders to assess needs, plan for improvement, and evaluate change;
- Creating 360-degree feedback mechanisms so that data is regularly gathered with regard to these constructs;
- Analyzing and utilizing constituent data gathered to drive improvement decisions and evaluate progress toward goals;
- Procuring and allocating personnel, finances, and materials effectively, in order to resource change; and

- Developing policies, procedures, and structures that support teachers and staff—again, with collaborative involvement of these groups.

Leader Shaped Constructs

Leader shaped constructs are those which leaders *influence at the cultural level*. This means that in order to effect better flourishing outcomes related to these constructs, leaders should engage in culture-shaping efforts that actively include multiple school constituents. Although leaders may view this construct level as the area in which their influence is most indirect, the sheer number of constructs—combined with their importance to the instructional, student, and community cultures of the school—makes this level critically important to school flourishing. The 17 leader shaped constructs identified in the FSCM are defined in Table 4, on the next page.

Table 4. Leader Shaped Constructs

Domain	Construct	Definition
Purpose	Holistic Teaching	Teaching involves helping students develop spiritually and emotionally (teaching the heart and soul, as well as the mind).
	God's Story	Students believe they are a part of God's bigger plan and can be used by him to "make a difference."
	Questioning	Students have doubts about their faith, lack time to pray or study the Bible, and feel that most Christians are too judgmental.
	Spiritual Formation	Students and alumni report that their Christian faith is stronger thanks to attending a Christian school, and they believe people can change with God's help.
Well-Being	Healthy Living (Students)	Students are happy with their physical health, including sufficient exercise and a healthy diet.
	Resilience (Students)	Students handle stress effectively and respond well to/bounce back from difficult situations.
Relationships	Family Relationships	Teachers "get to know" families, and frequent and systemic communication facilitates positive relationships.
	Mentoring Students	Staff point out talent in each student, help students see how they fit in God's bigger plan, and are aware of students' struggles at school or home.
	Christlike Teachers	Teachers show Christlike love, kindness, and care to students. Families feel students are cared about individually, including their spiritual development.
	Caring Environment	Teachers are kind, students feel included in class, and students are protected from bullying.
	Prosocial Orientation	Students not only enjoy helping others, but also are known by others (e.g., peers) for showing love and care.
Teaching & Learning	Collaboration	Learning from and with other teachers drives and inspires better teaching.
	Individualized Instruction	Students are helped to figure out how they learn best and to identify their natural strengths.
	Best Practice Orientation	Keeping up with best practices is prioritized and resources for doing so can be identified.
	Engaged Learning	Students engage in activities that nurture critical thinking, evaluating information, and problem solving.
	Behaviors for Learning	The classroom is orderly and well-managed, and teachers are organized and consistent in supporting student behaviors that contribute to learning.
Expertise & Resources	Responsiveness to Special Needs	Teaching staff work together to serve students with special needs, aided by processes and resources for identifying and responding to those needs.

Leaders will need to employ best practices in cultural change management in order to influence these constructs and, in turn, shape the overall school culture toward flourishing. These practices include:

- Setting clear, mission-aligned expectations for all school stakeholders, including teachers and staff, families, and students—both related to their roles at the school and to their relationships with one another;
- Modeling these expectations as leaders, intentionally and consistently;
- Engaging the school community around “big questions” inherent in these constructs; and
- Employing leader specific constructs to inform, manage, and evaluate culture-level change toward flourishing.

Translating Research into Practice

As is evident from the Flourishing Schools Research, leadership either impacts or influences all 35

constructs identified as correlated with flourishing for the school, educators, and students. The means by which leaders do this, however, differs by construct level—whether leader specific, leader directed, or leader shaped. With this in mind, the present report turns to the question of how these findings can be utilized by school leaders—including heads of school, administrators, and school boards—to develop their own practices that lead to flourishing-related outcomes for their schools.

To do so, this report draws upon not only the Flourishing Schools Research itself, but also over two years of additional qualitative research and learning from FSCI-participating schools as they examined and applied their results to a range of school improvement efforts. With the goal of helping leaders consider how they can personally and intentionally lead change and improvement efforts at their schools, insights on developing leadership practices for flourishing are shared in the next section of this report.

II. LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR FLOURISHING

As discussed in the previous section of this report, the Flourishing Schools Research provides insights regarding the relationship of each FSCM construct to school leadership (with each construct as either specific to, directed by, or shaped by leaders). The question becomes how leaders can develop their own practices that will promote the flourishing of students, educators, and schools. To answer this question, this section of the report first defines the three categories of practices that leaders can develop for flourishing, and then describes how those practices can be developed within schools.

Categories of Leadership Practices

The FSCM domains provide a helpful framework for conceptualizing three categories of practices that leaders can develop in order to lead flourishing schools: *foundational practices*, arising from the *Purpose* and *Well-Being* domains; *relational practices*, tied to the *Relationships* domain; and *strategic practices*, which correspond to the *Teaching & Learning* and *Expertise & Resources* domains. These three categories of practices and their corresponding domains are depicted in Figure 2, on the next page.

Figure 2. Leadership Practices for Flourishing Schools.



FRAMEWORK	DOMAIN	CONSTRUCTS		
		LEADER SPECIFIC	LEADER DIRECTED	LEADER SHAPED
Foundational Practices	Purpose	Integrated Worldview	Partnership (Families)	Holistic Teaching
		Responsibility (Leaders)	Responsibility (Teachers & Staff)	God's Story
	Well-Being	Stress (Leaders)	Stress (Teachers)	Questioning
				Spiritual Formation
Relational Practices	Relationships	Leadership Interdependence	Supportive Leadership	Healthy Living (Students)
		Community Engagement	Insular Culture	Resilience (Students)
	Teaching & Learning	Systems Thinking	Culture of Improvement	Family Relationships
		Data-Driven Improvement	Feedback	Mentoring Students
Strategic Practices	Teaching & Learning	Outcomes Focus	Professional Development	Christlike Teachers
				Best Practice Orientation
	Expertise & Resources	Resource Planning	Qualified Staff	Caring Environment
	Resource Constraints	Resources	Prosocial Orientation	
			Engaged Learning	
			Behaviors for Learning	
			Responsiveness to Special Needs	

Foundational Practices

As the name suggests, *foundational practices* are those that are prerequisites for leading flourishing schools. Foundational practices reflect the widely known leadership tenet that leaders must *lead themselves first*. In the FSCM, foundational practices arise from the *Purpose* and *Well-Being* domains and suggest that leadership for flourishing hinges on the process of self-development.

From the *Purpose* domain, leaders in Christian schools begin with a firm commitment to a philosophy of Christian education that is rooted in the biblical narrative and is centered on the sovereignty and work of Christ (as reflected in the construct Integrated Worldview). It is this foundation that enables leaders to enact and uphold the Christ-centered mission of their schools (Responsibility), which is borne out in Deuteronomy 6 partnerships with families (Partnership) and a holistic education for students that reflects God's design per Ephesians 2:10 (Holistic Teaching). Such a worldview commitment also manifests in the centrality of discipleship in Christian schools (God's Story and Questioning) and is evident in a deep and lasting impact of Christian education well past graduation (Spiritual Formation).

The *Well-Being* domain also informs foundational practices for leaders. Both leaders and teachers are often faced with long hours of work and a high level of stress-inducing situations. A flourishing leader understands the importance of healthy work-life integration and develops a plan for well-being (including addressing the construct of Stress). As C.S. Lewis writes in *God in the Dock*, "None can give to another what he does not possess himself... Nothing which was not in the teachers can flow from them into the pupils" (118). Unhealthy leaders (whether in mind, body, or spirit) simply cannot lead a school community to flourishing. Rather, well-being within a school begins with leaders who prioritize their wellness and both model and create the conditions for others to do the same (whether Stress, for teachers, or Healthy Living and Resilience, for students).

Relational Practices

Education is fundamentally a relational enterprise. Christian education is all the more so, given the incarnational nature of the Christian faith (John 1:14) and the emphasis of Scripture on love of neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). James Davison Hunter (2010) connects the covenantal nature of relationships with "the flourishing of the world around us" (p. 261; Beckman et al. 2012). Not surprisingly then, *relational practices*—framed by the *Relationships* domain of the FSCM—are crucial for school leadership that contributes to flourishing in Christian schools (Banke et al. 2012; Beckman et al. 2012).

This begins with leaders' cultivation of healthy leadership teams (Leadership Interdependence) that in turn mirror a healthy leadership culture with teachers and staff (Supportive Leadership). Continuing the cascade, positive relationships with students are cultivated through teacher and staff practices (Mentoring Students, Christlike Teachers, Caring Environment) as well as between students and their peers (Prosocial Orientation). Leaders of flourishing schools also build strong relationships within the school community (Family Relationships) and with the local community at large (Community Engagement, Insular Culture).

School leaders who prioritize relationships set culture-shaping imperatives for all members of the school community, and in the context of healthy, responsive relationships, leaders can become bridge builders over racial, socioeconomic, and other divides that often arise in school settings. Leaders need a sense of self-awareness, a high "EQ," a commitment to cultural awareness, and a reliance on God's grace, if they are to demonstrate the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) in their relationships with all constituencies. Ultimately, seeing "people work" as a primary, rather than a secondary, leadership task is essential to school flourishing.

Strategic Practices

The Flourishing Schools Research found that a school

culture in which educators are committed to ongoing learning and improvement is connected to flourishing not only for the school and educators, but also for students. Additionally, flourishing is inextricably linked to excellence in educational and school management practices. These research findings are embedded in the FSCM in the *Teaching & Learning* domain and the *Expertise & Resources* domain, respectively, and give rise to a number of *strategic practices* for leaders.

These include leaders' pushing for results (construct of Outcomes Focus) and using data to make decisions (Data-Driven Improvement), all while thinking holistically about the impact of their decisions on the school community (Systems Thinking). Leaders also develop their abilities to engage in strategic financial planning and management (Resource Planning, Resource Constraints, and Resources), which are evidenced in their hiring practices (Qualified Staff), as well as ensuring that all students have the resources and support they need to flourish (Responsiveness to Special Needs). In turn, leaders shape an overall culture where ongoing growth and improvement is expected and facilitated for faculty and staff (Culture of Improvement, Feedback, Collaboration, Professional Development, Best Practice Orientation) as well as for students (Individualized Instruction, Engaged Learning, and Behaviors for Learning).

Strategic practices enable leaders to be good stewards of people and resources, such that flourishing outcomes are enhanced for students, educators, and schools. From formal education and training to on-the-job learning to networked improvement communities, school leaders build their strategic practices by learning from one another, sharing resources, and seeking mentorship in these critical areas of flourishing school leadership.

Developing Leadership Practices

With the three categories of leadership practices (foundational, relational, strategic) for flourishing defined, this report turns to consider how these practices can be developed by leaders. Two

perspectives—that of adult learning and of leadership ecologies—inform the approach to leadership development for flourishing schools.

An Adult Learning Perspective

As just mentioned, formal degree programs are important for leadership development as are external professional development opportunities. For example, research has shown that “intensive institutes,” which often involve an academic weeklong immersive experience coupled with yearlong mentoring and follow-up activities, can transform educational practice (Swaner 2016). Formal and informal leadership networks, which provide opportunities for peer mentoring and collaborative work on shared improvement goals, also serve as valuable pathways for educator growth (Eckert 2018).

Along these lines, adult learning theory and research suggest that adults learn best by addressing authentic problems of practice in their own workplace (Schön 1987; Garvin 2000). By having to work through complicated or uncertain situations, adults learn how to make adjustments in action—a particularly valuable skill for school leaders, who work in complex and ever-changing educational and organizational environments. The key to adult learning is engaging in *ongoing reflection*; as Drago-Severson (2004) explains, the focus of professional development for educators should be to “examine and reflect on their practice and how it can be improved” (105).

In addition to individual reflection, leaders also benefit from engaging together in “reflections that make a difference to the communities that they value” (Wenger 1998, 10). While leadership unquestionably involves the development of individual skills and abilities, no one leads in a vacuum. Rather, leadership occurs in and through what Étienne Wenger (2015) describes as “communities of practice,” or groups of people who “share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact.” This leads to a consideration of leadership ecologies for the development of the individual leader.

A Leadership Ecology Perspective

Research demonstrates that leadership functions best within a school when it is distributed and collaborative; specifically, the literature identifies a positive link between the degree of distributed leadership within a school and students' academic achievement (Leithwood et al. 2004; Seashore Louis et al. 2010), as well as overall school improvement (Borko et al. 2003). As Mincu (2015) explains, "It is well established that leaders play a critical role in both pupils' achievement and school improvement more broadly... Effective leadership is distributed and shared..." (262). Cody (2013) uses a similar term, "collaborative leadership," which "is not about hierarchies or establishing who is best. Leadership is a quality we all have within, and the wisest leaders may actually do less leading as they create space around them for others to develop and grow" (71).

The Flourishing Schools Research in particular demonstrates an ecological view of school leadership, as the constructs related to school leadership identified in the research emerged from data gathered from heads of school, principals, department chairs, program directors, teacher leaders, and board members altogether. This is not to suggest in any way that all leaders have the same roles within a school. In fact, a lack of role clarity can be a source of confusion

or conflict in schools, particularly for trustees or school boards. However, viewing leaders as having distinct yet interdependent roles is closer to both the reality of how schools function and the path to optimizing leadership for flourishing.

A Process Approach

From these two perspectives, and rather than a proscriptive model, this report offers two sets of reflection guides that are structured around foundational, relational, and strategic leadership practices for flourishing schools. The first, while designed for individual leaders, can also be used as part of the leadership development process for a team. The second set is for school boards, with the goal of helping trustees to reflect on their unique leadership responsibilities as stewards of their school's mission and resources.

Given the diversity of size and structure of school leadership teams, as well as the existence of different board governance models and approaches, it should be noted that these reflection guides are intentionally designed with broad (versus narrow) questions. Leaders and trustees are therefore encouraged to personalize the questions as well as plan time to discuss collaboratively, identify areas of concern or needed growth, and create plans for further development and growth.

SELF-REFLECTION GUIDE FOR LEADERS

I. FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES (Purpose and Well-Being Domains)	
School Leaders Reflection Guide	
Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Self-Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Responsibility – <i>Leaders</i> feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.</p> <p>Integrated Worldview – Christian worldview changes how we educate; there is no such thing as a secular sphere.</p> <p>Stress – Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time to focus on physical health.</p>	How do I/we demonstrate a passion for the mission and flourishing of our school?
	To what degree do I/we maintain a strong sense of commitment to and responsibility for the outcomes of the school?
	How deeply have I/we embraced the central purposes and philosophy of a Christian education?
	How am I/are we integrating or demonstrating a Christian worldview in every aspect of both personal and professional life?
	To what degree am I/are we properly balancing work and life, including spending adequate quality time with family and friends?
	How am I nurturing my own spiritual growth and development to increase my faith and trust in the Lord, and how does our team encourage and hold each other accountability in this?
	In what ways do I/we prioritize spending time on physical health (exercising, sleeping enough, eating healthy)?
<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Responsibility – <i>Teachers and staff</i> feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.</p> <p>Family Partnership – Families feel they are a part of the school's mission, and that their child's spiritual development requires their partnering with and being involved at the school.</p> <p>Stress – Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time for teachers to prepare for instruction.</p>	How do I/we inspire a shared vision, mission, purpose, and plan for the school?
	Have I/we distributed a shared sense of ownership for the success of the school with board, teachers, and staff?
	Have I/we properly onboarded families and prepared them for involvement and partnership in the school?
	How am I/we consistently nurturing and encouraging families to grow in their spiritual formation together?
	Have I/we structured the school schedule to ensure that teachers have adequate time in their schedule for professional development, planning and grading?
	Have I/we established realistic expectations and a realistic pace/schedule for the teachers and staff that I/we lead and/or supervise?

<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Holistic Teaching – Teaching involves helping students develop spiritually and emotionally (teaching the heart and soul, as well as the mind).</p> <p>God’s Story – Students believe they are a part of God’s bigger plan and can be used by him to “make a difference.”</p> <p>Questioning – Students have doubts about their faith, lack time to pray or study the Bible, and feel that most Christians are too judgmental.</p> <p>Spiritual Formation – Students and alumni report that their Christian faith is stronger thanks to attending a Christian school, and they believe people can change with God’s help.</p> <p>Healthy Living – Students are happy with their physical health, including sufficient exercise and a healthy diet.</p> <p>Resilience – Students handle stress effectively and respond well to/bounce back from difficult situations.</p>	Have I/we been intentional about preparing teachers for a holistic teaching approach (heart, soul, mind)?
	How have I/we kept teachers accountable to holistic teaching through evaluations and metrics?
	Have I/we shaped an environment where students understand that God’s plans involve their engagement—that they can make a difference in the world?
	How have I/we prepared teachers and set the tone for students to feel safe throughout the school to ask questions about their faith?
	Have I/we made prayer, Bible study, apologetics, and outreach a regular part of the school program?
	How have I/we equipped teachers and staff to invest in the spiritual formation of students?
	Have I/we offered opportunities for students to invest in the spiritual formation of one another and even in younger students?
	How have I/we been assessing spiritual formation outcomes?
	Have I/we championed programs that emphasize healthy living habits and scheduled margin for students to engage in sports and other activities?
	How have I/we invested in proper guidance support for students and provided social/emotional learning (SEL)?

II. RELATIONAL PRACTICES (Relationships Domain)

School Leaders Reflection Guide

Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Self-Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Leadership Interdependence – Leaders, including board members, have diverse backgrounds and are transparent about and rely on others to offset their weaknesses.</p> <p>Community Engagement – The school engages with the surrounding community and local churches, and regularly taps into community resources, including networking and resource-sharing with other schools.</p>	How am I/are we facilitating a culture of leadership interdependence?
	Have I been self-reflective and open about my own strengths and weaknesses with other leaders as well as my supervisors, and how do we cultivate an environment as a team that encourages this?
	Have I considered how to reinforce my weaknesses by surrounding myself with people who are strong in my weak skillset?
	Have I/we tapped into the resources available through my local community (LEA, social services, law enforcement, etc.)?
	To what degree do I/we partner with local churches and ministries?
	Have I/we intentionally engaged in networking and resource-sharing with other schools?
	Have I/we engaged local, state, and national legislative representatives in positive ways to open dialogue concerning advocacy and access issues?
	How have I/we connected in meaningful ways with the surrounding business community to build strategic relationships and partnerships?
<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Supportive Leadership – Principals are trusted, teachers feel that leaders “have their backs,” and leaders empower teachers and staff to make decisions.</p> <p>Insular Culture – The school shields students from the world’s brokenness, the school is independent from the surrounding community, and/or the student body lacks diversity.</p>	Have I/we been thoughtful and strategic about earning the trust of the school’s constituencies?
	How have I/we demonstrated support for teachers in difficult situations or circumstances?
	How have I/we distributed leadership opportunities and empowered teachers to make both individual and collaborative decisions?
	Have I/we modeled the Great Commission and Great Commandment within our school, as I/we have engaged with a broken world and broken people?
	How have I/we facilitated opportunities for staff and students to engage in developmentally appropriate ways with the broken world around them?
	Have I/we addressed issues related to diversity in a Christ-honoring manner?
	How have I/we systemized processes and procedures related to diversity with faculty and staff?
<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Family Relationships – Teachers “get to know” families, and frequent and systemic communication facilitates positive relationships.</p> <p>Mentoring Students – Staff point out talent in each student, help students see how they fit in God’s bigger plan, and are aware of students’ struggles at school or home.</p> <p>Christlike Teachers – Teachers show Christlike love, kindness, and care to students. Families feel students are cared about individually, including their spiritual development.</p> <p>Caring Environment – Teachers are kind, students feel included in class, and students are protected from bullying.</p> <p>Prosocial Orientation – Students not only enjoy helping others, but also are known by others (e.g., peers) for showing love and care.</p>	How have I/we encouraged staff to recognize and appreciate the unique gifts and talents of each student?
	In what ways have I/we provided opportunities for staff to engage students in seeing themselves as part of a larger narrative—part of God’s story in which they can personally make a difference?
	Have I/we designed structures, processes, and accountability for teachers to regularly communicate with families and develop meaningful, collaborative relationships on behalf of their students?
	To what degree do I/we consistently model Christlikeness toward all families?
	Have I/we established the expectation of Christlike behaviors for all staff (love, kindness, care) as a fundamental value within the school?
	How have I/we shared examples of teachers and staff going the extra mile for students for their spiritual development (when appropriate)?
	How have I/we fostered a culture of belonging as a norm within the school?
	To what degree have I/we trained and equipped faculty and staff to prevent, recognize, and react in healthy ways to situations of bullying?
	How have I/we helped shape a culture whereby students are encouraged to serve one another and defer to one another?
	How have I/we helped shape a culture whereby students are encouraged to serve the community and become Kingdom-minded in their outreach?

III. STRATEGIC PRACTICES (Teaching & Learning and Expertise & Resources Domains)

School Leaders Reflection Guide

Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Self-Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Systems Thinking – When planning for change, the potential impact on the school, the classroom, students, and the overall system are considered.</p> <p>Data-Driven Improvement – Data is used to gauge school results and effectiveness, determine goal attainment, and address problems the school faces.</p> <p>Outcomes Focus – Process does not matter if it is not producing results, and change is distracting if it doesn't lead to increases in student achievement.</p> <p>Professional Development – PD is provided on-site and is subject- and role-specific.</p> <p>Qualified Staff – New teacher hires are credentialed (educationally and licensed/certified) and have classroom experience.</p> <p>Resource Planning – A strategic financial plan and master facilities plan is in place, and financial planning is a strength of the board.</p> <p>Resource Constraints – The school has financial resources to operate effectively; or, a belief prevails that the school could be more effective if not for fiscal constraints, and it lacks the resources needed to make changes.</p>	To what degree do I/we thoughtfully consider the input of stakeholders when planning for change to ensure a clear understanding of the potential impact, all the way to students?
	How have I/we used data to identify problems, inform decisions, and gauge the effectiveness of programs and goals?
	How have I/we been measuring expected outcomes to ensure that the processes and programs in place are producing the desired results in student achievement?
	Have I/we established a professional development plan for teachers that is school-based and personalized by subjects and roles?
	How have I/we been providing teachers with professional development that connects directly with the school's strategic plan and initiatives?
	Have I/we empowered teachers to engage in professional development that is flexible and differentiated according to their expressed needs?
	Have I/we established a clear process for hiring that ensures teachers meet or exceed licensure or certification standards, as well as overall fit for the school and its mission?
	How have I/we made certain that teachers keep their license/certification current with ongoing CEUs and professional learning?
	Have I/we established clear processes for exiting teachers who are unwilling to grow in their profession and/or keep their certification/licensure current?
	Do I/we work together with the board to provide input for the development of a strategic financial plan that ensures the procurement of the necessary resources to cover the initiatives of the strategic plan?
	Have I/we provided adequate input for the board to develop a facility plan that supports the strategic plan and provides the needed space for growth and programmatic changes forecasted in the strategic plan?
	To what degree do I/we provide effective stewardship over the financial resources that have been allocated for school operations?
	How have I/we contributed to ensuring that student recruitment and retention efforts generate the tuition revenue necessary to effectively operate the school?
	Have I/we established a process and plan for getting the word out about the quality of the school and distinctives of a Christian education?
Have I/we considered, alongside the board, creative ways to do more with less, through partnerships, mergers, alternative revenue sources and other innovative sustainability initiatives?	
How have I/we contributed to the establishment of strong fundraising/fund development processes and practices?	

<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Culture of Improvement – Guided by school leadership and focused on the future, the school is continually improving/makes necessary changes to improve.</p> <p>Feedback – Feedback on teaching practice and classroom management is given regularly to facilitate adjustments in real-time.</p> <p>Resources – Materials and resources for teaching, including technology, are sufficient, and the school building is in good physical condition.</p>	Have I/we participated in a strategic planning process, led by the board, to ensure the school's sustainability and relevancy into the future?
	To what degree do I/we give teachers feedback often and in real time to ensure that classroom management and teaching practices can be addressed immediately, and improvement can be ongoing?
	In what ways have I/we been engaged in sound budgeting/best practices for the operational side of the school?
	Have I/we made certain that teachers have the materials and supplies they need to teach effectively?
	Have I/we been initiating technology planning and procurement to ensure sufficient technology, media, and internet access are available as needed?
	How have I/we worked with the maintenance staff to ensure the maintenance and cleaning of the building(s), as well as the safety and security of the campus?
	How have I/we worked with the groundskeepers to ensure the maintenance of the playground, playground equipment, ball fields, parking lots, and general landscaping?
<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Collaboration – Learning from and with other teachers drives and inspires better teaching.</p> <p>Individualized Instruction – Students are helped to figure out how they learn best and to identify their natural strengths.</p> <p>Best Practice – Keeping up with best practices is prioritized and resources for doing so can be identified.</p> <p>Engaged Learning – Students engage in activities that nurture critical thinking, evaluating information, and problem solving.</p> <p>Behaviors for Learning – The classroom is orderly and well-managed, and teachers are organized and consistent in supporting student behaviors that contribute to learning.</p> <p>Responsiveness to Special Needs – Teaching staff work together to serve students with special needs, aided by processes and resources for identifying and responding to those needs.</p>	Have I/we established regular opportunities and processes for teachers to learn from one another both internally (colleagues in their school) and externally (peers from other schools)?
	How have I/we supported teachers in learning how to assess the individual needs of students and differentiate instruction to meet those individual needs?
	In what ways have I/we emphasized the need for teachers to stay current in instructional best practices?
	How have I/we resourced teacher development in all areas of pedagogy and best practices?
	How have I/we encouraged teachers toward and kept them accountable for providing a classroom environment of engaged learning for students, ensuring that students are involved in activities that nurture critical thinking and problem solving?
	How have I/we established expectations for orderly, well-managed classrooms that support student learning, and provided professional development/strategies for teachers in this area?
	Have I/we ensured that social-emotional learning (SEL) programs are in place to address the needs of students with behavioral, emotional, and social concerns?
	How have I/we made certain that students with special needs can be identified and assessed to determine their need?
	Have I/we established processes for teacher collaboration and the engagement of parents/guardians around students' special needs?
	To what degree have I/we identified and activated community support systems to assist the school in meeting the special needs of students?

SELF-REFLECTION GUIDE FOR BOARDS

I. FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES (Purpose and Well-Being Domains)	
Board Reflection Guide	
Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Board-Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Responsibility – <i>Leaders</i> feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.</p> <p>Integrated Worldview – Christian worldview changes how we educate; there is no such thing as a secular sphere.</p> <p>Stress – Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time to focus on physical health.</p>	In what ways has the board demonstrated passion about the mission, success, and improvement of the school?
	How does the board monitor and ensure accountability for the school’s expected outcomes?
	Have members of the board been recruited for their support of the central purposes of a Christian education, and to what degree do they understand and endorse a philosophy of Christian education?
	How does the board vet head of school candidates to ensure the head has an integrated Christian worldview in every aspect of both personal and professional life?
	How does the board support and encourage the head of school in balancing work and life, reducing stress, and ensuring that adequate quality time is spent with family and friends?
	In what ways does the board prioritize a vibrant spiritual focus as they seek to increase their faith and trust in God together?
<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Responsibility – <i>Teachers and staff</i> feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.</p> <p>Family Partnership – Families feel they are a part of the school’s mission, and that their child’s spiritual development requires their partnering with and being involved at the school.</p> <p>Stress – Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time for teachers to prepare for instruction.</p>	How has the board inspired a shared vision, mission, purpose, and plan for the school?
	How has the board cultivated a shared sense of ownership for the success of the school across the school community?
	Has the board developed foundational principles around the role of families in the spiritual development of their child(ren), and invited families to partner with the school in meaningful ways?
	In what ways does the board support and resource the spiritual development/spiritual formation initiatives of the school?
	To what degree has the board supported and resourced innovation in the area of scheduling, to ensure that teachers and leaders have adequate time to prepare and maintain a healthy pace?
	Has the board established policies for employee well-being, including adequate healthcare, sick days, vacation time, etc.?

<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Holistic Teaching – Teaching involves helping students develop spiritually and emotionally (teaching the heart and soul, as well as the mind).</p> <p>God’s Story – Students believe they are a part of God’s bigger plan and can be used by him to “make a difference.”</p> <p>Questioning – Students have doubts about their faith, lack time to pray or study the Bible, and feel that most Christians are too judgmental.</p> <p>Spiritual Formation – Students and alumni report that their Christian faith is stronger thanks to attending a Christian school, and they believe people can change with God’s help.</p> <p>Healthy Living – Students are happy with their physical health, including sufficient exercise and a healthy diet.</p> <p>Resilience – Students handle stress effectively and respond well to/bounce back from difficult situations.</p>	Has the board adequately resourced the school to enable intentional training for teachers on a holistic teaching approach (heart, soul, mind)?
	Has the board established policies that encourage and empower the head of school to keep teachers accountable to holistic teaching through evaluations and metrics?
	How has the board helped to shape an environment where students understand that God’s plans involve their engagement—that they can make a difference in the world?
	Has the board established principles and/or policies that set the tone for students to feel safe throughout the school to ask questions about their faith?
	To what degree has the board wholeheartedly supported prayer, Bible study, apologetics, and outreach as a regular part of the school program?
	In what ways has the board encouraged, resourced, and incentivized teachers and staff to invest in the spiritual formation of students?
	How has the board supported initiatives that encourage students to invest in the spiritual formation of one another and even in younger students?
	Has the board required periodic benchmark reports of spiritual formation outcomes, as well as resourced spiritual formation assessments?
	To what degree has the board endorsed programs that champion healthy living habits and provide margin for students to engage in sports and other activities?
	Has the board resourced/funded proper guidance counseling for students and social/emotional learning (SEL) support for students who need it?

II. RELATIONAL PRACTICES (Relationships Domain)

Board Reflection Guide

Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Board Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Leadership Interdependence – Leaders, including board members, have diverse backgrounds and are transparent about and rely on others to offset their weaknesses.</p> <p>Community Engagement – The school engages with the surrounding community and local churches, and regularly taps into community resources, including networking and resource-sharing with other schools.</p>	Has the board facilitated a culture of healthy leadership interdependence among its members and is it maximizing its potential synergy?
	Has the board been self-reflective and open about the strengths and weaknesses of each member and how that plays into the overall effectiveness of the board?
	In what ways has the board been strategic in recruiting board members in areas of overall weakness?
	Has the board tapped into the fund development resources available through the local community, even considering partnerships and mergers where appropriate?
	To what degree has the board been strategic in building bi-directional, mutually beneficent relationships with local churches and ministries?
	Has the board pursued networking, training, and resource sharing with other schools, through association membership and other venues?
	To what degree has the board engaged in local, state, and national legislative relationship-building to open dialogue concerning advocacy and access issues?
	How has the board connected in meaningful ways with the surrounding business community to build strategic relationships and partnerships?

<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Supportive Leadership – Principals are trusted, teachers feel that leaders “have our backs,” and leaders empower teachers and staff to make decisions.</p> <p>Insular Culture – The school shields students from the world’s brokenness, the school is independent from the surrounding community, and/or the student body lacks diversity.</p>	Has the board been thoughtful and strategic about earning the trust of the school’s constituencies through regular, transparent communication?
	In what ways does the board demonstrate support for school leaders and teachers facing difficult circumstances (policies, programs, financial support, etc.)?
	Has the board established policies and processes for conflict resolution that demonstrate confidence and support for leadership and teachers when they are confronted by upset parents or guardians?
	To what degree has the board modeled the Great Commission and Great Commandment within the school community, along with a biblical understanding that the world is broken and full of broken people?
	Has the board supported and resourced opportunities for staff and students to engage in developmentally appropriate ways with the broken world around them?
	In what ways has the board addressed the issues of cultural, economic, and academic diversity in their school community?
	Has the board developed policies and resourced the school in dealing with critical diversity areas, ensuring its leadership, teachers, and staff are equipped?
<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Family Relationships – Teachers “get to know” families, and frequent and systemic communication facilitates positive relationships.</p> <p>Mentoring Students – Staff point out talent in each student, help students see how they fit in God’s bigger plan, and are aware of students’ struggles at school or home.</p> <p>Christlike Teachers – Teachers show Christlike love, kindness, and care to students. Families feel students are cared about individually, including their spiritual development.</p> <p>Caring Environment – Teachers are kind, students feel included in class, and students are protected from bullying.</p> <p>Prosocial Orientation – Students not only enjoy helping others, but also are known by others (e.g., peers) for showing love and care.</p>	To what degree has the board, through the school’s vision, mission, purpose, and/or expected outcomes, set a schoolwide priority to recognize and appreciate the unique, God-given gifts and talents of each student?
	In what ways has the board supported opportunities for staff to engage students in ways that help their students see themselves as part of a larger narrative—part of God’s story in which they can personally make a difference?
	What evidence is there to demonstrate structures, processes, and accountability are in place for teachers to regularly communicate with families and develop meaningful, collaborative relationships on behalf of their students?
	In what ways are board members held accountable to model Christlikeness?
	Has the board established core values indicating the expectation of Christlike behaviors for all staff (love, kindness, care) as well as for themselves as a board?
	In what ways has the board fostered a culture of belonging as a norm within the school culture?
	Has the board established schoolwide policies that seek to prevent, recognize, and respond to situations of bullying?
	In what ways has the board empowered the head of school to shape a culture whereby students are encouraged to serve one another and defer to one another?
	How has the board resourced and structured the school to empower its leaders to encourage student service and outreach?

III. STRATEGIC PRACTICES (Teaching & Learning and Expertise & Resources Domains)

Board Reflection Guide

Leader-Related Constructs/Definitions	Board Reflection Questions
<p>Leader Specific Constructs</p> <p>Systems Thinking – When planning for change, the potential impact on the school, the classroom, students, and the overall system are considered.</p> <p>Data-Driven Improvement – Data is used to gauge school results and effectiveness, determine goal attainment, and address problems the school faces.</p> <p>Outcomes Focus – Process does not matter if it is not producing results, and change is distracting if it doesn't lead to increases in student achievement.</p> <p>Professional Development – PD is provided on-site and is subject- and role-specific.</p> <p>Qualified Staff – New teacher hires are credentialed (educationally and licensed/certified) and have classroom experience.</p> <p>Resource Planning – A strategic financial plan and master facilities plan is in place, and financial planning is a strength of the board.</p> <p>Resource Constraints – The school has financial resources to operate effectively; or, a belief prevails that the school could be more effective if not for fiscal constraints, and it lacks the resources needed to make changes.</p>	<p>Has the board thoughtfully and strategically solicited the input of stakeholders when planning for change to ensure a clear understanding of the potential impact down the line, all the way to students?</p>
	<p>In what ways has the board used benchmark reporting, surveys, and other metrics to identify problems, inform decisions, and gauge the effectiveness of goals?</p>
	<p>To what degree has the board established structures/procedures to hold the head of school accountable for expected student outcomes?</p>
	<p>Has the board established a budget that ensures a robust professional development plan for both leaders and teachers?</p>
	<p>To what degree does the board ensure that the head of school seeks professional development that connects directly with the school's strategic plan and initiatives?</p>
	<p>Has the board established policies for hiring that ensures teachers meet or exceed licensure or certification standards as well as overall "fit" for the school and its mission?</p>
	<p>In what ways does the board keep all staff (leaders, teachers, support staff) accountable for their licensure/certification and ongoing CEUs?</p>
	<p>Has the board established and/or supported clear policies for exiting teachers who are unwilling to grow in their profession and/or keep their certification/licensure current?</p>
	<p>Has the board developed a strategic financial plan that ensures the procurement of the necessary resources to cover the initiatives of the strategic plan?</p>
	<p>Has the board developed a facility plan that supports the strategic plan and provides the needed space for growth and programmatic changes forecasted in the strategic plan?</p>
	<p>In what ways does the board ensure effective stewardship and accountability over the financial resources that have been allocated for school operations?</p>
	<p>How has the board invested in an effective student recruitment and retention effort to generate the tuition revenue needed to effectively operate the school?</p>
	<p>If the school participates in school choice programs, how does the board effectively establish policies for the distribution of those funds and for resourcing staff to manage those funds? To what degree does the board participate in and/or support advocacy efforts at both the state and federal level to protect and expand those funds?</p>
	<p>In what ways has the board contributed to the establishment of strong, strategic fundraising/fund development program and practice?</p>
<p>To what degree has the board considered innovative approaches to sustainability, for example through partnerships, mergers, alternative revenue sources, and other initiatives?</p>	
<p>Has the board established and resourced a plan for getting the word out about the quality of the school and distinctives of a Christian education?</p>	

<p>Leader Directed Constructs</p> <p>Culture of Improvement – Guided by school leadership and focused on the future, the school is continually improving/makes necessary changes to improve.</p> <p>Feedback – Feedback on teaching practice and classroom management is given regularly to facilitate adjustments in real-time.</p> <p>Resources – Materials and resources for teaching, including technology, are sufficient, and the school building is in good physical condition.</p>	Has the board led, or engaged a consultant in leading, a strategic planning process to ensure the school's improvement and relevancy into the future?
	Has the board established policies for teachers to get regular feedback ensuring that classroom management and teaching practices are held to a high standard?
	To what degree has the board been engaged in sound budgeting/best practices for the operational side of the school?
	Has the board made certain through its budgeting process that teachers have the materials and supplies they need to teach effectively?
	Has the board been strategic in technology planning and procurement to ensure sufficient technology, media, and internet access are available as needed?
	In what ways has the board been involved in supporting and resourcing the school's maintenance staff to ensure the maintenance and cleaning of the building(s), as well as the safety and security of the campus, meets or exceeds expected standards?
	Has the board provided adequate resources for groundskeepers to ensure the maintenance of the playground, playground equipment, ball fields, parking lots, and general landscaping?
<p>Leader Shaped Constructs</p> <p>Collaboration – Learning from and with other teachers drives and inspires better teaching.</p> <p>Individualized Instruction – Students are helped to figure out how they learn best and to identify their natural strengths.</p> <p>Best Practice – Keeping up with best practices is prioritized and resources for doing so can be identified.</p> <p>Engaged Learning – Students engage in activities that nurture critical thinking, evaluating information, and problem solving.</p> <p>Behaviors for Learning – The classroom is orderly and well-managed, and teachers are organized and consistent in supporting student behaviors that contribute to learning.</p> <p>Responsiveness to Special Needs – Teaching staff work together to serve students with special needs, aided by processes and resources for identifying and responding to those needs.</p>	How has the board supported the head of school in establishing opportunities for teachers to collaborate together?
	Has the board provided the necessary resources to enable teachers to properly assess students and differentiate instruction to meet their needs?
	Has the board provided the resources for teachers to stay current in pedagogy, instructional best practices, and all areas of teaching and learning?
	To what degree has the board established school culture/values policies expecting engaged learning and activities that nurture critical thinking and problem solving?
	Has the board established policies that provide a framework for an orderly, well-managed school?
	Has the board resourced programs for social-emotional learning (SEL) to address the needs of students with behavioral, emotional, and/or social concerns?
	How has the board resourced programs and services for students with special needs?
	Has the board established policies for administrator and teacher collaboration with parents/guardians around students' special needs?
	Has the board helped to identify and activate community support systems through their networking ability, to assist the school in meeting the special needs of students?

III. LEVERAGING FSCI INSIGHTS TO LEAD SCHOOLS

With over one hundred schools administering the FSCI since its launch in 2018, the size of the research database and the opportunity to collect qualitative data on how schools use FSCI results continues to grow. This final section of the report shares insights from this expanding knowledge base around flourishing in schools, with a specific focus on 1) top cultural strengths and areas for growth identified across all FSCI-participating schools and 2) qualitative insights from leaders on how they are leveraging FSCI results in change and improvement efforts.

Meaningful Strengths and Growth Areas

FSCI research demonstrates that school flourishing is not “one-size-fits-all.” Every school has a different culture profile, along with potentially different ways of arriving at the same flourishing outcomes. However, when looking across the growing number of Christian schools administering the FSCI, it is possible to identify common areas of strength as well as other areas in which there exist opportunities for growth. To this end, in addition to analysis of responses from the over 15,000 participants in the study, the Flourishing Schools Research also analyzed results at the school level. The research identified a set of five top *strength areas* and five major *areas for growth*

across all participating schools (based on each school’s individual construct scores), thereby providing a snapshot of the key strengths and areas for growth for a diverse sample of Christian schools.

Table 5 below shows the distribution of meaningful strengths of participating schools, with the description of each construct provided (note: only strengths that were identified in more than a third of schools in the sample are included).

These findings confirm that many of the distinctives claimed by the Christian school sector were reflected as strengths for participating schools. This includes cultivating a strong and shared sense of mission, founded on a biblical worldview and operationalized through an education that develops the whole student (academically and spiritually). The findings also suggest that supportive leadership is a strength for a good number (although not a majority) of Christian schools.

Table 6 (next page) shows the distribution of opportunities for growth for participating schools, with the description of each construct provided (note: only opportunities for growth that were identified in more than a third of schools in the sample are included).

Table 5. Distribution of Meaningful Strengths

Domain	Construct	Percentage of Schools
Purpose	Holistic Teaching – Teaching involves helping students develop spiritually and emotionally (teaching the heart and soul, as well as the mind).	88%
Purpose	Responsibility – Leaders, teachers, and support staff feel a sense of shared ownership for school mission, success, and improvement.	73%
Purpose	God’s Story – Students believe they are a part of God’s bigger plan and can be used by him to “make a difference.”	50%
Relationships	Supportive Leadership – Principals are trusted, teachers feel that leaders “have our backs,” and leaders empower teachers and staff to make decisions.	45%
Purpose	Integrated Worldview – Christian worldview changes how we educate; there is no such thing as a secular sphere.	40%

Table 6. Distribution of Opportunities for Growth

Domain	Construct	Percentage of Schools
Expertise & Resources	Resource Constraints – The school has financial resources to operate effectively; or, a belief is held that we could be more effective as a school if not for fiscal constraints, and we lack the resources we need to make changes in our school.	72%
Teaching & Learning	Outcomes Focus – Process does not matter if it isn't producing results, and change is distracting if it doesn't lead to increases in student achievement.	67%
Well-Being	Stress – Constant feelings of stress and being overwhelmed accompany a lack of time to prepare for instruction (Teachers) or to focus on physical health (Leaders).	60%
Purpose	Questioning – Students have doubts about their faith, lack time to pray or study the Bible, and feel that most Christians are too judgmental.	48%
Teaching & Learning	Feedback – Feedback on teaching practice and classroom management is given regularly to facilitate adjustments in real-time.	43%
Relationships	Insular Culture – The school shields students from the world's brokenness, the school is independent from the surrounding community, and/or the student body lacks diversity.	37%

Given the market challenges that Christian schools have faced for well over a decade (Barna and ACSI 2017), it is not surprising that resource constraints present the greatest area for growth for schools. The second major area for growth is perhaps not unrelated to the first, as a laser focus on practices that produce outcomes is all the more critical if resources are perceived as limited. Stress for both teachers and leaders also topped the list; this is particularly significant given that the research findings predate the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which added even additional pressure in the area of well-being for educators.

For just under half of schools, student questioning appeared as a growth opportunity; rather than something problematic to be solved, this can be viewed an opportunity to meaningfully engage students in mentorship, discussion, and other life-on-life discipleship efforts as part of Christian schools' mission and vision for faith formation and discipleship. Real-time feedback on teaching—which is not always the same thing as formal supervision and evaluation processes, but rather tends to involve

peer engagement and observation by other teachers (Reeves 2008)—also appeared as a growth opportunity for a significant number of schools. Finally, over a third of schools were perceived by constituents as isolated from the community in one or more ways (e.g., overprotecting students, not engaging with the larger community, and/or lacking diversity in the study body).

While individual schools will benefit most directly from administering the FSCI in their own contexts, this snapshot of a large sample of Christian schools (diverse by location and size) provides insight for those concerned with leadership across the Christian school sector. For example, the top three current areas for growth identified by the FSCI across all schools (Resource Constraints, Outcomes Focus, and Teacher/Leader Stress) can inform Christian school leadership development efforts—in formal or informal, networked or individual, and organizational or academic contexts. Moreover, as the number of schools participating in the FSCI continues to grow, ongoing analysis will enable year-over-year tracking of shifts in these areas of strength and

growth opportunities for Christian schools, thereby generating trend-level insights regarding school strengths and improvement needs in the sector.

The FSCI and School-Level Change

In the fall 2020 edition of ACSI's *Research in Brief*, Albert Cheng, Cardus Senior Fellow and faculty at the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, writes:

As education continues to evolve in the data-driven age, educators will need to continue pioneering the way forward. What faith-informed practices will be needed to navigate teaching and learning as the salience of and dependence on data waxes? How should educators engage with emerging tools such as the school-level data reports that the FSCI will generate? (13)

This final section of this report addresses these questions, beginning with a discussion of how schools can best understand FSCI results, build on FSCI strength areas, and plan for improvement based on FSCI insights. The report concludes by considering the implications of flourishing for the change and improvement process in Christian schools.

Understanding FSCI Results

While the FSCI identifies constructs that are key to flourishing, it is not proscriptive. Rather, it enables schools to see themselves on a multi-layered journey—in which they may be flourishing with excellence in some respects, but need to grow and improve in others—versus passing a goalpost or marker which indicates they've "arrived" at flourishing. The FSCI school level report provides recommendations for using insights in this journey, as follows:

1. *Going deeper.* Schools should consider whether any quantifiable outcomes they track can be tied to the strengths and growth opportunities identified by the FSCI. Leaders may also seek to capture more in-depth data for a targeted area through

supplemental quantitative study (e.g., through use of a validated instrument specific to a domain or construct). Conducting qualitative interviews or focus groups with school constituents around these areas are also important for yielding additional nuance to the quantitative findings of both the FSCI and additional studies. These approaches will provide leaders not only with greater understanding of how these are areas of strength and for growth for the school, but also with community-building opportunities to engage diverse school audiences in reflecting together on their school's culture.

2. *Tracking growth.* While snapshots of a school's culture at a given point in time are useful for needs assessment and planning, longitudinal data is ideal for tracking change and growth. The FSCI provides benchmark data for each construct so schools can track any changes over time as measured by repeat assessment with the FSCI. In order to understand shifts in future years' results, schools will need to keep track of changes, programs, and initiatives, as well as determine a regular cycle of FSCI administration (as well as that of other surveys and/or qualitative measures) that allows for longitudinal comparison.

Building on Strengths

The FSCI provides school leaders with insights related to areas of strength *and* for growth. This is important to highlight because when receiving feedback or insights on their school's culture, the instinct of many leaders will be to focus on areas for improvement. While understandable, this often sidesteps important cultural gains to be had from also taking a strengths-based approach, as follows:

1. *Communicating strengths—internally and externally.* Data from the FSCI on school strengths can be used as part of internal and external communication efforts—both of which play important roles in shaping school culture—whether through school correspondence, on social media, or at school gatherings. Internally,

leaders can provide positive feedback to school constituents who contribute directly or indirectly to key areas of strength for the school. Qualitative feedback from FSCI-participating schools indicated this encourages teachers and staff, in particular, to reframe daily challenges with students in light of important outcomes (like spiritual formation impacts reported by alumni). School families will also want to know what makes their children's school unique in light of the research-based findings provided by the FSCI; prospective families can likewise benefit from these insights as they gauge the "fit" of the school for their children.

2. *Capitalizing on strengths to build momentum.* Schools can engage relevant internal stakeholders (board, leaders, staff) in discussions around how areas of strength can be reinforced and built out further. Understanding how a school has developed a particular area of strength can also help in leveraging those strengths for improving other areas. For example, if a school's area of strength lies in the construct of Collaboration (learning from and with other teachers drives and inspires better teaching), faculty teams can be leveraged to address other areas that present opportunities for growth (e.g., through focused effort by professional learning communities, collaborative action research, and so forth). This can create a "snowball" or "cascade" effect, whereby the momentum for change is generated by engaging the core strengths of the school.

Planning for Improvement

While the work of school leadership is challenging regardless of setting, based on their research with Christian school leaders, Banke, Maldonado, and Lacey (2012) observe:

Today's school administrators are expected to lead and manage schools. They balance the budget, attend to students' personal and academic needs, evaluate personnel and curriculum planning, and all the while attempt

to inspire the community and accomplish the objectives, mission and vision of the school... Christian school leaders are responsible for all these same tasks and responsibilities as other school administrators but are also responsible for the spiritual development of the school. (238-239)

Amid the pressures posed by these "routine" tasks, leaders must also manage the change process as they engage their schools in various improvement efforts. Key to this process is identifying areas of focus that, if prioritized in improvement efforts, are likely to have the biggest effect on flourishing outcomes.

To this end, qualitative feedback from leaders indicated that FSCI insights have helped them in gauging school priorities—specifically, by helping leaders to telescope out to the level of culture, to identify what "matters" the most for improvement, and to make mission-aligned change. For example, one school leader reported that the FSCI enabled the school to zero in on "accomplishing the things that matter the most." Another cited the FSCI as key in examining "our own school culture" and the "strengths and weaknesses" in that culture. And a third indicated that the FSCI insights enhanced the school's ability to "implement change... for delivering our mission to school families with the highest excellence."

Specific ways in which FSCI results are being used by school leaders fall into two categories, as follows:

1. *Using insights in existing efforts.* The growth opportunities identified by the FSCI can help inform ongoing efforts to shape and strengthen school culture. Participating schools have reported using FSCI insights in ongoing strategic planning, school improvement planning, and accreditation efforts. For many schools, FSCI insights have helped to spark dialogue and collaboration across multiple school audiences around ways that insights can be incorporated into existing improvement efforts. For others, FSCI findings have provided needed external validation of change efforts already underway at the school.

2. *Developing new/targeted efforts.* Schools have also reported developing new programs or initiatives to address key growth opportunities identified by the FSCI; for example, school leaders reported that findings in the *Well-Being* domain “alerted” them to the need for planning and programming around stress reduction for teachers. The FSCI school level report recommends that school leaders research best practices in areas for growth, as well as visit other schools with demonstrated success in those areas.

Finally, the FSCI’s inclusion of multiple audiences—such as support staff, who are often overlooked in school-based professional development—also pointed to the need to include input from different school constituents in both new and existing efforts.

Implications for School Change

When it comes to understanding and utilizing FSCI results, many of the approaches shared thus far are in keeping with best practice for translating research into educational practice. The question remains, however, how these practices can be “faith-informed” within the context of a Christian philosophy of education. In other words, how is the journey to flourishing in Christian schools different from the school improvement process in which other types of schools might engage?

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, flourishing involves a more expansive view of the goals of education and is more commensurate to the broader, holistic set of expected student outcomes in Christian schools. In addition to different ends, Christian schools also differ in their means to achieve those ends. Certainly, Christian schools engage in goal setting, long-range planning, using data to drive improvement, and gathering input from school constituents, which are the primary tools in the school improvement “toolbox.” However, Christian schools take a fundamentally different view of change than the managerial and technical approaches that predominate in school improvement. Because Christian schools are first and foremost incarnational communities of faith, they prioritize relational- and

community-based approaches to change.

Christian schools view school constituents not as people who simply execute a mission, or from whom buy-in must be obtained, but as equally beloved children of God for whom Christ died. Every member of the school community—leaders, teachers, families, students, board members, staff—brings to the school community various gifts and callings without which the school would be incomplete (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Similarly, change in the Christian school cannot be viewed as improvement for improvement’s sake. Rather, Christian schools commit to growth and improvement in order that all members of the school community might flourish—both students and educators—as Scripture encourages: “May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your children” (Psalm 115:14).

And finally, Christian schools have Jesus as their model, who did “everything well” and brought hope and healing to all who were in need (Mark 7:37). Flourishing schools do not better themselves *for* themselves, but rather so they can minister Christ’s love (Ephesians 5:2) and light (Matthew 5:14-16) more fully to the school community, as well as the larger communities in which they are situated. For this reason, school leaders seek to grow in Christlikeness in all the domains of flourishing—in their expression of and living out their purpose, in the quality of their relationships, in how they support teaching and learning, in their stewardship of expertise and resources, and in their care for the well-being of themselves and others—and to lead their schools in the same abundant, life-giving journey toward flourishing (John 10:10b).

For More Information

For more information about the FSCI, as well as to download the report *Flourishing Schools: Research on Christian School Culture and Community*, visit <https://www.acsi.org/thought-leadership>. Specific questions regarding the Flourishing School Research can be directed to research@acsi.org.

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