

HIGHLIGHTING THE LATEST FINDINGS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH TO INFORM BEST PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS ^{AND THE} REGULATION OF PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS



Teenage Religious Affect // 6



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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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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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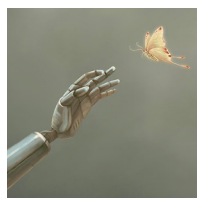
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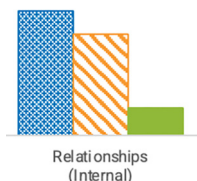
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Letter from the Editor

MATTHEW H. LEE

The more I study Christian education, the more I am struck by the importance of the Christian family, which lies at the center of Christian education. For students, few things leave as indelible a mark on their personal faith as having parents who view the world through the same faith lens, model spiritual disciplines, and forge a strong partnership with the Christian school. The parental responsibilities of praying with and for your children; singing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs; and providing instruction in the Word are emphasized in Terry L. Johnson's new book *Understanding Family Worship*, a wonderful primer on the regular discipline of spiritual training in the home, which I heartily commend to you. As Barbara B. Hart wrote in her 1965 hymn "A Christian Home":

O give us homes built firm upon the Savior,
Where Christ is Head and Counselor and guide;
Where every child is taught his love and favor
And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified:
How sweet to know that though his footsteps waver,
His faithful Lord is walking by his side!

Two articles in this issue of *Research in Brief* touch on families. The first, which I coauthored with ACSI Research Associate Eric Price, summarizes our recent policy study. Earlier this year in April, we asked leaders of ACSI member schools to complete a survey on their willingness to participate in a hypothetical private school choice program given experimentally assigned regulatory conditions. Relative to a control condition with no changes to school operations or additional regulations, we found that the open enrollment mandate and the employment regulation each significantly reduced willingness to participate. A full manuscript of this study was recently published in the *Journal of School Choice*. Our Public Policy & Legal Affairs team is taking these results to legislators to advocate for our member schools. A hearty thank you to all who participated and made the study possible.


The second article comes from Dr. Bruce Fawcett of Crandall University in Canada and Dr. Leslie Francis and Dr. Ursula McKenna of Bishop Grosseteste University in the United Kingdom. The authors studied Canadian youth in a summer youth mission and service program. Their research confirms



findings from previous studies examining the relationship between parents' faith and faith transmission. They extend prior work, which concluded that mothers were the primary influence and that fathers were the secondary influence, by documenting evidence of a statistically significant relationship between fathers' church attendance and youth's faith.

Dr. Albert Cheng of the University of Arkansas returns with a new article on the pedagogical power of poetry. As part of his work at the newly founded Classical Education Research Lab, Dr. Cheng summarizes the findings of a recent study conducted at a classical school in which some teachers incorporated poems about science as part of the unit. He finds that using poems increased students' attentiveness in class.

In this issue, you'll also find the follow-up to our first International Tuition & Salary Survey report that was published in the Spring 2022 issue of *Research in Brief*. In this report, ACSI Regional Director for International Schools Tim Shuman and Eric Price turn their attention to tuition, revenues, and enrollment.

Thanks for joining us for another issue. Let's pray for families where every child is taught the love and favor of Christ, as well as strong partnerships between families and Christian schools. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Matthew H. Lee, ACSI's director of research, serves as managing editor of *Research in Brief*. Dr. Lee is coauthor of *Future Ready* (Purposeful Design Publications, 2022), co-editor of *Religious Liberty and Education* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), and author of numerous peer-reviewed research articles, book chapters, technical reports, and op-eds on civics education, education leadership, and Christian education.

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS AND THE REGULATION OF PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

MATTHEW H. LEE & ERIC W. PRICE



Parental preference is a powerful predictor of student outcomes. Students who attend schools their parents prefer benefit on both short-term outcomes, such as test scores and graduation rates, as well as long-term outcomes, including health and labor market outcomes (Ovidi 2021; Beuermann and Jackson 2022; Beuermann et al. 2022; Greene and Paul 2022). This well-documented research finding begs the question: What kinds of schools do parents prefer?

Many parents prefer a faith-based education for their children. A comprehensive literature review of parental preference in school choice concluded that religious or moral education was one of the top reasons parents cited for choosing a school for their children (Erickson 2017).

Policymakers who are interested in improving students' test scores, graduation rates, health, and labor market outcomes should support policies that help parents access the schools they desire. Private school choice programs are one type of policy that helps parents do just this. These programs provide publicly funded scholarships to eligible students to attend a participating private school of their choice and are often organized as vouchers, education savings accounts, or tax-credit scholarships. A recent ACSI / Cardus research study identified participating in private school choice programs as one financial model that helps Christian schools sustain their mission (Swaner et al. 2022).

Unfortunately, regulations of private school choice programs dissuade schools from participating. Two previous studies concluded that open enrollment mandates and state testing requirements reduced school leaders' willingness to participate (DeAngelis et al. 2019, 2021). Programs with greater regulatory burdens tend to have both less private school participation (Sude et al. 2017) and less favorable student outcomes (Abdulkadiroglu et al. 2018; Erickson et al. 2021).

Christian schools may have reasons to be concerned about the regulation of such programs that are distinct from secular

schools. In previous studies of program participation, leaders of religious schools raised concerns about regulations, including their potential effect on religious identity and the right to "hire on mission" (Russo 2009; Austin 2015). Unfortunately, the question of how Christian schools respond to regulations of private school choice programs has not previously been answered.

How Do Christian Schools Respond to Regulations?

To answer this question, ACSI conducted a gold standard survey experiment in April 2022, in which we asked school leaders the following question: "If your state launched a new school choice program next academic year, with a value of \$7,500 per student, per year, how likely is it that your school would participate in the program?"

School leaders were randomly assigned to a control condition (with no additional regulations) or one of four treatment conditions.

1. The first treatment group (standardized testing) required participating schools to administer a specified standardized test each year.
2. The second treatment group (open enrollment) meant that participating schools could not require parents to indicate agreement with the school's statement of faith and/or lifestyle document.
3. The third treatment group (employment regulation) meant that participating schools could not require teachers to indicate agreement with the school's statement of faith and/or lifestyle document.
4. The final treatment group (copay prohibition) required participating schools to accept the voucher as full payment of tuition for voucher students.

Respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale how likely their school would participate under such conditions:

0 = Certain not to participate, 1 = Very little chance, 2 = Some chance, 3 = Very good chance, 4 = Certain to participate. We considered responses of 0, 1, or 2 to be unlikely to participate, while responses of 3 or 4 were likely to participate.

Who Participated in Our Study?

Altogether, 354 school leaders completed the survey, overseeing schools that are broadly representative of ACSI membership. The median school in our sample enrolls 260 students at \$8,000 per year in tuition. Sixty percent are covenantal in their admissions policies (requiring at least one parent to identify as Christian), 48 percent are church-affiliated, and nearly all have an employment policy (requiring faculty/staff to agree with the school's statement of faith and any lifestyle document). Over three-quarters are accredited by some organization, with the most common accreditations being ACSI (60 percent), Cognia (37 percent), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (9 percent), or state-specific accreditation (7 percent).

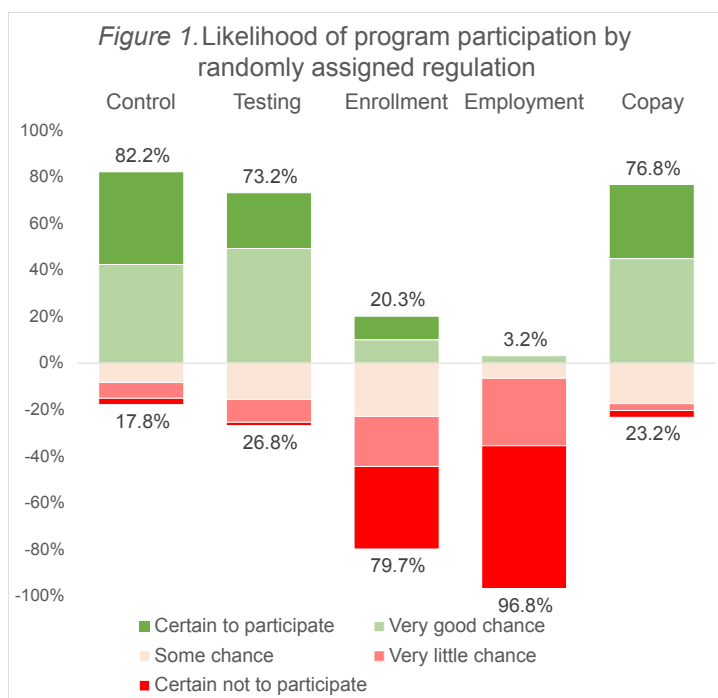
On average, four-fifths of control group leaders were likely to participate in a private school choice program with no additional regulations, with 40 percent indicating they were "Certain to participate" and 43 percent indicating a "Very good chance of participating."

How Did Regulations Affect School Leaders' Willingness to Participate?

The open enrollment mandate and employment regulation substantially and significantly reduced school leaders' willingness to participate in a private school choice program. Depending on model specification, the open enrollment mandate reduced leaders' willingness to participate by between 61 and 66 percentage points ($p < 0.001$), while the employment regulation reduced willingness to participate between 79 and 83 percentage points ($p < 0.001$), virtually eliminating all participation.

Participation rates were lower in the standardized testing and copay prohibition treatment groups, but not low enough to achieve statistical significance ($p > 0.05$); that is to say, we cannot confidently conclude that those regulations reduced participation rates or if participation rates were only slightly lower due to sampling differences across the treatment groups. (See Figure 1.)

We also found evidence of differences according to school characteristics. Accredited schools and schools with special programs (including special education, an online program, or an alternative curriculum) responded more negatively to both the open enrollment mandate and employment regulation than schools without such programs ($p < 0.001$). If schools with these characteristics are desired by families, this pattern suggests an even greater hidden cost of regulations,



which may reduce families' access to the schools they seek.

We also noted some regional variation. Standardized testing was particularly anathema to leaders in the Northwest region ($p < 0.001$). School leaders in Florida and the Rocky Mountain regions responded even more negatively to the open enrollment mandate compared to school leaders in other regions ($p < 0.001$). Policymakers should note these regional variations carefully and consider the effect these regulatory burdens may have.

It is noteworthy that many leaders from all sizes of Christian schools are eager to participate in these programs. Participation does not appear to be a question of financial resources, as copay prohibition did not significantly reduce participation rates, and schools with higher tuition rates did not respond differently to regulations than schools with lower tuition rates.

Conclusion

Parents prioritize religious education and moral training as top reasons for choosing a school. Private school choice policies help families access the faith-based schools they desire. But the regulatory burdens of private school choice programs may dissuade private Christian schools from participating, limiting families' access and program effectiveness.

To understand how regulations affect school leaders' willingness to participate in school choice programs, we conducted a gold standard experimental survey study. By randomly assigning leaders of ACSI member schools to a control group or one of four treatment conditions, we found that the open enrollment mandate and employment regulation significantly reduce leaders' willingness to

participate. We also found that accredited schools and schools with special programs responded more negatively to these regulations than schools without these characteristics.

Since religious private schools make up nearly two-thirds of all private schools in the United States, our research has clear implications for private school choice policy. Policymakers would be wise to consider how regulations may discourage private school participation, thereby limiting the potential benefit a program may have on providing access to desirable schools and supporting student learning. [RiB](#)

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Matthew H. Lee is director of research at ACSI, where Eric W. Price serves as research associate.

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The Connection Between Teenage Religious Affect and Parental Church Attendance: A STUDY AMONG YOUNG CANADIAN BAPTISTS

BRUCE G. FAWCETT, LESLIE J. FRANCIS, & URSULA MCKENNA

The question of faith transmission from one generation to the next has become an issue of increasing interest and concern across Christian denominations. Voas and Watt (2014) focused on this question in their commentary on the situation facing the Church of England. In it they make the point that "retaining children and youth is critical; it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders" (p. 19). In an earlier analysis, Voas and Crockett (2005) concluded that religious decline in Britain is generational: children tend to be less religious than

their parents. While two non-religious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion to their children, two religious parents have roughly a fifty percent chance of transmitting their faith to their children. Moreover, one religious parent does less well than two religious parents together.

Prioritizing Religious Affect

Empirical research into faith transmission needs first to clarify and then to measure appropriate indicators of faith. Survey research often focuses on indicators like self-assigned

religious affiliation (as captured by national censuses), public religious practice (like church attendance), or religious belief (like belief in God). Reviewing such indicators in the 1970s, Francis (1978a, 1978b) argued that the attitudinal dimension was able to get closer to the heart of religion within the individual lives of children and adolescents, and that the measurement of attitude carried a number of important advantages over the measurement of affiliation, belief, and practice in the exploration of the correlates, consequences, and antecedents of individual differences in religiosity.

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity is a twenty-four-item Likert Scale that contains both positive and negative items concerned with an affective response to five components of the Christian faith accessible to and recognised by both children and adults, namely, God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. The reliability and validity of the scale have been supported by studies among children and adolescents, as well as among adults. While originally constructed in English, the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity has been translated into a number of other languages. While Francis' research originally concentrated specifically on Christianity, parallel measures have been constructed to facilitate comparable studies within other faith traditions, including Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism (see Francis 2019).

Exploring Parental Influence

One strand of research that has systematically drawn attention to the centrality of the home in sustaining the faith of young churchgoers was initiated by the Australian National Church Life Survey, in which young churchgoers have been invited to complete a survey alongside the surveys completed by adult attenders. For example, in their report from the 2001 Australian National Church Life Survey, on data provided by 10,101 ten- to fourteen-year-old attenders, Bellamy, Mou, and Castle (2005) found that parents have a central role in the development of faith. They concluded that the practice of family prayer times, the encouragement of a personal devotional life for children, and parents simply being prepared to talk with their children about faith are all aspects that are positively related to higher levels of belief and a more positive attitude toward and involvement in church life.

In their report from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey, on data provided by 6,252 eight- to fourteen-year-old attenders, Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018) found that these data confirmed the power of parental example on frequency of church attendance. Frequent attendance among young churchgoers occurred when *both* parents attended.

Similarly, in their report on the 2001 Church Life Survey conducted among 10,153 eight- to fourteen-year-old attenders, Francis and Craig (2006) noted that parents play



a crucial role through what they do and what they model outside their pattern of church attendance.

Building on this research tradition established by the Australian Church Life Survey, Francis and colleagues have reported on three studies exploring the place of the home in sustaining young Anglicans in England and Wales. In the first study, Francis (2020) drew on data collected within schools in England and Wales to identify thirteen- to fifteen-year-old students who identified as Anglicans. From a total sample of 7,059 students, six hundred forty-five identified themselves as Anglican. This study employed multiple regression to take into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age) and psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) before testing for the effects of peer-related factors and parental factors. These data demonstrated that young Anglicans who practice their Anglican identity by attending church did so primarily because their parents were Anglican churchgoers.

In the second study, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) drew on data provided by 2,019 nine- to eleven-year-old students attending eighty-eight Church in Wales primary schools who self-identified as Anglican. These data demonstrated that the single most important factor in sustaining churchgoing among these young Anglicans was the church attendance patterns of mothers. The effect of maternal example is, however, augmented when fathers are also seen to support mothers' pattern of church attendance.

Continued on page 10

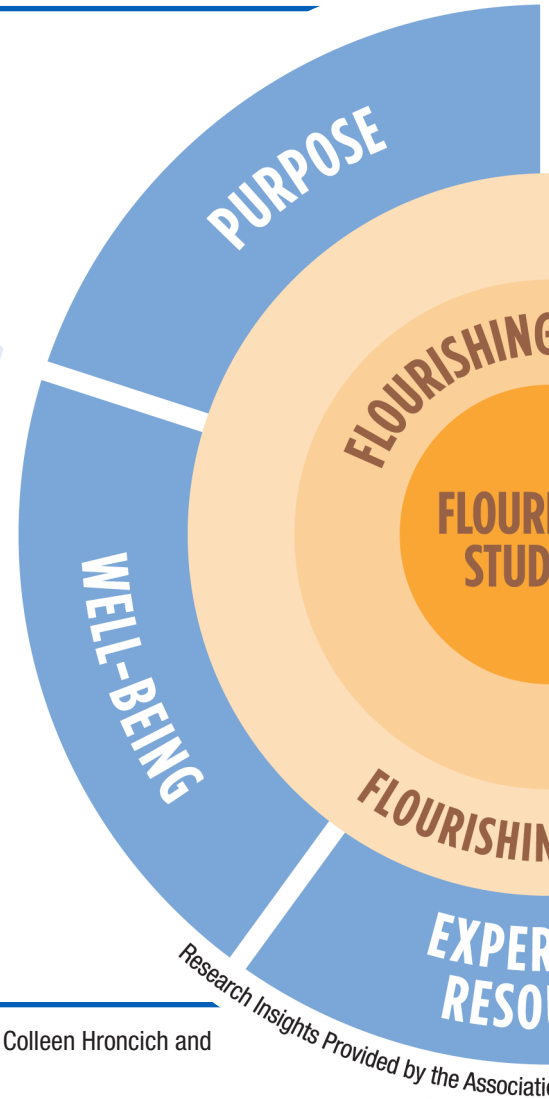
The Latest in Education

For each issue, we'll survey education research articles from scholars and experts across the country and

- **Partnership (Purpose):** A new study published by Aimee Leukert of La Sierra University finds a strong relationship between parents' religious identity and choosing a Christian school.
- **Responsibility (Purpose):** In their June 2022 report *Teachers and K-12 Education*, researchers from EdChoice found that private school teachers are much more optimistic about their profession than district public and public charter school teachers.

- **Stress (Well-Being):** A new study published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* by Aya Hatano, Cansu Ogulmus, Hiroaki Shigemasu, and Kou Murayama finds evidence of the benefits of "just thinking"—sitting in a quiet room without doing anything.

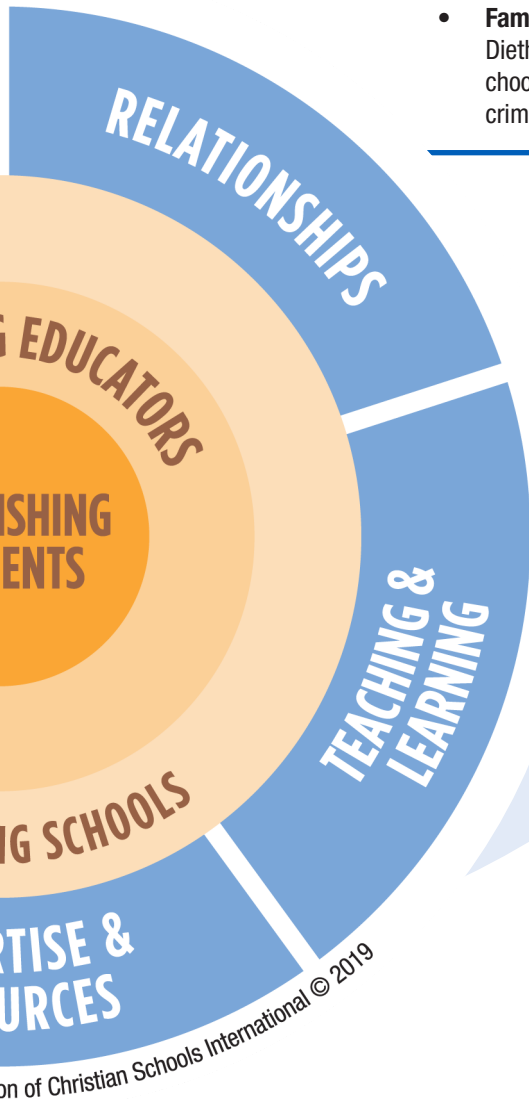
- **Resource Constraints (Expertise & Resources):** A Cato Institute study of school openings by Colleen Hroncich and Solomon Chen finds enrollment in private Christian schools to be on the rise.
- **Qualified Staff and Responsiveness to Special Needs (Expertise & Resources):** A new research article published in *AERA Open* by J. Jacob Kirksey and Michael Lloydhauser finds that students with disabilities score better in math if they have teachers with dual certification in elementary and special education.
- **Responsiveness to Special Needs (Expertise & Resources):** A new research article published in *Exceptional Children* by Roddy Theobald, Dan Goldhaber, Kristian Holden, and Marcy Stein of the American Institutes for Research and the University of Washington finds literacy decoding practices such as phonological awareness, phonics, and reading fluency help improve reading achievement for students with disabilities.
- **Responsiveness to Special Needs (Expertise & Resources):** Research by Allison Gilmour, Sabina Neugebauer, and Lia Sandilos published in *Exceptional Children* finds evidence of higher turnover rates for teachers with a higher percentage of students with disabilities, suggesting the need to identify supports for teachers in inclusive classrooms.



Research (ACSI Research)

d around the world. What does the latest in education research say about flourishing in its five domains?

- **Prosocial Orientation (Relationships):** A new Cardus study by Albert Cheng, Rian Djita, and David Hunt compares outcomes of Christian school graduates across three countries (United States, Canada, and Australia) in four areas: preparation for adulthood, civic engagement, family formation, and religiosity.
- **Family Relationships (Relationships):** A new article published in the *Journal of Human Resources* by Diether Beuermann and Kirabo Jackson finds attending a parent-preferred school improves students' educational attainment and adult well-being.
- **Family Relationships (Relationships):** Research published in *The Review of Economic Studies* by Diether Beuermann, Kirabo Jackson, Laia Navarro-Sola, and Francisco Pardo finds evidence that parents choose schools that improve students' test performance, increase labor market participation, and reduce criminality and teen motherhood.



- **Best Practice Orientation (Teaching & Learning):** A new study published in *Learning and Instruction* by Sigrid Blömeke, Armin Jentsch, Natalie Ross, Gabriele Kaiser, and Johannes König finds a teacher's skill and instructional quality can help mediate teacher knowledge and help improve student achievement in mathematics.
- **Outcomes Focus (Teaching & Learning):** A new study published in *Educational Psychology* by Arnold Glass and Mengxue Kang of Rutgers University finds students who do their own work benefit from homework, while those who copy answers do not.
- **Behaviors for Learning (Teaching & Learning):** A new article published in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* by J. Jacob Kirskey and Joseph Elefante of Texas Tech University finds that having consistent classmates from year to year can help reduce overall absences and chronic absenteeism.
- **Behaviors for Learning (Teaching & Learning):** A new article published in *Education Next* by Doug Lemov encourages schools to take away students' cellphones to "rewire schools for belonging and achievement."
- **Outcomes Focus (Teaching & Learning):** A meta-analysis published in the *Review of Educational Research* by Kathleen Lynch, Lily An, and Zid Mancenido concludes summer programs in mathematics for PK-12 students can help improve math achievement.
- **Best Practice Orientation (Teaching & Learning):** Three papers recently presented at the American Educational Research Association conference by researchers from the University of Delaware find long-term negative effects of skipping phonics for young students.

In the third study, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) drew on data provided by 2,323 eleven- to sixteen-year-old students attending eight Church of England secondary schools, one joint Anglican-Catholic secondary school, and one secondary school operated by a Christian foundation. These data confirmed that parental church attendance provides the strongest prediction of church attendance among young Anglicans.

Methodology

Against this background, the present paper reports on a study conducted in the context of the weeklong Tidal Impact summer youth mission and service program sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, held in 2017 in Halifax and in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. The study was designed to test the cumulative effects of child church attendance and parental church attendance on religious affect. Religious affect was assessed by the Francis Scale of Attitude Toward Christianity. Each of the twenty-four items in this scale was assessed on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). Summated scores range from twenty-four to one hundred twenty. Church attendance of the young participants, their mothers, and their fathers was assessed by three questions regarding frequency of attendance followed by the options: nearly every week (5), at least once a month (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), and never (1).

Of the 299 participants who provided full data, one hundred nine were male and one hundred ninety were female; 17 percent were twelve years of age, 18 percent were thirteen, 23 percent were fourteen, 17 percent were fifteen, 11 percent were sixteen, 10 percent were seventeen, and 4 percent were eighteen years of age. Full details on this study are provided by Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021).

Key Findings

The first key finding concerns the applicability of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity in this context. Consistent with the findings of previous research summarized by Francis (2019, pp. 9-34), these data confirmed that the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity demonstrates a high level of internal consistency reliability and that all the individual items work well alongside the other items to produce a homogeneous scale.

The second key finding concerns the religious profile of young Canadian Baptists. Data from the measure of religious affect suggest these young Canadian Baptist youth have warm and positive feelings toward God and Jesus, have confidence in the Bible and prayer, and indicate that the church is very important to them (for further detail, see Table 1).

Table 1 – The Francis Scale of Attitude Toward Christianity: Item Endorsements

	Yes %
I find it boring to listen to the Bible.	19
I know that Jesus helps me.	83
Saying my prayers helps me a lot.	67
The church is very important to me	79
I think going to church is a waste of my time.	9
I want to love Jesus.	89
I think church services are boring.	19
I think people who pray are stupid.	4
God helps me to lead a better life.	80
I like to learn about God very much.	82
God means a lot to me.	83
I believe that God helps people.	90
Prayer helps me a lot.	71
I know that Jesus is very close to me.	73
I think praying is a good thing.	87
I think the Bible is out of date.	14
I believe that God listens to prayers.	83
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me.	6
God is very real to me.	79
I think saying prayers does no good.	5
The idea of God means much to me.	80
I believe that Jesus still helps people.	87
I know that God helps me.	80
I find it hard to believe in God.	17

The third key finding concerns the role of parental religious attendance in faith transmission. The present data confirmed the findings from previous studies regarding the importance of parental attendance. The majority of these earlier studies employed church attendance as the measure of the young person's faith and found that mothers were the primary influence with fathers adding additional secondary influence. The present study has employed religious affect as a more sensitive measure of personal faith among young people than church attendance. In this case, fathers' attendance emerged as the statistically significant factor in the final regression model. It is this finding that carries implications for pastoral

practice (for further detail, see Table 2).

Table 2 – Regression Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Personal Factors			
Sex	.02	.03	.03
Age	-.09	-.10	-.10
Church Attendance			
Self		.19***	.11
Parental Church Attendance			
Father			.21**
Mother			-.03
r ²	.01	.05	.08
Δ	.01	.04***	.03**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Implications for Practice

The key finding from the present study concerns the importance of fathers (alongside mothers) in faith transmission. This finding should serve as an encouragement for Christian schools to give careful attention to their work among the fathers of their students. Since effective transmission of the Christian faith from believing parents to child is best promoted through worship attendance by fathers, alongside mothers, Christian school teachers and administrators would do well to design worship services and other school programs that encourage involvement of fathers and well as mothers.

Presuming that the involvement of Christian fathers in the lives of their children beyond just worship attendance also encourages successful faith transmission, Christian school teachers and administrators should also give careful consideration, when it comes to involving parents in assignments that are to be completed at home, to designing projects and written assignments that specifically and intentionally require the involvement of fathers.

Christian schools also ought to make it priority to encourage fathers to be present as chaperones and leaders in co-curricular experiences so that the Christian faith of the fathers is informally modeled to their children and their friends.

Finally, the value of the development of a father-boy mentoring program that encourages Scripture memory, Bible study, and service could enhance the likelihood of fathers from other families serving as a positive spiritual role model in the lives of students. [RIB](#)

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Bruce G. Fawcett, Ph.D., is president and vice chancellor of Crandall University, where he also serves as professor of leadership and religious studies. The Reverend Canon Leslie J. Francis, Ph.D., is professor of religions, psychology and education at Bishop Grosseteste University in the United Kingdom, where Ursula McKenna, Ed.D., serves as senior research fellow.

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A PEDAGOGY FOR PIETY: Using Poetry to Move from Science to Natural Philosophy and Worship

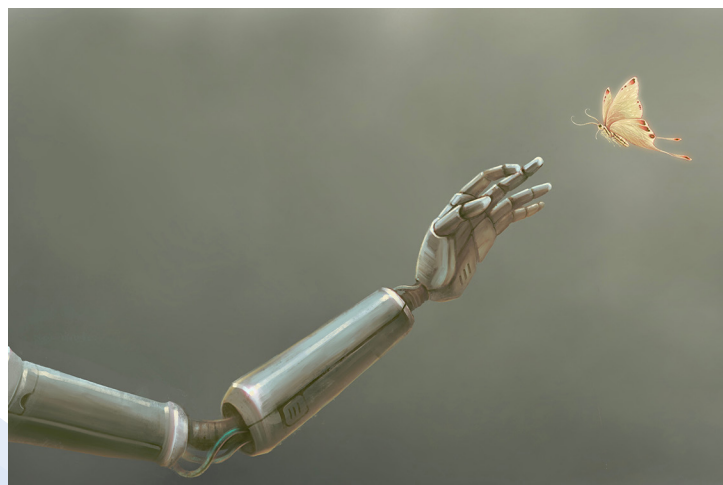
ALBERT CHENG

In Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks "What is piety?" Although Socrates failed to solicit a satisfactory answer from his eponymous interlocutor, Euthyphro, one could define the term as veneration for God. Christian school educators aspire to see their students grow in piety not merely by developing devotional habits but also by having hearts that properly recognize and worshipfully respond to God's preeminence. At Anthem Classical Academy in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where I serve as a board member, we articulate this aspiration as a pursuit of "excellence in character, scholarship, and service out of reverence for God and His glory."

Yet how can Christian schools cultivate piety? In a recent study conducted at a classical school in Northwest Arkansas, I explored whether poetry had a part to play. We divided sixty-six students in kindergarten through second grade into two groups for a two-week science unit. Teachers for one group of thirty-six students—the treatment group—received additional instruction in poems about the scientific topics under study. Teachers of the remaining students taught the science unit as usual without poetry. At the end of the two weeks, we evaluated students on specific learning outcomes to see if poetry fostered piety. Before sharing the results, however, we should consider why we ought to expect poetry to have an effect on piety at all.

Poetry's Pedagogical Power

God's people have always used poetry in the life of faith. In some instances, they used poetry to engage in the practice of worship. The Songs of Ascents found in Psalms 120 to 134 or the apostle Paul's ode about God's salvific plan found in Romans 11 are well-known examples. Other times, poetry is invoked because precise, systematic terms are insufficient to capture the mysteries of God. Paul appealed to poets in the Areopagus sermon in Acts 17 to convey the truth about



life as a gift from God. On Patmos, the apostle John fell back upon metaphor to describe the image of the glorified Christ: hair white as wool, eyes like flame of fire, and voice like the sound of many waters. Sometimes even poetry is not enough to describe God. As T.S. Eliot penned in *Four Quartets*: "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision."

Nonetheless, poetry, with its characteristic use of meter, rhyme, evocative language, and metaphor, may be at least necessary to plumb the depths of God's wisdom and nature. Poetic language stands in contrast to scientific language, which strives for precision and certainty. The scientific project relies on technical terms to define and formally describe phenomena. Scientific language may be insufficient to describe reality fully, and without seeing the splendor of God and His creation rightly, our hearts will not be tuned to worship.

To see the difference between scientific and poetic language, consider the pedantic beginning of the Wikipedia entry for daffodils:

Narcissus is a genus of predominantly spring flowering perennial plants of the amaryllis family, Amaryllidaceae. Various common names including daffodil, narcissus, and jonquil are used to describe all or some members of the genus. Narcissus has conspicuous flowers with six petal-like tepals surmounted by a cup- or trumpet-shaped corona. The flowers are generally white and yellow (also orange or pink in garden varieties), with either uniform or contrasting coloured tepals and corona. Narcissus were well known in ancient civilisation, both medicinally and botanically, but formally described by Linnaeus in his *Species Plantarum*.

On the other hand, consider the way British poet William Wordsworth, whose Lake District home was surrounded by daffodils, captured a moment when he was arrested by the beauty of the flower in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils.
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle in the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of the bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company.
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Wordsworth’s experience of beauty was a grace from God. He initially wandered lonely, aimless like many of our students who struggle to find purpose, suffer ennui, and rarely access the transcendent. Suddenly, a host of golden daffodils pierced his immanent frame. He then apprehended something true about the daffodils: their presence, “sprightly dance,” and the interconnectedness of all creation, likening the myriad of daffodils to “the stars that shine / And twinkle in the Milky Way.” Though the original rapturous moment ended, its memory continued to flash upon him with delight.

“Nonetheless, poetry, with its characteristic use of meter, rhyme, evocative language, and metaphor, may be at least necessary to plumb the depths of God’s wisdom and nature.”

Poets, as Thesus from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* observed, “apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends.” Wordsworth apprehended daffodils in a way more profound than a cool-headed, rational botanist whose reductive knowledge of daffodils is fit for only a textbook. Between these two perspectives on daffodils, which one is more likely to inspire wonder, gratitude, and worship? However, what did I find empirically?

The Poetry Intervention and Outcomes

During our study, kindergarteners embarked on a science unit about the weather. First and second graders learned about birds and phases of the moon, respectively. During this unit, students in the treatment group received additional instruction with poems that I curated with the help of poetry experts. Kindergarteners, for instance, were introduced to Christina Rossetti’s “Who Has Seen the Wind?” First graders interacted with poems about birds including Emily Dickinson’s “A Bird, came down the Walk,” while second graders studied poetry about the moon such as Percy Shelley’s “Into the Moon.”

We surveyed all students before and after their two-week science units. From the survey, we obtained pre- and post-treatment measures of three learning outcomes: affinity, curiosity, and attentiveness. Affinity refers to the degree to which students are delighted by the topic of study. For instance, did first graders find birds beautiful? Did they enjoy hearing them sing? Curiosity is defined as the extent to which students want to learn more about what they studied. Attentiveness is defined as the extent to which students notice and pay attention to the topic of study in their everyday lives. Did second graders notice the moon during the night, for example? Did they spot it during day? Did they see its appearance change over time? Although none of these outcomes capture the whole of piety on their own, they are requisite for piety. They characterize a posture that is necessary, albeit not sufficient, to receive creation as a gift and to respond in worship.

The results of our study are shown in Figures 1 through 3. As depicted in Figure 1, the control and treatment groups

averaged 2.75 and 2.94 scale points, respectively, on the affinity scale at baseline. After the intervention, the control group averaged 3.35 points on the affinity scale, while the treatment group averaged 3.65 points. Though there was slightly greater growth in affinity for the treatment group, the difference was not statistically significant at conventional levels.

Figure 1. Affinity Results

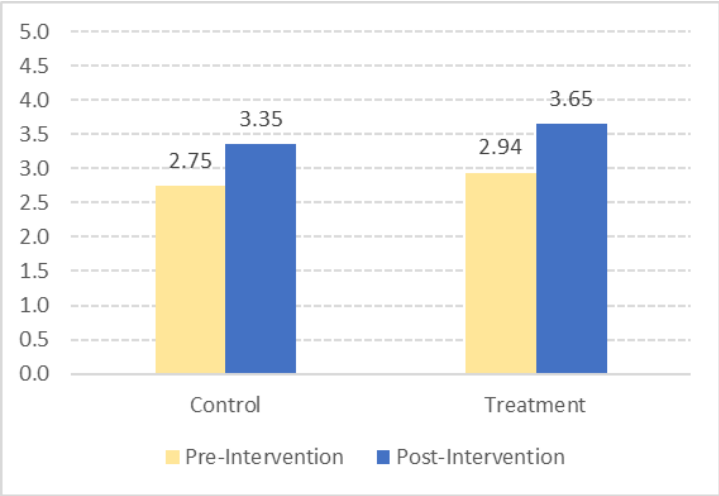


Figure 2 displays the results for curiosity. The control group scored an average of 2.89 points on that scale at baseline, while the treatment group scored an average of 2.98 points at baseline. After the intervention, the control group average rose to 3.29 points, while the treatment group average rose to 3.43 points. As in the affinity results, there was greater growth in curiosity among the treatment group, but the differences were not statistically significant. So we could not rule out the possibility that the differences in growth were due to random chance.

Figure 2. Curiosity Results

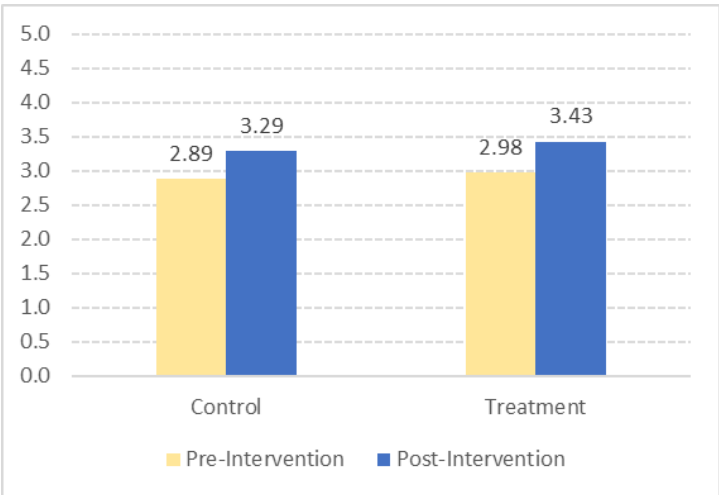
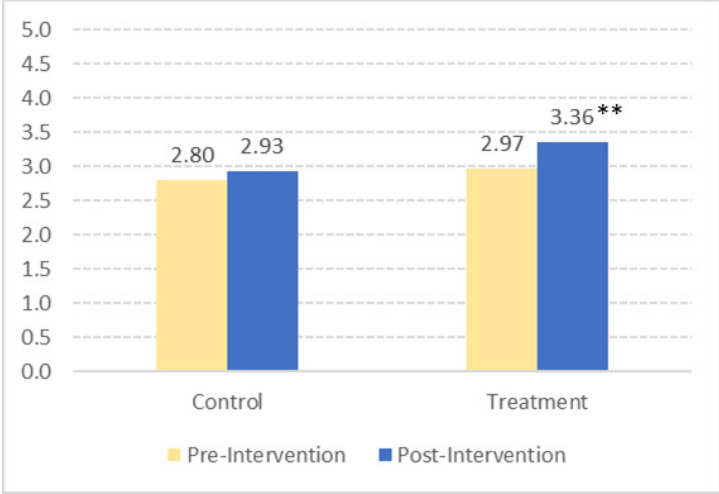


Figure 3 displays the results for attentiveness. On this measure, the control group experienced little change from baseline to after the intervention scoring 2.80 and 2.93 points

on the attentiveness scale at the two respective time periods. Meanwhile, we observed noticeable growth in attentiveness among the treatment group students, who scored 2.97 points on the attentiveness scale before the intervention and 3.36 points afterwards. This result was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Figure 3. Attentiveness Results



Note: **Indicates statistical significance at the 0.01 level.

This Is My Father’s World

Our results suggest that poetry has a part to play in cultivating piety. Poetry helped our study participants become more attentive to the natural world and possibly affected them in other ways necessary for piety. In some ways, they practiced the “new natural philosophy” that C.S. Lewis tried to articulate in *The Abolition of Man*. Natural philosophy—*philosophia naturalis*, literally the love of wisdom of natural things—aims to discern and love the wisdom of creation. It presupposes that creation is ordered, meaningful, and radiates God’s truth and character. “The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heaven,” Solomon observed (Prov. 3:17).

By knowing creation fully and as it really is, students come to know the truth about the nature of things, the goodness of it, and its beauty. Ultimately, they come to know their Creator, joining with the heavens to declare His glory and the skies to proclaim His handiwork (Ps. 19:1). Rather than seizing nature and seeking to impose their will on it, natural philosophy humbles students, helping them recognize that creation is a gift to be gratefully received and stewarded in God’s service for His glory. This posture contrasts with that of modern science, which aims to quantify and classify the world in order to master creation.


In conclusion, it appears worthwhile for teachers to consider how they may more regularly invoke poetic language, not only in science but across the curriculum in literature, the

arts, history, mathematics, and even physical education. Perhaps poetry will help students to see anew and resonate with the words penned by the 19th century American minister Maltbie Davenport Babcock:

This is my Father's world.
E'en yet to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world.
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world.
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.

This is my Father's world.
He shines in all that's fair.
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Albert Cheng is an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas, where he teaches courses in education policy and philosophy; a Cardus Senior Fellow; an affiliated research fellow at the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University; an editor at the International Journal of Christianity and Education; and governing board member of Anthem Classical Academy in Fayetteville, Arkansas.



Tuition, Revenue, and Enrollment in International Christian Schools

TIM SHUMAN & ERIC W. PRICE

Between December 2021 and January 2022, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) fielded the International Tuition & Salary Survey (ITSS). The ITSS serves as a companion survey to the United States-based ACSI Tuition and Salary Survey (TSS) for ACSI member schools, and provides key insights on tuition, salary, benefits, and enrollment at ACSI international member schools. Altogether, the ITSS was sent to 156 international schools. This ITSS report, a follow-up to the ITSS salary and benefits report that first appeared in the spring 2022 issue of *Research in Brief*, focuses on tuition, revenues, and enrollment data in international Christian schools.

This analysis is based on a convenience sample of thirty-nine schools, a 25 percent response rate. In general, we report means and medians (two measures of central tendency) for our sample, composed of twenty schools in Asia Pacific, eight schools in Latin America, five schools in Europe, and six schools in Africa, Asia Central, the Middle East, and North



America. It is therefore important to note that these overall findings mask important regional, cultural, and economic differences across these regions.

Tuition Rates

We begin by turning to standard tuition rates before any discounts or assistance. In Table 1, we report average, median, minimum, and maximum reported tuition by grade level.

Table 1. Tuition Rates, By Grade

	n	Average	Median	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-K 3	8	\$9,357	\$5,650	\$7,467	\$4,200	\$22,300
Pre-K 4	16	\$8,881	\$5,850	\$7,773	\$300	\$24,518
Pre-K 5	7	\$10,160	\$6,867	\$7,569	\$3,813	\$24,518
Full-Day Kindergarten	23	\$11,230	\$10,460	\$7,344	\$300	\$24,518
1st Grade	27	\$13,455	\$10,460	\$10,367	\$300	\$38,800
2nd Grade	27	\$13,481	\$10,460	\$10,352	\$300	\$38,800
3rd Grade	27	\$13,590	\$10,460	\$10,305	\$300	\$38,800
4th Grade	27	\$13,603	\$10,460	\$10,296	\$300	\$38,800
5th Grade	27	\$13,630	\$10,460	\$10,277	\$300	\$38,800
6th Grade	27	\$14,538	\$11,810	\$10,588	\$300	\$40,500
7th Grade	27	\$14,695	\$11,810	\$10,545	\$300	\$40,500
8th Grade	27	\$14,700	\$11,810	\$10,544	\$300	\$40,500
9th Grade	27	\$15,389	\$14,043	\$10,679	\$300	\$41,300
10th Grade	27	\$15,430	\$14,043	\$10,666	\$300	\$41,300
11th Grade	26	\$15,867	\$14,527	\$10,808	\$300	\$41,300
12th Grade	26	\$15,922	\$14,527	\$10,800	\$300	\$41,300

Median tuition rates for schools that offer early education ranged from approximately \$5,500 to about \$7,000, while full-day kindergarten tuition rates reflected the median of elementary grade rates at \$10,460. The average elementary education (1st-5th grade) tuition rate was near \$13,500. Middle school (6th- 8th grade) median tuition rates were \$11,818, while mean tuition rates were roughly \$14,600. High school (9th-12th grade) median tuition rates ranged from \$14,000 to \$14,500, with mean tuition rates around \$15,500.

Across regional categories, some variation is worth noting. Median tuition in Latin and North America ranged from \$5,370 for elementary grades ($n = 6$) to \$5,720 for high school ($n = 6$). Median tuition in Africa, Asia Central, the Middle East, and Europe ranged from \$12,000 for full-time kindergarten to \$17,270 for high school ($n = 7$). Finally, median tuition in the Asia Pacific region ranged from \$13,873 for full-time kindergarten to \$19,101 in high school ($n = 14$).

Generally, we observe means higher than medians, suggesting that outliers for tuition appeared on the upper range, rather than the lower range. Response rates were insufficient to report tuition rates for half-day kindergarten and boarding.

Tuition Changes and Discounts

Next, we turn to a comparison of tuition rate changes and discounts offered. For rate

changes, in particular, it is important to keep in mind that surveys were completed in December 2021-January 2022. Particularly noteworthy is how international schools kept tuition stable or introduced modest increases during the pandemic. The vast majority of schools (85 percent to 95 percent) reported keeping tuition the same as the previous year or increasing tuition by 1 percent to 7 percent (see Table 2).

About 60 percent of participating schools offer some form of tuition assistance. Average tuition assistance amounts primarily varied widely by region and budget tier, from a minimum of \$1,197 in Latin and North America to a maximum of \$6,651 in Asia Pacific (see Table 3).

Finally, we examine tuition discounts. In addition to multiple child discounts, many schools offer tuition discounts for children of one of five categories: missionaries, missionary agency partners, local or national pastors or ministry leaders, staff, and board members. For ease of presentation, we combine children of missionaries, missionary agency

Table 2. Tuition Changes, By Education Level

	Responses	Decreased 1% - 7%	Same Tuition as Last Year	Increased 1% - 7%	Increased 7% or more
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Early Education	20	5%	50%	45%	0%
Elementary	28	7%	39%	50%	4%
Middle School	28	11%	39%	46%	4%
High School	27	11%	41%	44%	4%

partners, and local or national pastors or ministry leaders into one category (see Column 3). The proportion of schools offering discounts for missionary children (56 percent) was higher than the proportion of schools offering discounts for missionary agency partners (23 percent) or local or national pastors or ministry leaders (33 percent).

Two-thirds of all schools in our sample offer at least one of the discount categories. The most common discount category was for ministry leaders (59 percent) or staff members (59 percent). Nearly half of all schools offer a multiple child discount, as well (46 percent; see Table 4).

Some variation among categories is worth highlighting. Asia Pacific schools were almost twice as likely as schools located outside that region to provide staff discounts. Schools with annual budgets between \$2.5 million and \$5 million were most likely to provide multiple child and MK discounts, while the greatest concentration of schools that offer any kind of tuition discount was found among those with annual budgets of less than \$2.5 million.

Enrollment

Next, we observe reported enrollment counts. Among international school survey participants, reported differences in average and median class enrollment can primarily be

observed at the preprimary level, while primary, middle, and secondary class enrollment is higher with comparatively little variation across grade level.

Median enrollment by grade level varied by region, with schools located in Africa, Asia Central, the Middle East, and Europe reporting enrollment between nine and seventeen students from grades K-12. Schools located in the Asia Pacific region and Latin America/North America reported similar K-12 enrollments ranging from twelve and fourteen to twenty-four and twenty-six students at the median. By budget, reported enrollment also varied at the median.

Table 3. Average Tuition Assistance By Enrollment, Region, and Budget

	Responses	Average Tuition Assistance
	(1)	(2)
By Enrollment		
0-200 students	8	\$6,456
201-400 students	13	\$4,822
> 400 students	3	\$5,835
By Region		
Europe, Middle East, Central Asia, Africa	7	\$5,797
Asia Pacific	13	\$6,651
Latin America/North America	4	\$1,197
By School Budget		
<\$2.5M	13	\$4,947
\$2.5M - \$5M	4	\$2,500
>\$5M	4	\$5,319

Table 4. Tuition Discounts (Percentage of Schools) By Enrollment, Region, and Budget

	Responses	Any	Multiple Child	Child of		
				Ministry	Staff	Board
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(7)	(8)
Overall	39	67%	46%	59%	59%	5%
By Enrollment						
0-200 Students	9	67%	33%	56%	56%	11%
201-400 Students	17	94%	71%	82%	88%	6%
> 400 Students	13	31%	23%	31%	23%	0%
By Region						
Europe, Middle East, Central Asia, Africa	10	70%	50%	60%	40%	10%
Asia Pacific	20	75%	50%	65%	75%	5%
Latin America, North America	9	44%	33%	44%	44%	0%
By School Budget						
<\$2.5M	14	86%	50%	79%	79%	7%
\$2.5M - \$5M	5	100%	100%	100%	80%	0%
>\$5M	5	100%	60%	60%	80%	0%

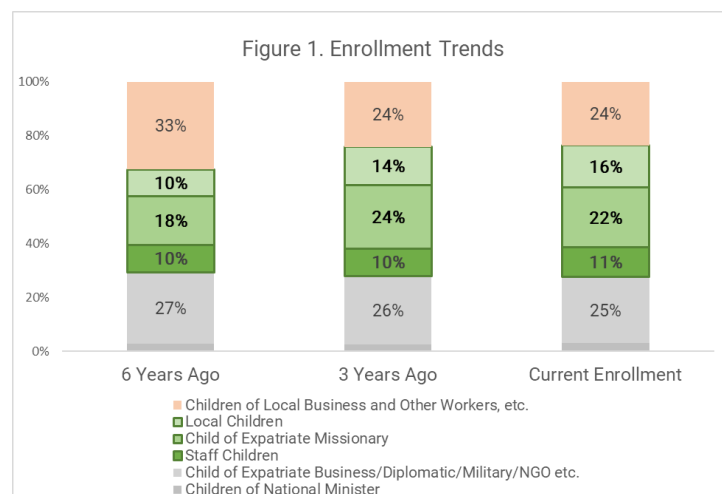
Table 5. Class Enrollment, By Grade			
	n	Average	Median
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Pre-K 3	12	7	7
Pre-K 4	20	13	11
Pre-K 5	11	11	10
Half-Day Kindergarten	4	7	5
Full-Day Kindergarten	27	16	11
1st Grade	31	22	17
2nd Grade	31	21	18
3rd Grade	31	22	16
4th Grade	31	22	19
5th Grade	31	23	19
6th Grade	31	21	19
7th Grade	31	22	19
8th Grade	31	22	21
9th Grade	31	22	18
10th Grade	31	19	18
11th Grade	30	20	15
12th Grade	30	18	14
Boarding	3	29	17

Schools with comparatively lower annual budgets (below \$2.5 million) reported smallest K-12 enrollments ranging from nine to eighteen students at the median. Schools with budgets between \$2.5 and \$5 million reported K-12 enrollments ranging from seventeen to twenty-six students. Schools with budgets exceeding \$5 million reported the largest enrollments at the median, ranging from twenty-three to thirty-nine students per grade.

We turn our attention to reported enrollment by category for international Christian schools. Survey participants were asked to report enrollment percentages across five categories ranging from local/non-missional student enrollment to expatriate missional/MK enrollment. Percentages across the five categories were compared from six years prior and three years prior to those current. Figure 1 displays these enrollment percentages as distribution bands.

Reported enrollment distribution in mission-aligned categories has increased from six years prior to current, with comparatively greater increases in enrollment of children of expatriate missionaries (MK) and staff children. Enrollment of local children unaffiliated with local business also increased over the six-year period (see Figure 1).

More than half of the schools that



participated in the study (64 percent) reported some form of special education policy. Among the most frequently utilized policies were “accommodations to learning” (56 percent), “modifications to curriculum” and “inclusion classrooms” (33 percent each), and resource classrooms (28 percent). Other special education policies were less frequently administered.

Revenue and Budget

Finally, we turn to revenues and budget. Participating international Christian schools reported that nearly all annual revenue is generated from tuition (median = 98 percent), with the largest outside revenue generators being fundraising events (such as auctions or fairs) and private donors (median revenue from each is \$15,000 and \$11,000 per annum, respectively).

We now shift our attention to participating international Christian school reported budget by enrollment and region.

Overall, participating schools with higher enrollment and Asia Pacific region schools reported higher comparative annual budgets. Salary and benefits were the largest budgetary line-item expenditures regardless of enrollment size or geographic region (roughly 60-70 percent). It is worth noting, however, that the upper end of the salary and benefit budget line item (70 percent of annual budget) was paid by

Table 6. Operating Budget, By Enrollment and Region				
	Responses	25th Percentile	50th Percentile	75th Percentile
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
By Enrollment				
0-200 students	8	\$643,108	\$1,125,000	\$1,630,811
201-400 students	12	\$1,900,000	\$2,560,085	\$6,018,313
> 400 students	4	\$3,800,000	\$5,032,462	\$9,974,962
By Region				
Europe, ME, CA, Africa	7	\$606,216	\$1,200,000	\$3,200,000
Asia Pacific	12	\$2,082,475	\$2,682,255	\$6,350,774
Latin America/NA	5	\$680,000	\$1,890,000	\$1,950,000

schools with comparatively lower enrollment (two hundred students or fewer) and international schools located in Latin or North America, while larger schools and schools located in other geographic regions allocated greater percentages of their annual budgets to other line items.

Lastly, most schools reported using local currency for accounting and tuition purposes (68 percent and 61 percent respectively).

International Schools on a Mission

When ACSI opened its first global office, its attention was focused upon “MK schools,” or schools primarily serving children of expatriate missionaries serving around the world. Since then, ACSI’s global office expanded greatly to include one hundred sixty-seven international member schools, 3,029 global/national schools of more than 800,000 students combined, and eighteen global/national offices. While there are still MK schools in membership, 92 percent of survey respondents preferred the term “international Christian school” or “international school,” while only one leader indicated preference for the term MK school.

Responses to this question indicate a more expansive purpose served by international schools. On one hand, international schools serve broader student populations. Changing admissions policies make it more possible for non-

believers to enroll their children in their schools. Sixty-eight percent of the international schools indicated that they either had no admission standard regarding faith and morality or that families only had to acknowledge the school’s statement of faith without requiring agreement to it. On the other hand, data from this survey indicate that international schools remain firm in their purpose to serve missionary families. Nearly three-fifths of all schools in our sample continue to offer generous discounts to children whose parents are called to the sacrificial life of ministry service abroad.

We hope to get an even better sense of these schools, as well as their policies, enrollments, and missions, in the coming years. In the meantime, we urge caution when interpreting and applying these numbers, especially given the diversity of international schools and relative limitations of our analytic sample to fairly capture all aspects of this diversity. Nonetheless, the ITSS allowed for a valuable first pass at the data, providing some important insights for international schools’ salary, benefits, tuition, revenue, and enrollment characteristics. We hope to build on the momentum and information gained in future iterations of this survey. [RiB](#)

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Insights from Flourishing Schools Research

ACSI RESEARCH

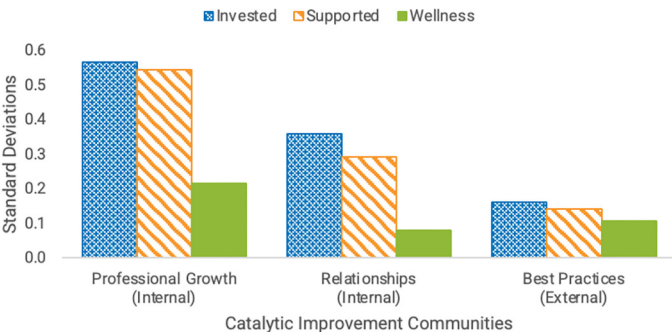
How can schools nurture learning communities that catalyze improvement among school leaders and teachers? We looked to data from the Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI) to see if we could understand how these improvement communities promote educator flourishing.

Catalytic improvement communities should be marked by at least three characteristics. Within a school, as *improvement* communities, they foster *professional growth* among school leaders and teachers. Again, within a school, as *improvement communities*, they should also encourage *relationships* among educators. Furthermore, across schools, they should facilitate the sharing of *best practices*.

From the pilot year of the FSCI (2018-19), we examined nine items in order to standardize measures of *professional growth*, *relationships*, and *best practices*. We hypothesized that catalytic improvement should improve how *invested* the educator was in his or her school, how *supported* teachers felt by their leadership, and how *well* the respondent felt, using another eighteen items from the FSCI.

We find evidence that respondents who feel they are part of a catalytic improvement community report being more invested in their schools, feel more supported by leadership, and express higher levels of wellness (all $p < 0.001$). Further, we find evidence that communities that focus on professional growth seem to make the biggest difference for flourishing and that intraschool communities have larger correlations with flourishing than interschool communities. [RiB](#)

Flourishing in Catalytic Improvement Communities



Becoming Future Ready

In 2019, ACSI received generous grant funding and, in partnership with Cardus, launched a two-year research project in which a research team identified, surveyed, and visited eleven schools and networks that have developed innovative approaches to sustainability while at the same time increasing access to Christian education. More than tweaking a practice or process here or there, they merged schools, started online academies, developed microschools, advocated for school choice programs, formed Christian school districts, shared backend functions with other schools, engaged in entrepreneurship and facilities leasing, started brand new schools, and provided inclusive education for students of all abilities.

Using an appreciative inquiry framework, the research team identified three key themes across this group of schools. Related to *mission and culture*, schools prioritized distinctiveness, relevancy, and inclusion as means toward ensuring their missions continue into the future. Regarding *structures and practices*, schools resourced creatively, reimagined structures, and took disciplined risks as they implemented non-traditional models of school finance and operations. Finally, related to *people and community*, schools prioritized their staff, invited partnerships, and shared

innovation with other schools. These themes show how future-ready Christian schools are not only addressing challenges to long-term sustainability but also transforming them into catalysts for mission-driven growth.

On August 1, 2022, a digital excerpt of the first third of the study was made available as a free download at <https://your.acsi.org/futureready>. This excerpt covers the first theme, that of mission and culture. All three themes will be covered in a book that ACSI and Cardus will co-publish in late fall 2022, which will be sent to every ACSI member school (additional copies will be available for order at the same website). The stories and strategies shared by the schools and networks in the study will inspire leaders to think innovatively, strategically, and above all, missionally about how to reach future generations with the love of God through healthy, thriving Christian schools. 