



THE FLOURISHING FAITH INDEX

**Measuring Biblical Worldview and Spiritual
Formation in Christian Schools**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In what ways and to what extent does spiritual formation take place in Christian schools? Which practices are most strongly related to promoting biblical worldview and spiritual formation development in students? Following the groundbreaking work of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in developing the industry-standard Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI), many schools raised questions as to whether it was possible to develop a similar survey instrument for understanding and measuring spiritual formation and biblical worldview development. In 2022, ACSI Research sought to answer these questions through new research on biblical worldview and spiritual formation development in Christian schools by developing and validating a new research tool—the Flourishing Faith Index (FFI).

Survey items were developed based on findings from an extensive review of relevant prior research and literature. The literature synthesis surveyed over 230 scholarly articles, reports, and books regarding spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in the home, church, and Christian school. This review guided the survey item development and factor discovery process. In total, ACSI Research tested 764 discrete variables across seven different constituent groups: students; parents; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; support staff; and board members. In the Fall of 2022, nearly 10,000 survey responses were collected from these groups, representing 33 Christian schools of diverse size and geographic location.

Data analysis for the instrument accomplished three goals. First, reliability and validity were tested for FFI items to produce a final subset of the original pre-validated questions, resulting in a psychometrically sound instrument. Second, the statistical power behind the FFI construction and analysis, particularly linkages to outcomes, enables the instrument to have strong, statistically significant, and meaningful associations with important markers of spiritual flourishing. And finally, the validated constructs identified through FFI data analysis were mapped onto a research-based model of spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in Christian schools—the Flourishing Faith Model (FFM).

The FFM clusters the validated constructs for all seven survey groups into six domains of flourishing in two

tiers. The inner “Flourishing Faith Core” maps faith in three dimensions: *Head*; *Heart*; and *Hands*. The outer “Biblical Worldview & Spiritual Formation Ring” maps spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in three analogical dimensions: *Intellectual*; *Nurturing*; and *Practical*. 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 spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in their schools.

Analysis of associations between these domains and markers of spiritual flourishing supported many of the expectations such an instrument would be expected to demonstrate, giving the instrument strong evidence of face validity. For example, students enrolled in a Christian school for a longer period of time scored higher on the propositional scale than did either students enrolled in the medium- or short-term. Similarly, respondents who self-reported being a Christian “for many years” scored higher on nearly all of the validated constructs than did respondents who self-reported recently becoming a Christian or being unsure of their Christian faith. Likewise, some construct scores in covenantal schools tended to be higher than those in missional or open-enrollment schools. Finally, many of these findings reinforce those of previous studies and give greater credence to practices like Sabbath-keeping and family devotions.

Forthcoming school-level reports and future FFI administrations will strengthen both the usefulness of findings for schools as we continue to find evidence of associations between the FFI and meaningful spiritual outcomes. Alongside this national report, ACSI will release two additional reports, which use FFI pilot data to describe the administrator and teacher pipeline in Christian schools. In the meantime, this national report unpacks FFI findings and the FFM model for Christian educators which, when taken together, provide measurable signposts on a roadmap toward biblical worldview development and spiritual formation in Christian schools.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Background	5
II. Literature Review	6
• Leadership	6
• Teaching in Christian Schools	6
• Courses and Content	7
• Family	8
• Friendship	8
• Church	8
III. Sample	9
• Schools	9
• Respondents	9
IV. Methods	10
• Construct Analysis	10
• Psychometric Properties	10
V. The Flourishing Faith Model	14
• The Flourishing Faith Core	14
• The Biblical Worldview & Spiritual Formation Ring	17
VI. Key Findings	20
References	22

BACKGROUND

Following the groundbreaking work of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in developing the industry-standard Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI), many schools asked whether it was possible to build a validated research tool for measuring biblical worldview and spiritual formation development in Christian schools. Such a tool could provide powerful insights for Christian schools as they seek to carry out their missions and support the work of families and churches as they nurture spiritual growth in students. In 2022, ACSI Research took up this task of developing a new research tool—the Flourishing Faith Index (FFI).

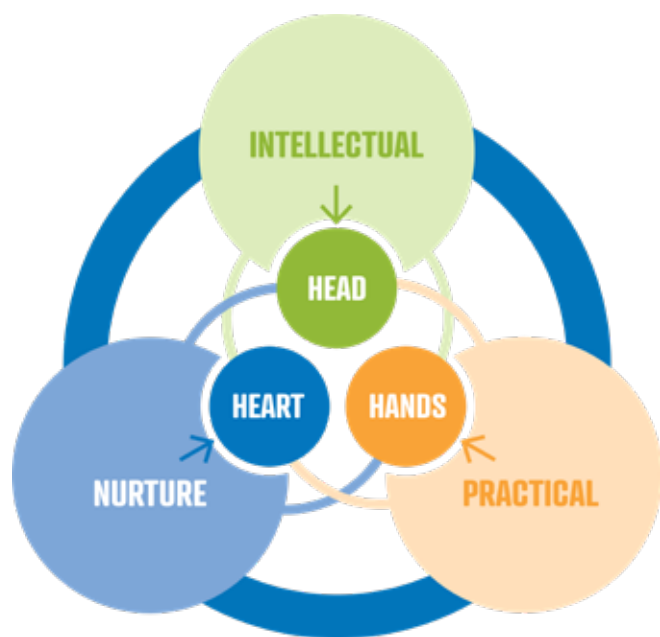
Survey items for the FFI were formed based on findings from an extensive review of relevant prior research and literature on spiritual formation in Christian schools. In total, the FFI tested 764 discrete variables across seven different survey groups: students; parents; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; support staff; and board members. In Fall 2022, nearly 10,000 survey responses were collected from these groups, representing 33 Christian schools of diverse size and geographic location.

Data analysis for the instrument accomplished three goals. First, reliability and validity were tested for FFI items to produce a final subset of the original pre-validated questions, resulting in a psychometrically sound instrument. Second, the statistical power behind the FFI construction and analysis, particularly linkages to measures of flourishing faith in three dimensions—“Head,” “Heart,”

and “Hands”—through logistic regressions verified strong correlations between the FFI and outcomes related to spiritual flourishing. And finally, the validated constructs identified through FFI data analysis were mapped onto a research-based model of spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in Christian schools—the Flourishing Faith Model (FFM).

The FFM organizes the validated constructs for all seven survey groups, along with a propositional survey based on ACSI’s Statement of Faith and a survey of frequency of spiritual disciplines, into a two-tiered model of spiritual formation. The inner “Flourishing Faith Core” organizes measures of flourishing faith into the three domains of Head, Heart, and Hands. The outer “Biblical Worldview & Spiritual Formation Ring” organizes measures of spiritual formation in the Christian school and community into three further domains: Intellectual, Nurture, and Practical. These domains provide a picture of the areas in which Christian schools can focus their efforts and resources in order to support spiritual formation in Christian school students.

Forthcoming school-level reports and future FFI administrations will strengthen both the usefulness of findings for schools as we continue to find evidence of associations between the FFI and meaningful spiritual outcomes. Alongside this national report, ACSI will release two additional reports that use FFI pilot data to describe the administrator and teacher pipeline in Christian schools. In the meantime, this national report unpacks FFI findings and the FFM model for Christian educators, which, when taken together, provide measurable signposts on a roadmap toward biblical worldview development and spiritual formation in Christian schools.



LITERATURE REVIEW

We know from Scripture that the command to nurture the faith of the next generation (Psalm 78:4, 6) is blessed with the promise of flourishing faith (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Proverbs 9:9; Ephesians 6:4). We also know that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). As assurance, or “evidence” as it is found in some translations, the Bible gives us some reason to believe that we can measure spiritual formation, however imperfectly. To this end, the FFI draws together prior research on spiritual formation in Christian schools in order to develop measures of spiritual formation.

Research identifying distinctive outcomes of Christian school graduates compared to peers in other sectors provides suggestive evidence of the robust role Christian schools play in students’ spiritual formation. Graduates of Christian schools are more likely than their public or secular private school peers to seek a vocation that fulfills religious calling (Casagrande, Pennings, and Sikkink 2019); volunteer and participate in charitable causes (Cardus 2019b; Cheng and Iselin 2020); engage in civic life and express prosocial orientation (Pennings, Sikkink, and Berner 2014; Green et al. 2016; Sikkink 2018a); participate actively in their churches (Green et al. 2016; Cardus 2019c); practice spiritual disciplines (Cardus 2019c; Sikkink 2018b); and remain in an intact marriage (Wolf et al. 2022; Schwarz and Sikkink 2017). Together, these findings suggest that Christian schools may play a significant role in influencing a student’s faith and practice.

Leadership

Establishing a vision for spiritual formation in Christian schools begins with school leadership. Christian school leaders may directly foster an environment for shaping students’ faith by providing direction and aligning the school’s mission with the Christian faith (Pennings and Wiens 2011; Beckman, Drexler, and Eames 2012; Sikkink 2012; Lee, Cheng, and Wiens 2021). Indeed, ACSI’s Flourishing Schools Research found that leaders help integrate a biblical worldview into the life of the school (Swaner, Dodds, and Lee 2021). School leaders exercise control over curriculum, personnel decisions, and school resources, shaping school culture and thereby indirectly influencing the spiritual formation of students (Russo 2009; Murray 2011; Beckman, Drexler, and Eames 2012).

Christian school leaders may also promote a particular vision for Christian education that is more conducive to spiritual formation (Hunter 2008; Lee 2021; Lee, Cheng, and Wiens 2021). Further, leaders of faith-based schools prepare for their leadership roles differently relative to their peers in other sectors, perhaps signaling the differentiated priorities and expectations of faith-based education (Lee and Cheng 2021). One qualitative study of six Christian school administrators similarly finds that these leaders believe an important part of the role is to preserve missional fidelity (Harrison 2012). These findings are consistent with scholarly claims that faith-based education must emphasize moral education and the development of virtue alongside academic excellence (Wynne and Walberg 1985; DeHaan et al. 1997).

Christian school leaders may also directly shape students’ faith through their example of lived faith (Beckman, Drexler, and Eames 2012). For example, Sikkink (2012) finds that Protestant school leaders are more likely to view themselves as a spiritual role model to students than their Catholic school peers. In qualitative studies, Christian school leaders articulated the importance of personal practices and relationships with others (Banke, Maldonado, and Lacey 2012), for example by embodying servant leadership (Harrison 2012). Research conducted in Christian higher education institutions finds similar emphasis on spiritual leadership (Burch, Swails, and Mills 2015).

Teaching in Christian Schools

Of course, spiritual formation in Christian schools cannot be considered apart from the adults with whom students predominantly interact—teachers. Graduates of evangelical Protestant schools are more likely to report a positive, caring relationship with their teachers than public school graduates (Cardus 2019a). Christian school teachers may embody or cultivate spiritual practices that deepen students’ faith. As Smith and Smith write, “Christian practices can contribute to how teaching and learning are carried out and experienced” (2011, 11). These disciplines may include observing the Sabbath (DeYoung 2011), nurturing a love of reading Christian texts (D. I. Smith 2011), showing hospitality (Call 2011), breaking bread (Walton and Walters 2011), and prayer (J. K. A. Smith 2011).

Teachers play a key role in the spiritual formation of their

students (Holloway et al. 2019). The intersection of spiritual formation and teaching practices is often described as the integration of faith and learning. According to Smith and Smith (2011), this integration is something that “called into question the very idea of ‘secular’ or ‘neutral’ learning, emphasized a faith-inspired affirmation of intellectual pursuits and refused to settle for models that positioned faith and learning as merely complementary or parallel” (2). Kanitz (2005) argues that a robust integration of faith and learning should consider not only shared core beliefs, but also distinctions across denominations and theological traditions (Romans 14:5). Similarly, Cooling (2005) advocates for developing theological curiosity and contextualization in teachers. Faith-based education is most robust when teachers are firmly rooted in their faith.

While there is disagreement on how best to integrate faith and learning (Acree 1994), one survey of primary and secondary Christian school teachers finds that teachers express high levels of confidence with respect to the integration of faith and learning (Williams 2021). Worldview may also vary with teaching experience, with more experienced teachers expressing higher levels of worldview as measured by the Worldview Assessment Instrument and Credal Statements (Evans 2015), particularly with experienced Bible teachers (Fyock 2008). Worldview integration may also vary across schooling contexts. Classical schools, for example, may emphasize the *trivium* for their pedagogy (Peterson 2012). Another study, while not examining the integration of faith and teaching per se, documented evidence that science teachers in Christian schools emphasize curricular content in distinctive ways relative to peers in public schools (Cheng 2018). At the very least, education founded upon the tenets of Christianity should appear inconsistent with teaching in secular contexts (Smith 2018).

Over time, Christian school students may grow in alignment with their teachers’ faith. A longitudinal study of one Christian school found that mean differences between students’ and faculty worldview scores as measured by the Politics, Economics, Education, Religion, and Social Issues (PEERS) test decreased over time, suggesting that students became more like teachers with respect to worldview (Fyock 2008). Other studies of Christian school enrollment have found evidence of differences in worldview by sector or length of time enrolled in a Christian school generally find evidence of a Christian school advantage (Pennings, Sikkink, and Berner 2014; Perkins 2007; Taylor 2009; Uecker 2008),

with one exception (Baniszewski 2016). At a policy level, the abolition of compulsory religious schooling in Germany led to lower levels of adult religiosity at the national level (Arold, Woessmann, and Zierow 2022). These studies lend credence to the idea that teachers may help nurture a biblical worldview, thereby strengthening the case for Christian education while simultaneously justifying Christian parents’ concerns over the influence of secular education.

Courses and Content

Courses and content may also play a formational role in students’ biblical worldview development and spiritual formation. Curriculum must be aligned with the school’s mission, purpose, and the objectives of educational completion and attainment, as well as to make use of literature that supports a school’s moral aims (MacIntyre 2007; Drexler and Bagby 2021).

Many Christian schools offer or require coursework in Bible, worldview, or apologetics. Previous research has examined the relationship between biblical worldview curricula and interventions on students’ worldview, with inconclusive results. Two studies find evidence suggesting a positive relationship. A causal/comparative study of the *Understanding the Times* worldview course surveyed a random sample of Christian high school students across the United States at various times and found a positive relationship between the course and students’ worldview (Barrows 2014). A study of a biblical worldview intervention in a hybrid mode of education context in California charter schools found the intervention increased students’ worldview as measured by the PEERS test (Barke 2014). Other studies fail to detect a relationship between curriculum and worldview (Brinkley 2021; Bryant 2008).

Two qualitative studies identify features of biblical worldview curricula and interventions that may mediate the relationship between intervention and outcome. According to Mooney (2018), effective biblical worldview programs should have four features: intentional design, personal responsibility, opportunities for application, and intrinsic development. Baley (2021) posits that biblical worldview courses may influence worldview by connecting biblical knowledge with ethical and cultural issues.

One way in which students may learn the “pattern of the sound words” of faith is through catechesis (2 Timothy 1:13; cf. 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15-17). Gantt (2004) explored

the historical and contemporary use of catechism among Protestant denominations from the time of the Protestant Reformation to the establishment of modern denominations and into the 21st century, and found that “the proponents of catechetical instruction saw it as passing the truth from one generation to another” (187). The use of formal catechism among students of various denominations of Christian faith has been in decline since the 20th century, and Gantt notes that there does seem to be a role for formal conveyance of Christian beliefs to students today, catechetical or otherwise. In contrast, Cooling (2005) argues for preferential use of theological contextualization over replication noting that, while both instructional models must promote scriptural faithfulness, contextualization is preferable due to its promotion of theological curiosity.

Family

The partnership between a Christian school and the student’s family may be one of the most important relationships with respect to spiritual formation (King, Furrow, and Roth 2002). Several studies documenting the influence of the Christian school on worldview development have commented on the importance of the coherence between school and family as a possible mediator for students’ spiritual growth (Uecker 2008). Similarly, Van Meter (2009) argued that while both the Christian school and the family may help shape high school students’ worldviews, the family plays the primary role. Perkins (2007) finds a significant relationship between family discipleship and worldview, and identified “the frequency and nature of spiritual discussion, quality of communication in family relationships, family rituals and routines, and the priority of family time” (6) as the channels of influence on adolescents’ biblical worldview.

Parents, as the first and primary influencers, play a key role in the critical early stages of child development (King and Boyatzis 2015). Parental religiosity, especially homogamous religiosity (that is, when both parents share the same faith) is linked with pro-social behavior in children (Bartkowski, Xu, and Levin 2008). Parental religiosity is predictive of adult emerging religiosity, particularly when household homogeneity (Leonard et al. 2013) and faith support (Leonard et al. 2013; Schwartz 2006) were present. According to Smith (2009), young children are content to follow their parents’ religious footsteps. One literature review found that children are more likely to share their parents’ denomination than

they are to share their parents’ occupation (Iannaccone 1990). But faith can also undermine young adult religiosity when it is perceived as a source of conflict (Leonard et al. 2013). Taken together, these findings unsurprisingly suggest that parents may influence faith formation in children beginning from an early age (Yust 2004).

What are the channels through which a parent may influence a child’s faith? One study finds that family spiritual disciplines, including prayer, Bible reading, singing sacred music, and religious service attendance play an important role (Marks 2004). Students in families that collectively engage in these “family worship” practices scored higher on a scale of Active Faith, and lower on Materialism/Legalism and Alcoholism/Drug Use scales (Lee, Rice, and Gillespie 1997). Parents may also influence faith through conversation (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003). Given the important role parents play, Christian schools may consider ways of encouraging active parental involvement in their children’s discipleship and education (Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna 2021; 2022).

Friendship

Research documents compelling evidence that peer influence is a significant predictor of faith formation (King, Furrow, and Roth 2002; Regnerus, Smith, and Smith 2004; Schwartz 2006; Cort 2008) and may be a channel by which parental influence on faith is mediated (Martin, White, and Perlman 2003). In particular, perceived support from peers was a significant mediator that was positively associated with church attendance or youth group participation (Schwartz 2006; Cort 2008).

Church

One study used the Raymond Meyer Worldview Instrument (Meyer 2003) to measure differences in worldview between Christian school students and their public school peers (Taylor 2009). Evidence of statistically significant differences was found for students who had attended Christian school for seven or more years, suggesting that continually reinforcing integration of biblical truth into instructional and curriculum components may impact the student’s worldview. Taylor (2009) concluded by arguing that the synergy between church and school may dynamically reinforce faith formation for students. This observation is consistent with other research that finds that students’ religious affiliations outside of school predict religious maturity (Ali 2014).

SAMPLE

Schools

In the fall of 2022, 33 schools successfully completed pilot survey administration. These schools are broadly representative of ACSI membership. Twenty-nine are based in the United States, with the remaining four being international (English-based instruction) schools outside of the United States. Twenty-nine are accredited by ACSI, while four are unaccredited members or accredited by another organization. The vast majority are PK/K-12 schools, with one PK-8 school. Two-thirds (22) are covenantal (requiring faith and/or church attendance commitments from one or both parents) while one-third (11) is missional (no faith or church commitment requirement of parents). Roughly two-thirds (23) are governed by an independent board and ten are affiliated with a church.

The schools are also broadly representative of membership by enrollment, tuition, and division. Six (18%) schools are in the smallest enrollment bracket, enrolling up to 200 students; eight (24%) between 201-400; eleven (33%) between 401-700; and eight (24%) over 700 students. Average tuition was \$10,174.73, with a median of \$10,000 and a range of \$6,200-\$16,410. The ACSI Eastern Division had the greatest representation with fourteen schools, followed by Central (eleven) and Western (four).

Respondents

Nearly 10,000 individual respondents completed FFI

pilot surveys. Respondent demographic characteristics are similar to those of the Flourishing School Culture Instrument pilot study, if slightly less non-white. Administrators (42 percent), particularly heads of school or similar role (66 percent) and board members (66 percent) were predominantly male. The student sample, consisting of students in grades 6 through 12, was roughly evenly divided by sex. Alumni (63 percent), parents (75 percent), teachers (81 percent), and staff (86 percent) tended to skew female.

As a whole, the sample is disproportionately White. Roughly one-third of the student sample (34 percent) reported a non-white ethnicity. Roughly one-eighth of parent (13 percent), teacher (12 percent), and staff (11 percent) respondents reported a non-white ethnicity. Less than one-tenth of alumni (9 percent), administrators (7 percent), and board members (3 percent) reported a non-white ethnicity. (See Table 1, below.)

With respect to the student population in particular, 5,050 students across 33 schools completed the FFI pilot surveys. Just under half of student respondents (47.94%) had been enrolled at their Christian school for four or fewer years, inclusive of the current year. Student enrollment by total number of years (ranging from 1, inclusive of the current year, to 14 years) across all participating schools was left skewed with average enrollment of 5.7 years.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

	FFI			FSCI		
	N	Male	Of color	N	Male	Of color
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Admin	168	42%	7%	226	41%	6%
HOS	29	66%	0%	65	63%	4%
Other admin	139	37%	8%			
Alumni	482	37%	9%	1,340	41%	14%
Board	146	66%	3%	216	63%	10%
Parent	2,322	25%	13%	4,291	28%	19%
Staff	337	14%	11%	413	9%	12%
Student	4,937	49%	34%	7,381		
Teacher	960	19%	12%	1,322	23%	11%

METHODS

As with the validation of the Flourishing School Culture Instrument, questions for a pre-validated assessment were formed based on catalogued findings from an extensive review of relevant prior research and literature. A team of five school leaders reviewed the instrument and offered feedback and revisions. The data was analyzed using Stata statistical analysis software (v. 17.0) for the purposes of construct analysis and establishing the psychometric properties of the finalized instrument.

Construct Analysis

Principal components analysis was conducted as exploratory factor analysis. As the intended purpose of the FFI is to delve more deeply within a narrow scope of understanding and assessing spiritual and biblical worldview formation in Christian schools (rather than school culture more broadly, as with the Flourishing School Culture Instrument), a promax oblique rotation was used, allowing for correlation among the items.

In total, 9,690 respondents across seven constituent groups tested 764 items. Respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale how strongly they agreed with each statement (1 = Strongly disagree; 3 = Neutral; 5 = Strongly agree). Ultimately, 129 items organized across 47 constructs were retained. PCA with promax oblique rotation yielded a structure where all individual question items yielded primary loadings, with the vast majority of individual items (118 of 129) yielding primary loadings over 0.5 and not a single item yielding cross-loadings over 0.3.

Psychometric Properties

Stata software analysis package (v. 17.0) was used to test the quantitative structural evidence for reliability and validity behind each question set. In the first round of analysis, evidence of divergent validity was used to immediately cut from the pre-validated assessment any question that highly correlated, either positively or negatively, with respondent ethnicity or sex. This was done to avoid including a pseudo-psychometric concept inadvertently measuring merely a demographic factor.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was then used to measure the overall reliability of each question set. Each assessment reached a

Cronbach's alpha level between 0.810 and 0.907, exceeding the industry standard of 0.700 as the preferable threshold for this measure and providing confidence in the internal reliability of these assessments. Validity analysis (KMO–Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) was conducted for the scaled outcome measures of each assessment. Each assessment reached a KMO of between 0.723 and 0.926, exceeding the industry standard of 0.500.

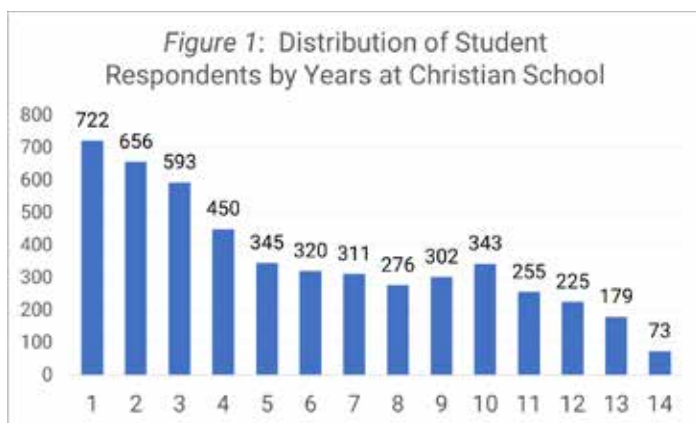
Furthermore, we estimated Cronbach's alphas for each construct within each assessment separately to test for the internal reliability of each discrete factor. All constructs exceed the minimum threshold of a Cronbach's alpha of 0.5, with over three-quarters exceeding the desired standard of 0.7. Of the ten constructs below 0.7, seven exceed 0.6 and only three fall below 0.6.

Logistic Regressions

Inner linkages within the Flourishing Faith Model were initially detected using logistic regression techniques. For each construct, as well as the propositional and spiritual disciplines surveys, we dichotomized each measure for whether the school average was above the median for our analytic sample. We then regressed each dichotomized measure on the validated constructs of the FFM to identify statistically significant relationships within the model. In the end, various constructs across the model were found to have strong and specific predictive value for one or more meaningful flourishing outcomes. These are discussed in the final section of this report.

Face Validity

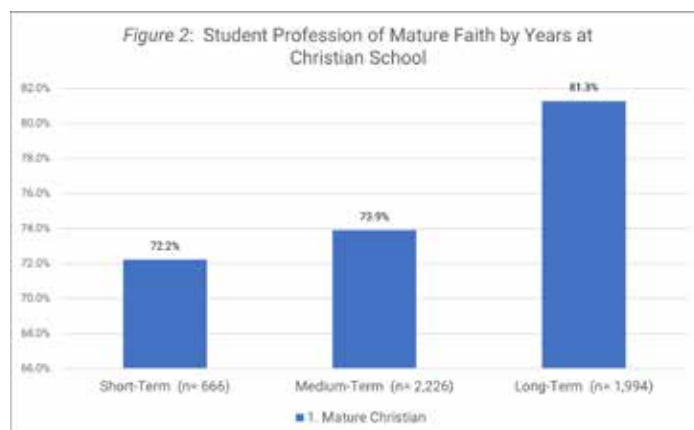
Importantly, ACSI's recent research on Christian school enrollment trends during and post-COVID found an average per-school enrollment increase of 35 percent since the 2019-2020 school year (Lee and Price 2022). This influx of new students suggests that a substantial proportion of students enrolled in Christian schools over the past four years was formerly enrolled in other educational sectors, including public and private non-sectarian. It also allowed us to analyze patterns of responses by length of time enrolled at a Christian school. If we theorize that attending a Christian school is formative for biblical worldview development, for a survey instrument to have face validity, it must demonstrate differences by length of time enrolled in a Christian school.



Years at Christian School

At face value, noting that an aim of Christian education is to raise students up in Christ-likeness through spiritual and faith formation, we would expect to see that students who more recently enrolled in Christian schools, and especially those students who made the transition to Christian schools from previously secular educational environments in response to COVID-19, would be less likely to agree with propositional survey items which reflect an individual's head knowledge and heart posture toward specific Christian catechism and worldview statements. In short, students who are comparatively new to Christian schooling may also be more likely to be new to Christianity, profess to be non-Christian, or have not developed their biblical worldview within the context of secular education settings secular educational settings, and such individuals may be expected to report comparatively lower propositional scores, on average (see Figure 1 above for distribution of years enrolled).

To test this, we compare the propositional survey item average scores across enrollment groups, dividing students into three groups by length of enrollment. We considered students to be "short-term enrolled" if they were enrolled in their Christian school for one year or less; "medium-term" if enrolled between 2 to 6 years; and "long-term" if enrolled for 7 or more years. In Figure 2 below, we plot the average propositional scores for medium- and long-term enrolled students relative to short-term enrolled students for each item, as well as an overall average. We find evidence of a positive association between enrollment and average propositional scores. On average, across all propositional items, medium-term enrolled students scored roughly .13 points higher than short-term enrollees,



while long-term enrolled students scored about .17 points higher than short-term enrollees. Individual propositional item score averages varied from roughly +.07 to +.27.

Christian Faith Profession

The FFI captures aggregated profession of faith data across head, heart, hands, and faith formation through statistically validated, extant-research-supported survey items and constructs. One particularly useful measure of faith profession is found through the FFI demographic survey item *Christian_faith* which measures personal profession of Christian faith inclusive of a durational component, as well as faith-wavering and non-Christian professions for all survey participants on a 5-point scale (1. *I have been a Christian for many years*; 2. *I have recently become a Christian*; 3. *I follow Christ, but don't call myself a Christian*; 4. *I'm not sure if I am a Christian*; 5. *I am not a Christian*).

More than three-quarters of all students (76.6 percent) reported being a Christian for many years, while roughly 11 percent reported uncertainty about their Christian faith identity or expressed with certainty that they were not a Christian. When students are grouped according to short-, medium-, and long-term enrollment, we do observe that length of enrollment is positively associated with Christian faith profession. Individuals who have been enrolled in Christian school for 7 or more years are more likely to profess having been a Christian for many years (+9.1 pp and +7.4 pp when compared with short- and medium-term enrollments) and are less likely either to profess having recently become a Christian or respond with a non-Christian personal profession (see Figure 2 above).

When observing response data from the propositional survey by years at Christian school and Christian

profession of faith (using the *Christian_faith* demographic survey item to create three distinct categories), we coded students as self-reporting as “mature” Christians if they reported being a Christian for many years; “young” Christians if they reported recently becoming a Christian or following Christ without claiming the identity “Christian;” and “non-Christian” if they reported uncertainty about their Christian faith or certainty about not being a Christian. Admittedly, self-report data are statistically noisy proxies for spiritual realities. For example, people may deceive themselves into believing they are repentant Christians (Acts 8:9-25; 1 John 2:4, 19); conversely, people who express uncertainty about their identity in Christ may possess genuine faith (1 John 3:19). Nonetheless, in sufficiently large samples, self-report data may provide helpful evidence of face validity.

To this end, we observe evidence of positive correlation between Christian faith maturity and propositional scores in the FFI data. The propositional survey findings by self-reported Christian faith for students provide evidence of face-level validity. On average, across all 25 survey items, self-identified young Christian students scored roughly half a point higher (+.49) than non-Christian students, while self-identified mature Christian students scored three-quarters of a point higher (+.75). Individual propositional item score averages exhibited modest variation, and ranged from +0.20 to +1.14 relative to non-Christian students. Across all 25 survey items, young and mature Christians scored higher on average than non-Christian students, and mature Christian students scored higher than young Christian students.

These propositional survey findings provide correlational support for the idea that Christian schools do impart Christian catechismal and worldview understanding and knowledge to Christian and non-Christian students alike. While the average level of comparative agreement on a 5-point Likert score basis with Christian propositional truth statements does vary by faith profession across mature, young, and non-Christian students, these pilot study findings suggest that medium- and long-term student enrollment duration is associated with increased agreement with Christian propositional truth, and that the greatest comparative average propositional score gains by length of enrollment at Christian school could be achieved among students who are 1) comparatively new to Christian faith, 2) wavering in their confessional beliefs, and 3) non-Christian.

Covenantal vs. Missional

Finally, we tested for differences in school-level means by admissions requirement for profession of faith. Covenantal schools require at least one parent to indicate agreement with the school’s statement of faith, whereas missional or open-enrollment schools require parents only to acknowledge the school’s statement of faith. For face validity, we expected covenantal schools to score higher than missional schools on most constructs, though of course there are a few notable examples in which it is reasonable to expect missional schools to score higher. This is in fact what we find in our analysis. Of the 47 constituent-level constructs as well as the school-level propositional score, covenantal schools scored higher in 30 categories and missional schools scored higher in 18 categories.

Covenantal schools scored higher than missional schools in 29 constructs as well as the propositional survey (see Figure 3). As expected, covenantal schools are more intentional about promoting Sabbath-keeping among faculty and families, administrators report a stronger parent partnership with the school, and students were more likely to observe a strong sense of congruence between church and school. Surprisingly, while covenantal schools scored slightly higher, scores were similar in some categories, including parent reports of protecting students from potentially harmful media content and engaging in conversation about faith with their child (see Figure 4). Furthermore, parents in missional schools were more likely to report engaging in family devotions. School leaders of both covenantal and missional schools should note these data carefully and consider ways of engaging with families to promote flourishing faith.

Missional schools scored higher than covenantal schools on 18 constructs (see Figure 5). Perhaps unsurprisingly, school personnel at missional schools were more likely to report engaging with students in their questions and doubts about the Christian faith and were more likely to report imparting skills for engaging the world with biblical perspectives to their students. Finally, and encouragingly, alumni of missional schools reported maintaining close friendships with many of their Christian school friends, and that these friends had persisted in the Christian faith.

Figure 3: Constructs with Higher Covenantal School Scores

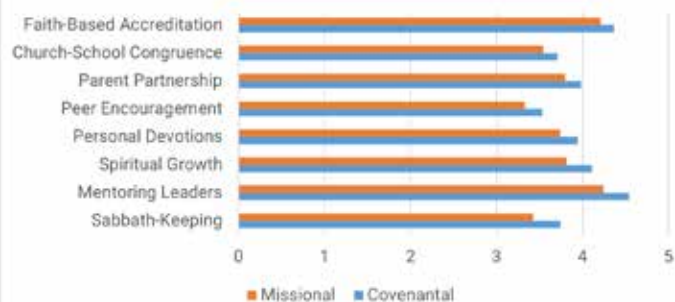


Figure 4: Constructs with Similar Scores at Covenantal/Missional Schools

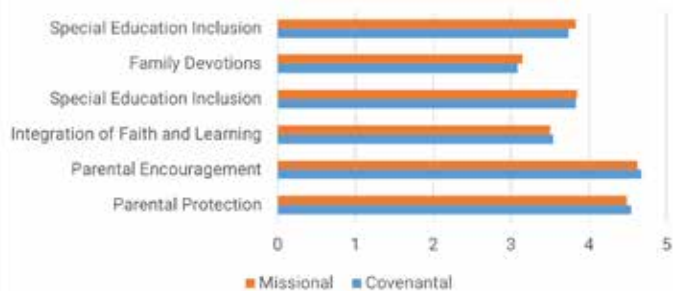
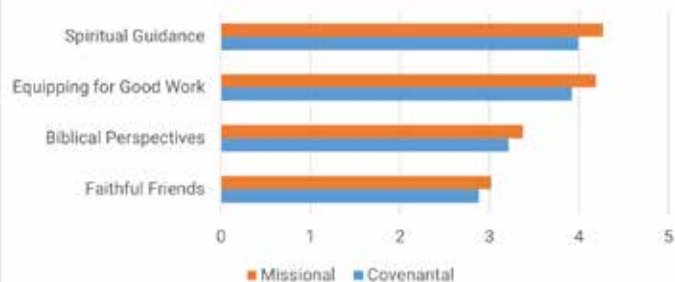


Figure 5: Constructs with Higher Missional School Scores



THE FLOURISHING FAITH MODEL

The Flourishing Faith Core

We begin by describing the three domains that compose the inner “Flourishing Faith Core,” which measure respondents’ flourishing faith in three dimensions: Head, Heart, and Hands.



Head

To measure Head, we included a propositional survey of 25 items based on ACSI’s Statement of Faith. As with the Flourishing Faith Index, respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale how strongly they agreed with each item (1 = Strongly disagree; 3 = Neutral; 5 = Strongly agree). These items are included in Table 2, right.

While the 25-item propositional survey, based on ACSI’s Statement of Faith, was not validated by factor analysis, preliminary analysis lends substantial face validity to the Head domain: students enrolled in their Christian school for more years were more likely to assent to survey items than students enrolled for just a few years, and respondents who self-reported being a Christian “for many years” were more likely to assent than those who were unsure or knew that they were not a Christian.

Table 2. Propositional Items

Prop 1	My sins are forgiven because Jesus died for me.
Prop 2	All people are created in the image of God.
Prop 3	The Bible is the inspired Word of God.
Prop 4	Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.
Prop 5	The Bible teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman.
Prop 6	There is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Prop 7	Sex outside of marriage is sin.
Prop 8	Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
Prop 9	My only hope for eternal life is in the finished work of Jesus Christ.
Prop 10	Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.
Prop 11	There is a real heaven where those who are saved through faith in Christ will live with God forever.
Prop 12	Jesus conducted miracles.
Prop 13	Since the Fall, people are born in sin and have a natural tendency toward evil.
Prop 14	Jesus was born of a virgin.
Prop 15	God created everything that exists without any help.
Prop 16	Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life.
Prop 17	Salvation is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ.
Prop 18	Jesus Christ died on the cross.
Prop 19	The Bible is our only standard for faith and living.
Prop 20	Jesus Christ rose bodily on the third day from the grave.
Prop 21	The church was established by God, and Jesus is the head of the church.
Prop 22	Jesus Christ will return someday in power and glory.
Prop 23	God continues to be involved in his creation, protecting and providing for his people.
Prop 24	God hates sin.
Prop 25	Christians are commanded to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.



Heart

Of all the measures of flourishing faith, the Heart proves the most difficult to measure. External fruit such as spiritual disciplines can be observed and measured. Head knowledge can be assessed. But if “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen” (Hebrews 11:1), as the evidence of things unseen, we can, however imperfectly, measure the growth of faith in our own lives as we seek to live out our Christian faith more and more faithfully.

The FFI identified respondents’ heart disposition towards God, the local church, the Bible, others, and the future. The constructs related to Heart were identified for six of the seven survey groups (students; parents; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; and support staff).

1. **Church Engagement** – Administrators are deeply devoted to a local church body (Romans 12:4-5; Hebrews 10:25).
2. **Personal Devotions** – Administrators, teachers, alumni, and staff are diligent about engaging with the Bible, including reading and memorizing Scripture (Psalms 19:7-8; 119:15).
3. **Spiritual Maturity** – Parents and teachers desire to grow in understanding and living according to the Bible (Hebrews 5:12-14, 6:1; John 15:5; Philippians 1:9).
4. **Hopefulness** – Students and alumni express optimism and purposefulness about their lives (Job 13:15; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 5:5).
5. **Reconciliation** – Students seek forgiveness from others and offer forgiveness when it is asked of them (Matthew 6:15; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
6. **Reverence** – Administrators, staff, and students revere God and live their lives in submission to His authority (1 Samuel 12:24; Proverbs 1:7; Hebrews 12:9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).



Hands

Finally, as a measure of Hands, we asked respondents to indicate how frequently they engaged in a series of spiritual practices. Scales were either six-, seven-, or nine-point Likert. The nine-point Likert scale had the following points: 1. Several times a day; 2. Daily; 3. Several times a week; 4. Weekly; 5. Several times a month; 6. Monthly; 7. Several times a year; 8. Yearly (or less frequently); 9. Never. The seven-point Likert had the same points from “Several times a week” to “Never,” ranging from 1 to 7. The six-

point Likert had the same points from “Weekly” to “Never,” ranging from 1 to 6.

All respondents were asked how frequently they attend religious services (seven-point Likert); participate in Bible study, prayer meeting, or youth group (9); pray (9); and read the Bible (9). All respondents except for students were asked how frequently they tithe (6). Students were asked how frequently their family has family devotions (9). Alumni were asked how frequently they share the Gospel with unbelievers (9); ask God for forgiveness (9); read books about faith, church, or missions (9); and volunteer outside of church (6). These measures are summarized in Table 3.

Like the 25-item propositional survey, the Hands domain does not contain any validated constructs, but rather 10 spiritual disciplines asked across the seven constituent groups. Best practice in survey design is not to ask respondents how they feel about a particular item (unavoidable for any measure of Heart), but rather how often they engage in particular behaviors, as frequency of behaviors can be more objectively stated, while perceptions require subjective judgment.

Table 3. Frequency of spiritual practices

	Likert	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff	Student	Teacher
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Religious services	7	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff	Student	Teacher
Bible study, prayer meeting, or youth group	9	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff	Student	Teacher
Pray	9	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff	Student	Teacher
Read Bible	9	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff	Student	Teacher
Family devotions	9						Student	
Share Gospel with unbelievers	9		Alumni					
Ask God for forgiveness	9		Alumni					
Read books about faith, church, missions	9		Alumni					
Tithe	6	Admin	Alumni	Board	Parent	Staff		Teacher
Volunteer outside of church	6		Alumni					

The Biblical Worldview & Spiritual Formation Ring

We continue by describing the three domains that compose the outer “Biblical Worldview & Spiritual Formation Ring,” which measure the ways in which the Christian school and school community may influence spiritual formation and biblical worldview development. These three domains correspond with the inner “Flourishing Faith Core” in three domains: Intellectual, Nurture, and Practical.



Intellectual

The Christian faith is one that can be known (Luke 1:1-4; 1 John 5:13). Faith is formed at least in part in the mind and the Bible often describes faith as belief (Mark 1:15; John 20:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Thus, Christian schools seek to train students’ minds and to prepare them to view the world from a biblical perspective. A Christian school engages in many intellectual practices to train minds and develop a biblical worldview. FFI data analysis identified constructs related to the Intellectual domain for six of the seven constituent groups (students; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; support staff; and board members).

1. **Teacher Worldview Training** – The school trains teachers in their biblical worldview and evaluates their growth (Ezra 7:10; Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:10-11).
2. **Integrating Faith and Teaching** – Teachers study how to integrate faith with their academic discipline and receive appropriate training (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 John 2:6).
3. **Integrating Faith and Learning** – Students see how their academic work helps them better understand God’s character and the Bible’s teachings (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; Romans 8:6-7; Matthew 12:25, 30).
4. **Spiritual Guidance** – School personnel are open to guiding students in their questions and doubts about the Christian faith, and alumni recall the school providing a safe environment for such questions (Acts 8:26-40; Luke 24:38; Jude 22).
5. **Faith-Based Accreditation** – Board members see the value of the accreditation process in aligning the school with its Christian mission (Philippians 1:10; 1 Timothy 4:15; Colossians 3:10-11, 23; Hebrews 11:1; Luke 18:27).
6. **Distinctively Christian Education** – Board members feel Christian education must be distinct in both content and pedagogy (2 Timothy 1:13, 3:16-17).



Nurture

Faith extends to the heart. Belief in Christ is evidence of true heart change (Romans 10:9-10) and the product of divine heart surgery (Ezekiel 36:26-27). True believers do not simply assent to certain truths asserted by the Bible; their desires change to seek after the things of God (Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:19-24).

A Christian school works closely with the local church and with parents to nurture a certain heart disposition toward the Christian faith. For many schools, nurturing spiritual formation emerges from a partnership with church and family and yields close relationships between students, leaders, and families (Deuteronomy 6; Joshua 24; Psalms 78, 127). At the same time, it is important to note that covenantal and missional schools may interpret some of this data differently, while still gaining important insight into the nature of the school's relationships with its families and parents. FFI data analysis identified constructs related to the Nurture domain for six of the seven constituent groups (students; parents; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; and support staff).

1. **Spiritual Growth** – Administrators, teachers, and staff feel supported in their spiritual health and growth (2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 2:6-7; Psalm 92:12-14).
2. **Mentoring Leaders** – Administrators have been mentored by other leaders and embody servant leadership by mentoring others (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:2).
3. **Supportive Culture** – Alumni recall being supported by members of the school community (Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:13).
4. **Faithful Friends** – Alumni report maintaining close friendships with friends from school, who continue to be strong in their faith (Proverbs 18:24).
5. **Peer Encouragement** – As “iron sharpens iron,” students feel supported by their peers in the Christian faith (Proverbs 27:17).
6. **Parental Encouragement** – Parents and students spend quality time with each other and engage in conversation about the Christian faith (Deuteronomy 6:7; Psalm 78:4).
7. **Parent Partnership** – Administrators understand the importance of a strong partnership between parents and the school for nurturing the child's spiritual growth (Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 24:15; Psalms 78, 127).
8. **Church Partnership** – Students recognize how the teachings of their school and church agree with each other (Romans 12:4-5; Hebrews 10:25).



Practical

Faith is lived out in the hands. God writes His law upon our hearts and causes us to walk according to His statutes (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Christian schools put policies in place and engage in practices that foster spiritual disciplines in all members of the school community. Such practices may be implemented at the school level, such as a policy that promotes Sabbath-keeping or the ways in which the board helps guard the mission. They may take place in the classroom, as when a school provides practical skills for evaluating the world. They may also be cultivated within the family, as when parents read the Bible with their children or protect them from potentially harmful online content. FFI data analysis identified constructs related to the Practical domain for all seven constituent groups (students; parents; alumni; teachers; leaders/administrators; and support staff).

1. **Guarding the Mission** – Board members feel confident that the school will guard its mission (1 Timothy 6:20).
2. **Missional Hiring** – The school hires faculty and staff who are rooted in their faith and support the school's beliefs and mission (Amos 3:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14).
3. **Special Education Inclusion** – The school's special education practices welcome students with special needs and honor them as image bearers (Psalm 139:13-16; Mark 10:14; John 9:1-3).
4. **Biblical Perspectives** – From the perspective of alumni, the school provided students opportunities to engage with biblical perspectives on social and political issues (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 2:8).
5. **Equipping for Good Work** – Administrators and staff believe the school provides students with practical skills for evaluating the world and stewarding their health and financial resources (Proverbs 22:6; Luke 6:40; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 4:8; 2 Timothy 3:16).
6. **Sabbath-Keeping** – The school has policies to help personnel and families keep the Sabbath and communicates these expectations (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Hebrews 4:1-13).
7. **Family Devotions** – Parents and students report spending time in their families reading and praying together (Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 24:15; Psalms 78, 127).
8. **Parental Protection** – Parents provide a healthy "hedge of protection" for their children from potentially harmful online content (Job 1:10).

KEY FINDINGS

Logistic regressions allowed us to explore the inner linkages within the FFM. If we have validated meaningful measures of spiritual formation, we should expect to find statistically significant evidence of associations with measures of flourishing faith. Our hope is that this in turn provides helpful feedback to Christian schools as they seek to faithfully support students' spiritual formation and biblical worldview development. Table 4 (below) provides a sampling of findings from this preliminary analysis.

School leaders will consider many of these findings to be intuitive and unsurprising. School communities in which students and parents are above the median in their engagement in family devotions (a construct we've defined as including Scripture reading as a family) also report reading the Bible with greater frequency. Schools in which

administrators emphasize the importance of parental partnership in Christian education also have parents report significantly higher levels of parental engagement, including personal devotions, providing a "hedge of protection" around their children from potentially harmful online content, and having conversations with their children about the Christian faith. Other connections confirm the findings of previous research, which document the important role that churches, peers, and parents play in the spiritual formation of children.

It is also important for us to highlight some surprising findings—surprising not because a reverse relationship would have been hypothesized but more because research is relatively scant with respect to these practices. Particularly noteworthy are findings around practices of

Table 4: Select FFI Findings

Domain	When...	Then...
Hands	Administrators and staff express higher levels of reverence	School community reports engaging in spiritual disciplines more frequently, including religious service attendance and family devotions
	Students and parents report engaging in family devotions	School community reports reading the Bible with greater frequency
Head	Administrators report being involved in a local church	School community more likely to assent to propositional survey
	Board members express confidence in ability to guard mission	School community more likely to assent to propositional survey
	Students report greater parental, peer, and church influence in their spiritual lives	School community more likely to assent to propositional survey
Heart	Administrators and staff emphasize the importance of special education inclusion	Alumni more likely to report supportive culture, engaging with biblical perspectives on contemporary issues, and having lasting and meaningful friendships from their Christian school
	Teachers and board members report the school has policies to protect the Sabbath	Students more likely to report their Christian school positively influenced their spiritual growth
	Administrators emphasize the importance of a parental partnership	Parents more likely to take an active role with their children, and students more likely to report a positive parental influence on their spiritual growth
	Teachers report feeling supported in their own spiritual growth	Students more likely to report higher levels of reverence and hopefulness, as well as a positive parent, church, and peer influence on their spiritual growth

special education inclusion and policies that protect the Sabbath for the school community. For example, in schools in which administrators reported a vision for an inclusive special education program as important to the mission of a Christian school, alumni of those schools were more likely to report they felt guided through questions and doubts related to the Christian faith, that they had opportunities to engage with biblical perspectives on contemporary issues while enrolled at their Christian school, and that they maintained meaningful friendships years out of Christian school. Similarly, when staff members stressed the importance of special education and inclusion, alumni also reported engaging in biblical perspectives and maintaining faithful friendships, and students were more likely to report pursuing and offering reconciliation. Finally, when teachers prioritized special education and valued each student as bearing God's image, students were more likely to report that their Christian school positively influenced their spiritual formation.

We find similarly insightful findings for schools with policies that help protect the Sabbath for the school community. When teachers report such policies, the school community is more likely to report frequent religious service and Bible study attendance, and students are more likely to report that their church positively influenced their spiritual formation. When board members report that such policies are in place, alumni are more likely to report that their Christian school fostered a supportive culture, and students are more likely to report that their Christian school positively influenced their spiritual formation.

Of course, it must be said that these findings are confounded by the likely endogenous nature of spiritual formation and biblical worldview development: people engage in behaviors—in the case of this study, school policies, attendance, and spiritual disciplines—of their own volition and convictions. Schools adopt policies and practices, parents select schools, and individuals engage in behaviors, all in volitional ways for which we cannot fully control. God is sovereign and man is free—and this presents lots of challenges, statistically speaking.

Some of these challenges could be addressed by studying spiritual formation longitudinally. By linking student data year-over-year and following up with respondents over a longer period of time, a longitudinal study could provide even more powerful insights into school

practices and flourishing faith constructs that lead to truly meaningful change. Commonly employed strategies for such longitudinal analysis include collecting non-invasive subject-generated identification codes that can uniquely but anonymously identify individuals within a school. We look forward to engaging with school leaders about the possibility of a longitudinal study in the near future.

ACSI Research continues to be dedicated in its mission to support the work of Christian schools by providing robust and rigorous evidence regarding flourishing culture and faith. Our work in turn supports the mission of Christian schools to prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Our hope and prayer for the Flourishing Faith Index, alongside the Flourishing School Culture Instrument, is that this work will stimulate and mutually reinforce faithfulness, efficacy, and school improvement as Christian schools carry out their mission.

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