



A Different Approach to Christian School Partnership: **The University-Model Approach**

By Stephen Dill

On Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, Alison attends classes at Liberty Christian Academy, a University-Model school near her home. She particularly enjoys her seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Roberts, because she loves literature and writing. Like most other seventh graders, she changes classes each period and has different teachers for different subjects. Mrs. Wright (Bible), Mrs. Roberts (English), and Mr. Jones (Science) assign Alison work to do at home—under her mother’s supervision—on Tuesdays and Fridays. The assignments vary, but they include writing short stories, Scripture analysis and writing, comparative essays regarding the books she has read, science experiments, research, projects, and preparing classroom presentations. On some “home” days, her family takes an educational field trip recommended by her teachers. She has little evening homework on days when she is on campus; she has a significant amount of school work to do on her “home” days. Her mom helps her figure out what to do with some of the assignments; many she completes on her own, and then her mom looks it over before she submits it to her teacher. Some assignments she brings to school, but most of the time she e-mails the assignment to her teacher.

All of Alison’s teachers are ACSI-certified teachers with college degrees in the academic area they are teaching. Mrs. Wright is a Bible college graduate who loves to teach the Bible, Mrs. Roberts has two children enrolled in the school, and Mr. Jones is a recently retired public school science teacher. All three appreciate part-time teaching schedules—Mrs. Wright often babysits her grandchildren, Mrs. Roberts gets some time at home with her children, while Mr. Jones enjoys the freedom to do other things several days a week.

Alison’s parents live frugally so that they can afford the tuition at Liberty Christian. (Liberty Christian is a fictitious name used here to describe a typical school following this model.) They pay just over \$8,000 a year for Alison and her older brother. This is about one-third less

than the cost of tuition at the traditional Christian school in town. Liberty is able to charge less tuition because faculty members are part-time employees; thus they have part-time salaries without funding benefits. The school has not yet had a problem finding qualified teachers because they have an ample supply of people who are interested in part-time teaching.

Liberty Christian Academy is a member of the National Association of University-Model Schools (NAUMS), a growing association based in Midlothian, Texas. NAUMS began as a subdivision of Grace Prep, one of the first University-Model schools in the nation. NAUMS became an independent organization in 2005, and Grace Prep is now one of more than 80 member schools.

Advocates of this approach believe that their model offers the best of both worlds. When I interviewed a group of school parents at a NAUMS school last year, most had previously homeschooled their children. They loved the University-Model approach because qualified teachers were directing curriculum objectives, learning activities, and assessments. Many had questioned their ability to do those things well when homeschooling. Several parents had transferred their children from the traditional Christian school to the University-Model because they felt they would have more family time together. In most University-Model schools, the students complete school work during their home days and do not spend significant additional time in the evenings or on weekends doing homework. These parents believed they were getting quality Christ-centered education and still having adequate time as a family.

The University-Model name comes from the schedule design, which is similar to common university schedules, with classes either on Tuesday and Thursday or Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. College students—and NAUMS students—are supposed to be doing meaningful school work on the days when they don’t have classes. (Specific days for elementary or secondary grades vary with schools; some follow the Monday-Wednesday-Friday

schedule for secondary students and Tuesday-Thursday schedule for elementary students. The school I visited held classes for all grades on Mondays and Wednesdays, and the secondary school students also attended on Thursdays.)

State officials have varying opinions about the University-Model approach. Some consider this to be homeschooling, since the number of school days or hour requirements do not meet state requirements. Other states have accepted this model as meeting state attendance requirements if the school is accredited by regional accrediting associations like AdvancED or Middle States. Many of the NAUMS schools are accredited by AdvancED.

All Christian schools attempt to have some level of partnership with families. The Scriptures are clear in communicating that God gives the primary responsibility for training and teaching children to parents (Ephesians 6:4). Discipleship- or covenant-model schools require that at least one parent be a committed believer to be accepted into the school; open-enrollment schools also seek to partner with parents in significant ways. The schools championed by the National Association of University-Model Schools take parent partnership to a higher level. These schools employ qualified teachers who design a curriculum for students scheduled to attend classes two or three days a week; on the other school days students stay at home and work under parental oversight—doing instructional activities designed by their teacher. This model is not homeschooling, nor does it fit the traditional model of Christian schooling.

The Advantages

Advocates for NAUMS cite four primary reasons in supporting this model: (1) it encourages family time since the school schedule does not control their family schedule, (2) it is built on a very strong partnership with parents since parents have to be actively involved in monitoring and supporting their child's instruction and performance, (3) it costs less money than the traditional Christian school, and (4) schools claim to deliver strong results in academic achievement and spiritual formation.

The Critiques


Advocates admit that there is no perfect model that fits every child and every family. One of the limitations of the NAUMS model is that the family must have one parent at home several days a week to assist with instruction; thus single-parent families or dual working couples

will not be able to make use of this model. The strong parent partnership generally works as an advantage because parents are highly vested in their children's success. However, this can also be a weakness as the quality of instructional support can vary between too much or too little parent involvement. Often NAUMS schools, because of their size, have limited cocurricular activities. The schools are college preparatory in curriculum and instruction; students with learning differences may struggle in this environment.

A key element to this model is the availability of qualified teachers seeking part-time employment. Generally these schools can charge 50 to 70 percent of the normal Christian school tuition. They can do so because of part-time salaries without benefits for most of their faculty. The school that I visited had no difficulty in finding qualified teachers seeking part-time work; however, this may not be the case in every geographical area.

Many NAUMS schools are also members of ACSI. If the school meets ACSI accreditation requirements, including teacher certification, NAUMS schools can pursue joint accreditation with ACSI and their regional accrediting body.

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The NAUMS website summarizes the benefits of the model: “Blending the best attributes of home education (parents) with the best attributes of the traditional classroom (professional teachers), a University-Model® educational community establishes distinctive partnerships with parents to develop mature, college-worthy followers of Jesus Christ for the next generation” (www.naums.net).

Stephen Dill, EdD, served at Delaware County Christian School in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, for 40 years before joining the ACSI staff in 2013. Currently he leads ACSI's work in the United States as senior vice president for USA.