

A COMMUNITARIAN PARADIGM FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Dedication

I dedicate this work first to my husband Jim, whose unfailing support has both encouraged and challenged me to reach higher than I thought I could; and second, to my five children, who have taught me more than I have taught them. It is from these heart connections I have drawn the strength and courage to continue, and I thank them for their extravagant love.

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Abstract

The community school model is defined by a philosophy and operational infrastructure that offers implications for change to traditional Christian private schools that face a number of challenges among their school members as a direct result of a weakened sense of community. This study examines the communitarian perspective in education as defined by James Arthur in 10 general themes, looks at how closely the Christian community school model reflects the communitarian paradigm, and gives the results of a survey of community school participants in five schools that measured the opinions and perceptions of school members concerning the important aspects of communitarian thinking as expressed in a Christian context. Recommendations to traditional Christian private schools include writing an updated philosophy of identity that considers a new view of what constitutes the school, and the development of service learning and family education programs that build community and encourage the contribution of all school members. A final recommendation concerns the updating of regional and national accreditations standards to include more communitarian-reflective school operations.

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A Communitarian Paradigm for Christian Education

CHAPTER 1: Overview

Communitarianism is a social philosophy that favors the building of a good society based on core values of justice and compassion, equality of opportunity, partnership and collaboration, self-fulfillment and personal responsibility. It is essentially optimistic, as communitarians believe that, although there is a natural human tendency to act in self-serving ways, it is still possible to build a good society based on the desire of human beings to cooperate to achieve community goals that are based on positive values.

The International Community School in Winter Park, Florida, is a private school that reflects many aspects of communitarian thinking in an educational model that is gaining popularity among various Christian communities around the world. There are current cultural, academic, and spiritual reasons that this model is being welcomed, both as the advancement of Christian values as they are embodied in humanitarian relief and environmental stewardship, as well as an answer to a number of recurring challenges common to Christian private schools.

In his book “Schools and Community: The Communitarian Agenda in Education,” (Arthur, 2005), James Arthur contextualizes current debates within the British educational system around the many topical ideas being developed by communitarian thinkers, including: character-building; the role of parents; the community and the individual; values and education and citizenship; community education; standards; and community ethos in schools. Of course, communitarianism is not limited to conversations in Britain, but rather, has become an

international dialogue, in diverse fields of study ranging from sociology, political science, and anthropology to economics, business, international diplomacy and education.

Arthur concludes his overview and analysis of communitarian thinking in education with this statement (p. 144).

Many communitarians appear to be utopians, that is, sincere men and women from academic think tanks who believe in an ideal social order. Unfortunately, in their zeal for attaining an ideal order they invariably run the danger of attempting to impose their own self-generated image of what society and therefore reality 'ought' to look like. Therefore, the problem with the communitarian agenda for education is that it promises more than exclusive State [public] institutional schooling can possibly deliver.

At the same time, he readily admits that "religious schools [as opposed to public schools] are able to operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective" (p. 139), and states that, "while there has not emerged any workable communitarian blueprint for schooling, communitarian ideas on education are receiving increasing attention by politicians and policy-makers, which consequently means that we need to be clear about what these communitarian ideas are and assess their implications for education in schools."

The International Community School is a Christian private school, and has proven Arthur's point that a religious school is able to operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective. The communitarian ideas and their implications for education that Arthur surveys in his book are wholly represented in the philosophy and operational design of the International Community School. Although Arthur claims that "there has not emerged any workable communitarian blueprint for schooling," the founding of the International Community School and development of this educational model that reflects communitarian philosophy has brought forth a workable blueprint that is both reproducible and sustainable in a variety of cultures. It has implications in the understanding and development of Christian community in schools and reformation of national and regional accreditation standards.

Statement of the Problem

Christian private schools have enjoyed a long history of success in North America, and in fact, were in the business of educating children before government-subsidized schools became the norm. Those engaged in the traditional model of Christian education in more recent years, however, grapple with a number of pesky issues that have been bemoaned from within the Christian sub-culture and criticized from without.

Primarily, Christian private schools have struggled to maintain a sense of community among members of the school in a way that reflects the Christian mandate given in the Bible for relationships that foster personal growth, encourage accountability, provide for interdependency, and inspire individuals to serve the needs of those around them. Those outside the Christian school system and even many of those who have been educated by and graduated from Christian schools, have leveled the harshest criticism, claiming that most traditional Christian schools are hypocritical in that the verbal expression of their Christian faith doesn't match up with the evidence of actual social, cultural and spiritual behavior among members of the school itself. In addition, it is common among Christian schools to respond to the dominant post-Christian culture with an inward-focused exclusivity that promotes fear or disdain of the very culture for which they claim to be preparing their graduates.

This lack of community within the schools has given rise to other directly related challenges, including a growing sense of "consumerism" among the parents, evidenced by increased demands for convenience, service and amenities, lack of participation in school initiatives, and a decreased sense of personal responsibility for positive change within the organization. Faculty and staff who don't perceive a sense of community generally feel isolated and fearful in their positions, feel discouraged in areas of professional growth and development,

experience poor communication with parents, each other and the administration, and endure increased job-related stress and burn-out. Administrators and board members, without the healthy buoyancy of a vibrant community to support their leadership, experience the ongoing frustration and discouragement of trying to serve a largely ungrateful, unconnected public.

The problem of maintaining a sense of community in Christian private schools can be met only if there is a change in philosophy of identity and educational purpose that informs an infrastructure built into the operational fabric of the school. This study will examine the communitarian paradigm as it is played out in an educational model and specifically designed to reflect Christian values and scriptural commands, and what strategies for positive transformation it can bring to traditional Christian schools.

Research Questions

This study will seek to answer the following questions: How does the community school model reflect the communitarian agenda for education? What aspects of communitarian education do participants in community schools perceive as important? What can be learned from the community school model that offers implications for change in traditional Christian schools so that a sense of community can be increased?

Potential Significance

This research has implications and potential significance in the areas of educational theory, pedagogical praxis, public and private school accreditation standards, and future research.

Educational theory has always been influenced by the particulars of the society it seeks to serve; however, the perceived gap between ivory tower theorists and classroom practitioners has been the object of much debate and the scorn of those on both sides. Communitarian thinking,

by definition, brings together professionals on both sides of that divide by acknowledging the contributions of each and promoting the idea of interdependence. The synergy of theorists and practitioners working together within the framework of a communitarian educational model can transform theory into vision, and practice into mission.

Pedagogical praxis refers to “the development of useful and socially valued ways of thinking through personally and socially meaningful activity” (David Williamson Shaffer, 2003a, p. 39) in educational settings. It is the practical, useful combination of learning and doing. A communitarian model of education promotes the twin ideas of character development and experiential learning, particularly in the promotion of community service, which advances the objective of preparing students to become compassionate contributing citizens of a global society.

Accreditation standards do not currently reflect a written standard for parent engagement in the educational process. In spite of numerous studies conducted over the span of many years, the consensus of educators, psychologists, and child development professionals, and the witness of countless families themselves, the educational community has largely been unsuccessful in designing policies or programs to promote parent engagement at a level where students’ academic achievement is significantly impacted. Work needs to be continued in this area, and educational designers will be stimulated to action with the addition of accreditation standards that simply require it. The communitarian ideology and therefore, an educational model based in communitarian thinking, are in the forefront of efforts to strengthen and rebuild the family. Offering a school infrastructure that not only provides for, but requires parent participation in the educational process, represents a giant step toward this goal, and should be made a standard for school accreditation.

Future research into educational theory and practice will be built on current advances, with communitarian thinking offering implications for both viable and sustainable new models of education. One area that will benefit is private Christian education, where additional research is needed to appropriate the benefits of various communitarian ideas. Another is the field of global communication and enrichment as it pertains to educational practice, where research that builds on an understanding of communitarian educational models will discover better methods of integrating cross-cultural, transnational issues of global citizenship into the academic framework of both public and private schools.

Conceptual Framework

This field of study is in Christian education; therefore, analysis of information and data collected through research will be discussed with Christian education in mind. Also, because the study explores communitarian issues, discussion will be contextually set in communitarian thinking. However, the work that has been done in founding and developing a model for Christian communitarian schooling places this study in a unique position both in education and in communitarianism. While there are shared values and aspects of identity and practice associated with both communitarianism and education, there are innovations that have been made in each field in order to produce a particularly unique educational model known as the Christian community school.

The term “Christian communitarian” is self-evident; that is, while all communitarians may not be Christian, it is true that all Christians are essentially communitarian, since the basic principles of communitarian thinking of diversity within unity, families as primary moral educators of children, contribution to the common good as a priority of citizenship, necessary balance between freedom and responsibility and so forth, are found in the Christian sacred text, the Bible. The central benefit to Christian communitarians is their agreement that the Bible is

the word of God, therefore, accepting its moral code as truth without question, while secular communitarians continue to debate which morality among various religious traditions in the world should be adopted as universal.

Discussion of educational models will show the difference between the philosophical underpinnings of the traditional Christian school and the Christian community school. This research examines the application of communitarian ideas in education and how that thinking has been shaped into a new educational model called the community school, with benefits that could be applied to the traditional Christian school.

Summary of Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that expands a knowledge base about an innovative educational model that offers viable strategies for current problems in Christian education, especially challenges associated with a diminished sense of community in traditional Christian schools. Research will include a literature review of communitarian-reflective educational practices, an appropriate correlation of literature with observation of a working model, on-site observation and personal participation as a parent, and results of a survey with participating informants in five existing community schools.

Limitations

In using Arthur's outline of a communitarian agenda for education, the study necessarily excludes other possible constructs of communitarian thinking with regard to education, although a review of current literature did not disclose any other currently articulated system of

communitarian education. In addition, the superiority of a communitarian model to answer the problems chosen for research is assumed.

Another limitation is the relatively low number of participating informants available for interviews at the various working community schools. Because this is a new educational model, participants in only five existing schools were interviewed.

Finally, although the findings of this research have potential significance for education in both public and private sectors, and for education in a variety of cultures and locations worldwide, the literature review and participant interviews were restricted to the United States and Britain.

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

Communitarian ideology is centered on the ideals of a good society where each individual is engaged in the pursuit of moral behavior that contributes to a common good. It recognizes that a healthy society must have a correct balance between individual autonomy and social cohesion, and that it is the responsibility of the adult members of the society to train the young in such a way that they are encouraged toward moral maturity.

Because children are primarily trained by the adult authority figures in their lives, it is important that the adults who are in closest proximity to children and are responsible for their training and education be connected in community with one another, and partner together for the benefit of the child, and ultimately, for the preservation of the healthy society. This underscores the critical nature of the relationship between the church, the home and the school.

Because the study is based on Arthur's description of the communitarian agenda for education as the platform for research, the literature review will be organized according to the ten basic themes that Arthur identified (2005, pp. 136-141). These are: (1) the family should be the primary moral educator of children; (2) character education includes the systematic teaching of virtues in schools; (3) the ethos of the community has an educative function in school life; (4) schools should promote the rights and responsibilities inherent within citizenship; (5) service learning is an important part of a child's education in school; (6) a major purpose of the school curriculum is to teach social and political life skills; (7) schools should promote an active understanding of the common good; (8) religious schools are able to operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective; (9) many existing educational practices reflect the communitarian perspective; and (10) schools should adopt a more democratic structure of operating.

Theme 1: The family should be the primary moral educator of children.

The role of the family in the training of children is at the very heart of the communitarian perspective. In the words of Amitai Etzioni, a prominent communitarian voice in the United States, “Making a child is a moral act. Obviously it obligates the parents to the child. But it also obligates the parents to the community.” (Etzioni, 1993, p. 54) Etzioni points out that parents hold a moral responsibility to the community to invest themselves in the proper upbringing of their children, and to do this to the best of their ability. The 1991 release of “The Responsive Communitarian Platform” included a clear message of the responsibility of families in the moral education of their children (Bethke, Aird, Etzioni, Galston, Glendon, Minow & Rossi).

To rebuild America's moral foundations, to bring our regard for individuals and their rights into a better relationship with our sense of personal and collective responsibility, we must therefore begin with the institutions of civil society.

The best place to start is where each new generation acquires its moral anchoring: at home, in the family. We must insist once again that bringing children into the world entails a moral responsibility to provide, not only material necessities, but also moral education and character formation.

Moral education is not a task that can be delegated to baby sitters, or even professional child-care centers. It requires close bonding of the kind that typically is formed only with parents, if it is formed at all.

Much research has been done on the effect of early behavior patterning as foundational to a child’s moral training. William Damon (1995) argues that habits of good conduct, deepened through years of reinforcement and practice, are the foundations upon which the moral life is built. Child development experts tell us that a child’s self-concept is formed during the first five years of life, making the adults in those five years important contributors to this process. Parents are the primary socializers of their children during the first five years, and most feel responsible for ensuring that their child measures up to societal, cultural, familial and parental expectations (Bigner, 1994). Parents have a major influence on the child’s cognitive, social,

emotional and physical development, and they are the role models from whom children imitate and learn about themselves, their family and the community in which they live (Bigner, 1994).

If the relationship that is formed between parents and children during the early years is nurtured into the child's later years, it can have a positive effect on the child's moral choices. Strong family relationships are seen as critical deterrents to bad behavior, since children who are strongly attached to their parents will know that misbehavior will be a source of disappointment to them, and will consequently try to avoid it (Hirschi, 1969). Among a number of factors that seem to prevent children's participation in criminal behavior, Hirschi gave precedence to the role played by parents in the child's development and the strength of the relationship that is built during those critical formative years.

As it relates to schooling, James Coleman (1987) found that the most significant variable in the child's educational achievement in school was the factor of family background. Even though less objective factors, family strength and parental involvement were measured against other seemingly vital factors such as pupil-teacher ratio, library resources, expenditure on pupils and so on (Coleman, 1987). This finding has been supported by numerous other studies, and research continues to show that the partnership of parents with teachers is critical to the creation of a consistent moral environment that offers maximum support to the moral training of the young. It takes the collaborative effort of both school and home to provide the best arrangement for moral education. This view is summarized by Thomas Likona (1991, p. 35).

Even if schools can improve students' conduct while they are in school – and the evidence shows that they can indeed do that – the likelihood of lasting impact on the character of a child is diminished if the school's values aren't supported at home. For that reason, schools and families must come together in common cause. Working together, these two formative social institutions have real power to raise up moral human beings and to elevate the moral life of the nation.

Theme 2: Character education includes the systematic teaching of virtues in schools.

Although the communitarian perspective considers the family to be the primary moral educator of children, it is also agreed that social institutions such as schools bear secondary responsibility for character development among children (Etzioni, 1996, p. 182). Most children in this country spend a major portion of their time during the week in a school setting, interacting with peers and being under the direct influence of school personnel. The time spent in school provides an ideal training ground for responsible, contributive community participation. However, the process of inculcating values into the life of a child at school so that they become responsible, contributive community participants, is the subject of considerable debate.

Whereas the communitarian perspective values the systematic teaching of virtues in schools, the predominant philosophical view that has informed character education programs in the public school system for the past thirty years or so has been what is known as “values clarification.” These two approaches are in direct conflict with each other. Simply put, values clarification is a method of teaching whereby students are taught to engage in moral reasoning, according to personal values that they identify for themselves, without any internalization of values that are brought to them by common agreement of their community. Children are allowed to pursue their own vision of the good, and are taught that a moral choice is good, healthy or wise if its outcome is pleasing to the individual, or bad, if it results in unfavorable consequences.

In sharp contrast, the systematic teaching of virtues in schools assumes, first of all, that it is possible to identify a broad-based set of values that communities share (Etzioni, 1996, p. 185), and secondly that schools are responsible for contributing to the moral infrastructure of society (Etzioni, 1996, p. 182). In the communitarian perspective, the values taught to children are brought to them, based on an agreed upon common morality framed by identified virtues, in contrast to the values-clarification approach which leads children to decide on their own values

as a result of moral reasoning skills (Simon, Howe & Kirschenbaum, 1995, p. 6).

The rationale for training children to a set of common values which are internalized through the systematic teaching of virtues woven into the school curriculum is based in the idea of creating a common moral voice throughout the society. Communitarians see the moral infrastructure of a society as based on four social formations: families, schools, communities and the community of communities, or the society at large (Etzioni, 1996, p. 176). When there is agreement on the set of common values, and when those values permeate the society at every level, it follows that there will be a corresponding rise in the standards of personal and corporate behavior, a deepening of reciprocal relationships, a decrease in crime and an enriched sense of social inclusion (Arthur, 2005, p. 7).

Theme 3: The ethos of the community has an educative function in school life.

Central to this theme is the question of what purposes are served by a child's experience in a school environment. It is recognized that there is value to the school experience that reaches beyond the simple acquisition of academic skills and accumulation of knowledge. Amid the many articulations of what constitutes a good education is this succinct statement put forth by the National Paideia Center (Adler, 1982): "The three callings for which schooling should prepare all Americans are: (a) to earn a decent livelihood; (b) to be a good citizen of the nation and the world; and (c) to make a good life for one's self." Paideia educators agree that the means to that end requires a classroom combination of didactic teaching of subject matter, coaching of students by the teacher that produces the skills of learning, and Socratic questioning for seminar discussion and reflective thinking. The results of these three types of teaching are expected to be the acquisition of organized knowledge, the formation of habits of skill in the use of language and mathematics, and the growth of the understanding of basic ideas and issues (Adler, 1998).

One could argue that the three educational goals put forth by Adler are essentially communitarian ideas: that to “earn a decent livelihood,” the graduate must have encountered enough experiences in the school setting to teach good character; that to “be a good citizen of the nation and the world,” the graduate must have been exposed to compassion projects, been taught responsibility and active participation, and experienced opportunities for successful collaboration and partnership; and that to “make a good life for one’s self,” the graduate must have been taught a proper balance between personal rights and personal responsibility, to value the common good and see personal contribution to the common good as a measure of success.

The idea of building a community ethos in the classroom is at the core of a well-articulated educational philosophy put forth by Parker J. Palmer, who understands the central role of the teacher to be the creation and maintenance of a “community of truth” among the students and the teacher (Palmer, 1983, pp. 88-89). In this community of truth, which he describes as an ethos which evokes a balance of trust and truth in the experience and communication of ideas and knowledge, both students and teacher are free enough to pursue the truth required for true learning to take place. The community of truth is one that can embrace, guide, and refine the core mission of education: the mission of knowing, teaching and learning (Palmer, 1998, p. 94).

When the school community is defined and characterized by an ethos that values communitarian ideals of participation, partnership, contribution, and service, and children see those communal commitments shared by administrators, teachers and parents alike, they are offered powerful models for their own growing understanding of responsible community membership, and offered a social context that is conducive to more effective citizenship education.

Theme 4: Schools should promote the rights and responsibilities inherent within citizenship.

The communitarian vision is characterized by strong citizenship themes of individual contribution and participation, reciprocity and interdependence among the members of a society, a healthy balance between rights and responsibilities as well as individual freedom and the requirements of the social order. There is an emphasis on the duties each member owes to the community in return for the rights they enjoy as citizens. Characteristics of good citizenship derive from the development of strong character and social ethics within individuals, making citizenship education fundamentally connected to moral education.

There are two central issues in communitarian thinking about citizenship education. First, citizenship is seen as something that is earned, not a right in itself; and second, citizenship requires commitment and participation on the part of every member, which earns them the rights inherent in the good society. The relationship of the citizen to the society is therefore, reciprocal.

Etzioni is clear in his statement that claiming rights without assuming responsibilities is both unethical and illogical (1993, p. 9), although he reminds us that citizens have some duties that lay moral claims on them from which they derive no immediate benefit or even long-term payoff, among them our joint commitment to a shared future, especially our responsibility to moral, social and political environments. He also warns us about the danger of uncontrolled minting of rights, that is, the proliferation of societal benefits that were once accessed by individuals as a result of social earnings that are now demanded by constituents as rights (Etzioni, 1993, p. 6), stating that “each newly minted right generates a claim on someone,” and “the expression of ever more wants in the language of rights, makes it difficult to achieve compromises and to reach consensus, processes that lie at the heart of democracy.”

Seeing the classroom as a reflection of the larger society, and offering students an opportunity to engage in classroom dynamics as responsible citizens is the subject of

considerable research, with much of it reported in developmental sociological terms as well as in the area of citizenship education.

Rhys Griffith discusses two approaches to citizenship education which he describes as learning about citizenship and learning in citizenship (1998, p. 33). Griffith says:

Education about citizenship consists of teaching pupils about the rights and duties they will later have as citizens but do not presently have as pupils. Education in citizenship is child-centered and aims to develop citizenship through the child's exploration of her own rights and responsibilities via personal actions within the school community and environment.

James Arthur notes that simply learning about the qualities of good citizenship reduces citizenship education to nothing more than an academic exercise of collecting information and advice (2005, p. 80), while an experiential approach to children's citizenship education gives them opportunities to practice good citizenship in their school environment, which helps mold the character of children as citizens themselves.

A review of current Civics or Citizenship Education Standards and Curriculum Frameworks for the 50 U.S. states reveals a general consensus that the purpose of K-12 social studies is to develop informed, responsible citizens, develop active participants in the political, social and moral issues of society, and to empower students to confront today's problems and make informed decisions (National Center for Learning and Citizenship). Performance standards for citizenship courses in most states includes an experiential aspect, where students are required to apply knowledge of democratic principles, political history and citizens' rights to construct plausible solutions to problems in the community.

The National Center for Learning and Citizenship's Education Leadership Colloquium has taken the lead in recent years to provide state teams with a model of youth participation in citizenship education with a three-pronged agenda that includes civic education, service learning and meaningful student engagement in decision making. The aim is to allow state teams to

experience youth-adult partnerships so that they may engage youth in policymaking and civic participation in their own communities (National Center for Learning and Citizenship, 2007).

Because of the communitarian emphasis on parent engagement in the educational process, there is particular interest in a civics initiative launched by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) known as Kids Voting USA. This interactive civics curriculum taught during U.S. election campaigns promoted the civic development of high school students along with parents by stimulating news media attention and discussion in families. Following interviews with students and families who participated in the KVUSA project in 2002, with follow-up interviews in 2003 and 2004, findings suggest that the influence of this curriculum project was retained for attention to internet news, frequency of discussion with friends, testing opinions in conversations, support for unconventional activism, volunteering, and campus activism. The curriculum also influenced the family as a setting for political discussion and media use, habits that eventually lead to participation in government, especially, voting as part of the democratic process.

Citizenship education in the U.S., as a whole, is meant to stimulate students' moral obligation to others, to cultivate a sense of interdependence and mutuality and encourage a deeper understanding of the rights and responsibilities inherent in democracy.

Theme 5: Service learning is an important part of a child's education in school.

A particularly unique communitarian idea has been the shift in understanding from what used to be known among educators as community service to an experiential educative process known as service learning. Although the educational practice of combining community service and classroom curriculum has been in use for over a century, it has only been in recent years that a national service learning movement has taken shape, and the concept of service learning has become widely discussed among educators and policymakers.

The difference between community service and service learning is a matter of some discussion, but primarily focuses on the superiority of service learning due to the intentional learning of meaningful lessons by students through the experience of serving those outside the classroom, with a special emphasis on moral values such as compassion and empathy.

Communitarian thinking takes this thought even further, by emphasizing the importance of teaching service learning participants that the groups that are being served also have contributions to make to those serving them (Etzioni, 2004, p. 25):

Service learning is a term that heretofore has been used mainly for domestic policies. It calls on those who bring educational programs, religious teachings and social services to the poor or minorities to recognize that these groups have contributions of their own to make; that we ought to refrain from approaching people of different subcultures as if one were bringing light to the heathens, but instead show our eagerness to learn from them as we share with them what we hold to be true.

While service learning initiatives take a variety of forms in K-12 schools, it is generally agreed that they are characterized by intentionally connecting service experiences to academic outcomes, providing a context for classroom learning and helping students in the reflection process after the service experience takes place so that meaningful lessons are learned. Along with curricular integration, the major components of service learning include a response to real community needs over a sustained period of time, youth decision-making and participation in the

design of the project, and regular reflection and analysis through journals, group discussion and written papers to assist students in drawing lessons from the service.

Learning In Deed is one of a number of national initiatives that have brought both resources and focus to this movement. Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in 1998, Learning In Deed is comprised of four components, including policy and practice demonstration projects across the nation, the National Commission on Service-Learning, the Learning In Deed K-12 Service-Learning Leadership Network, and the Learning In Deed Research Network. By assessing the successes of service learning projects conducted over the past nine years, the Learning In Deed website offers a summary of service learning benefits that fall into six broad categories: the impact of student personal and social development; the impact of civic responsibility; the impact on student academic learning; the impact on career exploration and aspirations; the impact on schools; and the impact on communities (Billig, Shelley H., 2000).

Of particular importance regarding the inclusion of service-learning in an educational program are the benefits cited by Billig as impacting student academic learning and the school environment. Her research showed that service learning helps students acquire academic skills and knowledge, with students who participated in service learning projects gaining higher scores on state tests of basic skills, achieving higher grade point averages, showing gains on student achievement tests, and greater gains in problem-solving skills. She also reported that students who participate in service learning are more engaged in their studies, more motivated to learn and have better attendance records. The impact on the school environment was equally optimistic, with research showing that service learning results in greater mutual respect of teachers and students, and builds cohesiveness and more positive peer relations among students. Billig found that service learning ultimately improves the overall school climate, as students and teachers in schools with strong service programs reported a feeling of greater connectedness to

the school, decreased teacher turnover and increased teacher collegiality.

The communitarian idea of partnership is foundational to the service learning movement which brings together the school's needs and resources with the community's needs and resources to enhance the effectiveness of each. The successful partnership will work toward improving the quality of education as it improves the quality of life in the community it serves. However, there are points of potential conflict in the partnership that are related to differences in the cultural distinctions of both community and school. Susan Abravanel, writing for the Education Commission for the States, identifies points of difference that can be hotspots of conflict during the life the service learning project, including the project focus, service philosophy, project planning and leadership, project scheduling, measures of success, and final assessment tools at the end of the project (2003).

There are obvious strong ties between citizenship education and service learning, where students are taught their responsibility to respond to community needs and discover the empowerment of being personally involved in community solutions to public issues in the environment, social services, public housing, cause advocacy, etc. Among the considerable amount of research on the topic are studies that have looked at the connection between service learning programs in high school and adult civic participation. A recent study conducted by Daniel Hart, Thomas Donnelly, James Youniss and Robert Atkins found that both voluntary and school-required community service in high school were strong predictors of adult voting and volunteering (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss & Atkins, 2007, p. 197). They found that by performing service, students become personally involved with political issues rather than thinking about them abstractly, and they become familiar with social problems of which they were previously unaware. Another tie to citizenship education is the opportunity students have through service learning to develop the "youth voice." This refers to the inclusion of young people in the

planning and implementation of the service opportunity, which not only enables students to feel respected and valued because of their ability to contribute to the common good and to meet real needs of the community, but also gives them a strong model for civic participation later in life (Abravanel, 2003).

Theme 6: A major purpose of the school curriculum is to teach social and political life skills.

Social and political life skills are those that enable an adult to fully engage in the life of a community, participate in transformative political processes, and successfully negotiate relationships across cultures. Consensus-building, conflict resolution, trans-cultural communication, collaboration, partnership and team-building skills can and should be taught as part of the school experience.

According to James Arthur (2005, p. 138), communitarians would say that education should above all be directly concerned with the development of social action through informed civic participation. He lays the responsibility at the school door:

The abilities for making socially productive decisions do not develop by themselves; rather, they require that the content of the school curriculum, skills and attitudes be introduced early and built upon throughout the years of schooling. The school curriculum should therefore promote those skills that are necessary for social and political literacy so that young people can make reasoned judgments, considering others' views and acting for the benefit of the community. Young people need to acquire civic skills which will include the ability to talk with each other, compromise with each other and engage in open exchange.

Civic participation is encouraged in an environment where governing authorities pay attention to positive methods of conflict resolution and the building of consensus among diverse points of view. Operating a classroom environment as a micro-community, teachers have found social and academic benefits in encouraging students to learn these skills. There have been a number of curriculums written over the past twenty years with the clear objective of teaching

consensus building and conflict resolution skills to students in K-12 classrooms. The thinking among educators is both communitarian in nature as well as both necessary and practical in application, as school administration and faculty professionals have been challenged with the increasing violence and bullying taking place on many school campuses.

According to a joint report from the Office of Juvenile Justice And Delinquency Prevention and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the purposes of conflict resolution are to provide an environment in which each learner can feel physically and psychologically free from threats and danger and can find opportunities to work and learn with others for the mutual achievement of all, and so that the diversity of the school's population is respected and celebrated (Crawford & Bodine, 1996). It identifies the three essential processes of conflict resolution to be negotiation, mediation and consensus of decision making. These processes are taught through classroom teaching following daily curriculum lesson plans, mediation programs where selected individuals are trained in the principles of conflict resolution to provide neutral third-party input to assist others in reaching resolution to a conflict, the "peaceable classroom" approach that integrates conflict resolution education into the curriculum and classroom management plans, and the "peaceable school" strategy that uses conflict resolution as a system for managing the schools as well as the classroom. In this last approach, the entire school community gets involved, including parents, in learning conflict resolution principles and processes.

Consensus-building is another social process that seeks to bring diverse opinions and perspectives together to move toward a common goal, most often during times of conflict or transformative change. A notable example of consensus-building as a structured social or political process is seen among the Religious Society of Friends, known as the Quakers, who have used this process successfully for the past 350 years. A report from the Quaker

Foundations of Leadership draws a distinction between conflict resolution and consensus-building, in that consensus-building is a decision-making process that strives toward unity, where each stake holder's opinion is heard and all members of the group are able to come to a decision that benefits the common good, contrasted with the "getting to yes" strategies of conflict resolution that seek to settle a dispute (Berry, 1998).

Collaborative learning has become popular among K-12 teachers, especially those who work to create a community environment in their classrooms. This instructional method involves the grouping and pairing of students at various performance levels who work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own; thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful. Robert Slavin reports that relationships improved among students who engaged in collaborative learning, especially with those of different ethnic, socio-economic and academic abilities (1991, pp. 71-82). Community skills gained through collaborative learning include taking turns, sharing, giving help to others, accepting help from peers, contributing to a group, learning from others, partnership performance, consensus-building and cross-cultural communication, all of which contribute to creating a sense of community in a classroom.

Cross-cultural communication is a life-skill that is rooted in the communitarian idea of diversity within unity. When students are taught the value of differences among members of a community and the skills of building relationships with those who are culturally different from themselves, they are being equipped to more fully participate as responsible citizens as adults. Sheryl Denbo, Executive Director of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, states that cross-cultural communication is an essential dimension of effective education and cites a wide range of social and academic benefits (1990). She identifies the challenges of communicating with those of diverse cultures in wide range of communication aspects, including language, values,

handshakes, eye contact, loudness, speed of delivery, silence, humor, distance between speakers, and breaking into an existing conversation. By developing an awareness of these complex communication behaviors and how different they can be interpreted in various cultures, students learn the neutrality of culture and to value others.

Theme 7: Schools should promote an active understanding of the common good.

An understanding of the common good is connected to the social and civic benefits of skills that teach students to fully engage in the life of the community, to promote transformative political processes and to successfully negotiate relationships across cultures. Communitarian thinking and writing is replete with references to the common good, defined by Arthur as a collective or public interest that can be promoted by individuals within communities (Arthur, 2005, p. 139). It is often referred to as “shared values,” and is central to the balance between individual autonomy and social cohesion, since the assumed conflict between the rights of the individual and the responsibilities of government can be resolved by policies that are consistent with values that have been agreed upon and work to the benefit of all members of a community.

Teaching students to make specific contributions to the common welfare of their fellow students helps them bring their own interests into harmony with the needs of the community. It is the moral dimension of personal responsibility, teaching students that through their association with others, they are able to promote private interests which the entire community holds in common. For many students, the teaching of these concepts comes primarily through both character education programs and classroom management in the school experience, but, as Arthur points out, a shared responsibility for training young people to value contribution to the common good also lies with other educating institutions such as the family and the church (2005, p. 94).

Much of the discussion in educational research with regard to the common good in the school environment centers on student discipline. The increasing problem of “kids out of control” in the school environment has been well documented and explored, giving rise to a plethora of community programs, curriculums, classroom strategies, parental instruction initiatives and numerous other attempts at solutions. But Kay Hymowitz of the Manhattan Institute (Spring 2000) points out that these programs offer little real help. School officials have found themselves entangled in layers of legal complexities that continually threaten to undermine their authority, family systems that offer little to no support for student’s moral training, and students who have under-developed moral character that disallows them to understand the concept of a common good. In these cases, primarily in the public school system, the idea of a common good deteriorates into a system of external attempts to regulate internal control, with poor results. She puts it this way:

When educators aren't talking like lawyers, they're sounding like therapists, for they've called in the psychobabblers and psychologists from the nation's education schools and academic departments of psychology to reinforce the attorneys in helping them reestablish school discipline. School bureaucrats have been falling over one another in their rush to implement trendy-sounding "research-based programs"—emotional literacy training, anti-bullying workshops, violence prevention curriculums, and the like—as "preventive measures" and "early interventions" for various school discipline problems. Of dubious efficacy, these grimly utilitarian nostrums seek to control behavior in the crudest, most mechanical way. Nowhere is there any indication that adults are instilling in the young qualities they believe in and consider integral to a good life and a decent community. Kids find little that their innate sociality and longing for meaning can respond to.

According to Hymowitz, the full consequence of these dramatic changes has been to prevent principals and teachers from creating “the kind of moral community that is the most powerful and dependable guarantor of good discipline ever devised.” She asserts that when things work “as they should” (in the traditional manner familiar all over the world and across the ages, which is moral education at home and reinforced in the community institutions such as the school), principals forge a cohesive society with clear shared values, whose observance confers a

sense of worth on all those who subscribe to them. People behave morally primarily because they assent to the standards of the group, not because they fear punishment. She concludes, “A community of shared values cannot be legalistic or bureaucratic or based on a set of behavior exercises; it must be personal, enforced by the sense that the authority figure is protective, benevolent, and worthy of respect.”

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam’s landmark study on the collapse and revival of the American community, he discusses at great length the idea of social capital, that is, the many ways our lives are enriched and made more productive by social connection. Putnam claims that social capital can be simultaneously a “private good” and a “public good,” as the benefit that comes from acting morally benefits both the individual and the community to which he contributes (2000, p. 20). For Putnam, the idea of social capital in schools extends to the entire community. He reports that decades of research have shown that community involvement is crucial to schools’ success, both in terms of academic achievement as well as student behavior, referring to studies that have found that student learning is influenced not only by what happens in school and at home, but also by social networks, norms and trust in the school and in the wider community. Putnam’s interesting review of a state-by-state social capital index shows that in states that score high in social capital (states whose residents trust other people, join organizations, volunteer, vote and socialize with friends, in other words, contribute to the common good), youth score higher on standardized tests, watch less TV, experience fewer teenage pregnancies, are less involved in violent crime, and fewer young people die prematurely due to suicide or homicide. (Putnam, 2000, p. 297) He concludes, with Robert Coleman, the late University of Chicago sociologist that laid the intellectual foundations for the study of social capital and its link to academic success, that we cannot understate “the importance of the embeddedness of young people in the enclaves of adults most proximate to them, first and most

prominently the family and second, a surrounding community of adults, exemplified in all these results by the religious community.” (Coleman, 1987, p. 229)

Coleman’s reference to the importance of the family as a primary influence on student’s behavior at school speaks to the critical nature of the relationship between the school and home as an active expression of contributing to the common good. Research has confirmed over and over that family involvement in school life contributes to positive results for students, including higher academic achievement, better attendance, more course credits earned in high school, more responsible preparation for class, fewer disciplinary actions with students, and other indicators of success in school. (Epstein, September 2005) The results of these studies also show a universal connection between parent involvement and student success across all socio-economic demographics.

Arguably the strongest method of children in school experiencing an active understanding of the common good is when students are encouraged to participate together in some shared process by which they can experience creating the common good for themselves. Previous sections of this literature review have referred to collaborative learning, service learning, partnership training, and citizenship and moral education, all of which are aspects of communitarian thinking that lead the school community toward a greater understanding of and opportunities to contribute to the common good.

Theme 8: Religious schools can operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective.

The ideals that make up the communitarian ideology are highly congruent with many of the shared practices of religiously affiliated schools. Major religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism all place strong emphasis on the communal nature of human existence, and teach that our own identity is largely formed in relationship with others.

All of these religions have a strong sense of history, emphasize community and solidarity, have well-defined duties and responsibilities among their members, respect tradition, place a strong emphasis on responsibilities of parents in the moral and spiritual training of their children, and believe that the curriculum of the school should be designed to support and maintain the training that is taking place in the home. The communitarian elements that characterize these religions would, therefore, be seen throughout every educational process in schools affiliated with them. Further, because religious schools are places of choice for members, they attract families that seek to train their children in the spiritual tradition represented at the school, creating a strong sense of solidarity in educational objectives.

Parker Palmer, a leading American Christian educator, strongly articulates a communitarian perspective in his discussion about the pursuit of truth, which he claims is the focus of all educational processes. Palmer asserts that the pursuit of truth must be communal, that it is neither purely objective nor subjective (Palmer, 1983, pp. 55-57):

By Christian understanding, truth is neither “out there” not “in here,” but both. Truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue of knowers and knowns who are understood as independent but accountable selves...If we are to grow as persons and expand our knowledge of the world, we must consciously participate in the emerging community of our lives, in the claims made upon us by others as well as our claims upon them. Only in community does the person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become.

This deep connection between the personhood of the individual and the ethos of community, particularly strong in Christian thought, is culturally rooted in the Puritan tradition that founded this country’s government and early culture. Robert Fowler points out a number of aspects of today’s communitarian thinking that reflect Puritan ideals, four of them remarkable (1999, pp. 2-8). First, the Puritans held to a covenant theology which rejected the idea of the divine right of the king to govern; rather, they favored a government created by a community’s covenant with God. This particular form of government eventually evolved into a democracy,

with many civic responsibilities reflected in communitarian thinking. Second, the Puritan doctrine of original sin (human depravity) required that, since everyone was born with a predilection for immoral behavior, the individual must be restrained by socialization within a community to protect the common good. The Puritan idea of freedom was not that the individual had license to do anything they pleased (individualism), but rather the ability to do that which is morally right, again, for the protection of the common good. They emphasized the strong role of the community in nurturing and restraining the individual, and, according to Fowler, “This aspect of their outlook is receiving renewed attention today, especially in light of the perceived excesses of individualism.” (Fowler, 1999, p. 7) Third, the Puritan emphasis on religious education came out of their history as part of the Protestant Reformation. They rejected the Roman Catholic idea that people needed a mediator (priest) to communicate with God; thus, they placed a great emphasis on education so that people could read and comprehend sacred texts on their own. Rigorous training in Greek, Latin and Christian theology, along with the natural sciences was central to the original curriculum of Harvard College, now Harvard University, the oldest institution of higher learning in the country. Fourth, the common narrative of the Puritan’s sacred text, the Bible, has been a cohesive element of this country’s moral culture for almost 400 years. For much of the nation’s history, Americans have shared a common knowledge of Christian thought and a moral code rooted in scripture. Even public education reflected the centrality of the Bible as a transcendent truth for many years, forming strong communal bonds around a common morality.

Ultimately, James Arthur points out that “community is, therefore, a product of shared morals” (2005, p. 135), and although secular communitarians struggle with a clear identification of which moral code is common to all cultures everywhere, religious communitarians associated with a faith-based school community quite simply point to their sacred text to find a common

moral structure. United by a common framework of morality that is accepted without question, embraced with passion and perceived as the word of God, the religious school community is bound together with a collective understanding of purpose for teachers, students and parents, and is able, therefore, to operate a particularly strong version of the communitarian perspective.

Theme 9: Many existing educational practices reflect the communitarian perspective.

The central point in this theme is the vast permeation of communitarian thinking reflected in current educational practices. The idea of creating a classroom or school-wide environment as a community, with each student, teacher or administrator participating as a community member with rights and responsibilities, contributing to the common good, identifying core values, promoting collaboration and cooperation and so forth, is commonplace in public schools, both in the United States as well as Britain. Among the many online teacher resource websites, Teachology.com, for example, identifies a number of distinctly communitarian issues as current trends in education, including character education, collaboration, conflict resolution/mediation, inclusion, multicultural education, accountability, and partnership with parents.

In communitarian-reflective schools, students are given the opportunity to create a micro-society, experientially preparing themselves to take an active role as participating citizens in adult life. As active members of the school's community, students are made aware of their choices, freedoms and responsibilities with regard to their own behavior; they're given a forum for making decisions, where they discuss and decide school rules and conventions, and help deal with problems like bullying; and they are encouraged and coached to learn open communication and the sharing of ideas in regular meetings. In the words of a senior teacher, the school is "the children's society is a web of networks. It is not merely like a society, but their actual society" (Arthur, 2005, p. 121). Kids Vote USA, mentioned earlier in this paper, is an example of a

highly successful program that offers students an opportunity to engage in a civic experience while engaging families in the community process at the same time.

Outside the school walls, there are efforts to connect with the local community, as well. The Institute for Responsive Education, affiliated with Cambridge College School of Education and the National Institute for Teaching Excellence, has designed the Parent Leadership Exchange for New England public schools. This innovative program provides networking and training opportunities for parents during the school year that encourages parental involvement. Parents are offered a schedule of classes that include such topics as school governance, grassroots organizing, creating family-friendly schools, starting a family center and public policy lobbying. Communities in Schools, a 30-year-old non-profit organization based in Atlanta, Georgia, continues to operate partnership programs nationwide that bring together families, schools and community leaders to create a support systems for students, primarily aimed at preventing drop-outs. Many of the public schools in which CIS works feature dedicated space and regular scheduling for social services, other non-profits and business organizations to come on-campus to serve community families. Their success is well-documented, with as much as a 70% decrease in discipline problems and up to a 50% increase in attendance rates in participating schools.

The idea of the school as the central meeting place of the larger community is not new, but with the agency of current communitarian thinking, has taken on new impetus. David Hargreaves (1982) has identified four approaches to the range of community education ideas, among them the concept of the school as a community center, in which members of the school and the neighborhood share facilities. He points out that elementary schools are particularly well-placed as natural gathering places for community groups, as most parents visit every day and they tend to be closer to home than the less numerous high schools.

Service learning, also mentioned earlier in this paper, is an example of students involved in the community process, and is gaining wide popularity as a movement throughout the United States, in both public and private schools. The National Youth Leadership Council has emerged as a forefront leader in the service learning movement, designing well-attended national conventions (3000 attending in 2007, representing schools from all 50 states and 12 countries outside the United States), and developing innovative service learning projects nationwide. A powerful example of a current educational practice that reflects a communitarian perspective is an NYLC project called the Gulf Coast WalkAbout program occurring in the summer of 2007. This dynamic service learning initiative brought together 300 5th through 8th grade students from elementary schools in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana to help continue the rebuilding process in their states following the devastation created by 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Wegner). Students worked alongside teams of teachers, college students and adult volunteers to actively learn about environmental and natural science, emergency preparedness and response, and oral history. The summary statement by a sponsor of the event is reflective of the power of this kind of learning: “This project has helped transform young people from hurricane victims into community leaders.”

Theme 10: Schools should adopt a more democratic structure of operating.

The emphasis in communitarian thinking on each member of a society having a responsibility to contribute to its social progress has implications in the operating structure of a communitarian school community. The idea is that schools should be structured so that civic participation and democratic principles are encouraged among members of the school community, including students, teachers and parents. Beyond a mere reflection of communitarian values, political theorist John Rawls, among others, concludes that a more

democratic form of school governance at the student level prepares young people to become fully cooperating and contributing members of society as adults (Rawls, 1993).

The practical aspect of managing day-to-day operations of a school requires a certain amount of hierarchical organizational structure, since every decision cannot be made by consensus or another team approach; however, there are ways that members of the school community, including parents, can engage in joint decision-making, and power to shape the ethos of the school can be shared.

Among the many states that have written standards for school-parent-community partnerships, the State of Indiana Department of Education documents a number of quality indicators that should be used to measure the effectiveness of school decision-making, including administrative support, continuing education for school staff and parents on how to create and maintain effective partnerships, parent involvement on policy and procedure committees and school performance evaluations, and formal procedures in place to involve parents who have limited time to contribute to school issues.

Yale child psychiatrist James Comer has developed a model for effective connection among schools, parents and the community. Two of the guiding principles of this three-way partnership include coordination and cooperation among all adults concerned with the child's best educational interests, and active involvement of parents every step of the way. However, Comer found that parental participation can improve school performance only if parents are given real decision-making responsibility and are placed in positions suited to their knowledge and skills (1980). Jerry Mintz contrasts the idea of "real decision-making responsibility" with the character of many student or parent council structures, where little if any real power to make school operational decisions exists (2005). Mintz calls these structures a sham, having very little actual decision-making power, with limited benefits to individuals or the overall community. He

states:

In a true democratic process, decisions are made by using all the creative forces and all the authority of the many participants who are involved in making those decisions. To the extent that they are disempowered by special groups having veto power, to that extent is the authority and the creative power of the total body eroded.

Reasons for the barriers to parent involvement and full decision-making power was cited by Carole Molnar as not so much parent apathy as the lack of support by educators who remain defensive about professional territory and skeptical about parents' ability to offer meaningful solutions to operational problems. In addition, parents often feel like they're interfering, or they consider their lack of time and busy lifestyles as impossible barriers to their involvement (Molnar).

Inferences for Forthcoming Study

Most of the literature reviewed for this study was derived from secular sources and reflected practices in public schools. Arthur's ten themes of the communitarian agenda in education offered a general infrastructure for literature review; however, the main purpose of this research is to show that a private school founded on communitarian thinking as seen through the lens of Christianity has implications for change in traditional Christian schools.

Further research into current practices and thinking of Christian community school participants will measure how well these schools are matching up with the ten themes identified by Arthur, first, to affirm the communitarian thinking that permeates the philosophical identity of the community school model, and also to show how these various aspects of educational practice and community values can benefit more traditional Christian schools.

Conceptual Framework for Forthcoming Study

The community school paradigm is placed in current communitarian thinking in certain practices of the school, such as: the emphasis placed on the priority of the family as the primary moral educator of children; the systematic teaching of virtues as the agency of character education; an ethos of community that permeates all operational aspects of the school; the promotion of rights and responsibilities inherent in the teaching of citizenship education; the emphasis placed on service learning; the teaching of social and political life-skills throughout the curriculum; the promotion of an active understanding of the common good; communitarian practices in classroom management; and a democratic structure of school governance. However, while secular communitarian thinking would be centered on developing a political and social community as the basis for a good society as an end in itself, the community school paradigm would place individual and corporate spiritual development leading to maturity as the reason for being in community together, according to truth as it is articulated in the sacred text of Christianity, the Bible.

Community school participants see spiritual maturity as both the means to an end, and the end in itself, since the Bible teaches that both the process and the product of spiritual maturity lie in service to others. Christian communitarians, then, define the good society as a place where each individual, interdependent with and connected to a community, contributes to the common good through service to others, bringing healing and reconciliation to the world.

As educators, the community school model reflects best practices associated with creating superior learning environments, teaches through a well-designed curriculum, and is built upon a sound educational philosophy articulated by the following ten assumptions:

1. There is ultimately no knowledge that is incompatible with the Christian faith, and a sound education is based on the principles of truth given in the Bible.

2. Family engagement in the educational process makes a critical difference in the efficacy of a student's education.
3. Ethics training, in the context of a reciprocal partnership between teachers and parents, provides the moral foundation necessary for superior scholarship.
4. The best education for today's students anywhere in the world is international in scope and design.
5. The best learning environment is inquiry-based, promotes critical thinking, fosters a respect for diverse points of view, and is committed to pursuit of truth.
6. The best academic framework is based on developmental stages of learning, where students progress intellectually from concrete learning in the acquisition of basic skills and facts, to logic and integration of information and ideas, and finally, to the art of abstract thinking in the communication and defense of what they know.
7. There are many pathways to learning, based on diverse multiple intelligences, all of which must be developed in the learning environment.
8. Academics must be balanced with experiential and service learning in the context of teaching a theology and practice of work.
9. A comprehensive environmental education, integrated across all other core disciplines, is our responsibility as world citizens and stewards of the earth.
10. The goal of our education is to train students for ministry of the faith of Jesus Christ, regardless of the vocation they choose.

These ten assumptions could be found as the basis of an educational philosophy associated with any private Christian school, and indeed, many of them might be found in a

number of secular schools, including public education; however, in the community school model, there is a philosophical shift that has taken place in the identity of the school that changes how these assumptions are played out operationally. This results in an educational model that is both innovative and fundamentally different from most traditional Christian schools. The philosophical shift in the community school model lies in how members are identified as a school, and how we understand the church-home-school relationship.

In traditional Christian schools, the school is formed first as a service-providing enterprise, out of which a community develops. The community that is derived from the school is confined to that school by its identification with a specific enterprise in a specific location, and the school is defined as the administration, staff and faculty professionals that come together in that venue to offer an educational program as a market commodity to families who seek such a service. The central uniting factor of the families whose children are in attendance is the fact that their children go to the same school. They may have other life circumstances in common, but primarily, the school community is formed by virtue of parents making the same choice of educational service providers. The community that is formed serves the school by supporting fundraisers, helping with homework, assisting in field trips, and so forth, but recognizes that the school (the team of administrative and academic professionals who work there) is responsible for the education of the children. The school sets the policies, disciplines the children when necessary, and teaches the children seven or eight hours a day, five days a week, providing a safe environment for a good general education. The church, the home and the school are seen as separate but mutually supportive institutions, each being strengthened by the others by working together to advance common objectives of education, training and nurture of the young.

The philosophy upon which a community school is designed is different from that of a traditional model. When a community school is to be formed, the first task of organizers is to

identify a community of people who share common unities of faith, family values, and educational philosophy. When common ideas concerning these three areas have been identified, and a resulting ideological community has been defined, some members of that community come together in a particular geographical location to form a school. It is understood that those who unite to form a school are not the entire community, but a part of something greater than themselves as a subset of a larger community of people that stretches around the world. They come together not because their children all attend the same school; but rather, their children all become part of the same educational experience because they have come together as a community. Therefore, because the school is derived from the community, it serves the community rather than the traditional school paradigm of the community serving the school.

There is also a fundamental shift in how the school is defined. In a community school, there are five categories of people that comprise the school: the governing board, the administration, the faculty, the parents and the students. It is emphasized that the school is not complete and cannot operate without all five aspects of its identity, and each person who is a member has a responsibility to “be the school” according to the role they fulfill. Therefore, the “school” is still responsible for the children’s education, but that responsibility is equally shared by all those who are the school. And, since parents and students are considered equally as much the school as the administration and faculty, the educational process of meeting the school’s academic, civic, moral or spiritual goals is not confined to a specific place such as a classroom on a campus. It can equally happen at home, at a place of business in the greater community, on a service learning project or an international mission trip, or even on vacation, since the definition of the school is broadened to include a working partnership of all those who are involved in the learning enterprise.

The traditional understanding of the church-home-school relationship is also different in

a community school model. Rather than seeing the church, home and school as separate institutions that work together, it is understood that these three words refer to three different aspects of each member's own identity (Figure 1). Christians are familiar with the metaphor used throughout the New Testament that describes the community of Christian believers as the "Body of Christ." There are many passages that discuss the different parts of this Body, the diversity of gifts and function that are ascribed to each, the importance of working together, and a common faith that binds us together in unity.



Figure 1 - Identity of Each Community Member

Among community school participants, there is a common understanding that Christians themselves are the church wherever they are, as a matter of identity, not just when they are in a building called a church. Their identity as the church of Christ compels them to respond to the world around them in a certain way, everywhere, everyday. In the same way, it is understood that as mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, they are the home, not just when they are in the house that they call home, and that aspect of their identity compels them to respond to the world around them in a certain way, everywhere, everyday. Their identity as the school is the same; they understand that they are the school, not just when they are in a building called a school, and that aspect of their identity compels them to respond to the world around them in a certain way. They acknowledge that they have both freedoms and responsibilities in each of these areas of identity, and are both reminded and held accountable to these by others in the community.

A final difference between the community school and many traditional schools is the order of priority in which the common values of faith, beliefs about family systems, and

educational philosophy are placed. Virtually all Christian schools would agree on the importance of these various values, but their operational design indicates in what order of priority the values of faith, family and scholarship are placed. Virtually all schools that call themselves Christian would say that their common faith, as Christians, is the most important value they share, and evidence of that is seen throughout their operations, curriculum, traditions, and so forth. It is in the second priority that the difference is seen.

Many Christian schools would place their emphasis on superior academics as their second philosophical priority, since they see themselves as the institutional school, and academics is both their mission as well as their business. It is not that they do not care about family values, it is that they hope that families are brought together and strengthened as a by-product through the connection to the school as they work as a school community to support what the school is trying to accomplish.

In contrast, the community school paradigm places strong family values second in priority after a common Christian faith, and before academic excellence. It is not because the community school is not interested in superior academics, but it is because it believes that the potential for superior academics is heightened among students who are nurtured in strong families who have taken responsibility for the moral and spiritual training of their children. Because there is a belief in the communitarian idea that families are the primary moral educators of children, and because it is known that good moral character is a prerequisite to academic excellence, it follows that family values trumps academic excellence in priority.

These philosophical distinctives have given rise to an operational design that is unique to the community school model, and different from the traditional Christian school. Because such an emphasis is placed on family values, it is understood that the best way for a family to be strengthened and to forge deep and enduring relationships is to spend time together. Out of this

priority came a hybrid model that combines both on-campus and home education, where students spend a maximum of three days a week in the classroom and the balance of the school week at home, working from teacher-generated lesson plans. Because the community school philosophy claims both parents and students to be the school, the time spent off-campus is valued as working toward academic objectives in the same and related way as when students are sitting in classrooms. Parents are equipped to fulfill academic responsibilities through a Family Education program that offers a wide range of classes and workshops where they can earn their required “Family Education Units” each school year. In addition, parents are required to spend at least two or three days volunteering in their student’s classroom per 18-week semester in a Parent Partner program, further assisting them in their teaching or academic supervision at home.

Another innovation in the community school model that is derived from the communitarian philosophy is the drawing together of the parents, faculty and administration in mandatory Community Meetings five times during the school year. The philosophical impetus is this: just as members of the Body of Christ known as the church come together on a regular, periodic basis to remember who they are and to be encouraged in their vision and mission in the world, so also the school comes together for the same reasons. Just as members of each family come together on a regular basis to remember who they are together and be encouraged in their various endeavors, so also should the school come together for the same reasons. On the first Tuesday evening of every other month, parents, faculty, staff, administration and board members come together for a time of worship, business updates, special speakers, announcements and spiritual inspiration that reminds all present of their identity as the church, home and school, the vision and mission of the community in these three areas, and why they are doing what they are doing, thereby strengthening the community to a greater resolve to fulfill the vision set forth by the founder.

The schematic model of the community school conceptual framework (Figure 2) shows an overview of the community school model by identifying each of the five member roles at the tip of each point of the star, and depicts the partnerships among them by connecting lines.

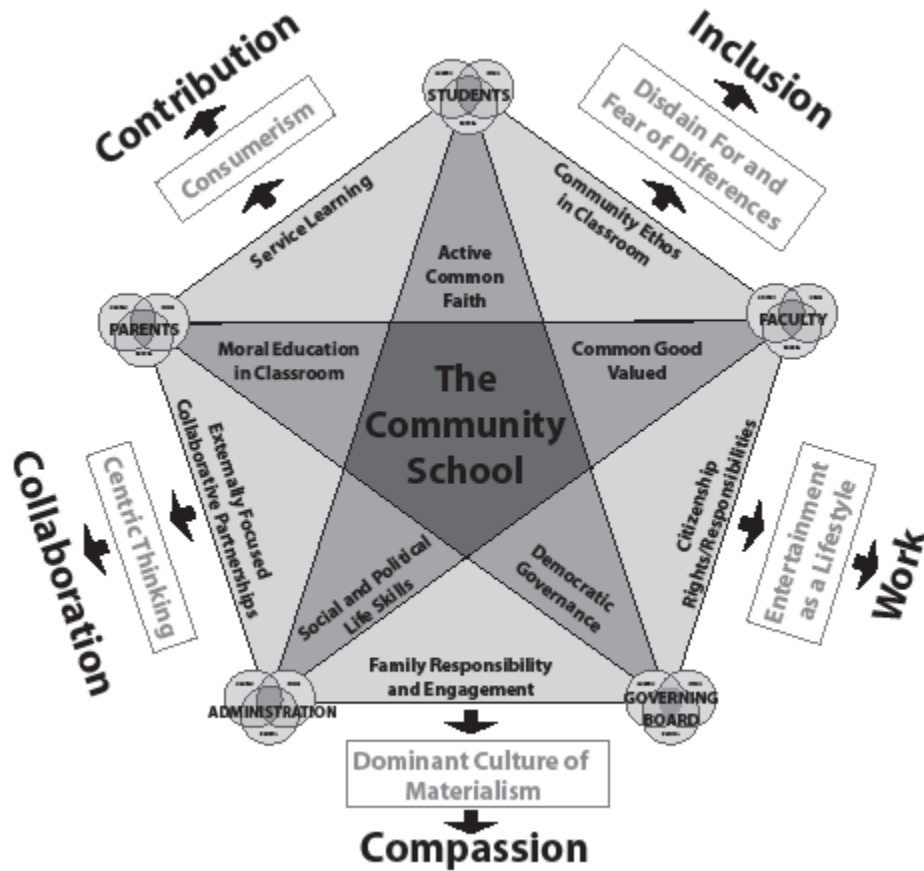


Figure 2 - A Schematic Model of Conceptual Framework

Within the spaces that are created by these connections, ten supporting themes of communitarian practices merge philosophy and operations together to show solidarity and collaborative commitment to community objectives. Arrows pointing outward depict the external focus of the community that facilitates the transformative process that continues to move members from community-weakening behaviors such as consumerism, disdain for and fear of differences, entertainment as a lifestyle, materialism, and centric thinking to community-building

characteristics such as contribution, inclusion, work, compassion, and collaboration.

It is through this conceptual framework that the research problem is viewed; that is, the struggle among many traditional Christian schools to maintain a sense of community, and the attenuating difficulties of lowered participation by parents, stress and burn-out among faculty, a growing sense of consumerism and selfish dissatisfaction among parents and students, and a deepening reality of students leaving the Christian faith because of the apparent hypocrisy they perceive in the gap between what is being taught in Christian schools and what is being practiced. Traditional Christian schools could benefit from a philosophical adjustment that would help them forge a new sense of identity, change the order of priority of families and academics, and bring them to a new level of community involvement.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This will be a qualitative study that seeks to expand a knowledge base about educational models that offer viable strategies for current problems in Christian education, especially the challenges arising in Christian private schools due to a real or perceived lack of a sense of community among the school members.

Assumptions are: (1) There is a need for new educational models; (2) Current traditional models for Christian education are not adequately meeting the needs of faculty, parents or students for a sense of community, and thereby not fulfilling the mission of Christian education of preparing students to be contributing citizens of a global world; and (3) Communitarian thought is currently a dominant cultural ideology that finds expression in three aspects of our corporate and individual identity, that is, the church, the home and the school.

Research will include a literature review and an appropriate correlation of literature with observation of a working community school model and results of interviews with participating informants.

My relationship to this study is as participant observer. The study will show that the underlying philosophy of the community school model as expressed operationally at various schools in Florida and Alabama reflects the core ideas of the communitarian agenda as summarized by James Arthur, and meets the need for a viable new educational model. Interviews will be conducted with informants who are currently or have participated in the schools as board members, administrators, parents, teachers and students to collect data to support this claim.

This research will benefit informants because it will lead to a higher profile and further development of the community school model, both locally and globally, which will increase its credibility as a viable educational alternative. This, in turn, will make community school

graduates more attractive to post-secondary institutions. Benefits to the greater community include strategies for Christian schools to increase a sense of community among their constituents, and possible changes to both public and private school accreditation standards that offer school development plans.

Research Questions

The survey that was offered to participating parents and teachers within the community school model included the following questions:

1. Do you consider yourself as a parent to be the primary moral educator of your children?
2. Your family delivers moral education to your children primarily through:
teaching with a character education curriculum; child training according to training received by parents; informal guidance through everyday life; regular family worship time; parents modeling moral behavior; teaching moral behavior through literature/videos/TV. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
3. Does the community school model effectively encourage parents to be the primary moral educators of their children?
4. Which of the following components of community school education most promote character education for children? Family education parent training; in-class encouragement/priority of teachers; administrative support for children's character education during times of correction; community emphasis on character education among families; classroom environment with peers from families actively involved in moral training at home. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
5. How important is the systematic teaching of virtues in the classroom in overall

character education? Very important; somewhat important; mildly important; not important.

6. What aspect of character education has the most impact on a child's moral training? Parents modeling right behavior; parents spending time with their children; teachers modeling right behavior; classroom instruction in virtues/character education; parent training in how to effectively train children at home in moral behavior and character-building; community partnerships that agree on the value of character education and moral training. (Rank answers in order of most to least impact.)
7. Does the ethos of the community have an educative function in the life of a school? Yes; no.
8. What are the most important aspects of community that your family has learned at this school? Diversity within unity is necessary for healthy community; the value of the "common good" of the community; accountability; sharing the load through partnership; emphasis on a sense of "otherness"; rights and responsibilities are connected. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
9. Which aspects of the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship that are taught at the community school are the most important? Sense of otherness; personal responsibility; respect for differences; personal service; character is more important than appearances; work ethic; think and act locally; think and act globally. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
10. How important is service learning to a child's overall education? Very important; somewhat important; mildly important; not important.

11. How important are these aspects of service learning to a child's education?
Personal work ethic; compassion; value of other cultures; empowerment of individual to change personal or environmental conditions of others; personal responsibility; value of serving others; leadership skills; teamwork. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
12. Do you agree that a major purpose of the school curriculum should be to teach social and political life skills? Yes; no.
13. How important are the following aspects of social and political life skills which are taught through the community school curriculum? "Curriculum" refers to all that is taught in the classroom and at home that is considered schooling, including experiential learning. Personal accountability; rights of individual balanced with responsibility to the "common good" of the community; importance of diversity within unity; responsibility of individual to participate in community life; respect for differences; consensus skills; learning to disagree respectfully; learning appropriate debate and logic skills; critical thinking. (Rank answers in order of importance.)
14. Do community schools promote an active understanding of the common good? Yes; no.
15. What are the most effective aspects of the community school model that promote an active understanding of the common good? Training in the "preciousness of others"; parent education to support moral training at home; otherness practiced as a priority in classroom environment; service learning; contribution used as a measurement of success; on-campus Parent Partner program. (Rank answers in order of importance.)

16. Do you agree that faith-based private schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular private schools or public schools? Yes; no.
17. Can the community ethos be as strong among non faith-based families who value a common morality and are committed to the common good as it is among faith-based families? Yes; no.
18. Can a non-Christian faith-based school (other religion) achieve as strong a community ethos as a Christian school? Yes; no.
19. If you think a stronger community ethos can be created among Christians than non-Christians, please explain your position in a brief statement.

Research Procedures

Participating informants at six community schools located in Florida and Alabama were invited to take an on-line survey through a web-based survey tool. The invitation was sent via email to a total of 420 families and faculty members of the six schools, with a cover letter by each school's chief administrator stressing the importance of participating in the survey. Unfortunately, the survey invitation was sent out in the beginning of May, at the end of the school year, when busyness and school fatigue is at its highest, resulting in a lower than expected response. Nevertheless, a total of 124 individuals participated in the survey.

A number of existing documents were also examined that articulate the founding philosophies of the community school model, from which were drawn assumptive conclusions that shaped the analysis of data collected. As a participating parent in the community school model, using personal experience as a practicing, contributing community member, the effectiveness of the community school was evaluated and the implications of the findings as effective strategies to strengthen traditional Christian schools were explored.

CHAPTER 4: Results

The survey was sent out via email to 420 email addresses with an invitation to participate through a web-based survey tool. One hundred twenty-four completed surveys were received from board members, administrative staff, faculty and parents from community schools located in Orlando, Tampa, Brandon (Florida), Jacksonville and Clanton, Alabama. The aim of the survey was, first, to discover whether participants of Christian community schools agree that this educational model embodies certain communitarian principles in its operational design; and second, to measure what aspects of communitarian ideology are perceived as most important by participants. The framework used to design the survey questions was provided by Arthur's 10 themes in communitarian education, although two of the 10 themes were not surveyed because they were specific to classroom management and school governance issues, and not general enough to be surveyed by the larger group of community school participants.

The most remarkable results we can see from the survey is that more than 90 percent of those who responded said that: (1) they consider themselves, as parents, to be the primary moral educator of their children; (2) the community school model effectively encourages parents to be the primary moral educators of their children; (3) the ethos of community has an educative function in the life of a school; (4) community schools promote an active understanding of the common good; and (5) faith-based schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular private schools or public schools. (Figure 3)

Do you consider yourself as a parent(s) to be the primary moral educator of your children?	Yes	99.2%	No	.8%
Does the community school model effectively encourage parents to be the primary moral educators of their children?	Yes	96.8%	No	3.2%
Does the ethos of community have an educative function in the life of a school?	Yes	97.4%	No	2.6%
Do community schools promote an active understanding of the “common good”?	Yes	93.3%	No	6.7%
Do you agree that faith-based private schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular private schools or public schools?	Yes	95.9%	No	4.1%

Figure 3 Majority Opinions Among Community School Participants

A break-down of results categorized according to Arthur’s 10 themes follow.

Theme 1: The family should be the primary moral educator of children. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents agreed that they considered themselves as parents to be the primary moral educator of their children, and they identified “informal guidance through everyday life” and “parents modeling moral behavior” as the two most important ways that moral education is delivered in a family setting, followed, in order, by: regular family devotions; teaching with a character education curriculum; training children according to training received by parents; and teaching moral behavior through literature videos or television.

Theme 2: Character education includes the systematic teaching of virtues in schools. The majority of respondents stated that the systematic teaching of virtues in the classroom was “very important” to overall character education, but a fifth of the respondents said it was only “somewhat important.” Over half of the respondents chose “parents modeling right behavior” and “parents spending time with their children” as the aspects of character education that have

the greatest influence on a child's moral training. After these two leading responses, the following aspects were named, in order of importance: parent training in how to train children at home in moral behavior; teachers modeling right behavior; and partnerships within the community (teacher/parent, parent/parent) that agree on the value of character education and moral training.

Theme 3: The ethos of the community has an educative function in school life. Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed with this statement. The most important aspects of community that respondents claimed they have learned by being part of the community school are the emphasis on otherness and accountability. After those, in order of importance are: sharing the load through partnership; the value of the common good; and the concepts that rights and responsibilities are connected, and diversity within unity is necessary for healthy community.

Theme 4: Schools should promote the rights and responsibilities inherent within citizenship. Almost half of the respondents chose "character is more important than appearances" as the most important aspect of citizenship education being taught at community school. Personal responsibility was second, followed, in order of importance, by: sense of otherness; personal service; work ethic, respect for differences; think and act locally; and think and act globally.

Theme 5: Service learning is an important part of a child's education. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that service learning is very important to a child's overall education, while about 30 percent claimed that it is only somewhat important. When asked which aspects of service learning are the most important to a child's education, the value of serving others and teaching compassion were ranked first, followed, in order of importance, by: personal work ethic; teamwork; personal responsibility; leadership skills; empowerment of individual to change

personal or environmental conditions of others; and value of other cultures.

Theme 6: A major purpose of the school curriculum is to teach social and political life skills. A majority of the respondents agreed with this statement, but almost a third disagreed. When given a number of aspects of social and political life skills that are taught in the school curriculum, and asked to rank them in order of importance, almost half cited personal accountability as the most important, followed by: responsibility of the individual to participate in community life; critical thinking; learning to disagree respectfully; respect for differences; learning appropriate debate and logic skills; importance of diversity within unity; rights of the individual must be balanced with responsibility to the common good; and consensus skills.

Theme 7: Schools should promote an active understanding of the common good. Ninety-three percent of respondents said that community schools promote an active understanding of the common good. Half of the respondents claimed that the most effective aspects of this educational model that promotes an understanding of the common good is the training in the “preciousness of others.” Otherness practiced as a priority in the classroom environment followed as second most effective in teaching about the common good, with service learning ranked third, and followed with parent education to support moral training at home; on-campus Parent Partner program; and contribution used as a measurement of success.

Theme 8: Religious schools can operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective. Ninety-five percent of respondents agreed that faith-based schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular private schools or public schools. A softer majority of 71 percent thought that the community ethos could not be as strong among non faith-based families who value a common morality and are committed to the common good, as it is among faith-based families. When asked to distinguish among religions, only a slim majority of 59 percent claimed that a Christian school can achieve a stronger community ethos than a faith-

based school affiliated with another religion. Those that thought that a stronger community ethos can be created among Christians than non-Christians were asked to explain their position in a brief statement. Of those 73 statements, 50 respondents referred to the spiritual bond of Christians through the Holy Spirit, 14 respondents referred to the common morality found in the Bible, and six cited the eternal quality of Christian community taught in the Bible as being the reasons that Christians are able to create a stronger community ethos than non-Christians. Three respondents appeared to misunderstand the question and their responses were not counted.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

This study examined the communitarian paradigm in educational practice, specifically looking at how well current operational structures in Christian community schools reflect communitarian thinking, and what implications for change it can offer to traditional Christian schools. A review of relevant literature established parameters for communitarian thinking in education, and a survey of participating community school members confirmed that this new model of education not only offers a comprehensive theory of education from a communitarian perspective, but also a philosophy of identity that can be a workable blueprint for transformation in traditional Christian schools desiring to establish and maintain a vibrant sense of community among their school members.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The difference between Christian community schools and traditional Christian schools is a communitarian philosophy of identity that leads to prioritization of values, which, in turn, generates a specific operational infrastructure through which spiritual and educational goals are realized. A correlation of this study's literature review and results of a survey of community school members will show how each of the 10 themes in communitarian education can benefit those committed to the mission of Christian education. Throughout this discussion, the term "community school" will refer to those schools specifically associated with the Christian community school network that are bound together through a common conceptual framework and were given the opportunity to respond to the survey.

Theme 1: The family should be the primary moral educator of children. The priority placed on strong family dynamic and the responsibility of parents to train their children in the community school model is confirmed in the survey results, where 99 percent of the respondents indicated that they considered themselves to be the primary moral educator of their children.

This is not surprising, given that the families that choose to become members of a community school have largely been attracted there because this is a priority, and they are seeking relationships with other families who share their values.

The understanding that consistent moral training at home substantially improves a child's academic readiness is confirmed in the literature, and is one of the reasons that community schools prioritize family engagement. However, more important to the Christian community is the mandate given in scripture to "teach the children" and to pass on the doctrines of the faith, many of which are rooted in the ancient Hebraic moral code. Christian families as a whole would not argue that they are responsible for the moral and spiritual training of their children, but many young parents feel unprepared to do that in any systematic way, many of them coming from inadequate or dysfunctional parenting styles themselves.

To that end, community schools require parents to take an 18-week Christian parenting course during the first year of enrollment. This requirement is clearly indicated in the information meeting and family interview required for all first-time families, eliminating arguments that might take place later when families are held accountable to fulfill the requirement before they are allowed to re-enroll for their second year. There is some variety in the parenting courses that are approved for this requirement, but all of them offer an in-depth exposure to sound theories of child development and practical systems for children's moral training.

The results have been impressive. Even parents who initially chafe at the idea of being required to take a parenting course inevitably acknowledge that it was worth their time and helpful in the day-to-day management of their children as well as their own consistency in training. One of the most remarkable and beneficial results of this requirement is that parents inevitably take what they are learning about their children and apply it in their own lives, and in

this way, continue in their own moral training. The combination of parents modeling right moral behavior and spending time with their children was the winning formula mentioned by respondents in the survey as the two factors that have the most impact on a child's character education. Listed in third place was the parent training in how to effectively train children at home in moral behavior and character building, underscoring the importance of this contribution to families.

These top three factors, all centered in the training and instruction that happens at home, scored higher on the survey than classroom factors such as teachers modeling right behavior, teacher-parent partnerships that agree on the value of moral training and classroom instruction in character education. This confirms the efficacy of the priority that the community school places on family support and training, as parents are discovering the benefits of their engagement in the lives of their children, both in relationship and academic achievement.

Communitarian literature universally agrees that the family is the primary unit of a community, and that the responsibility of parents for their children is a moral obligation they have to society. Unfortunately, there are conflicting values in the dominant American culture that pull parents into a conflict for time and energy when it comes to family engagement. The pressure put on the American middle class consumer for a certain materialistic measurement of the "good life" correspondingly draws many families into a perceived need for two incomes, placing both mother and father outside the home for much of the time, most of the week. In addition, these are often the parents that seek private schooling for their children, some of them working outside the home to generate enough income just to pay for private school tuition. Add to the time spent five days a week in employment and school, the hours spent in evening homework, sports and other extracurricular activities outside the school, church functions, and everyday house and home upkeep, and result is that the typical American middle-class family is

left with very little time actually spent together. Parents report that once their children start school, they have even less time to spend with them and begin to notice the effect, often in conflict with their family's values, of the influence of peers and increased exposure to television programming when parents are still at work during after-school hours.

Many families who join the community school transfer from public and traditional private schools, citing their frustration and angst over lost family time as a primary reason. Because the communitarian philosophy and operational design values parents as partners in the school experience, and allows students to do their schooling at home for at least two additional days during the week, parents are given the gift of time with their children. In addition, there is no evening homework assigned, as students are given the opportunity to get the rigorous curriculum accomplished during their school days during the week at home. Parents report that given the time to teach their children during the school day and spending family time together in the evenings gives them more consistent time and context for the transference of their moral and spiritual values, thereby deepening their relationship with and their influence on their children.

Theme 2: Character education includes the systematic teaching of virtues in schools.

While parents are considered the primary moral educators of their children, communitarian thinking also stresses the importance of being connected to other members of the community and to community organizations that reinforce what is being taught at home. This becomes a powerful social network of influence for a child that cannot be underestimated. To repeat Thomas Likona (1991, p. 35), "Working together, these two formative social institutions [family and school] have real power to raise up moral human beings to elevate the moral life of the nation."

Survey respondents affirmed this value by ranking "classroom environment with peers from families actively involved in moral training at home" as the leading factor that promotes

character education when students are on campus. Because all community school parents are required to complete an in-depth parenting course, and because these courses are carefully selected based on a congruency of parenting philosophy, there is consistent training taking place in all community school homes. In addition, all teachers are required to take the same parenting courses, whether they have children in the school or not, so that their classroom management and relationship with students is interwoven with the same “language of virtues” and moral standard used at home. In fact, the second-ranked factor that promotes character education when students are on campus was the in-class encouragement and priority that teachers place on the teaching of virtues.

When asked directly on the survey of the importance of systematically teaching virtues in the classroom in overall character education, only 80 percent responded “very important,” 19 percent said “somewhat important,” and two respondents, representing one percent, said “mildly important.” This is interesting, in that it may reflect the strength of parents’ belief that since they are the primary moral educators of their children, their training at home is far more important than what happens in the classroom.

Character education is not contained only in the classroom when children are on campus. The language and process of dealing with children who need additional guidance in their behavior is also consistent in the Dean of Students’ office. It is a stated policy that parents are responsible for the discipline of their children and will be called to campus should their children need it; however, it is also stated that “adults on campus are responsible to respond to the children’s behavior appropriately,” with steps being carefully laid out that indicates clearly what that means, including explaining to the child the moral reason why the behavior was wrong and allowing the child the opportunity to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with the offended party. Other school-wide moral habits include a specific protocol for interrupting conversations,

repeated references to “the preciousness of others,” addressing adults as “Mr./Mrs./Miss”, and the practice of “naming the virtues,” that is, calling attention as often as is practical to children’s behaviors and attitudes as courageous, brave, respectful, honoring, kind, obedient, and so forth. In these ways, the environment of the school campus is permeated with character-building practices, moral reasoning and virtuous living among both children and adults.

Theme 3: The ethos of the community has an educative function in school life. There is constant reference to “community” among the members of the community school. Although the word “community” is used in many different ways in our American culture, from community banks to community activists, what is meant at the community school is a reference to the feeling of connectedness and congruency of philosophy and practice that binds hearts together to work toward common objectives. This is the “heart” of the school. It has been heard many times, from parents, teachers, and administrators, the phrase, “They’re just not community,” referring to an individual or a family whose values and practice don’t appear to line up with the philosophy of the school.

The educative function of this community ethos is in the remarkable transformation of its members in their continuous move toward maturity. This comes as a result of the powerful alchemy of grace and accountability, high expectations with abundant personal support, and a respect for differences amid conformity to a common standard. Relationships between teacher and parent, administrator and teacher, parent and student, and so forth, are seen in terms of partnerships that are governed by the law of reciprocity, defined as a strong sense of otherness, and interdependent, mutual trust. This acknowledges the responsibility that each member of the partnership has for the other, the equitable sharing of the load, and the critical importance of trust in the relationship. Survey results reveal the great value community school members place on the sense of otherness, accountability, and partnership, naming these the three most important

aspects of community that they have learned during their experience with the school.

Maintaining a strong ethos of community is difficult, even in a community school where it is well defined and encouraged. A paper entitled “Building Community in the Christian School” identified a number of reasons this is so, among them, a common “sin nature,” which continuously tempts people toward selfishness and pride; the common human frailty of all people as the cause of forgetfulness and fear of exposure; and the dominant culture, which tempts people to fall prey to convenience and consumerism. These challenges are met with regular reminders of the school’s identity and mission through corporate “community meetings,” and an extensive Family Education program that includes certain courses that are required of all members. In this way, a “culture of learning” is not confined to students’ classrooms, but is created throughout the organization, with the acknowledgement that the best teachers are good learners.

One of the required courses is “Principles of Community,” a one-hour condensed presentation that articulates the identity and mission of the school through twelve principles. Every adult member of the school (parents, teachers, administrative staff, board members) is required to sit in on this class every two years, where they are refreshed in such basic principles as: the source of our unity is outside ourselves; diversity within unity is necessary for healthy community; the best way to relate to each other is through the Spirit of God; we are all approaching maturity; parents are responsible for the spiritual and moral training of their children; a partner relationship is built on reciprocity and mutual trust; each member of a community represents the whole; authority is properly exercised with accountability; and leadership is held to a higher standard.

The ethos of community continues to be the primary reason that people who come to the school, stay, and soon realize that the educative function of “community” is the deep lessons

learned by all who are connected. The moral and spiritual development of both children and adults, the strengthening of families, the repair of marriages, the accompaniment through grief and the forging of lifelong friendships are among the many stories of community life that are shared each year at the community school. The students of this kind of school learn early and consistently through their formative years that the substance of community life is what teaches the important things, beyond knowledge and information, that will sustain them the most throughout their adult lives.

Theme 4: Schools should promote the rights and responsibilities inherent within citizenship. The vision statement of the International Community School (ICS) reads: “The International Community School will train students to become world citizens as learners and leaders through the strengths of a common faith, family engagement and a superior learning environment.” Similarly, the mission statement describes this objective: “The International Community School strives to produce learners and leaders who will contribute well-trained minds and hearts to an interdependent global community through a lifetime of personal ministry as they reflect the character of Jesus Christ to bring connection, healing and reconciliation to the world. We are building a Christian community of responsible world citizens who partner together to create an educational environment that: (1) fosters a passion for learning through integrated international studies enhanced by experiential learning; (2) stimulates spiritual, physical and intellectual vitality through the arts, competitive sports and environmental education; and (3) instills in students a compassionate heart trained to partner and serve on a global scale.”

Both of these statements are filled with references to the communitarian paradigm, and not only identify ICS graduates as world citizens, but also extend the responsibility of citizenship to the entire community. This is a recognition that one of the chief objectives of the entire

school enterprise is to foster an understanding of responsible citizenship, through the curriculum, classroom management, character education, healthy parenting and so forth.

The strong tie between teaching responsible citizenship and character education is seen in the results of the survey, where almost half of the respondents ranked “character is more important than appearances” as the most important aspect of good citizenship taught at the community school. Personal responsibility and a sense of otherness, both qualities basic to moral education, ranked as second and third most important accordingly.

The secular communitarian platform refers to rights of the individual in society that must be balanced with responsibility, but is generally discussed as characteristic of citizens in a political community. In a Christian community, there is not so much discussion of rights as there is of freedoms. The idea of rights loses its coherency in light of scripture, which teaches that human beings who are born in sin and in need of redemption, are without rights, and that only the grace of God grants them freedom. The teaching of citizenship, then, is more likely to be centered on the idea of personal responsibility as a response to the freedoms that have been given.

The idea of this balance of freedom and responsibility is used throughout the parenting education required for all families, so that this particular principle of moral living is taught to children from a young age. Children learn that freedoms come only through responsibility, and may be removed, just as in the greater society, if the individual chooses to ignore his responsibility.

Theme 5: Service learning is an important part of a child’s education in school.

Assumption eight of the stated educational philosophy of community schools reads, “Academics must be balanced with experiential and service learning in the context of teaching a

theology and practice of work.” This points to the importance placed on pedagogical praxis, or, as Shaffer defines it, “the development of useful and socially valued ways of thinking through personally and socially meaningful activity.” (2003, p. 39) The connection between head knowledge and experience is well known to educators in the critical process of internalization of ideas for learners, and seen in the light of communitarian thinking which places great value on interdependent relationships and personal contribution to the common good, service learning takes on considerable importance in the school experience.

Given this importance, the survey results were somewhat surprising to me, as only two-thirds of respondents indicated that service learning is “very important” to a child’s overall education. However, this survey covered five schools, not all of them with a service learning component developed yet, which may account for the lower number of total respondents placing a high value on it. In addition, the philosophy of a school is transmitted to members primarily through its administrator, and in a newly developing school, administrators are generally overwhelmed with the amount of detail and the number of separate programming issues that need attention, and most likely see service learning as an add-on rather than central to the school’s overarching objectives.

When asked which aspects of service learning are most important to a child’s education, respondents’ answers more closely reflected the Christian communitarian philosophy, in that they named “the value of serving others” (45 percent) and “compassion” (35 percent) as the two most important factors. This is not surprising, given the core values of the community. The third factor listed, in order of importance, was “work ethic,” correlating well with the educational philosophy statement of service learning being taught in the context of teaching a theology and practice of work. The idea here is two-fold: first, children should be taught that service to others often places them in situations that are uncomfortable and require hard work with little tangible

personal return; and second, training children to a strong work ethic is part of character education which reflects a Christian theology that, simply put, states, “We work because God works.”

At the International Community School, each classroom (high school students divide into multi-age teams) is required to complete both a local and a global service learning project each school year. Under the teacher’s guidance, children review options and, in a democratic process, vote on their favorite project. Teachers are encouraged to connect service learning to classroom study, and find ways to tie in the cultural, historical or geographical aspects of the project. A further step in the learning process occurs when students are able to directly connect with the people they are serving. This happens more often in local service projects, but global connections are more complicated. ICS arranges “Service Adventures” which take students and parents to overseas destinations, primarily to the communities where students have made a personal investment during service learning projects. An example is a village in Honduras where a number of orphaned children received fleece blankets made by ICS students during the school year, and then welcomed the same students for a two-week stay in June where relationships were initiated and further construction work on a new church was accomplished.

Ultimately, the relational connection between those who serve and those who receive becomes reciprocal, as students learn that those they are serving have contributions to make in their own lives. In Etzioni’s words, students being taught through service learning are able to “show their eagerness to learn from them as we share with them what we hold to be true,” with relational reciprocity marking the central difference between the old concept of community service and the communitarian idea of service learning.

Theme 6: A major purpose of the school curriculum is to teach social and political life skills. In order to live out the communitarian ideals of civic contribution, partnerships, collaboration and humanitarian service, children must be taught the processes and skills needed

for critical thinking, conflict resolution, teamwork, consensus-building, and effective cross-cultural communication. These aspects of communitarian ideology are taught both formally through specific curriculums as well as informally, through the modeling of these skills by adults and the use of various techniques in classroom management.

Even though most of the survey respondents agreed that the teaching of social and political life skills should be a major purpose of the school curriculum, the 69 percent majority seemed low, given the critical need for graduates to obtain these skills to achieve the school's vision. A possible explanation for this is that the question was asked without an explanation of what was meant by "social and political life skills." This was an inherent weakness in the survey, since respondents could be generally unfamiliar with the terminology, and were left to their own interpretation. When asked which aspects of those skills were most important, respondents placed personal accountability and critical thinking at the top of the list, which is interesting in that those two qualities of independent learning are stressed throughout the academic experience in the community school model. Because the question used the word "curriculum," it may be that respondents considered the answers in light of academic process rather than social and political life skills needed for the development of future citizenship.

The community school model lends itself to the development of these skills, in both its philosophy and operational design. Students are taught through the powerful example of their parents' contribution to community life that they, too, have a reciprocal debt to pay to the community that nurtures them. The requirements that parents contribute their time in the classroom, teach and supervise learning at home, attend mandatory meetings, complete Family Education requirements and so forth, provide continual examples of community involvement.

One of the courses offered to parents is a conflict resolution curriculum called Peacemakers, another is called "Dealing with the Difference" which calls attention to the

benefits of diversity and offers strategies to overcome the centric thinking common to any culture. Teamwork and leadership skills are taught to students in a number of contexts, both in and outside of the classroom, including special focus retreats, competitive sports, specially designed social events, and service learning projects.

Theme 7: Schools should promote an active understanding of the common good. With the many reminders of members' responsibilities to contribute to the community seen throughout community school life, it is not surprising that 93 percent of respondents agreed that this model promotes an active understanding of the common good. In sharp contrast to many traditional private schools, where parents are comfortable dropping off their children day after day and allowing the institution to be solely responsible for the educational process, the community school requires members to be actively engaged both on and off campus.

In community schools, the common good refers to the betterment of relationships or conditions in the three aspects of identity known as the "pillars of community," or faith, family and scholarship. Since each member is reminded of their responsibility to contribute through service, charity, and work in each of these areas, the community as a whole benefits as much as the individual. In addition, particularly in a Christian school, the religious dimension of living to a common moral code generalizes the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") into a broad application of Christian living and is woven into the fabric of community life, where it is expected of each member of all ages.

This emphasis on the Golden Rule as the basis of a common moral code is exemplified in the phrase, "the preciousness of others," which is used throughout the community school environment and is derived from the parenting classes required of all parents and faculty members. The phrase refers to the value placed on each human being by God, both as His creation and object of His redemption, and children are taught that they are to treat others based

on the value placed on them by God, not the value they may assign themselves. The term is widely used both in the home and on the school campus, where children are reminded of the “preciousness of others” in the social dynamics of every classroom and during times of correction. Because of this, it is not surprising that half of the respondents ranked “training in the preciousness of others” as the most effective aspect of the community school model that promotes an active understanding of the common good, and almost a third of the respondents ranked “otherness practiced as a priority in the classroom environment” as the second most effective aspect. Members would say that the primary reason they contribute to the common good of the community is because they must consider the value of other people based on God’s requirement for moral living rather than their own idea of “doing good.” This is an important reason why faith-based schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular schools.

Theme 8: Religious schools can operate a strong version of the communitarian perspective. The survey asked three questions to help illuminate the opinions of community school members on this topic, and the results were somewhat surprising. First, to the question of whether or not faith-based private schools are able to achieve a deeper sense of community than secular private schools or public schools, the resounding answer was yes, with 96 percent of respondents in agreement. Next, when asked if the community ethos can be as strong among a group of non faith-based families but who still value a common morality and are committed to the “common good” as it is among faith-based families, the majority of respondents who attribute community strength to a common spirituality dropped to only 71 percent. Third, when asked to consider faith-based communities alone, only 59 percent claimed that Christian schools are able to achieve a stronger community ethos than schools affiliated with other religions.

Because the first question used the contrasting terminology of “faith-based” versus

“secular” schools, the emotional response of 96 percent of respondents was predictably tilted toward the word “faith” and away from the word “secular.” This points to the persisting attitude among some Christians that life must be lived apart from anything called “secular.” The resistance among the greater Christian community to consider that the sacred could be, and in fact should be, integrated with the secular, is the subject of much current discussion among Christian writers who deplore the perceived weakening of the Christian influence in dominant society, and feel that the so-called “missional impulse” of the Church must come from the risky dynamic of living as the Church in the midst of a culture, not separated from it.

When the word “secular” was removed from the question, and communitarian language was added as a description of the community ethos, 29 percent of respondents agreed that a common faith wasn’t the only glue that holds people together, and said that non faith-based families can achieve as strong a sense of community as faith-based families, as long as they share a common morality and a commitment to the common good. This indication that almost a third of respondents have internalized the communitarian values of common morality and personal contribution to the extent that they can understand the power of these values even outside of a common faith, is an expression of hope and promise to secular communities.

Seventy-one percent, however, affirmed that faith-based families are still able to achieve a stronger sense of community than non faith-based families who value a common morality and are committed to the common good, clearly placing a strong emphasis on the importance of a common spirituality. When asked, then, whether or not it was important that the common faith be Christian as opposed to another religion, only 59 percent of respondents agreed. A significant number of respondents, just over 40 percent, indicated that the important factor to creating a strong community is a common faith and not necessarily Christian. This is a reflection of the emphasis placed on the first philosophical priority of community schools, a common faith.

These are people who understand the depth of relationship that is possible between individuals who share life through a common spirituality, whether or not it is identified as Christian, and further, who know that most religions, not just Christianity, share a common moral code and spiritual disciplines that draw people together in fundamentally deeper ways.

The only survey question that asked for an open-ended response was a request of those who agreed for an explanation of why a stronger community ethos can be created among Christians than non-Christians. The three main reasons were given as the spiritual bond of Christians through the Holy Spirit of God, the common spiritual principles and moral code taught in the Bible, and the eternal quality of Christian community as opposed to the temporal relationships confined to the experience of living on earth.

All three of these reasons reflect a deep commitment to and affirmation of the principle of community that states, “The Source of our unity is outside of ourselves,” included in the course entitled “Principles of Community,” required every two years for every adult community school member. This principle is grounded in several passages from the sacred text, including Ephesians 4:4, which says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all,” and Colossians 1:16-18a, “He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...For by Him all things were created...He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church.” (The Holy Bible, 1984) In the statement of the principle, it is agreed that the Source of unity outside of any one individual is Jesus Christ.

The strength of the community bond that is derived from a source that is both apart from any one individual and also dwells within each person who has received that truth, is seen as a bond that cannot be matched by any other human experience. In addition, because Christians

believe that the Bible is the infallible, inspired word of God, it contains absolute truth derived from a source outside of any particular individual's opinion, and is therefore, trustworthy for all. And finally, the emphasis placed in scripture on the eternal nature of existence beyond this lifetime, and the understanding that relationships among Christians forged during this lifetime will persist after death in some other dimension where personality will continue in some other form, gives rise to a deeper sense of connectedness among believers now. In contrast, the humanistic quality of secular communitarian ideas such as living to a common moral code and contributing to the common good are seen as being derived from within an individual and still possible without the underpinnings of a Christian spiritual perspective.

Recommendations

Having shown how the community school model effectively reflects the communitarian agenda for education, and exploring the opinions and perceptions of participating community school members as to various aspects of communitarian education, the discussion now turns to what can be learned from the community school model that offers implications for change in traditional Christian private schools.

The changes that are called for are those that will meet the challenges experienced in most traditional Christian schools resulting from a poor sense of community among members. This lack of community ethos has produced a host of discouraging problems within the school walls, as well as damaged the reputation, weakened the influence and inhibited the growth of Christian schools within the broader society.

Traditional Christian schools can look at the community school model to gain an understanding of the important benefits of establishing and maintaining a strong sense of community. These benefits fall broadly into three categories: identity, transformation and

contribution. If traditional Christian schools will make changes in these three areas, it is possible for them to find lasting solutions to the challenges associated with a current lack of community ethos among their members.

Identity

Organizations, like people, must understand that “what we do comes from who we are.” Articulating a strong identity starts with vision and mission statements, and most schools have those written in their brochures, on their websites and posted on their walls. But often there is no cohesive, spoken or written philosophy that gives enough shape to those vision and mission statements for members to internalize them. Further, because the identity of the school is not clearly articulated, those responsible for designing and maintaining school operational policies don’t have a clear, driving philosophy to inform their decisions, resulting in a dissonance between what members think the school stands for and what is actually happening in the life of the school. Therefore, Christian schools should have a clearly written philosophical statement that tells members why they are committed to a particular vision and why that vision calls for a specific mission to get it accomplished. Further, there should be a program established that offers regular, consistent formats and venues for communicating this identity to members, and this should be accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, there could be mandatory information meetings for all incoming families where the philosophy and identity is clearly spoken, required meetings throughout the school year for members to come together to be inspired and reminded of who they are and why they’re doing what they’re doing, and reminders through a variety of intra-school communication forms of the priorities demanded by their identity and played out in operational design.

There is a critical difference between the community school philosophy and traditional schools’ understanding of the church-home-school relationship. If Christian schools will stop

thinking of these three as separate institutions and begin to consider them aspects of each individual's identity, a sense of community will inevitably follow. They must help each member of the school community to understand the individual responsibilities they have that result from being the church, being the home and being the school, and then expect members to live up to their responsibilities. They will reap the benefits that will come from this primary change of identity, as they see that consumerism is replaced with contribution, centric thinking is replaced with collaboration and teamwork, and individualism is transformed into partnership.

As community members internalize their identity as the school, the definition of who constitutes the school will also change. Traditionally, the school is defined as the team of professional administrators and educators that are responsible for the education of children in a specific location; however, Christian schools would do well to consider the school to be the partnership of the governing board, administration, faculty, parents and students, and incomplete with the contribution and reciprocal responsibilities of members in all five categories. As members internalize their identity as the school and value the need for others in different roles, a strong sense of community will ensue.

The priority of family engagement over academic excellence is another critical change that traditional Christian schools must consider. Many schools place such a strong emphasis on academics that family time is compromised, and there is too little attention given to the importance of families spending time together in the transference of family values and the time required for parents to be effective in the moral training of their children. When these family factors are considered as priorities because they are seen as prerequisites to excellence in academics, Christian schools will reap the benefits in academic achievement, as well as more stable family systems among school members.

Transformation

Similar to the beneficial process of being in a strong family system where children are given a well-crafted sense of personal identity that enables them to grow toward maturity in healthy ways, so too, is the growth and development of each member of the school as he or she engages in the transformative process of moral, spiritual and academic growth that results from being in a healthy, vibrant school community. But, just like in a family, this process will not happen unless there is an intentional plan in place to inform, train and hold accountable the various members of the community.

The community school model features an infrastructure of parent engagement, parent-teacher partnership and on-going family education that supports the personal growth and development of its members. Even though traditional Christian schools require students to be on campus five days a week, they should still offer opportunities for parents to be engaged in the academic process beyond helping with homework, require parents to participate in school initiatives, and mandate on-going education for parents that helps them enrich their family life and understand educational issues more deeply. When parents and teachers learn together, and participate as partners in setting goals and finding strategies to help their students, relationships are rooted in common experience, and a strong sense of community begins to emerge. The accountability that comes from an understanding of reciprocity and protection of a mutual trust among the partners holds everyone to a common standard and ultimately results in a transforming process that brings those involved to a higher level of maturity.

Particularly in the Christian community, it is agreed from scripture that the mandate of the Christian life is to move toward maturity. The sacred text is replete with admonishments to continue in the journey of spiritual growth, and Christian schools should find as many ways as possible to integrate the life of the school with spiritual formation, reminding each member of

their responsibility to submit to the difficult but rewarding process of denying selfish ambitions and becoming more like Christ in a growing sense of otherness.

Contribution

Learning to give back to the family that nurtures them is crucial to the moral training of children in a healthy home. It is each one bringing their personal resources of time, energy, talents and skills to the entire family for the benefit of all. It is the communitarian concepts of contribution to the common good and of synergy, which is the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that there is a common benefit to the collective contribution of individuals that goes beyond what a collection of individuals can accomplish separately.

When parents consider themselves and are valued by administrators and faculty as equal members of a school, they are more willing to invest their time, energy, talents and skills to the school body. Traditional Christian schools must communicate to parents the high value they place on them as members of the school rather than treating them as intruders on their professional space. Allowing parents to be part of real decision-making bodies, inviting them to lead students in various initiatives, requiring them to participate on campus in school activities, and encouraging them to volunteer as extra hands on the playground, in the lunchroom, in the library and so forth, are all powerful ways to seek their contribution to school life.

Maturity in the Christian life is measured in terms of contribution, mostly in terms of personal service to others. In Christian schools, the emphasis placed on service to others should be seen internally in the form of contribution on campus, as well as externally in the form of service learning. Traditional Christian schools must move beyond the idea of requiring community service of their students to qualify for certain scholarships, to the much deeper and more socially and spiritually significant concept of service learning. While community service does help students understand the need to contribute to the common good and to volunteer their

time, service learning takes students to a whole new level of social entrepreneurship and heart engagement that teaches compassion and encourages them to approach service projects as opportunities to learn from those they are serving.

Traditional Christian schools have been criticized as exclusionary enclaves of Christian citizens that are either disdainful or fearful of the dominant culture in which they live. Students who have left the faith after growing up in traditional Christian schools have reported they did so because they grew up thinking that in order to be a Christian they had to be isolated from the culture, and because they saw a credibility gap between what was taught as the Christian principle of serving others in love and what they saw in their Christian subculture as being inward-focused, self-contained, and exclusive to the greater community. Not only is this wrong both morally and scripturally, but it is a tragic loss for the church. Traditional Christian schools must be careful to remain externally focused, engaging all community members in service learning and other opportunities for contributing time, energy, talents, skills and financial resources to those outside the Christian community. In this way, they will find that they will continue to become stronger internally, as the community strengthens to discover collective inner resources necessary to be of service together.

A final recommendation concerns changes in accreditation standards for both regional and national accrediting agencies. Given the many issues that are addressed during the accrediting process and the vast amount of time it takes to assemble documents, refine systems, update facilities and otherwise complete the self-study required, it is reasonable that those structures that are recommended but not required will take last place on the list of school improvement initiatives. Unless these changes are written into accreditation standards, there will be no lasting change, and traditional Christian schools will likely snap back to the grid of older, more convenient, easier ways of operating. Therefore, more research needs to be done, primarily

in the areas of family education and service learning, to expand the conversation among educational professionals and raise the level of consciousness about the benefits of deepening a true sense of community in schools.

The building and maintaining of community in Christian schools is neither easy nor simple, as it is a remedy that is both difficult and complex. But it is possible through the structures of the community school model. This is good news for communities of faith, for the Christian private school system, for those administrators and faculty members whose vocation calls them to ever deeper and more authentic experience, for families who seek connection with other families to be encouraged and inspired toward healthy, strong relationships, and ultimately, for students, who must be taught to be life-long learners and contributing citizens to a global community that needs intelligent, compassionate problem-solvers.

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Appendix 1

Vision Summary of the International Community School

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the leading edge of educational design, the International Community School is a learning environment where the ethos is one of inquiry, creativity, Christian faith and vibrant experience. This is where students explore the complexities of global systems, develop international relationships, and engage with idea and information with both mind and heart. Challenging academics are balanced with opportunities for other giftings to be developed in the arts, business, and competitive sports. This is where faculty, students and families are given opportunity to study and serve internationally, where parents are engaged in the education of their children by design, and each member of the educational community is encouraged to explore the terrain of his own spiritual formation as central to the learning process.

We believe that the best learning environment is built on the triadic structure of academics, service learning and work, understanding that each of these components is necessary for the other two to be accomplished. In this way, students develop internal resources of spiritual strength, critical thinking, innate giftedness and acquired skills that promote them to places of leadership, problem-solving, responsible partnering and world transformation.

The International Community School is actively building complementary relationships around the world. These relationships comprise a network of diverse peoples, cultures and geographies connected by the unifying principles of a common faith and educational philosophy. By definition and mission, the school cannot exist without community partnerships, both locally and internationally.

This is 21st Century Christian education that produces students who are prepared to contribute well-trained minds and hearts to a global community as learners, partners and world changers.

2 WHO ARE WE?

2.1 Profile The International Community School is a private school located in Winter Park, FL, where the current academic program serves just over 400 students from Pre-Kindergarten (K-4) to 12th Grade. Known as The Community School since its founding in 1998, the organization changed its name to International Community School in June 2004 to more accurately reflect the expansion of the vision to a school of international studies and global connectedness.

2.2 Vision The International Community School will train students to become world citizens as learners and leaders through the strengths of a common faith, family engagement and a superior learning environment.

2.3 Mission The International Community School strives to produce learners and leaders who will contribute well-trained minds and hearts to an interdependent global community through a lifetime of personal ministry as they reflect the character of Jesus Christ to bring connection, healing and reconciliation to the world.

We are building a Christian community of responsible world citizens who partner together to create an educational environment that

- (1) fosters a passion for learning through integrated international studies enhanced by experiential learning;
- (2) stimulates spiritual, physical and intellectual vitality through the arts, competitive sports and environmental education; and
- (3) instills in students a compassionate heart trained to partner and serve on a global scale.

2.4 Legal Status ICS is registered with the Florida Department of Education as a non-public school, is incorporated in the State of Florida as a non-profit corporation, and holds 501 (c) (3) status with the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt organization.

2.5 Accreditation ICS is nationally accredited by Christian Schools International (CSI), holds regional accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and international accreditation through the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA).

2.6 Christian Ethos The fundamental character of ICS is that of a Christian culture. This underlying ethos informs the beliefs and practices of the educational community, for we understand that ultimately there is no truth that is incompatible with the Christian faith. We believe that the existence of a triune God is seen throughout creation and history, that while we are drawn together around many unifying principles and aspects of human existence, Jesus Christ is the only source of common unity among Christians and ultimately the only hope for healing and restoration of brokenness in the world. We agree that this unity transcends cultural, denominational and geographical boundaries, and is the essential link that connects us with this common purpose.

3 WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

ICS is an entirely unique learning environment, including aspects of many different kinds of schools in its design, but combining them in such a way that the result is a distinctive educational model not found anywhere else in the world.

3.1 Community School Philosophy Because what we do comes out of who we are, our identity as a community school directly impacts our operational design. The community school philosophy can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Whereas traditional private schools maintain a separation between the institutions of the church, the home and the school and seek to create an operational model whereby these three community institutions are mutually strengthened and informed, the community school assumes that the church, home and school are not separate institutions, but rather, three aspects of each individual's identity.

- (2) As each individual in the community continues to mature in their understanding of and responsibility to “being the church,” “being the home,” and “being the school,” the powerful synergy of a vibrant, strong Christian community emerges to work toward the strengthening of the body of Christ within the church, the home and the school.
- (3) The community of Christian believers is identified by (1) common values in these three aspects of identity; and (2) the order of priority they hold in each individual’s life, and this Christian community spans beyond the boundaries of any particular school.
- (4) Each community school, then, is a subset of a larger Christian community drawn together by a common identity, and is characterized by a network of working partnerships among the members of the community.
- (5) The five component roles of the community school are the board of directors, the administration and staff, the faculty, the parents and the students. The community school is not complete without all five component roles working in partnership together.
- (6) There are 12 “Principles of Community” that define our corporate identity, and best articulate the spiritual standard against which all operational decisions are measured.
- (7) Responsibility for the education of students is shared by individuals in all five component roles of the school community, and an infrastructure of responsibility and accountability for each role is built into the operational design.
- (8) Family Education is a hallmark of each community school, and serves to protect the “heart of the school,” the distinctive identity of this educational model.

3.2 Educational Philosophy Our educational philosophy is founded on the strength of these primary assumptions.

- (1) There is ultimately no knowledge that is incompatible with the Christian faith, and a sound education is based on the principles of truth given in the Bible.
- (2) Family engagement in the educational process makes a critical difference in the efficacy of a student’s education.
- (3) Ethics training, in the context of a reciprocal partnership between teachers and parents, provides the moral foundation necessary for superior scholarship.

- (4) The best education for today's students anywhere in the world is international in scope and design.
- (5) The best learning environment is inquiry-based, promotes critical thinking, fosters a respect for diverse points of view, and committed to pursuit of truth.
- (6) The best academic framework is based on developmental stages of learning, where students progress intellectually from concrete learning in the acquisition of basic skills and facts, to logic and integration of information and ideas, and finally, to the art of abstract thinking in the communication and defense of what they know.
- (7) There are many pathways to learning, based on diverse "multiple intelligences," all of which must be developed in the learning environment.
- (8) Academics must be balanced with experiential and service learning in the context of teaching a theology and practice of work.
- (9) A comprehensive environmental education, integrated across all other core disciplines, is our responsibility as world citizens and stewards of the earth.
- (10) For Christians, the goal of education is to train students for ministry, regardless of the vocation they choose.

3.3 Family Engagement Family engagement programs are gaining attention throughout the educational community in the U.S. as a way to increase student achievement in the classroom. Study after study shows a strong correlation between the level of parental involvement and academic achievement, offering a strong rationale for schools to view parents as partners in the academic process.

3.3.1 Parents as Partners A prominent feature of the ICS operational design is the innovation that combines the best attributes of home education with the best of private schooling. Parents arrange their lives to accommodate the priority of their children's education, as students' time is split between classroom instruction and teacher-directed home education. The strength of this model lies in the significant partnership between parents and highly qualified educators. This partnership is supported by balanced scheduling, strong administrative systems, reciprocal responsibility and high accountability. The result is a well-balanced education tailored to the student's individual needs, increased context for building family relationships, lower overall cost

for parents, additional opportunity to adapt academics to students' individual needs, and improved classroom behavior. This design also allows for increased classroom space for additional programming.

It is understood that while some parents have life circumstances that prevent them from participating in supervision of education at home, they are still considered fully vested partners in their children's education and are held accountable to the responsibilities of that relationship within a five-day program. Although the International Community School does not provide for a five-day program, it is possible that other community schools would.

3.3.2 Family Education and Moral Training The view of parents as partners in education is based on a founding philosophy that parents are responsible for the spiritual and moral training of their children. In addition, the role of the partnering community organizations of church and school is to encourage and equip parents in their commitment as primary teachers. Further, we consider the strong structures of family identity and moral training to be foundational for learning, understanding that emotional nurturing and character building is prerequisite to a well-trained mind.

To that end, all ICS board members, administrators, staff, faculty and parents are required to participate in Family Education, where they complete courses in four categories: (1) School Philosophy & Identity; (2) Being the School; (3) Parenting & Home Management; and (4) Academic Instruction.

“School Philosophy & Identity” refers to instruction that explains and explores the vision, mission and core values, identity and educational philosophy of that specific school community.

“Being the School” refers to instruction that assists parents and teachers in generic educational theories (multiple intelligences, learning styles, “Laws of the Learner”, etc.) or offers assistance in general schooling (Teaching the Reluctant Learner, Home Schooling with Babies and Toddlers, Assessing Learning Disabilities, etc.).

“Family & Home Management” refers to instruction in parenting, personal finances, time management, etc. (“Shepherding A Child’s Heart,” “Crown Financial Management,” “Managers of Their Homes,” etc.).

“Academic Instruction” refers to training associated with teaching specific curriculums taught in that school community (Saxon Math, Latin, Shurley Grammar, etc.).

These opportunities help create a culture of learning for the entire family while it builds community in places of “common ground” among member families. As a benefit to the local Central Florida community, all ICS family education courses, workshops, conferences and seminar series are open to all families, regardless of faith or school choice.

3.4 Educational Choice Parental choice in education has been the outcry of many families in the U.S., regarded both as a civil liberty and a moral responsibility, and has given rise to creative alternatives in education such as charter schools, voucher programs, distance learning and home education.

Our innovative program design offers parents a full spectrum of academic choices:

- (1) University-model structure for middle and high school learners designed to offer a college prep academic program that includes specialty “tracks” for both part-time and full-time students, and both on-campus classes and off-campus independent studies.
- (2) High school options that include dual enrollment, night classes, on the job training, summer/winter short-term institutes overseas and exchange programs within the network of collaborating schools;
- (3) Combination off-campus/private school arrangement, where elementary and middle school students attend private school classrooms 3 days/week, and parents teach them at home from teacher-generated lesson plans 2 days/week.

- (4) Concentrated experiential learning one day/week that features hands-on academic enrichment in fine arts, science, global studies, foreign languages, culinary arts, construction, etc.
- (5) Traditional home education supported by academic counseling and testing, administrative accountability, enrichment and service learning options, and accessibility to campus resources for sports and performing arts, libraries, labs, etc.
- (6) Distance learning through state of the art information and communication technologies, accessible to students anywhere in the world

3.5 The New International Education Intense globalization of cultural, social, economic, business and political systems has demanded that educators everywhere take a new look at the need for international education.

3.5.1 Traditional international schools have proliferated around the world since WWII, when the civil community declared “Never again,” and responded with a system of education that sought to teach the value of differences and respect for multiculturalism. Typically, these schools represent a British or American educational system and give an advantage to students of those nationalities living in foreign cultures along with local national students who desire to continue post-secondary education in England or the U.S. An internationally accredited curriculum is used that holds to uniform standards and is recognized around the world, such as the International Baccalaureate Program.

Until recently, there was no other definition of international education.

3.5.2 A new understanding of international education is quickly emerging as traditional national schools, both public and private, recognize the need to prepare students to be responsible citizens of a global world. We see now a continuum of international education that ranges from local schools that have some reflection of international studies in their curriculum but no apparent representation of multiculturalism, diverse ethnicities, language immersion, etc., to schools that are fully defined as international schools in the traditional sense. Most of this movement is

identified in the U.S. educational system, but because globalization touches the entire world, educators around the world will be forced to seek new ways of responding in the classroom.

3.5.3 What makes ICS international? As a developing school, the following features will strengthen or emerge as we gain in our ability to reflect a broad-based international education:

- International studies reflected throughout the academic curriculum in all subject areas
- Global emphasis in service learning partnerships
- Complexity of global systems taught within the matrix of service, problem-solving, reconciliation and reciprocal relationship
- Faculty with international origins and/or experience
- Opportunities for families, students, faculty and staff to travel overseas
- Hosting international students and faculty from around the world
- High value placed on respect for differences, forming a neutral, safe environment for inquiry-based teaching and learning
- Students learn to articulate and think critically with a highly civil manner of interchange and respect for others around the world
- Multi-lingualism encouraged, with foreign language infusion programs encouraged at the earliest levels
- Diverse ethnic/cultural family profiles representing different nationalities or those who have spent significant time in different cultures
- Mobility issues acknowledged and addressed, such as culture adjustment, emphasis on integration of strangers, sensitivity to differences, orientation and inclusion
- Campus environment identifies ICS as international through architecture, art, music, etc.

3.6 Academic Design Based on the framework of our educational philosophy, ICS academic design promotes a student's movement through developmental stages of learning, presenting information and the exploration of ideas in diverse ways according to the assumption of multiple

intelligences. All academics are presented in the light of personal spiritual formation and the building of a systematic theology.

Students in elementary school will gain basic skills of literacy and mathematics, learn the rudiments of research and presentation, explore multiculturalism and acquire basic facts through world geography, world history and science, and be exposed to multiple foreign languages.

Students in middle and high school will continue with a college preparatory education, taught through an international studies matrix. This six-year program will expose students to the integration of global cultural, political, economic, and religious systems, and offer the opportunity to gain advanced training in specific subject areas according to individual interests and giftedness, in a university-style model. Specialty tracks in humanities, sciences, business, performing arts and sports will allow the design to accommodate differences while promoting a unified high academic standard.

Post-secondary students will be guided in their efforts to develop their ministry capabilities more precisely, to a level of world leadership and service. This may involve partnering with secular or Christian institutions of higher learning in the United States, with students being mentored by ICS advisors. Other ICS students will go on to university undergraduate and graduate programs in the countries to which they have been called by God and developed relationships through the years as ICS students. They will continue to be mentored by others in Christian service indigenous to that country or culture. For the students called to church leadership ministry, there will be a choice of programs locally available at partnering seminaries or schools that will train them specifically in their particular calling. In each case, the ICS graduate will continue to receive encouragement and mentoring support from ICS and Northland advisors. ICS recognizes that all ministry must be an expression of the church, as Christian service results from, and leads to, worship of God.

3.7 Service-Learning Experiential learning is a critical balance to academics and comes in many forms, both within and outside of the classroom. Service-learning offers students an opportunity to experience what they have studied, integrate academic ideas with ethical training,

and practice what they need to learn to be people of change and initiative in vital relationship to the larger community. Civic engagement, job skills, social action, environmental stewardship, community collaboration and global awareness are among the many benefits gained by students that discover that educating the heart is equally important as training the mind.

3.8 Work Program Along with strong academic design and service-learning, a successful student work program completes the triadic relationship of a well-balanced learning environment. There is a disconcerting cultural trend in the U.S. that places entertainment and recreation high on the list of lifestyle priorities among youth, and a correlating decrease in work ethic. The ICS work program seeks to:

- (1) Instill positive attitudes about the work ethic, the dignity of labor and the value of serving others
- (2) Teach a theology of work that trains the heart to sustain work effort
- (3) Strengthen a sense of personal ownership through investment of time and energy and a sense of community through common endeavor
- (4) Teach the value of teamwork and collaborating partnerships
- (5) Benefit the community by providing labor that lowers operating costs
- (6) Provide opportunities to learn job skills

3.9 Non-Academic Program A strong emphasis on non-academic learning will extend the learning environment out of the classroom and offer venues for international and cross-cultural experience and community collaboration.

3.9.1 Performing Arts A state-of-the-art performing arts center will be the showcase structure for the entire campus. Its central location will emphasize the importance we place on performing arts, as a worship site, a community gathering auditorium, a context for international learning and exchange, and a place of professional instruction and performance in theater, dance, orchestra and other performing media. The center will offer the ICS community as well as the greater Central Florida area a valuable additional venue for performing arts events.

3.9.2 Visual Arts Painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, printmaking and book arts are areas for international expression and exchange, and will be offered in a studio context, balancing the academic aspects of art history and cultural art studies.

3.9.3 Sports International exchange, local community relationships, healthy competition and recreation are points of emphasis for a strong competitive sports program. ICS sports will be supported by a superior multi-sports facility for recreational and competitive use.

3.9.4 Environmental Education Training students to become responsible world citizens must include the integration of a comprehensive environmental education program that will facilitate the teaching of other core disciplines and support service-learning initiatives. Site development of the ICS campus will reflect a strong environmental awareness and will be a showcase of environmentally sound solutions that are congruent with our educational philosophy.

3.9.5 Industrial Arts An industrial arts program, either on-site or through collaborative community resources, will offer training in electronics, mechanics, welding, carpentry and drafting. ICS is committed to developing the giftedness of all students, and training international students who are unable to acquire industrial skills in their native country.

3.9.6 Business A great learning environment will include innovative ways to connect education and work by offering linking opportunities for students to gain work-based experience in the community. Partnerships with local and overseas businesses and service organizations will offer valuable on-the-job training as a critical bridge between school and vocation.

3.10 Partnerships The ICS model is arranged as an “open system,” where the organization is open to and dependent on the environment, especially connections with external and internal components, in the form of complementary partnerships. Parents with teachers, students with students, schools with schools, and schools with community resources are examples of the many interdependent relationships that form the social, cultural, and educational architecture of the ICS model. The synergistic benefits of such an arrangement are foundational to teaching students to be responsible, contributing community members.

4 TECHNOLOGY

In a world where innovative communication technologies are commonplace, and students have grown up in the familiar environment of constant technological development, the response in education is obvious. Because the ICS model is defined by partnerships, both internal and external, technology will be the primary linking modality and will provide the ambient setting for efficient administration, communications and distance learning.

4.1 School Administration Beyond the typical functions that are offered by administrative software, the need for strong communications and access to lesson plans, parent schedules, attendance records, teaching tips, and many other resources is directly related to our partnering model. Parents, as team educators, must have instant access to the resources that are typically reserved for teachers in other schools. At the middle and high school level, students depend on internet and intranet links to communicate with teachers and enjoy classroom technology that will connect them to other schools and other students across town or around the world.

4.2 Curriculum Infusion Technology is a powerful tool for inquiry-based learning and must be considered one of the most important aspects of building connections for students, both in terms of relationships and research development. Computer literacy is assumed among ICS students, teachers and parents.

4.3 Classroom Instruction Each classroom will be equipped to be connected through technology to any classroom in the world anytime. Students will benefit from the instruction of teachers overseas as well as the relationships that will be built with students in other classrooms around the world.

4.4 Distance Learning To offer an accredited academic program to students around the world, a comprehensive distance learning system will be designed. Local ICS families or students overseas will have the opportunity to engage in an online program that offers an accredited, high-quality education with continuity, accountability, convenience and relationship.

5 GLOBAL CONNECTEDNESS

ICS is self-defined by its global connectedness. The advancement toward our vision and the fulfillment of our mission depends on the continued development of international relationships in every aspect of our program design.

5.1 Curricular Support As academics must be balanced with experiential learning in order to meet the demands of a well-rounded education, an international studies curriculum must offer opportunities for experiential global awareness through travel, service learning initiatives, cultural exchange events, vocational partnerships, language immersion programs, visiting faculty and students and ongoing international relationships.

5.1.1 International Travel Fund It is the goal of ICS to see that every student is able to visit at least one of our partnering schools or service-learning partnerships overseas. Because of our philosophy of parents as partners in education, travel opportunities will be designed for students to be accompanied by one or both of their parents, as we seek to connect families and communities around the world. Therefore, it is imperative that we design a system of ongoing fund development that families and business partners invest in to support this critical aspect of the ICS model.

5.1.2 International Partnerships A robust service-learning program and a well-defined vocational education system will offer many opportunities for international partnerships. All ICS students are required to engage in service-learning projects, and are encouraged to travel to the site of international projects to gain hands-on experience and develop personal relationships with those they are serving.

Additionally, international relationships with business, school and church partners around the world offer ICS students opportunities for short-term internships designed to develop giftedness, cross-cultural skills and personal confidence.

5.2 Exchange Programs Open exchange of ideas, information and perspective at ICS

is encouraged through exposure to visiting international faculty and students. It is intended that each connecting school around the world will feature a residential component to provide temporary housing to accommodate visitors.

ICS students and faculty will be strongly encouraged to engage in exchange programs through the establishment of short-term institutes as well as longer term arrangements.

5.3 Short-Term Institutes To encourage international relationships and experiential learning, ICS Short-Term Institutes will offer students opportunity for accredited study abroad within the context of service-learning and on-site experiential education. Courses in cultural studies, history, language, theology, performing arts and visual arts will be offered for academic credit through reciprocal matriculation agreements with major colleges and universities, and will be strategically situated around the world to facilitate participation by a culturally diverse student population.

5.4 Multi-Campus Design ICS is designed organizationally to allow the expansion of the school into multiple locations, both locally and globally. Each ICS campus would have its own administration and be financially self-sustaining, but operate within the relational constraints of participating as a representative part of the International Community School organization. Common to all campuses would be educational philosophy, academic framework, community philosophy and other important aspects of ICS identity. ICS campus locations could be local, national or international.

Appendix 2

Principles of Community

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE	Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
THE SECOND PRINCIPLE	Love your neighbor as yourself.
THE THIRD PRINCIPLE	The Source of our unity is outside ourselves.
THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE	Diversity within unity is necessary for healthy community.
THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE	The best way to relate to each other is through the Spirit.
THE SIXTH PRINCIPLE	We are all approaching maturity.
THE SEVENTH PRINCIPLE	Parents are responsible for the spiritual and moral training of their children.
THE EIGHTH PRINCIPLE	Parents are responsible for the education of their children.
THE NINTH PRINCIPLE	A partner relationship is built on reciprocity and mutual trust.
THE TENTH PRINCIPLE	Each member of a community represents the whole.
THE ELEVENTH PRINCIPLE	Authority is properly exercised with accountability.
THE TWELFTH PRINCIPLE	Leadership is held to a higher standard.

Appendix 3

*Building A Family Education Model*The Church-Home-School Relationship

The church, the home and the school have long been thought of as separate institutions within the body of believers, although intricately connected. Western thinking has compartmentalized the functions and responsibilities of these three institutions, while regarding their interconnectedness as critical to the strengthening of each. Christian educators have always sought the building of community through the partnership that exists between school and home, though most traditional schools have not yet developed a satisfactory way to engage parents in the academic process beyond help with evening homework.

The emergence of alternative educational models such as home schooling, university model schooling and community schooling has changed the relationship between home and school by bringing both function and responsibility together “under one roof.” This has led to a more useful way of considering the relationship of the church, home and school as three aspects of identity of each believer rather than separate institutions.

We are familiar with the metaphor used in the New Testament regarding the church of Jesus Christ as a “body,” and each member as belonging to the body under one Head, which is Christ. The church is identified as the people who are believers together, each one a member of a greater body. As the church, we come together in times of corporate celebration and edification in

“church” services, in a building called a “church,” but we are equally the church during the rest of the week when we’re distributed into our homes, businesses, schools, etc. Our identity as the church compels us individually to respond to the world around us accordingly, as bearers of the Light and those who are identified as Christ-followers.

Similarly, if we are members of a family, we carry with us the identification of our various family roles as father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, etc., whether we are together as a family in one place at one time such as being in the home, or when we are apart from one another. Our identification as a family member also compels us to respond to the world around us accordingly, as is appropriate for each specific role. So wherever we are, we are both the church and the home.

Our identity as a school should be the same. Jesus gave us the primary example of discipleship, He as the Rabbi, or Teacher, and his followers as His disciples, or students. In the same way, we are called to identify with Him as teachers, with the understanding that we all have disciples who follow our teaching -- particularly if we are parents! So, we are the school, as well. Our identity as the school compels us to respond to the world around us accordingly, remembering that we are teachers and that we have a responsibility to disciple those that God has placed in our custody, all the time, everywhere, both when we come together in a classroom or when we’re at home, on vacation or at the ball game.

Each member of a school, then, whether his/her role is as Board member, administrator, staff member, faculty member, parent or student should consider that they don’t just “belong” to a

school; rather, they ARE the school. “Being the school” brings a sense of responsibility, investment, ownership and contribution that engages each individual in a strong sense of community and an endeavor toward the common good. It strengthens the corporate bond and keeps each member striving toward the nurture of the entire organization.

When each believer understands his/her identity as the church, the home and the school, and has embraced the responsibilities of each, a strong Christian community emerges. Community is the antidote to consumerism and the impetus for responsible citizenship. It is where God does His best work in each of us as individuals through the process of spiritual formation, and it is where His grace abounds and He is glorified through the strengthening of His church, His families and His schools.

The Heart of the School

We are regularly reminded of our identity as the church during our weekly worship services and Bible studies. We return again and again to the stories of our “roots” as presented throughout the Word of God, and are continually exhorted in the doctrines and creeds of the church. It keeps us strong in our faith, protects the orthodoxy of our beliefs, and repeatedly reminds us of our common unities as believers, as members of the Body of Christ.

Similarly, strong families are kept strong by intentional instruction and regular reminders that teach family members the traditions, stories and value system of the family. “Johnsons don’t give up” or “Smiths are hard workers” or “that’s because we’re Irish” become more than mere

sayings. They are embodied deep within the identity of each family member and they help shape behavior, keep the bond strong, and protect the “heart” of the family.

Schools that have a compelling vision that continues to inspire its members, a well articulated educational philosophy that each member embraces, and a mission statement that drives each operational decision are schools with a strong “heart.” The “heart of the school” is the substance of identity that is regularly and intentionally taught to all of its members.

This will not happen by magic; in fact, left alone without any plan for regular reminding and teaching, the heart of the school will inevitably dissipate, just as it will in both the church and the family. We will get so involved in the operations and duties of the school (or church or family), we will begin to forget WHY we’re doing what we’re doing. It is the intentional design of the enemy of our souls to weaken the body of Christ, and one of his most effective tools is distraction.

Family Education is the broad term that encompasses a well-designed strategy for protecting the heart of the school through regular teaching and reminding of the school’s identity, philosophy and value system. It also includes the equipping and training of parents to develop strong families and accomplish their responsibilities in the moral training and academic instruction of their students at home. It extends to each member of the school community, including Board members, administrators, staff, faculty, parents and students. It is a standard by which we evaluate commitment and contribution, and becomes a measurement of “good standing” for re-enrollment. It helps to create a culture of learning for every member of the school community as we learn and grow together, adults and students alike. And it deepens and strengthens the

partnership between teachers and parents through a shared identity, a common basis for moral training of students, a common understanding of educational philosophy, and a common training for academic instruction of specific curriculum.

What Is a Family Education Program?

A Family Education program is the intentional effort made by the school community to hold one another accountable to on-going training to develop two aspects of each member's three-fold identity. Since it is assumed that we are each receiving on-going, regular training as members of the Body of Christ through an active involvement in a local church fellowship, the Family Education program is primarily focused on instruction and encouragement in "being the home" and "being the school."

This is accomplished through regular "community meetings" scheduled throughout the school year, through a "Parent Partner" program that requires parents to participate in their student's classroom on campus from time to time, and through the offering of or referral to a broad range of learning opportunities (including courses, lectures, workshops, conferences, etc.). Each family is required to earn a number of Family Education Units (FEUs) per school year, with the simple ratio of one hour of instruction equal to one FEU.

The administration of the FE program will vary according to the size of the school and the complexity of the FE program that has been developed. Initially, it may fall under the responsibility of the Dean of Character Education, but may eventually require a full-time

Director or Dean of Family Education. If Family Education requirements are used as a measurement of “good standing” in order for families to be eligible for re-enrollment, there will be an additional important link to the Registrar’s Office, as well.

Community Meetings, held at least five times during the school year (roughly every other month), offer an opportunity for the entire school community to come together around a common purpose, and to celebrate the unity of believers. Corporate worship, business meetings, fund raising updates, sports announcements, high school vocal ensemble presentations, special speakers, and inspirational messages can all be a part of this special time. **It is mandatory for all parents, staff, faculty and board members to be present.** Some schools take advantage of these evenings to add break-out sessions with grade level meetings, support groups, special prayer groups, etc. In some cases, students capture this opportunity to feature bake sales to raise money for class mission trips, or specialty clubs, etc. It’s a grand and highly valuable community-building, corporate identity-reminding, mutually encouraging time. Although members of the school together do not comprise *a* church, they are nonetheless *the* church, and are enriched and strengthened by coming together periodically and regularly.

The Parent Partner Program is intended to be of reciprocal benefit to both parents and classroom teachers. When families join a school, they are joining a community of believers who desire to share in the load of responsibilities equally according to each member’s personal identity as “being the school.” Therefore, **it is required that parents participate in their students’ classrooms for mutual benefit to**

themselves, their students and the classroom teachers. Each family is required to serve on campus according to the needs identified by the administrative team, and on a rotational schedule with other parents. Each school will write the details of their Parent Partner Program; however, for a sample policy, please contact Terri Alderman, Family Education Director, International Community School, P.O. Box 952495, Lake Mary, FL 32795, or email her at talderman@internationalcommunityschool.org.

Family Education Units are earned through direct instruction that falls into one of four categories: (1) School Philosophy & Identity; (2) Being the School; (3) Parenting & Home Management; and (4) Academic Instruction.

“School Philosophy & Identity” refers to instruction that explains and explores the vision, mission and core values, identity and educational philosophy of that specific school community.

“Being the School” refers to instruction that assists parents and teachers in generic educational theories (multiple intelligences, learning styles, “Laws of the Learner”, etc.) or offers assistance in general schooling (Teaching the Reluctant Learner, Home Schooling with Babies and Toddlers, Assessing Learning Disabilities, etc.).

“Family & Home Management” refers to instruction in parenting, personal finances, time management, etc. (“Shepherding A Child’s Heart,” “Crown Financial Management,” “Managers of Their Homes,” etc.).

“Academic Instruction” refers to training associated with teaching specific curriculums taught in that school community (Saxon Math, Latin, Shurley Grammar, etc.).

Upon enrollment, each family is required to complete an approved “gateway” Christian parenting course within the first year. Because of the large variety of parenting materials available, it is critical that the school leadership identify one or two curriculums that reflect a similar parenting philosophy, that are in depth enough to cover solid ground in parenting issues, and are popular enough to be readily available. Two basic courses that are widely used for this purpose are “Shepherding a Child’s Heart,” and “Along the Virtuous Way” (formerly “Growing Kids God’s Way”). Additional parenting enrichment classes based on many other publishers are available to parents throughout each school year, offering plenty of opportunity for exposure to a broad cross-section of current thinking in Christian parenting.

After the first year, to continue enrollment in the school community, each family is required to achieve a minimum of 5 FEUs per school year. These can be earned through any of the instruction offered directly by the school, or by taking advantage of the many opportunities offered throughout the larger community (churches, other schools, home Bible studies, etc.) upon approval of the Family Education administrator.

Parent Orientation Week This is a focused training period that takes place the week before

classes begin in the fall. All mandatory classes and electives are offered several times during the week, along with teachers' classroom orientations and open house celebrations, lunch-time panels, curriculum sales, "community closet" uniform sales/donations, etc. This is generally the time that parents are the most hungry for and, therefore, most receptive to new information. It pulls the community together for that big push to get the school year started, and gives both teachers and parents a feeling of being "on top of things" before adding students to the mix. (A sample Parent Orientation Week schedule is attached.)

Starting a Family Education Program

Because Family Education has a transformational impact on every part of the school community, a transition plan must take into account the potential challenges and benefits for each community member.

Board Members It is imperative that members of the school board understand the critical need for a Family Education program and the benefits that will result. Whether or not they have children in the school themselves, at a minimum they should be required to take (or teach) one or more of the "Essential" courses so that they can heartily recommend them to other members of the community and lead by example. It is wise to have a "champion" for Family Education on the board, either as one individual or, in the absence of a Family Education Director, as a standing board committee.

Administrator The Administrator must also be "on board" with the Family

Education model. He or she may be tempted to think of this as just one more program to be managed -- make sure the administrator clearly understands that this will actually make his or her job easier! Family Education courses offer a common platform for discussion, where parents find themselves “on the same page,” and being taught a common standard of expectations, or a common philosophy of parenting. This, in turn, makes the resolution of the broad variety of conflicts and other problems that challenge the administrator each day easier to work through.

Faculty/Staff A Family Education program will increase the feeling of partnership among the parents and those who work on campus. It offers a common place for discussing student behavior challenges, for encouraging responsibility and contribution to the partnership on both sides, and for benefiting the academic instruction at home that will complement classroom teaching. In the classroom, the Parent Partner component offers invaluable assistance, community building, and an opportunity to train parents to teach at home and to serve as classroom substitute teachers should the need arise.

Parents Although parents get regular instruction in their identity and growth as members of the church body through involvement in various church fellowships, they don’t often get similar instruction as family or school members. A Family Education program that requires parents to engage in continual training and a deeper understanding of their responsibilities both as the family and the school will help them embrace the call on their lives in each of these areas. Instruction in parenting, home management, educational philosophy, community life, learning styles, temperaments, etc., will encourage, equip and inspire them to grow. In addition, the Parent Partner program offers parents the opportunity to be in the classroom, learn how to teach,

connect with their student's playmates, and be trained in campus routines so that they can be available to serve as paid substitute teachers should the need arise.

Students The impact on students of a Family Education program should not be underestimated. With various authority figures in their lives "on the same page," receiving the same instruction and called to the same standard, students benefit in their spiritual, moral and academic training. Their home education is enhanced, their families are strengthened, and their identity and experience as a school member is deepened. In addition, students love having their parents serve in their classroom, and enjoy the sense of family approval and community that happens through this special experience.

How Do We Get Started?

Initiatives to transition an existing school with no Family Education program or requirements currently in place should begin at the board level, and continue to the chief administrator, the staff and faculty and then to the parents.

Step 1 Start with the **Board of Directors**

- Meet to discuss the Family Education model
- Get input from school with existing FE program (International Community School in Orlando, for example)
- Invite an FE consultant to meet with Board to inspire and explain the nuts and bolts of the program (Margi McCombs is available through NAUMS)
- Decide parameters of FE program for your school -- how many years to phase into full

program, number of Family Education Units to be required per year, how the FEU requirement does or does not affect reenrollment, who will administrate the FE program, etc.

➤ Write strategic plan to implement FE program

Identify vision, mission, educational philosophy, core values

Identify FE champion

Decide when to start FE program

Decide how many years to phase initial development

What will be mandatory?

Who will write/teach courses?

How often will they be offered?

Consider other electives

Who will administrate FE program?

Step 2 Cast a vision for the **Administrator**

➤ It is imperative that the Administrator be “on board”, and well versed in benefits to each member of school community

➤ If Administrator is not present at Board meetings, invite him/her to a special FE vision/planning meeting

➤ Administrator should call/visit school with existing FE program for training on FE administration

➤ Administrator should consider how to administrate FE program (existing staff member or create new position as FE Director)

- Write FE program into existing parent/student handbook, enrollment information, school calendar, etc.

Step 3 Cast a vision for the **Staff and Faculty**

- Once the strategic plan is written, arrange a special meeting of the staff and faculty to launch the FE vision from the Board of Directors.
- Have your most inspiring/admired/gifted speaker do the presentation, and make sure he/she really “gets it”, and is passionate about Family Education!
- Emphasize philosophy and benefits -- the WHY behind the decision to add FE and the benefits to every member of the school community.
- Offer contact information for those in schools with an existing FE program for staff and faculty members to ask questions.
- Announce FE course opportunities that will be made available to staff and faculty members, and clearly outline expectations of any mandatory requirements.
- Make mandatory FE course opportunities as easily accessible as possible (repeated offerings, flexible scheduling, babysitting, etc.)

Step 4 Cast a vision for **Parents**

- Create a brochure or other written piece that offers a simple philosophy, gives benefits and clearly outlines both suggested opportunities and mandatory courses for Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, etc.
- Throw a “remembrance party”, plan a “back to the basics” celebration, have a “founders day” event -- create a context for parents that builds community, helps them remember

who they are and why they're doing what they're doing.

- Have your inspiring/gifted/admired speaker back again to present the FE program, but be sure to create the context first that reminds them of their identity, their calling and their passion to educate their children. In other words, remind them of the “heart of the school.”
- The best way to avoid making the FE program sound legalistic, judgmental or punitive is to do a really good job of presenting the philosophy (WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT) and the benefits (TO EACH MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY).
- Be enthusiastic!

Suggested 3-Year Phasing for Start-Up FE Programs

YEAR ONE

1. Schedule 5 Community Meetings (Sept, Nov, Jan, March, May)
2. Require 2 FEUs per family
3. Offer 2 Mandatory Classes (i.e., “Principles of Community,” Parenting Course)
4. Offer 2 Electives (i.e., School Educational Philosophy, Learning Styles)

YEAR TWO

1. 5 Community Meetings
2. Require 3 FEUs per family
3. Mandatory Classes for new families
4. Require minimum 2 on-campus days per semester per family
5. Add 2 Electives (i.e., “Safe Cyberspace,” “Children At Promise”)

YEAR THREE

1. 5 Community Meetings

2. Require 5 FEUs per family
3. Mandatory Classes for new families
4. Require minimum 4 on-campus days per semester per family
5. Add 4-5 Electives

Your FE program will develop and grow each year, as you offer new courses in all four categories.

Sample Family Education Course Offerings

Following is a list of courses/workshops that are offered at the International Community School in Orlando, FL, as part of their Family Education Program.

IDENTITY/PHILOSOPHY

Principles of Community (Required every two years)
ICS Foundations: Building an International Educational Philosophy
Global Education
Administrative Team Q & A/Idea Session
Enjoying the Differences

BEING THE SCHOOL

Brain Mapping and Retraining the Brain
Cyberspace Savvy
Helping the Struggling Reader
High School 101
Kolbe Assessment
Learning Styles
Home Schooling with Babies or Toddlers
Organizing Your Home School
Q & A for New High School Students
Schooling The Reluctant Learner
Mom's Prayer Group
Road to College
Seven Laws of the Learner
Teaching Parents How to Teach
Temperaments
World Views

FAMILY & HOME

Biblical Stewardship
Children At Promise
Discipling Our Children
Internet Safety Course
Love and Logic
Managers of Their Homes
Moral Training
Nutrition
Purity Works
Temperaments
World Views

ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION

Elementary Math
How to Teach Latin
Middle School Math
Phonics Museum
Primary Math
Shurley Grammar
Writing Workshop