CESA

COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL
STANDARDS & ACCOUNTABILITY

2020 Principal Survey

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In the spring of 2020, the Council on Educational Standards and Accountability invited school leaders of 72 member schools and candidate schools to participate in the annual CESA Principal Survey. The survey included questions about school leaders' professional experience, demographic characteristics, and responsibilities. It also asked leaders about their student body and the ways in which faith informs the life of the school. Overall, 62 school leaders responded to the survey, representing approximately 80 percent of all CESA member and candidate schools.

The purpose of the survey was to gauge CESA schools on several issues within Christian education. We highlight some key findings in this research brief. It is our hope that the themes illuminated by the survey raise opportunities for self-reflection as school leaders consider how they can be more faithful in their pursuit of educational excellence and in their respective vocations.

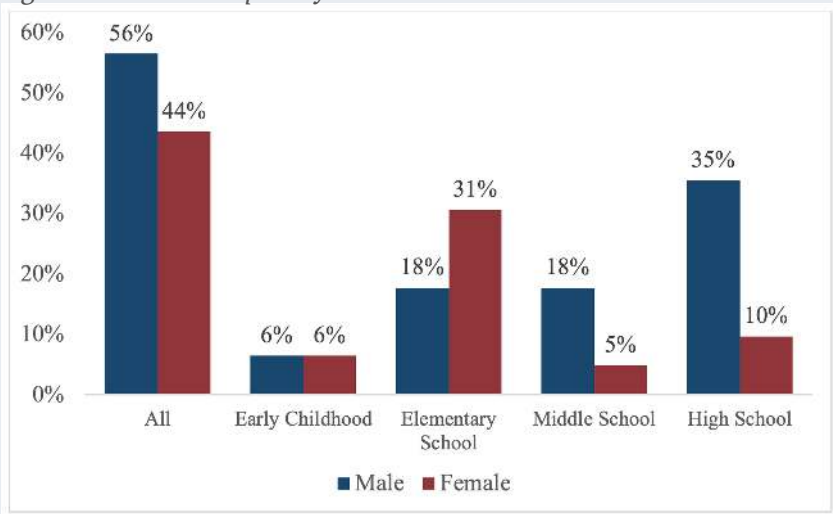
In what follows, we begin by describing the schools and school leaders that belong to the CESA network. What is the demographic composition of the student body served by these schools and who are their leaders? We then turn to principal preparation, considering the prior and ongoing training that school leaders have received. Also addressed are perceptions of the adequacy of such training and past leadership experiences inside and outside of education. Next, we consider faith in leadership practice, focusing specifically on schools' educational goals and priorities and the ways in which faith informs various areas of school life. In the concluding section, we leave school leaders with questions for further reflection.

PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL PROFILES

SCHOOL LEADERS AND GENDER

CESA schools serve the full range of primary and secondary grade levels, from early childhood education to high school. Roughly 90 percent of all respondents indicated that their school served elementary, middle, or high school grade levels. A few respondents report providing early childhood education services. Figure 1 displays the proportion of male and female principals for both the entire survey sample and by grade-levels served. (Note that percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents indicated overseeing multiple school levels.) Men and women appear to be both well-represented leaders of CESA schools overall, though there are some noticeable patterns across specific grade levels. Slightly over half of leaders across all schools are male. Female leadership is more common among the primary grade levels, while male leadership skews towards the secondary grade levels. Male school leaders outnumbered female school `leaders at the middle (18 to 5 percent) high school (35 to 10 percent) levels, while female school leaders outnumbered males at the elementary school levels (31 to 18 percent).

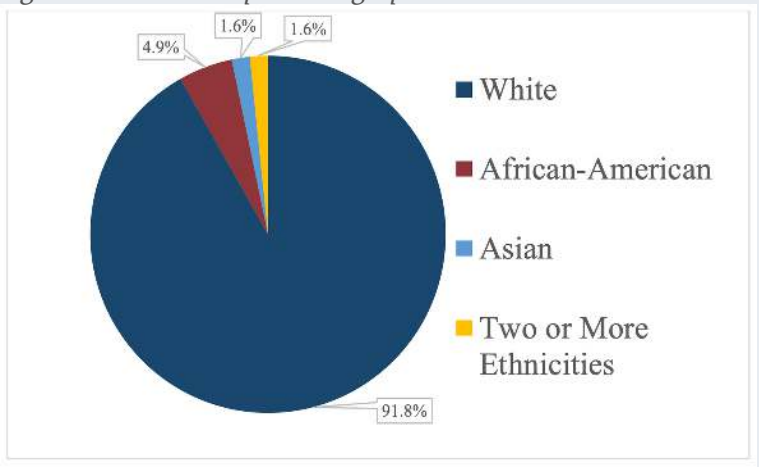
Figure 1: CESA Principals by Gender and Grade Level Served



RACE AND ETHNICITY

While CESA schools are diverse when it comes to grade levels served, some consideration should be given to the ethnic diversity of CESA schools. Over four out every five administrators in the survey reported working in a school with a predominantly White student body. Out of the 62 respondents, only two respondents reported serving a predominantly Black or Hispanic student population. Eight respondents, about 13 percent of the sample, indicated that their school serves a racially integrated school. In terms of the ethnic composition of CESA principals themselves, minorities are not well-represented. Over 90 percent of school leaders self-identified as White. These findings are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: CESA Principal Demographic Characteristics



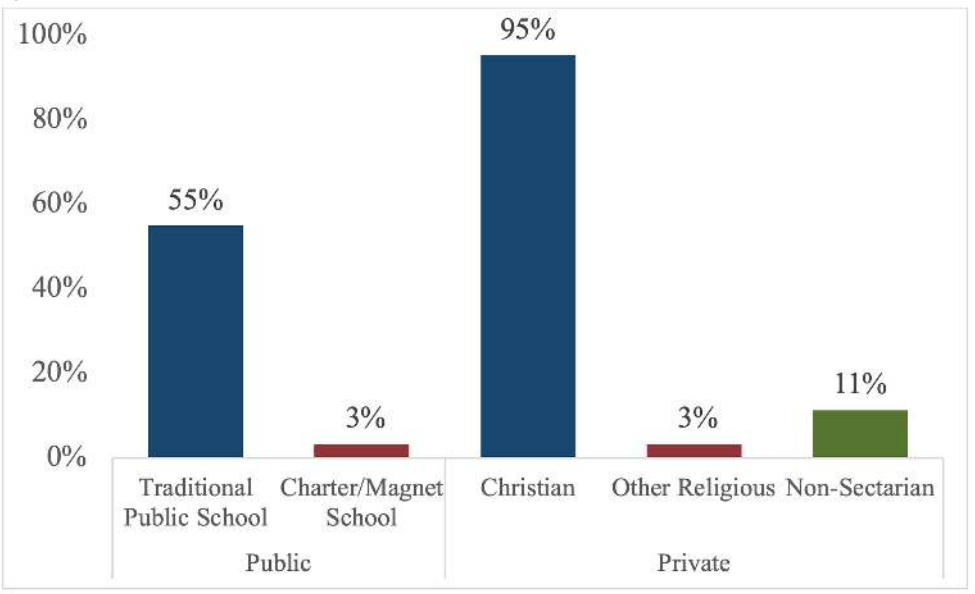
On one hand, these results might mask the underlying diversity of CESA schools. As recently as 2017, CESA enrollment data indicated that the majority of CESA schools had a minority student population between 25 to 40 percent of their total enrollment.A principal overseeing a school with a considerable minority population could nonetheless indicate that his or her school was "predominantly White." On the other hand, CESA principals should be cognizant of these results and give thoughtful consideration to interpreting what they mean. Moreover, many CESA schools have faced challenges with retaining students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION AND ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

SCHOOL LEADERS' PRIOR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

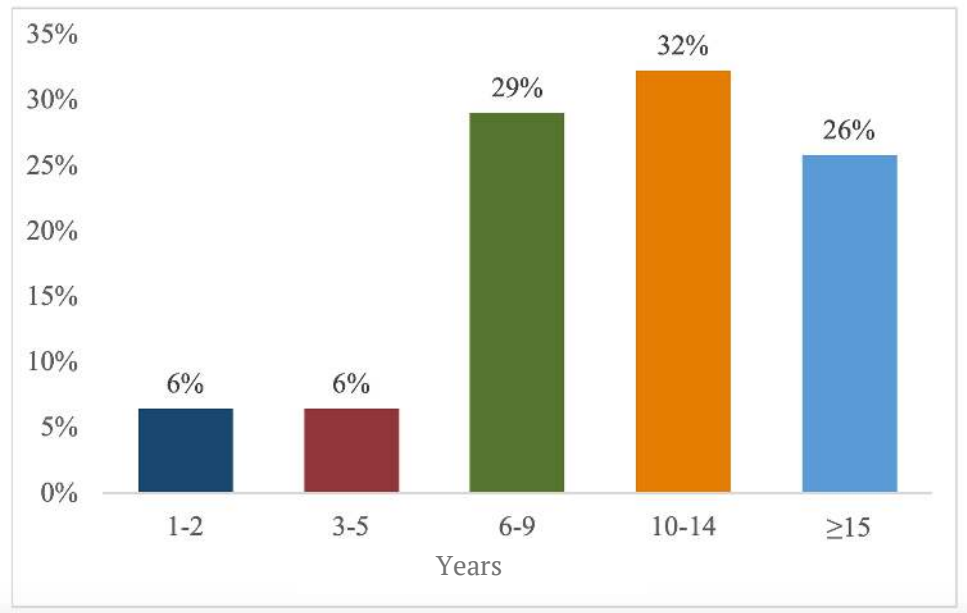
Experience in other school sectors. What are the experiences of CESA school leaders prior to serving in their current roles? Roughly half of all respondents indicated having experience in both public and private education sectors prior to serving in their current role (see Figure 3). Of these principals, experience in the public sector typicallycame from working in a traditional public school rather than a public charter school or magnet school. Administrators with prior experience in the private school sector, almost all of them worked in a private Christian school rather than a non-sectarian school or a school of a different faith tradition.

Figure 3: CESA School Leaders' Experience in other Education Sectors



Teaching experience. Overall, few CESA school leaders currently teach in addition to fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. Only one in 10 respondents indicated currently having teaching responsibilities. This finding is consistent across all grade levels, as principals at middle or high school are no more likely to teach than principals at elementary school or schools that offer early childhood education.

Figure 4: CESA School Leaders' Years of Teaching Experience

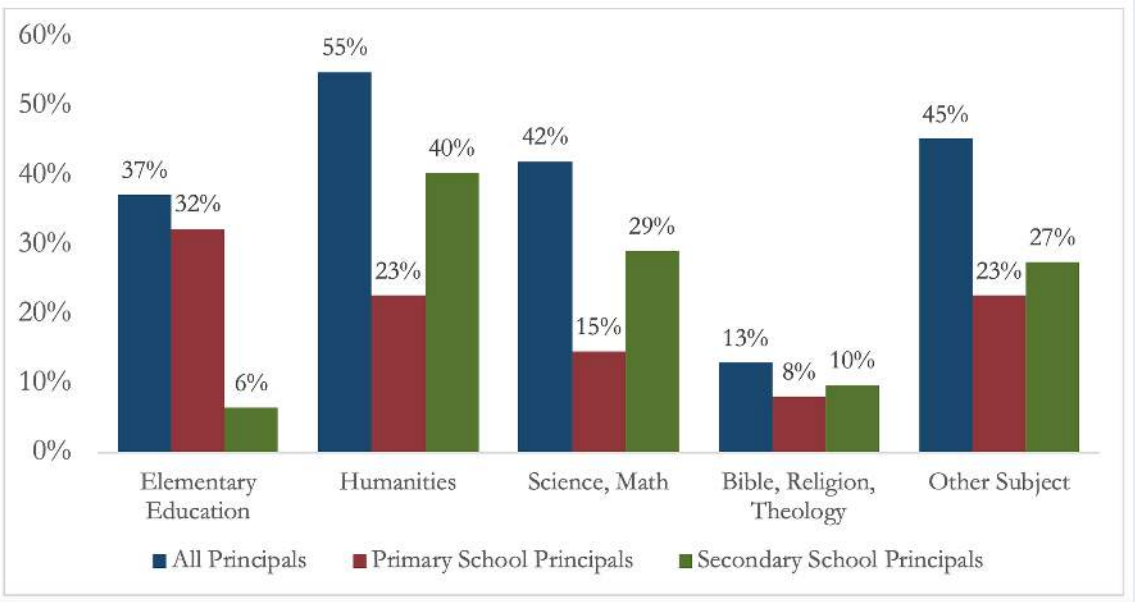


While few CESA school leaders currently have teaching responsibilities, they have substantial past experience in the classroom. As shown in Figure 4, almost 60 percent of respondents indicated having at least 10 years of teaching experience. Only 13 percent of respondents reported having five or fewer years of teaching experience and the remaining 30 percent taught more than five but less than 10 years.

For CESA leaders, the most common content areas in which they taught were the humanities (such as social studies or history), math and science, or elementary education. Just over half of respondents reported teaching a course in the humanities. About 40 percent of school leaders have teaching experience in math and science, which is about the same proportion of school leaders who have ever taught a self-contained class at the elementary school level. These results are depicted in Figure 5.

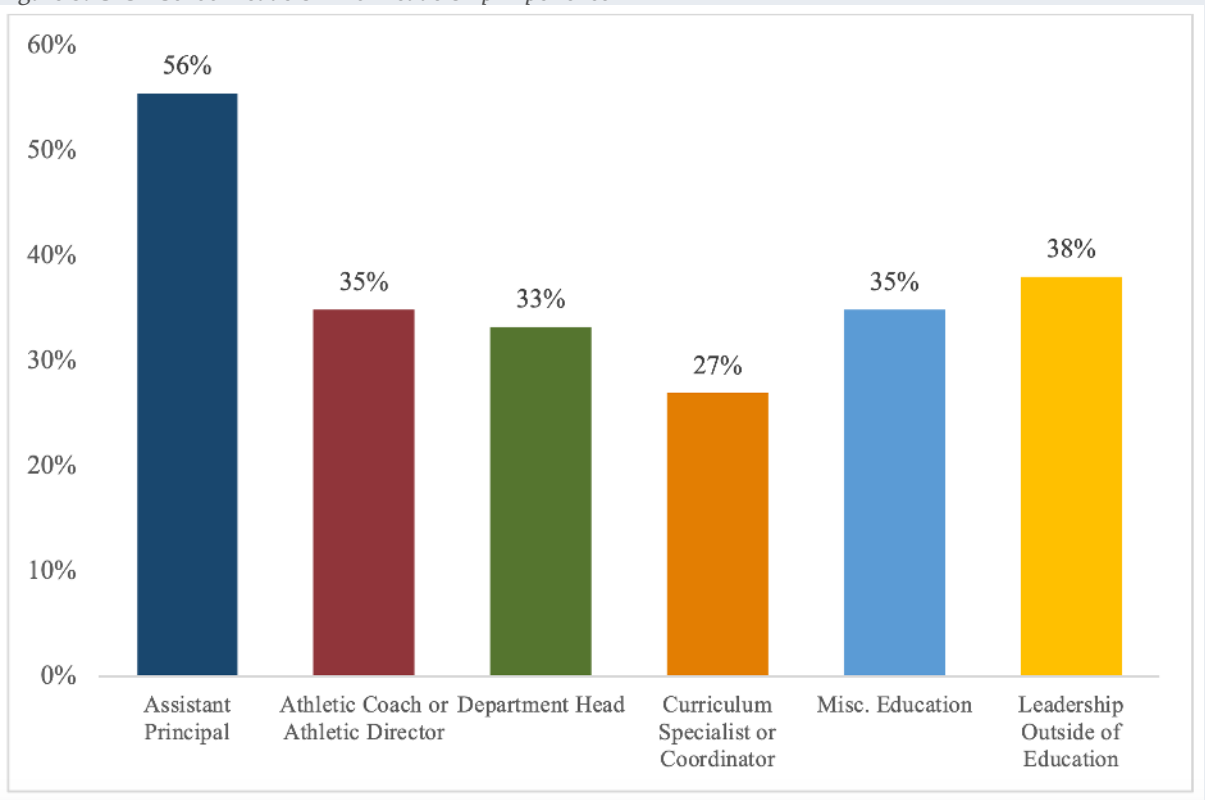
Primary school were five times more likely to have principals with experience teaching in an elementary school classroom compared to secondary schools. Many administrators had teaching experience in another subject, such as fine arts, physical education, or foreign language, or have worked as special education teachers. In contrast, few administrators taught Bible, religion, or theology courses.

Figure 5: Teaching Experience by Subject



Prior leadership roles. CESA school leaders also held a variety of leadership roles before their current position. The most common experience prior was to serve as an assistant principal. As shown in Figure 6, slightly over half of current school leaders held an assistant principal position in the past. One third of respondents also reported working as a coach, athletic director, or department head. proportion of respondents with experience as a curriculum specialist or coordinator is not much lower. Other leadership experiences in education included serving as a guidance counselor, librarian, or student activities sponsor. Almost 40 percent of CESA school leaders also have prior leadership outside the field of education. These experiences include working in church ministry, business, or the military.

Figure 6: CESA School Leaders' Prior Leadership Experience



While prior experience both in and outside the classroom can help prepare a leader for their role, many respondents noted the value of on-the-job training. In this regard, CESA school leaders tend to be inexperienced. Nearly half of all respondents had fewer than five years of experience as an administrator (Figure 7), and over half of all respondents had fewer than four years of experience at their current school (Figure 8). This result raises the concern that CESA school leaders may turn over after a few years and may undermine the capacity to development a longer-term vision for their school. Only about 15 percent of all CESA school leaders have at least 10 years of experience as school leader at their current school.

Alternatively, a number of school leaders have retired recently, a trend that started approximately three years ago and may even have been exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. This trend might also partially explain current lower levels of principal experience.

Figure 7: Total Years of Principal Experience

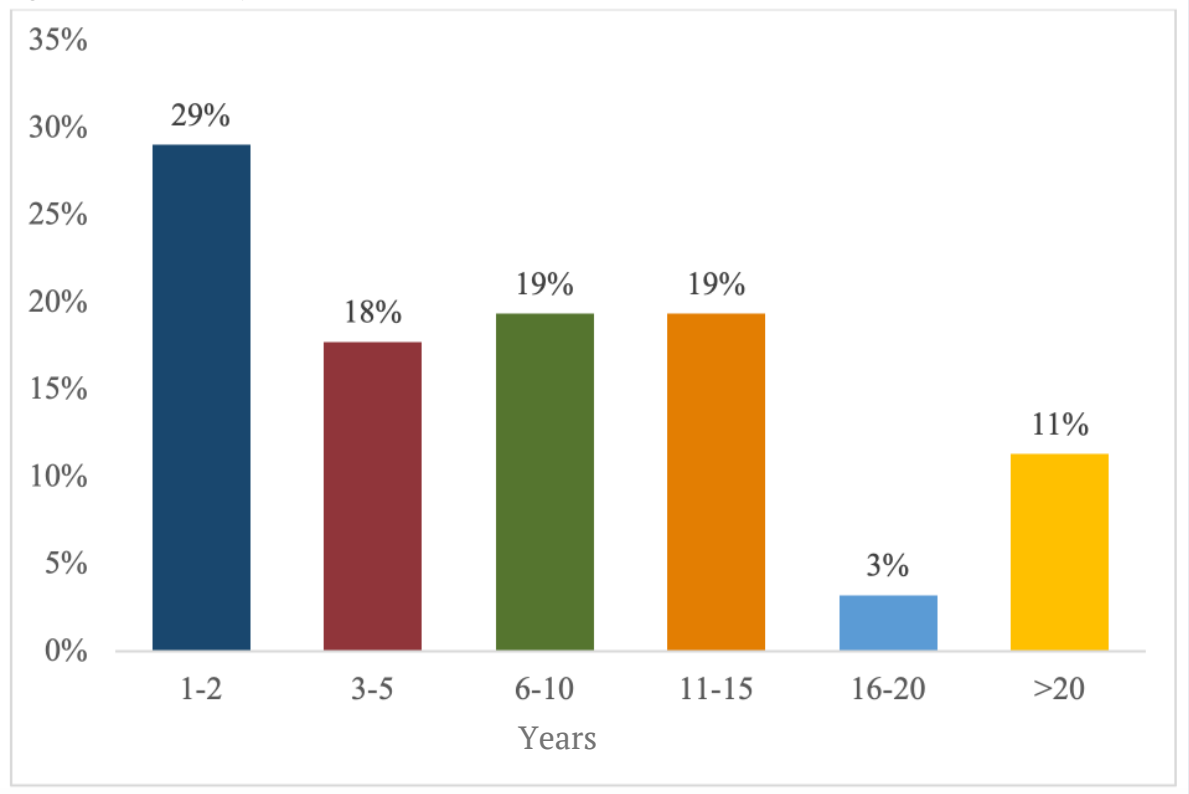
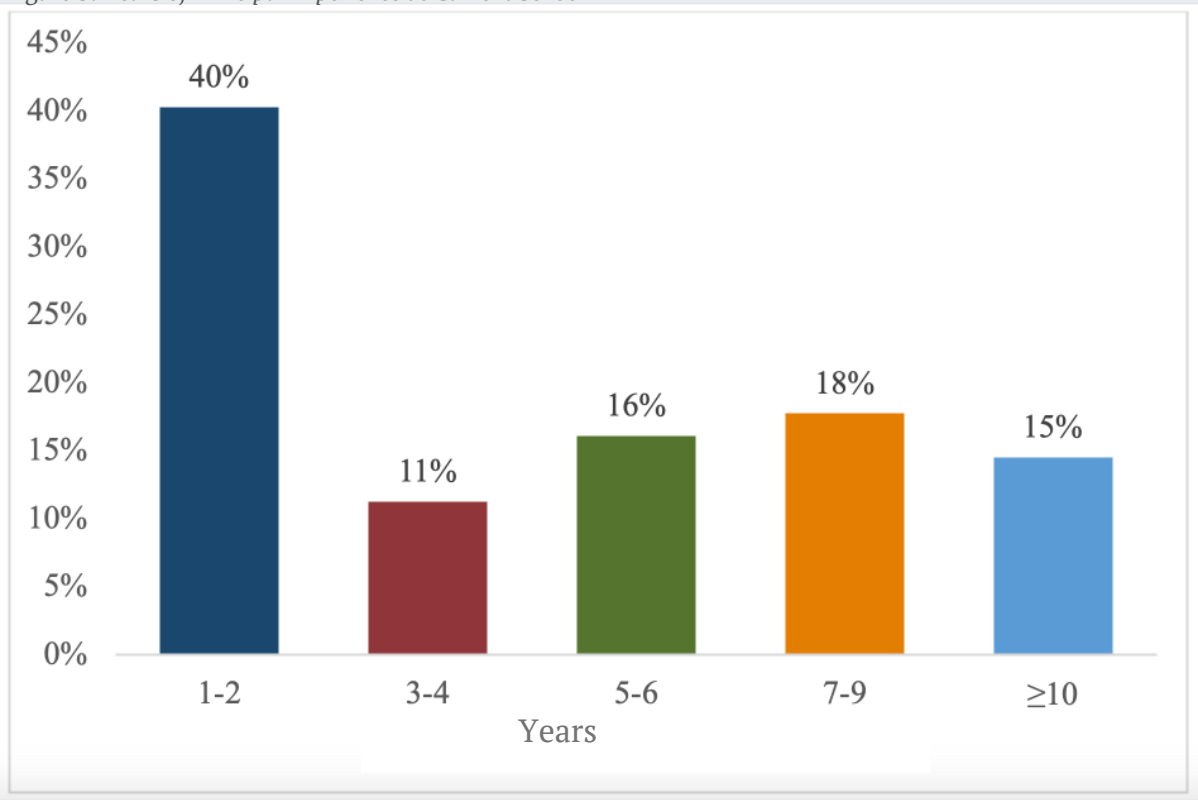


Figure 8: Years of Principal Experience at Current School



Prior and Continuing Education

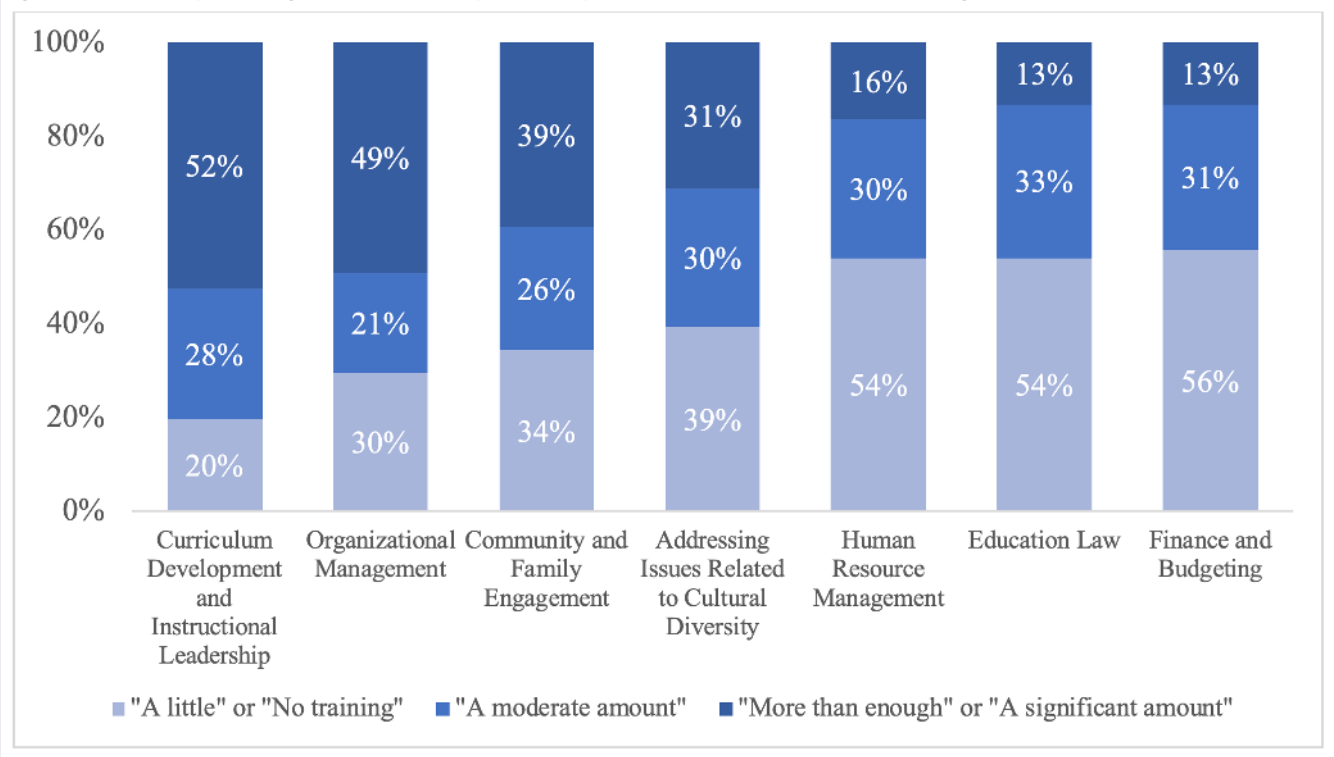
Table 1: CESA School Leaders' Postsecondary Field of Study

	Education		Bible/ Theology/ Religion	Business	Humanties	Math/ Science	Other
	Admin	Non-Admin					
Undergraduate	50%	50%	8%	8%	32%	16%	19%
Postbaccalaurate	68%	13%	7%	3%	2%	0%	7%

Notes. Education administration degrees include degrees in education leadership, curriculum development, or education administration. Non-administration education degrees include degrees in teaching, counseling, general education, or special education. "Other" includes fine arts, foreign language, etc.

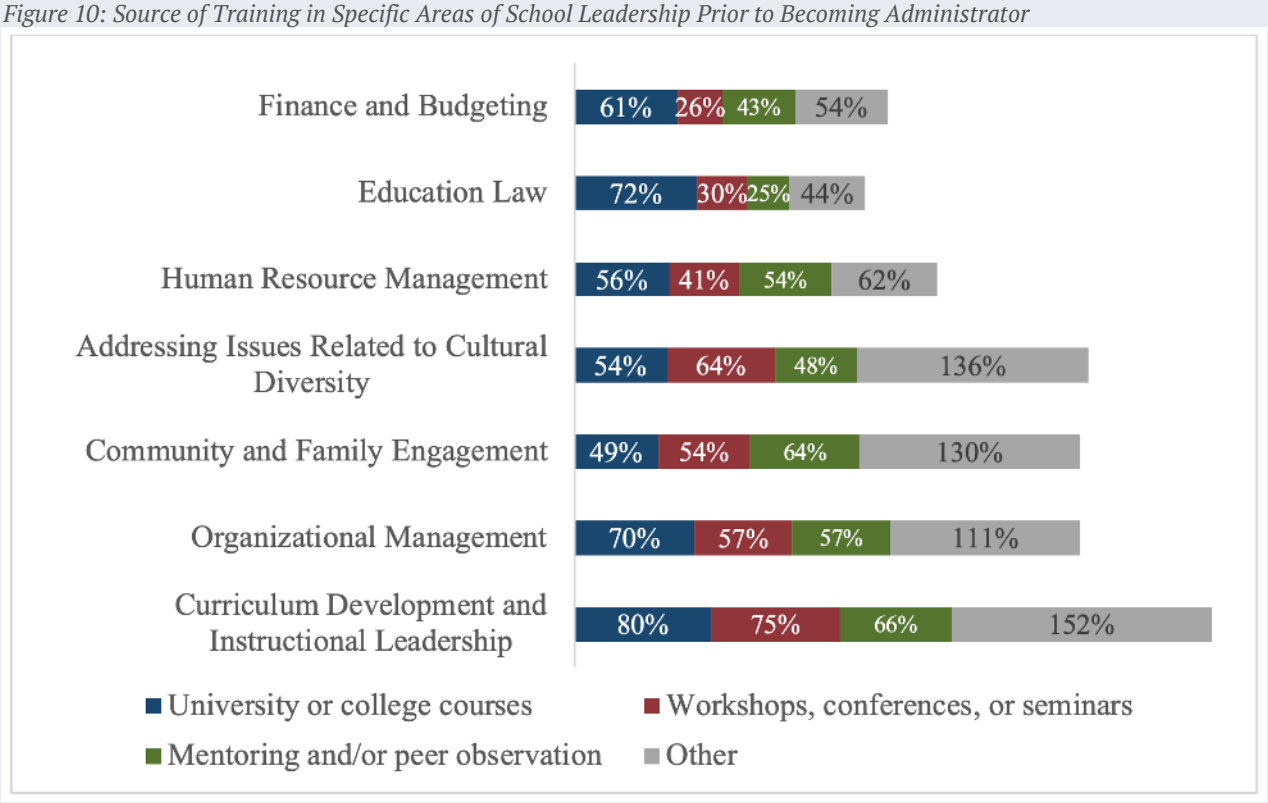
Undergraduate and Graduate Education. What studies did CESA school leaders pursue prior to their current roles? Most CESA school leaders obtained a degree in the field of education. Half of all respondents received a bachelor's degree in education. Over 80 percent went on to obtain a master's degree or doctorate in education, and over two-thirds obtained a post baccalaureate degree specifically in education administration. In contrast, at most 15 percent of CESA school leaders pursued studies in business or Bible, theology, or religion.

Figure 9: Amount of Training Received in Specific Areas of School Leadership Prior to Becoming Principal



School Leader Assessments of Prior Preparation. Respondents on the survey further described their prior preparation by indicating the amount of training they received in seven areas of school leadership practice such as curriculum development, organizational management, and finance. Survey results are displayed in Figure 9. It appears that school leadership preparation programs emphasized curriculum development, instructional leadership, and organizational management with about half of respondents stating that they received "more than enough" or "a significant amount" of training in those areas. School leaders reported receiving relatively lower levels of training in community and family engagement and addressing issues related to cultural diversity. Between 30 and 40 percent of respondents reported "more than enough" or "a significant amount" of training in those areas. Perhaps in connection with the finding that few CESA school leaders have a background in business, the majority of respondents indicated having "a little" or "no training" in finance and budgeting as well as human resource management. Other areas in which the majority of respondents indicated having "little" or "no training" include education law. Half of the survey respondents attested to this lack of training.

Figure 10: Source of Training in Specific Areas of School Leadership Prior to Becoming Administrator



Among respondents who received any amount prior training in each of these areas, most received it through university or college courses (49 to 80 percent), workshops, conferences, or seminars (26 to 75 percent), and mentoring and/or peer observation (25 to 66 percent). Principal networks, visits to other schools, and individual or collaborative research were not popular sources of training prior to becoming principal. When respondents indicated another sources of training, they typically referenced some form of experience—either some type of internship position or in a similar job but in a context outside education.

School Leader Assessments of Ongoing Preparation Many school leaders continued to receive ongoing training in a variety of areas of leadership. However, we note the substantial proportion of respondents reported little to no training. In curriculum development and instructional leadership, 4 out of every 10 school leaders reported getting only "a little" continuing training at best. A similar proportion reported not getting much continued training in organizational management.

When it comes to engaging with families or the community along with addressing cultural diversity, even more administrators report getting little to no ongoing training; about half of respondents indicated so. Moreover, ongoing professional development did not make up for the lack of prior training in finance, law, or human resource management. In these areas, large majorities between 65 and 83 percent of respondents indicated receiving only a little ongoing training at best.

Regarding the sources of ongoing training, CESA school leaders shifted away from university or college courses and relied more heavily on workshops, mentoring, or their principal network. Visits to other schools and research constitute other more common sources of ongoing training when it occurs. These results are depicted in Figure 12.

Figure 11: Amount of Ongoing Training in Specific Areas of School Leadership While Serving as Principal

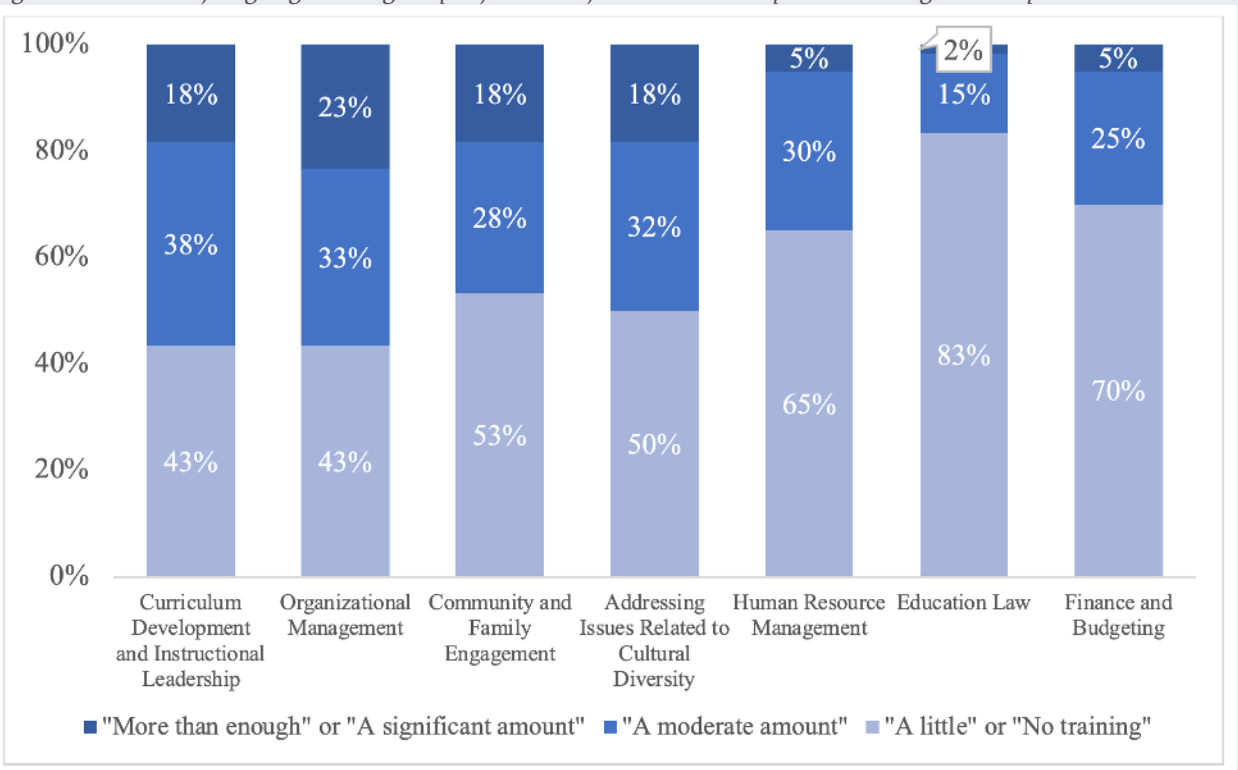
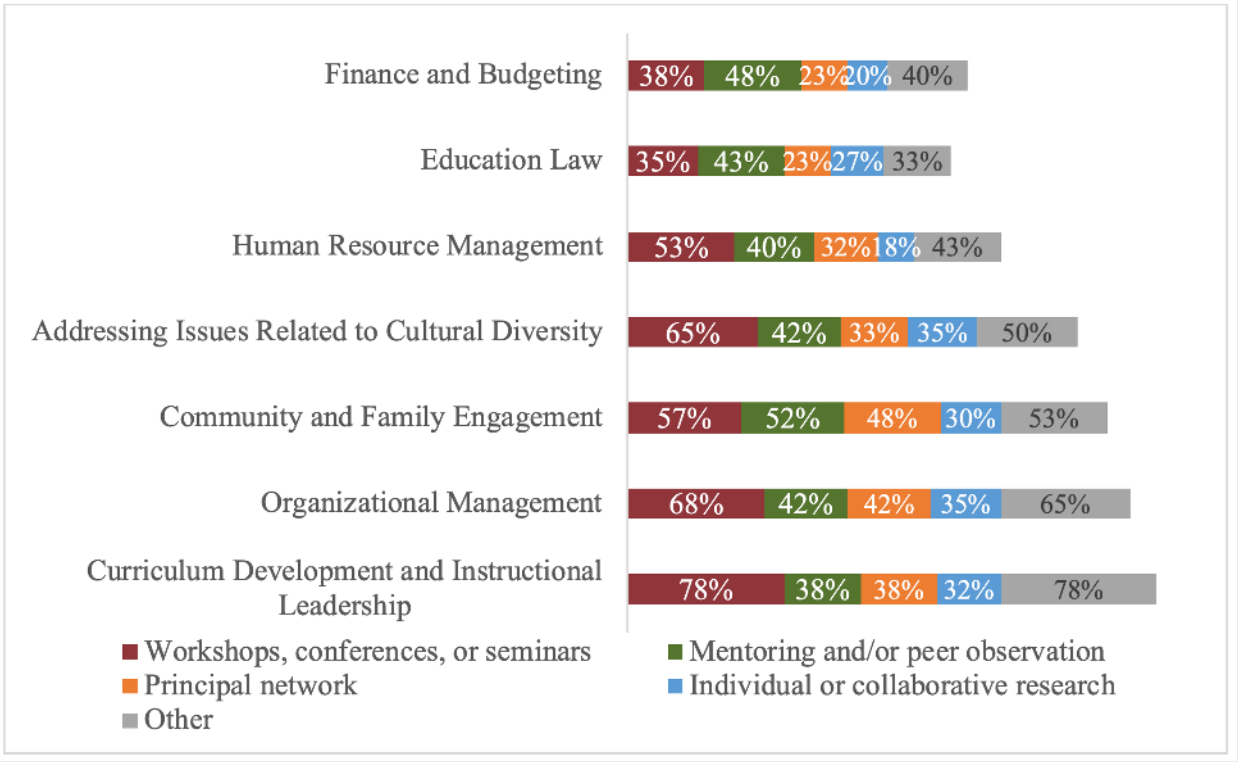


Figure 12: Source of Ongoing Training in Specific Areas of School Leadership



Aims of Education

Table 2: How important are each of the following goals to your school?

	Percent Ranked Most Important	Percent Ranked Second Most Important
Fostering religious or spiritual development	48	25
Encouraging educational excellence	18	16
Building basic literacy skills (reading, math, writing, speaking)	13	21
Promoting specific moral values	8	13

Notes. Percentages calculated out of 61 respondents.

Central to CESA's mission is enabling students "to learn within the framework of a Christian belief system." It is likewise important to consider how teaching—the flip side of learning—and school leadership are also practiced within the framework of Christian faith. In the next set of findings, we discuss the ways school leaders responded to items pertaining to the way Christian faith informs the day to day operations and school practices of CESA schools.

We first asked CESA school leaders to rank in order of importance 10 educational goals. The top four goals are listed in Table 2. Other goals included "promoting occupational or vocational skills," "preparing students for post-secondary education," "promoting multicultural awareness or understanding," "promoting personal growth (self-esteem, self-knowledge, etc.)," "promoting good work habits and self-discipline," and "promoting human relations skills." Fewer than 5 percent of all respondents ranked any of these categories as the most important educational goal.

CESA school leaders placed a heavy emphasis on both spiritual development and academic excellence as priorities of their schools. "Fostering religious or spiritual development" was ranked the most important or second most important goal. Half of principals ranked this goal as the most important aim in their school. "Promoting specific moral values" was ranked first or second by another fifth of all respondents. In terms of academic goals, "encouraging academic excellence" and "building basic literacy skills" were each ranked as the most important goal of their school by 18 percent and 13 percent of respondents, respectively.

The Role of Faith in School Leadership We also asked CESA leaders to indicate the extent to which they believed that their Christian faith informed four aspects of the life of their school: (1) Organizational culture, (2) Relationships, (3) Financial practices, and (4) Curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

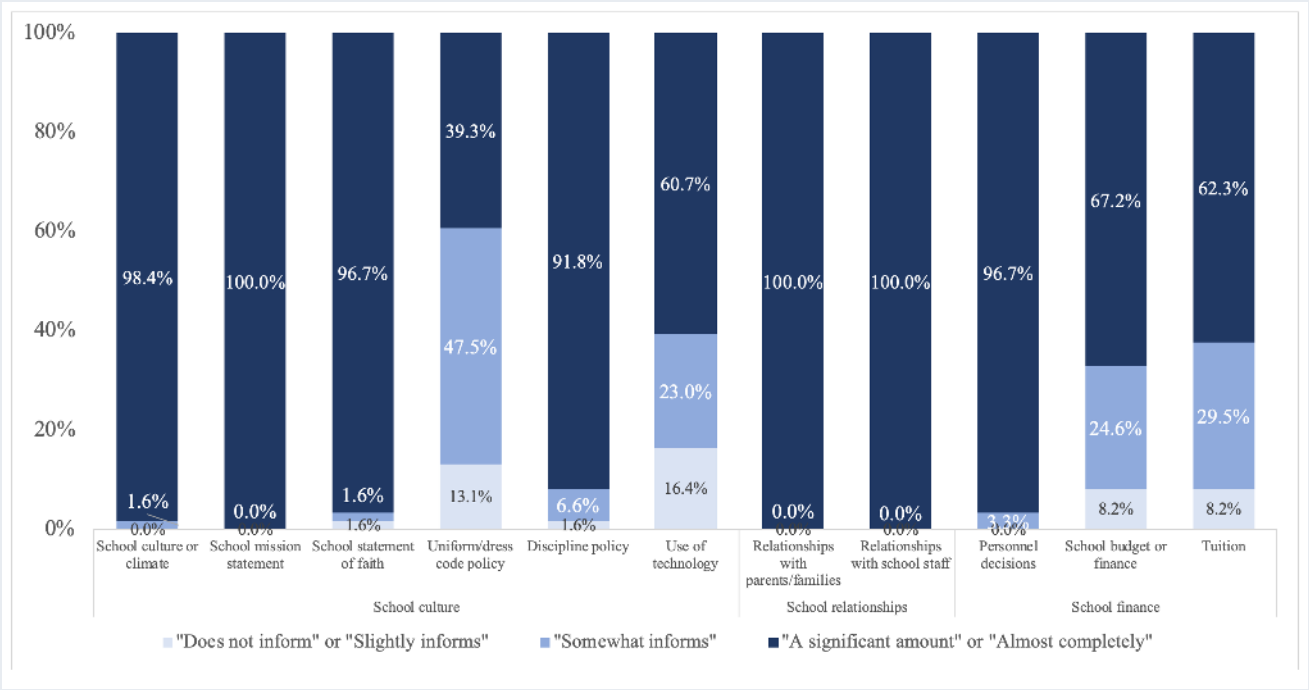
Responses to the first three areas are displayed in Figure 13. With a few exceptions, respondents stated that faith informed aspects of school culture and relationships "a significant amount" or "completely."

Almost all respondents reported that faith is a major influence in their overall school culture or climate, school mission, the school statement of faith. A slightly lower proportion of respondents indicated that their discipline policy was informed by their faith at similar levels. Faith seemed to play even less of a role regarding school dress codes and use of technology.

Meanwhile, faith influenced the nature of relationships to a great extent. According to the survey respondents, the way staff members relate to one another and the way they relate to families was informed "a significant amount" or "almost completely" by the Christian faith.

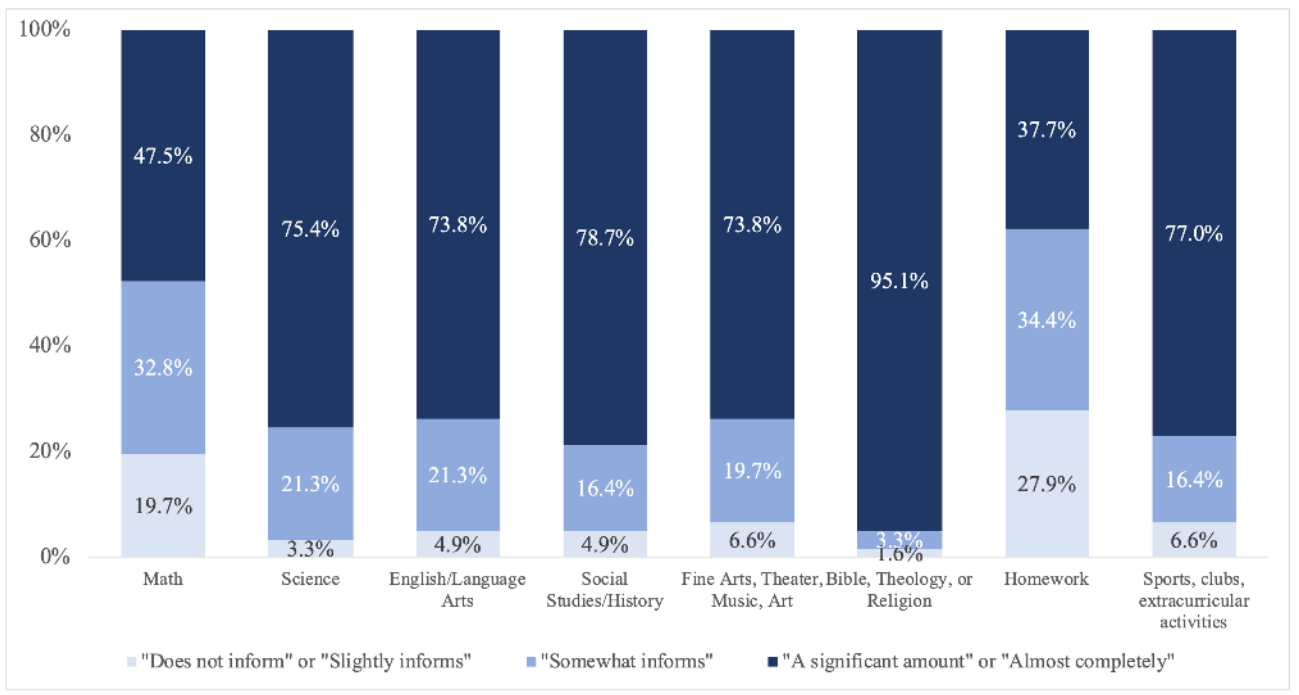
Conversely, school leaders were less likely to report faith playing a major role regarding financial practices. At most two-thirds of respondents stated that budgeting and managing issues related to tuition was informed "a significant amount" or "almost completely" by their faith. While a majority of respondents recognized the place of faith in these practices, the proportion is comparatively low with respect to other aspects of the life of the school. Faith, however, appeared to play a much larger role regarding personnel decisions.

Figure 13: To what extent does faith inform each of the following aspects of your school?



Responses varied more when it came to how faith informed the school's curriculum or extracurricular activities. These findings are shown in Figure 14. Unsurprisingly, 95 percent of respondents indicated that faith informs their Bible, theology, or religion classes "a significant amount" or "almost completely." Most other courses also took Christian faith into account; about three quarters of respondents reported that faith informs these courses "a significant amount" or "almost completely." A similar proportion of respondents stated that faith informed sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities to the same extent.

Figure 14: To what extent does faith inform the curriculum or extracurricular activities of your school?



However, faith played comparatively less of a role in informing math curriculum and homework policy. Less than half of respondents indicated that faith informed math curriculum "a significant amount" or "almost completely." Even fewer indicated the same for their school's homework policy. In fact, the proportion of respondents who said that faith significantly or almost completely informed homework policy is half as large as it is for the other subject areas besides math.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The CESA 2020 Principal Survey covered a range of issues including school and school leader demographic profiles, leadership training, and the ways faith informs the practice of teaching and learning. We hope these data points will spark some reflection about how member schools can be more faithful in their work. We conclude with a few remarks regarding some of the findings.

Pursuing Kingdom Diversity

One potential concern that emerged from the survey is the racial composition of CESA schools. Although other CESA school data sources report that 25 to 40 percent of the student body at a majority of CESA schools come from racial minority backgrounds, 83 percent of all respondents in this survey still characterized their school as serving a predominantly White student population. Nine out of every ten school leaders also indicated their race as White. Moreover, almost 40 percent of all respondents noted receiving "a little" or "no training" in addressing issues related to addressing cultural diversity prior to becoming a school leader. Even after becoming a school leader, training in addressing cultural diversity is even less common. Almost half of respondents stated that they receive little to no training on this issue.

We note that race is but one aspect of diversity. Diversity in terms of ability, economics, and other characteristics are also important. Being a school community that embodies the welcome of Christ and the unity in diversity that Christians are called to reflect is part of faithfulness.

We do not discount the challenges of pursuing Kingdom diversity. Nor should we overlook the group school leaders who currently work in schools that they characterize as racially integrated. Other schools may already be trying to recruit diverse students and staff but have not had much success, especially if the communities in they find themselves or the staffing pipelines are relatively homogenous.
Wherever school communities find themselves on these matters, we encourage CESA leaders to take this opportunity to reflect on ways to more faithfully pursue Kingdom diversity. For example, how could CESA schools become more integrated or representative of their surrounding communities? Are retention rates lower among minority students? If so, why and what can be done to address it? Does the price of tuition, language barriers, the availability of transportation, or the availability of services limit the extent to which schools can be welcoming? Are there staffing practices associated with hiring or leadership appointments that schools might be able to adopt, try, or modify to diversify their staff? How might Christian schools begin to lead and bear witness in the area of diversity in a broader cultural milieu that is seeking similar ends in its particular way?

Tending the principal Pipeline

A second theme emerging from the findings underscores issues related to the principal pipeline. To begin, we found that CESA school leaders tend to be inexperienced in their current role and at their current school. About 30 percent of all respondents have only at most two years of experience as the principal of any school, and 40 percent of respondents have only at most two years of experience as administrator of their current school. As we noted earlier, this raises the concern that CESA school leaders tend to turn over after a short period of time. Even if this trend is simply due to a coincidence of a large influx of recent school leader retirements, it raises questions about a need to equip new principals.

It is difficult to discern the ideal level of turnover. While some turnover might be healthy for an organization, the disruptions caused by an excessive amount of turnover may not be. There are financial as well as emotional costs to conduct a search for a new school leader. More importantly, instability within school leadership poses a significant challenge to attain organizational aims. For instance, CESA calls its member schools to “provide high quality academic programs” that “distinguish the institution as one of high quality.” This task becomes more difficult when short tenures preclude principals from having the time to lead and establish their school communities to improve student learning, retain high-quality teachers, build relationships with families, and promote a positive school climate.

The survey also uncovered particular gaps in principal preparation. On one hand, half of respondents reported receiving “a significant amount” or “more than enough” training in the areas of curriculum development, instructional leadership, and organizational management prior to becoming principal. On the other hand, only a few respondents felt that they received an equal amount of preparation in the areas of education law, budgeting and finance, and human resource management. Over half indicated that they received little to no training in these matters. With few school leaders having formal business training, this may not be surprising. Practically, this trend may mean that many CESA school leaders need to heavily rely on chief financial officers to steward their resources well and to “demonstrate astute financial management, appropriate budget forecasting, and thoughtful short and long-term financial planning processes,” as CESA charges them to do.

Even after becoming principal, an even greater proportion of respondents reported receiving little to no continuing training to make up for this deficiency. Ensuring that school leaders feel equipped in these areas is essential for "Effective Governance" and "Institutional Viability," to cite two of CESA's standards.

Although educational leadership programs at postsecondary institutions as well as professional development programs—the means by which many respondents received any school leadership training—bear some responsibility for this lack of preparation, we would be remiss to not ask school leaders and associations themselves to consider how they might come together to find ways to address this issue. Indeed, many respondents to the survey mentioned receiving training through peer mentoring, school visits, and other principal networks. How might these other means offer opportunities for solutions?

Training for Spiritual Leadership

According to this precept, CESA calls its schools to develop a "sense of coherent Christian community" and to "develop a Christian ethos" rooted in historic creeds and "the foundational tenets of Christian orthodoxy." Consistent with the Christian teaching and CESA standards, CESA school leaders regard faith and spiritual formation as a priority for their schools. Nearly half of all respondents made "fostering religious or spiritual development" the top priority for their schools. "Promoting specific moral values" was ranked first or second by another fifth of all respondents.

Despite the fact that respondents emphasized promoting spiritual growth, only about 10 percent of respondents have experience teaching Bible, religion, or theology courses. Even fewer respondents have undergraduate or post-baccalaureate degree in related fields. Of course, one need not to have a degree in theology or biblical studies in order to be effective spiritual leaders for a school. One's faith is worked out in a variety of contexts. Indeed, almost all school leaders reported the Christian faith playing a significant role in influencing school culture, educational mission, and the relationships between members of the school community. Four out of every five respondents also noted that the Christian faith played at least as significant a role in informing the curriculum in Bible courses as well as other content areas such as the sciences, art, English, and history. CESA schools appear to maintain a distinctive Christian ethos with respect to the content of the curriculum and other facets in the life of the school.

At the same time, there is room for growth. A majority of survey respondents did not say that the Christian faith significantly informs math curriculum and homework policy. A noticeable proportion of respondents also indicated that faith did not play a major role in technology use and dress code policies. Furthermore, and consistent with the lower extent of preparation in budgeting, finance, and human resource management, over one-third of respondents stated that faith only, at best, moderately informs budgeting, financial decisions, tuition, and practices associated with personnel management. These matters are essential for organizational health and tending to them is a part of good stewardship. We do not have answers for how Christian faith can and should inform math curriculum, homework policy, budgeting, or human resource management. For now, we merely raise these questions for school leaders to consider. How can Christian schools be more wholly faithful? How can one's faith be worked out and practiced in these areas that are not conventionally approached through the lens of faith.

To further expound on this point, consider the way teaching and learning is typically understood in Christian education. Christian schools are often branded as distinctively Christian because students

attend Bible courses, have an explicit curriculum that is uniquely based upon a Christian worldview, or engage in a limited set of religious habits such as prayer or Scripture reading.In other words, Christian education has primarily focused on ensuring that the content of what is taught and learned is grounded in Christian faith.

As important as maintaining the integrity of educational content, Christian schools have tended to neglect considering how educational practice might also be similarly grounded. For example, how might the ways teachers assess students, manage their classroom, or assign tasks to students be informed by Christian faith. Similarly, how might the manner in which students intellectually approach a new topic, relate to their classmates, use educational technology, apply what they have learned, or invest in their learning be informed by faith. In other words, what is distinctively Christian about the practice of teaching and learning in Christian schools? How can teachers and students be more faithful in their vocation as teachers and students, respectively?

We pose these same questions for educational leadership. How can the practice of educational leadership be informed by Christian faith? What is distinctively Christian about the way school leaders work out their vocation as school leaders? Are there areas of leadership practice where faith plays a less salient role? How can faith be better integrated in those areas? How might school leaders be more faithful at pursuing excellence in the school communities that they are charged to oversee?

The 2020 CESA Principal Survey gives us a colorful overview of CESA schools, their leaders, and the ways in which faith informs their daily practices. While this report gives us only a glimpse into what these schools are really like, we hope it provides helpful insights into some key areas of growth and reflection.

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