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Bible Theory or Biblical Living: What are Christian Schools Providing for Families with Children with Special Needs?

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Abstract

Private Christian elementary and secondary schools, along with Bible training and Bible exercises, have been a part of the United States and international community since the 1800s. This article examines these questions: (1) What Biblically-based principles are in evidence in Christian schools' treatment of children with special needs; and (2) how do Christian schools work with the parents of these children. Results from the Christian schools that participated in this study indicate although that they were attending to their children with special needs, these schools may actually be missing many more students who are in need of services.

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Bible Theory or Biblical Living: What are Christian Schools Providing for Families with Children with Special Needs?

A.Y. "Fred" Ramirez, Ph.D., Biola University • Melissa Stymeist, MAED

Abstract

Private Christian elementary and secondary schools, along with Bible training and Bible exercises, have been a part of the United States and international community since the 1800s. This article examines these questions: (1) What Biblically-based principles are in evidence in Christian schools' treatment of children with special needs; and (2) how do Christian schools work with the parents of these children. Results from the Christian schools that participated in this study indicate although that they were attending to their children with special needs, these schools may actually be missing many more students who are in need of services.

Authors' Note

To examine the issue of Christian schools and children with special needs, the authors wish to place the first-person narrative of one family at the beginning of the study to ensure that the reader feels the full impact of what some Christian schools are omitting from their theology and pedagogy. Mr. Lopez is a third generation Latino-American male whose parents were born and reared in the United States. Mr. Lopez and his wife are native English speakers who successfully earned undergraduate degrees while Mr. Lopez furthered his education with two graduate degrees. Mr. Lopez was willing to tell his story, for he felt moved to comment and share his as well as other parents' experiences so as to better inform Christian educators and parents regarding Christian education. For purposes of authenticity, the authors of this paper would wish to keep the

father's story as a first-person narrative. This is his story.

Story from the Lopez Family

As a father of three, I understand the expectation of being a father, a provider, a mentor, and an educator for my children. My father assisted all he could with my schooling and worked hard to send us to private, parochial schools. When I became a father myself, I wanted to give the same support and type of education to my own children as my father gave me. Though my parents were very involved in all the schools I attended, I found closed doors at the private Christian school where my own children attended to families of children with special learning needs. I also observed that the school's values were driven by monetary outcomes, and that there were limited avenues to support families with special needs children. The school also had an atmosphere that catered to students who were able to score high on achievement tests, which were not the same tests used by the local public schools. Even though the private Christian school used a different test from the local public schools, the principal stated that his school did "better" on testing than they. Although the mission of the school was based on Christ, in reality, the administration was more concerned with enrollment and with retention of

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those students who scored well on the standardized tests than with the best interests of its students. Children with special needs were cast aside, and high scoring children were embraced.

My story, however, does not only involve me. It focuses on friends of my family from the school that experienced similar situations when their child may have benefited from additional assistance, but administrators were unwilling to accommodate the child. The administrators even suggested that the child be retained and special services outside of the school would be sought. When the administrator was asked from where his degree and educational training were, he replied that his master's degree was in social studies, and no formal educational training in special education had been obtained.

Although this was one school where the spirit of the school was based on Christian theology, in truth, this school was based on secular principles of allowing only the better students to remain while failing to assist those students who may need additional assistance.

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While my own two children were attending, I inquired as to what I could do to assist the school and their teachers due to my connections with a university and my research in families and schools. I also offered to conduct parent education workshops focused on at-home study skills and suggested that a survey be used to measure parent perceptions of the school. When asked if we could receive information from parents, the principal commented that although it would be fine to

generate follow-up from parents, "it wasn't really necessary." When I inquired if financial scholarships were available for parents who wanted their children to attend the school (based on experiences with Catholic schools where many students are on financial assistance) I was told, "We don't do that here." When one parent offered to hold events to raise money for scholarships on the parent's own time, the principal negated the offer by again stating, "We don't feel the need to offer scholarships for families." In fact, during my time of interaction with this Christian school, parents were asked only to give of their money to support the teachers in purchasing classroom items and to feed them during their annual standardized testing. As a result of speaking with other families, we discovered that little was being done to secure parental input or positive communication. Even less was being done to secure information for parents with children with special needs.

Although my wife and I had met fabulous families from the school, the academic needs of our children were not being met; one child was bored due to her academic giftedness and was only given extra busy work to do at home, while our other child, although receiving high grades, was struggling with retention of information. When my wife and I spoke with teachers and administrators regarding our concerns, we were told the school didn't have anything that they could do. This was puzzling, for one of the teachers had participated in an accredited teacher credential program where learning about and putting together strategies for students with special needs was part of the curriculum. Our third child attended the pre-school that was part of the same Christian elementary school. When one of the head administrators of the pre-school heard that we were thinking of pulling our children out of their schools, I was told, "Where else will your children receive a Christian education?" I replied, "From me, and their mother, for Christian values in children are learned first and foremost from parents, not from schools." This expression of a Christian education was emphasized in our verbal exchange because we struggled to see the Christian experience lived out at this school. The principal had failed to show us that Christ's actions were being fully developed within the

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school as it related to servicing and loving all children, regardless of their performance and regardless of their special learning needs. Bible theory was being taught, but biblical principles were not being applied.

After exploring the public schools, we found the local public school district to be better prepared and equipped to work with all families no matter their background. Plus, the public school was actually academically outperforming the private Christian school. So then, for what were we paying? What concerned us, as parents, was the fact that despite receiving excellent grades at the private school, our children were actually below grade level when we transferred from the private school to the local public school. Teachers at the new school were quick to respond to the needs of our children and desired to work with us, as parents, to find out what our children's academic needs actually were. They as teachers sought how they could assist in developing our students socially and academically. Because of this teacher/parent communication, modifications of curriculum were devised for our children and positive learning outcomes resulted.

To state our perspective simply, we left the private Christian school because the administrator demonstrated no interest in the academic development of children who learned differently or performed poorly on standardized tests. The administrator had teachers teaching biblical theology as theory, not practice. As believers in Christ, we felt that we could not support a school whose mission was solely to remain fiscally in the black. Nor as Christians did we care to support a school that seemed to value only the students who performed well on standardized tests and seemed to ignore students who may not have performed well on these same tests.

In conclusion, after leaving the Christian elementary school, our children are now doing well spiritually, socially and academically. Testing was conducted for one child who was academically performing well, but still, as parents, we believed something was missing. We were noticing these items within our child while at the Christian school:

- Difficulty in paying attention and remembering
- oral information
- Troubles listening
- Homework was taking longer than usual
- The need to take time to process information
- Problems requiring more than one step confusing
- Becoming more bitter toward school and learning

Testing results proved our feelings as parents were correct. Our child, when moved to the public school, was diagnosed with auditory processing disorder which is the difficulty of processing or interpreting information. When this was discovered, my wife and I immediately began to comb online information for strategies. Some that we found were the following:

- Reduce background noise and reverberation.
- Keep the child near where you are.
- Get child's attention before giving instructions.
- Have the child paraphrase directions
- Pre-teach new vocabulary/concepts
- Use a slower speaking rate.
- Allow extra time for the child to respond to questions.
- Allow extra time for quizzes and tests.
- Insert pauses to allow the child to catch-up.
- Use visual aids (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009)

When the documents were given to our new principal, we formally met with our child's teachers, and a 504 plan was developed and implemented with positive results. A 504 plan is mandated for people who have been diagnosed with a disability and emphasizes that no person shall be denied educational opportunities due to his or her disability. The 504 meeting is required each year to list modifications needed by the student so that he or she may have the opportunity to academically perform at the same level as his or her peers. After two years of having the 504 plan and modifications that have included lessening the amount of homework problems,

sitting in the front of the class, and checking our child's agenda before leaving class, our child is performing well and has regained confidence in their academic ability. Most important, however, is the fact that our child has continued to grow spiritually in his or her faith.

This story from Mr. Lopez, again, was highlighted to introduce this research project that was conducted on Christian schools and how they interact with parents who have children with special needs. Using the introductory narrative, the research and recommendations for Christian schools are below.

Issues with Educating Students with Special Needs in Christian Schools

The Lopez family's discouraging experience with a private Christian school is, unfortunately, not an uncommon one for families with students with special needs. Before this research was conducted, informal observations were made regarding ACSI accredited Christian schools and students with special needs. These schools claimed that they could not accept and/or retain students with special needs due to a lack of financial and professional resources. These are certainly two barriers that private Christian schools face in educating students with special needs. However, further investigation found that within the leaders of private schools, there is an undeveloped heart for students with special needs. Meaning, that students with special needs are often overlooked or ignored by the administrators. This insight lends itself to the importance of developing Christ's heart for students with special needs in private Christian schools, and then discovering how to best meet the needs for this population of students. Therefore, the questions for this research include the following:

1. Are private Christian schools allowing student's with special needs access to a Christian education?
2. How are private Christian schools providing students with learning challenges with an education that meets their special needs?

3. Are the approaches that private Christian schools are taking to educate students with special needs effective?

Literature

According to the US Department of Education, approximately 10% to 12% of school-aged-children are students with special needs (Taylor, 2005, p. 282). Some Christian schools, because of lack of sensitivity to such students, are unwilling to accept students with special needs (K. Norton, personal communication, July 5, 2008; M. Stranske, personal communication, July 3, 2008; L. Sudman, personal communication, fall 2006). If Christian schools exclude these children, this group of students will lose the opportunity to have a Christian education. Christian education philosopher Richard A. Riesen (2002) argues, "education, if not the most important, is nonetheless among the most important gifts a society can give" (p. 42). Therefore, each student, regardless of ability needs to be given the opportunity to be educated within his or her desired school. It is unjust to withhold the precious gift of a Christian education from the population of students with special needs. However, a struggle within private Christian schools is the school's hesitancy to accept students with special needs for fear of gaining a reputation of being a school that specializes in special education rather than an excellent academic institution (Shaywitz, 2003, p. 297; M. Stranske, personal communication, July 3, 2008; Pudlas, 2004). Why could not private Christian schools be known for both diversifying instruction to meet special needs and academic excellence? A school that embraces this kind of instruction is truly dedicated to excellence because it embraces a multi-faced approach toward instruction and it embraces in the truest sense the *Imago Dei* (image of God) in each child.

Furthermore, if Christian schools want their biblical teaching and practice to be consistent, they must examine what the Bible implies about students with special needs. According to the Bible, God created people with challenges and limitations (Exodus. 4:11 New International Version). Whether or not people have issues that will cause them to struggle in a classroom, all

humans will struggle with some weaknesses. Scripture teaches that weaknesses can actually be a blessing that may lead a person into a deeper relationship with their Creator (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Therefore, Christians in education who hold to these biblical teachings should humbly embrace the unique talents and struggles of students with special needs in their schools.

There are some private Christian schools that see the hypocrisy in being Christian and refusing to accept students with special needs. In fact, many experts educating students with special needs believe that the percentage of students with special needs or learning challenges is higher in private schools than in public schools (Barton, 2006; Taylor, 2005 p. 286). They reason that parents of children who struggle in school perceive that private schools, with their smaller class sizes and noted care and concern for students, can do a better job than public schools when it comes to serving their children. While Christian schools are known for these admirable qualities, traditionally, they do not have the same breadth or depth of special education resources for students with special needs that public schools offer. This presents the second problem faced by parents with children with special needs who desire a Christian education face. Christian schools that do accept students with special needs cannot always give the students or parents the kind of support that they need due to a lack of professional and financial resources (Norton, 2008; Stranske, 2008; Sudman, 2006). Therefore, the needs of students with special needs are not adequately met, and their chance for academic success in private Christian schools is diminished. However, once private Christian schools develop a heart for students with special needs and accept these students in their schools, they must develop instructional interventions for students with special needs.

Instructional Interventions

Extensive research is necessary on the instructional approaches that private Christian schools specifically are using to address their populations of students with special needs (Taylor, 2005). The following approaches addressed in this literature review were chosen

by the authors because of their weighty presence in the published literature published on successful approaches for working with students with special needs and their prevalence in Christian schools. For the purposes of this paper, the following approaches will be considered: consultation model, teaming model, collaborative co-teaching model, advocacy approach, and task analysis. The first three approaches are promoted by the OIAR or Organization for Inclusion, Acceptance, Respect, which emphasizes the research of Elaine E. Daack (1999), built upon Gartner and Lipsky's (1997) research, for helping students with special needs (Organization for Inclusion, Acceptance, Respect, 2008). The last two approaches are approaches that the authors noticed in local private Christian schools.

Consultation

The consultation model is a model in which an expert special educator teaches students with special needs individually outside of their general classrooms. Opportunity Schools is an organization that works with private Christian schools to establish a specialized consultation program on their campuses. With Opportunity Schools, students who are identified by their classroom teachers who have noticed them falling behind academically, enter a small group tutoring program with a specially trained teacher who uses multisensory approaches to teaching math and reading (K. Miller, personal communication, October 11, 2008; Opportunity Schools, 2008). Opportunity Schools also works with Christian schools on practical ways to finance the program. In fact, the program draws more students to the Christian school, giving the school a healthy enrollment, the chance to provide a Christian education for more students, and more tuition funds, which can help to pay for the program. Opportunity Schools is an example of a successful way to implement the consultation model for educating students with special needs in private Christian schools.

Teaming

Daack (1999) defines the teaming model of educating students with special needs as an approach whereby special educators and

classroom teachers, parents, school psychologists, and counselors, work closely together in every step of the education process of the student with special needs. This includes the following: assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation (Carpenter et al., 1998). This approach requires positive administrative support and teachers who are eager to collaborate (Coben et al., 1997, p. 429). Educators participating in teaming must have mutual goals and respect for all involved in the collaboration on behalf of the student with special needs (Coben et al., 1997, p. 429). This model strives for the inclusion of students with learning challenges and may be considered by private Christian schools as an effective means for educating students with special needs.

Collaborative Co-Teaching Model

Co-teaching is a model where two teachers—one special educator and a classroom teacher—team up to teach a heterogeneous class of students with and without special needs. It involves a high degree of expertise from both teachers, who plan, contemplate, and implement their instruction together. Both educators must be actively teaching and assessing all students in the classroom during instructional time (Wilson, 2008). Administrative support for co-teaching, planning time, and training are all key components to this method for reaching students with special needs (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 403-404). This model also strives for the inclusion of students with learning challenges and may be considered by private Christian schools as an effective means for educating students with special needs.

Advocacy

One creative instructional intervention for students with special needs in private Christian schools may be advocacy. Christian school teachers in schools without services for students with special needs, and without their own special education expertise, may find themselves searching for ways to connect their special needs students to places, such as the local school district, that can help students get the kind of instruction that they need to be successful academically.

These educators would be considered advocates for their students with special needs. Although this approach may help students in Christian schools gain the resources that they need to achieve academic success within the Christian school, it may be criticized because it is a method that looks outside the private Christian school to solve a problem that is growing within it.

Task Analysis

Dr. Mel Levine (2002) has developed his own “Mind at a Time” approach to educating students with special needs. This is where teachers use task analysis and observation to diagnose the learning problems of their students. Levine asserts, “Educators and parents are not just influencing the thought processes of children but actually helping to construct their brains” (Levine, 2002, p. 307). Therefore, Levine believes that the role of general educators as experts in understanding the brain and being able to determine what weaknesses a mind might have is absolutely essential to helping students with special needs improve academically. Once teachers have diagnosed not the students, but their brain activity, the educators are to “demystify” their students by showing them how they can focus on improving weaknesses that are hindering learning. Furthermore, Levine suggests that teachers adopt certain students, so as to become their advocates, advisors, academic coaches, or mentors (Levine, 2002, p. 313).

Using this method, regular classroom teachers become experts and implement special strategies in their own classrooms. Building on Goldman’s (1988) argument, Coben and Thomas (1997) assert that teacher quality is both the problem and solution for educating students with special needs. Levine’s task analysis approach trains teachers to be the solution. Miller & Sabatino (1978) and Oldridge (2001) assert that an approach like Levine’s might be the future of special education. They advocate taskanalytic remediation programs in the general education classroom rather than the traditional or formal diagnostic procedures of special educators and special day classes (Miller & Sabatino, 1978, p. 89; Oldridge, 2001, p.196).

Combination Approach

Of course, Christian schools may choose any combination of the aforementioned instructional approaches to helping students with special needs. For example, a school might implement the consultation and teaming approaches simultaneously or train its teachers in the taskanalysis approach while also using the consultation approach to offer tutoring to its students. The best approach for a Christian school to take may depend on the particular school's population and culture. Christian schools should make these considerations as they seek to find a pathway to provide an accessible and quality education for students with special needs. See figure 1.

Research Design

After reviewing the literature, and finding the five common approaches or a combination thereof for helping students with special needs, a survey was created around these approaches to discover which approaches were being used in Christian schools and how effective the Christian schools deemed them to be when it came to helping their students with special needs. The survey also allowed for answers to open-ended questions to determine if there were any approaches that differed from those found in the literature. Moreover, the survey noted demographic information to determine the number of students with special needs in the Christian schools that responded to the survey and the title and position of the staff member who filled out a survey.

Methods

The 15-item survey was an electronic questionnaire that could be completed online. It was a mixed-method study composed of short-answer, essay, check-all-that-apply, and Likert Scale questions. The Likert Scale questions asked educators to rate programs at their schools offered to students with special needs on a scale of 1 to 4: 4 being extremely effective and 1 being completely ineffective. This scale contributed to

the significance of the study in that it forced educators to choose a number on either the effective or ineffective side. There was no middle numerical rating.

The staff member at each selected Christian school who was "most intimately acquainted with educating students with special needs" was invited to take the survey. If there was no such person in a school, the school administrator was asked to complete the survey. Ultimately, the administrators determined who completed the survey, be it themselves or a person at their school who most closely served the students with special needs. ASCI or WASC accredited private Christian schools in California with an enrollment of 300 or more students were asked to participate in the survey. If at least 10% of students in private schools have special needs as the literature indicated these schools would indeed have a significant population of students with special needs to serve. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that schools with a healthy enrollment of 300 or more would be more than likely to have access to at least some resources for serving students with special needs.

Data Collection

The data from the surveys was collected with the help of an online tool called "SurveyMonkey" (www.surveymonkey.com). SurveyMonkey is software that allows users to design surveys and collect the results of respondents online. Respondents submitted the answers to their survey questions online, and SurveyMonkey collected the completed responses, giving each respondent a number. The software further calculated facts and figures, such as the percentage of respondents that answered each question in a particular way.

Summary of Survey Findings

One hundred fifteen schools were invited by e-mail to complete the survey. Thirty-four Christian School educators accessed the online survey about students with special needs; however, only 24 of these educators completed the entire survey. Therefore, the study had a response completion rate of about 20%.

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Of the respondents, 14 or 58.3% were school administrators such as principals, heads of school, or superintendents; 4 or 16.7% were administrators specializing in instruction, curriculum, academic support or family services; and 6 or 25% were special educators with titles such as resource specialists, psychologist, learning lab director, special education director, or counselor. The survey results provided the following answers to the original research questions:

Are private Christian schools allowing students with special needs access to a Christian education?

Ninety-two percent of the schools that participated in the survey serve students with special needs. However, the schools that said they served students with special needs, on average, identified only 6.1% of their student population as students with special needs, while experts (Barton, 2006; Taylor, 2005) estimate that the percentage of students with special needs attending private schools is at least 10%. Therefore, while a significant number of the Christian schools that participated in this study are serving students with special needs, these schools may not be identifying all the students with special needs in their schools who might benefit from academic accommodations and or interventions.

Therefore, while a significant number of the Christian schools that participated in this study are serving students with special needs, these schools may not be identifying all the students with special needs in their schools who might benefit from academic accommodations and or interventions.

How are private Christian schools providing students with learning challenges with an education that meets their special needs?

According to the results, private Christian schools are using multifaceted approaches to serving students with special needs. According to the survey results, with the exception of co-teaching, over half the schools that participated in the survey used each of the noted approaches (consultation, teaming, advocacy, and task-analysis/teacher training in special education) to educate students with special needs. Therefore, all of the approaches, with the exception of co-teaching, have been shown to be a feasible way to educate students with special needs in Christian schools. It was further noted that some schools were very specific in describing their programs for serving students with special needs. Researched-based curriculums like Orton-Gillingham, and programs like the National Institute for Learning Disabilities and Opportunity Schools were mentioned by three of the different schools that participated in the survey. Therefore, to some degree, Christian schools are using research-based interventions to educate students with special needs.

Are the approaches those private Christian schools take to educate students with special needs effective?

The survey results showed that the current approaches Christian schools are taking toward helping students with special needs are only somewhat effective and that Christian schools will need to expand their exposure to students with special needs as well as their financial and professional resources to meet the needs of these students in a manner of excellence.

Quantitatively, the study found that, on average, the survey respondents ranked the consultation, teaming, and advocacy approaches toward educating students with special needs with a 3 out of 4 or "somewhat effective" rating. The average rating for the teacher training/in-services effect on serving students with special needs was a 2 or "somewhat ineffective" rating. This may imply a need for training with specific research-based approaches and curricula that has been proven to be effective for educating students with special needs. More research might be conducted to discover why the schools that participated in the study found teacher training/in-services to be the

weakest approach toward educating students with special needs.

Qualitatively, respondents answered a short answer question about the disadvantages of their school's approach to educating students with special needs with words like, "not comprehensive," "minimal," and "limited." These responses show dissatisfaction with current approaches for educating students with special needs in private Christian schools. When the respondents were given the opportunity to share what things might help their school become more successful in the area of educating students with special needs, they overwhelmingly shared a desire to hire more professionals and gain more financial resources so that they could afford to employ the professionals and the respective programs that they might implement. Therefore, while the approaches that are being taken to educate students with special needs in Christian schools are somewhat effective, there is much potential for Christian schools to grow toward being more effective in the ways that they help students with special needs.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, researchers found that Christian schools educate a percentage of students with special needs that is below the national average. Also, the approaches that Christian schools take toward educating students with special needs are varied, sometimes implementing researched-based interventions. Finally, according to the survey, on average, Christian schools are somewhat effective in their approach toward educating students with special needs, but have significant room to grow.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations include a replication of this study, or a similar one, to be conducted on a larger scale with a random selection of Christian schools so that the results might be generalizable across a broader population. Because participation in the survey was voluntary, the survey results may have been somewhat skewed, featuring schools that are already engaged in educating students with

special needs and eager to share about their approaches toward helping these students. More stages of data collection, such as interviews, should also take place. Furthermore, the parent issues that surround helping students with special needs should be examined more closely. Special consideration to the stigmatizing of Christian schools that have reached out to students with special needs, versus the schools that serve this population successfully and continue to grow enrollment, should be made. In addition to parent issues, a further study is recommended to determine to what extent schools are using research-based approaches for educating students with special needs.

Final Thoughts for Christian Educators

As we reconsider Mr. Lopez and his family, we as educators and Christian leaders and parents ask ourselves, what do we expect from our Christian schools? As believers, we must first look at who Jesus was and is, and what he did for women, people with disabilities, non-believers, and those that people within his own culture shunned. We have our faith in Christ due to the grace that He extended to everyone, yet there are Christian schools that profess to be of Christ, while asking students and parents to leave based on test scores. So the question remains, what is available for families with children with special needs within Christian schools, and what should we do as Christian educators? Another question to ask is this: If a school is accredited by ACSI, what guidelines does it use to measure a private Christian school's options for students with special needs? According to the current president, the association believes the following:

"We must be the best schools anywhere, and we must keep Christ in Christian education, for in Him alone we find life and meaning! Jesus Christ is our distinctive! We are not merely excellent private schools; we are private Christian schools that exist for a very specific life-saving purpose." (Simmons, 2009)

With this in mind, Christian schools accredited by ACSI would need to deliver light for the children and families that attend their schools. Parents,

Christian schools, and organizations such as the ACSI need to understand that children are quite often diagnosed with disabilities when they start to attend schools. Christian schools, therefore, need to either be honest and tell parents that they will not have the services to provide children with disabilities, or hire teachers with such training. Also, we, as parents and educators, need to find out what ACSI examines when they accredit schools. Is the school being lead by the Spirit of Christ or the spirit of monetary and testing excellence?

If ACSI wishes to “exist for a very specific lifesaving purpose,” then parents of children with disabilities must be given opportunities to have their needs met. And, if we examine the current course offerings of the ACSI regional conferences, we do see ACSI schools moving in this direction. However, the movement is slow. Therefore, this research attempts to make recommendations to assist Christian schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Now, as researchers – a professor at a Christian university and an ACSI-accredited teacher training institution, and an elementary school teacher, we are even more passionate to see Christian schools teach and live out biblically-based principles as we ourselves are now charged with this duty to meet the needs of all children in our schools.

Christian schools, therefore, need to either be honest and tell parents that they will not have the services to provide children with disabilities, or hire teachers with such training.

Recommendations for parents of children with disabilities to consider asking private schools before attending are these:

1. If my child needs special services, what will you provide?
2. Is your school willing and/or able to meet these needs?
3. What training do the teachers have in special education, and what resources

will schools cover to have specialists come and train teachers?

4. How many teachers do you have, and how many are credentialed and from where?
5. Does ACSI (or the accrediting agency of the school) provide schools with any resources for children who do have disabilities?
6. What legal recourse do parents have regarding poorly trained administrators who suggest special education when they are not certified?
7. Ask to see the credentials of teachers. If parents are spending thousands of dollars in tuition with no financial assistance available, then they should be able to know who is teaching their child(ren).
8. If parents do find that their child(ren) have a learning issue, to whom will they be referred? At the school mentioned here, the principal had sole power over the entire school and there were no specialists that could see our child with learning needs.
9. Are students at the private school performing at the same academic level and tested with the same standardized tests as the local public school students?

If schools are unable to provide services, recommendations based on biblical principles should be made for the parents.

Christian schools must increase their interaction with students with special needs in order to provide an equitable education for all. When Jesus wanted to challenge, grow, and better his disciples, he exposed them to people they would not usually serve—Samaritans, women, children, and tax collectors. He provided opportunities for His disciples to interact with people who were different so that they might develop His heart for all mankind. If Christian schools wish to be “fruitful bearers of the image of Christ,” they must educate students with His heart, exploring how to embrace those who learn differently, and how to educate them well. If done well, then people like the Lopez family may truly feel the presence of Christ and the expression of their faith and biblically-based values within their children’s school.

Appendix

Ramirez Stymeist Appendix 1

Students with Special Needs in Christian Schools Survey

Thank you for filling out this survey! Please be as detailed as you can in your responses to these questions.

Name:

Name of School where Employed:

School Enrollment:

Position held at your school:

Note: for the purposes of this survey, the definition of a student with special needs is a student who can benefit academically from special accommodations implemented into his or her educational experience. This definition is broad and applies to students with dyslexia, autism, ADHD, audio-processing disorders, etc.

Survey Questions

1. About how many students at your school have special needs? _____

2. How do you discover students with special needs at your school? (Please choose all that apply.)

A. School entry assessment

B. Teacher evaluation

C. Parent Interview

D. Cum File Review

E. Other (please specify)

3. What kind of services do you offer students with special needs? (Please choose all that apply.)

A. A pull-out time of one-on-one or small groups tutoring with a specially trained educator

B. Team meetings between special educators and classroom teachers to discuss how to best educate a student with special needs

C. Co-teaching (A special educator and classroom teacher share a classroom and teaching duties)

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- D. A separate special education program or special school for students with special needs
- E. Advocacy (A staff member becomes an advocate for students with special needs by investigating what a local school district can offer students in the way of special education)
- F. Teacher training or inservices about different ways in which students with special needs learn and some effective ways to teach them
- G. None of the above
- H. Other: _____

4. On a scale of 1-4 (with a 4 being extremely effective and a 1 being completely ineffective) please rate the effectiveness of the services your school offers students with special needs.

- A. Pull -out time of one-on-one tutoring with a specially trained educator
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- B. Team meetings between special educators and classroom teachers
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- C. Co-teaching
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- D. Separate special education program/special school for students with special needs
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- E. Advocacy
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- F. Teacher training/Inservices
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.
- G. Other _____
1 2 3 4 N/A This program does not exist at my school.

5. Please list the advantages of your school's approach to servicing students with special needs.

6. Please list the disadvantages of your school's approach to servicing students with special needs.

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7. How are services for students with special needs financed at your school? (Please choose all that apply.)

- A. By the parent(s) of the child with special needs
- B. By the general school budget
- C. Donors
- D. State Funding
- E. Federal Funding
- F. Scholarship Funds
- G. Other (Please explain below.)

8. Please write the number of people at your school that hold the following positions

- ___ Resource Specialist
- ___ Reading Specialist
- ___ Speech and Language Specialist
- ___ School Psychologist
- ___ Special Educator (with a credential in special education)

9. If money were no object, what would be your school's next step toward helping students with special needs academically succeed?

10. Additional Comments:

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