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Making Way for MILLENNIALS in LEADERSHIP

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"POSITION VACANT: School Principal. QUALIFICATIONS: Wisdom of a sage, vision of a Chief Executive Officer, intellect of a scholar, leadership of a point guard, compassion of a counselor, moral strength of a nun, courage of a firefighter, craft knowledge of a surgeon, political savvy of a senator, toughness of a soldier, listening skills of a blind man, humility of a saint, collaborative skills of an entrepreneur, certitude of a civil rights activist, charisma of a stage performer and patience of Job. SALARY: Lower than you might expect." (Copland 2001)

Over the past decade, I have researched the question of leadership and the differences that might occur among baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials as leaders of organizations. To this end, my research on the perceptions and aspirations of millennials to become principals of Christian schools involved 40 case-study interviews with aspiring leaders, as well as focus groups involving current principals and sector leaders. Additionally, a literature review was conducted into contemporary leadership models, generational differences, the principalship, and employment trends (Pampuch 2010). This research provides some important insights for school boards and leaders as they look for the next generation of principals and administrators.

Who Are the Millennials?

The millennials are the generation born between 1982 and 2000. Mackay (2007) claims Gen Y's attitude toward work has been shaped by two very different influences. On the one hand, they have entered the workforce at a point of almost unprecedented economic prosperity. On the other hand, they have also witnessed what happened to their parents

during the economic recessions of the '90s and the new millennium. Salt (2007) claims that these influences have led to clear preferences for tribal structures. Their friends, parents, and workmates are important points of reference and sources of information.

Millennials are twice as likely to live at home as previous generations. They also tend to postpone getting married, buying a house, and having children into their late twenties and thirties. These trends have had the effect of delaying the transition into the type of financial responsibility associated with asset and family protection. This shift in mores—along with a broadly benign global economic environment—has forged a generation that is unlike those of previous eras (Cole, Smith, and Lucas 2002).

Shortage of School Leaders

Coinciding with the emergence of millennials in the workforce, there has been a global decline in the number of applicants for educational leadership positions. In 2006, Ross reported that only four percent of teachers in the United Kingdom were actively seeking a principalship. This dearth is not limited to the UK, but has also been mirrored in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, and Singapore (DEST 2007; Williams 2003; Walker, Scott, and Cheng 2003; others). The reasons cited for not pursuing a school leadership position included:

- A lack of classroom engagement
- Poor media image
- Painful and substantial transition into the role of leaders
- Challenges being far greater than support offered
- Long hours
- High levels of stress, pressure, and conflict
- Significant family impact (which can contribute to divorce)
- Role complexity
- Lack of sufficient resources and authority
- Public disclosure of mistakes
- Need for relocation
- Immovable cultural values and norms
- Politics

Often, for millennial teachers, school leadership positions hold little attraction. What they have seen of the leader's role is negative, and there appear to be more viable career options outside of education. Leaders voicing their own frustrations deters younger staff. Additionally, many teachers want to remain in the classroom and not become a manager or administrator. Other millennials questioned the fairness and transparency of the promotion process (Neidhart and Carlin 2003). To this end, many educational authorities and sectors have raced to find solutions to this leadership succession problem.

The Impact of Perceptions on a Future Leader's Desire to Aspire

In line with the literature, the study I conducted found that there are very few millennials who are actively aspiring to leadership positions. Those who are currently in middle manager positions often feel they have arrived by "accident"—a need arose (or a crisis has occurred) that forced them to step into a leadership position. Most millennials, however, remain uninterested in administrative roles because of the perceptions noted above.

Another significant obstacle for many millennials is the perception that baby

boomers are blocking their progress—either intentionally or unintentionally. Some participants in the study felt that baby boomers were staying on longer in their positions due to the global financial crisis and the need to shore up their retirement. Others believed that baby boomers felt they had first rights for leadership positions because of their longer tenure, though their skills may not have been as strong as those of younger candidates. Many millennials felt that leadership roles were structured to suit an older generation, and lacked the currency for an emerging generation.

The Pathway to Leadership in Christian Schools

When discussing the pathway to leadership, many millennials in the study felt that there was limited documentation about the process or pathway to promotion, and that it was often poorly articulated by senior leaders in their schools.

Participants felt that to become a leader, they needed to be sponsored by an influential individual in their school, church, or sector. Certain principals and leaders were seen as "king makers," and determined whether aspirants would be successful. With the endorsement of a "king maker," individuals were more likely to be afforded leadership opportunities.

When selecting a school leader, millennials felt that there was a degree of social reproduction occurring. One quoted a board chair who said (when replacing a retiring principal): "We want just the same as the current guy, but 10 years younger." This selection style had the effect of creating a stable of potential applicants who were similar in age, gender, ethnicity, denomination, and social position to the incumbent.

Finally, millennials noted that securing a school head position required an individual to adhere to an apprenticeship model approach. To be considered for that role, one first had to be a deputy or assistant, dean, department head, and teacher. Non-traditional candidates who came from other occupations or industries, though having excellent leadership experience, would not be considered. Women were most impacted by this model, since at the exact time that promotion positions were being offered, many female aspirants left to begin families.

Needs of Millennial Leaders

Participants in the study stated that to attract a new generation of leadership, school leaders and administrators need to recognize that for millennials there are striking differences in terms of their needs and preferences in the workforce. They have a disregard for traditional hierarchical structures and are more team-focused. They are also more likely to enforce

firm boundaries around their work to achieve balance with family, leisure time, and relationships. They have a good work ethic, but often sheer quantity of hours at work (whether productive or not) was prized over fewer but more productive hours (i.e., "You had to appear to be suffering"). In terms of markers of success for millennials, more important than a promotion is the ability to try a range of activities and experiences, as they feel that "change is as good as a pay raise." For many millennials, a lifelong career in education will be replaced by a range of different careers in different professions, though they might come back to education if the experience was good.

When asked what they required for effective leadership preparation, many millennials in the study hoped that workplaces would develop a range of legitimate opportunities and experiences that prepare aspirants for the role. This was related to their desire for a supportive school environment where individuals could test their aptitude for leadership, and where they could experiment with different styles and models. Millennials also wanted their leaders to engage with them in ongoing professional dialogue about their career aspirations and professional development. Taken together, millennials want to be seen as more than just a commodity to be used by the school and desire to focus holistically on their health and well-being.

A New Model of Leadership

The literature and my research study indicate that a new model of leadership is required to attract and retain millennial leaders. Millennial leadership of the future will be characterised by four elements:

1. Diversity of Skills in Leadership Groups

The concept of a single leader in Christian schools needs to be reconceptualized to one that embraces wider notions of leadership diversity. To cope with the complexity and change within

the education sector, millennial leaders will need to surround themselves with a diverse group of specialized executives, deferring to others with the greatest level of skill and expertise necessary. Placement of a young aspirant in a narrow leadership model is likely to result in feelings of personal inadequacy, role overload—and in some cases—role abandonment.

2. A Density (Abundance) of Leaders

Additionally, discrete areas of responsibility need to be replaced by dense leadership hubs. The ability to form a high density of multiple leadership roles emerged from the study as having the power to potentially sustain the leader and transform the organization. The findings of the study indicate that a dense leadership hub would also serve as a vital mechanism, alleviating millennials' feelings of isolation and entrapment. By making fellow leaders a part of the inner circle, a leader's health and well-being could be sustained for the long term.

3. Deep Relationships Among Leaders

The findings of the study also indicate that deeply developed relationships could be utilized by millennials to deal with societal changes and technological advancement; uncertainty and change could be overcome by trust, mutual respect, and support. Additionally, these relationships could also be used to break down social and cultural barriers, and bring about a more inclusive school culture.

4. Comfortable with Dissention with (or Moving Away from) Traditional Leadership Styles and Practices

Finally, for such change to occur, school boards and leaders will need to be comfortable with periods of ambiguity, while established practices are replaced by more contemporary ones. In particular, Christian school boards and leaders will need to encourage a form of dissent from established models that allows experimentation and the trial of new practices. The findings indicate that such dissent from established practices has the potential to engage millennials, and provide a new style of leader for our Christian schools in the future.

Final Thoughts

The role of school leaders is becoming more complex as societal expectations deepen, and both external and internal demands for accountability increase. The sentiments of the opening job advertisement at the beginning of this post (Copland

2001) are a reality for all leaders, not just millennials. However, by seriously considering the needs of this emerging group of leaders, Christian schools and their boards have the opportunity to consider changes that will support and assist all leaders in their work—no matter their age, gender, ethnicity, or level of experience. The role of the leader is extremely important for the success of the Christian school both as an educational institution and as a community of believers. Changing expectations and increased demands must be met with thoughtfully redeveloped models of leadership for the success of our current leaders, and for those to come. RiB

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Ideas for Application

- Gather your leadership team to discuss how your school is supporting millennial leaders—either those who are currently in leadership or who might take on leadership roles in the near future.
- Develop a plan for the coming school year to be more intentional in this effort.
- Start by asking, "If our our school were to be known as a supportive place for young leaders, what would our leadership culture need to look like?"

Professional Development for Christian School Educators and Leaders:
Frameworks and Best Practices

LYNN E. SWANER

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Professional development opportunities are nearly universal in the experiences of U.S. educators, both in public school settings and in Christian schools (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Finn, Swezey and Warren 2010). Nationwide spending on professional development (PD) totals billions of dollars, which makes PD for educators "big business" (Hill 2009). Yet, despite the sizeable investment of time and resources, teachers generally report dissatisfaction with PD experiences, particularly with short-term workshops, which comprise the majority of PD offerings (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). Moreover, both practitioners and researchers are uncertain as to what constitutes effective PD. According to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2011), even after nearly five decades of research, "Parsing the strengths and weaknesses of the vast array of programs that purport to invest in teachers' knowledge and skills continues to be a challenge" (1).

In an effort to address this issue systematically, and for the field of Christian education, a literature synthesis—involving extensive searches of the academic literature and analysis of over 500 studies and documents—was conducted, with the following guiding question: "What are the best frameworks and practices in professional development for Christian school teachers and leaders?"

To answer this question, this synthesis organizes findings from the literature into four distinct lines of investigation: 1) mapping the landscape of PD in the U.S. (including history, models, conceptual frameworks, and PD in Christian schools); 2) examining the evidence for program components (such as content focus, active learning, and duration) that may contribute to PD effectiveness; 3) reviewing the research base for a number of specific PD practices; and 4) summarizing the research on PD for school leaders.

The Professional Development Landscape

In surveying the landscape of PD programs and related research, three broad time periods can be identified over the last five decades. In the first, the school restructuring era (from the 1960s to the mid-1990s), federal legislation provided funding for PD as a means of improving schools to produce better student outcomes. Schools imported PD methods directly from the business world during this period, which resulted in a prevalence of training workshops, conferences, and train-the-trainer approaches, all of which are categorized in the literature as "standardized PD" (Hooker 2008; Gaible and Burns 2005). PD effectiveness was typically evaluated by measuring teacher satisfaction with PD experiences, with little attention paid to the outcomes of PD for teacher practice or student achievement.

In the "reform" era (Stewart 2014; Desimone 2009), from the mid-1990s until approximately 2010, legislation continued to shape the PD terrain by calling for more job-embedded PD forms such as coaching and mentoring, along with evaluation of programs based on gains in student achievement. The growth of adult learning theory during this time also bolstered and provided a conceptual base for these "site-based" forms of PD (Hooker 2008; Gaible and Burns 2005), by suggesting that teachers learn best by integrating experience, reflection and action in an iterative cycle (Kolb 1984, 1999; Hutchings and Wutzdorff 1998); focusing on authentic problems of practice through reflection-in-action (Schön 1987; Garvin 2000); engaging in learning that not only impacts practice but also transforms professional identity (Mezirow 1991); and learning from and alongside colleagues in the social context of schools (Wenger 1998). Online PD formats became more prevalent as Internet use expanded, which offered new opportunities for "self-directed PD" (Hooker 2008; Gaible and Burns 2005) as educators participated in webinars, online discussion groups, and virtual learning communities. During this time period the role of school leaders began to shift as well, away from managerial and operational functions toward instructional leadership. Finally, research methodologies focused on specific components or features of PD experiences that might contribute to their effectiveness, along with evaluating program impact on student achievement (particularly in urban and low-performing schools).

The most recent period, from 2010 until the present, is

> *"Some research suggests that the success of PD efforts is not dependent on the specific formulation of PD, but rather is directly linked to the presence of a school-wide orientation toward continuous improvement."*

termed by this synthesis the accountability era. With the inception of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, PD across the country moved toward training teachers in CCSS implementation and related assessment (Hill, Beisiegel and Jacob 2013). Additionally, in the wake of the 2008 recession and reduced PD funding, the demand for cost-efficient approaches to staff development has grown stronger. Taken together, CCSS implementation and budgetary constraints may be contributing factors as to why less expensive, short-term workshops still seem to predominate the PD landscape (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009), even though job-embedded forms of PD were widely heralded during the preceding era. Overall, the present period—inclusive of the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) at the federal level—is marked by increased pressure on schools by states, the federal government, and the public to be accountable for both student outcomes and instructional expenditures. Thus while the search for effective PD has characterized each of the preceding eras, the pressure to identify PD opportunities with high return on investment (ROI)—now almost exclusively measured by student achievement gains—is more urgent than ever.

While not operating under the same constraints as public schools, private schools have not been isolated from these developments over time. Though there are very few empirical studies of PD in Christian schools specifically, what exists suggests that such PD mirrors the larger landscape in American education. Survey research from different parts of the U.S. confirms that in-service workshops still predominate in Christian school PD efforts, and that more collaborative and reflective forms of PD are least available to teachers (Headley 2003; Finn, Swezey and Warren 2010; Neuzil and Vaughn 2010). Additionally, Montoro (2013) found that PD in a sample of Christian schools did not fully meet the standards of the National Staff Development Council [2001, which are now the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward 2011)], and that progress is needed in providing more active, collaborative, and content-specific PD. Finally, leaders in Christian education have reported that most teachers and administrators in Christian schools remain skeptical of educational research, and are not as engaged in reform efforts as their counterparts in other educational settings (Boerema 2011). Taken together, the research suggests there is room for improvement in PD experiences in Christian school settings.

Research on Professional Development Components

From the mid-1990s until approximately 2010, during the "reform" era of PD, substantial research was conducted to identify "a core set of features of effective professional development" (Desimone 2009, p.181) that could be built into any PD practice (whether workshops, coaching, mentoring, and so forth) and thereby bolster its effectiveness. Five such components, all proposed and supported by adult learning theory, figure prominently in the literature:

1. **Content focus**, or a PD focus on the specific academic subject matter taught by teachers;
2. **Active learning**, which is the opposite of teachers passively listening to or watching a presentation of information;
3. **Coherence**, which most frequently is described as PD alignment with school, district, and state reform initiatives;
4. **Duration**, or longer time span as well as greater total number of hours spent in PD; and
5. **Collective participation**, which entails grouping teachers who work together within the school for PD activities.

Utilizing teacher self-report data, analyses of several large-scale teacher surveys provided substantial evidence that these components were linked with PD effectiveness (Garet et al. 2001; Desimone et al. 2002). The findings of these studies were correlational in nature, however, and did not provide causal data. Additionally, other research that examined outcomes like student achievement resulted in mixed findings, as did evaluations of PD programs that were designed using the above five components (Hill, Beisiegel and Jacob 2013). Other concerns with this line of research involve questions of whether *other* components might be equally if not more important for PD effectiveness (e.g., facilitators' skills, teacher identity), or whether a tipping point exists where enough of one component or the addition of other components creates an effective PD experience (Desimone 2009).

While component-based research is therefore not conclusive, nor does it provide "sufficient specificity" from which to design PD programs (Wayne et al. 2008, p.470), it does offer some "basic principles for designing professional learning that school and district leaders and policymakers would be well advised to consider" (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009, p.9). In addition to their substantial face validity and endorsements from teacher self-report data, these components are sufficiently correlated with PD effectiveness to warrant their consideration as guidelines for designing PD programs.

Specific PD Formats and Practices

This literature synthesis also involved extensive and iterative searches of the literature for specific PD practices addressed most frequently in research. This process resulted in identifying the following seven broad categories of PD practices:

- **Direct delivery approaches**, which are short-term experiences like workshops, seminars, and conferences, and are often held off-site and facilitated by outside experts;
- **Intensive institutes**, or PD experiences with longer duration (e.g., a summer institute, or yearlong seminar course) that are frequently offered through a university-school partnership and are most common in science and mathematics;
- **Professional learning communities (PLCs)**, which are a collaborative approach to structuring teaching and learning at a school (e.g., through teacher groups, team meetings, group study) and often include a combination of other site-based approaches;
- **Coaching and mentoring**, which involve the pairing of two teachers (typically of unequal experience), with the purpose of supporting the teacher in need of improvement and/or help in implementing new instructional methods;
- **New teacher induction**, or systematic programs for orienting new teachers in a school, which commonly feature mentoring by a more experienced teacher;
- **Inquiry-based PD**, including the specific practices of action research, problem-based learning (PBL), lesson study, and video-based PD, each of which engages teachers in collaborative inquiry on instruction; and
- **Online formats**, which include synchronous courses and workshops, asynchronous webinars, online mentoring and coaching, virtual professional learning communities (VPLCs), and PD for instructional technology integration.

A tremendous diversity in both program formulation and study methodologies exists for each of these practices. This is particularly the case for online formats, which can be considered more of a "delivery format" than a specific PD approach (Fishman et al. 2013) since each of the other six PD practices have been translated into online settings. Further, schools often combine two or more practices to formulate a PD program (for example, workshops plus coaching), making it difficult to disaggregate the impact of a single practice that is part of a larger PD "package."

The literature provides some supportive evidence of impact for each specific practice. Thought there was variance in the strength of evidence from study to study, across the research for all seven approaches, substantial evidence was found that PD participation led to positive gains in teachers' content knowledge. This was particularly true in the fields of science and mathematics, which were the most frequently studied in the literature. Additionally, all seven practices have been shown to elicit changes in teachers' instructional practice, though evidence for this outcome is not as consistent or strong as for teacher knowledge.

However, far less is known about the impact of these practices on student achievement, for a number of reasons. First, fewer studies explicitly examined student outcomes as a result of PD participation. Second, for those studies that did measure student achievement and identified a positive impact of PD,

the effect size of that impact was often weak or not sufficiently isolated from other possible contributing variables to be conclusive. Finally, some studies that examined student achievement found mixed results from teachers' participation, or found no relationship at all. When considering the impact of PD on student achievement, the literature does not provide enough information on which "program models which are most effective… the need for further research on the subject is apparent" (Hanover Research 2012, p.13).

School Leadership

Drago-Severson (2009) describes the challenging educational context in which school leaders currently work, and asks a key question: "Educators are expected to lead in ways in which they were never taught to lead and they themselves have never experienced. How can we help each other to develop the capacities needed to lead through the complex demands of teaching and learning?" (11). In an attempt to answer this question, this synthesis examined the literature on PD for four types of school leaders: heads of school; principals; teacher leaders; and school boards.

While there is substantial evidence in the literature that school leaders have a significant impact on teachers' experiences and student achievement (Marzano, Waters and McNulty 2005), there is a pronounced lack of research on effective PD for these four groups. This literature synthesis found much the same as Spanneut, Tobin and Ayers (2011), who assert, "Compared to the literature and research about the professional development

of teachers, less information existed about school leaders' professional development" (3). The literature on heads of school, principals, teacher leaders, and school boards reveals that systematic PD opportunities appear to be few and far between for each, and what research exists on PD programs is primarily descriptive in nature with little to no evaluation (Orr 2007; Teitel 2006). Although calls for training and recommendations for PD formulations are issued in the literature, these tend to come in the form of advice from seasoned practitioners as opposed to empirical research (Land 2002).

While research on effective PD for school leaders is largely absent from the literature, there are a number of needs assessment studies that provide data regarding school leaders' PD needs. School leaders consistently rank **instructional leadership** as their primary developmental concern; this was found to be the case for heads of school (Spanneut, Tobin and Ayers 2011), principals (Spanneut, Tobin and Ayers 2012; Whalstrom et al. 2010), and school boards (Seiler et al. 2010). Further, while published studies on effective PD for Christian school leaders are virtually nonexistent, the literature suggests that **spiritual leadership** is an important additional responsibility beyond the typical duties of school leaders in other settings (Banke, Maldonado and Lacey 2012; Keenan et al. 2007; Lowrie and Lowrie 2004). More PD opportunities for school leaders that address these needs, as well as systematic evaluation of those experiences, are needed before it becomes clearer what constitutes effective on-the-job learning for school leaders.

PD Effectiveness and Cultures of Improvement

While this synthesis reviewed research on components of effective PD, as well as specific PD practices for teachers and school leaders, an important question arises from the literature regarding the school cultures in which these practices

are situated. Some research suggests that the success of PD efforts is not dependent on the specific formulation of PD, but rather is directly linked to the presence of a school-wide orientation toward continuous improvement. This view does not limit PD to a single practice or even a collection of practices, but rather views PD as part of a larger approach to reshape the underlying values of the school community (The New Teacher Project 2015; Deal and Peterson 2010).

In order for schools to conduct PD within a cultural context of continuous improvement, this synthesis proposes the concept of a professional development system. Such a system has the following five key elements or process steps:

1. **An instructional culture audit**, which entails a cross-constituency review of current processes, practices, and outcomes relative to instruction, and that identifies instructional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT);
2. **Strategic planning for instruction**, which is based on results of the instructional culture audit and includes goal setting, targeted outcomes, and metrics for success, with the aim of developing a multi-year plan that is tied to overall institutional strategic planning and incorporates resource allocation (time, personnel, funding);
3. **PD alignment**, in which PD is matched with the goals of instructional strategic planning to develop a web of PD practices (reflecting sufficient content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation) and involving all members of the school community;
4. **Mechanisms for monitoring, feedback, and evaluation**, that are consistent, involve multiple school stakeholders, and utilize diverse measures to assess impact on targeted outcomes; and
5. **Supporting instructional leadership**, which includes orienting school leadership around envisioning, coordinating, managing, and leading the instructional culture.

PROCESS STEP/ ELEMENT	GOAL	STRATEGIES
Instructional Culture Audit	*Know your culture*	Cross-constituency SWOT analysis; needs assessment
Strategic Planning for Culture Development	*Be intentional*	Multi-year plan with goals, outcomes, metrics for success, anticipated resources, challenges
PD Alignment	*Develop your faculty*	A diverse "web" of PD opportunities that are aligned with strategic plan, reflect effective practices in adult learning, and engage all school constituents
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback	*Track successes and make adjustments*	Develop mechanisms for gauging success and improving the process (i.e. school-level action research; developmental evaluation)
Supporting Instructional Leadership	*Equip leadership*	Orient leaders' roles around shaping the instructional culture; provide for PD for instructional leaders

Regarding this fifth element of a PD system, formal PD opportunities for instructional leaders are rare (Orr 2007; Teitel 2006). To successfully support these leaders, schools and professional organizations must develop what this synthesis terms PD for instructional leaders, to lead instructional PD. In other words, school leaders are in need of specific development opportunities in which they can learn how to better lead PD efforts at their own schools. Research suggests that school leaders' capacities for leading such PD is positively linked with better instructional outcomes (Moore and Kochan 2013; Moore et al. 2011).

While many Christian schools face financial challenges in funding PD, they also have the flexibility and freedom to set the priorities of staff development according to their unique goals and needs. In this sense, Christian schools, like many charter schools, are more nimble than public school districts when it comes to making decisions regarding PD. While a smaller budget may prevent some schools from inviting costly presenters or sending teachers and leaders to intensive institutes, it does not preclude schools from developing a coherent professional development system as outlined above (many of

the proposed elements and process steps of such a system have little to no cost, beyond allocation of time). Such a system will help schools to strategically invest PD resources in ways that will have the most ROI for teacher and student outcomes. **RiB**

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Ideas for Application

- Together with the instructional leaders in your school, review and discuss the professional development system proposed at the end of this article.
- What elements do you already have in place, and what else might you want to implement?
- For the coming school year, consider how your team could work to improve or enhance PD as part of a larger instructional culture.

The Heart of Education
## The Relational Schools Project—An Australian Perspective

DARREN ISELIN

In seeking to undertake one of the largest research projects conducted of its kind, Christian Schools Australia (CSA) commissioned a study, in collaboration with the Relational Schools Foundation (RSF) and its director Dr. Rob Loe (relationalschools.org), to investigate and analyze the quality and impact of student-student, student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships within Australian Christian Schools. The research adopted the Relational Proximity Framework (RPF)—a validated survey tool from RSF that provides empirical data on how well one person engages with the thinking, emotions, and behavior of another person. The RPF measures the levels

of "relational proximity," which is defined as a measure of the distance in the relationship between two people across five domains: encounter; storyline; knowledge; fairness; and alignment.

To achieve relational proximity requires that high levels of the five "domains" are present. These domains, their drivers and their subsequent emphases and expressions are outlined the table on the following page.

The RPF was designed out of a belief that relationships are the building blocks of all communities and organizations. If
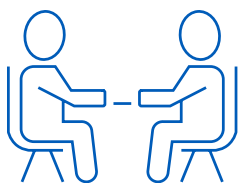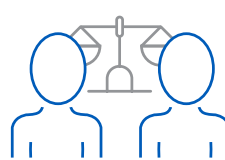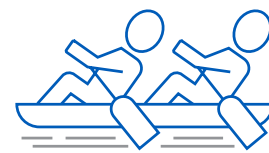
| Encounter | Storyline | Knowledge | Fairness | Alignment |

there are effective ways of analyzing those building blocks, organizations can measure and then cultivate healthy relational communities.

RSF Research Project Survey

The assessment of relationships in CSA schools in Australia utilized the RSF survey, a 60-item questionnaire with additional questions to measure student well-being. Data was gathered across 17 Christian schools from Australia and nearly 11,000 surveys were completed. Standardized testing data (NAPLAN) was also collected and was used to determine any causal links between relational proximity, well-being, and academic performance. In total, there were over one million lines of data that were analyzed within this landmark research project.

Project Findings

The research findings arising from the Relational Schools Project were significant in both scope and quality. The level of relational proximity within Australian Christian schools was very high. The findings highlighted a distinct "Christian Schools Effect" whereby children who went to Christian schools were likely to experience higher levels of relational proximity. This effect was consistent across all CSA schools and was particularly prevalent in multicultural and indigenous contexts.

Well-Being and Attainment

The project findings also identified a correlation between the level of student academic performance and high levels of relational proximity within a school community. (See Figure 1 on the next page).

The graph highlights that students with high levels of educational academic attainment are those who self-report relationships that are nurturing, supportive, and rewarding. Conversely, there is a correlation between those individuals with low academic attainment and an increased likelihood of expressing lower self-esteem and social disconnection. Such well-being results demonstrate the benefits of a strong relational school culture and reinforce the value of identifying students who may be struggling, in order to assist them in developing and sustaining strong relationships with others.

Areas for Improvement

The findings also identified that there were some students whose experience of relationships in Christian schools was not positive. There were challenges identified relating to gender, parental separation, and school size, which CSA schools can purposefully address and improve.

The issues of parental separation and family dysfunction are pressing societal issues that require schools to support parents. A promising means of such support may be engaging parents in relationships education, which can potentially

DOMAINS of Relational Proximity	DRIVERS of Relational Proximity	FEATURE of Relationship	EXPERIENCE in Relationships	OUTCOME for Organization
Those of…	Greater…	Creates…	Encouraging…	and Producing…
Communication	Directness	Encounter	Connectedness	Communication
Time	Continuity	Storyline	Belonging	Momentum
Knowledge	Multiplexity	Knowledge	Mutual understanding	Transparency
Power	Parity	Fairness	Mutual respect	Participation
Purpose	Commonality	Alignment	Shared identity	Synergy

benefit the level of relational proximity for both parents and students.

Gender is an increasingly important issue within contemporary society. The analysis of the data by gender identified that younger male students may need more support in relationship building, and by their senior year female students may also be feeling less proximity to others. Pastors, educators, and parents who are purposefully caring for students and helping them develop relational skills should consider these gender-specific developmental needs and priorities.

The findings also confirmed that school size has a significant impact on student relationships. Compared to one class per grade level, having a second class of a grade level reduces relational proximity by 8%, and a third class reduces it further by 4%. Therefore, large schools need to be highly purposeful regarding relationships and actively seek ways to promote relational proximity as schools grow to include multiple classes per grade level.

Figure 1 Correlation of Student Well-Being and Academic Attainment

Conclusion

It has been said that at the heart of education, is an education of the heart. Christian schools exist to create flourishing communities where children, from all backgrounds, feel like they belong. What is evident from this landmark research is that for many students and staff working in Christian schools within Australia, a sense of relational proximity, well-being, and belonging is strong, and the impact of these relational communities is critical in shaping and promoting positive school learning experiences.

Relationships lie at the heart of CSA member schools' mission and values. The findings of the Relational School Project reveal a story of infusion of student well-being, belonging, and engagement within healthy school communities. The findings of the Relational School Project confirm the importance of relational proximity, as well as affirm the value of the survey instrument in understanding the capacity for impact of relational proximity in Christian school communities.

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Ideas for Application

- Develop a yearlong focus or theme on relationship-building among school constituents (for example, student-to-student, teacher-to-student, administrator-to-teacher, staff-to-parent, parent-to-student).
- Think of ways to gather information from constituents on their relational needs and ideas for how these relationships can be improved.
- In planning out the year, consider connecting with area pastors, counselors, mediators, and other community resources to provide equipping and support.

Insights from Doctoral Research

Is There a Difference Between School Board Members' and Heads of School's Perceptions of Effective Christian School Board Governance?

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Both the school board and the head of school have a vested interest in how effective a Christian school board is in its governance role. A partnership between both entities is needed to ensure that the Christian school adheres to its mission and vision in principle and in operation. However, the operational functions of the head of school and the governing functions of school boards may contribute to different perspectives of the board's effectiveness on the part of both heads and boards. The frequency of head of school turnover, as well as issues that lead to closure of Christian schools, provide compelling reasons to investigate the question of whether perceptions of board governance effectiveness may differ between board members and heads of school.

Research Purpose and Method

Holland, Chait, and Taylor (1989) conducted research to identify the competencies of effective non-profit boards with the goal of establishing a theoretical framework for board effectiveness. Their framework resulted in the identification of six board competencies: contextual; educational; interpersonal; analytical; political; and strategic. An assessment tool, the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ), was developed out of their research. Smoley (1999) conducted research specific to public school boards, which resulted in a revision of the BSAQ instrument. His research resulted in the development of a Model for School Board Effectiveness that defined six actions of effective school boards: making decisions; functioning as a group; exercising authority; connecting with the community; working toward board improvement; and acting strategically.

This study used the Christian School Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (CSBSAQ) constructed by the researcher and adapted from the work of Smoley (1999) and Chait, Holland and Taylor (1989). The CSBSAQ instrument included language specific to Christian schools and Christian school boards and included three qualifying questions, 73 four-point Likert scale questions comprised of school board actions related to the Model of School Board Effectiveness, and ten demographic questions.

The target population for this study was the heads of school and their school board members from the eight regions of ACSI member schools in the United States. The ACSI Research Department endorsed the study and electronically distributed the CSBSAQ to approximately 2,500 ACSI member schools. The resulting sample was composed of 328 respondents, including 187 heads of school and 141 school board members. Fifty percent of the board members surveyed had served in their role for less than four years, while 32% of heads of school have served less than four years and 33% served more than 12 years in their respective roles. Fifty-six percent of heads of school and 32% of school board members participated in formal school board training.

Findings

Study findings indicated that there indeed was a statistical difference between the total mean scores of school board members and heads of school in their answers. The analysis indicated that school board members had a higher perception of board effectiveness overall in their answers than heads of school.

Further, the analysis revealed a statistically significant differences—with the majority of school board members having higher perceptions than heads of school—in the areas of perceptions of making decisions, working toward board improvement, functioning as a group, connecting with community, exercising authority, and acting strategically.

The demographic data gathered in this study indicated statistical significance in two areas: board training and length of service of the respondents.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that heads of school consistently perceive their school boards as less effective than school board members themselves perceive their boards. This

suggests a degree of disharmony between the perceptions of these different leaders of Christian schools.

The larger number of heads of school with board training experience may play a role in their consistently lower board effectiveness scores. Moreover, the lack of training experience of school board members may likewise be a contributing factor to their greater perception of their board effectiveness.

This difference of perception could potentially have a negative impact on the functioning of the school board in all areas of its governance, as well as the relationship between the board and the head of school. For heads of school, this might contribute to unmet expectations, lack of feeling of support and trust, and head of school turnover. Ultimately, differences in perceptions of effective school board governance threaten the partnership necessary between school board members and heads of schools as they lead Christian schools in their roles. RiB

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Question to Consider

Might you and your board have differing perspectives on the board's effectiveness, and if so, how can you productively work to bridge that gap?

The Headmaster as Pastor: Examining the Pastoral Leadership of Evangelical Christian Heads of School

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Healthy and vital Christian schools depend on strong leadership. Effective Christian school leaders have a compelling vision for their school, are able to evaluate their schools' programs and personnel to ensure they are aligned with the schools' core values and mission, competently lead in designing and implementing strong strategic plans, and nimbly assemble and train robust and effective leadership teams (McGee 2012). In a Christian school, caring for school culture requires that heads focus attention on the school's spiritual health. Heads of Christian schools set the spiritual tone of their schools, similarly to how a pastor serves as the cultural leader of a congregation.

Research Purpose and Method

Overall, there is little scholarly research of any kind on the particular work of the Christian school head (Beckman, Drexler and Eames 2012). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover the ways that heads of Christian schools lead pastorally within the school community and how their pasto-

> **"The heads of school in the study provided pastoral leadership to their schools through the classic pastoral functions of proclaiming, caring, and equipping."**

ral leadership affects school outcomes and helps form school culture. Three schools were chosen for study: one from the south-central United States; one from the southern part of the country; and one from the Midwest. The heads of school and their constituents were chosen from schools that were members of one of two evangelical Christian schools organizations: the Council on Educational Standards and Accountability (CESA) and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). Some diversity was ensured by choosing within the three sites one female head of school and two male heads of school, as well as one church-affiliated school and two independent schools.

After the heads and their schools were selected, the heads selected constituents within their schools to participate in the study. The participants at each school included one board member, two teachers, one non-faculty senior staff member, one school parent, and one senior student. The heads intentionally selected participants who would present different voices and perspectives and who were also familiar with the head's leadership. The researcher then personally visited each of the three sites and conducted interviews with each of the 21 participants in the study over the course of five months, and obtained digital copies of documents such as blogs, newsletters, commencement addresses, chapel speeches, and other communications from the head of school at each site. A cross-case analysis was conducted to identify commonalities and themes that transcended the cases.

Findings

The heads of school in the study provided pastoral leadership to their schools through the classic pastoral functions of proclaiming, caring, and equipping. The heads proclaimed the mission, vision, and values of the school by tying God's Word and the school mission into everyday aspects of leading: writings and speaking opportunities; using annual themes containing scriptural or symbolic language to focus and unify school families for the year; and contextualizing God's Word to school events and happenings, showing that God's Word spoke to all of life and reflecting a biblical worldview. The heads incarnationally lived out their school values through their daily life and walk, serving as role models and their schools' chief representative. They also used phrases, stories, symbols, and traditions with common meaning to proclaim their schools' missions.

The heads of school provided pastoral care to school community members, care that served to connect community members with the vision and values. They demonstrated pastoral care through their physical presence, communicating value through physical engagement by showing up to school events and gatherings, as well as being present to support families in times of need. Heads of school also used the student discipline process as a type of shepherding, seeing discipline as discipleship, rather than as punishment or intended solely for behavior modification.

Finally, the heads exercised pastoral leadership through equipping school constituents to serve the school community. Heads poured most of their energies into senior leadership team members, so that those leaders could, in turn, serve their teachers and students. Yet, when possible, heads also took a personal hand in preparing faculty through training and modeling and sought out relationships with individual students, encouraging students' spiritual growth.

Discussion

The study showed that heads intentionally led pastorally to promote several important purposes within their school communities. First, pastoral leadership projected care and concern for school community members. This projection of care built rapport and trust with school constituents, and evoked biblical images of humility, compassion, and empathy. Heads also exerted pastoral leadership to align people with school mission and values. The heads modeled the biblical worldview perspectives their schools promoted, and reiterated their schools' missions to reinforce the schools' faith value proposition in constituents' minds; these functions provided stability and spiritual grounding within the school family. Finally, heads exercised pastoral leadership in order to model the distinctively Christian ethos of their schools, creating an attractive climate and culture characterized by effective learning and gospel living.

Pastoral leadership yielded very real outcomes on school quality, primarily through culture. To the person, heads and their constituents—whether parents, students, or teachers—characterized their schools' cultures as loving, open, excellent, and caring. They believed these cultures were cultivated and fostered by the head of school through leadership described as pastoral. School community members believed these cultures not only glorified God by reflecting gospel community, but also created emotionally and spiritually safe environments where students tried harder academically, were likely to take educational risks, ask questions, and express academic and social confidence. These nurturing environments also appeared to create cultures of collaboration and a growth mindset among adults, leading to high work quality.

Notably, none of the heads of school studied had any formal pastoral training, despite how mission critical pastoral leadership was to their work. Even though mentoring from more senior heads of school, on-the-job training, and the ordinary trials of life served as equipping functions in this study, pastoral leadership in Christian school is too important to leave to chance. This points to the need for leadership programs to address pastoral leadership in intentional ways. ᴿⁱᴮ

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Question to Consider

Reflecting on your own leadership style and practices, how can you more intentionally engage in the three pastoral functions (proclaiming, caring, and equipping) identified in this research?

School Culture and Retention
in Private Schools

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Private school enrollment has steadily declined over the last 15 years (Kena et al. 2016). Enrollment decline has closed many private schools and threatens the sustainability of many more (Hunt, McGovern and Taylor 2016). Many factors may lead to a family choosing to leave a school. While many fac-

tors are outside the control of the school, schools must effectively address factors that are within their control. Some areas generally within the school's control fall under the category of school culture, which has been shown in the literature to have an impact on many areas of the school including teach-

er retention, student achievement, character development, peer and faculty relationships, institutional commitment, and student connectedness.

Research Purpose and Method

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there is a positive correlation between school culture and student retention in private schools. The primary instrument utilized in the study was the School Culture Survey (SCS), developed by S.W. Gruenert (1998) as part of his doctoral dissertation and which has been used hundreds of times to measure school culture with high levels of validity and reliability. The SCS is a 35-question, five-point Likert-scale survey that has six sub factors: Collaborative Leadership; Teacher Collaboration; Professional Development; Unity of Purpose; Collegial Support; and Learning Partnership.

The sample for this study included private Christian schools that serve grades K-12 with an enrollment of at least 300 students. Participants were recruited by sending an email request to a total of 552 private Christian schools. Requests were sent to 52 schools associated with the Council of Educational Standards and Accountability (CESA) and 500 member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). Thirty-one schools that agreed to participate attained at least 40% participation by their faculty in completing the SCS and provided their retention data as requested. The 31 private Christian schools were spread across 17 states. Enrollments of the participating schools ranged from 300 students to 1,435 students, with an average enrollment of 598 students. In total, 1,026 faculty and counselors fully completed the SCS. The head of school at each private Christian school also provided the student retention information based on student enrollment during both years of the study (2016-2017 and 2017-2018).

Findings

Descriptive statistics were computed as a component of the study. First, the retention rates of participating schools were calculated as ranging from 76% to 97% with a mean retention rate of 90%. Next, the six factors on the SCS ranged from a mean score of 3.56 for collaborative leadership to 4.17 for unity of purpose, which suggests a generally favorable impression of school culture.

A linear regression was conducted of the overall the SCS score and student retention. Overall, a very small but positive correlation was demonstrated between school culture and student retention in all 31 participating schools, and measured at an adjusted $r^2=0.09$, meaning that 9% of the observed variance in school retention can be ascribed to differences in school culture. Each of the six sub-factors of school culture showed a small but positive correlation with student retention in the 31 participating schools, though not reaching the threshold of statistical significance.

Discussion

This study identified a positive though small relationship between school culture and student retention in private Christian

schools. Even considering the complexity of student retention in private schools, a higher correlation was anticipated from the research. The literature indicates there are many factors beyond school culture that can impact retention that were not accounted for in this study, such as affordability, individual needs of students, family relocation, and facilities. Future studies of school culture and student retention should account for these and other variables. Additionally, including parent and student feedback about school culture and the educational environment would benefit future research, as this study was limited to data collected from faculty and school counselors.

School leaders are fighting for the sustainability of their schools. To maintain a healthy enrollment, school leaders must seek not only to increase the matriculation of new students, but also to ensure the retention of current students. While further research is needed to understand the landscape of school culture and its impact on enrollment in Christian schools, elements of school culture should be considered when developing a schoolwide retention strategy. RiB

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Question to Consider

How can you factor in school culture as part of your school's overall retention strategy?

Cardus Education Survey (CES)
U.S. 2018 Data Unpacked for ACSI

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Talking to graduates is the best way to measure the difference that Christian schooling makes. Cardus Education has been doing this for nearly a decade via the Cardus Education Survey (CES) in North America. Using a nationally representative sample of 1,500 25-39 year-olds, the CES compares the academic, religious and spiritual, social, and political outcomes of independent non-religious schools, independent Protestant Evangelical schools, and independent Catholic school graduates to those of public school graduates. CES results have consistently pointed to Christian school graduates having a distinctive graduate outcomes profile, particularly when it comes to their religious and spiritual formation.

ACSI supported the 2018 administration of the CES and is pleased to provide this unpacking of 2018 data, developed by Cardus for ACSI member schools. This summary focuses on the data for Protestant Evangelical school graduates compared to their public-school counterparts. Note that CES uses sophisticated statistical controls to screen for parental religiosity and other socioeconomic factors; thus, differences noted are attributable to the type of school attended.

Attainment and Work

Christian schools hope to offer an expansive counter-story about the fullness of the "good life" when it is lived out in God's story. Academic attainment and vocational readiness are only a part, but an important part, of what schools do. At the sector level, there is little or no statistical difference between public school graduates and Protestant Evangelical school graduates on most attainment and work measures. However, the following data points are worth highlighting.

- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are 60% less likely than a public-school graduate to have taken an AP or an IB course, as well as a physics or calculus class.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates spend the same number of years in post-secondary education as public-school graduates; however, they are more likely than a public schooler to obtain a BA or BS.

- If a Protestant Evangelical school graduate attends postsecondary education, they go on to finish a bachelor's degree, but they are less likely to continue and do an advanced degree (about half as likely to have a Masters, professional or Ph.D. degree as a public-school graduate).
- Protestant Evangelical school students are twice as likely as a public-school graduate to report that their school experience prepared them well for college and work.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are more likely to report that they want a job that fulfills their religious calling.
- Protestant Evangelical school students are much more likely to be employed in the health care system than public-school graduates (about 1.8 times more likely).

Religious and Spiritual Formation

For many, the distinctive formation of the religious and spiritual lives of young people is the whole point of Christian education. Three waves of survey data (2011, 2014 and 2018) consistently demonstrate that Christian school graduates have a distinctive religious and spiritual profile.

- Personal religiosity is very high among Protestant Evangelical school graduates; they are more likely to report conservative Christian beliefs than public school graduates and less likely to leave the faith.
- Protestant Evangelical graduates are four times as likely to view God as a person, and more likely to believe in the infallibility of the Bible and a six-day creation.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates report that their spirituality brings a feeling of fulfillment, and that they experience deep spiritual peace in the midst of problems and deep communion with God. They strongly agree with the view that everything, including suffering, is part of God's plan.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are more likely to hold traditional views of marriage and sexuality than graduates from other sectors.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are much more likely than Christian students graduating from a public school to say that they have a religious or moral obligation to regularly practice spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and Bible reading. This is reflected in more time spent in personal prayer, the reading of religious literature, and much higher rates of attendance at religious services.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates tithe regularly to religious and charitable causes. They are 1.5 times as likely to give financially to their congregation and more likely to donate to other religious organizations or causes than public-school graduates.

Social Ties and Political Engagement

Cardus measures how this distinctive religious and spiritual profile spills over into practices of civic virtue. The data does reveal a tension for Protestant Evangelical School graduates between their experience of strongly-connected religious community and isolation from the broader community.

- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are more likely than public school graduates to feel that culture is more hostile to their moral and spiritual values. The average Protestant Evangelical school graduate is less likely to trust the mass media, public school teachers and administrators, and scientists. However, Protestant Evangelical school graduates surveyed in 2018 are not as suspicious of the federal government as past cohorts.
- All religious school graduates (Catholic and Protestant) report having more friends who share their religion and who attend religious services. However, Protestant Evangelical school graduates are less likely to be closely tied to an atheist than are public schoolers, and they are also about half as likely to have at least one close tie who is gay or lesbian.
- There is no statistical difference between Protestant and public-school graduates in the racial and ethnic diversity of their friends.
- Protestant Evangelical school graduates are less likely than public-school graduates to be politically active, or to express an interest in politics or in international issues and global identities. They are also less likely to know an elected public official.
- Protestant and public-school graduates are just as likely to agree that science and religion are compatible.

On a final note, CES data has found remarkable similarities between school sectors on civic and political engagement in America. This refutes the myth that Protestant Evangelical school graduates are religious and political extremists. In fact, Evangelical Protestants are more likely to volunteer and give than public-school graduates (for more details, consult the in-depth 2017 Cardus report, *The Lasting Impact of High School on Giving and Volunteering*, by Jonathan Schwarz and David Sikkink). This evidence of love of neighbor is important, because it persists even against a backdrop of uncertainty among graduates around political participation and civic engagement.

To Learn More

During the fall of 2019, Cardus is releasing multiple reports on findings from the 2018 CES. Members are encouraged to visit the Cardus website to view additional reports from that data along with reports from prior years, at: https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/. RiB

ACSI FLOURISHING SCHOOL CULTURE INITIATIVE: RESEARCH UPDATE

SUMMER 2019

Background

How do Christian schools flourish? What elements of school culture contribute to flourishing, and do some elements matter more than others? Does flourishing look different across different schools—rather than a one-size-fits-all definition? Is there a roadmap to school flourishing that is backed by empirical research in Christian schools?

The answers to these questions matter for Christian schools to improve and grow—in teaching and learning, spiritual formation and discipleship, engaging and serving the community, and modeling leadership and best educational practice. A flourishing Christian school is a community of students, educators, and families that glorifies Christ, and that excels in knowing Him and making Him known. Though such a community happens entirely by His grace, it does not happen at all by accident.

Working with school leaders three years ago, ACSI developed the Formative-to-Flourishing Continuum, which has proven helpful to schools as a self-reflective tool—encouraging them to ask thoughtful questions about their culture and improvement trajectory. A year ago, ACSI Thought Leadership and Research set out on the next step in understanding school flourishing by exploring these questions systematically, through rigorous research on Christian school culture, using a new research tool—the Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI).

About the FSCI

Thanks to a generous grant by a private foundation, ACSI Thought Leadership and Research staff developed and launched the FSCI in Fall 2018. The FSCI is exploratory in nature, in that it tests a range of outcomes at three levels: students; leaders, faculty, and staff; and the school as an organization. The FSCI also draws upon a diverse set of inputs (i.e. educators' and leaders' practices, school programs and policies, and cultural elements).

In terms of survey construction, the FSCI:

- Is based upon the most recent research on school culture (not limited to Christian or private school settings, but encompassing all K-12 educational sectors). Over 500 research articles and scholarly books were included in a literature synthesis which has informed the instrument development process.
- Is also informed by an analysis of the expected student outcomes (ESOs) of over 60 Christian schools (with an emphasis on larger and/or well-established schools, from across the United States). This analysis of ESOs, along with those identified in the academic literature, has informed the range of outcomes to be tested by the instrument.
- Is designed as a 360-degree assessment, in which school leaders (administrators and board members), faculty and staff, school families, students in grades 6-12, and alumni participate in surveys.

The FSCI will inform a working model of school flourishing, based on the relationship between inputs and outcomes, the statistical strengths of those relationships, and the resulting profiles of schools and the different ways they may flourish. While the instrument will be predictive, it will not be prescriptive—rather, it will provide a rich picture of Christian school cultures, and identify those elements of culture that are most strongly correlated with student, educator, and organizational flourishing.

Results

Analysis of survey responses—numbering over 15,000—from a highly diverse sample of schools is currently underway. FSCI insights and the predictive model will be available in fall 2019, and results will be shared in upcoming issues of the ACSI *Research in Brief* publication. Schools that participated in the initial FSCI administration will receive an individualized school report in the beginning of fall 2019, that will:

- Show their school's FSCI results benchmarked alongside national averages;
- Provide insights on their school culture that can inform school improvement and strategic planning efforts; and
- Provide evidence of the school's unique strengths that can be shared with prospective families and members of the school community.

When considering both the national-level insights and school-level reports resulting from this research, we anticipate that this initiative will be groundbreaking both for the individual schools that participate and the Christian school sector as a whole. RiB

![ACSI - Association of Christian Schools International]

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NEW READING: It's Time for a MindShift in Christian Education

Research demonstrates that Christian education has a positive impact on student outcomes like purpose-driven career choices, community-mindedness, and stronger religious affiliation and practice. And Christian school teachers and leaders know from their own experiences that Christian education does, indeed, make a difference. And yet, Christian schools around the world are facing significant threats to sustainability and relevance from increasingly secular cultures, changing faith profiles of parents, competitive educational marketplaces, rapid technological innovation, diversification of schools, and changing learners' needs.

These challenges are not just "new"—they are more complex and disruptive than anything we've encountered before. Beyond technical solutions, we needed an entirely new way of thinking about these challenges. We needed a way to catalyze change in Christian education. For teachers and school leaders alike, this will require a **MindShift**.

MindShift is an industry-transforming process of dialogue and exploration pioneered by futurist and Christian author Rex Miller. To produce a MindShift in Christian education, a group of 60 leading Christian educators—from diverse backgrounds and walks of life—journeyed together over two years

for dialogue and site visits to innovative schools. Sixteen of these educators joined together to share their insights in a new edited book, *MindShift: Catalyzing Change in Christian Education*. Drawing on insights from research and case stories from innovative Christian schools, these authors share how Christian schools must shift in their mindsets and practices, from *scarcity to abundance, isolated to networked, White to mosaic, Gutenberg to 5G, machine to human, siloed to engaged,* and *fear to hope.*

As disorienting as it may be, the current educational and cultural moment provides a ripe opportunity to drive change in Christian education. MindShift can not only help our schools thrive into the future, but also reframe the challenges we face as opportunities—to provide a more deeply and authentically Christian education, to reach our neighbors with Christ's story of love and hope, and to catalyze the growth of the Church and the Kingdom. To learn more, visit https://mindshift.school/.