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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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

INNOVATIVE MISSIONS AND MODELS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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- educators who embody a biblical worldview, engage in transformational teaching and discipling, and embrace personal and professional growth.

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ACSI STRONGER TOGETHER

CONTENTS

RiB

Letter from the Editor

MATTHEW H. LEE

How can we prepare and plan for a brighter future for Christian education? As the old saying goes, commonly attributed to the colorful and pithy Benjamin Franklin, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." There are many aspects of Christian schools that need care and diligent attention in order to promote flourishing, not merely for the student, but for the entire school community. This takes intentional planning and preparation. In this latest issue of *Research in Brief*, I'm delighted to share with our readers five new research articles that provide insights about how we can be preparing for a brighter future today.

First, we must stay informed on innovative and sustainable practices in which schools are currently engaged. You may have read *Future Ready: Innovative Missions and Models in Christian Education*, which I coauthored alongside Lynn Swaner, Jon Eckert, and Erik Ellefsen. This issue features a shortened version of our research findings with new insights from the eleven schools we studied.

One of the innovative models we study in *Future Ready* is hybrid schooling, sometimes called microschooling or "pandemic pods," as popularized during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second article in this issue comes from the nation's leading expert on hybrid schools, Dr. Eric Wearne, Associate Professor at Kennesaw State University and Director of the National Hybrid Schools Project. His article draws together the findings from two NHSP reports coauthored with Dr. John Thompson. Many of these hybrid schools indicate some Protestant affiliation, and the vast majority of teachers report sharing beliefs and values about the school's mission.

Second, while we scan the horizon for innovations and new models, we must continue to invest in our traditional programs. The third article in this issue, written by Dr. Stacey Bose, Dean of the School of Education at Cairn University, focuses on the perceived value of accreditation in international schools. In this mixed methods study, she surveyed and interviewed parents, teachers, and leaders in five ACSI-accredited national Christian schools in Latin America. She finds that stakeholders held positive perceptions towards the accreditation process and felt the process had a significant impact on the school. Her work helps us reflect more thoughtfully about the role accreditation can play in school improvement.

Third, we must learn about the generation we are trying to reach. In the fourth article, in which Dr. Lynn Swaner, ACSI's Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer and Cardus Senior Fellow, interviews Dr. David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, we learn more about the latest research Barna conducted in partnership with ACSI. The "Open Generation," today's 13- to 17-year-olds, are open to everything and anything. This reality presents both a challenge and a critical opportunity for Christian schools—a challenge because of the many cultural forces competing to occupy this generation's openness, but also an opportunity for Christian schools to write the truths of what God has done for his people on *tabula rasa*.

Finally, we must equip ourselves with strategies for building relationships with this generation. If the "Open Generation" is a blank slate, how can teachers build rapport with them? The final research article, by Dr. Lindsey Fain, Associate Dean at Covenant College, investigates which practices teachers perceive to be the most effective at developing rapport with their students. Her mixed methods study finds that flexibility, humor, creativity, empathy, and respect are among the qualities perceived to be most effective.

Of course, as we prepare and plan for the future, we also trust in God's providence in our lives. Thus, we pray and labor—*ora et labora*—at the same time. As we read in Proverbs 16:9 (ESV), "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." It is my prayer for you that these articles would prove helpful in stimulating new ideas and conversations, as we both pray and work toward a brighter future for Christian education. RiB

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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.*

INNOVATIVE MISSIONS AND MODELS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

LYNN E. SWANER AND MATTHEW H. LEE

In his book *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory,* Fuller Theological Seminary professor Tod Bolsinger describes the journey taken by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. While they initially planned to traverse the territory by canoe, when they came upon the Rocky Mountains, they discovered that their tools would be inadequate for the task at hand. Thus, Bolsinger argues, leadership in uncharted territory requires new navigation tools.

The Lewis and Clark account helpfully illustrates the challenge faced by Christian school leaders. Lewis and Clark would have to accept tremendous risk by abandoning their canoes and continuing with their journey, but there was perhaps a greater risk in staying with their canoes: failing their mission. There may be safety in the comfort of tried-and-true tools of the trade, but to insist on the means might require sacrificing the mission. How can Christian school leaders innovate new means to ensure the sustainability of their mission?

This was the central question we sought to answer in our new book *Future Ready: Innovative Missions and Models in Christian Education*, coauthored with Jon Eckert and Erik Ellefsen of Baylor University. While a copy has been mailed to every ACSI member school in the United States, we briefly summarize our key findings in this article.

The Context

The sustainability study follows a qualitative Appreciative Inquiry design that has been used to study Christian schools in Canada and the United Kingdom (Cooling and Green 2015; Castellon and Jule 2020; Stavros et al. 2016). As an Appreciative Inquiry study, *Future Ready* is fundamentally an exploration of what is possible for Christian schools. We encourage school leaders to imagine ways of adapting some of the innovations in our study to their specific contexts.

We purposively sampled eleven Christian schools or networks across the United States engaged in one or more of the following innovative models: mergers; voucher programs; property ownership and leasing; online or hybrid programs; micro-business hubs; or closely related categories. These categories were identified for addressing key challenges facing Christian schools today, including a growing enrollment gap between middle- and upper-class families; low enrollments of historically underserved student populations (NCES 2022; ACSI 2021), including racial or ethnic minorities and special education students (NCES 2021; ACSI 2021); lack of innovation in the Christian school sector (Van der Walt and Zecha 2004); and concerns over compensation and mental health of leaders, faculty, and staff (Swaner and Lee 2020).

The schools we studied were: Chattanooga Christian School (Chattanooga, TN); Christian School Association of Greater Harrisburg (Harrisburg, PA); Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy (Cincinnati, OH); The City School (Philadelphia, PA); Grand Rapids Christian Schools (Grand Rapids, MI); Hope Academy (Minneapolis, MN); HOPE Christian Schools (Milwaukee, WI; part of the Open Sky Education network); Lynden Christian Schools (Lynden, WA), Oaks Christian School (Westlake Village, CA); Valley Christian Schools (Youngstown, OH); and Valor Christian School (Highlands Ranch, CO).

The Findings

We organize our findings into three primary themes: *Mission & Culture; Structures & Practices;* and *People & Community.*

Mission & Culture

With respect to mission and culture, we consistently found that schools in our study were guided by a clear, distinctive mission. A clear mission articulates what a school will not compromise—and gives great freedom to innovate on the means to accomplish that mission. We identified this in several schools in our study.

Mergers between Spruce Hill Christian School (founded in 1978) and City Center Academy (founded in 1983) resulted in the founding of The City School in 2006, later joined by Philadelphia Mennonite High School (founded in 1998). Early years for The City School were characterized by a lack of missional clarity, at times even a sense of dissonance between urban blight and academic excellence. School leadership understood the importance of a distinctive, clear mission to guide the school and ultimately settled on "Shalom," bringing together the Reformed idea of a ministry of reconciliation with the Mennonite desire for peace. Today, The City School continues to work to bring shalom to the city of Philadelphia and has woven itself into the fabric of the city and the communities in which their three campuses reside.

Valley Christian Schools was founded as Youngstown Christian School in 1975 with the desire to serve students of all races and creeds. After a capital campaign, they opened a new high school in downtown Youngstown in 2006 but were dismayed to find that many of their suburban, tuition-paying families that primarily composed their enrollment did not enroll as they expected. Nonetheless, school leadership had a strong desire to invite all those who would come to the wedding banquet (Luke 14). When the state of Ohio created the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program, school leadership flipped the financial model of the school from a tuition-driven model to a scholarship model, with the result that their school population changed nearly overnight to scholarship students. This ultimately enabled them to fulfill the founding pastor's mission to serve diverse students and families in the city of Youngstown.

Grand Rapids Christian Schools is a multisite school system with five campuses around Grand Rapids, MI. GRCS's decision to develop an inclusive special education program was motivated by their mission to serve their families and the firm belief in *imago Dei*, that all persons bear the image of God. On the classroom side, school leaders view an inclusive education as serving all students, not only by exposing students to diverse student needs, but also by providing support services to all students through a multi-tiered system of supports. On the financial side, GRCS practices tuition equity—not charging additional fees or tuition for inclusion services. This policy is seen as an important part of their mission to serve families, many of whom already have additional financial and emotional pressures as a result of having a child with exceptional needs. Their mission to serve all students in their community is articulated best by GRCS Director of Inclusion Services Kim Primus: "We're not whole if they're not here. Inclusion changes the culture in the school. It is a blessing for all."

Structures & Practices

Schools in our study also innovated unique structures and practices in order to achieve their missions.

Hope Academy was founded with a desire to provide a high-quality, Kingdom-minded education to low-income urban families in Minneapolis, MN. To that end, the school employs what leadership calls the "Kingdom flip"—while many schools rely on a financial model in which tuition covers 80 percent of a school's budget and the remaining 20 percent is covered by fundraising, Hope Academy relies on hundreds of donors to cover 90 percent of the school's budget, with the remaining 10 percent covered by tuition. Partnering with hundreds of smaller-gift donors ensures that the school is not beholden to a small number of large-gift donors. Furthermore, by pairing each donor with a family, Hope helps make the gift more personally meaningful to both the donor and the family. Hope Academy enjoys a high retention rate with its donors and helps spread their financial model with the Spreading Hope Network, which founds urban Christian schools throughout the United States.

Entrepreneurship and innovation are ingrained in the culture at Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy in Cincinnati, OH. At CHCA, the innovative process is not characterized by haphazard risk-taking, but rather as an intentional, incremental, and iterative process that helps minimize risk. A teacher innovation fund provides small grants to teachers to pursue unique projects but are evaluated on their potential to enhance learning and drive the mission forward. Leaders have the mindset of "failing forward" and learning from past mistakes to maximize future success. This process helped a small coffee cart called the Leaning Eagle grow into a full-fledged student-run coffee shop that grosses over $50,000 in revenue each year. Finally, teachers and leaders seek to maximize impact by diversifying the ways in which an innovation can influence their community. A greenhouse, for example, provides learning opportunities for students in science, but the produce is used in the student test kitchen in which students learn about international culinary arts. Business students also earn credits for developing marketing

strategies for both fresh produce from the greenhouse and baked goods from the kitchen.

Like Valley Christian Schools in Ohio, HOPE Christian Schools in Milwaukee, WI, rely primarily on a private school scholarship program for tuition revenue. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was created in 1995, and religious schools' participation was later upheld by the state supreme court in *Jackson v. Benson* in 1998. HOPE Christian Schools are part of the Open Sky Education network. The network also features Eagle Charter Schools, which are tuition-free public schools with a wraparound, faith-based character formation program that allows parents to access a Christian education at a fraction of the cost. The diversity of structures within the Open Sky Education network allows for nimble response to opportunities to educate more students with a "full and lasting education" (per the network's mission) and to do so at scale across state lines.

The Christian School Association of Greater Harrisburg was founded in 2017 when Harrisburg Christian School (founded in 1955) merged with West Shore Christian Academy (founded in 1973). The two schools have unique cultures and serve distinct neighborhoods that are separated by the Susquehanna River. While the two campuses retain their unique cultures—including colors, mascots, and sports teams—the merger has helped the schools realize economies of scale. For example, rather than employing two bookkeepers, CSAGH now staffs a Chief Financial Officer. Faculty from the two campuses share professional development, best practices, and expertise. This "school district" approach—with sharing of backend office functions, key faculty, school leadership, and a unified board—has helped to strengthen both schools' financial positions as well as the health of Christian schooling in the Greater Harrisburg area.

People & Community

Lastly, schools in our study took careful steps to prioritize people and community.

Valor Christian High School, founded in 2006 in Highlands Ranch, CO, outside of Denver, is the youngest school in our study. To prioritize families, the school offers a four-year price for Valor, with tuition (and financial aid) divided evenly over the four years. This unique structure enables Valor to maintain a 105 percent hard income ratio, which in turn also allows investment in its teachers; Valor offers competitive salaries that match or even exceed those of surrounding public school districts. The school also has a campus pastor whose ministry is exclusively to faculty and staff (as opposed to students, who are served by dedicated student life staff); the campus pastor is able to support faculty and staff in their spiritual growth, as well as times of challenge.

Oaks Christian School in Westlake Village, CA, outside of Los Angeles prioritizes community by forming partnerships with many businesses in its community. For example, a University of Southern California professor and advisory board member codesigned a business class and helped facilitate partnerships with Spotify and Skype. Oaks' IDEA (Innovation, Design, Engineering, and Aeronautics) Lab introduces students to hands-on experiences as part of their Institute of Engineering and has led to a partnership with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, making Oaks JPL's only non-university partnership.

Similarly, Lynden Christian Schools has served its rural community in Lynden, WA, for over a hundred years. As its community has grown, so too have the school's offerings. The school operates a thrift shop and a greenhouse on campus, both of which generate revenue for the school but also meet needs of the community. The school has also invested in Career and Technical Education (CTE) facilities and partnerships with local dairy farms, construction firms, and other businesses, all of which meet local needs and connect students to their community in meaningful ways.

Chattanooga Christian School serves its community of Chattanooga, TN, in a number of ways. Their desire to provide an inclusive education led to a partnership with the Siskin Children Institute. The Siskin Children's Institute was founded by Mose and Garrison Siskin, two Jewish businessmen and brothers who had a desire to create a state-of-the-art facility for students with disabilities and partnered with CCS for their heart to serve students with exceptional needs. CCS also partners with historic churches in downtown Chattanooga to open microschools that deliver a Chattanooga Christian learning experience at a fraction of the cost, The King School at Olivet Baptist Church and Purpose Point Learning Academy at Mount Canaan Church.

Concluding Thoughts

We've used several metaphors to describe the journey that the schools in our study have taken toward greater long-term sustainability, missional growth, and increased reach within their communities. We want to close with one that may be helpful in framing our schools' journeys—"blocking and tackling," which originates in American football and refers to the need to be disciplined in sticking to the basics and succeeding at fundamental skills or tasks. Often when discussing issues around school sustainability, leaders will point to the importance of blocking and tackling versus taking innovative or untried approaches to a problem. In writing this book, we were not suggesting that good practices related to financial management, policy governance, school leadership, and continuous improvement be thrown out the window—and the schools in our study didn't throw them out, either. But the belief that blocking and tackling will always ensure success is entirely predicated on every playing field being level and standardized—for every single team and for every single game.

By way of contrast, Christian schools today are playing on fields that are unlevel, are not built to any uniform regulation or code, and are constantly changing. They also play in many different communities with unique resources, needs, challenges, and opportunities. Overall, the field of independent schooling looks less like *Remember the Titans* these days and more like something out of an M.C. Escher painting, the dreamworld in the movie *Inception*, or Dr. Strange's mirror dimension in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (take your pick). While the schools in our study never abandoned the essentials of playing the educational management game, they also realized that they needed new skills, team configurations, and game plans if they were to be successful on their educational playing fields.

To this end, the schools in our study moved beyond asking questions that "tinkered around the edges"—questions of how we can keep doing the same thing we are doing today, but do it slightly better. They realized that adaptive-level challenges require adaptive level solutions, which always seem radical and risky, but in reality are no more so than keeping the current course. The schools in our study give us hope because instead of relying on the "way we've always done things," they added brand new tools or retooled entirely, which now other schools can now test out in their own settings. Their stories give us hope that other Christian schools, of all shapes, sizes, and locations, can creatively ensure the sustainability of their missions into the future. RiB

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn Swaner is chief strategy and innovation officer at the Association of Christian Schools International, where Matthew Lee serves as director of research.

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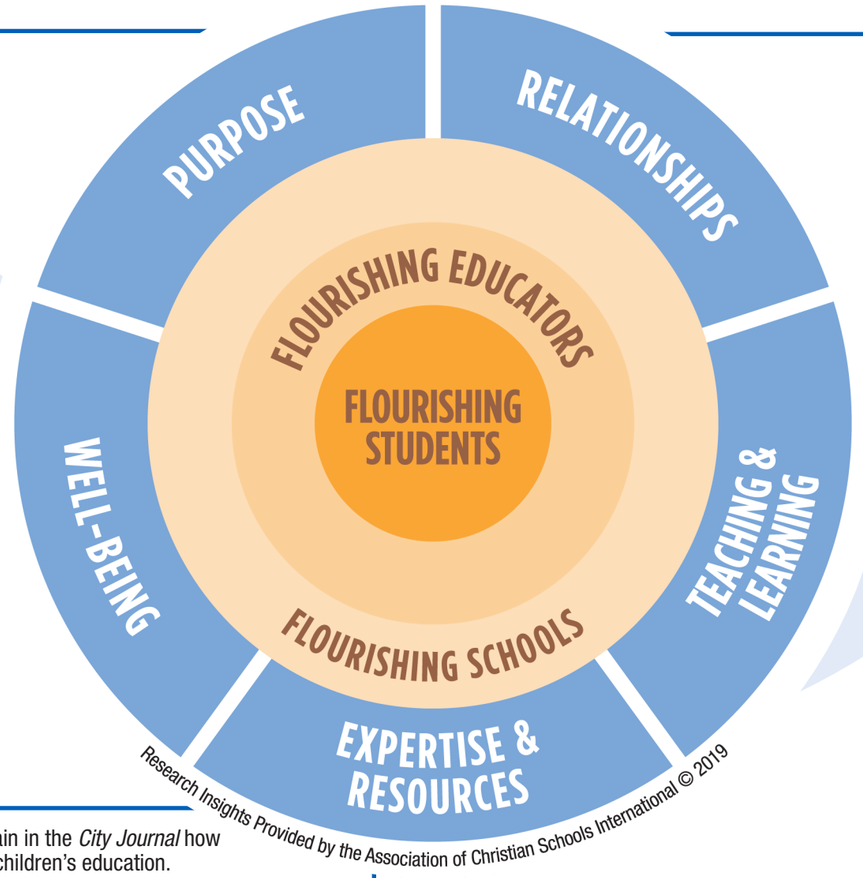
The Latest in Education Research (ACSI Research)

For each issue, we'll survey education research articles from scholars and experts across the country and around the world. What does the latest in education research say about flourishing in its five domains?

- **Responsibility:** What are hybrid schools, and who teaches at hybrid schools? Eric Wearne and John Thompson of Kennesaw State University explore these questions in a new report, *Hybrid Schools 2022 Teachers Survey.* Teachers at hybrid schools overwhelmingly report sharing beliefs and values with colleagues about the school's central mission.
- **Holistic Teaching:** A new peer-reviewed study published by researchers from Baylor University in the *Journal of Research on Christian Education* examines survey data from students at one Christian university and finds that students' faith maturity was influenced the most by peers and church attendance.

- **Supportive Leadership:** A new Cardus report by Jon Eckert (Baylor) shows how collective leadership can catalyze improvement in Christian schools and identifies ways in which independent and district schools differ with respect to collective leadership.
- **Family Relationships:** A new working paper by Julio Cáceres-Delpiano and Eugenio Pedro Giolito examines evidence in Chile and finds that students' educational attainment increases if parents have access to a more expansive set of choice options.



- **Healthy Living:** New survey data from the Centers of Disease Control examines youth mental health and finds that self-reported depression has doubled among teenagers since the mass adoption of the smart phone and social media, and that the rise of depression is particularly pronounced among teenaged girls.

- **Resources:** Nicole Stelle Garnett and Richard W. Garnett (Notre Dame University) explain in the *City Journal* how education savings accounts (ESAs) can help empower parents to take control of their children's education.
- **Resources:** A new working paper from the Annenberg Institute at Brown University by David M. Houston (George Mason University) examines political views and finds that the partisan gaps between Democrats and Republicans on education are increasing.
- **Resources:** A new report from Nat Malkus and Cody Christensen (American Enterprise Institute) finds that public school districts that took longer to reopen lost more student enrollment.

- **Outcomes Focus:** A new peer-reviewed study published in *PLOS ONE* by Alice Bertoletti, Mara Soncin, Marta Cannistra, and Tommaso Agasisti (Politecnico di Milano) explores some of the earliest school closures in Italy due to COVID and finds that teachers who used a broader set of digital instruments were more satisfied with their teaching practices, and also that teachers who used technology to develop content rather than merely to communicate with students were more effective at promoting student learning.
- **Behaviors for Learning:** A new peer-reviewed study published in the *Journal of Public Economics* by Bruno Ferman (Sao Paulo School of Economics in Brazil) and Luiz Felipe Fontes (J-PAL LAC and Insper, Brazil) compares teacher-assigned and blindly assigned scores on high-stakes exams and finds that teachers inflate the scores of better-behaved students and deduct points from the worse-behaved ones.
- **Individualized Instruction:** A new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research by Simon Burgess (University of Bristol), Shenila Rawal (Oxford Partnership for Education Research & Analysis), and Eric Taylor (Harvard University) examines how teachers spend classroom time and finds that devoting more time to individual practice and assessment in math or discussion and groupwork in English improves test scores, independent of measures of teacher quality.
- **Best Practice Orientation:** A new peer-reviewed study published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* by Daniel Bowen (Texas A&M) and Brian Kisida (University of Missouri) finds evidence that arts education improves both students' academic outcomes and social-emotional development.
- **Outcomes Focus:** A new peer-reviewed study forthcoming in the *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* by David N. Figlio (Northwestern University), Cassandra Hart (UC Davis), and Krzysztof Karbownik (Emory) examines private school choice in Florida and finds that school choice benefits even public school students, evidenced by higher standardized test scores and lower absenteeism and suspension rates.

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LESSONS FROM HYBRID SCHOOLS:

Research on Hybrid Schools Finds High Levels of Morale, Strong Sense of Shared Values Among Teachers

ERIC WEARNE

The National Hybrid Schools Project launched in 2020 at Kennesaw State University in order to explore a growing phenomenon in American schooling—schools in which students attend physical classes several days per week but are "homeschooled" the rest of the week. Typically called "hybrid schools," or "hybrid homeschools," the schools we study are more formal institutions than homeschool co-ops—students typically take all of a hybrid school's offerings, rather than a few a la carte classes—but they are also less formal than conventional five-day schools in that parents and students are expected to self-regulate and sometimes study new material on home days, outside of school.

Our inaugural 2022 survey of hybrid schools (Wearne and Thompson 2022a), which sought to simply ask as many of these schools as possible about their operations, curriculum, enrollment, and other characteristics, found a large percentage of them to be Christian schools. Nearly two-thirds indicated some Protestant affiliation, and the most common were Baptist or non-denominational. This supports other previous work that also finds a large percentage of hybrid schools to be Christian in nature (Wearne 2020).

As a follow-up to our inaugural annual national survey, we conducted a survey last spring on a particular issue related to hybrid schools: their teachers. This month the National Hybrid Schools Project released the results of that new survey (Wearne and Thompson 2022b). As we wrote in the report:

> The 2022 Hybrid Schools Teacher Survey (HSTS) is the first effort at exploring the group of teachers who work in hybrid schools (schools in which students physically meet for fewer than five days per week and are homeschooled on the other days). The survey asked hybrid school teachers to respond to a variety of questions about their own education in terms of college degrees, their preparation to become teachers, their experiences as teachers over the course of their careers, their work environments in hybrid schools, and others. While some research has been conducted on the families who attend hybrid schools (Wearne 2020), and on their general operations (Wearne 2021), almost none has been done on the teachers within these schools. Most of these schools employ either one full-time person (usually the school principal/director), or zero. Teachers in these schools tend to be very part-time, teaching only a few classes or only a few days per week.

Given this description, hybrid school teachers clearly have a different work situation compared to their peers in five-day conventional schools.

Some of the content explored in this survey includes teacher backgrounds, their work experiences at hybrid schools, and their hybrid schools' responses to COVID during the 2020-21 school year. None of the results below are empirical, and readers should caution themselves against making comparisons, but noting our results next to some of the results for private schools in the most recent NCES report (Taie and Goldring 2020) might be useful for readers to orient themselves. While not all of the schools in our responses are private (many are from hybrid charter schools), the private schools in the NCES report are likely a closer comparison group for hybrid school teachers.

Teacher Backgrounds and Pay

Teachers at hybrid schools appear to have fewer years of experience than their peers in conventional private schools, with 10.5 years of teaching experience on average, less than the national average of 14.3 years. Hybrid teachers reported an average of 4.7 years of experience teaching specifically in hybrid schools. Of these, 51.9 percent of hybrid school teachers said they had less than 4 years of experience, and 4.6 percent said they had 15 years of experience or more.

Hybrid teachers also seem less likely to have taken courses in a variety of common teacher prep topics before beginning to teach. Teachers were asked about the following undergraduate or graduate coursework prior to teaching:

- classroom management techniques
- lesson planning
- learning assessment
- using student performance data to inform instruction
- serving students from diverse backgrounds
- serving students with special needs

Less than half of hybrid school teachers reported taking courses in any of these areas before teaching. However, like hybrid school teachers, fewer than half of private school teachers reported taking courses on using student performance data to inform instruction, serving students from diverse backgrounds, or serving students with special needs.

While their work satisfaction (discussed below) seems to be high, hybrid school teachers' salaries appear to be lower than those at other private schools. Hybrid school teachers' annual salaries averaged around $35,000, compared to $52,900 in conventional private schools. A wider variation among hybrid school teachers likely exists as well, as many of these teachers are very part time, often teaching only one or two classes for a few days per week.

"Nearly two-thirds [of hybrid schools] indicated some Protestant affiliation, and the most common were Baptist or non-denominational."

Responses to COVID

Around 27 percent of hybrid teachers reported no change in the way their schools operated during the 2020-21 school year. This may seem somewhat surprising at first glance, although private schools were more likely to be open than public schools that fall in general (Scafidi et al. 2021). But given hybrid schools' nature, this is less of a surprise. Even in spring of 2020, when every school in the country was forced to close, this was less of a change for hybrid schools than it was for others (Wearne 2021). A typical hybrid school changed from offering two to three days per week of live instruction, with some online support the other days, to five days of online support. Many hybrid schools use some kind of online learning management system to handle lesson plans on home days even during normal times. In reaction to COVID, they simply switched to using those systems all the time. They had more infrastructure in place to handle this quick transition, and their families had some practice in using it. Still, this survey shows that, like other private schools, most hybrid schools were willing to reopen and to operate normally as soon as they could.

Work Environments

Perhaps our most important and interesting findings relate to the work environments in hybrid schools and what those findings might imply for Christian (and other high-identity) schools in particular. Hybrid school teachers responding to our survey seemed to provide a counterpoint to the seemingly low teacher morale around the country's conventional schools. Nearly 98 percent of hybrid school teachers said they were "somewhat" or "strongly" satisfied with being a teacher at their school, and 95.8 percent of teachers agreed with the statement: "Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be." The former finding suggests a reasonably healthy professional culture at many hybrid schools. The latter statement should be of special interest to Christian educators; as institutions with specific identities, the teachers within these hybrid schools

seem to be well-aligned with each other and with the overall missions of their schools. This survey is, again, exploratory and not experimental, and so there may be some selection bias in the results. But such high numbers do at least point toward a shared sense of ownership between hybrid school teachers and leaders regarding the missions of these schools. This satisfaction among teachers seems to indicate that they and their schools are "flourishing" at some level (Swaner et al. 2019).

Why might this be the case? By their nature, these schools require a unique and strong sense of partnership between families and schools. Hybrid school families are choosing to agree with a school's mission by sending their children there a few days per week, but they also play a role in enacting a hybrid school's mission by assisting with their children with work from the school during home days. Hybrid schools also tend to be small (the average enrollment in our full 2022 survey was 170 in grades K-8 and 79 in grades 9-12). Trying to be a large, comprehensive operation can be a threat to a school's mission. It can get diluted as a school tries to be all things to all comers. Most hybrid schools functionally cannot even attempt this and so are able to stay more focused on their original missions. The level of parental involvement in the day-to-day life of the school seems to matter, too. Parents cannot simply hand their students over all week and have the school do most of the work—the parents have responsibilities, too, and are very aware about the curriculum content, assessments, and other pedagogical practices on an ongoing, intimate basis. But, unlike full-time homeschoolers, the parents are not actually in charge of determining curriculum and assessments. Parents who persist in a hybrid school setting are also submitting to the authority of the school to a greater extent than a homeschooling parent would, and this likely adds to their feelings of attachment to a school's mission. Given the fact that most of these schools are small, a large amount of their operations are do-it-yourself by parents and faculty, which only adds to the shared sense of ownership.

This relates to our survey of teachers, as well. Hybrid school teachers' jobs tend to be quite different from conventional school teachers' jobs. A hybrid school teaching position is one of the very few in which a person can continue to work very part-time as an educator. Former teachers who stayed home for a few years but would like to continue to teach on a much-reduced schedule, or retired teachers and other professionals, are common profiles of hybrid school teachers. Having a place where they can simply teach the materials they love, with a significantly reduced load of paperwork and other responsibilities, is an attractive prospect for many teachers as they seem to appreciate and feel attached to these schools.

"Entrepreneurial opportunities are also more open to teachers now than they have been since the days before the common school ."

Conclusion

We do not have much data or research on academic or other outcomes for hybrid school students. We do have evidence that families are choosing these schools more often over time, as the rate of hybrid schools being founded appears to be increasing. Families were interested in these schools before COVID, and the popularity of these schools has only grown.

We also know that the teaching profession itself is changing. The long-anticipated teacher shortage may actually be coming true now, through a combination of planned retirements and early retirements encouraged by COVID rules and changes in school culture. Entrepreneurial opportunities are also more open to teachers now than they have been since the days before the common school (Matus 2022). Hybrid schools are one way that not just families, but teachers themselves might be seeking out new educational options.

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Perceived Value and Impact of ACSI Accreditation in Christian Schools in Latin America

STACEY BOSE

Principal Smith announces to the staff that the school will begin its accreditation self-study in the weeks to follow. The expressions on the faces of the faculty look as though a minor plague has just struck the school. If Principal Smith could read the minds of his staff, what might they be contemplating at that moment?

For some, the word "accreditation" can immediately trigger ill feelings of anxiety and work overload. Many who have experienced accreditation can attest to the overwhelming nature of the process. There is no doubt that the accreditation process is not to be entered lightly, as the pursuit of school quality demands hard work and dedication from all who embark on the journey.

Despite the incredible effort required, many who complete the journey attest to its value. By definition, accreditation is designed to guide schools in engaging in school improvement (Brittingham et al. 2008), in verifying the level of quality (Ahearn 2000; Brittingham 2009; Prados et al. 2005), and in providing quality assurance to stakeholders (Brittingham et al. 2008; Van Damme 2000). As schools align with researched-based standards of excellence and identify strengths and weaknesses through the self-study process, the result is often genuine school improvement. A recent research study on the impact of ACSI accreditation on Christian schools in Latin America revealed that despite the hard work, stakeholders highly valued the accreditation process.

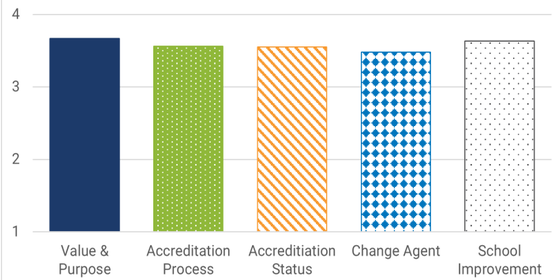
The Research Study/Findings

The study participants included the stakeholders from five accredited national Christian schools in the ACSI Latin American region. Approximately 25 percent of the 1,500 parents, teachers, and school leaders completed an electronic survey by rating their agreement with statements relating to the following five factors of accreditation: (1) the value and purpose of accreditation, (2) the accreditation process, (3) the accreditation status, (4) accreditation as a change agent, and (5) the relationship between accreditation and school improvement. In addition to the survey, a group of 15 stakeholders, consisting of one parent, one teacher, and one leader from each of the five schools were selected for an interview about the accreditation process. The results of the survey and the interviews were analyzed separately using quantitative and qualitative methods and then combined for a joint analysis. The following paragraphs highlight the top three findings of the research study.

Finding #1: Stakeholders held positive perceptions toward the accreditation process.

The results of both the survey and the interviews verified that stakeholders valued the accreditation process and felt the process helped foster school improvement. The mean scores of stakeholders revealed that the majority agreed or strongly agreed with survey statements related to the five factors of accreditation (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Stakeholders' Perceptions of Accreditation Factors



Note: Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

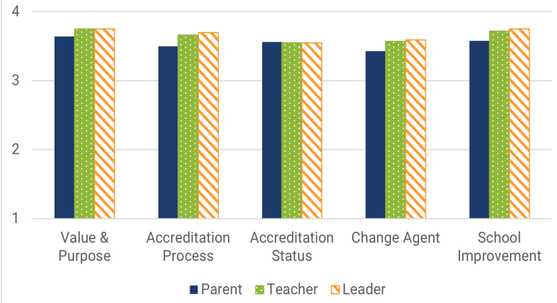
During the interviews, stakeholders spoke very highly of the accreditation process. All 15 participants agreed that the accreditation process was beneficial. Participants explained that the accreditation model was a useful tool to improve the level of quality in the school. One leader stated, "the process is very good and definitely helps a lot—it is a very good tool." Not only did stakeholders hold positive perceptions toward accreditation for their respective schools, but they also recommended the process for other schools. One parent explained, "I would recommend the accreditation … I can

see the changes. I can see how the level or standard of the school has escalated to a higher place. I would recommend that to other schools."

Finding #2: There was a difference in the perceptions by stakeholder group.

The results of the survey showed that the mean scores of the school leaders were the most favorable to the five factors of accreditation, closely followed by the mean scores of the teachers and then the parents (Figure 2). All three groups agreed most strongly with statements related to the value and purpose of accreditation. The parents agreed least with statements related to accreditation as a change agent. Leaders and teachers agreed least with statements related to accreditation status. Statistical tests confirmed that there were significant differences among the responses by stakeholder groups on all factors except for accreditation status. The mean scores of the leaders and the teachers were significantly more positive than the scores of the parents toward several of the factors of accreditation. There was no significant difference between the mean scores of the leaders and the teachers. This may indicate that one's level of involvement in the accreditation process correlates with more positive perceptions (Cushing 1999). Because school leaders and teachers are normally more heavily involved in the accreditation process than parents, they may hold more positive perceptions than parents who are not as actively involved in the process.

Fig. 2. Perceptions by Stakeholder Group



Note: Scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Finding #3: Stakeholders felt the accreditation process had a significant impact on the school.

All interview participants and an overwhelming majority of survey respondents confirmed that the accreditation process had a positive impact on the school. One parent simply stated, "The ACSI accreditation process has impacted the school in every way." Participants reported that there were noticeable changes in the schools. The changes included the formalization of processes, additional professional training for teachers, the improvement of facilities, and the development of academic programs. Participants felt the school's level of quality increased throughout the accreditation process. The self-study process motivated schools to continually improve by identifying weaknesses and strengths. Participants explained that the school community felt a greater sense of quality assurance knowing the school was accredited. Having an external entity with high standards holding the school accountable provided stakeholders with confidence about the school's level of quality. One leader passionately stated:

> We can now say we are a different school with a great degree of consciousness in our work. We are committed to excellence. The fact of having an external organization that watches and guides us has contributed toward reaching our goals of excellence. We have better personnel and staff. Our school facilities and teaching environment have improved a lot. The stakeholders are more engaged in school activities. Our students have made a lot more academic progress. The impact has been for good, definitely!

Accreditation: A Blessed Mirror?

ACSI accreditation had a substantial impact on the schools in the study. This impact was evidenced in the noticeable changes seen in the schools, in the increased level of quality, and in the stakeholder's assurance of school quality. The theme of school improvement was the most reoccurring theme throughout the study.

The results of the study highlight what many educators already know about accreditation. It is a valuable process which can result in genuine school improvement. Martin, Manning, and Ramaley (2001) propose that accreditation is a catalyst for change because schools identify areas in need of improvement from the findings of its self-study. The self-study serves as a mirror which reflects the current reality of the school in light of the accreditation standards. As schools take an honest look in the mirror, they are compelled to improve.

The next time you hear the word accreditation, instead of thinking of it as a minor plague, I encourage you to consider accreditation as a mirror of truth. As you gaze into the mirror, may God give you the courage to change the things you see. By utilizing the powerful tool of accreditation, we can build schools of excellence for God's glory! RiB

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RiB

"The Open Generation": New Barna Research on Today's Teens

DAVID KINNAMAN AND LYNN SWANER

In this article, Dr. Lynn Swaner, ACSI's Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer and Cardus Senior Fellow, interviews Dr. David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, about a new research project on today's teens. As a partner in the research, ACSI is working with Barna to apply this research in the Christian education context and deliver insights to Christian school educators all over the world.

Lynn Swaner (LS): ACSI was very privileged to work with Barna in the past on the project "Multiple Choice: How Parents Sort Education Options in a Changing Market." Now ACSI is one of several partners in Barna's new project on teens around the world. Can you start off by telling us about the study and why it's the first of its kind and scope?

David Kinnaman (DK): We've interviewed more than 25,000 teenagers aged 13 to 17 around the world, in more than 25 countries, and in more than a dozen languages. It's the first study of its kind that looks at the spirituality of teenagers around the world in the scientific, social research way that Barna conducts, where we get to listen in on an emerging generation and hear their thoughts and perspectives about a range of different issues. Number one, we're exploring issues related to their perceptions of the person and work of Jesus. Second, we're also looking at their attitudes towards the Bible. And third, we're also looking at their orientation toward causes, poverty, and issues around the world, things that they want to make a difference in.

LS: For my part, it's been great to be a part of the team and see some of this information start to come in. One of the things I'm excited about is the overarching title of this study, "The Open Generation." Can you talk a little bit about why that title was chosen as you started seeing some of these results coming in for the study?

DK: Yes, I'm excited about the title, too. A few years ago we did a big study called "The Connected Generation," which was on 18- to 35-year-olds. And then as we started to look at teenagers, and we began to look at the data, there was this real sense that these teenagers are very open—they're open to Jesus, they're open to Scripture, they're open to others. They're open to the world around them. They're sort of open to everything and anything. And there's some downside to that, but there's this real sense that they're open, they're available. They're sort of a blank slate of a generation onto which I think God is writing His story. So the "Open Generation" is 13- to 17-year-olds, and we're so honored to be able to tell their story through the data.

LS: One of the encouraging things as I was reading some of the drafts of journals that were coming out was that the teens really viewed adults as trustworthy sources when it comes to faith—even more than social media and maybe potentially even more than other people in their orbits. Adults are still viewed as trustworthy. Can you share some of those findings? I think they're particularly encouraging for Christian school

leaders, as Christian schools are seeking to have that life-on-life engagement between the adults in the school and students.

DK: It's one of the consistent things we've been seeing in this research and other previous research with Gen Z: that they really do trust and value the input of adults. When intergenerational relationships are at their best, they really are the magic by which people are formed. I think I saw this in a documentary once with Mr. Rogers—it's like we're loved into loving, we're sort of taught into teaching, and we're able to understand generosity by seeing other people who are generous. So there are a lot of reasons why I think Christian education is so important.

It is challenging—this generation is smart, they're connected, they're ambitious, they're open. There's lots of good, and there's lots of challenges—like all the social issues of the day and the question of how do we teach biblical truth. But what we're really seeing is that for this generation, they really do want input. They do trust older adults when it comes to learning to understand Scripture. Often this happens in the context of the relationships around them. So, we need to recognize that this generation is very open to the input of older adults.

We also need to ask ourselves, how do we lean into that in an authentic way? Because there's also a lot of skepticism… Young people said they sometimes think older adults don't understand the world that they're living in and that they want to live their faith in the real world. The older Christians don't get the real issues that they're facing. They're trying to be overprotective. The research is helping us really understand that relationships are the catalyst through which discipleship, formation, and education can happen. And we ourselves as older adults have to be ready to be changed by those relationships too.

LS: Our Flourishing Schools Research has found much of the same in terms of things like mentorship and Christ-like teachers, and even community engagement—being involved with the adults and the different people in your community, which is correlated with significantly higher rates of alumni reporting that they're continuing to walk with God. In our research we also identified the construct of questioning: students often question their faith, or they might view Christians as judgmental, or they might not have time to read the Bible or pray. What did you find in these areas? Are those "yes, but" findings, and what are some of the implications for Christian schools and where they could go next?

DK: Well, I think most of our history and research here at Barna is a lot of "yes, but" actually. And I think some of the most compelling research we conduct is when we're able to confirm some things that might sound true and are true, but they have another sort of story to them or some sort of qualification. It's never as simple a story as I think sometimes that we set out to tell. For example, we find that this generation is actually much more open to spirituality, much more open to Christianity than we could have expected.

The idea is that this generation is largely secular and doesn't care and is embracing primarily or exclusively a kind of nihilistic or secular mindset—it's just not true. They're very open spiritually, but there are also ways in which they're really struggling with what it means to live as faithful Christians and what it means to follow Jesus. We found a lot of examples of this. There's high regard for Jesus—teens believe that He was crucified, but fewer believe that He rose again. And even among young Christians, there's sometimes this perception that, "Yeah, we believe in Jesus, but we're not really sure what that means for our life today."

We also saw that teens have a high regard for Jesus in terms of his character but much less regard for Christians that they know. They're much more likely to say Jesus is kind, open, and loving—and they still view Him as a deity. But they also see Christians as much more likely to be judgmental and hypocritical. But I think it's important to realize that one of the consistent themes we've been seeing in this Open Generation research and some other studies is that this generation is wrestling with a more holistic set of questions.

I love this emerging generation. I'm a big advocate and proponent for them because I think, again, we sometimes do them a disservice by sort of oversimplifying their lives or the ways we present the Gospel. But they're interested in understanding that Christianity is both true and good. We saw this in the research really clearly. This generation wants to understand that Christianity is good—part of their openness is that they want to understand that it's good for the world, for their communities, for their friends, for work, for relationships, for life, and for sexuality. And not just that it's simply true. We need to convey the truth of these ideas, that Christianity is true in every way, that it is the fundamental reality of the universe. But we also have to understand that they're looking to see that it's good and that it's beautiful and that it works in the world.

Finally, this notion that it's an open generation, I think could be really inspiring and should be very inspiring to us as leaders in Christian education. I think that one of the biggest challenges we have is that we have a very closed-fisted church; we have people who are maybe closed-minded. I think that what is happening with this generation is they're sort of responding to a kind of fear. And they're saying we want our faith to really matter in the real world. If Jesus matters in any place of life, he should matter in all the places of life.

I think this open generation could help release the power of God. They're open to the working of God. They're open to prayer. They're open to supernatural activities. They're open to miracles. I think it would be really powerful and important things for the church to say we're not just going to educate you, but we're actually going to partner with what God is opening you to. Then, I think it could become very helpful to members of this generation as they find their great purpose in the Lord and in the Christian community in the days and months to come.

LS: David, thanks so much for spending just a few minutes with me today. I've been very encouraged, particularly as I think of Christian school leaders and their work with their teams and their school missions to really engage this current generation in very meaningful and powerful ways.

DK: Absolutely. And what you do for Christian education, both at ACSI and for those [in schools], it matters so much. It matters more now than ever, in light of the last couple of years and all the changes we've been through. There is hunger in this generation—let's be ready to ask the Lord to fan the flames of the spiritual gifts of this generation through our work. Just to encourage you, it's a challenging time, but a fun one as God is bringing new opportunities that should open us up to what God is doing in this new generation. RiB

For more information (including webinar recordings and to order copies of research journals), visit https://www.barna.com/the-open-generation/.

David Kinnaman is president of the Barna Group. Lynn Swaner is chief strategy and innovation officer at the Association of Christian Schools International.

RiB

Fostering Teacher-Student Rapport:
Teacher Perceptions of the Most Effective Practices

LINDSEY FAIN

Within modern Christian school communities, there is often adequate discussion concerning the integration of faith and learning in content, but less consideration of the integration in method (Smith 2019). Pedagogy is never neutral; it is a medium that carries its own message (Knight 2006). Smith (2018) parallels pedagogy to a "house" in which teachers and students live. Thus, teaching is about making choices with respect to patterns that invite or dampen opportunities to connect with students. Teachers' daily decisions exercise inclusion, extend hospitality, or energize a classroom. A teacher's pedagogy informs and exemplifies everything that he or she values (Erdvig 2021).

Summary of the Literature

One facet of pedagogy is teacher-student rapport (Benson et al. 2005). Teaching is inherently relational. Teacher rapport in both Christian and secular settings can help support student learning (Frisby and Martin 2010), reduce risky behaviors (Vidourek et al. 2011), and increase participation, critical thinking, satisfaction, and dropout prevention (Cornelius-White 2007).

There are reasons to expect that teacher rapport bears unique characteristics in Christian school settings. Christian teachers recognize the student as an image bearer and attempt to captivate his or her heart as part of their whole being. Healthy relationships are thus the catalyst to student learning and flourishing school communities (Swaner et al. 2019). Teachers are naturally situated to foster rapport simply due to "relational proximity" (Loe 2022). In this proximity, teachers can serve as connectors or "relational vessels" who draw the students into a relationship with themselves and ultimately with the Lord (Knight 2006), for example, by mentoring students or fostering their well-being (Graham 2003). Thus, in a Christian school context, a teacher's desire to build rapport with students is an opportunity to be used as an instrument to steward, love, and model the core values of the school.

Students learn better through intentional, not merely incidental, relationships (Loe 2022). Teachers need a fundamental understanding of how to build rapport with students. In fact, qualities that describe "good" teaching are as much about how students were treated as how they were taught (Webb and Barrett 2014). Building rapport does not necessarily result in learning but is certainly a catalyst to create conditions conducive to learning (Frisby and Martin 2010). Relationships and the quality of relationships have implications and outcomes for education (Frisby and Martin 2010). Besides the expected improvement in learning outcomes, building rapport fosters classroom community, as well as longevity in relationships that are characterized by caring, openness, and empathy (Granitz et al. 2009). Indeed, each of these exemplify qualities that K-12 Christian schools desire for students to become transforming agents to carry out the Lord's redemptive work. For ACSI Christian schools, the concept of flourishing is a holistic idea that aims to both engage and improve the whole student (Swaner et al. 2019).

Unfortunately, despite the importance of rapport, for many schools, practices of rapport are fashioned through incidental junctures instead of intentional opportunities (Loe 2022). Ideally, rapport should be developed, embodied, and put into action by the teacher (Webb and Barrett 2014). Granitz et al. (2009) assert that a key trait of a master teacher is the ability to foster rapport.

Methodology

To identify teacher practices teachers perceived to be most important for fostering teacher-student rapport in Christian schools, I surveyed over 200 teachers in ACSI schools. Participants were K-12 teachers from schools that are accredited members of the Eastern Division of ACSI. Two criteria had to be met in order for the schools to participate: they needed to be accredited K-12 programs with enrollments of 300 students or more. The survey link was forwarded by email to all of the teachers by their administrators and remained open for three weeks. The email with the survey link was successfully delivered to 163 out of 181 eligible schools, which yielded 218 participants. For this sample, the two categories with the highest percentages of the number of years of teaching were 11-19 years with 29 percent of respondents and 6-10 years with 21 percent of respondents. As for the number of years teaching in a Christian school, the leading category was 2-5 years with 29 percent of respondents and 6-10 years with 28 percent of respondents. In regard to the grade level where most of their time is spent, 50 percent of respondents answered grades 9-12 and 18 percent were from grades 3-5.

The survey was self-constructed and developed based on the review of the literature. In an effort to address the reliability of the self-constructed instrument, a pilot study was conducted with ten local K-12 Christian school teachers who were contacted by their principal or administrator. The survey consisted of 31 questions. The first 23 questions used a four-point Likert scale, with a range of *very important (4), important (3), somewhat important (2),* to *not important (1)*. Question 24 required teachers to consider their level of intentionality. Question 25 was a ranking question where they were asked to rank the top five practices. Questions 26 to 30 were short-answer personal questions that might be helpful to other teachers. Question 31 was an open-ended question asking teachers to explain what it means to them to be intentional in building rapport with students.

A stepwise and backward regression analysis was used for the Likert scale Questions 1 through 23. Question 25 was the only question ranking the top-five practices. In addition, Question 31 was an open-ended question, which provided a way to compare results with the practices found in the regression analysis. The results were then analyzed to find practices that were most common. There were six practices found to be most common.

Key Findings

The six overall practices found to be the most common included: prepared to adjust a lesson or calendar when necessary; display a sense of humor; provide interesting and creative lessons; create opportunities for students to feel empathy; apply empathy to understand who the student is, where they come from, and how they learn; and cultivate a culture of reciprocal respect. Empathy—understanding who the student is, where they come from, and how they learn—was found significant in the regression analysis at all levels. This practice also received the most comments at all levels for the open-ended question. One respondent commented, "Knowing how they learn, what makes them tick, and who they are." Another respondent stated, "Listening, understanding their needs, and connecting with them on a personal level." Indeed, the frequency and pattern of this practice showing up in all grade levels for two of the three categories, as well as particular grade levels, is indicative of the need for students to feel seen, known, and have a place to belong (Stronge 2018). This also epitomizes the importance of the teacher's role as the emotional, relational, and cognitive "connector" (Graham 2003).

The results of this study and contributions of the various practices in this study exemplify the notion that faith and biblical truth does inform the processes and practices in the classroom (Smith, 2018) and that pedagogical choices become part of student formation (Bruner, 1996). While many of the influential rapport practices seem simple in nature, for instance, such as greeting a student at the door, calling each student by name, or displaying a sense of humor, they indeed communicate invitation and care, which are important ingredients for establishing an immediacy or connection of rapport (Weimer 2010). These establishing and maintaining practices generate deposits in the "relational bank" for students creating a meaningful and positive affinity between the teacher and student that increases comfort, trust, better communication, and a sense of loyalty (Stronge 2018). Teachers hold a high responsibility for setting the tone that flows through the halls of classroom homes.

Implications for Schools

The findings of this study suggest that classrooms truly are a "pedagogium—a house, or dwelling place—where teachers and students live for a while" (Smith 2018). Students are searching for a place to belong (Thompson 2021). Just as building rapport cannot be compartmentalized solely to one or two practices, this study has echoed the same reality that teaching is also holistic and comprised of varied roles (Graham 2003). Jesus is divine and without sin, and humans are not (Graham 2003); thus, Jesus is the ultimate model as host. The good news is that humans, as teachers, are able to emulate His approach through modeling; personalize teaching to connect to the needs of the learner; and be intentional with proximity, display empathy, vulnerability, transparency, accountability, consistency, and shared purpose (Erdvig 2021).

The classroom, as a house, is a community where the students and the teacher live and work together (Smith 2018). The teacher, as host, is the influential instrument that invites students in (Kaufmann 2017). In drawing conclusions from this study, I would propose that rapport acts as the catalyst, since it promotes unity and a sense of flourishing that is not a sheer personality attribute or cognitive practice. Rather, it stems from the heart and is an intentional act of transparency, vulnerability, and authenticity that results in harmony and affinity for others (Granitz et al. 2009) and communion with God (Erdvig 2021).

Of course, it should be stated that the present study focuses on teacher perceptions of the most effective practices for fostering teacher-student rapport. Whether these practices are effectual for doing so is a question worthy of further investigation. Nonetheless, there are important implications that proceed from this study. Based on this study's findings, helping teachers recognize the importance of the intentionality of building rapport and potentially incorporating opportunities into lesson planning is recommended. Building rapport comes easier for some teachers than others, so intentionally planning for daily or weekly opportunities is necessary.

Schools and teachers can also reflect on their practice of rapport collectively and individually to determine if there is harmony between their educational practices and basic philosophical beliefs. Effective teachers possess a growth mindset as reflective practitioners who invite feedback by eliciting information and critique from others to broaden perspectives and perfect their craft. This could be accomplished through consistent professional development sessions, peer small group sessions, or one-on-one by evaluating the classroom climate of rapport that the teacher cultivates and offering feedback of strengths, weaknesses, and practices to help with improvement.

Another recommendation for practice refers to the hiring of teachers. The pedagogy of who we believe students to be is lived out in the practice (Erdvig 2021) of whether we are hospitable or inhospitable to the classroom or "house" (Smith 2018). Also, truth and relationships, built with rapport, are the two strands of DNA for transformative learning (Erdvig 2021). Therefore, an administrator will want to include in the hiring process the value of intentionality in building rapport with students. Questions that should be asked during the interview might include: "What are ways that you seek to foster rapport in your classroom?" "If you could use a metaphor to describe your classroom, what would it be?" "What particular practices do you think help to build intentional rapport with your students?" "Describe a time you struggled to connect with a student … how did you seek to connect?"

Also, providing a mentoring program for teachers who struggle to build rapport with students could be helpful. Offering these opportunities builds confidence in trying new practices and strategies to help build rapport (Weimer 2010). Finally, the six practices that were found to be significant in this study could provide the foundation for a K-12 rapport workshop, to be conducted for enhancing intentionality in implementing these particular practices in the Christian school classroom. RiB

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Insights from Flourishing Schools Research

Last December, schools participating in the Flourishing Faith Initiative pilot study wrapped up administration of Flourishing Faith Index surveys. Altogether, 33 schools participated in the pilot. Twenty-nine of these schools are in the United States, while the remaining four are international schools. Roughly two thirds are covenantal (and one third missional) and two thirds are independent (and one third church-affiliated). The schools are broadly representative of ACSI membership by enrollment, tuition, and division. Altogether, nearly 10,000 students, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, board members, and alumni participated in the pilot study.

The ACSI Research team is engaged in data analysis and survey validation this spring. When the FFI is available, it will provide powerful insights for schools, particularly in the areas of biblical worldview and spiritual formation.

In this update, we share a preliminary finding from pilot analysis. Using experimental data from parent surveys, we find that parents most highly value spiritual formation when choosing a school (with stronger spiritual formation at a school increasing the likelihood a parent would select a school by 20 percentage points), followed by academic quality (roughly 18 percentage points). Tuition and extracurricular offerings were roughly similar, with lower levels of tuition increasing likelihood by 7 percentage points and more desirable extracurricular activities increasing likelihood by 6 percentage points. RiB