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The Dayton Agenda

Professional Development Policies and Practices in Schools Affiliated with the Association of Christian Schools International

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This is a report of survey research conducted among administrators of schools belonging to the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) regarding their professional development policies and practices. Schools from five states in the northwest region of the United States were included in the study. Three categories of policies and practices were identified: supporting individual growth, supporting group growth and those supporting both. We offer recommendations both for professional practice and further research.

Over the last 25 years, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) has been committed to providing services and support to Christian Schools in the United States and around the world. These services include school accreditation, educator certification and professional development of teachers and administrators. ACSI is an international association of over 5,000 schools in 106 countries, serving about 1,200,000 students worldwide.

The mission of ACSI is "To enable Christian educators and schools worldwide to effectively prepare students for life." Further, "ACSI is committed to respond to the needs of Christian schools and lead its membership to spiritual and academic excellence." Among the twelve core values of the association is professional development. "Professional resources and training are vital for the development and growth of Christian educators and students" (Association of Christian Schools International, 2002, p. iv).

The purpose of ACSI-affiliated schools is to deliver academic programs within the context of a Christian worldview. This purpose presents a worthwhile opportunity for parents and students. However, due to the fact that ACSI schools are independent and receive little or no state support in the United States for their capital costs or operations, challenges exist in providing quality education at reasonable tuition rates. One of these areas of challenge is in the recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers and administrators. Further, appropriate professional development opportunities for educators in ACSI schools are often out-of-reach or out-of-touch. This is especially true for those with limited financial resources, in rural areas, and employed in small schools. Previous research (Headley, 1997) in this area found that Bible content and activities concerning the integration of faith and learning were frequently identified as needed by Christian school educators. Further, those educators wanted professional development activities that were relevant to their need, at an affordable cost, and close to home. Educators need to grow and learn so that they can continue to help their students grow and learn. ACSI President Ken Smitherman (2003) has stated, "Professional development for Christian school educators must be aggressive and ongoing, with programs that are stretching and demanding while invigorating and encouraging" (p. 16).

Educators have long recognized the need for professional development, although there have been differing views in defining professional development. One view is that professional development is training of

individual staff members to address particular deficiencies (Epperly and Cohen,1984). Another view is that professional development is a “systematic attempt to affect the professional practices, beliefs and understanding of school persons toward an announced goal” (Bradley, Kallik, and Reagan, 1991 p. 3). Current understandings of professional development indicate that the following are keys for effectiveness:

- a. continuity (Nicholson, Joyce, Parker, and Waterman, 1976),
- b. coherence in approach (Fullan,1991),
- c. agreed upon vision and aims (Richardson, 2003),
- d. focus on educators as learners (Lieberman, 1995),
- e. collaboration (Darling-Hammond, Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1995),
- f. based in teachers’ own inquiry (Darling-Hammond, Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1995),
- g. planned with results in mind (Sparks and Hirsh 1997), and
- h. student centered (Harwayne, 1999).

For the purposes of this study, professional development was defined as activities focused on addressing individual educator needs while building team capacity within the context of the whole school environment and founded on group vision and commitment to common values. This definition implies that professional development is a complex and far-reaching enterprise and part of a broader effort at establishing and maintaining a biblically grounded education within the Christian school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

While the Association of Christian Schools International offers a number of professional development opportunities for their member educators, many administrators recognize that further research is needed in order to determine further steps in serving educator professional develop-

ment needs. For example, little is known about the specific professional development policies and practices of local schools. This study was the second phase of a comprehensive research program (for findings of the first phase see Headley, 2003). The purpose of this study was to survey the professional development policies and practices of ACSI-affiliated schools in the Northwest Region which consists of the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. As of the 2002/03 school year there were 278 schools in the Region.

Objectives of the study included:

- a. to determine the willingness of school administrators to participate in a more complete investigation;
to examine teacher turnover in the local schools;
- b. to determine specific policies and practices related to professional development offered by local schools; and
- c. to identify critical needs in the professional development of administrators and teachers.

METHOD

The author developed a one-page "Professional Growth Checklist" and used it as an instrument in collecting data from school administrators in the ACSI Northwest Region. The checklist was designed for ease and speed of completion and listed a number of items identifying specific professional development policies and procedures identified in the literature. Administrators were invited to participate at ACSI district meetings and at the Portland and Anchorage Teacher Conventions in the fall of 2002. In addition, letters of invitation were sent to any schools with student populations exceeding 250 not responding to the initial calls for participation. Sixty administrators, representing schools from Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho participated in the study. Additional background information regarding the participating schools was

obtained from the ACSI 2001/02 Membership directory. No attempt was made to select a random sample. However, the author attempted to secure participation from all schools with a student population of at least 250. Thirty-nine of fifty such schools participated.

The data were analyzed by compiling frequencies and percentages of responses regarding the elements (policies and practices) of professional development. The author then developed a general scheme of grouping professional development elements, based on whether the elements supported individual or group growth, or both. In addition, the author conducted an analysis of the open-ended questions regarding critical needs to review the responses and to categorize those responses into thematic groupings.

FINDINGS

Sixty schools were represented in this survey. Nineteen of the schools (32%) were accredited by ACSI. The average age of the schools was 28 years with the age varying from five to 57 years. Schools varied in size from a student population of 30 to 1600, with an average student population of 374. Thirty-nine of the schools (65%) had a student population of 250 or more. Findings are organized by sections providing information related to each of the objectives of the study. The first section relates to whether schools were willing to participate in a more thorough investigation.

Further Investigation

Administrators reported whether they would be willing to allow for a school visit for the purpose of further investigation. Administrators demonstrated their willingness by indicating that they welcomed a visit, by providing contact information, and by identifying a contact person.

Fifty-two (87%) of the administrators stated that they welcomed a visit, with eight either stating "no" or not responding to the item. Twenty-seven (45%) identified a specific contact person or persons at their school. All 60 of the administrators provided contact information, either phone, email or both.

Teacher Turnover

Administrators identified the number of teachers who left their school at the conclusion of the 2001/02 school year and how many new teachers they had in their school for the 2002/03 school year. The average number of leaving teachers was 2.6, ranging from 0-10. The average number of new teachers was 3.3, ranging from 0-10.

Policies and Practices

Administrators reported which professional development elements were in use in their schools. Nineteen specific professional development policies and practices, identified by a review of the literature and through conversations with ACSI representatives and local school administrators, made up the checklist. These policies and practices were grouped into three major types, those that primarily support individual teacher growth, those that support group growth, and those that could support either individual or group growth, or both. Figure 1 presents the types of professional growth policies and activities.

Administrators selected those policies and practices that were offered by their local school. In addition to the nineteen specific elements, administrators had the option of selecting "Other" and briefly describing that other policy or practice. No definitions or descriptions were offered on the checklist, which left interpretation of the meaning of the named policy or procedure to each respondent.

Policies and practices that support individual growth

- ACSI Convention participation
- ASCI Enabler Participation
- Professional leave days
- Graduated salary scale based on educational attainment
- Tuition reimbursement for graduate study
- Professional development fund for faculty
- Teacher evaluation for professional growth
- Faculty handbook

Policies and practices that support group growth

- Collaborative teacher research
- Joint planning periods
- Ongoing faculty development courses
- Book study groups
- Accountability and support groups
- Specific preparation in biblical worldview integration

Policies and practices that support group or individual growth or both

- Collaboration with colleges and universities
- Collaboration with other K-12 schools
- School sponsored in-service activities
- New teacher mentoring
- Peer coaching

Figure 1

Types of Professional Growth Policies and Practices.

Individual Growth. Eight policies and practices were listed that primarily support individual growth. Table 1 presents information about this group. The three most frequently identified professional development elements in this group were faculty handbooks (92%), ACSI convention participation (90%), and teacher evaluation for professional growth (87%). The average usage of elements in this group was 69 percent.

Table 1***Policies and practices that Support Individual Growth (N = 60)***

Activity (Ranked in descending order)	Responses	
	no.	%1
Faculty handbook	55	92
ACSI Convention participation	54	90
Teacher evaluation for professional growth	52	87
Professional leave days	42	70
Graduated salary scale	42	70
ASCI Enabler Participation	30	50
Professional development fund for faculty	30	50
Tuition reimbursement for graduate study	25	42
1. Mean = 69 SD = 19.8 Minimum = 42 Maximum = 92		

Group Growth. Six policies and practices were listed that primarily support group growth. Table 2 provides information about this group. Ongoing faculty development courses (42%), preparation in biblical

Table 2***Policies and Practices that Support Group Growth (N = 60)***

Activity (Ranked in descending order)	Responses	
	no.	%1
Ongoing faculty development courses	25	42
Preparation biblical worldview integration	25	42
Joint planning periods	24	40
Accountability and support groups	11	18
Book study groups	07	12
Collaborative teacher research	07	12
1. Mean = 28 SD = 15.1 Minimum = 12 Maximum = 42		

worldview integration (42%), and joint planning periods (40%) were the three most frequently listed elements in this group. The average usage of elements in this group was 28 percent.

Group and Individual Growth. Five policies and practices were listed that could support individual growth, group growth, or both. Table 3 provides information about this group. The most frequently identified elements in this group were school sponsored in-service activities (92%), new teacher mentoring (57%) and collaboration with other K-12 schools (43%). The average usage of elements in this group was 47 percent.

Total Policies and Practices Offered. In examining the total scope of professional development activities, schools were measured by the total number score of policies and practices that they offered. Table 4 presents information about the total number of elements offered. Administrators could identify up to a total of 19 policies and practices. The vast majority (71.7%) of schools offered between 6 and 12 professional development policies and practices. Eight schools identified five or fewer elements, while nine schools listed more than 12.

Table 3
Policies and Practices that Support Group or Individual Growth or Both (N=60)

Activity (Ranked in descending order)	Responses	
	no.	%1
School sponsored in-service activities	55	92
New teacher mentoring	34	57
Collaboration with other K-12 schools	26	43
Peer coaching	14	23
Collaboration with colleges and universities	11	18
1. Mean = 47 SD = 29.8 Minimum = 18 Maximum = 92		

Table 4***Total Policies and Practices Offered by Schools (N=60)***

Number Offered	no.	%
0-5	8	13.3
6-9	18	30.0
10-12	25	41.7
13-15	8	13.3
16-19	1	1.7
Mean = 9.5 SD = 3.4 Minimum = 1 Maximum = 19		

Other Elements. Several administrators listed additional policies and practices. Additional elements included: requiring all teaching staff to be ACSI-certified, usage of individual professional growth plans, a teaching tips bulletin board, Bible and Philosophy CEU programs, and usage of consultants to address specific needs.

Critical Needs

Administrators described teacher and administrator greatest needs regarding professional development. Fifty-one administrators identified administrators' needs and fifty identified teachers' needs. Table 5 presents information about critical professional development needs for administrators. The identified needs were of four main categories:

- general leadership skills,
- basic resources,
- types of professional growth opportunities, and
- specific content of professional growth opportunities.

Table 5***Administrators' Greatest Needs (N = 81 responses)***

Need	Specific Group	
	f	f (%)
<i>General Leadership Skills</i>	12	15
Leading, visioning, change	4	
Dealing with conflict and criticism		2
Administrator preparation	2	
Awareness and communicate with parents	2	
Completing accreditation	1	
Awareness of classroom happenings	1	
<i>Basic Resources</i>	49	60
Money	18	
Time	17	
Affordable/accessible pd activities	7	
Overcoming staff attitudes and lack of time	3	
Needs assessment	2	
"Resources"	1	
Paraprofessionals	1	
<i>Types of professional development opportunities</i>	8	10
Graduate programs	2	
Mentoring	2	
Administrative leadership program	1	
Continuing Education (CEU) programs	1	
Credit bearing inservice programs	1	
Christian-based programs	1	
<i>Content of professional development opportunities</i>	12	15
Curriculum alignment and development	3	
Practical information daily operations	2	
Time management	2	
Christian-based class management	1	
Legal and legislative information	1	
Strategic planning	1	
Board training	1	
Teacher mentoring	1	

Table 6***Teachers' Greatest Needs (N= 83 responses)***

Need	Specific Group	
	no.	no. %
<i>Academic content and educational processes</i>	36	43
Biblical worldview integration	7	
Classroom management skills	6	
Methods of teaching	4	
Curriculum development	3	
Assessment	2	
Technology	2	
Individual differences of students	2	
Special needs and dyslexic students	2	
Multilevel classroom	1	
Character education	1	
Leadership skills	1	
Early childhood	1	
Understanding today's families	1	
Gifted education	1	
Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP)	1	
Specific subject matter	1	
<i>General resources</i>	47	57
Time	17	
Money	16	
Affordable/ Accessible opportunities	5	
Continuing Education (CEU) programs	2	
Credit bearing courses	2	
Department planning	1	
Part-time administrator	1	
Plans for growth and follow through	1	
Observing other teachers	1	
Mentoring	1	

The most frequently identified category was 'basic resources' with 60 percent of the responses being in this category. Specifically, administrators identified time and money as the two most critical needs for administrative professional development. A wide variety of other needs were also identified.

Administrators also identified the greatest professional development needs of teachers. Information about teachers' needs is presented in Table 6. Needs were categorized as either academic content and educational process needs or basic resources. Basic resources were identified 57 percent of the time, with time and money being the most critical specific teacher needs. Classroom management and biblical worldview integration were the greatest specific content and educational process need for teachers.

SUMMARY

Sixty schools participated in this survey of professional development policies and practices of ACSI-affiliated schools in the Northwest Region. The average age of the schools was 28 years with the age varying from 5 years to 57 years. Nineteen of the schools (32%) were accredited by ACSI. Objectives of the study included:

- a. to determine the willingness of school administrators to participate in a more complete investigation;
- b. to examine patterns of teacher turnover in the local schools;
- c. to determine specific policies and practices related to professional development offered by local schools; and
- d. to identify critical needs in professional development of administrators and teachers.

Fifty-two (87%) of the administrators stated that they welcomed a school visit, indicating a willingness to participate in a more thorough

investigation. Regarding teacher turnover for this academic year, the average number of teachers leaving a school was 2.6, ranging from 0-10. The average number of new teachers was 3.3, ranging from 0-10.

Professional development policies and practices were grouped in three categories; those supporting individual growth, those supporting group growth, and those supporting either individual or group growth, or both. The three most frequently identified professional development elements in the individual growth group were ACSI convention participation (90%), faculty handbooks (92%) and teacher evaluation for professional growth (87%). Individual growth elements were in place, on average, in 69 percent of the schools.

Policies and practices supporting group growth were in place, on average, in 28 percent of the schools. Ongoing faculty development courses (42%), preparation in biblical worldview integration (42%), and joint planning periods (40%) were the three most frequently listed elements of this type.

About one-half (47%) of the schools had policies and practices that could support individual growth or group growth, or both. The most frequently identified elements in this group were school sponsored in-service activities (92%), new teacher mentoring (57%) and collaboration with other K-12 schools (43%).

The average number of professional development practices offered by the schools was 9.5. A majority (71.7%) of schools offered between 6 and 12 professional development policies and practices. Eight schools identified five or fewer elements, while nine schools listed more than 12.

Concerning critical needs for professional development, the most frequently identified category of administrator need was 'basic resources' with 60 percent of the responses being in this category. Specifically, administrators identified time and money as the two most critical needs for administrative professional development. Regarding teachers, basic resources were identified 57 percent of the time, with time and money

being the most critical specific teacher needs. Classroom management and biblical worldview integration were the greatest specific content and educational process need for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined professional development policies and practices offered by local schools. Respondents were not asked to provide detail as to the descriptions, effectiveness, costs and scope of the particular professional development elements offered at the schools. Therefore, it is not possible to draw complete conclusions about the professional development of educators at these ACSI-affiliated schools from the findings of this study alone. To explore the actual effect of professional development on faculty and students will require additional research. As previously stated, this study is the second phase of a multi-phase research project. More comprehensive conclusions will be available as the project progresses. Since the sample for this study was not necessarily a representative sample, it is not possible to generalize to a broader population.

The schools represented in this study offered a wide range of professional development policies and practices. However, there is a noticeable difference between the frequency of usage when comparing elements that support individual, group or those supporting both types of growth. The schools primarily offered policies and practices that supported individual growth (69%), with much less emphasis on group growth (28%) practices. Activities that supported both individual and group professional development were offered in about one half (47%) of the schools. It seems that generally, the view of professional development as addressing individual needs is the prevailing view in these schools.

If professional development is recognized as those activities focused on addressing individual educator needs while building team capacity within the context of the whole school environment, the schools in this sample are certainly emphasizing individual needs but may not be adequately addressing team capacity-building. In addition, if professional development is founded on group vision and commitment to common values, then greater emphasis must be placed on building the vision and commitment to common values, an integral component of professional development.

The four most frequently reported practices were

- a. ACSI convention participation,
- b. faculty handbook,
- c. teacher evaluation for professional growth, and
- d. school-sponsored in-service activities.

These four activities are viewed as 'traditional' within ACSI-affiliated schools, with about 90 percent of the participating schools offering them to their faculty. In fact, of the 19 elements identified, these four elements made up 38 percent of the total offerings by the schools. Although it not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities from these findings, it is obvious that they play an important role in professional development in schools represented in this sample.

In addition to listing particular elements offered by their schools, administrators described a number of critical professional development needs. It is apparent that generally, the basic resources of time and money, are lacking. Addressing this lack of basic resources is essential in order to provide for appropriate professional development opportunities. In addition, a significant minority of administrators described the need for building leadership capacity and competence within Christian schools. This indicates that beyond increasing basic resources, leadership is recognized as important to professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations, based on the findings and conclusions of this study, will be presented in this section. Recommendations are organized in the following categories, for local schools, for ACSI, for institutions of higher education and other professional development providers, and for further research.

Recommendations for local schools

1. Professional development is essential and is also a complex undertaking. Since existing information is incomplete, local schools should participate in further study in order to determine effective policies and procedures.
2. In addition, local schools should undertake ongoing self-study, to evaluate the effects of their current professional development practices and to explore improvements. As part of this study local schools should re-examine their offering of 'traditional' professional development elements to assess costs and benefits.
3. Local school personnel should consider a close examination of the research and professional literature to seek out principles of effective professional development. This examination should lead to reflection and evaluation of current practice.
4. Since administrators recognized time and money as the most critical needs for professional development of both administrators and teachers, every effort should be made to increase both time and money allocated towards professional development efforts.
5. Schools are not collaborating, to any great extent, with other schools or with universities. Local schools should leverage their Association membership or membership in local consortia to broker the services of professional development providers for individual schools and educators.

Recommendations for ACSI

1. Since local schools rely heavily on ACSI conventions and other ACSI-sponsored events for professional development; It is recommend that the Regional Offices consider whether the principles of effective professional development identified in the research literature are adhered to in planning and delivery of activities and events. Further, ACSI should experiment with alternative programs, offered through the conventions or outside of the conventions, which introduce and model principles of effective professional development.
2. ACSI should closely examine accreditation and certification programs to determine to what extent these programs align with professional development needs of individuals and schools. It should not be necessarily assumed that current accreditation and certification programs foster growth of the kind needed and desired by schools and educators.
3. ACSI should consider additional programs in mentoring, leadership capacity building and resource stewardship. It is important to use the power of the Association to investigate and experiment with meaningful activities that may not be possible to attempt by individual schools alone.
4. ACSI should seek partners in research and development efforts for effective professional development. With the Association's current emphasis on implementing student outcomes, a unique window of opportunity exists to pique the interest and rally the support of schools, funding agencies and potential partners.

Recommendations for higher education and other providers

1. There is not much evidence of collaboration between local schools and institutions of higher education (IHE). It is recommend that higher education personnel; especially those from schools of education at Christian IHEs seek out collaborative

arrangements with ACSI, local schools and consortia of schools for the purpose of professional development.

2. Christian IHEs should closely investigate the unique needs of educators at Christian schools in an effort to modify existing degree and continuing education offerings or to create new offerings that would address those needs.
3. Universities, consultants, and continuing education providers should consult the professional development literature in order to align their efforts with principles of best practice.

Recommendations for further research

1. As stated in the conclusions, no information that described and evaluated particular practices was available through this study. Therefore, additional research should be undertaken to describe and evaluate professional development practices in local schools affiliated with ACSI. In particular, attention should be placed on investigating best practices of effective professional development.
2. In addition to additional descriptive and evaluative research, efforts need to be made to examine relationships among the factors associated with professional development. This is an important step in constructing a model that explains effective professional development and demonstrates how the elements work together in the whole school environment.
3. Similar research should be conducted with a broader scope. It is not known how the findings of this study compare to those that would be found from samples in other ACSI regions. This author recommends that a survey of professional development practices and policies at schools internationally be conducted.
4. Since time and money were identified as critical professional development needs, additional research should be done to determine professional development investments (time and money) of ACSI-affiliated schools. In particular, an investigation of how specific local schools have developed the capacity to invest time and money to a greater extent is especially needed.

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