HOW TO START
A CHRISTIAN
SCHOOL FOR
A.C.E. STUDENTS
Dear Prospective School Developer

We would like to commend you for taking the first step in changing the lives of the children around you. By establishing a new Christ-centered school, you are making a loud statement to these children that you care. Starting a school is a major undertaking, and ACSI is committed to assisting you every step of the way.

The success of your school depends largely on good planning. To start a program that not only appears excellent but actually is excellent in curriculum, instruction, and delivery requires months and months of planning. The ACSI New School Program is an 8-step process that will assist you in effectively planning the start-up of your school. The amount of time it takes to complete the process is totally dependent on you.

During this time you will have one-on-one consulting with the staff of the A.C.E. Student Success Center (ACESSC) by phone and/or in person. We can offer guidance on how to organize your board of directors and how to devise a funding plan. We can even network you with other individuals and organizations that have started schools or are in the process of doing so.

This is just a partial list of the services we offer. Please visit our website at www.acsi.org to find out all the services ACSI offers to member schools. Our goal is to help make quality education available and accessible for all children. We believe that a Christ-centered education prepares children to succeed in their present lives and for all eternity.

We have put together a checklist of items to ensure that your school will have a successful beginning. What is not included is information on the issues specific to your school, and we can work on those together.

If you find you need our assistance, please don’t hesitate to call, write, or e-mail us. We are here for you. We are looking forward to co-laboring with you to make your school a success!
A Vision for the Future

One of the most exciting things the Holy Spirit is causing to happen in the body of Christ today is the expansion of Christ-centered elementary and secondary schools targeting children who are academically disenfranchised, culturally diverse, and economically disadvantaged. We refer to them as A.C.E. students for short. Perhaps the Lord is leading you to establish a Christian school as part of the ministry of your church, or perhaps to start an independent Christian school. Our association has guided the development of hundreds of Christian schools over the past thirty years. Please allow us to suggest several basic steps.

Step One

A Christian school is usually born in the heart of one person. From that point on, the idea should be nurtured in prayer. The academic education and spiritual welfare of young lives is a serious responsibility and should be entered into only after definite direction from the Lord. Prayer and complete dependence on the Lord are important throughout the entire enterprise.

Step Two

Appoint a start-up team of five or more responsible persons. They should be of such caliber that they could become the members of the first school board after the school gets under way. The start-up team should visit or review at least three other established Christian schools serving A.C.E. students. Contact our office for the names of schools in your area. Make an appointment with the heads of the Christian schools you plan to visit. During each visit be sure to ask about mission, vision, admissions, student outcomes, and any other questions your group may raise. It’s a good idea to have a list of questions prior to each visit. Additionally, ask if you can call on them for support and encouragement as needed.
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Step Three

Be sure to take all necessary legal steps. If the school is going to be church-sponsored, then the church governing body should take the necessary legal steps for establishing and operating the school. If your school is going to rely heavily on charitable contributions, we strongly recommend that you establish a federal tax ID number separate from the church’s. You should do that and begin the process of creating a nonprofit organization very early. By doing so, you will allow foundations and individuals to provide grant money. We also suggest that you pursue public funding in the forms of vouchers, tax credits, education savings account, etc., if available.

Step Four

A clear statement of the school’s philosophy identifying the target population—along with a statement of faith, a vision statement, and a mission statement—should be prepared at the outset. The board of directors should develop the Christian philosophy of education and make it a part of the policy manual. Each employee and parent should know and understand the school’s philosophy because it is the basis for all the school does.

Step Five

After the sponsoring group has approved the plan for your school, you are ready to take several very important steps. Begin by selecting an executive leader to further the development of the school. This person may or may not become the head of school. Your Christian school, like any other institution, will be a credit to the cause of Christ and Christian education in direct proportion to the quality of people you bring together as your administration, faculty, and staff. It is helpful if you select an executive leader with a wide range of administrative abilities. He or she should be a strong spiritual leader, be competent in finance, and understand procedures for starting a business. All these and more are characteristics of the person you need to make your Christian school a success.
Step Six
Analyze your options for school facilities. Many schools are established in church educational buildings. One reason the Christian school movement has flourished so rapidly is that, in developing their Sunday schools, churches have built excellent educational buildings. Usually, with a few changes, Sunday school rooms can easily serve as classrooms for your Christian school. The parking lot or other property often serves well as a playground area.

In some states it is necessary to obtain approval from a building inspector to ensure that your facility meets all applicable health, fire, and safety codes. Know the legal requirements in your community before starting a Christian school. Questions in this area can be answered by your ACSI regional director or the leadership of other Christian schools in your area.

Step Seven
Begin promoting your school beginning in January of the year the school will start. As you begin your enrollment campaign, prepare a brochure describing your school’s ministry, a school calendar of events for the first year, a parent-and-student handbook, and a registration form.

Do not be overzealous about building a large student enrollment for your first year. Be more concerned about bringing together educators who will provide a Christ-honoring education to the children entrusted to your care. There is no substitute for a good start, and you rarely recover from a poor start. It is better to enjoy a modest success than to experience a colossal failure.
Step Eight

Follow sound financial policies. Simply stated, your income must be commensurate with your expenses. It is important to distinguish between what it will cost to educate each child in the school and what your targeted families can pay for tuition. We have developed formulas for determining the per-pupil costs for your location and what the families can reasonably afford to pay for a private education. The momentum of a new school is greatly impaired if a large deficit is incurred the first year. The school board should monitor carefully the monthly financial reports to evaluate the school’s financial progress.

Checklist

- [ ] Prayer

School Strategy

- [ ] School vision statement
- [ ] School mission statement
- [ ] School philosophy

Education Plan

- [ ] Learning goals
- [ ] Instructional methods used
- [ ] Program for special needs students

School Accountability

- [ ] Methods of student assessment (testing)
- [ ] School evaluation and improvement
- [ ] Accountability instruments

Faculty/Staff Development Plan

- [ ] Professional development processes (for teachers)
- [ ] Personnel policies/manual
School/Family/Community/ Church Partnership
- School/family/community partnerships
- Safety policies/manual
- School handbook

Financial plan
- Current budget
- Projected budget
- Criteria for purchasing materials and equipment

Statement of Faith
The statement of faith should answer such questions as what the school stands for spiritually, what is taught, and the spiritual background of the school. You may want to include your statement of faith in information provided for parents to sign, indicating that they have read it and agree to have their children taught according to those beliefs.

School Vision Statement
The school’s vision statement is designed to imagine a future that inspires the efforts of those within the organization. It is a brief, compelling statement, projecting student outcomes, that motivates the community to produce the highest quality program using the most effective processes.

Example: The ABC Christian school believes that all students are valued and will become top performers and community contributors.

School Mission Statement
The school mission statement explains what the school exists to do, how it will carry out its roles and tasks to accomplish the mission, and why. This is the process the school will use to fulfill the vision.

Example: To create a Christ-centered learning atmosphere conducive to the academic excellence, social growth, and spiritual development that will encourage and prepare students for successful, productive lives.
School Philosophy
The school philosophy statement expresses the beliefs of the school community about children and about learning. Sometimes the school philosophy statement contains a commitment to a definite plan of action for the school.

Example: We believe that every child has infinite worth and has a God-given capacity to learn; therefore, we are committed to providing a high-quality education that is academically excellent, Bible based, and character shaping.

Compliance with Local Codes
Local codes and ordinances require proper documentation of compliance. Local authorities often provide forms. Local codes vary from community to community and from state to state.

Public Relations/Marketing Materials
The school usually uses its public relations and marketing materials to advertise the school to its various publics. Usually these are print materials, although they may include radio announcements and social media as well.

School Demographics
School demographics describe the characteristics of the school community and the student population. Statistics usually include nationality, race, age, and gender of students, locality description, religious background, student enrollment, income levels, educational level of parents, and marital status. Each of these should be expanded as necessary to meet the needs of your school.

This information is easy to acquire by requiring certain fields on the child’s school application.

Communication Tools
Communication tools include the various means used by the school to communicate with its various publics. Included are internal and external written, oral, and multimedia means of communication.
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Business Policies/Manual

Business policies ensure the smooth financial operation of the school. Some schools maintain a separate handbook to be used by school personnel who are involved in financial matters; but whether there is a separate handbook or not, clear policies for the financial operations of the school should be in place, and these policies must be followed to the letter.

Current/Projected Budget

The school budget clearly defines school priorities. The budget should define expected sources of income and approved areas of expenditure, and it should paint a clear picture of the school's cash flow. Based on expected enrollment and sources of income as well as expenditures, the budget should be projected at least three years from the current year.

Budgeting can be a difficult task. If you are uncertain about any aspect of your budget, you would be wise to retain an accountant. Accountability and good bookkeeping can make a positive difference in obtaining funds from grant funding or a lending institution.

Organizational Flowchart

An organizational flowchart not only describes who is responsible to whom but also provides a key to communication among staff, board members, faculty, and outsiders.

It is important to establish the organizational flowchart carefully so that roles are clearly defined and are not overlapping.

Board Minutes

Copies of minutes of the board are included in the strategic plan. These minutes tell when and how often the board met, who was present, and what business was discussed in the meetings. In the interest of good public relations, a summary of board proceedings is sometimes distributed to parents and other interested stakeholders.
Consultants Used

This is another aspect of accountability. If you used an attorney, accountant, or any other professional service for which you paid, it is important to document the service rendered, the date of the service, and its cost. Remember, good bookkeeping will help encourage grantors and lenders to fund your project.

Conclusion

We hope this information has been helpful. Please note that the A.C.E. Student Success Center is here to assist you. For more information on our direct services and materials, feel free to give us a call or send us an e-mail.

Our goal is to help create accessible, high-quality, Christ-centered education for all children, with a focus on A.C.E. students. We have included a basic outline of information you will need to get started in the development of your new school, running your school, resourcing your school, and preparing your school for ACSI's nationally recognized accreditation. We encourage you to contact us for information to obtain this very comprehensive program.
Action Steps
We pray the Lord’s blessing upon your endeavors.