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Responding Nimbly, Leading Forward

LYNN E. SWANER AND CHARLOTTE MARSHALL POWELL

Just like schools from all sectors across the globe, Christian schools were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020. In the U.S., most public and private school campuses were closed by state mandate during the month of March—often with little to no advance notice. Across the country and the world, Christian schools pivoted their instructional practices and business operations in the face of this new reality.

In an effort to understand the responses of Christian schools in the face of COVID-19, ACSI Research conducted a survey of U.S. member schools in late April 2020. The survey collected real-time data on school closures, the transition to distance learning formats, current distance learning practices, and the financial impact of COVID-19. The findings of the survey—as detailed in the report *Christian Schools and COVID-19: Responding Nimbly, Facing the Future*—point to the **overall nimbleness and tenacity of Christian schools in responding to COVID-19.**

ACSI then conducted a second survey in late summer 2020, in an effort to understand the reopening plans and financial outlook of Christian schools for the fall. Similar to the first survey, the findings of the second survey—shared in a second report, *Christian Schools and COVID-19: Reopening Plans and Fall 2020 Outlook*—found that Christian schools continued to respond nimbly and adapt creatively to thrive in the face of ongoing challenge, with the **majority of schools open and ready for business for the fall, while placing a strong emphasis on delivering fully on their value proposition.**

Survey Demographics

The first survey was fielded electronically in late April 2020. All of ACSI's member schools in the United States were invited to participate via email. A total of 790 unique

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ACSI Mission Statement

ACSI exists to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire students to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

ACSI Vision Statement

ACSI will become a leading international organization that promotes Christian education and provides training and resources to Christian schools and Christian educators, resulting in:

- schools that contribute to the public good through effective teaching and learning and that are biblically sound, academically rigorous, socially engaged, and culturally relevant and
- educators who embody a biblical worldview, engage in transformational teaching and discipling, and embrace personal and professional growth.

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schools responded to the survey for a response rate of 42.4%. Respondents to the survey identified themselves as heads of school (63%), other school administrators (21%), or other staff or board members (16%). Overall, the responding schools were representative of ACSI membership across a number of demographic factors. This includes geographic distribution, with 32% of responding schools located in the Western U.S., 30% in the Central U.S., and 38% in the Eastern U.S. Respondents were also fairly representative of ACSI membership in terms of school size (by enrollment) and grade levels offered. Respondents were also fairly representative of ACSI membership in terms of school size by enrollment (with 42.2% of schools enrolling 0-200 students, 28.2% enrolling 201-399 students, 18.5% enrolling 400-699 students, and 10.8% enrolling 700 or more students).

The second survey was fielded electronically in late July 2020. All of ACSI's member schools in the United States were again invited to participate via email. A total of 548 unique schools responded to the survey for a response rate of 30%. Overall, the responding schools were fairly representative of ACSI membership across a number of demographic factors. This includes geographic distribution, with 25% of responding schools located in the Western U.S., 24% in the Central U.S., and 41% in the Eastern U.S. Respondents were, again, fairly representative of ACSI membership in terms of school size by enrollment (with 48.4% of schools enrolling 0-200 students, 28% enrolling 201-399 students, 15.9% enrolling 400-699 students, and 7.7% enrolling 700 or more students).

Spring 2020 Impact

At the time of the survey administration in late April, the physical campuses of over 98% of schools with elementary, middle, and/or high school grades were closed. Where these schools reported also having an early education program, 89% of those programs were physically closed. The survey also asked how many instructional days schools missed due to physical closures (not counting holidays or planned breaks), with the goal of gauging how quickly member schools pivoted to distance learning. Across all levels, approximately one-third of schools missed no instructional days due to campus closures; nearly two-thirds missed fewer than three instructional days; and nearly four out of five schools missed fewer than five instructional days (see table below).

Spring 2020 Instructional Days Missed by Grade Level

Grade Levels	No days missed	Missed fewer than 3 days	Missed fewer than 5 days
Early Education	29.6%	52.2%	69.5%
Elementary	36.8%	64.5%	82.5%
Middle School	36%	66.8%	85.1%
High School	35.1%	65.7%	86.5%
Average	34.4%	62.3%	80.9%

A number of survey questions were designed to gauge schools' **preparedness for the transition to distance learning**. This included self-report by respondents of their level of preparedness, from *extremely unprepared* to *extremely prepared*. Respondents most frequently reported being either prepared or extremely prepared (total of 44%) for the transition to distance learning; an additional 25% described their school as neither prepared nor unprepared; and 31% reported their school was either unprepared or extremely unprepared for distance learning. In addition to self-rating their school's preparedness, the survey asked respondents about their school's usage of distance learning tools *prior* to COVID-19 closures. The survey found that 83% of schools had utilized at least one distance learning tool/method prior to COVID-19, while 17% reported never using any distance learning tools/methods before.

The survey asked respondents to identify the **distance learning tools/methods in use during COVID-19** across the grade levels offered at their schools (early education, elementary, middle, and high school). Across all levels, *teacher-recorded videos, Zoom or other videoconferencing tools, and Google Classroom* were among the top five distance learning tools/methods for instruction. Additional approaches included project- or problem-based learning, student collaboration, and web-based services (e.g., Khan Academy, Rosetta Stone). Across all grade levels, the subjects most frequently offered via distance learning were (in descending order of frequency): core academics; Bible; music/arts' physical education; and electives. Only at the high school level were electives offered with greater frequency than physical education.

The survey also asked participants about the **availability of special education and student support services** during distance learning. Among responding schools, these services are most frequently being offered at a *decreased* level of support (32.8%). A smaller percentage of schools are offering services at the *same* level of support (22.8%), at a *higher* level of support (7.3%), or have *discontinued* services altogether (4.6%). [It should be noted that a further 32.5% of schools indicated they did not offer these services prior to COVID-19.]

The survey results also showed that schools highly prioritized **nurturing Christian community** even despite closure of their physical campuses. Schools utilized a variety of formats to continue to maintain and foster ongoing communication with and between school constituents. These methods included regular emails, phone calls, videos, virtual chapels, and a variety of creative approaches to community-building. Additionally, more than two-thirds of member schools reported providing emergency financial assistance to families impacted by COVID-19. Overall, qualitative data from respondents suggests that school families appreciate the connection with, and support from, the school.

The survey also asked respondents about the **financial impact of COVID-19**. Results indicated that the majority of schools were: a) as previously mentioned, providing emergency financial assistance to families; b) *not* offering discounts or refunds for tuition; c) attempting to minimize staff furloughs and layoffs; and d) planning to participate in the SBA loan program provided through the CARES Act. Quantitative data indicated that a substantial proportion of schools (40.8%) halted fundraising campaigns and initiatives due to COVID-19. An additional 37.8% of schools were continuing fundraising campaigns and initiatives, but with modifications to existing plans. Qualitative data from



schools provided strong support for continuing or modifying fundraising efforts, as respondents reported that donors were often willing to continue or increase their giving toward financial assistance or special funds designated for families struggling with COVID-19-related financial needs.

Fall 2020 Outlook

The second survey conducted by ACSI asked about schools' *current* plans for reopening school at the point of administration (in late July). The vast majority of schools (88.2%) planned for a physical reopening of their campuses in the fall. The majority of schools with grades in the K-12 range (54%) were planning to offer on-campus instruction with an option for distance learning (e.g., in case of illness, health condition, or family preference). Over a quarter (26.8%) planned to offer on campus instruction only. When asked about their timeline for reopening, 18% of schools indicated they planned to delay the start of the school year, while the majority (82%) were planning an on-time opening.

For schools with attached early education programs, the majority of those programs (58.6%) were slated to open for on-campus instruction as usual. An additional third (35.9%) of early education programs were planning to be open, but with significant modifications (such as changes to scheduling, number of classes, etc.) due to COVID-19.

Influences on Planning

The majority of respondents (54.7%) indicated that *almost all* parents desired their students to return to campus. Just over an additional third (35.2%) reported that *most* parents preferred a return to campus. An additional 8.2% indicated that parents were split on the issue of returning to campus, and less than 2% reported that most parents did not desire a physical return to campus. The survey also asked about the influence of various input sources in schools' formulation of reopening plans. State guidance, health department guidance, and teacher/staff and

parent input were reported as the most influential, whereas student input was least influential (qualitative comments indicated most schools did not seek student input).

COVID-19 Modifications

Survey respondents provided data on modifications to scheduling, health and safety, space usage, programs and events, district transportation, special education and student support, and testing. **Instructionally**, the most frequently cited modifications were student cohorts, in which students stay together at most or all times during the day (88.2% of schools); concurrent instruction, in which classes are attended simultaneously by students on campus and via distance learning (42.1%); different start times each day for specific grades or cohorts of students (16%); and alternating day or week schedules for students (8.3%).

A number of modifications to **space usage** were featured in Christian schools' plans to reopen school. The most frequently cited were modifications to campus gatherings, such as chapels, back-to-school nights, etc. (94.5% of schools); limiting visitors to campus (91.6%); re-arranging or re-purposing physical space (90%); modifications to the lunch schedule/program (87%); and designated/special routing of student traffic through buildings (65%).

Modifications to **health and safety procedures** were also reported by schools in their reopening plans. Close to all schools (97.2%) planned to require handwashing and/or other personal hygiene protocols, as well as expand or enhance cleaning (94.5%) and require regular temperature checks and/or health checklists for students and staff (94.3%). Illness protocols (i.e. requiring testing, notification, and contact tracing) were also planned by 81.5% of responding schools. And in terms of personal protective equipment

(e.g., masks), 87.2% of schools were planning use of PPE for teachers and staff, and 76.9% for students.

Schools reported a number of different modifications to **programs and events** at their campuses. These included modifications to student outings like field trips and service activities (91.9%); to the athletic program and/or team sports (74.6%); to the performing arts, including band, orchestra, and choir (69.9%); and to the school calendar, i.e. by extending or rescheduling planned breaks (35.8%).

The survey asked participants about the availability of **special education and student support services** in their Fall 2020 plans. The same question was also asked on the previous survey, regarding services during distance learning in Spring 2020. The majority of schools (56.9%) reported planning to offer the "same" level of support as pre-COVID-19 for Fall 2020; this is up significantly from Spring 2020, when only 22.8% of schools held services steady at the same level, whereas 32.8% reported decreasing levels of support during the spring. This suggests that special education and student support services may be returning to "normal" for this fall at those schools which offer them (notably, nearly a third of schools do not offer such services).

Staffing Impact

The survey asked schools about the impact of COVID-19 on their staffing levels as they plan for the 2020-2021 school year. Schools most frequently reported that they are keeping the same overall FTE for the coming year (48.5% of schools), while 28.9% reported an increase in overall FTE and 22.7% reported a decrease in FTE.

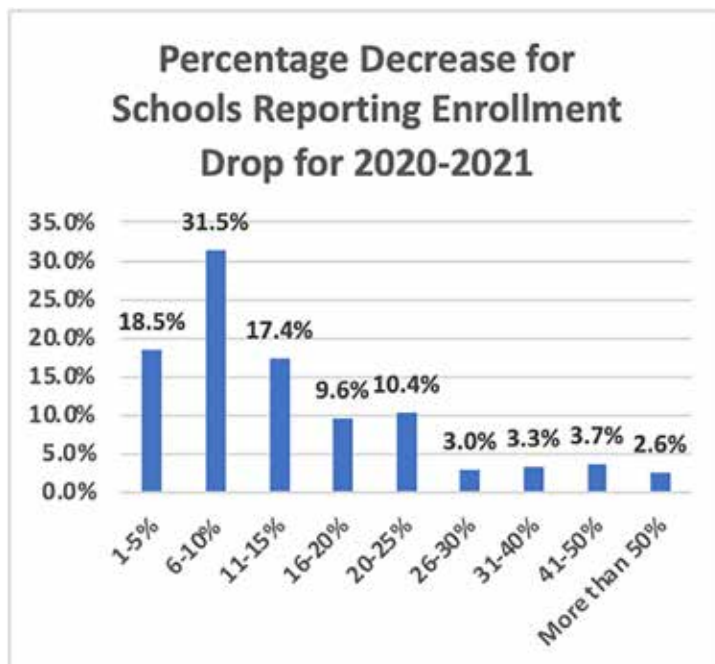
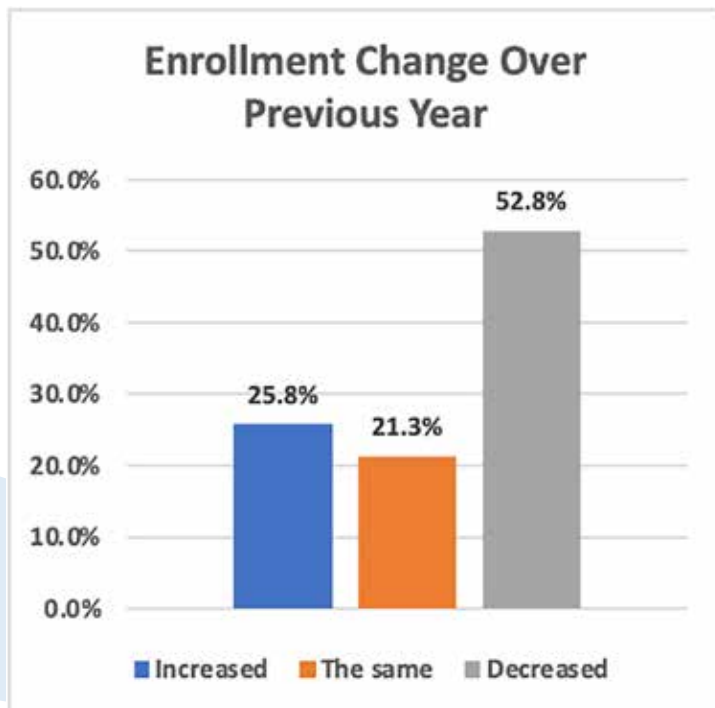
The survey also inquired about schools' expectations for teachers and staff to return physically to campus, and whether and how employees might be allowed to work from home. A majority of schools (62.1%) indicated they are requiring all teachers and staff to return to work on campus when it is open. An additional 22.5% reported that while they expect all teachers and staff to return, they will allow those with documented medical or health concerns to work from home (e.g., via distance learning). The remaining 15.4% reported that they will also work with teachers and staff who are uncomfortable returning to campus to allow them to work from home.

Financial Impact and Outlook

The survey asked respondents about the financial impact of COVID-19 and the outlook for the 2020-2021 school year. Findings in this area were as follows:



- Just over half of schools (52.8%) reported decreased **enrollment** for Fall 2020 (see chart below, left) with the most frequently cited range of enrollment decrease being 6-10% (see chart below, right). For the 25.8% of schools that reported increases in enrollment, many provided qualitative data that indicated the following reasons for those increases: lower classroom sizes; local public schools not providing in-person learning for Fall 2020; and nimble transition of Christian schools to distance learning in Spring 2020. These schools also reported increases in admissions inquiries and wait lists.
- The vast majority of schools reported that they are not offering **tuition discounts** for either on-campus instruction (86.1%) or distance learning (73.1%). A



slightly higher number of schools (11.2%) *will* offer a discount for distance-learning than for on-campus learning (9.8%) in the fall.

- Schools most frequently reported that their **operating budgets** (40.5%) have increased for 2020-2021. Although the survey did not gather data on the reasons for this increase, it is possible that additional technology investments and upgrades—which were planned by over two-thirds of schools (72.1%)—are a contributing factor behind budget increases.
- A majority of schools (50.5%) reported that **financial aid** levels were staying the same as compared to the previous year, while over a third (36.4%) indicated plans to increase financial aid for 2020-2021. Another 5.1% of schools were decreasing aid, while 8.1% of schools reported not offering financial aid.
- At the time of the survey, a strong majority of schools (83.7%) indicated they had received funds through the Payroll Protection Program of the **CARES Act**. Close to half of schools (46.2%) also reported participation in Equitable Services programs through the CARES Act, with another 28.2% not participating and 25.6% unsure about their participation.
- Just over a third of schools (34.1%) reported that their **fundraising efforts** would remain at the same level as previous years, while approximately another third (31.7%) indicated they were unsure of their plans with regard to changes in fundraising efforts. The remaining schools indicated their efforts would either increase (22.6%) or decrease (13.6%) this year.

Discussion & Recommendations

The quantitative and qualitative data from both surveys reveal three emerging themes which, taken together, illustrate the overall response of Christian schools to COVID-19. These are: 1) schools *responding nimbly*; 2) schools *delivering on their value proposition* in the midst of challenge; and 3) schools' need to *prioritize long-term sustainability* as they look toward the future.

Responding Nimbly

The data suggest that, overall, ACSI member schools responded nimbly to closures of their physical campuses due to COVID-19. Across all levels (early education through high school), approximately a third of schools missed zero instructional days, with two-thirds missing less than three days, and four out of five schools missing less than five. Many member schools reported, via qualitative data, that their turnaround time to launching distance learning was significantly shorter than other types of schools in their area.

Moreover, the vast majority of member schools continued to offer a substantial portion of their curriculum—such as core academics and Bible classes—via distance learning. Over half of

elementary, middle, and high schools also offered music and arts, and at the middle and high school level, around half of schools continued to offer both physical education and electives as well.

Data from ACSI's 2018-2019 Tuition and Salary Report help to illustrate the degree of nimbleness with which schools transitioned to online learning. At the time of that survey, in late spring 2019, 67% of schools *did not offer any online courses*. Only 31% of schools offered between 1-25% of their courses online, 2% offered between 26-50% of courses online, and *no schools* offered more than 50% of their courses online. This suggests that moving to 100% online instruction would have been a logistical and pedagogical challenge for most schools, and a significant feat when accomplished as quickly as data suggest.

The second survey showed that Christian schools continue to adjust nimbly to ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 for Fall 2020, with a clear majority planning for a physical (88.2%) and on-time (82%) return to campus. These plans are highly responsive to the desire of families, with close to 90% of schools reporting that almost all or most families desire a physical return to campus. Even with a physical return planned, nearly two-thirds (61.4%) of schools are offering a distance learning option or component, which signals schools' ongoing commitment to remaining nimble and planning for contingencies in the face of COVID-19 related uncertainty.

Delivering on Value Proposition

Qualitative data collected from the second survey indicate that while most Christian schools will be open and ready for business in the fall, local schools in other sectors have mostly moved to distance learning or are limiting the number of days students are physically on campus. Many Christian schools responding to the survey reported a resulting uptick in admissions inquiries and new enrollments by families who were attracted to Christian schools' readiness for an in-person return in the fall, as well as their nimble responses to the COVID-19 disruption during Spring 2020, as well as the enormous value of Christian community during crisis.

These findings suggest that Christian schools' value proposition related to providing a high-quality educational experience has been made clearer to the public through the challenges of COVID-19. Delivering on that value proposition has likely been aided by the smaller size of most Christian schools, their flexibility in staffing and scheduling, and their overall responsiveness and accountability to families as private schools. For Christian schools, reopening school—and doing so effectively and safely—is not optional, but essential to the children and families they serve.

Prioritizing Long-Term Sustainability

The increase in enrollment at a quarter of Christian schools (25.8%) is heartening—especially given the qualitative data attributing much of that increase to schools' nimble response in

reopening school, as well as to their unique value proposition. However, this finding is tempered by aggregate data from the survey, which suggest continued financial challenges lie ahead for many Christian schools. Given the data on enrollment and operating budgets across the sector, the data suggest that schools' revenue in 2020-2021 is most likely to decline, while their operating expenses are most likely to increase.

Again, looking at the data across all schools, this picture is further complicated by the likelihood that fundraising efforts will not be able to fill these gaps. This is because less than a quarter of schools (22.6%) report plans to increase fundraising efforts, while nearly half (47.7%) are staying the same level or are decreasing their efforts, and a staggering near-third (31.7%) do not have plans in place for fundraising as the new school year approaches. Although certainly the financial picture at the individual school level will vary, these sector-level findings suggest the importance of prioritizing financial sustainability in the months ahead.

Sound financial practices in budgeting, management, and fundraising are essential to school viability, regardless of market changes. However, in times of ongoing flux and uncertainty, schools' ability to thrive may increasingly depend on innovation and reaching new markets. Along these lines, data from the spring survey revealed that close to half of schools (48.6%) were considering added blended learning to their offerings, and over a third (35.4%) were considering offering a fully virtual program or programs as part of a hybrid model (see table below). Qualitative data from the two surveys indicated that some schools are also looking at efforts like merging with other Christian schools or programmatically supporting home-school groups or co-ops.

New Opportunities Being Considered Due to COVID-19

New Opportunities Being Considered by Christian Schools	% of Schools
Incorporating distance learning into brick and mortar delivery	48.6%
Making additional investments in technology (e.g., LMS)	24.6%
Offering new hybrid delivery program	23%
Offering completely new online program for domestic students	8.3%
Engaging online curriculum providers	6.3%
Offering completely new online program for international students	4.1%

Schools should pay significant attention to cultivating new opportunities for influence and impact that may exist in the coming school year and beyond. This might involve developing programs or offerings that increase access to families and students for whom Christian education was previously inaccessible—whether because of their unique

circumstances, geographical location, or inability to afford private school tuition. It may involve opportunities for collaboration and cost-sharing with other Christian schools. Or it might necessitate considering innovative new business models and income streams.

Christian schools have been experiencing challenges to sustainability for more than a decade, but COVID-19 is likely to accelerate and deepen schools' need to take significant steps toward rethinking and reimagining their financial models. Paradoxically, for Christian education to be sustained into the future, the way Christian education looks and functions will need to change. This is because sustainability does not mean finding a way to continue current practices into the future, as much as that might be preferred. Rather, sustainability means ensuring the school's *mission* continues into the future, which likely will require that Christian schools—and the financial models by which they operate—look different from the past or today.

While school leaders may understandably feel they cannot afford the time to explore these and other opportunities for innovation, the reality is that many schools cannot afford to ignore them. Times of crisis have the potential to provide ripe conditions for incubating paradigm-shifting ideas. This may be especially true for Christian schools, if they approach this time prayerfully and with expectation in God, “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,

according to his power that is at work within us,” all for His glory (Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV). **RIB**

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Novice Expertise for 2020-2021

JONATHAN ECKERT AND MATT THOMAS

The global pandemic has made us all novices. We have never lived, let alone led, through anything like this. Every school leader we have talked to since March is facing unprecedented challenges based on limited if not bad information. Uncertainty can be paralyzing. Schools across the globe are waiting for guidance from anywhere to let them know what the 2020-2021 school year will be like. Two things we know for certain: 1) This coming school year will be uncertain. 2) We have to make decisions.

How can students thrive through this disruption? Through Baylor's Center for Christian Education, we started asking Christians in school leadership this question even as they scrambled to finish the 2019-2020 school year to tap their collective expertise. We have been working with leaders from more than 150 schools in month-long virtual learning academies to redesign education at the school and classroom levels. Within those academies, we have education leaders

from states that ranged from New York to Texas to California to Montana—all remarkably different in pandemic impact, state policy decisions, and community contexts. The diversity of state contexts was powerful because of what we found we all had in common.

Together, we are approaching novel problems with the freedom, creativity, and opportunistic learning that comes from being novices. Based on our experiences and the qualitative and quantitative data we collected during our learning academies, we identified what is most important regardless of delivery method: well-being; engagement; and feedback.

Well-Being

Maslow's hierarchy of needs precedes Bloom's taxonomy. If students are experiencing uncertainty or fear, then the brain



is not in “learning mode” (Prothero 2020). School leaders recognize that if students’ and teachers’ physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social

well-being are not intact, then nothing else matters. Before addressing academic demands, school leaders are supporting well-being in some basic ways. For example, in the spring, administrators were setting up multiple connection points each week to check in with teachers at their convenience. They asked teachers two simple questions: “How are you doing? What do you need?” Both teachers and administrators were making well-being phone calls each week. Some homes received as many as three calls per week from different staff members.

Other schools were helping their students think beyond themselves by conducting service with school mentors. Noting challenges with technology, five students at one school formed a tech support hotline for families struggling with basic issues encountered through distance learning. Because of shelter-in-place restrictions in many states, some of the service was centered on serving the immediate people in your home, but students were focused on others, which supported their mental health. With the U.S. Census Bureau (CDC 2020) reporting that one-third of Americans are struggling with depression and anxiety, these are necessary interventions. Students were also leading chapel services, going to other students’ homes to pray over needs from a porch or a front yard, or delivering meals to those in need. Sometimes, educators organized these efforts, but in many cases, the ideas began with students, and educators came alongside to facilitate the opportunities.

Engagement

After we address well-being, the next step is to engage students’ minds. Depending on school circumstances, the tools needed to do this are different. A teacher no longer has proximity control or a view of the entire class in one panoramic view. The challenges of distance learning became very real for many educators this spring, but so did the opportunities. Whether learning occurs virtually or in person, we collectively identified the 4 Cs of engagement:

content; competition; collaboration; and creation.

Content delivery is a necessary precondition for instruction. Some schools transitioned relatively easily to online learning if they had robust learning management systems like Schoology or Canvas. Others cobbled together tools to try to make something work for emergency distance learning. For 2020-2021, a coherent approach for content delivery is vital.

Competition, friendly in nature—think Kahoot or Gimkit—has always been a great way to engage students in reviewing surface level knowledge. Digital tools are readily available for schools to use whether we are on campus or virtual.

Collaboration between students and teachers is a mainstay of quality engagement. We identified amazing tools that allow for virtual discussions like Parlay, real-time data collection like Mentimeter, and digital workspaces for visual collaboration like Mural. These are tools that can support student collaboration regardless of the education delivery method.

Creation of content by students is the objective of authentic assessment and performance tasks. This is how students thrive, and also how we collect evidence of their growth. Tools like Canva and Padlet allow students to create beautiful digital content, while Screencastify and Loom allow them to annotate work like Sal Kahn of Kahn Academy.

Feedback

Feedback is the pinnacle of teaching and learning because it is here that we see their overlap. John Hattie’s research on feedback has made it clear that feedback is vitally important to learning and widely variable. To provide good feedback, we need to be clear about what students will need to know and be able to do. Wiggins and McTighe’s work on backward design has permeated work in schools for the past two decades. We need to start with the essential questions and assessment first prior to designing learning experiences.

This is particularly true in the current context where so much is uncertain for teachers and students. Schools’ transitions to distance learning exposed assessment and feedback problems. Teachers and administrators recognized that many of their assessments were not authentic. They did not require students to synthesize, apply, or innovate.

As we use tools to engage students’ minds, school leaders realized that the best indicator of this occurring was the kinds of feedback teachers and students were giving to each other. As we look toward 2020-2021, we need to use tools that allow for flash feedback on surface learning (e.g., Nearpod, Quizlet, Gimkit) and reserve teacher expertise for deeper feedback on more authentic assessment when students create content (e.g., Flipgrid, Seesaw, and feedback tools through robust learning management systems).

What can we control this coming school year? Certainly not when a vaccine will be available or when COVID-19 will stop wreaking havoc on institutions, plans, and lives. We know we will have to address the well-being of students, families, and educators; student engagement; and assessment and feedback for students and teachers. Over this past spring and summer, we have tapped collective Christian leadership in powerful ways. Our job has been to listen to challenges and connect people with opportunities to grow and improve. Now we must determine how to apply our expert knowledge in creative and productively innovative ways to ensure that all three are in place for teachers and students in 2020-2021.

In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul reminds us that “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” We serve a sovereign God who is always good and has given us power. Certainly, 2020-2021 will expose us all as novices in

many ways. We have to embrace this. If we do, we will be more likely to expand our collective expertise by seeking the wisdom of others. No one will be an expert in how to lead schools through a pandemic, but we will have many opportunities to learn together. **RIB**

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Prioritizing Relationships in Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion: Insights from Research in Christian Schools

CHARLOTTE MARSHALL POWELL AND LYNN E. SWANER

Education is relational. For Christian schools in particular, relationships are important because of the incarnational nature of the Christian faith, expressed through community and in discipleship (John 1:14, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:16). Loving relationships between members of the Christian community are central to the Gospel, as Jesus explains: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Jesus affirms the dignity and identity of the disciples through their relationship.

This same pattern is evident in culture now. Various value systems and cultural worldviews are passed down through generations through our relationships. As we examine recent events in the United States concerning issues of racial injustice, educators all over the world are taking a closer look at their relationships and their worldviews. For many, this time of reflection has been convicting—revealing a striking imbalance of the distribution of equity and empathy among all peoples.

Relationships in Christian schools are one of the most powerful contexts for worldviews to be cultivated. Whether teacher to student, student to student, leader to teacher, family



to school—the mission and purpose of these relationships are unlike any other. These relationships are called to reflect a story of love, grace, and unity—not uniformity. As Christian school leaders and educators examine their school cultures with fresh urgency and resolve to create more diverse, just, and inclusive communities, what can we learn from research specifically on Christian schools to inform this effort?

As we have reported previously (Swaner, Marshall, and Tesar 2019), ACSI's Flourishing Schools Research identified trust-filled, supportive, and authentic relationships between



all school constituencies, as well as with the surrounding community, as key to flourishing outcomes. Within the larger flourishing domain of *Relationships*, the research identified nine validated constructs that were predictively linked to flourishing outcomes for a number of school constituents (students, parents/guardians, alumni, teachers, leaders/administrators, support staff, and board members). In this article, we revisit these constructs.

School and Community Relationships

Within the category of school and community relationships, the research identified three key constructs as linked to flourishing outcomes, as follows:

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.* This specific construct was among the most frequently identified top “opportunities for growth” for Christian schools in the FSCI sample, with 36.7% of schools having this in their top five.

Community Engagement — *The school engages with the surrounding community and regularly taps into community resources, including networking and resource-sharing with other schools.* This specific construct was also among the most frequently identified top “opportunities for growth” for Christian schools in the FSCI sample, with 31.7% of schools having this in their top five. Additionally, the research found that where leaders/administrators engage the surrounding community, alumni were significantly more likely to report they are currently walking with God.

Family Relationships — *Teachers “get to know” parents and guardians, and frequent and systemic communication facilitates positive relationships.* This construct identified how cultivating positive relationships with families, through frequent and systemic communication, helped parents and guardians feel more connected with the school and with teachers.

The research findings with regard to school and community relationships are particularly strong and are informative for

schools at this time. Schools that disconnect from the outside world in an effort to “protect” students do not cultivate flourishing (Jeremiah 29:7). Instead, schools can introduce students to issues in the world, provide a safe environment in which they can wrestle with complex issues, and prepare them to confidently engage with maturity and empathy (1 Peter 3:15). Similarly, school leaders can serve their school community as early leaders in the church were commanded, knowing that this ultimately reflects Christ (1 Peter 5:2-4; Matthew 20:28).

The research also found that diversity in the student body is important for flourishing outcomes. This suggests that schools should be intentional in recruitment and admissions processes concerning this issue, as well as ensure that the school environment is welcoming and inclusive of students from varying backgrounds once they matriculate, and also throughout their school experience. Schools can also intentionally cultivate positive relationships with families of all students, with attention paid to ensure that families from all backgrounds benefit from frequent and systemic communication, and ensuring that families feel their input and participation is valued not only in their children's learning but also in the overall life of the school.

School Leadership Relationships

Within the category of leadership and staff relationships, the research identified two key constructs as linked to flourishing outcomes, as follows:

Leadership Interdependence — *Diverse backgrounds, transparency about one's weaknesses, and relying on others to offset those weaknesses is key.* This specific construct was among the most frequently identified top “meaningful strengths” for Christian schools in the FSCI sample, with 30% of schools having this in their top five.

Supportive Leadership — *Principals are trusted, teachers feel that leaders “have our backs,” and leaders empower teachers and staff to make decisions.* This specific construct was also among the most frequently identified top “meaningful strengths” for Christian schools in the FSCI sample, with 45% of schools having this in their top five.

These findings indicate that diverse backgrounds of leaders and a mutual dependence on each other is important for flourishing, as are trust-filled relationships between leaders and teachers/staff. In examining findings relative to leadership relationships at Christian schools, this appears to be a strength of a significant number of schools. The findings suggest that schools should continue to prioritize unity (1 Corinthians 1:10) and build on existing relational capital among the leaders and staff in their efforts to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Within the category of teacher-student relationships, the research identified three key constructs as linked to flourishing outcomes, as follows:

Christlike Teachers — *Teachers show Christlike love, kindness, and care to students. Students are cared about individually, including their spiritual development.* Students and their families value individualized attention and loving care from teachers.

Caring Environment — *From the perspective of school graduates, teachers were kind, students felt included in class, and students were protected from bullying.* Caring for and including students in class, as well as addressing bullying, can improve students' perceptions of the school environment.

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.* Students benefit from staff efforts to point out their individual talents and show how they fit into God's bigger plan, as well as greater staff awareness of students' struggles at school or home.

In addition to identifying these constructs as significant for flourishing, the research found that at schools where students confirmed their teachers care about them, school alumni were significantly more likely to report they are currently walking with God. This suggests that the teacher-student relationship is not only crucial for students' faith formation during the school years, but also has a lasting impact far beyond. As schools consider ways to become more intentional in fulfilling the greatest commandment (Mark 12:30-31) and in teaching students to do the same, prioritizing caring teacher-student relationships—among teachers and students of all backgrounds—will be key and ultimately will have a lasting, lifelong, and eternal impact.

Student Relationships

Within the category of student-to-student relationships, the research identified one key construct as linked to flourishing outcomes, as follows:

Prosocial Orientation — *Students not only enjoy helping others, but also are known by others (e.g., peers) for showing love and care.* Students that are more oriented toward helping others learn how to show love and care toward peers in a variety of ways.

This finding shows how important it is for our students to engage in loving their peers for the identity of Christ—as our redeemer and restorer (Titus 2:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17)—to be reflected in their own lives. Educators can support and reinforce this positive desire on the part of students by teaching, modeling, and celebrating ways to show love and care toward peers of all backgrounds in meaningful and consistent ways.

Discussion

The research is clear—how we relate to each other in Christian school community matters. This moment of unrest and reflection in our country can propel us to re-prioritize equity, empathy, and life-giving relationships among all school constituencies and the surrounding community. The 2020-2021 school year offers new opportunities to create a Christlike, caring, and inclusive environment that removes impediments for children to come to learn (Mark 10:13) and to be a light to our communities (Matthew 5:14-16). [RIB](#)

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Meditations on “Meditation in a Toolshed”: What C.S. Lewis Can Teach Educators about Data Usage

ALBERT CHENG

We dwell in a data-driven age. Almost everything today is counted and quantified in some fashion, and if something is not, someone will inevitably try to develop a numerical measure for it. From everyday matters, such as the personalized product recommendations that spring up on Amazon and Google, to larger matters, such as the public policies we should have to manage COVID-19, none of us are untouched by our dependence on information science and data analytics.

Hardly any area of our lives remains untouched, including education. For example, the data revolution

has fundamentally influenced the practice of educational leadership. Leadership training programs, including those in other fields like business and public administration, are increasingly imbued with a pragmatic flavor, devoting much of the course of study to develop the technical skills necessary for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and consuming data. In other words, these programs focus on how to use data so that students will abide by key tenets of the data hegemony, including measurement, evidence-based decision-making, and “letting the data speak for itself.”



I, however, am more concerned not simply with how to use data but, more importantly, how to use data *well*. As a researcher of education who relies on quantitative methods, I have witnessed data used both well and poorly. For example, the Cardus Education Survey is an exemplary case of data-use. This survey measures educational outcomes and implements quantitative research methods to examine how schools—Christian and non-Christian alike—contribute to the long-run formation of their students. In addition to influencing public policy, the Cardus Education Survey has catalyzed important self-reflection and numerous discussions among Christian schools for how they might be more faithful stewards and lead in the area of education.

Conversely, I also regularly bear witness to the abuse of data in educational research. Overreaching on what one might infer from the data, to the more egregious instances of changing numbers are, sadly, not uncommon. Data can be used for manipulation and in other self-serving ways. Dispositions, disciplines, and practices are therefore needed to guard hearts and minds against such data malpractice. In short, particular virtues are essential, navigating both the possibilities and challenges that come with this new data-driven age.

What are some considerations regarding data-use for educational practice? In particular, how can school leaders appropriately use tools like ACSI's new Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI), which was featured in the Spring 2020 issue of *Research in Brief*? Perhaps unbeknownst to most Christians, C.S. Lewis wrote broadly on modern science, and it is one of his insights about measurement that I wish to raise.

Lewis on *Looking Along* and *Looking At*

Wisdom for navigating the uncertainties of future often

comes from observing the past. In his 1939 sermon, "Learning in Wartime," C.S. Lewis observed that "we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present." How apropos it is, then, to consider another reflection that Lewis had about data usage to help us chart a way forward.

In his short essay entitled "Meditation in a Toolshed," which I commend readers to read in its entirety, Lewis describes two ways of experiencing reality: "looking at" and "looking along." When *looking at* something, one stands outside of it to understand it. *Looking along*, in contrast, entails participating in the thing itself. To illustrate, Lewis describes the difference between looking at love and looking along love:

A young man meets a girl. The whole world looks different when he sees her. Her voice reminds him of something he has been trying to remember all his life, and ten minutes of casual chat with her is more precious than all the favours that all other women in the world could grant. He is, as they say, "in love". Now comes a scientist and describes this young man's experience from the outside. For him it is all an affair of the young man's genes and a recognised biological stimulus. That is the difference between looking along the sexual impulse and looking at it (212).

The young man looks along love, while the scientist looks at love. To cite another example from the essay, a young child is heartbroken because her favorite doll has broken *looks along* loss. The child psychologist, on the other hand, *looks at* loss, disinterestedly observing and explaining that such loss is simply a "nascent maternal instinct [that] has been temporarily lavished on a bit of shaped and coloured wax" (12).

Looking along and *looking at* are two ways of seeing. Lewis primarily argues that one way of seeing is not necessarily more valid than the other. Both are different approaches to truth-seeking and understanding reality. However, in a data-driven culture that prioritizes empirical measurement, there is a bias towards *looking at* as opposed to *looking along*. The danger arises when one begins believing and then acting as if looking at is a more valid approach than looking along when, in all likelihood, both horizons are needed to be faithful truth seekers.

Lewis's point is crucial for educators as they assess and reflect on their own schools. They can look along or look at them. Tools such as the FSCI provide educators with a way to look at their schools. Quizzes and standardized tests likewise provide a way to look at students. All of these tools provide valuable insight by compiling quantitative data about various aspects of schools and students into accessible reports. However, these tools are best used when they complement the ways educators already look along schools or their students.

Educators must not forget that in their everyday interactions as a fellow member of the school community, they are always looking along their students and schools to discern what is going well and what is not. Qualitative everyday experiences and quantitative formal tools like the FSCI both provide insight about the well-being of school communities and students. Both reveal, in their own ways, how school communities excel or what they may be lacking. Often times, it is the coupling of the quantitative and qualitative that is most enlightening. Each type of data helps the leader understand what lies behind the other type of data. Other times, one way of looking will be more valid, and there may even be some occasions where both ways of looking are both invalid. The practice of seeing in both ways and discerning the validity of each is a mark of wisdom.

Virtues for a Data-Driven Age

More generally, data-use requires the cardinal virtue of temperance. Educators must hold in proper measure what measurement can or cannot do. They must give data its due regard for what it can legitimately say, while also recognizing what it cannot legitimately say. Data, for instance, can reveal what *is* but it cannot reveal what *ought* to be; it serves a *descriptive* but not a *normative* function. For those who are familiar with biblical hermeneutics jargon, data always speaks in an *indicative* voice, not an *imperative* one. Tempered educators will recognize that they must move beyond the data, use wisdom, and draw upon moral sources to make value judgements if they wish to move from the descriptive to the normative realms in determining what should be done in response to the data.

The virtue of temperance also speaks of balance and moderation. Regarding data-use, educators need to examine themselves so that they do not fall into one of two extremes.

There is the temptation, on one hand, to eschew any attempt to measure things for fear that quantification of complex concepts like flourishing, school climate, character, or student learning is inherently reductive and does not wholly capture the concept with integrity. On the other hand, there is the temptation to eschew every other way of knowing except through empiricism and quantification. According to this view, humans are fallible observers and only numbers provide an objective way of understanding the world that is free from the whims and biases of human opinion and perception.

There is some wisdom in both of these positions, as both ways of seeing are necessary to discern the truth. Educators must look at and look along. Educators know, for example, that a quiz score reveals something about how much students know. Yet educators also rely on innumerable observations about students to gauge their learning—their assignments, the kinds of questions they ask, their facial expressions in the middle of a lesson, or conversations that take place outside of class. Quantifiable data *and* unquantified human perceptions are used to determine the truth of a student's mastery of the curriculum. Balancing both ways of seeing and relying on each to its proper measure demonstrates temperance. A tempered educator refrains from being over-reliant on quantitative data and simultaneously avoids being overly skeptical about whether it is possible to quantify a qualitative concept.

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? There is a need for leadership in Christian education with respect to addressing these questions and many lessons yet to be learned. I hope leaders within Christian education will share their successes and failures with one another as they gain experience and practical wisdom with data use. May they stir up one another to greater excellence and more faithfulness in their vocations. [RIB](#)

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Insights from Doctoral Research

Navigating Tensions between Christian Ethos and Assessment Practices

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A fundamental goal of Christian education is to help each student to maximize their God-given gifts in order to reach their full potential and become “truly human.” A biblical worldview sees each learner as unique and made in the image of God. This uniqueness extends to the ways in which they grow, develop, and learn with Christian schools seeking to create opportunities for *all* students to do so. A “successful” Christian school, therefore, would be one where students develop Christlike attributes and flourish in all areas of their lives. Edlin (1999) contends that the biblical model of excellence is the measure of performance against potential, with each student evaluated against their own individual gifts and talents.

Against this backdrop sits a very different narrative around success and excellence. The modern education system, born during the industrial era, was built on purposes that are politically and economically driven rather than based on ensuring the development of godly character and the promotion of a life of biblical flourishing for each individual student. Many of the prevailing practices of this system, particularly those of high stakes assessment and standardized testing, are viewed in tension to the ethos that underpins Christian schooling (Green 2017). The academic “excellence” discourse is characterized by a spirit of competitiveness and a very narrow definition of success. This sits at odds with the notions of holistic growth, discipleship, realizing one’s own unique potential, and learning in community.

Research Purpose and Methods

A key purpose of this study was to shed light on the potential tension between ethos and assessment practices by exploring the perspectives of teachers in one Australian Christian school. The study investigated teacher beliefs and attitudes, the influences shaping these, the way in which Christian ethos is understood and experienced by individual teachers, and how, if at all, this is applied to their assessment practices.

This study was located within a qualitative paradigm and used case study methodology. The key data collection strategy was individual, semi-structured interviews with 13 teachers from the school. Findings emerged through a sequential and iterative approach to data analysis that

utilized Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of field, habitus, and capital as a background theory through which to draw out both the perspectives of the participants and institutional assumptions, and also conceptually to understand, analyze and explain the data collected in this study.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research showed that teachers experience the relationship between Christian ethos and assessment practice as one of tension: a struggle between competing systems of beliefs, values, and practices. Christian school teachers inhabit both the broader field of education and its subfield of Christian education and find themselves having to navigate opposing forces between the two. Participants identified that the exertion of economic power and pressure from the broader field of education, demands and requirements from regulatory bodies external to the school, and parent expectations often sat at odds with the espoused Christian ethos of the school.

Furthermore, through the reflexive process of the interviews, teachers also identified that, as people who have spent most of their lives within the education field and have successfully navigated the system and its assessment regimes and benefitted so powerfully from these, perhaps they were more inclined to accept and perpetuate, rather than question, prevailing practices that may be at odds with Christian ethos. Bourdieu argued that teachers are so habituated to the conventions and structures of the educational world that they “like a fish in water” are unable to feel the water (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 35). The fact that many of the teachers in this study admitted that they rarely questioned assessment practices supports his assertion.

A key tension for the teachers exists around the “why,” “what,” and “how” of assessment. Contemporary scholars in the school assessment field generally agree that the purpose of assessment should be to improve learning (Black and William 2014). This view sits well alongside the Christian school goals of formation and discipleship. However, as is currently being argued strongly within the broader field of education, high stakes testing generally has very little to do

with learning (Timmis et al. 2016). The teachers in this study spoke with some frustration about the challenge of trying to coalesce two seemingly competing goals and philosophies of assessment but acknowledged that they invariably accepted the status quo without too much question.

Instead of the school being one that supports the biblical flourishing of each student, respondents felt the school was beholden to an assessment philosophy that focuses on a narrow band of academic outcomes, and on ranked achievement rather than growth. The participating teachers recognized that the underlying purpose of assessment within the broader field of education is the sorting and sifting of students to serve economic purposes around work. The potential result of this is the “pigeonholing” of students, students being defined by their grades, and students being pitted against one another in competition. Teachers, particularly those who were working in the senior levels of schooling, argued that this focus on results also tended to lead to teachers giving more attention to students who they perceived as having the potential to succeed within the system, thus creating further inequities.

Bourdieu would argue that this is an example of the school teaching students the “natural order” (of social hierarchy and domination), and of the school “reproducing the conditions of its own existence” (Jenkins 2002, 109). The pedagogic action of the teachers results in the favoring of some students over others. This runs counter to the goal of all students having equitable access to learning and the biblical principle of the “body of Christ” with each member of the body having equal value and deserving of equal honor (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

A related area of tension described by the respondents was between what *is* and *should be* assessed. While the school’s goal is for the spiritual, social, academic, physical, and emotional development of each child, there was general agreement that assessment tended to be limited largely to just one narrow element, which the teachers identified as “academics.” The teachers expressed a lack of clear direction from the school about what other aspects of a student’s development, such as understanding of Christian ethos and worldview and development of Christlike attributes might be assessed. An even bigger challenge was *how* these might be assessed and how a student’s progress in these areas might best be communicated (the use of grades was considered highly problematic). The teachers articulated that they needed clear guidance and scaffolding which would support them in collectively generating assessment structures, assessment tools, and new ways to report student progress.

Conclusion

Two decades ago, Hill (1997) made the bold claim that, when it comes to assessment practices, Christian schools have no distinctive at all. This research supported his contention



with respondents suggesting that both the institution and the teachers themselves ‘were saying one thing but doing another’ by only ever measuring students against government requirements, and not against the school’s biblically-based views of success or flourishing and by unquestioningly accepting practices that run counter to Christian ethos.

It might be argued, for Australian Christian schools that wish to remain registered and receive government funding, not all practices can be changed. Schools are, after all, subject to the laws of the land and the regulations of the broader field. However, this does not mean that there should be blind or unthinking acceptance either. This study has affirmed the value and importance of firstly exposing the worldview assumptions of practices in order to critique them and then look for ways to change ingrained thinking and practices.

Hull’s (2003) contention is that Christian school educators need to engage in “paradigm warfare” if they are to close the gap between Christian school-espoused vision and the reality of practices that he claims are essentially the same as those of secular schools. Rather than simply accepting the presuppositions and practices of the education field, Christian schools need to be intentional in critiquing the prevailing practices according to their worldview assumptions. This process will require honest reflexivity on the part of Christian schools and teachers, will involve struggle, and will require creativity and tenacity to navigate. [RIB](#)

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Donor Motivations for Charitable Giving: A Capital Campaign Case Study

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A nonprofit organization's viability and scope rely upon the resources available for funding their mission. Christian schools likewise depend upon the generosity and faithfulness of their donors. While private K-12 schools benefit from tuition dollars that offset operating costs, they also depend upon charitable giving to provide scholarships, enhance programs, renovate facilities, build new buildings, or grow endowments to secure the future of the organization. Understanding why donors make financial gifts is critical to the future stability and sustainability of Christian schools.

This study considers how extrinsic and intrinsic motivations relate to charitable giving in the context of a multimillion-dollar capital project. The framework for this particular study includes theories on social exchange and self-determination as predictors of altruistic and prosocial behaviors. In an effort to provide an in-depth exploration into donor motivation, this study examines a purposive sample drawn from a pool of 400 potential majors. This sample of potential donors was contacted after the fundraising campaign, and overall, 53 donors and 13 non-donors responded to the survey.

In considering the philanthropic motivations of donors, it is important to not only understand their capacity for making a large donation, but also appreciate their values, insights, passions, and point of view (Dolan 2013). Donors make decisions to give from altruistic and prosocial paradigms, for their own personal benefit, or in the interests of their family, business, foundation, donor advised fund, or a trust. Regardless of how they choose to engage in philanthropy, “understanding individual donor motivations is essential to future nonprofit development success and donor outreach” (Olszewski 2012, 2).

Life Aspirations and Intrinsic Motivations

Significant financial capacity is not necessarily an indicator of interest or desire to give. Understanding a donor's personal aspirations and life goals can help advancement officers and nonprofit leaders to align invitations to give with the goals and desires of the donor. This donor-centric approach changes the focus from the sole benefit of the nonprofit organization, to accomplishing goals with mutual purpose. This creates a win-win scenario for both the donor and the school. Two theories—Social Exchange Theory and Self-

Determination Theory—can help explain what motivates a potential donor to give.

Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals seek to evaluate their social interactions by weighing the cost-versus-benefit ratio before seeking to engage, reengage, or continue in a particular social interaction (Griffin 2012). In essence, it means that individuals in a social exchange are asking “*what is in it for me?*” Using Social Exchange Theory as a framework for exploring donor behavior, one presumes donors will evaluate their charitable giving as an exchange in which they must benefit in some way in order to exhibit prosocial behavior or continue engaging in charitable giving (Griffin 2012).

External factors play a more influential role in donor engagement when motivations for giving are based on personal benefit (Adam 2009; Andreoni 1990; Callahan 2018). Boenigk and Scherhag (2014) caution, however, that too much focus on external rewards for giving can erode donors' passion for the mission, keeping them focused on what they can get, rather than on what they can give. Engaging donors in contributing to nonprofit efforts in a way that maximizes their personal goals for giving, while still accomplishing the work of a noble cause, creates the opportunity for mutuality in the donor experience.

In contrast, intrinsic motivations are internal drivers, which are self-directed and central to an individual's personal paradigm for how, when, and why they take action. Understanding the commonalities among those who choose to donate personal resources to a nonprofit cause may help leaders to develop processes that inspire donors to respond as a natural outflowing of their own purpose and will. When people act in accordance with their own will and without coercion, they are being authentic and true to who they are (Deci and Flaste 1995).

Self-Determination Theory regards intrinsic motivation as grounded in autonomy, with enjoyment and perceived choice being influential factors for encouraging prosocial behavior. It is “based on the premise that people are growth oriented and therefore actively seek opportunities to develop their fullest potential” (Roche and Haar 2013, 516). When considering donor engagement through the lens of self-determination, the internal aspects of individual perceptions play a greater role in influencing activity (Deci et al. 2001;

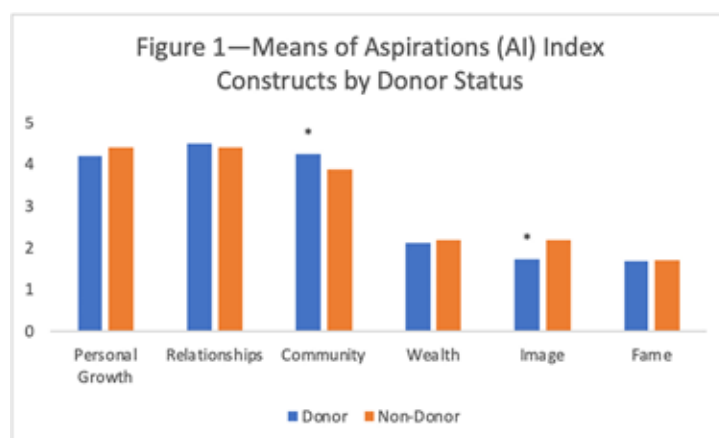
Ryan & Deci, 2013, 2018). By allowing donors to participate in campaign activity, while encouraging autonomous decision-making, development officers and school leaders can influence the enjoyment experienced by donors during a campaign. When donors are invited to contribute to a nonprofit in a way that does not pressure them, but instead honors who they are and what is most important to them, they are able to make an authentic decision about their involvement and “embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment” (Deci and Flaste 1995, 2).

Therefore, donors who give out of a sense of personal purpose are more likely to remain committed and interested in the cause that they are helping to support. Deci and Flaste (1995) emphasize encouragement without pressure or control as the key to providing support for autonomous decision-making. By seeing giving from the donors’ perspective and helping them to accomplish their own desired philanthropic goals, the donors are esteemed as valued partners rather than passive sources of funding to be manipulated for the sole purpose of increasing revenue. Alignment with donor priorities makes “it possible to encourage responsibility without undermining authenticity” (Deci and Flaste 1995, 43).

Findings

The quantitative phase of the study commenced after the major gifts portion of the campaign was completed. This was intentional so that no participants experienced undue pressure to contribute to the campaign. Both donors and non-donors were included in the Likert style survey that went out to campaign participants via email. Correlations and comparisons were considered between the self-reported intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of donors and non-donors. Two scales developed by Ryan and Deci (2018a and 2018b) were used to measure donors’ and non-donors’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

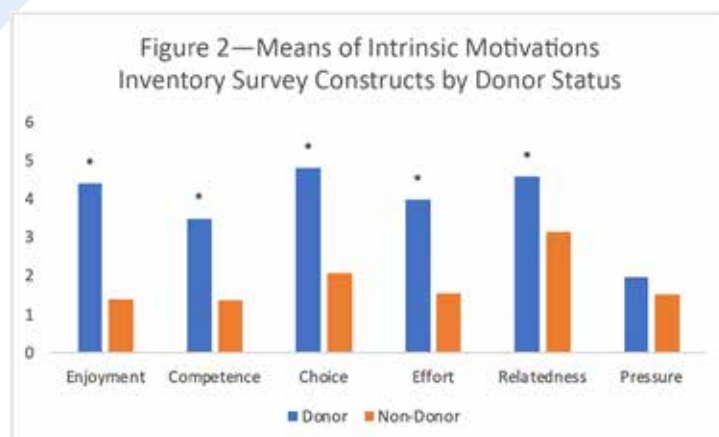
First, the Aspirations Index (AI) was used to measure differences between the overall ratings of life goals of donors versus non-donors. The AI contains six subsections of life aspirations—personal growth, relationships, community, wealth, image, and fame. While no significant differences between the overall ratings of the life aspirations of donors versus non-donors were detected, analysis of variance indicates donors and non-donors differed significantly on their ratings of image and community (see Figure 1). This is of particular interest because the non-donors had a higher AI rating for image, but the aspiration was not strong enough to compel them to give. Unsurprisingly, donors had a higher AI rating for community. In accordance with this internal value, donors gave significantly and often sacrificially to benefit their school community.



* Indicates difference was statistically significant, $p < 0.05$.

Second, the Intrinsic Motivations Inventory (IMI) Survey was used to measure how five factors related to an individual’s enjoyment of fundraising campaign activity. Both donors and non-donors were invited to complete the IMI survey. The five factors include competence (potential donors’ self-perception of their own generosity), choice (the extent to which the donor chose to participate in the campaign), effort (how hard the donor had to work to make the campaign successful), relatedness (how positively the donor felt about working with the campaign leadership), and pressure (how much pressure the donor felt to participate in the campaign). According to Ryan and Deci (2018), enjoyment is the only true measure of intrinsic motivation.

While analysis reveals no significant correlation between enjoyment and the giving *levels* of donors, there is a distinct correlation between enjoyment and the *decision to make* a campaign contribution. Multiple regression was used to analyze the relationship between self-reported levels of enjoyment experienced during the campaign activity and the combination of choice, competence, effort, relatedness, and pressure ratings. Statistical tests indicate that a participant’s perception of four of the five factors (all except pressure) during a campaign was significantly associated with their intrinsic feelings of enjoyment during campaign activity (see Figure 2).



* Indicates difference was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$.



While intrinsic motivation is by its very nature internal, Ryan and Deci's (2018b) IMI suggests that there is room to influence a donor's motivation by improving the level of enjoyment they experience during campaign activity. Enjoyment, according to the multiple regressions run on campaign participants' self-reports, can potentially be predicted by increasing levels of perceived choice and competence, while engaging donors in active participation to move the campaign forward (i.e. effort). These findings are consistent with previous research conducted on donor motivations (Cluff 2009; Lawson and Ruderham, 2009).

Conclusions

Understanding what motivates donors to engage in giving activity is of significant interest to nonprofits seeking to improve their donor cultivation strategies and build long-lasting relationships with their donors. Donors each experience a capital campaign bound by their own questions, agendas, aspirations, and motivations for giving. While some donors will look for the benefits of extrinsic motivation in the social exchange between themselves and the nonprofits they support, others will give generously out of self-less altruism and the enjoyment they derive from being a part of the donor community.

This study found that intrinsic motivations may be a stronger consideration for potential donors than extrinsic ones. When considering extrinsic factors, donors and non-donors in this sample are similar on their overall life aspirations, though donors are more likely to be motivated by community, and non-donors are more likely to be motivated by image. For intrinsic factors, this study finds that enjoyment seems to be the key to encouraging giving based on intrinsic motivations; enjoyment can be amplified by feelings of autonomy related to perceived choice and competence, or reduced by pressure and tension (Ryan and Deci 2018).

Motives for human behavior are multifaceted, and the driving force behind donor decisions to make large contributions can be just as complex. Lawson (1991) contends that there is rarely a single motivation for charitable giving, "rather, there are usually one or two dominant

motives with a cluster of psychological influences supporting and energizing them" (92). While each organization must determine for itself what donor cultivation practices, gift acceptance policies, and donor recognition strategies are appropriate for their mission, organizational culture, donor philosophy, and individual donors, the goal of this study was to gain additional understanding of major donor motivations for giving and to inform the donor development practices of similar organizations. Understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of donors may help Christian schools organize their fundraising campaigns more effectively and in doing so work more effectively toward a stable and sustainable future. [RIB](#)

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New Research Finds Evidence Linking Protestant School Attendance and Strong Marriages

MATTHEW H. LEE

If education research is a beachhead of pebbles examining test scores, graduation rates, and employment outcomes, a study linking education with the understudied, yet critically important outcome of marriage is a rare and precious jewel. In a new report for the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for Family Studies, Cheng and coauthors (2020) examine the relationship between marriage outcomes and educational sectors.

Previous research consistently documents the advantages of stable marriages, including greater happiness, prosperity, and better health (Graham et al. 2006; Wilcox and Nock 2006; Wilcox, Wang, and Mincy 2018). Children raised in married households have higher graduation rates, higher earnings, and lower premarital childbearing rates (Wilcox 2013), and communities with greater proportions of married households have higher rates of economic mobility and lower rates of incarceration (Wilcox et al. 2018).

The current study involved two nationally representative samples of U.S. adults. In both samples, the authors find adults who primarily attended Protestant schools as children are most likely to be in an intact marriage, least likely to ever have a child out of wedlock, and less likely than public school students to ever have been divorced. Differences with public school students persist even after adjusting for key demographic characteristics. The authors note being “particularly struck” by the ways in which these outcomes “appea[r] to be a consequence of attending a Protestant school” (19).

The authors make clear that attending a Protestant school does not necessarily cause these marital outcomes. Nonetheless, they offer some thoughts as to why they consistently observe a Protestant school advantage. The first reason relates to the cultural influence of these schools. While they may not subscribe to a common creed, nonreligious public and secular private schools “have their own value propositions and take moral stances” on sexual ethics, marriage, and family. Public schools, for example, may “stress the importance of being tolerant and accepting of family diversity or just avoid talking about loaded matters” (Cheng et al. 2020, 6).

Religious private schools also draw from their faith traditions, which “explicitly speak to sexual ethics and conceptions of marriage or family.” But Catholic schools have recently become more “catholic” (read: universal), and therefore “open to those of various religious and moral perspectives, including beliefs about sexual morality and marriage” (Cheng et al. 2020, 7). Cheng and his coauthors continue, “By contrast, Protestant schools are more likely to stress the importance of marriage

as a good in and of itself” (2020, 7). This cultural influence certainly generalizes to many Christian schools, which often have a statement of faith that affirms traditional sexual ethics as expressed in the context of biblical marriage.

The second reason has to do with peer composition. The researchers detect “stark differences in the peer environment of various school communities” in favor of Protestant school students (2020, 7). Young adults in Protestant schools were far more likely to report that in their grade, almost no students have ever had sex or use illegal drugs, and that almost all students go to church regularly. A similar proportion of Protestant, Catholic, and secular private school students reported that almost all students plan to go to college—nearly three times the rate of public school students.

The authors of this report wisely observe that “there is more to life than excelling at school and work” (2020, 3). Overall, this new report provides encouraging evidence that these schools are thinking more broadly about their educational goals, providing a flourishing school culture that not only promotes academic excellence but also prepares its students to work out their faith, and encouraging them to glorify God in their schoolwork and in their families. [RIB](#)

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GOING DEEPER TO FLOURISH: ACSI Offers New Flourishing Schools Institute (FSI) for 2021

The biblical concept of flourishing, backed by ACSI's groundbreaking Flourishing Schools Research, serves as the framework for a premier professional development offering coming in 2021. Designed for Christian school leaders who desire to take their schools deeper into flourishing, the **Flourishing Schools Institute (FSi)** will feature nationally known speakers and a unique event structure designed for rich learning and engagement.

Speakers for 2021 include **John Stonestreet**, President of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview (for the *Purpose* domain); **Dr. Rob Loe**, Director of the Relational Schools Foundation (for the *Relationships* domain); **Peter Greer**, author of *Mission Drift* and *Rooting for Rivals* (for the *Expertise & Resources* domain); **Dr. Althea Penn**, educational consultant and development specialist (for the *Teaching and Learning* domain); and **Rex Miller**, author and creator of the *MindShift* for teacher wellness (for the *Well-Being* domain).

The 2.5-day event will engage leaders in the “GLEAN” cycle, where they will Gauge their schools' strengths and opportunities for growth; Learn about the flourishing

domains and constructs; Experiment with other leaders to design programs and interventions for flourishing; Apply new learning across their school culture; and Network with other leaders who are focused on their school's flourishing.

The Flourishing Schools Institute (FSi) will be launched in 2021. Please see our website for locations and dates.

<https://community.acsi.org/pdforum/fsi> 

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