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Exploring the Congruency between Mission and Practice
in a Pre-K–12, Midwestern, Christian School

by

Allison Bearden

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

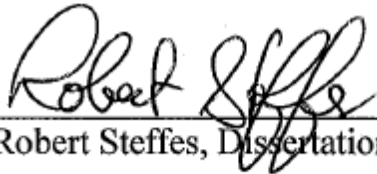
School of Education

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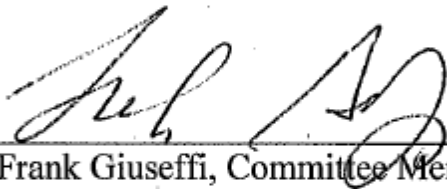
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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Doctor of Education
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education



Dr. Robert Steffes, Dissertation Chair

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Allison Leigh Bearden

Signature: Allison Leigh Bearden Date: April 21, 2017

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I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. John Long, my honorary committee member. Thank you for always answering my *many* questions and believing in me. I would also like to thank the MDA school board, my co-workers, the senior class students, and my fellow alumni. May these findings help us to continue in our pursuit of educating students in a way that enables them to persist in their faith long after they leave the seats of our classrooms.

Last, but not least, my heartfelt thanks goes to my family and friends. Thank you for allowing me to disappear from life to pursue this goal. Your love, support, and encouragement is the reason I have been able to do this. It is only because I have had the most supportive group of people surrounding me that I could prove to myself that being called ‘Doctor’ was a possibility. I love each and every one of you.

Abstract

Christian school education is unique in nature. Integrating faith into academics led many families to choose an environment for their students that aligned with the faith, morals, and doctrinal beliefs they held as essential pieces in raising their children. The partnership with the school in instilling a strong foundation of faith for students set Christian schools apart from public and non-religious private schools.

Because families purposely choose Christian schools based upon like-minded values and beliefs, it was essential that the school seeks to fulfill its mission in practice and vision. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the congruency of mission and practice in one Midwestern, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade Christian school, as evidenced by program evaluation. The researcher utilized surveys and interviews to collect data from three stakeholder groups (then-current staff members, then-current senior class students, and alumni) to investigate how, if at all, Mission Driven Academy (pseudonym) fulfilled its mission. Data was analyzed and organized by emerging themes into the school's five foundational components, referred to as the Pillars of Excellence. The qualitative data revealed that Mission Driven Academy was successfully fulfilling its mission to equip students with a Christ-centered education, empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God.

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List of Abbreviations

ACSI	Association of Christian Schools International
ACT	American College
AP	Advanced Placement
MDA	Mission Driven Academy
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NEA	National Education Association
PCS	Private Christian School
STAR	Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio

Chapter One

Having grown up in Christian school kindergarten through 12th grade, Christian education was always deemed a priority and sacrifice worth making in our family. My experience in Christian school not only affirmed the Biblical truths and teachings displayed and communicated by my parents at home, but also set me on a firm, spiritual foundation. I enjoyed my years of elementary, middle, and high school, and most of my best friends were the friends I made in those pivotal years. Not only did my friendships last with my peers, but also I built relationships with my teachers and coaches that lasted into adulthood. While my experiences and lasting relationships could also be evident in public schools, the fact that I was surrounded by like-minded individuals truly helped to build and complete the solid, spiritual foundation I needed as I entered into college.

I began my teaching career at my alma mater and later moved into an administrative role as I completed two more degrees and discovered a passion for administration. After switching roles from student to teacher and administrator, I learned the important task of being driven by our mission in our practices, curriculum, and decision-making. In our school, we often used the phrase ‘mission-fit’ to discuss such things. If our practices, curriculum, hiring, or decision-making were not mission-fit, then it did not benefit us as a school to move forward.

At the time of the study, our school had over 900 alumni. As we became increasingly intentional about making mission-fit decisions, I desired to know if the perspective of our students, faculty and staff, and alumni reflected mission-driven decisions in the day-to-day operations of the school. I also wanted to know if we were,

as our mission stated, impacting our students in such a way that it was reflective of their post-high school careers, community involvement, spiritual lives, and decisions.

With significant culture shifts, it was even more important that we continually evaluated and made necessary adjustments to serve our stakeholders even better.

Exploring the congruency between our mission and practice would effectively help in that process. The results of this research study helped improve and/or revise then-current practices and curriculum in order to fulfill our mission as we had truly set about to do.

Background of Mission Driven Academy

Mission Driven Academy (MDA, pseudonym) opened its doors in 1980 with an enrollment of 30 students. Families who saw a need for a non-denominational Christian school in the county started the school. These families desired the option to send their children to a school where they could be educated both academically and spiritually (Researched Institution, 2016d).

Mission Driven Academy's first campus was located in the basement of a church. Teachers and a group of parents tore down the desks and partition walls every Friday after school, in order for the building to be ready for church on Sunday mornings. That same group of teachers and parents came back every Sunday evening after church and set the classrooms back up for the Monday morning start of school (B. A. Budde, personal communication, September 28, 2016). The weekly tearing down and setting up continued until 1990 when the school purchased a church building, thus becoming the first building owned by MDA.

The next 18 years after Mission Driven Academy opened its doors, it grew from one campus to two and from having only grades kindergarten to eight, to having grades

kindergarten to eleven. MDA prepared to have the first graduating class in 1999. However, in the summer of 1997, two weeks before the start of school, a Christian school from a neighboring county closed its doors. With an influx of families seeking to continue their children's Christian education, many families quickly enrolled their children in MDA. Among those new students included four seniors, who thus became Mission Driven Academy's first graduating class in 1998 (C. L. Bearden, personal communication, August 8, 2016).

In 2000, the school saw yet another growth with the donation of land and the completion of the first building project. The new building housed seventh through 12th grades. Four years later, the addition of a state-of-the-art, collegiate-sized gym and additional classrooms was completed, making the class of 2005 the first to graduate on a Mission Driven Academy campus (Researched Institution, 2016d, p.1). The school envisioned to one-day purchase the surrounding property and build an elementary school building and a middle school building, allowing all buildings to exist on one campus.

Mission Driven Academy's enrollment at the elementary school continually grew throughout the years. Enrollment times would have families waiting in line down the street to get their children enrolled for the following school year. In 2000, MDA's elementary enrollment was at its maximum. The school board decided to open a second elementary campus that included the first preschool classes that the district offered. As more families continued to look to a Christian education beginning at the early childhood age, the preschool grew from two classes to four, allowing each elementary campus to offer an early childhood program.

The 2008 recession hit the United States and severely affected enrollment for the first time in Mission Driven Academy's 28 years. Many families unenrolled their children because of pay cuts, the loss of jobs, and housing changes. By 2010, Mission Driven Academy's school board and administration felt it was fiscally responsible to combine both elementary campuses back to one in the original building. Although the effects of the recession resulted in the closing of other surrounding private schools in the years following, MDA's enrollment upon going back to one campus was steady, as families sought to keep their children in Christian education (J. K. Drury, personal communication, October 17, 2016).

In 2013, Mission Driven Academy purchased another local Christian school, referred to as Private Christian School (PCS) for the purposes of this study, which was in danger of closing its doors. The acquisition purchase, effectively named the 'Coming Together,' had two large benefits for both school communities. First, it allowed the preschool through eighth grade families and staff from PCS a place to go that would provide jobs and familiar faces. Secondly, it significantly boosted the enrollment of Mission Driven Academy's preschool and elementary campus.

With the acquisition, purchase came many changes that altered the course of Mission Driven Academy. With the boost in enrollment, the preschool moved to a separate campus already under a lease contract from PCS' existing preschool program. Another change was the addition of two administrators who were PCS administrators. PCS' school board members also joined the board of Mission Driven Academy, which impacted the board, administration, and staff dynamic.

The first year of the ‘Coming Together’ was not without its bumps and struggles. Two different school cultures combining into one brought about academic, spiritual, and foundational discussions and task forces. After those discussions and task forces, many families that came from PCS concluded that Mission Driven Academy would not remain as their school community and unenrolled within the first year. While many initially struggled with the combining of two very different school climates and philosophies, the newly joined families and staff eventually settled in and unified. There was a renewed focus on purpose, academic rigor, and community.

At the time of research, Mission Driven Academy remained the only pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, non-denominational school in the county. The first enrollment year of 30 grew to over 780, more than 900 alumni, and over 100 staff and faculty. The school maintained independence from any church affiliation, and had over 100 churches represented throughout the district (J. K. Drury, personal communication, October 4, 2016). Students also represented a variety of denominations as displayed in Figure 1.

Mission Driven Academy was a discipleship school. For the purposes of this study, a discipleship school was defined as partnering with Christian families in the academic and spiritual education of their child(ren). Admission requirements for Mission Driven Academy required at least one parent or guardian to be a professing Christian and able to provide a pastoral reference letter to the church. Middle and high school students could be professing believers and gain admittance, even without having a parent or guardian who had a profession of faith.

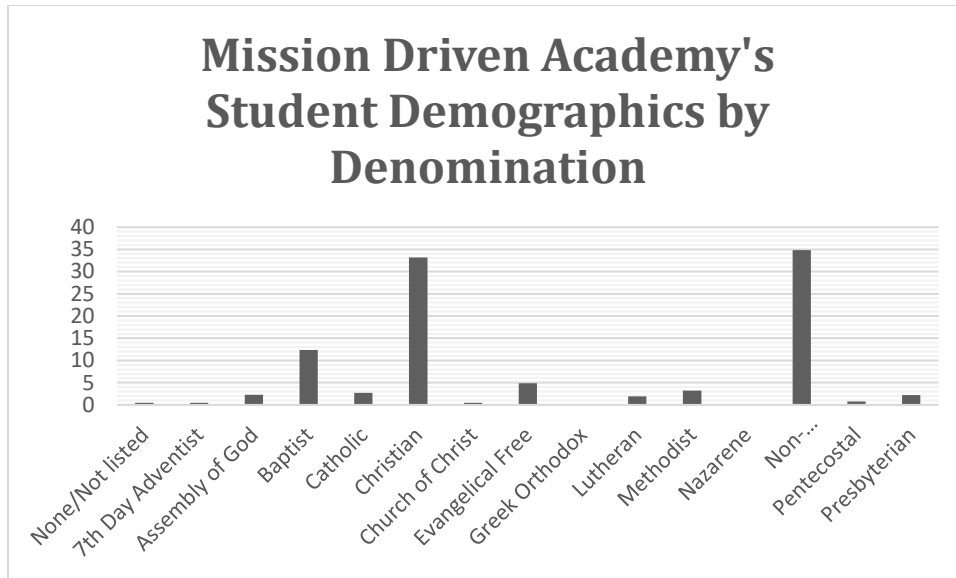


Figure 1. Mission Driven Academy's student demographics by denomination.

The academic rigor and performance on standardized tests at MDA was higher than the average found in Evangelistic/Protestant schools, as well as public schools. Elementary students on average scored in the 88th percentile or higher on standardized tests (Researched Institution, 2016a, p.1). Fifty-five percent of seventh grade students and 31% of eighth grade students scored within the 95th percentile or higher on standardized tests (Researched Institution, 2016c, p.1). The average American College Test (ACT) score was a 25, five points above the national average (“What are Good ACT Scores,” 2016). There were also several recipients of Bright Flight scholarships, along with National Merit finalists and semi-finalists (Researched Institution, 2016b, p.1).

Community service became an integral part of the culture and graduation requirements early in Mission Driven Academy’s history. When seniors graduated from MDA, they left with almost 16,000 hours of community service over the course of their high school career. Students had multiple advanced placement (AP), honors, and college

credit courses offered throughout middle and high school. They also had over 30 sports, clubs, and activity options through the state athletics and activities association.

Purpose of the Dissertation

Mission Driven Academy's mission was "to assist Christian families in equipping students with a Christ-centered education, empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God" (Researched Institution, 2016e, p.1). Mission Driven Academy consistently evaluated stakeholder opinions through a variety of formal and informal ways, such as end-of-the-year surveys. However, when reviewing concerns and ideas during open sessions at monthly board meetings and in alumni surveys, there was no evaluation specific to the congruency between the school's mission and practice. This study explored the congruency of mission and practice as evidenced by program evaluation. The research and data collected through the study showed if Mission Driven Academy fulfilled its mission in the day-to-day operations, as well as post-graduation, as stated in the mission statement.

Mission Driven Academy had five foundational components that provided an education of academic excellence, spiritual depth, and moral integrity. These foundational components were referred to as The Five Pillars of Excellence. The Pillars were Artistic Expression, Relational Development, Spiritual Growth, Academic Excellence, and Distinguished Athletics (Researched Institution, 2016f, p.1). Data collection utilized these five foundational components throughout the research analysis.

Rationale

There was little literature on the congruency between mission and practice in Christian schools. Because stakeholders had a choice in Christian schools, it was more

important for Christian schools to be distinguished by their mission and vision. Families chose private education based upon like-mindedness and expectations that differed from what they found in public education. Vander Ark (2000) reiterated the crucial part that mission played in Christian education when he said:

Unless we in Christian education- especially teachers- become much more intentional about carrying out our school's mission, we will drift, become as bland as a boiled paper wad, and lose our parents and students either to strongly academic nonreligious schools or to schools that focus on piety. (Vander Ark, 2000, p. 6)

Another critical aspect of Christian education specific to the mission of Mission Driven Academy was the decrease in persistence of faith in America. In 2016, 73% of Americans claimed to be Christians; however, 41% of those were non-practicing Christians (Barna Group, 2016, para. 1-2). Studies showed that most young adults in their 20s walked away from active involvement in their Christian faith, like they were during their teen years, and many never returned (Barna Group, 2006). Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) referred to the lack of persistence in faith as a 'dropout' problem in which three realities existed. First, while teen church engagement was strong, those same teens did not grow up to be faithful, young adults that persisted in the faith. Secondly, there were different levels or kinds of dropouts that were unique to each individual and their personal story, rather than grouped together as the same. Finally, Kinnaman stated that the dropout problem existed, because young people were not prepared by the church to remain faithful during the change in cultures (as cited in Barna Group, 2006).

Kinnaman reported that dropouts could be blamed on where young adults were in their stage of life during those crucial years in their 20s, or that it could have been directly related to that specific generation (as cited in Barna Group, 2006). However, a separate, but equal responsibility could have been the church itself. Kinnaman hypothesized that ministry to that age group was not adequate preparation for persistence in the faith (as cited in Barna Group, 2006). Kinnaman went on to report that the lack of preparedness to persist in the faith began earlier than in the 20s. Instead, it began in younger years, where ministry failed to prepare and build a solid foundation of faith in young people that would sustain them post-high school (as cited in Barna Group, 2006).

With the statistical evidence of young people needing a strong foundation of faith built before they left high school, to approach the world post-high school with a Biblical worldview, Christian education needed to play an important role in their Biblical worldview formation. While all Americans were reported to have a worldview in 2003, only 4% of adults had a Biblical worldview (Barna Group, 2003). Tackett (n.d.) defined a worldview as “the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world.” (para.3). However, a Biblical worldview was defined as:

Believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He still rules it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. (Barna Group, 2003, para. 4)

Schultz (2006) understood the important role Christian education played in the formation of a student's Biblical worldview. He said, "The Christian school is the only system, outside the home, where the teachers will instill in your child a Biblical worldview" (Schultz, 2006, p. 23). Mission Driven Academy's mission to parent with Christian families to build students' Biblical worldviews implied the understanding of their significant role in Biblical worldview formation.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was how, if at all, does Mission Driven Academy fulfill its mission? There were three specific research questions:

RQ1: How do stakeholders perceive that Mission Driven Academy equips students with a Christ-centered education?

RQ2: How, if at all, do graduates of Mission Driven Academy live the mission post-high school, as evidenced by career choice, volunteerism (short-term mission trips & community outreach), persistence in the faith, and legacy?

RQ3: What is the perception of current students concerning the application of the pillars of excellence at Mission Driven Academy?

Limitations

This research study was conducted with four known limitations:

- 1) There was a limited amount of research on the congruency of mission and practice.
- 2) The study's research and data were only taken from one, Midwestern, suburban, Christian school.

- 3) The study's primary researcher was an alumni and employed by the study school at the time of research.
- 4) Research was only collected over one semester, rather than over multiple years and with multiple senior class perspectives.

Definition of Terms

Academic excellence - The pursuit of excellence in both curricular and extra-curricular activities, with a commitment to training students to have superior intellects subject to righteous character (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5.2).

Alpha and Omega - For the purposes of this study, Alpha and Omega were defined as students who attended Mission Driven Academy from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Artistic Expression - Seeking excellence through artistic expression allowed students to develop and grow their artistic gifts through visual arts, band, orchestra, choir, and theatre (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5.4).

Biblical worldview - Believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He still rules it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. (Barna Group, 2003, para. 4).

Christ-centered - For the purposes of this study, Christ-centered was defined as things that were centered around Biblical truths.

Distinguished athletics - Seeking excellence through Christ-centered, Biblically directed athletic teams that bear the mark of integrity, pursue competitive excellence, and inspire leadership and spiritual growth (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5.5).

Excellence - For the purposes of this study, excellence was defined as the pursuit of doing all things to the glory of God.

Five Pillars of Excellence - Mission Driven Academy's five foundational components that provided an education that was of academic excellence, spiritual depth, and moral integrity. The Five Pillars of Excellence were Artistic Expression, Relational Development, Spiritual Growth, Academic Excellence, and Distinguished Athletics (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5).

Legacy - For the purpose of this study, legacy was defined as Mission Driven Academy Alumni who sent their child(ren) to Mission Driven Academy.

Missionally - For the purposes of this study, missionally was defined as regarding the mission of Mission Driven Academy. This word was commonly used throughout the MDA institution.

Relational development - Seeking excellence through developing relationships, not only within Mission Driven Academy, but throughout the local community and throughout the world by means of volunteerism (short-term mission trips & community outreach) (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5.3).

Spiritual growth - Seeking excellence in providing curricular and non-curricular opportunities and resources to encourage the maturity, strengthening, and growth in each

student's spiritual life in accordance to God's Word (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5.2).

Stakeholders - For the purpose of this study, stakeholders were defined as then-current students, staff, and alumni.

World view - The framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world (Tackett, n.d., para.3).

Conclusion

Mission Driven Academy's mission statement to equip students with a Christ-centered education and empower them to impact the world for the glory of God was evidenced by the five pillars of excellence: Artistic Expression, Relational Development, Spiritual Growth, Academic Excellence, and Distinguished Athletics. The purpose of this study was to explore whether Mission Driven Academy showed evidence of fulfilling their mission in both the day-to-day operations, as well as in post-graduation life in their alumni. The study utilized a program evaluation by collecting data via student surveys, staff and faculty online surveys, and interviews. The study also utilized secondary data collected from Mission Driven Academy's over 900 alumni, since the first graduating class in 1998. The evidence collected showed the congruency between mission and practice.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review examined the culmination of factors included when exploring the congruency of mission and practice. There was little previous research on the congruency of mission and practice at the time of this research. However, it was vital to understand the foundation and purpose of both mission and practice in relation to academics. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, it was essential to understand the role that both mission and practice specifically played within private, Christian schools.

Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review begins with an in depth look at program evaluation by understanding school board governance. Similarities and differences in public and private schools were identified. Program evaluation also included research of administration and leadership styles and models.

Following program evaluation is a thorough look at mission and vision statements. This subtopic discussed how these statements were developed, as well as their importance and role in the success of an organization. A comprehensive look at the differences of school culture and school climate, as well as how school culture could be assessed were found within mission and vision. Next, organizational trust is defined to show the role it played in the fulfillment of an organization's mission.

Finally, a comprehensive look at the comparison between private and public schools is explored and discussed. This comparison begins with a brief history of the inception of formal education in the United States. The brief history is followed by three

significant subtopics when comparing private and public schools; academic rigor, social impact, and smaller class sizes.

Program Evaluation

School board governance. There were approximately 15,000 local boards of education and nearly 95,000 school board members in the United States in 2009 (Dixon, 2009, para. 1). Of those 15,000 boards of education, board governance models varied from board-to-board. The type of governance model used by a school board was often chosen based on the type organization, type of school (private or public), religious affiliation, and the individuals that made up the board.

Public school board governance. Models of school governance were found to vary from state-to-state and even county-to-county. The Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group (2007) reported three different types of governance models in public schools.

The first model was elected boards. Ninety-six percent of school boards in the country utilized this model (Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group, 2007, p. 7). However, one weakness and concern was reported that in some areas where there was low, eligible-voter participation, the ability and authority of the school board could be compromised. Elected board members may have also tended to struggle with focusing on policy and strategic planning and pushing personal agendas instead (Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group, 2007).

The appointed board model was reported to exist in 19 states in 2007 (Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group, 2007). This model consisted of board members appointed by local officials, such as the mayor, governor, or in some cases, the president

of the board of alderman. This model was shown to decrease the likelihood that board members could be influenced by special interest groups; however, it also signified a minimizing of the voice of the community (Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group, 2007).

The third model was a hybrid of the elected and appointed boards. In this model, the community voice was still valued and applied, while mayors and governors were also able to be directly involved. In a hybrid model, the board established policy, while the superintendent tended to the daily operations of the district (Education Funders of St. Louis Affinity Group, 2007).

Private school board governance. Many school boards in private schools operated well under governance models designed for non-profits. Ingram (2009) identified ten basic and fundamental responsibilities for non-profit boards that, in essence, became a job description. They were: (1) Determine the mission and purposes, (2) select the Chief Executive, (3) support and evaluate the Chief Executive, (4) ensure effective planning, (5) monitor and strengthen programs and services, (6) ensure adequate financial resources, (7) protect assets and provide financial oversight, (8) build a competent board, (9) ensure legal and ethical integrity, and (10) enhance the organization's public standing (p. 9).

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) reported three types of governance found in independent schools. The first model was the 'parents' cooperative model.' This model allowed parents of the school to be the board members and/or elect the board members (Bassett & Moredock, 2013). Bassett and Moredock (2013) stated that schools utilizing a parent-driven model tended to be defective. Boards under this

model typically were bent towards parental opinions, rather than what was best for the school in its entirety, and focused on the short-term and operational, rather than the long-term and strategic.

The Carver Model, also referred to as Policy Governance, was another popular governance found in independent/private schools. The Carver Model, created by Dr. John Carver, was structured in a way that allowed the board to focus on the organization's purpose, rather than focusing on the organization's issues (as cited in The Policy Governance Model, 2016). Bassett and Moredock (2013) reported that Policy Governance allowed the head of the school to look more to the daily operations. While the Carver Model was a viable model, it could have had weaknesses when considering financial oversight and maintaining connectivity between the model and strategic oversight (Bassett & Moredock, 2013).

The third governance model reported by NAIS was the corporate model (Bassett & Moredock, 2013). In this model, Bassett and Moredock (2013) stated that the board elected itself and its successors. The corporate model also viewed itself as only having one employee, whom they hired and fired, the superintendent. They also focused on the strategic future, rather than the operational items (Bassett & Moredock, 2013).

Effective board governance. Regardless of the type of governance model or type of school, a board's effectiveness was directly tied to student achievement (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Dervarics and O'Brien's (2011) research found eight effective qualities shared by high achieving districts.

The foundational characteristics included:

- 1) Developed and focused on the mission and vision of the school.

- 2) Shared beliefs and values of the ability of students to learn at any level.
- 3) Remained focused on policies that would ensure student achievement, not operational issues.
- 4) Collaborated with stakeholders and the community using effective communication.
- 5) Consistently utilized all data, whether positive or negative.
- 6) Aligned and sustained resources.
- 7) Collaborated with the superintendent in a unified and trusting manner.
- 8) Engaged in their own continuing education in order to enhance their knowledge. (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011)

Administration. School leadership was the second most influential impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leadership was exhibited in many different styles. However, Goldman (1998) stated, "Leadership style is determined by deep-seated values and beliefs about how people learn" (p. 21).

Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube (2015) reported six common leadership styles. One commonly used leadership style was transactional. A transactional leadership style involved employees being hired for jobs, with the understanding they must obey their leader, and in return they received pay for a job, based on the fact that the hired expectations were met. Another leadership style was a similar form of transactional leadership called autocratic. Autocratic leadership involved leaders who made quick decisions that were implemented immediately, and provided no opportunity for employee suggestion. Bureaucratic leadership was another leader-driven style. In this style, there were many rules that were implemented and had to be followed exactly. Charismatic

leadership, also known as transformational leadership, was a style where leaders focused their efforts on motivating and inspiring their employees. This type of leadership allowed for great productivity; however, the pressure of motivating employees relied solely on the leader. Democratic or participative leadership allowed employees to be a creative part of decision-making as stakeholders, but the leader made the final decision. Laissez-Faire leadership turned over complete control to employees, providing resources as needed, but allowing autonomous decision-making.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) reported, after reviewing and analyzing data from 2,894 schools, 14,000 teachers, and over 1.1 million students, that there was a direct and positive correlation between effective school leadership and student achievement (p. 48). Goldman (1998) stated that whether or not leaders' values were directly stated, they would be found through institutional practices. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) also reported that leaders' influences on student learning came mostly through indirect ways, simply because of their influence on other people and parts of the organization.

While effective leadership could be defined many ways, Waters et al. (2004) found 21 areas of school leaders' responsibilities that directly affected student achievement. The school leader: (1) fosters school culture: (2) establishes order: (3) effectively handles discipline: (4) provides teachers with necessary resources: (5) curriculum, instruction, and assessment: (6) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: (7) focus on goals: (8) visibility with teachers and goals: (9) recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments: (10) communication with teachers and students: (11) outreach to stakeholders: (12) allows input from teachers on policies and decisions:

(13) affirmation of school accomplishments and acknowledges failures: (14) builds personal relationships with faculty and staff: (15) accepts role as a change agent; (16) is an optimizer: (17) communicates ideals and beliefs: (18) has flexible leadership behavior: (19) monitors and evaluates effective school practices: (20) has situational awareness: and (21) stimulates faculty and staff intellectually.

While these 21 responsibilities were vital to effective school leadership, it may have been difficult for one leader to effectively embody each of them. One form of leadership found to be effective and successful was distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). Distributed leadership allowed leaders to incorporate collaboration on policies and decision-making from others within the school. This type of approach was more effective in spreading the 21 responsibilities throughout a leadership team, rather than a single, individual.

Leithwood et al. (2004) noted that this leadership style may be referred to more frequently as distributed leadership in the education field, but overlapped with the democratic or participative leadership style. Amanchukwu et al. (2015) discussed where employees share in the role of decision-making. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) referred to this approach of shared leadership as purposeful community. Purposeful community was defined as “one with the collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 99).

Burgess and Bates (2009) stated that a shared leadership model meant that school leaders not only involved others, but that they also gave tasks that highlighted the individual’s strengths. Leithwood et al. (2004) concurred with Burgess and Bates (2009)

when they reported that one of three sets of practices that were the core of shared leadership was developing people. Part of this concept of developing people was that the leader also provided the individual support that the employee needed to be successful in the responsibility they were given. For a leader to know the strengths and the needs of their leadership team, they needed to have a relationship with the individual that went beyond only professional. Burgess and Bates (2009) stated that school leaders must understand how a strong relationship with their faculty was developed, both formally and informally. When this was accomplished, they would then be able to motivate faculty and staff in the same direction, in order to fulfill the purpose and mission.

Mission and Vision

The culture and mission of a school were very closely related. As stated by Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), “Culture represents the unwritten mission of the school” (p. 30). However, in the same way that culture and mission were closely related, so were mission and vision. A mission statement in simplest terms was a purpose statement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Vander Ark, 2000). A vision statement was where the organization would like to be in the future (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009; Kenny, 2014; “Vision and Mission,” n.d.; Papulova, 2014).

Both mission and vision were equally important to the success of an organization, especially a school. However, Gabriel and Farmer (2009) stated in their book, *How to Thrive Without Breaking the Bank*, that vision statements should be created first because “you need to know where you want to be before you can determine how you plan to get there” (p. 1). Vision statements needed to be short, easily remembered and recognized

(Gabriel & Farmer, 2009), and seen by staff members as inspirational (Hawthorne, n.d.; Gabriel & Farmer, 2009; Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, & Hackman, 2010).

Vision of an organization was the bigger picture; it was the plan that moved past the day-to-day activities, goals, and responsibilities (Kenny, 2014). Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) discussed four core purposes for vision. First, vision should motivate and inspire. Vision statements needed to set the bar for optimum performance and goals within the organization. Second, vision needed to push organizational members to action. Vision statements set the expectations for expected behaviors from the organizations members. Third, vision statements needed to be short and to the point. Shockley-Zalabek et al. (2010) stated that if organizational members could not remember the vision statement, then it did not even exist within their practice. If a vision statement was too long for members to remember, then it could not be motivational or inspirational. The shorter the vision statement, the more committed the organizational members. Finally, vision needed to operate on multiple levels. Vision statements needed to be applicable to all levels and job functions within the organization (Shockley-Zalabek et al., 2010).

When speaking specifically in reference to vision statements for schools, the same schools of thought were applied. The authors at Center for School Change went as far as to say, “A muddy vision or mission can help lead to continuing conflicts and a school that has difficulty identifying priorities” (“Vision and Mission,” n.d., para. 2). In a school, the vision should be convincing enough for stakeholders to want to join on the quest to reach that future-envisioned state (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Vander Ark (2000) spoke specifically in terms of a Christian school’s vision. He believed that a Christian school’s

vision statement should include the school's "beliefs about God, creation, sin, covenant, redemption, and the kingdom of God" (p. 18). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) agreed that both mission and vision existed in order to implement a set of beliefs. They also stated that this was where culture intertwined with mission and vision, because they must align with the culture that existed within the school. They indicated that if ever a conflict existed between mission and culture, culture would always win (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

After a vision statement was created, a mission statement could be formed. A mission statement was more specific than a vision statement (Vander Ark, 2000). A mission's purpose was to provide focus for the organizational members (Kenny, 2014). The Center for School Change stated that there were three questions for organizations to consider when developing a mission statement: "First, whom do you seek to serve? Second, What do you seek to accomplish? And Third, How will you proceed (what methods will you use)" ("Vision and Mission," n.d., para. 6).

Mission statements were the practical, day-to-day ways or action plans that helped organizations to reach their vision. While the vision statements were shorter and more to the point, mission statements needed to be longer and more explanatory in nature (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Gabriel and Farmer (2009) went on to state that when creating mission and vision statements, the correlating relationship between the two must be evident.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) showed the correlation of culture, mission, and vision. They said, "Cultures have missions, but they do not have visions- they can only

perceive themselves as they currently are, not as they will be” (p. 30). These everyday actions were what made up the mission of the school.

While fundamentally, the development of a Christian school’s mission and vision statements was the same as any other school or organization, there were qualities that set them apart. Vander Ark (2000) stated that a mission statement in a school organization should focus attention on one main thing; what was the expectation for students when they finish the course? He then went on to explain that mission statements for a good Christian school would know and state, “what it stands for and teaches toward” (p. 19). In his book *Kingdom Education*, Schultz (2006) felt that part of a Christian school’s mission should be to teach and encourage the importance of the church and the involvement in their church as a core principle.

Another crucial part of implementing an organization’s mission and vision statement was the leadership of that organization. Gabriel and Farmer (2009) stated that one of the most important responsibilities of an organization’s leader was not only establishing the vision, but also including the organization’s members to be a part of that vision and its development, as well. When there was leadership in fulfilling an organization’s mission and vision, they were directly influencing the culture of their organization. Gruenert and Whittaker (2015) stated that, “Only leaders can have visions that might potentially change the culture. Cultures do not lead; leaders lead. If the culture is leading, then the leader is only managing” (p. 31).

School culture. It was said that the best schools in America had one thing in common; school cultures that created and encouraged their students’ ability to achieve not just academically, but encouraged excellent and moral character (“Developing and

Assessing School Culture,” 2010). School leaders needed to create a culture that met academic needs, as well as character needs. Culture needed to be part of a planned strategic effort in order for it to be the most effective and influential (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2012).

According to Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), there was a common misconception that school culture and school climate were synonymous. School culture could be defined simply as a school’s personality, while climate was its attitude (Gruenert, 2008; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). School climate was described as “what you do, while culture is why you do it” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 16). Culture was not something that changed in a day’s time. Culture was the result of time and predominately an organization’s mission, vision, values, and beliefs (Fisher et al., 2012; Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015).

When discussing how to shape a culture, Gruenert (2008) suggested that it was accomplished through the climate:

Climate is the main leverage point for any culture, which means that if school leaders want to shape a new culture, they should start with an assessment of the climate. If the culture is ineffective, there are probably climate issues that were missed before they became rooted in the culture. (p. 58)

With renewed focus on school improvement in the United States, focus shifted towards improving the culture of schools. While the intentions were good, misconceptions of what exactly it took in order to improve the culture of a school had become increasingly obvious. In the public school sector, funding poured into districts in order to help change specific aspects of schools, such as safety and assessment.

However, those funds were not specifically designated to improve the culture of these schools, which could have also helped to improve the aforementioned aspects in an all-encompassing way (“Developing and Assessing School Culture,” 2010, p. 2). These types of interventions had proven to fail to unite faculty, students, and families in a way that would result in turning around the culture of a school (p. 2).

Most school improvement plans focused on academic focus and goals. While these were crucial pieces to a school improvement plan, Fisher et al. (2012) suggested that the school improvement plan was only one-half of the necessary elements needed for successful school improvement (2012). Fisher et al. (2012) suggested, “Both developing school culture and creating academic press are necessary, but neither is in and of itself sufficient” (p.1). If schools only focused on safe and caring social climates without addressing intellectual climates, then they missed a critical opportunity for student achievement (“Developing and Assessing School Culture,” 2010, p. 5).

A vital piece of school culture was intentionally assessing it and identifying the type of culture that existed. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) identified six types of cultures. Table 1 best exemplifies and defines these six types.

There were several tools and ways to assess a school’s culture. O’Brennan and Bradshaw (2013) covered six factors in which to consider while assessing a school’s climate: choosing a reliable and valid assessment, assess annually, survey across perspectives, communicate findings, take action, and repeat. Gruenert and Whitaker stated, “Knowing the type of school culture you *have* will help you to plan for the one you *want*” (2015, p. 66).

Table 1

Six Types of School Cultures

Type of School Culture	Definition	Action	Qualities
Collaborative	This culture embraces learning for all adults and students	Teachers: Share educational values Pursue professional development opportunities together Are committed to improving their work Observe their peers	Help Support Trust Openness Collective reflection Collective efficacy
Comfortable-Collaborative	This culture is one that many schools believe they have. It is more important to get along than to teach effectively.	Teachers: Hesitate to disagree for fear of hurting someone's feelings Don't ask essential questions about how to improve Limit their conversations to sharing advice and tricks of the trade Have surface conversations as to not expose their own weakness in the classroom	Passive People pleasing Surface-level Complacent
Contrived-Collegial	Leadership determines how staff are to behave. It is meant to support new approaches and techniques in teaching.	Teachers: May have reduced motivation to cooperate with au changes Feel discouraged from collegiality Feel forced to build relationships with others	Superficial Forced Teacher behaviors
Balkanized	Collaboration occurs only within cliques of like-minded staff, and competition is	Teachers: Only collaborate with like-minded staff Cling to subcultures that grow in strength Support each other when leadership creates stress Create divisions within their cliques when feeling threatened	Negative subcultures Internal conflicts against leadership Party-line decision making

continued

Table 1. Continued.

Type of School Culture	Definition	Action	Qualities
Fragmented	Individuals do their own thing with little drama or care of what others are doing.	Teachers: Are collegial, but enjoy having their own territory Do not collaborate Do not have professional interaction Work independently Do not feel a stake in the success of all the school's students	Unhealthy Competitiveness Individualism Hands-off approach to leadership Unavailable leadership
Toxic	This culture expends energy on preventing change. Ineffective or negative teachers can be seen as heroes who essentially blame students' parents or administration for their	Teachers: Focus on the negative aspects of the school's operations and personnel Feel justified in poor performance Justify low expectations for their students Purpose in collaboration may not align with the goals of student achievement Protect themselves Hide their beliefs Prioritize survival over improvement	Negative, but powerful subcultures Diminished student achievement expectations Minimal, positive collaboration Minimal need for affirmation

Note. Adapted from *School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform It* by Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015, p. 50-63. Copyright 2015 by ASCD.

Organizational trust. Leadership in the areas of mission and vision also directly affected the organizational trust. Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010) discussed the impact that leaders could have in these areas. They stated that leaders helped to establish direction, learned direction from the leaders before them, and were always assessing mission and vision, as well as how the environment surrounding the organization was affecting them. If organizational members were going to be encouraged and inspired in fulfilling the mission and vision, the trust in a leader worth following needed to be present.

Covey (2009) took a deeper look into the behaviors of high-trust leaders. He identified 13 common behaviors in such leaders: (1) Talk straight, (2) demonstrate

respect, (3) create transparency, (4) right wrongs, (5) show loyalty, (6) deliver results, (7) get better, (8) confront reality, (9) clarify expectation, (10) practice accountability, (11) listen first, (12) keep commitments, and (13) extend trust.

However, Covey (2009) cautioned that each of these behaviors needed to be balanced with another, and that any behavior exhibited to the extreme could actually become a weakness.

Private Schools versus Public Schools

In the early, formative years of the United States, private school was the only choice for colonial children (Kennedy, 2016). Kennedy (2016) reported that it was not until the 1840s that northeastern colonial parents began to desire other educational options for their children. The 19th century parents began to push for a better education that would be more formalized and uniform, and help the new nation grow. Out of this desire was birthed the concept of funding for schools at the local level, which continued to be a successful model through the 21st century.

Not unlike the northeastern parents of the 19th century, parents and families continued to have choices between private and public schools. Religion was a major factor in many families' decision between not just public and private school, but even in which type of private school. Broughman, Swaim, and Hryczaniuk (2011), reported that in 2009, 68% of private schools had a religious affiliation or purpose. However, private school attendance dropped over the years (p. 2). Only 5.4 million students attended private school in 2013-2014, a 12% decrease from 1995-1996 ("Private School Enrollment," 2016, para. 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016)

reported that 38% of private school students in 2013-2014 were enrolled in Catholic schools.

Other factors evolved in the decision-making process for families choosing between private and public school for their students. Like the early 19th century colonial parents, many families had a primary focus on academic rigor. Other factors also included social impact and the benefits of smaller class sizes.

Academic rigor. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in the 2013-2014 school year, 5.4 million students were enrolled in a private school for prekindergarten through grade 12 (“Private School Enrollment,” 2016). While this statistic was a substantial decrease from the 6.3 million students enrolled in the 1995-1996 school year, the fact remained that many families continued to choose private education for their children (“Private School Enrollment,” 2016). Many studies showed significant benefits of private school education versus a public school education.

Chen (2015) discussed several factors considered when families decided between private and public education for their children. One major factor many considered was academic reputation. Chen (2015) referred to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment of 2003. The NAEP reported that private-school students tended to perform higher than public school students on standardized achievement tests (para. 5). Braun, Jenkins, & Grigg (2006) stated that the purpose of administering the NAEP in 2003 was to take a closer look and examine the differences in math and reading scores between private and public schools (p. iii).

The NAEP assessed students in grades 4 and 8 in reading and mathematics. There were over 6,900 public schools and over 530 private schools that participated in

the grade 4 NAEP (Braun et al., p. iii). After collecting the fourth grade data, it was found that the average private school mean reading score was 14.7 points higher than the average public school mean reading score (Braun et al., p. iii). The average private school mean mathematics score was 7.8 points higher than the average public school mean mathematics score (Braun et al., p. iii).

Over 5,500 public schools and over 550 private schools participated in the 2003 grade 8 NAEP assessment. The collection of data reported that the average private school mean in reading was 18.1 points higher than the average public school mean mathematics score (Braun et al., p. iii). Braun et al. (2006) also reported that the average mathematics mean of private schools was found to be 12.3 points higher than the average public school mathematics mean (p. iv).

In a 2005 NCES report, researchers compared scores from 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2005. It was reported that not only did grades 4 and 8 private school students have higher average reading and math scores, but that they also had higher science and writing scores. NCES also reported in the 2005 report that grade 12 was also assessed and found to have the same higher than public school average scores in math, reading, science and writing as grades 4 and 8 (as cited in Perie, Vanneman, & Goldstein, para. 3).

However, in a 2006 Harvard study, Peterson and Llaudet (2006) further researched the NAEP results and determined further classifications within the private school sector that contradicted the belief that all private school students performed better than public school students (p. i). Peterson and Llaudet (2006) classified private schools into three subcategories: Catholic, Lutheran, and evangelistic Protestant. They found that Lutheran school students tended to have the highest advantage over public school

students, followed by Catholic school students, which was the largest private school subcategory. Evangelistic Protestant students were found to have an advantage in reading, but had comparable scores to public students in math.

Braun et al. (2006) found similar results as Peterson and Llaudet (2006) when private school students were broken into further subcategories and when select characteristics were considered. Some of the characteristics taken into account were race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, English language learners, and school population in relation to size and location. After these characteristics were adjusted, Braun et al. (2006) reported that the private school advantage was no longer significant, except in regards to grade eight reading. Braun et al. (2006) agreed with Peterson and Llaudet (2006) with similar findings that Catholic and Lutheran schools tended to score higher than conservative Christian schools.

A 2006 study out of the University of Illinois, completed by Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) reported similar statistics in the 2003 NAEP results. However, Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) identified possible factors that may have skewed data when reporting that conservative Christian schools scored lower or comparably to public school students. According to Lubienski and Lubienski (2006), there were low numbers of participating Lutheran and conservative Christian schools in both grades 4 and 8. They also discovered that the participation rates of conservative Christian schools did not meet the NCES reporting standard in grade 4, as well as for “other private schools” in grades 4 and 8 (p. 21).

The Cardus Education Survey (2014) reported that STEM was a greater focus within private schools, which led to more interest in these job fields upon graduation (as

cited in Pennings et al., 2014, p. 30). In 2016, STEM-related job fields were predicted to increase by 14% by 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, Table 1). One exception to a greater focus on STEM within private schools was that evangelistic Protestant schools had lower interest rates in STEM than other non-public schools. However, student interest in math and science was comparable to public school students; therefore, not putting evangelistic Protestant students at any more of a disadvantage (p. 30).

Social impact. The 2014 Cardus Education Survey explored the impact of private school by sampling 1,500 American high school graduates between the ages of 24 and 39 (as cited in Pennings et al., 2014, p. 29). Pennings et al. (2014) discovered that when asked about their high school experience, students who had attended private schools tended to look back much more favorably on their experience than students who attended public school. This type of close-knit community compelled many families to choose private education, in order for their student to develop socially. Pennings et al. (2014) concluded from the Cardus survey that the close-knit-community was more likely to foster social capital than public school graduates were.

Pennings et al. (2014) examined an on-going question of whether American schools were fulfilling their role in civic education, and whether private schools helped or hindered democratic preparation and integration (p.22). Pennings et al. (2014) found through the data from the 2014 Cardus Education Survey that there was similar support for civic engagement, specifically in political interest, feelings of obligation to participate in civic affairs, and trust in an organization, across the school sector.

When specifically considering private schools, Pennings et al. (2014) discovered variations of civic engagement based upon the type of private school students attended.

They reported that private, non-religious graduates were more likely to volunteer in organizations that had to do with the arts or were cultural. Catholic school graduates were more likely to talk about politics at work, as well as donate to non-religious organizations. Evangelistic Protestant students were found to trust the federal government, media, and teachers and administrators less than public school graduates. However, they were more likely to give to charitable organizations and serve within their church congregations (Pennings et al., 2014).

Smaller class sizes. Researchers showed that smaller class sizes led to having higher achievement (Alt & Peter, 2002). The student-to-teacher ratio fluctuated over the years. NCES reported in 2013 that the average student-to-teacher ratio in a private school was 12.2 compared to 16.1 in public schools (as cited in “Teachers and Pupil/Teacher Ratios,” 2016, para. 3).

The Tennessee Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project was one of the first experiments performed to study how class size affected achievement in the 1980s (“Class Size Reduction,” 2008, para. 3). The STAR project took place in 79 elementary schools and involved 11,500 students and 1,300 teachers (Schanzenbach, 2014). Schanzenbach (2014) reported that students placed in a smaller class size had improved standardized test scores in math and reading of 5% on average.

Another significant finding from the STAR project was that both students from lower socioeconomic status and African American students were found to have the largest positive effects from being placed in a smaller class (“Class Size Reduction,” 2008; Krueger & Whitmore, 2000; Schanzenbach, 2014; Whitehurst & Chingos, 2011). Whitehurst and Chingos (2011) also reported that boys in general were shown to have

more positive effects than their peers who were placed in larger classrooms. Kreuger and Whitmore (2000) stated that students in smaller classes were almost 4% more likely to take the ACT or SAT exam (p. 3). Once again, African American students were seen to have an even larger positive effect in that those placed in smaller classes were 8.5% more likely to take the ACT or SAT than African American students in larger classes (Kreuger & Whitmore, 2000, p. 3). The National Education Association also reported that the gap between African American students and White students taking college entrance tests was reduced by 60% simply by placing African American students in smaller classes (as cited in "Class Size Reduction," 2008, p. 2).

Students in smaller classes proved to have many long-term benefits, as well. The NEA (as cited in "Class Size Reduction," 2008) stated that students in smaller classes through the STAR project were still higher achieving in seventh grade in reading, math, language, science, and social studies. Chetty et al. (2010) reported that students placed in smaller class sizes were shown to be more likely to own a home, be married, have a 401(k) account, and graduate college. Schanzenbach (2014) also reported that students from smaller classes were shown to have lower rates of juvenile criminal behavior, teen pregnancy, and be more likely to graduate high school, enroll in higher quality colleges, and choose better residential locations. While Chetty et al. (2010) stated that there were no significant impacts on students earning a higher salary, Fredriksson, Ockert, and Oosterbeek (2012) argued that, at age 27 it was too early in one's career to be able to observe this impact. Fredriksson et al. (2012) found that between the ages of 27 and 42, students from smaller class sizes did in fact earn a higher wage than their peers from larger classes (p. 24).

Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, and Willms (2001) stated that, while the most important and most impactful part of education was classroom instruction, linking class size to instruction was vital. Ehrenberg et al (2001) continued to discuss two ways in which correlating class size and instruction could directly affect achievement. First, a smaller class-size may have allowed teachers to make changes that were better for students, such as enabling the ability to spend more time individualizing students' learning, assessing their needs more frequently, and structuring classes in a way that allowed students to be more involved in their learning experiences. Secondly, even if teachers were to not change any instructional practices, the very fact that fewer students were in the class may have helped with student attention and allowed already existing practices to be more effective, simply because of size.

Schanzenberg (2014) reported positive impacts concerning teachers throughout the STAR project, stating that teachers of small classes were more effective using a variety of learning strategies. Teachers with smaller class sizes felt that the size of their class directly affected their ability to implement differentiation in using learning strategies. The NEA (as cited in "Class Size Reduction," 2008) reported that students in smaller classes had a more positive attitude towards learning, and were found to be more engaged than their peers in larger classroom settings.

Conclusion

This literature review examined school board governance, leadership styles and models found in administration, the purpose, necessity, and development of strong mission and vision statements, school culture and climate, organizational trust, and factors when comparing private and public schools. The most significant of these factors

for the purposes of this study was the existence of an organization's well-developed mission and vision. The research in this chapter added substantial value to the current study by setting a solid foundation of the important factors considered throughout the program evaluation of the study school.

In the Chapter Three, the methodology for this research study is addressed. The methodology allowed the researcher to collect meaningful data from the stakeholders in order to explore how, if at all, the mission of one, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, Midwestern, Christian school was fulfilled.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore if Mission Driven Academy (MDA) fulfilled its mission in the day-to-day operations, as well as in post-graduation. Data was collected utilizing online and paper surveys, interviews, and secondary data. Online surveys were sent to Mission Driven Academy's staff and faculty at the time of research. A paper survey was distributed to participating senior-class students who had the appropriate consent or assent forms completed on the day of survey distribution. All online and paper survey responses were anonymous. Three MDA staff were also interviewed. The interviews were audio-recorded and identities were scrubbed at the time of transcription. All questions in the interviews and surveys were aligned to one or more of the school's Pillars of Excellence. Secondary data was used from a previously distributed survey to MDA's alumni. All stakeholder responses were coded according to emerging themes. The emerging themes were then coded into corresponding Pillars of Excellence.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was how, if at all, does Mission Driven Academy fulfill its mission? There were three specific Research Questions:

RQ1: How do stakeholders perceive that Mission Driven Academy equips students with a Christ-centered education?

RQ2: How, if it all, do graduates of Mission Driven Academy live the mission post-high school, as evidenced by career choice, volunteerism (short-term mission trips & community outreach), persistence in the faith, and legacy?

RQ3: What is the perception of current students concerning the application of the pillars of excellence at Mission Driven Academy?

Problem Statement

Little research existed specifically about the congruency between mission and practice. The literature was saturated in regards to the importance of mission and vision; however, the researcher could not find any that then tied the importance of fulfilling a school or an organization's mission to its practice. Thus, the researcher investigated the components of successful mission statements, the differences of private and public schools, and the reasons families chose between the two educational systems, in order to determine the importance of connecting mission and practice.

The Research Site

This study took place at MDA, a suburban, Midwestern, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, Christian school. MDA began in 1980 and only offered grades kindergarten through eighth in one building. At the time of the study, MDA had grown to include pre-kindergarten through 12th grades and was comprised of two campuses. One campus housed the preschool through fifth grades and the second campus housed the sixth through 12th grades. While the campuses were separate, the faculty, staff, and curriculum operated as a district.

The district was led by a superintendent and had a school board comprised of then-current parents, as well as alumni parents. At the time of the study, board members were all male (Researched Institution, 2016g, p. 1). The school board adopted and ran in accordance to the Carver board governance model, which was implemented in 2013 (K. Currivean, personal communication, October 18, 2016).

MDA was dually accredited for grades kindergarten through 12 and had certifications from both AdvancEd and Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The Academy's accreditation cycle was on a five-year rotation with continuous improvement tasks reported annually to AdvanceEd.

At the time of the study, MDA was comprised of over 100 staff and faculty, and 778 pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade students. The curriculum, referred to as Eagle Expectations, was a self-composed curriculum based upon state, national, and Biblical standards. A variety of publishers were used as resources throughout the curriculum. Several offerings of honors, AP, and dual credit classes were available to middle school and high school students and met the issuing body's curricular expectations.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The first step in beginning the research study was gaining organizational approval from the MDA school board and superintendent to conduct research. IRB approval was then obtained from Lindenwood University. After the IRB approval, recruitment of participation began.

Since the school was comprised of two campuses, each campus held separate faculty meetings. To recruit the staff and faculty participants, the researcher presented the purpose of the study at the preschool and elementary school's bi-weekly faculty meeting. The same presentation was given via e-mail. In both presentations, the researcher assured staff and faculty that participation was voluntary, and there would be no negative ramifications as a result of participation or non-participation.

After the presentations were given, the researcher informed staff and faculty that a link to the survey would be e-mailed to their school e-mail addresses. It was also

communicated that all survey responses would be anonymous and upon taking the survey, participant consent was implied. The researcher contacted willing interview participants via e-mail, and scheduled an interview date and time. Interview participants received a consent form to sign and return before the interview took place. The consent form gave participants an explanation of the purpose of the research study and informed them that there would be no direct benefit, other than their contribution to furthering the knowledge of the congruency of mission and practice in Christian schools, as well as society. The consent form also stipulated that there were no anticipated risks, participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw consent at any time without any penalization. The researcher informed participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded for accuracy purposes only, and their identities would be scrubbed from any transcription and publications. To maintain confidentiality of the school and its staff, faculty, students, and participants, the school name was changed to Mission Driven Academy throughout this study.

An agreed upon date was discussed with senior-class advisory teachers for the research study presentation and the paper survey distribution. A parent letter was sent home to senior class parents/guardians before the scheduled presentation and survey. The letter informed parents/guardians of the purpose of the study and the survey distribution date. Consent and assent forms were attached, to be returned prior to the day of the survey.

During the senior-class presentation, the purpose of the study was communicated, as well as the value of participation. The researcher assured students that should they choose to participate, their responses would be anonymous. Signed assent forms were

collected from participating students under the age of 18, and consent forms were signed and collected for participating students aged 18 or over.

Interviews were held at agreed upon times and locations. Each interview was audio recorded for accuracy purposes only. The researcher listened to the audio recordings from each interview and transcribed notes into Microsoft Word. All identification was scrubbed by the researcher at the time of transcription. Secondary data was used from an alumni survey conducted by a previous researcher.

The interviews, surveys, and alumni data were coded into emerging themes. The researcher utilized open and axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined open coding as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p.61). Once data was coded into emerging themes, utilizing open coding, the researcher then analyzed by applying axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined axial coding as “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 96). This research study employed MDA’s Five Pillars of Excellence to categorize and draw conclusions from the data.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed survey and interview questions. Each question reflected at least one Pillar of Excellence. The Pillars of Excellence were defined as the following:

Academic Excellence - The pursuit of excellence in both curricular and extra-curricular activities with a commitment to training students to have superior intellects subject to righteous character.

Artistic Expression - Seeking excellence through artistic expression allows students to develop and grow their artistic gifts through visual arts, band, orchestra, choir, and theatre.

Distinguished Athletics - Seeking excellence through Christ-centered, Biblically directed athletic teams that bear the mark of integrity, pursue competitive excellence, and inspire leadership and spiritual growth.

Relational Development - Seeking excellence through developing relationships not only within MDA, but throughout the local community and throughout the world by means of volunteerism (short-term mission trips & community outreach).

Spiritual Growth - Seeking excellence in providing curricular and non-curricular opportunities and resources to encourage the maturity, strengthening, and growth in each student's spiritual life in accordance to God's Word. (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5)

Some questions reflected multiple pillars. All staff survey questions with a Likert scale response were given an 'other' option that allowed responders 100 characters for an open-ended response. Each stakeholder was also given an open-ended response as the final question of the survey or interview to respond with any additional comments they felt would benefit Mission Driven Academy (MDA) and the research. Table 2 through Table 6 reflect each of the survey and interview questions and their corresponding pillar(s). Table 2 provides survey and interview questions for Artistic Expression.

Table 2

Artistic Expression Survey and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Likert Scale
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Likert Scale
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Likert Scale
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
MDA has several opportunities to take part in classical and fine arts (i.e. music classes, art classes, drama classes etc.)	Student	Likert Scale
MDA prepares students throughout all grade levels to take part in the arts	Student	Likert Scale
MDA has knowledgeable teachers and staff who instruct classical and fine arts classes.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA is dedicated to growing and teaching students classical and fine arts.	Student	Likert Scale
What are some areas of improvement that MDA could make in the area of the arts?	Student	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview

Table 3 provides survey and interview questions for Relational Development.

Table 3

Relational Development Survey and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA provides students several opportunities to participate in local community service projects.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides students several opportunities to participate in global service projects.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA educates students about local and global needs.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA is dedicated to providing for local community and global needs.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA staff and teachers are dedicated to building relationships with students outside of the classroom.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Likert Scale
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Likert Scale
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
What are some areas of improvement that MDA could make when thinking about growing relationships?	Student	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
What are some examples of ways that you see the district partnering with parents?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Table 4 provides survey and interview questions for Spiritual Growth.

Table 4

Spiritual Growth Survey and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA' classes are taught from a Christ-Centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA provides professional development opportunities for staff to grow in their knowledge of teaching from a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA successfully equips students to enter into the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA graduates have been given appropriate tools, resources, and support in order to view all content areas with a Biblical worldview.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA is committed to every students' spiritual growth.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA has staff and teachers dedicated to helping each student grow spiritually.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Likert Scale
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Likert Scale
Do you feel as though students are adequately prepared to move into the college and career path equipped to persist in their faith? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
What could MDA do to improve the way students are educated in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview?	Staff	Open Ended

continued

Table 4. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
MDA athletic coaches are strong spiritual leaders.	Student	Likert Scale
I feel spiritually and Biblically equipped to defend my faith in a secular setting.	Student	Likert Scale
What are some areas of improvement that MDA could make when referring to spiritual growth?	Student	Open Ended
How do you believe that MDA fulfills its mission in equipping students with a Christ-centered education?	Staff	Interview
What are some ways that students are taught with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview in the classroom?	Staff	Interview
How well do you think students are able to persist in the faith post high school in the college or career fields?	Staff	Interview
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Table 5 provides survey and interview questions for Academic Excellence.

Table 5

Academic Excellence Survey and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA classes are taught from a Christ-Centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides professional development opportunities for staff to grow in their knowledge of teaching from a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA successfully equips students to enter into the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA graduates have been given appropriate tools, resources, and support in order to view all content areas with a Biblical worldview.	Staff	Likert Scale
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Likert Scale
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Likert Scale
What could MDA do to improve the way students are educated in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
MDA has multiple course offerings from which students may choose.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA has a variety of honors courses in which students can enroll.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA appropriately challenges students in each class.	Student	Likert Scale

continued

Table 5. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA provides teachers who are appropriately equipped to teach their subject area.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides classes that are interesting to students.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides teachers who keep students engaged in coursework through a variety of ways (i.e. using technology, engaging discussions, enjoyable activities etc.)	Student	Likert Scale
MDA prepares students for the ACT.	Student	Likert Scale
What are some areas of improvement that MDA could make when referring to academics?	Student	Open Ended
How do you believe that MDA fulfills its mission in equipping students with a Christ-centered education?	Staff	Interview
What are some ways that students are taught with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview in the classroom?	Staff	Interview
What is some evidence that students are understanding content within a Biblical worldview?	Staff	Interview
What is some evidence that students are understanding content within a Biblical worldview?	Staff	Interview
How well do you think students are able to persist in the faith post high school in the college or career fields?	Staff	Interview
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Table 6 provides survey and interview questions for Distinguished Athletics.

Table 6

Distinguished Athletics Survey and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Likert Scale
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Likert Scale
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff Student	Likert Scale
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff Student	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff Student	Open Ended Likert Scale
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
MDA offers a variety of sports programs.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides knowledgeable coaches for athletes.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA athletic coaches are strong spiritual leaders.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA provides adequate facilities to practice and play each sport.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA has a competitive and successful athletics program.	Student	Likert Scale
MDA is dedicated to the growth of the athletic program.	Student	Likert Scale
What are some areas of improvement that MDA could make when referring to athletics?	Student	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Participants

The first group of participants in the study was the staff and faculty of MDA. The staff and faculty consisted of over 100 employees, with 77% of the population being females and 23% males. Staff and faculty were broken into three departments, administration, faculty, and support staff. Figure 2 shows the distribution of these three groups. Administration consisted of the superintendent, building principals, assistant principal, business and human resources director, counseling department, athletic director, and campus pastor. The faculty included both full and part time classroom teachers. The support staff department consisted of office staff and aides, business office and human resource staff, food service staff, counseling department staff, athletic department staff, and custodial staff.

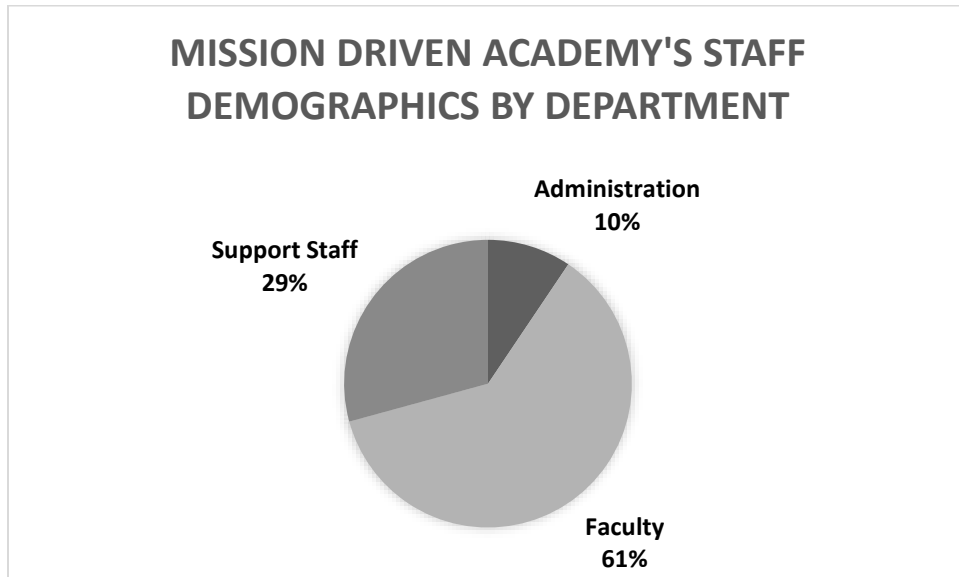


Figure 2. Mission Driven Academy's staff demographics by department.

MDA's staff and faculty held a variety of levels of degrees. Figure 3 shows the diversity of the highest level of degrees held by staff and faculty. Figure 3 does not

reflect staff and faculty who held multiple degrees, or those pursuing higher degrees at the time of research.

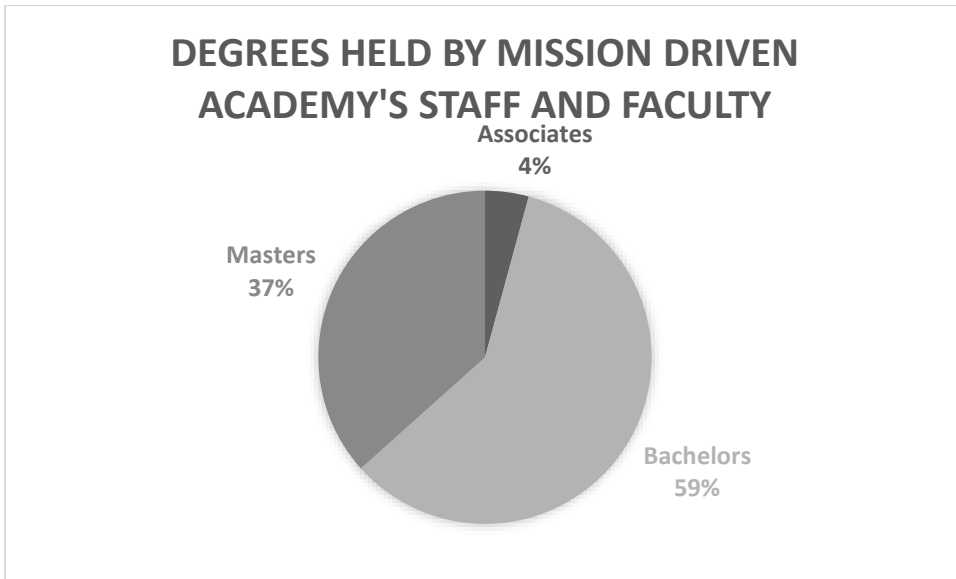


Figure 3. Degrees held by Mission Driven Academy's staff and faculty.

All staff and faculty shared the same core, doctrinal values, as agreed upon in the school's doctrinal statement. Their range of service was from first year to 30 years within the district. Each employee received a formal evaluation at least once a year, as well as on an as-needed basis. In addition to formal evaluations, employees had ongoing informal evaluations throughout the school year. Forty-two participated in the online survey and three participated in the interviews.

MDA senior-class students were the second group of participants. The senior class had a variety of demographics, as displayed in Figure 4 through Figure 6. Of the 86 students represented, 43% participated in the paper survey.

Figure 4 displays the gender characteristic for the senior class, as the time of the study.

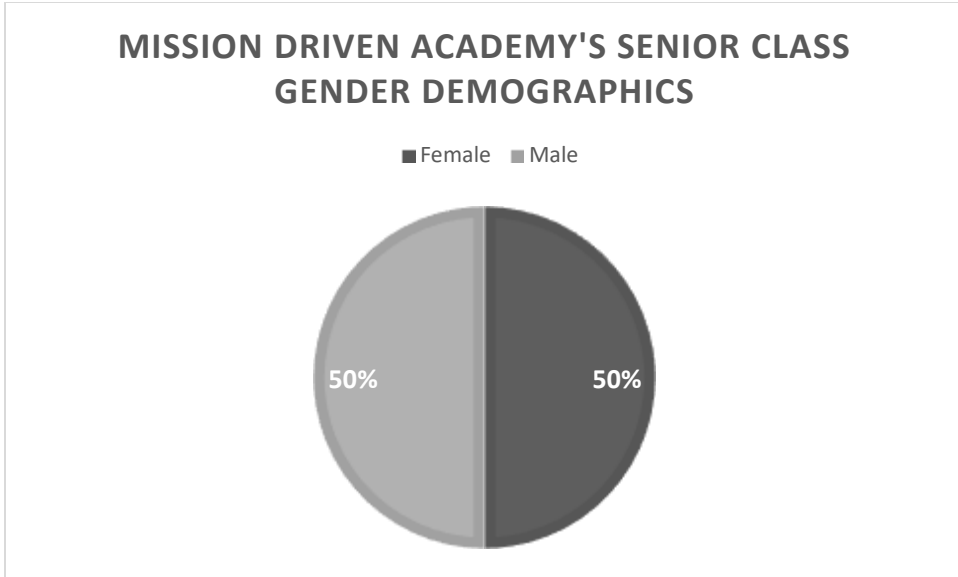


Figure 4. Mission Driven Academy's senior class gender demographics.

Figure 5 displays the senior class ethnicity, predominately Caucasian.

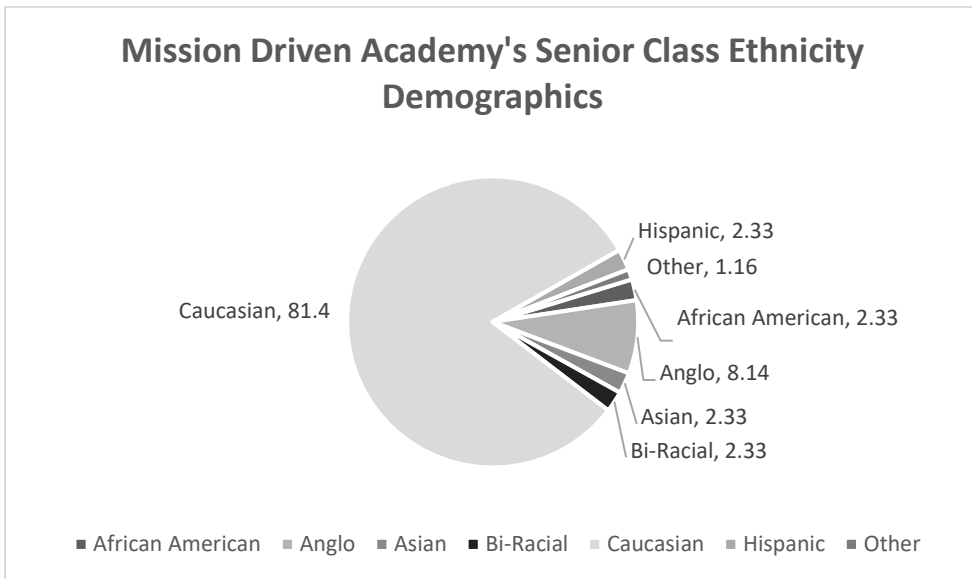


Figure 5. Mission Driven Academy's senior class ethnicity demographics.

Figure 6 displays the students' length of enrollment at MDA by indicating the percentage of the senior class in attendance for one to three years, three to five years, five to 10 years, and 10 to 13 years.

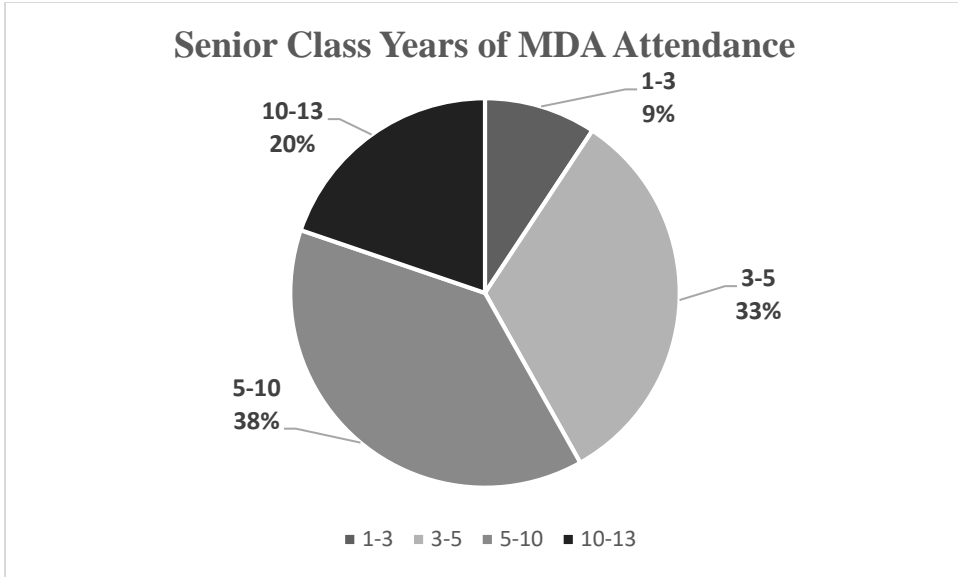


Figure 6. Years attended Mission Driven Academy.

The third group of participants were MDA alumni. There were over 900 alumni at the time of the research study. Data collected from alumni were secondary data from a previously distributed survey. MDA’s alumni database and social media outlets were used to distribute the survey.

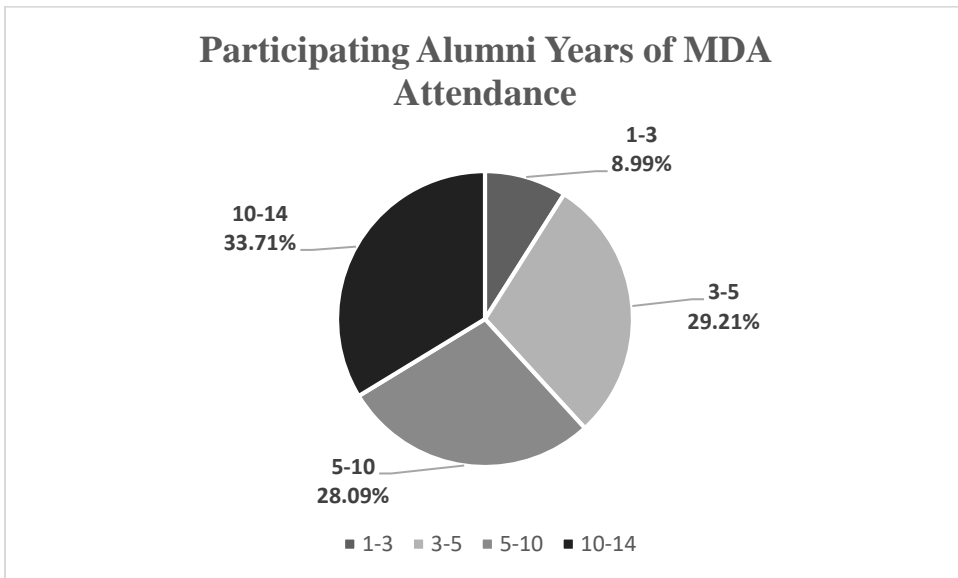


Figure 7. Alumni years of MDA attendance.

Of the participating alumni, 21.35% were Alpha and Omega alums. Alpha and Omega were defined as students who attended MDA from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of alumni in attendance for the categories representing the number of years of attendance of MDA. The categories were one to three years, three to five years, five to 10 years, and 10 to 14 years.

Conclusion

MDA was a suburban, Midwestern, dually accredited, preschool through 12th grade, non-denominational, Christian school. At the time of the research study, there were almost 800 students in attendance. The school was comprised of two campuses, but operated as one school in curriculum and mission.

There were three groups of participants in this study. The first group was the staff and faculty, which consisted of over 100 employees holding a variety of degrees. The second group was senior class students. There were 86 students in the senior class, varying in years of attendance from first year to 14 years. The third group represented members of over 900 alumni, which provided secondary data from a previously distributed survey.

Chapter Four displays the results of the data collected. Chapter Four also includes the responses to questions found in the online and paper surveys, as well as responses to the interview questions. Both the primary and secondary data are reported in Chapter Four, according to emerging themes and corresponding Pillars of Excellence.

Chapter Four Results

General Qualitative Feedback

This research study explored the following overarching research question: how, if at all, does Mission Driven Academy fulfill its mission? Within this overarching question, were three Research Questions:

RQ1: How do stakeholders perceive that Mission Driven Academy equips students with a Christ-centered education?

RQ2: How, if at all, do graduates of Mission Driven Academy live the mission post-high school, as evidenced by career choice, volunteerism (short-term mission trips and community outreach), persistence in the faith, and legacy?

RQ3: What is the perception of current students concerning the application of the pillars of excellence at Mission Driven Academy?

For the purposes of this study, stakeholders were defined as then-current staff and faculty, the then-current senior class, and alumni. Primary data were collected by the researcher from the staff and faculty and the senior class. The alumni data were secondary data gathered by a previous survey.

Survey and interview questions of primary data were developed by the researcher and classified into one or more of the Pillars of Excellence of Mission Driven Academy (MDA). The Pillars of Excellence were MDA's five foundational components that provided an education that was of academic excellence, spiritual depth, and moral integrity. The Five Pillars of Excellence were Artistic Expression, Relational Development, Spiritual Growth, Academic Excellence, and Distinguished Athletics (Mission Driven Academy Board Policy, 2016, 2.5).

Table 7 defines the Pillars of Excellence.

Table 7

Pillars of Excellence Definitions

Pillar	Definition
Academic Excellence	The pursuit of excellence in both curricular and extra-curricular activities with a commitment to training students to have superior intellects subject to righteous character.
Artistic Expression	Seeking excellence through artistic expression allows students to develop and grow their artistic gifts through visual arts, band, orchestra, choir, and theatre.
Distinguished Athletics	Seeking excellence through Christ-centered, Biblically directed athletic teams that bear the mark of integrity, pursue competitive excellence, and inspire leadership and spiritual growth.
Relational Development	Seeking excellence through developing relationships not only within Mission Driven Academy, but throughout the local community and throughout the world by means of volunteerism (short-term mission trips & community outreach).
Spiritual Growth	Seeking excellence in providing curricular and non-curricular opportunities and resources to encourage the maturity, strengthening, and growth in each student's spiritual life in accordance to God's Word.

Note: Adapted from "Mission Driven Academy Board Policy" 2016.

The first collection of data was from the staff and faculty. The staff and faculty of MDA consisted of over 100 employees. Of the 100 employees, 39.6% participated in the online survey, and three participated in the on-site interviews. Interview participants represented each level in MDA; pre-K through fifth grade, sixth through eighth grades, and ninth through 12th grades.

The second collection of primary data was from senior-class students. The senior class had 86 students at the time of research. Of the 86 students, 43% participated in the paper survey.

Emerging themes within each pillar were identified by the researcher through coding of open-ended responses by the participants. Qualitative feedback was organized per Pillars of Excellence and their emerging themes. Table 8 displays each pillar and theme.

Table 8

Emerging Themes by Pillar

Artistic Expression	Relational Development	Spiritual Growth	Academic Excellence	Distinguished Athletics
Lack of spiritual growth emphasis	Local community service opportunities	Adequate fulfillment of spiritual growth	Adequate fulfillment of academic excellence	Adequate fulfillment of distinguished athletics
	Global Needs education	Lack of real world application of Biblical worldview	Lack of adequate Biblical worldview training for teachers	Over-emphasis on distinguished athletics
		Lack of Biblical worldview and training	Sacrificing caring for students as individuals for academic excellence	
		Lack of spiritual growth for some students Missionally un-fit families Legalistic environment		

Artistic expression survey and interview results. Table 9 and Table 10 display student and staff survey responses followed by a table displaying the open-ended and interview questions regarding the artistic expression pillar.

Table 9 displays the percentage of agreement with the prompts related to Artistic Expression. Available responses were strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and other.

Table 9

Artistic Expression Survey Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response	
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Strongly Agree	21.43%
		Agree	47.62%
		Somewhat agree	14.29%
		Disagree	2.38%
		Strongly disagree	2.38%
		Other	11.90%
		MDA will develop the whole child – spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff
Agree	59.52%		
Somewhat agree	4.76%		
Disagree	4.76%		
Strongly disagree	0%		
Other	4.76%		
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff		
		Agree	57.14%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	4.76%
		Other	4.76%

continued

Table 9. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder	Response	
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Artistic Expression	2.02%
		Distinguished Athletics	3.07%
		Academic Excellence	3.80%
		Spiritual Growth	3.86%
		Relational Development	2.19%
MDA has several opportunities to take part in classical and fine arts (i.e. music classes, art classes, drama classes etc.)	Student	Strongly Agree	21.43%
		Agree	57.14%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	4.76%
		Other	4.76%
MDA prepares students throughout all grade levels to take part in the arts	Student	Strongly Agree	10.81%
		Agree	35.14%
		Somewhat agree	48.65%
		Disagree	2.70%
		Strongly disagree	2.70%
MDA has knowledgeable teachers and staff who instruct classical and fine arts classes.	Student	Strongly Agree	21.62%
		Agree	37.84%
		Somewhat agree	35.14%
		Disagree	5.41%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
MDA is dedicated to growing and teaching students classical and fine arts.	Student	Strongly Agree	8.33%
		Agree	25.00%
		Somewhat agree	36.11%
		Disagree	27.78%
		Strongly disagree	2.78%

Table 10 summarizes open-ended responses to interview questions provided by staff members.

Table 10.

Artistic Expression Open Ended and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
What are some examples of ways that you see the district partnering with parents?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Lack of spiritual growth. While the majority of respondents agreed there was adequate fulfillment of the Artistic Expression pillar, four staff members who gave open-ended responses specifically referred to a lack of spiritual growth in this area. All four respondents stated that more could be done specifically in those activities to enhance and emphasize spiritual growth. One participant simply stated that he/she did not know if there was any spiritual emphasis in extra-curricular activities.

Lack of emphasis on the arts. Only 33.33% of then-current students felt as though MDA was dedicated to growing arts programs. The remaining 66.67% of students only somewhat agreed or strongly disagreed concerning the school’s dedication in this area. Many of the open-ended responses reflected this same result. One student replied, “Focus more on the arts because here, if you’re not an athlete, then you’re technically not involved by default.” Another senior stated, “Emphasize the fine arts

more.” A different respondent said, “[Have] more interest in fine arts (band, choir, etc.).” Another replied, “Spend more on arts funding.”

Relational development survey and interview results. Table 11 provides the Likert-Scale survey responses to Relational Development followed by a table summary of open-ended and interview questions regarding the relational development pillar.

Table 10

Relational Development Likert Scale Survey Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response		
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Strongly agree	26.19%	
		Agree	59.52%	
		Somewhat agree	4.76%	
		Disagree	4.76%	
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	
		Other	4.76%	
		MDA provides students several opportunities to participate in local community service projects.	Staff	
Student	Strongly agree			26.19%
	Agree		38.10%	28.57%
	Somewhat agree		14.29%	42.86%
	Disagree		7.14%	22.86%
	Strongly disagree		2.38%	2.86%
Other	11.90%		-	
MDA provides students several opportunities to participate in global service projects.	Staff		Staff Response	Student Response
		Student	Strongly agree	2.44%
	Agree		29.27%	8.57%
	Somewhat agree		31.71%	34.29%
	Disagree		17.07%	40.00%
	Strongly disagree		4.88%	17.14%
	Other	14.63%	-	

continued

Table 11. Continued

Question	Stakeholder	Response		
		Staff Response	Student Response	
MDA educates students about local and global needs.	Staff			
	Student			
		Strongly agree	11.90%	2.78%
		Agree	38.10%	27.78%
		Somewhat agree	26.19%	36.11%
		Disagree	9.52%	27.78%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	5.56%
MDA is dedicated to providing for local community and global needs.	Staff			
	Student			
		Strongly agree	12.20%	0.00%
		Agree	39.02%	24.32%
		Somewhat agree	24.39%	51.35%
		Disagree	7.32%	21.62%
		Strongly disagree	2.44%	2.70%
MDA staff and teachers are dedicated to building relationships with students outside of the classroom.	Staff			
	Student			
		Strongly agree	16.67%	29.73%
		Agree	47.62%	27.03%
		Somewhat agree	16.67%	37.84%
		Disagree	7.14%	5.41%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.00%
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff			
		Strongly agree	21.43%	
		Agree	57.14%	
		Somewhat agree	7.14%	
		Disagree	4.76%	
		Strongly disagree	4.76%	
	Other	4.76%		

continued

Table 11. Continued

Question	Stakeholder		Response
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Artistic Expression	2.02
		Distinguished Athletics	3.07
		Academic Excellence	3.80
		Spiritual Growth	3.86
		Relational Development	2.19

Table 12 provides the open-ended and interview responses to Relational Development.

Table 11

Relational Development Open-Ended and Interview Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
What are some examples of ways that you see the district partnering with parents?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Local community service opportunities. A common theme from staff members and students in the area of relational development was the need to increase local, community outreach opportunities. Five respondents said they would like to see more

opportunities available, and two of those respondents specifically desired the increase of opportunity at the elementary campus stating that it “wasn’t common at the elementary level”, and one furthering their comment by saying they “weren’t sure at the high school level”. Another respondent also stated campus differences. This staff member reported that opportunities for local community service were more prevalent within the middle school than they were in the high school.

Global needs education. When staff participants were asked about providing for needs both locally and globally, there was even more variation in the responses. Four participants simply did not know if opportunities were available, while ten of the respondents discussed how there is partial fulfillment of this aspect of relational development. One said that the opportunity to provide was merely by finances. Three participants referred to the lack of communication and education of both local and global needs. One referred to the elementary school saying that the “Elementary school sponsors kids, but we don’t really talk about them.” One individual said, “The emphasis on ‘educates’. The needs are presented.” Another also referred to the lack of application and education saying “I feel like there is a missed opportunity to not share more regularly info on our chapel offering. Perhaps get people excited about the goal, educate them more on who needs our help.” Three other participants mentioned that students were given opportunities and adequately educated about local needs, but not global needs.

Dedication to building teacher-student relationships. Another important facet of relational development was the building of relationships between staff and students. According to two staff respondents, there was a campus disconnect. One said, “[the elementary school and middle school] I would agree. [The high school] I only agree with

a couple of teachers.” Another staff member stated, “We could make more one on one contact at an earlier level. Let’s not wait until high school to start cultivating personal relationships. Let’s start having relationships to check their Jesus barometers early on and more continuously.” Other staff respondents did not give campus specifications, but two individuals stated that “many are” and “Some are, some aren’t. It’s dependent on the personality of the teacher.”

The majority of staff agreed that teachers were dedicated to building relationships with students outside of the classroom. One staff member said, “Yes, I think the students are surrounded by teachers that truly love and care for them. Not knowing their home life, MDA does the best they can do.” Another referred to the relational development that occurred both outside of the classroom with the community and as a staff saying, “Yes. It [the schools] strives to make a difference in the classroom and community with every devotion, chapel gathering, staff meeting, etc.”

Over half of students agreed that MDA had staff who were dedicated to building relationships with them outside of the classroom. However, a few respondents mentioned inconsistency in this area. One student said that “mostly Bible teachers” were dedicated to building these relationships. Another senior replied that there was “teacher/student bias” and that this often existed in the “treatment of non-believers.” Several students also tied their perception of this dedication lacking when referring to helping students grow spiritually, which can be found in the Spiritual Growth pillar.

Spiritual growth survey and interview results. Table 13 and Table 14 display staff and student survey responses, followed by staff open-ended and interview questions. Table 13 provides the Likert-scale survey responses to Spiritual Growth.

Table 12

Spiritual Growth Likert Scale Survey Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Responses		
MDA’ classes are taught from a Christ-Centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff Student	Staff Response	Student Response	
		Strongly agree	28.57%	42.86%
		Agree	54.76%	42.86%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%	11.43%
		Disagree	2.38%	2.86%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.00%
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Other	7.14%	-
		Strongly agree	21.43%	
		Agree	47.62%	
		Somewhat agree	14.29%	
		Disagree	2.38%	
		Strongly disagree	2.38%	
MDA provides professional development opportunities for staff to grow in their knowledge of teaching from a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff	Other	11.90%	
		Strongly agree	17.07%	
		Agree	34.15%	
		Somewhat agree	24.39%	
		Disagree	9.76%	
		Strongly disagree	2.44%	
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Other	12.20%	
		Strongly agree	26.19%	
		Agree	59.52%	
		Somewhat agree	4.76%	
		Disagree	4.76%	
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	
		Other	4.76%	

continued

Table 13. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder	Responses		
MDA successfully equips students to enter into the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith.	Staff	Strongly agree	9.76%	
		Agree	56.10%	
		Somewhat agree	7.32%	
		Disagree	4.88%	
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	
		Other	21.95%	
MDA graduates have been given appropriate tools, resources, and support in order to view all content areas with a Biblical worldview.	Staff	Strongly agree	9.52%	
		Agree	47.62%	
		Somewhat agree	28.57%	
		Disagree	4.76%	
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	
		Other	9.52%	
MDA is committed to every students' spiritual growth.	Staff	Staff Response	Student Response	
	Student	Strongly agree	36.59%	11.11%
		Agree	46.34%	47.22%
		Somewhat agree	12.20%	27.78%
		Disagree	2.44%	11.11%
		Strongly disagree	2.44%	2.78%
		Other	0.00%	-
MDA has staff and teachers dedicated to helping each student grow spiritually.	Staff	Staff Response	Student Response	
	Student	Strongly agree	47.62%	42.86%
		Agree	42.86%	42.86%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%	11.43%
		Disagree	2.38%	2.86%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.00%
		Other	0.00%	-

continued

Table 13. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Responses
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Strongly agree	21.43%
		Agree	57.14%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	4.76%
		Other	4.76%
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Artistic Expression	2.02
		Distinguished Athletics	3.07
		Academic Excellence	3.80
		Spiritual Growth	3.86
		Relational Development	2.19
MDA athletic coaches are strong spiritual leaders.	Student	Strongly agree	5.56%
		Agree	33.33%
		Somewhat agree	27.78%
		Disagree	8.33%
		Strongly disagree	5.56%
		Cannot answer	19.44%
I feel spiritually and Biblically equipped to defend my faith in a secular setting.	Student	Strongly agree	11.11%
		Agree	36.11%
		Somewhat agree	36.11%
		Disagree	16.67%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%

Adequate fulfillment of spiritual growth. As the data reflected, many of the staff and student responses throughout surveys and interviews supported the existence of adequate fulfillment of the spiritual growth pillar. One staff member said, “I believe they

[students] get the foundation they need to find the answers they will need in the future.” Another staff member spoke to the spiritual growth of all students in the school saying, “I believe that down to the youngest students, we are teaching them the Christian base and worldview.” A different respondent also referred to adequate worldview preparation saying, “I think they [students] are challenged to consider outside worldviews and consider what their response will be . . . particularly in senior Bible class.” Another staff member replied, “I believe they are given resources to form a solid Biblical foundation and worldview.” One respondent said, “I feel like we do this well. We give students opportunities to ask questions and develop their own faith. We challenge them not to just follow Christian rules but to follow Jesus.”

Some student responses agreed with adequate worldview formation. One said, “[teacher’s name removed] how to defend our faith against other religions.” Another said, “They [teachers] teach Christian views as truth, but educate about opposing viewpoints a well.”

Two staff members responded referring to spiritual growth being fulfilled through curriculum. The first individual said, “As staff, we do what we can on a daily basis, and our curriculum is from a Christian worldview.” The second respondent also referred specifically to curriculum, but also added that the provision of counselors played a part in students’ spiritual growth.

Lack of real-world application of Biblical worldview. While the majority of staff members agreed that students were given the opportunity, tools, and foundation to enhance their individual, spiritual growth, many stated in open-ended responses that there is a lack of apologetics and real-life application for students to be able to persist in their

faith after high school. One staff member stated, “Our Bible classes fail to teach apologetics and fail to compare other religions in an applicable way. Students are taught book knowledge, but they aren’t taught how to apply what they’ve learned to their faith.”

Another staff member also referred to supplying the book knowledge:

I feel like they are adequately prepared in head knowledge, but I don't know that they are always prepared in ways to apply the Truth to everyday life. It feels like some of the key parts of being a disciple are missed such as how do grow spiritually independently, how do to find a church when they go to college, how to love other Christians and their differences, etc.

Another staff member also referred to the lack of apologetics saying, “I don't know that we equip them well enough in apologetics in order for them to effectively defend their faith in the ‘real world.’” One staff member stated, “We do not send out graduates that are ready to take on the secular world” Another respondent replied saying, “We give them tools, but I am not sure that they are prepared/practiced in how to use them in a non-sheltered setting.” A different staff member also referred to students being unprepared because of being sheltered by saying, “However, unless they are going to a Christian college, our students are pretty sheltered and naïve. They do struggle when set against other viewpoints.” Another staff member said, “Many of our students have not been challenged concerning their faith, so persistence in it has become routine.”

One staff member strongly disagreed that students are prepared to move into the college and career path equipped to persist in their faith by saying, “Students are hit hard at the university level with humanistic philosophy, which causes doubt in their faith. In addition, their faith is being hit with arguments not touched on at MDA.” Another

respondent also disagreed saying, “Students need to be put in real life situations in high school where they can defend their faith, not just pass the test.” An additional statement was made by an individual who said, “They [the school] need to present topics like evolution so students know its flaws and can defend their faith.” Another staff member mentioned the need for education on the topic of evolution as well:

Evolution vs. creation is not taught with support of why do you think that- other than well that’s what the Bible says. This doesn’t prepare our students for college at all. They do not know how to answer for their faith and why they believe what they believe when talking to an atheist.

Another individual stated the need for a stronger Biblical worldview by saying, “I think a stronger Biblical worldview would help their foundation be stronger so that they truly know WHY they believe what they believe and can effectively defend their faith.” A second individual mostly agreed students were prepared to persist in the faith, but that there were “still graduates who do not retain the Biblical worldview into college.”

Many students saw the lack of real-world application as well. One student said the school needed “better acceptance of differing beliefs (in terms of Christianity).” A different individual said that MDA needed to “Prepare students for the secular world better.” Another senior felt that classes were only “attempted to be taught from a Christ-centered worldview”.

Lack of spiritual growth for some students. Another common theme that emerged from open-ended responses from staff members was that there was truly only spiritual growth for a select group of students; students who came from strong Christian homes and/or students who came as believers and already had a foundation of faith

started. When responding to whether students were equipped to enter the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith, one staff member said, “Students who are believers are equipped. Those who aren’t can’t be required no matter how hard we try.” Another individual stated, “We do to some extent [equip them], but we can only work with where the students are- those who don’t enter with a solid foundation often don’t do as well.”

One staff member discussed the difficulty in equipping some students who were not saved by saying, “We provide what they need to be prepared, but so many of our students aren’t saved. You can’t prepare a student to defend something they don’t believe.” Another individual also speculated saying, “Some are, others are not [prepared to persist in the faith]. Maybe because they have not yet made a commitment to the Lord.” One respondent agreed that students were prepared to persist in the faith, but only if “they have actively pursued knowing God during their middle school and high school years.” Another staff member also agreed, but that the choice was on the student. They stated, “They are if they want to be. I believe we provide the tools for that to happen, but not all students want what we provide.”

Four MDA employees stated that they mostly agreed that students were equipped to persist in the faith post high school, but also mentioned the students as vital parts of that persistence. One said, “There are still students who choose not to stay in the faith once in college. They have the necessary knowledge of how to come back to Christ.” A second replied, “but the student needs to put forth the effort to learn and grow.” A third staff member stated, “Yes, I see many who do, so I believe the preparation is there. Many choose not to.” Another staff member stated, “I think students who are already

believers are further equipped; however, I am not sure we convert too many who are not already strong in their faith.”

Two staff members specifically mentioned students who did not fall into the expected norm of MDA students. One said, “Many students are nurtured and encouraged spiritually and remain strong in their faith, others who don’t fit a mold . . . are sometimes made to feel they are not accepted and then leave the faith.” A second staff member said when referring to be prepared to persist in the faith post high school that “College [bound students], yes. Trade school, no. Students who don’t fit the norm of planning on going to college are on the fringe.”

One staff member mentioned another factor in students’ ability to persist more than others; their home environment. She stated, “I think students that are also raised in a strong, Christian home with active, Christian parents probably are more prepared to persist [than those not raised in a strong, Christian home].” Another staff member also stated the partnership with families as a pivotal role for students to be equipped to persist in the faith by saying, “MDA guides students along with their families, to a relationship with Jesus and to go out and impact the world wherever they go.” One of the interviewees stated that she personally believed that evidence of faith in the home was the biggest factor in persistence of faith. She said:

How strong is it [faith]? Do they go to church? Do they pray? Do the parents get involved? We can talk about it here and pray at lunch, but to me, if it’s not enforced at home as well, I would think that that is more of a challenge for a child to stick with it and believe it.

Missionally unfit families. Several respondents touched on the aspect of missionally unfit families and students who make equipping them for persistence in the faith post high school difficult. Table 14 provides the open-ended and interview survey responses to Spiritual Growth.

Table 13

Spiritual Growth Open-Ended and Interview Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
What could MDA do to improve the way students are educated in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
How do you believe that MDA fulfills its mission in equipping students with a Christ-centered education?	Staff	Interview
What are some ways that students are taught with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview in the classroom?	Staff	Interview
How well do you think students are able to persist in the faith post high school in the college or career fields?	Staff	Interview
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

One staff member specifically discussed lack of spiritual growth support from families saying, “Often the families are not contributing to spiritual growth.” Partnership with families was mentioned by another staff member saying, “We partner with the family, and if the family concern is more on acceptance than discipleship, our preparation is limited.” One individual from the staff also responded saying, “It is not just up to the

school, the family needs to do their part too.” Another staff member touched on missionally unfit families and apologetics by saying, “When we accept students that don't have a strong, Christian home and are only being spiritually fed at school, I don't know that we equip them well enough in apologetics in order for them to effectively defend their faith in the "real world.”

Legalistic environment. Several respondents commented on the existence of an environment of legalism. One staff member said:

Students who challenge why we believe what we believe are sometimes made to feel they are not accepted and then sometimes leave the faith. This especially happens when they know that some students act one way in front of teachers and another way with their peers and the teachers fall for their act. They often find more love and acceptance from nonbelievers which make them question if what we say we believe is real.

Another staff member said, “I think sometimes kids just see it [faith] as a thing that goes with school and not as their own. They can rebel when they leave because it has been a legalistic system [within the school].”

When students responded to the open-ended question that asked what they felt would be areas in which MDA could improve, a few responders expressed that they felt an environment of legalism existed as well. One said, “[MDA could] be less strict.” A second responder simply said, “Less rules.” A third student felt the legalistic environment caused an imbalanced focus. He/she said, “Focus on education more than what we wear [pertaining to dress code policies and violations]”.

When the staff was asked what MDA could do to improve the way students were educated in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview, four staff members mentioned a legalistic or unloving environment. One respondent said, “We are very good at teaching doctrine, but at times our community can come across as very Pharisee-like, especially to those new to the school system.” Another responded, “Be less legalistic. You can give grace without being legalistic.” A third staff member said, “We need to allow our students to ask the hard questions without feeling threatened. We need to show love to the ones hardest to love.” Another individual stated, “As a school, we need to love everyone where they are and realize that we are all created in the image of God.”

Academic excellence survey and interview results. Table 15 displays student and staff survey responses, followed by open-ended and interview questions:

Table 14

Academic Excellence Likert Scale Survey Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response		
		Staff Response	Student Response	
MDA classes are taught from a Christ-Centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff Student	Strongly agree	28.57%	42.86%
		Agree	54.76%	42.86%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%	11.43%
		Disagree	2.38%	2.86%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.00%
		Other	7.14%	-

continued

Table 15. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Response
MDA provides professional development opportunities for staff to grow in their knowledge of teaching from a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview.	Staff	Strongly agree	17.07%
		Agree	34.15%
		Somewhat agree	24.39%
		Disagree	9.76%
		Strongly disagree	2.44%
		Other	12.20%
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically	Staff	Strongly agree	26.19%
		Agree	59.52%
		Somewhat agree	4.76%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
		Other	4.76%
MDA successfully equips students to enter into the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith.	Staff	Strongly agree	9.76%
		Agree	56.10%
		Somewhat agree	7.32%
		Disagree	4.88%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
		Other	21.95%
MDA graduates have been given appropriate tools, resources, and support in order to view all content areas with a Biblical worldview.	Staff	Strongly agree	9.52%
		Agree	47.62%
		Somewhat agree	28.57%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
		Other	9.52%

continued

Table 15. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Response
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Strongly agree	21.43%
		Agree	57.14%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%
		Disagree	4.76%
		Strongly disagree	4.76%
		Other	4.76%
With 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important, number each pillar in the order of importance as displayed by MDA.	Staff	Artistic Expression	2.02
		Distinguished Athletics	3.07
		Academic Excellence	3.80
		Spiritual Growth	3.86
		Relational Development	2.19
MDA has multiple course offerings from which students may choose.	Student	Strongly agree	8.11%
		Agree	32.34%
		Somewhat agree	29.73%
		Disagree	24.32%
		Strongly disagree	5.41%
MDA appropriately challenges students in each class.	Student	Strongly agree	10.81%
		Agree	54.05%
		Somewhat agree	24.32%
		Disagree	10.81%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%

continued

Table 15. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Response
MDA provides teachers who are appropriately equipped to teach their subject area.	Student	Strongly agree	8.11%
		Agree	43.24%
		Somewhat agree	35.14%
		Disagree	13.51%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
MDA provides classes that are interesting to students.	Student	Strongly agree	5.41%
		Agree	48.65%
		Somewhat agree	37.84%
		Disagree	8.11%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
MDA provides teachers who keep students engaged in coursework through a variety of ways (i.e. using technology, engaging discussions, enjoyable activities etc.)	Student	Strongly agree	5.41%
		Agree	40.54%
		Somewhat agree	43.24%
		Disagree	8.11%
		Strongly disagree	2.70%
MDA prepares students for the ACT.	Student	Strongly agree	5.41%
		Agree	21.62%
		Somewhat agree	32.43%
		Disagree	40.54%

Table 16 provides the open-ended and interview responses for both staff and students.

Table 15

Staff and Student Open Ended and Interview Questions

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
What could MDA do to improve the way students are educated in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
How do you believe that MDA fulfills its mission in equipping students with a Christ-centered education?	Staff	Interview
What are some ways that students are taught with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview in the classroom?	Staff	Interview
What is some evidence that students are understanding content within a Biblical worldview?	Staff	Interview
What is some evidence that students are understanding content within a Biblical worldview?	Staff	Interview
How well do you think students are able to persist in the faith post high school in the college or career fields?	Staff	Interview
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Adequate fulfillment of academic excellence. As the data suggests, staff and faculty agreed that MDA provided academic excellence. One staff member said, “I know I have heard from people that MDA prepared students for college very well and that college was an easy transition because of the preparation they had here.” One staff member agreed students were adequately prepared with the exception of math. They

said, “Math classes could be more rigorous to prepare for calculus in college if your child is not in honors math classes.”

Lack of adequate Biblical worldview training for teachers. Teaching content areas through a Biblical worldview is a key element of academic excellence at MDA. Several staff members mentioned the need for better training in order to teach well with a Biblical worldview throughout their open-ended responses. One staff member said, “Develop teachers specific understanding of a Biblical worldview to their curriculum area.” Another said, “Educate the teachers as to what is a ‘Biblical worldview’ so they can model it more.”

Many staff members specified the need for practical application of Biblical worldview. One individual said, “The in-service opportunities need to include practical ways on how to implement Biblical worldview.” Another respondent also agreed with utilizing professional development, but specifying by content area. They said, “Have professional development that centers around developing Biblical worldview in each content area. Possibly divided by the departments at [the middle school and high school].” Another said, “Staff needs better training on how to integrate a Biblical worldview in their specific content area.” One respondent also included administration’s need to have training as well by saying, “Make sure the administration and teachers understand what a Biblical worldview is and how they can apply it in the classroom.”

Sacrificing caring for students as individuals for academic excellence. Several staff members mentioned the need for more focus on all needs of students as individuals. One staff member referred to a lack of spiritual growth taking place inside the classroom. The participant said, “In the classroom, I think academics takes precedence [over spiritual

growth].” Another staff member said, “We over emphasize college, scholarships, and getting ahead in the world [over educating in a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview].”

One individual said:

Everyone is given different talents and this is where future growth needs to be looked at in the future as most of MDA students are college bound, but some are not and their gift is just as important in God’s eyes.

Student responses also referred to college-bound focus. Over 80% of seniors somewhat agreed to strongly disagreed that MDA provided adequate information of trade school opportunities. One student responded that they had never personally even received information about trade school opportunities. A different student said, “It’s all about college.”

Lack of a variety of classes. Almost 60% of MDA seniors responded that they somewhat agreed to strongly disagreed that multiple course offerings were available. Many students used open-ended responses to express their disagreement. One said, “Provide different English classes than just standard.” Another senior said MDA could improve by offering “More variety in classes.” A different student said that there were “too many required classes to [be able] to choose from a variety.” One senior not only stated he or she would like more classes to choose from but also suggest that “teachers [should be] specific to a subject.” Another senior referred to the overemphasis of the athletic programs, rather than academics. The student said, “As you can see, the focus is on the athletic department. Expanding the selection of a variety of classes would be a nice improvement to the school.”

Distinguished athletics survey and interview results. The following tables display the staff and student survey responses, as well as the open-ended and interview questions. Table 17 provides the Likert-scale survey responses to Distinguished Athletics.

Table 16

Distinguished Athletics Likert Scale Survey Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Responses		
MDA puts an emphasis on spiritual growth in curricular and extra-curricular activities.	Staff	Strongly agree	21.43%	
		Agree	47.62%	
		Somewhat agree	14.29%	
		Disagree	2.38%	
		Strongly disagree	2.38%	
		Other	11.90%	
MDA will develop the whole child—spiritually, academically, relationally, artistically, and physically.	Staff	Strongly agree	26.19%	
		Agree	59.52%	
		Somewhat agree	4.76%	
		Disagree	4.76%	
		Strongly disagree	0.00%	
		Other	4.76%	
I know and understand what the Pillars of Excellence are.	Staff	Staff Responses	Student Responses	
	Student	Strongly agree	21.43%	40.54%
		Agree	57.14%	32.43%
		Somewhat agree	7.14%	27.03%
		Disagree	4.76%	0.00%
		Strongly disagree	4.76%	0.00%
Other	4.76%	-		

continued

Table 17. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Responses
I believe that MDA fulfills its mission (to assist Christian families in equipping student with a Christ-centered education, empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God).	Student	Strongly agree	2.70%
		Agree	16.22%
		Somewhat agree	16.22%
		Disagree	32.43%
		Strongly disagree	32.43%
MDA offers a variety of sports programs.	Student	Strongly agree	21.62%
		Agree	54.05%
		Somewhat agree	13.51%
		Disagree	10.81%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
MDA provides knowledgeable coaches for athletes.	Student	Strongly agree	16.67%
		Agree	50.00%
		Somewhat agree	13.89%
		Disagree	16.67%
		Strongly disagree	2.78%
MDA athletic coaches are strong spiritual leaders.	Student	Strongly agree	5.56%
		Agree	33.33%
		Somewhat agree	27.78%
		Disagree	8.33%
		Strongly disagree	5.56%
		Cannot answer	19.44%
MDA provides adequate facilities to practice and play each sport.	Student	Strongly agree	19.44%
		Agree	19.44%
		Somewhat agree	25.00%
		Disagree	19.44%
		Strongly disagree	5.56%
		Cannot answer	11.11%

continued

Table 17. Continued.

Question	Stakeholder		Responses
MDA has a competitive and successful athletics program.	Student	Strongly agree	5.56%
		Agree	58.33%
		Somewhat agree	33.33%
		Disagree	2.78%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%
MDA is dedicated to the growth of the athletic program.	Student	Strongly agree	40.54%
		Agree	32.43%
		Somewhat agree	27.03%
		Disagree	0.00%
		Strongly disagree	0.00%

Table 18 provides the open-ended survey responses Distinguished Athletics.

Table 17

Distinguished Athletics Open-Ended and Interview Responses

Question	Stakeholder	Response Type
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its mission? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
	Student	Likert Scale
Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?	Staff	Open Ended
What are some of the strengths of MDA education?	Staff	Interview
How do you see the pillars of excellence as a vital part of MDA?	Staff	Interview
Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?	Staff	Interview

Adequate fulfillment of distinguished athletics. Many staff members agreed that there is adequate fulfillment of the distinguished athletics pillar. One staff member

noted the visible fulfillment saying, “I do see a move to emphasize sports” Another individual said, “I feel like a good job is done [developing students] physically”. A respondent mentioned staff involvement and support of athletics when responding, “I know teachers go to sports events and other activities of students when possible.” Another staff member spoke about spiritual growth fulfillment through athletics. The individual said, “The coaches do emphasize spiritual growth.”

Over-emphasis on distinguished athletics pillar. While majority of staff and students felt the distinguished athletics pillar was adequately fulfilled, many mentioned that it was emphasized to the point of detriment to other areas of the school and the spiritual growth of students. When staff were asked to provide additional comments that they felt would benefit MDA, one staff member simply said, “Stop putting athletics first.” A second respondent said, “Too much emphasis on athletics. Money not invested in other areas.” Another said, “We need to re-evaluate the center of our emphasis. We promote athletics over Christian service.” One staff member that mentioned the visible “move to emphasize sports,” added, “perhaps sacrificing other areas.”

Three staff members mentioned the lack of other pillars that could overlap into athletics. One staff member mentioned the lack of spiritual growth. The participant said, “I see this [emphasis on spiritual growth in extra-curricular activities] in our extra-curricular arts, but not in all of our sports.” Another staff member referred to the emphasis on spiritual growth in extra-curricular activities saying, “Lacking in athletics.” One individual referred to relational development and a lack of opportunities to serve the community through athletics saying, “We could do a lot more. All athletic teams, band, drama, clubs, etc. should be required to have a service project.”

Many students utilized open-ended responses to express their perception of an over-emphasis in athletics as well. One student said, "Focus more on the arts because here, if you're not an athlete, then you're technically not involved by default." Another student responded, "The school focuses way too much on sports." One senior said, "As you can see, the focus is on the athletic department"

When asked if MDA was dedicated to the growth of the athletics programs, one senior said, "Yes, more so than the fine arts" A different student responded that he or she felt there was specifically no dedication to the growth of the wrestling program. Another senior also cited an overemphasis on some sports more than others. The student said, "support all sports, not just some".

Mission contradictions. There were several open-ended responses throughout the surveys and interviews that were in direct contradiction to the school's mission statement. Two themes emerged: (a) accepting missionally un-fit families for growth, (b) students not prepared spiritually for post-high school (which can be found in the spiritual growth feedback section earlier in this chapter).

Accepting missionally un-fit families for growth. This theme emerged in the spiritual growth pillar several times, as teachers stated needing the partnership from families in the home environment to ensure students are equipped to persist in the faith post-high school. That data and qualitative feedback can be found earlier in this chapter under the spiritual growth pillar. However, another aspect of this emerging theme were comments from staff about feeling that maintaining and growing enrollment was of higher priority than accepting and keeping mission fit families. One staff member said:

As the school has grown, the lack of emphasis on selecting students who are mission fit has been a problem. It's been about numbers, growing the school, and having a budget big enough to do what we want. I think the interview process needs to be a little more rigorous.

Another staff member said:

I think worrying less about keeping tuition dollars, and more about keeping mission fit families would do us a world of good. Many times it SEEMS as though that is the focus, which comes off to staff as not feeling supported when student and parent issues arise. We need to decide as a school if we would rather have growth, or if when a confrontation arises and the parent is without a doubt in the wrong, can admin and teachers hold them (respectively) accountable without worrying they may be "in trouble" later by a supervisor? I don't know that many can confidently say yes to that.

One staff member mentioned a difference of school focus and family focus by saying:

We do not send out graduates that are ready to take on the secular world. We partner with the family, and if the family concern is more on acceptance than discipleship our preparation is limited. Many of our students have not been challenged concerning their faith so persistence in it has become routine.

Another staff member included a third part in their responsibility to persist in the faith along with the school and family. They said, "the student needs to put forth the effort to learn and grow. It is not just up to the school, the family needs to do their part too." A second employee also mentioned three parts to the equations by saying, "Yes [students are equipped to persist], if there is truly a three-strand cord of home-church-school."

Vision fulfillment. The final question of the staff survey was an open-ended response to “Do you feel MDA adequately fulfills its vision? Why or why not?” The data from this question varied greatly. However, three major themes emerged: (a) adequate fulfillment of the vision, (b) unaware of a MDA vision, and (c) a loss of identity as a school.

Adequate fulfillment of the vision. When staff were asked whether they felt MDA adequately fulfilled the vision, 42.42% agreed it was adequately fulfilled. One staff member said, “[MDA] prepares students well to become life-long Christians.” Another said, “Yes, the growth of the schools is improving.” A different staff member agreed but added, “No school will be perfect in fulfilling such a grand perfect vision.” One staff member said, “Yes. It strives to make a difference in the classroom and community with every devotion, chapel gathering, staff meeting, etc.” Another staff member said, “Yes, we strive to fulfill its statement.”

Two respondents referred to the character of MDA staff. One said, “Yes, they work with families to help all children succeed and continue to move forward as part of MDA, therefore sending more graduates out in the world with a Biblical worldview.” The second responder replied, “Yes. I think the heart of those running and pirating MDA is truly working for the Lord. We are all human though so we all are still falling short of what we need to do.”

Unaware of a MDA vision. Of the staff responses to whether MDA adequately fulfills the vision, 57.58% of staff was unaware of the existence of a vision. One staff member said, “What is the vision? I've never heard one stated as the vision of our school.” Another respondent speculated, “What is our vision? I think it is evolving and

changing . . . is this good or bad?” A different responder replied, “No, because they don't have a clear vision.” Another also affirmed they did not feel there was fulfillment by saying, “What is our vision again? Therefore, no I don't.” One employee responded, “No. It [MDA] doesn't know what its vision is.”

Some employees referenced a lack of communicating the vision as to why they were unaware of one. An individual said, “I'm not sure that a vision has ever been communicated to the faculty and staff. We have our mission statement and our pillars, but I've never seen a vision statement.” Another replied, “Maybe? I don't necessarily know what it is and could not look it up on the website.” One wondered, “Do we even have a stated vision?”

Many respondents speculated what the vision statement entailed. One felt that there was an imbalance of pillars, assuming they were a part of the vision. The individual said, “Too much emphasis on athletics. Money not invested in other areas.” A different staff member also contemplated the vision and tied it to the relational growth pillar saying, “If the vision is to make Christian education available to more of the community, we need to be more visible as a group. Prayer, open chapel certain times to the community, on a half-day perhaps. People will know us by our service.” A different responder also wondered if community was a part of the vision by saying, “If the vision is to make Christian education available to more of the community.”

Two staff members were confused about the difference of a mission and vision. One individual stated that they thought the question was a duplicate of the previous mission fulfillment question. A second employee said, “I'm not sure how the vision and mission differ.”

A couple of respondents referred to a change in the clarity of vision over time. One said, "I think our vision is no longer as clear as it once was and this is where we need to focus in the future." A second respondent said:

If we fulfilled our vision wouldn't we have better facilities? Does an organization ever fulfill its vision? No, I think any organization constantly revises. As they match their vision this year they set new goals for the next. Have we been making strides over the past 30 years? I think we fulfilled the vision of 30 years ago. Have we fulfilled the vision of this year? Probably not, but we are constantly refining and fine tuning expectations.

Loss of identity as a school. Throughout staff and student open-ended responses, a clear theme referring to the school no longer knowing its identity emerged. The researcher refers to this loss of identity as mission-drift. Throughout the responses, two specific areas of mission-drift became evident: a) sacrificing discipleship model for growth, and b) programs.

Sacrificing discipleship model for growth. Many employees felt that MDA often sacrificed the discipleship model to gain enrollment. One staff member referred to inconsistency of the discipleship model by saying, "Decide whether we are going to be an evangelistic or discipleship school. Once that has been decided, it will become easier to know how to minister best to our students." A student also agreed saying, "Decide to be either an evangelistic school, or a discipleship school. You cannot be both." Another responder said:

I think worrying less about keeping tuition dollars, and more about keeping mission fit families would do us a world of good. Many times it *seems* as though

that is the focus, which comes off to staff as not feeling supported. We need to decide as a school if we would rather have growth, or if when a confrontation arises and the parent is without a doubt in the wrong, can admin and teachers hold them (respectively) accountable without worrying they may be "in trouble" later by a supervisor? I don't know that many can confidently say yes to that.

Another individual replied:

In an effort to "diversify," are we losing sight of what is really important? In an effort to be more "appealing" to the world and to draw in more students, have we lowered our standards . . . our standards of admission, of pastoral recommendation, of service, of family accountability?

Programs. Several responders referred to unbalanced programs throughout their responses. One employee said, "We need to re-evaluate the center of our emphasis. We promote athletics over Christian service. We emphasize advance degree over service. More emphasis on what does a Christian in this world do to promote God over man." Another staff member referred to the school's need of a philosophy of education. He or she said, "By developing its own philosophy of education and not being blown back and forth by the trends of secular education and radical psychology."

Secondary data: alumni survey. The researcher retrieved secondary data from a previous survey of the 1998-2016 MDA alumni. The survey primarily focused on alumni's persistence in the faith post-high school, but other areas of the Five Pillars of Excellence emerged. Therefore, the secondary data is presented according to the pillars and within the following themes. Table 19 provides the emerging themes contributed by Alumni.

Table 18

Alumni Survey Emerging Themes

Artistic Expression	Relational Development	Spiritual Growth	Academic Excellence	Distinguished Athletics
	Continued relationships with staff	Evidence of spiritual growth	Academically prepared	
	Continued relationships with classmates	Lack of Biblical worldview and training	Unprepared academically in the field of science	
		Legalism and hypocrisy		

Artistic expression. Artistic expression had the smallest amount of feedback throughout the survey. Two alumni referred to understanding there could have been growth in this area since their attendance. One said:

There was also the challenge for students to find support to grow their artistic, athletic, musical, or other interests as the offerings of extracurricular activities was very limited. But, I'm hoping this has changed with a few more years and significant growth under its belt.

Artistic expression was the lowest scoring by means of MDA preparation by pillar. On average, alumni felt 54% artistically prepared upon leaving MDA.

Relational development. Throughout the alumni survey, two major themes emerged: continued relationships with staff and continued relationships with peers. Several of the responses indicated the lasting impact of those relationships on their personal and spiritual lives.

Continued relationships with staff. Throughout the open-ended responses, several alumni referred to continued, strong relational development with staff, coaches and peer relationships. Several mentioned that those relationships were still active. One responder said, “I loved the coaches and most of the teachers; most of these coaches I still consider to be mentors/leaders to me today.” Another former student also included their former coach and player relationship saying, “So many teachers, staff members, and coaches left a lasting impact on my life and my relationship with Christ. I still have strong connections to teachers and coaches today. I am grateful for their influence on my life then and now. Thank you [MDA]!”

An alum referred to the impact of both students and staff saying, “I loved my time at [MDA]. I was so impacted by the teachers and other students. They truly poured blessings into my life.” Another alum also referred to both teacher and student relationships saying, “[I] loved the teachers, friends, and encouragement that I had.” A different alum responded:

[MDA] has/had on staff some of the most incredible, kind-hearted people that I know. [Names removed for anonymity] (just to name a few) had tremendous influence in my academic career as well as my personal life. I cannot describe to you how their knowledge coupled with their love for their student affected me. And there are many others who display so much love in what they do. They are invaluable to you and to what you set out to do as an organization. They care. They show children that they matter and that they are of value. They assist in the development of young men and women in a positive and godly manner.

One alum referred to the individualized attention they received. He or she responded:

At a public school I might have had more access to a larger variety of things, but at [MDA] I was challenged to succeed. The small teacher-student ratio put me in a position to be noticed and personally assisted . . . I feel I am still benefitting from it today.

A different alum discussed the care they received as a whole person saying:

[MDA] was a fantastic school. I loved every minute of high school and the support from the students and staff I received there. The staff really cared about me and where I was at, whether that was academically, socially, or spiritually.

Another alum discussed the pivotal moment that they came to know the Lord during their years at MDA, and the role that relationships they had affected that decision. He/she said, “The relationships I made there helped me to do that, and it will forever be the most important time period in my life.” A different alum also referred to the impact of MDA saying, “I loved [MDA] and I believe that my time there has had a great impact on who I am today. I’m so thankful for every teacher that took the time to invest in my life.”

Two alum referred to the community of teachers. The first responder said, “I always say the biggest difference in [MDA] was how much the teachers genuinely cared about all of us.” The second alum replied saying, “I never hesitate to tell someone where I went to school. I am in community with some current staff members and can say that they are a true gift to current [MDA] students.” A different alumnus said, “[MDA] did a good job of creating a solid foundation of relationships.”

Continued relationships with peers. Another significant aspect of relational development was the continued friendships mentioned throughout the survey. An alum said, “I cultivated deep relationships with some of my teachers. I created friendships that impacted my life, and a few of those friends are still my best friends to this day. My (now) husband also went to the school from kindergarten to graduation.” Another responder agreed by saying, “I’ve kept in touch with several friends from high school as well as teachers. I love being able to keep in touch with people who made such an impact in my life.” One simply said, “I still keep in touch with old classmates.”

One alumnus replied with the significant and long-lasting effect their MDA friendships have had on their life. He/she said:

I made forever friends at [MDA] . . . They were my roommates in college.

Across states and campuses, we took on the world together. We celebrated graduations and new jobs. We still find time to hang out with each other. We are in each other’s weddings. We gush over each other’s babies. We sit and discuss any and every topic. We have held each other through the loss of loved ones.

Through triumphs and heartache, tears of joy and of pain we have a bond that I pray will continue to withstand the test of time and never be broken. I praise God for them.

Community and global service. A crucial piece to MDA’s relational growth pillar was community and global service. Of the responding alumni, 29.1% claimed to not volunteer in any form or fashion inside or outside of the church. Many alumni served in multiple areas. Figure 8 displays the different areas in which the alumni volunteered.



Figure 8. Alumni survey: Community and global service results.

Of the options not listed in the survey, alumni also volunteered in the following areas: financial support ministry for those in need, spouse of pastoral staff, small group leader, camp counselor, Christian education, and volunteering with animals. The focus on the relational growth pillar prompted on alum to reference a global impact on his or her life. The alum said, “[MDA] opened up my love for missions and helping those not as fortunate as myself.”

Negative relationships: legalism, hypocrisy, and cliques. While the majority of alumni responded favorably in the area of relational growth, there were many who referred to negative teacher relationships and the existence of legalism, hypocrisy, and cliques. One individual said:

I felt like [MDA] was a very judgmental and lonely place. Not only did I struggle with relationships but also felt that from the staff and teachers. I'm very sad that my experience was so poor at a place that is supposed to make people feel at home and loved.

Another alumnus stated:

When I went to [MDA], although the gospel was verbally stated, the attitude that students perceived from teachers et al. was that moral behavior, especially that regarding sexuality, was more important than grace. Parents and teachers seemed to be more interested in keeping students from committing mistakes and knowing doctrine than in making sure that we had regenerate hearts or that we knew we were forgiven and loved after our mistakes. This was what pushed so many of my classmates away from the faith after they left high school.

A different alumnus replied, “At times, my education was negatively affected by teachers and faculty. Their entitlement to assert themselves into my personal life, relationships, and spirituality caused damage that I am still working to overcome as an adult.”

Several alumni reflected on negative social experiences throughout their years at MDA. One individual said:

The social benefits were not there for me because I entered mid-high school. Everyone else had their core group of friends and I did not make deep relationships upon entering; not that this is anyone’s fault; it’s the nature of social relations during that time of life, but just added to my overall disappointing experience.

Another alumnus said, “I did feel as if there were cliques, more so than I’ve experienced at college and otherwise in life.” A different responder said, “the cliques and hypocritical students made relationally and spiritually a very difficult experience.” Another individual also referred to experiencing hypocrisy that has had lasting effects saying:

I'll never forget going to an all-school assembly to be told that a girl was expelled for getting pregnant. Three years later, I read *The Scarlet Letter* in English class and didn't think about the irony yet— but other students tallied up all the ironies and double standards they could find, and they never got over it. I've never even kissed a boy, but to this day, I have nightmares that I'm pregnant and I'm terrified of telling my parents and my community because I expect to be as rejected as she was.

Spiritual growth. The alumni survey provided several pieces of data that reflected the spiritual growth pillar, specifically in terms of whether alumni were persisting in the faith post-high school. Of the responding alumni, 87.6% claimed that at the time of the survey, they considered themselves to be an active Christian. For the purposes of this study, an active Christian was defined as an individual who currently professes a faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and actively seeks to grow in knowledge, wisdom, and love of Him.

Four of the remaining 12.3% claiming to no longer be an active Christian explained their reasoning for separation from the faith. One alumnus said, “That's a big question. Here's an absurdly brief summary: the Christian worldview is devoid of any and all intellectual merit, honesty, or rigor.” Another individual said, “I no longer consider myself a Christian. I practice spirituality apart from the Christian church.”

Two of the respondents explained that MDA directly affected the reason they walked away from the faith. One said, “Due to how the teachers shoved religion down my throat and closed off discussions of controversial topics, my faith has been harmed.” The second alumnus responded:

I stopped being a Christian while attending [MDA]. The existence of a god, any god, doesn't make sense from a rational perspective. I looked at sources outside of the ones we were given in our religion and science courses and it was clear [MDA] wasn't telling the truth. Evolution makes total sense- there's no need for a creator. I've never felt god in my life so it was easy to just stop believing one day. Plus, the sexism, homophobia, and hypocrisy of the church had disgusted me for a long time.

Positive spiritual impact. Several alumni mentioned the positive spiritual impact that MDA had on their lives. One alumnus stated, “The Lord used [MDA] as a part of making me who I am today. My heart will always be thankful for my four years at [Mission Driven Academy].” Another former student said, “The Lord set the foundation of my faith while at [MDA], and I am very grateful.” Another stated, “This school was a place that significantly affected my spiritual growth.”

One alumnus referred to MDA's role in their salvation experience. He said, “During my time at [MDA] I truly learned what it means to live for God. It was also when I gave my life to Him.” A different responder also mentioned their new salvation journey by saying, “I came to [MDA] as a church-ed-my-whole-life, but new believer in Christ. [MDA] provided me with a small, family-type atmosphere that was GOOD for me at the place I was at in my faith.” Another former student reflected, “Needless to say, my life has definitely been impacted by [MDA], and I couldn't be more happy with the education, friendship, mentoring, and faith-inspiring upbringing that MDA had a hand in giving me.” Finally, an alumnus concluded their survey saying, “[MDA] helped me cultivate a firm relationship with the Lord, which I am forever grateful.”

Spiritual mission fulfillment. When alumni were asked if they felt they were impacting the world for the glory of God as partial fulfillment of the school's mission, 84.4% responded that yes, they believed they were, and 15.6% responded that they did not. Of the 84% that responded yes, there were multiple ways in which they felt they accomplished the mission. Fifteen cited their impact was through serving or working in ministry, nine described raising their children, 18 responded with ways that correlated with their lifestyles and/or jobs, 14 explained their impact was through the relationships that they built, and two cited their work as community volunteers.

Some of the alumni that responded that they did not believe they were impacting the world for the glory of God cited various reasons to explain the lack of fulfillment. One alumnus said, "I still love Jesus, but I don't love organized religion." Two responded with a personal reflection. The first said, "Personality and emotional issues make it difficult for me to effectively witness to others as well as demonstrate true empathy." A second replied, "I am struggling to keep my faith strong. I have no outlet, no accountability partner to help push me in my faith, therefore I do not feel as though I'm impacting the world at all for the glory of God." One alum simply stated, "I could be doing more."

A few alumni mentioned their lack of persistence in the faith was the sole reason they do not fulfill the second half of the mission. One said, "I do good for the world, but not in the name of any religion." A second alumnus also mentioned good for humanity instead of for the Kingdom by saying, "I am impacting the world for the good of humanity." A different alumnus replied, "I am an atheist now, so definitely not."

Another mentioned a decrease in their persistence by saying, “Not as active as I used to be.”

Unprepared for differing views and narrow-mindedness. One emerging theme throughout the survey was the responses from alumni that included feeling unprepared for differing views outside of Christianity. Many specifically referred to post-high school as “the secular world” or “real world.” One alum said, “Moving into college, I felt unprepared for dealing with the secular world.” Another replied, “However, it [the school] did not prepare me for the real world. I was so sheltered and protected that college was a huge shock and struggle.” A different responder said, “I was totally unprepared for the real world. I hope the next generation has a class aimed at what being an adult actually means.” Another said:

The only negative result I have experienced is that I was not exposed to any “worldly” situations to be prepared for or know how to handle post high school. Rather than teaching a conservative view, I wish I would have also known about the more liberal view as well.

One alumnus stated:

I think it is valuable to learn how to interact with a person who does not share the same worldview as a Christian. I wish [MDA] taught me how to live in a world that does not know Jesus, instead of a world where everyone knows Jesus, as great as that world is.

Several alumni’s responses referred to narrow-minded experiences while at MDA.

One alumnus said:

I do resent being indoctrinated as a child. I don't feel I was allowed to really choose for myself since I was taught Christianity at such an early age. When a person goes to church multiple times a week, to a religious school, and lives in a religious home, that religion is their whole life. It was a very, very painful process to remove myself from that mindset and believe something different.

When I tell my friends about my experiences growing up and at [MDA] (which I rarely do because it's painful to talk about), they compare it to a cult.

Another replied:

When I went to [MDA], although the gospel was verbally stated, the attitude that students perceived from teachers et al. was that moral behavior, especially that regarding sexuality, was more important than grace. Parents and teachers seemed to be more interested in keeping students from committing mistakes and knowing doctrine than in making sure that we had regenerate hearts or that we knew we were forgiven and loved after our mistakes. This was what pushed so many of my classmates away from the faith after they left high school. They still view Christianity as a moral code. A different youth pastor preached to us about sexual purity every other week; it seemed to be all anyone cared about, while when a friend and I asked one teacher after another why Christians in our community spent so much money on material indulgences in light of the poverty and needs of the world, no one gave real attention to our questions. Of course we were confused.

Two alumni discussed how close-mindedness could have played a part in some alumni walking away from the faith. One said:

I felt that the environment at many times was very sheltered, but not in terms of shutting out the "secular" world to keep our "good Christian status." As Christians we can often be close-minded to the thoughts and perspectives of those around us--even on religious topics. I wish the approach that was taken toward these differences had come from a desire to understand and love one another. It often felt that if you had differing views from [MDA] staff, you were immediately met with defensive maneuvers, attacked to show you how you were wrong. I feel we could have made a lasting difference in those lives if we had just met them with kindness, worked to understand their thought process, and shown them the truth in love.

A second alumnus replied:

In general I believe an acknowledgement of other views that Christians hold and have held historically is better than any area where a teacher feels the need to insist that certain views are right and certain views are wrong. In some areas I felt that teachers did a decent job at this, in others I only realized the shortcomings after I was exposed to other views after high school. This was not harmful to me personally but I believe it has been harmful to others.

Another alumnus responded with how the focus only being on Christianity directly affected their lack of persistence in the faith. They said:

I would estimate that 50% of my time spent at [MDA] was focused on religion and spirituality. While this is to be expected at a religious school, students would be better served if their experiences were treated as individual. Christianity as a whole preys on the emotions of their audience and as adolescents, our hormones

and emotions made us especially vulnerable to these messages. I would describe some experiences at [MDA] (Spiritual Emphasis Week, Senior Trip activities, Thursday chapels that frequently included "altar calls", etc) as a form of bullying or coercing young people into following their suggested beliefs and behaviors. Rather than educating students on the actual principles and beliefs of Christianity, we were encouraged to act/rely on our emotions. As an educated adult, I completely disagree with many of the theories, principles, and ideologies taught at [MDA] (and by the Christian church). I believe that my negative experience in high school has been a contributing factor to this. I feel that has a great opportunity to ensure that their students are well-prepared for higher education, if they do not let their pride get in the way.

Raw spiritual growth data. The researcher considered other influencing factors when researching alumni persistence in the faith. These factors included: (a) whether the alumnus was a believer, or Christian, upon entering MDA, (b) the point in time which they became a Christian, (c) when they began a personal relationship with Christ (which is considered to be the beginning of their active Christian walk), (d) what and/or who had the most influence on becoming a Christian, and (e) whether their parents or guardians were believers. The following figures display results from the questions that considered each of these factors.

Figure 9 displays the percentage of respondents who were Believers when enrolling at MDA.

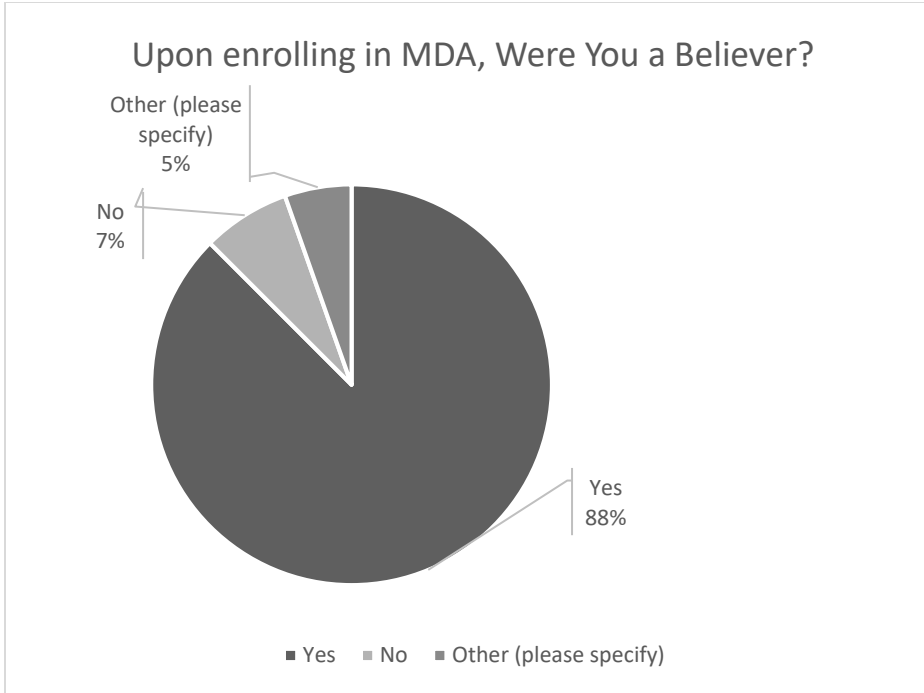


Figure 9. Alumni: Upon enrolling in MDA, Were you a believer?

Figure 10 displays by percentage the number of MDA enrollees who became believers during different life-phases.

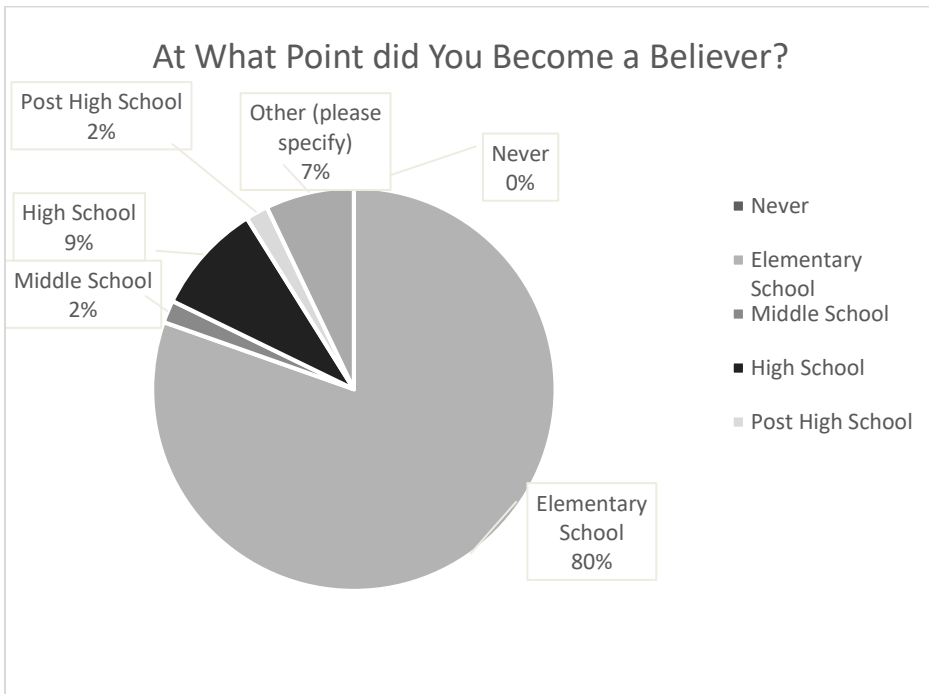


Figure 10. Alumni: At what point did you become a believer?

Figure 11, Figure 12, and Figure 13 display the response selections made by alumni.

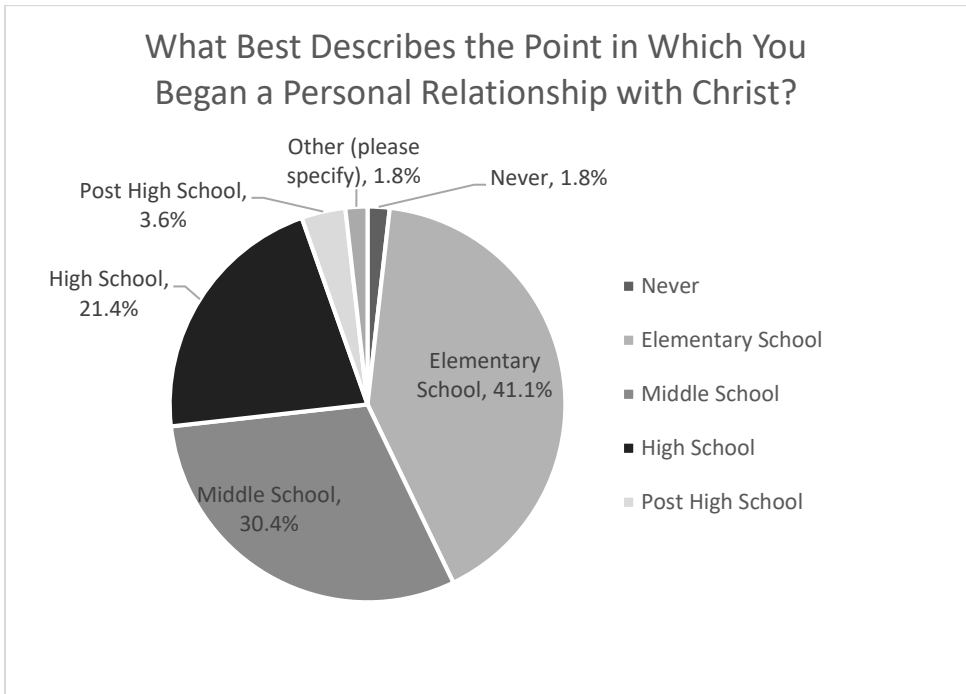


Figure 11. Alumni: Personal relationship with Christ.

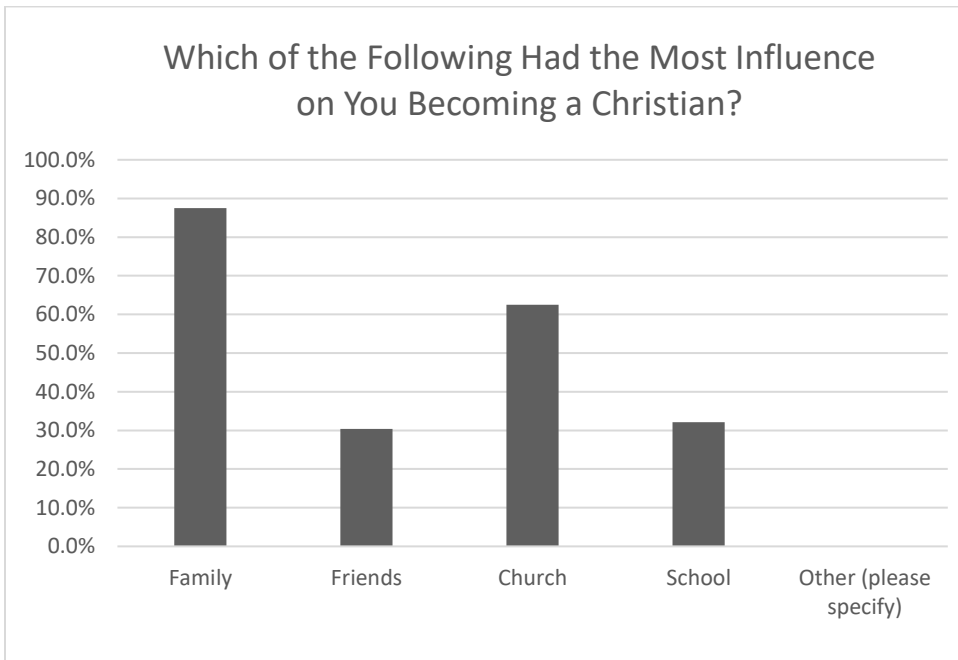


Figure 12. Alumni: Most influence on becoming a Christian.

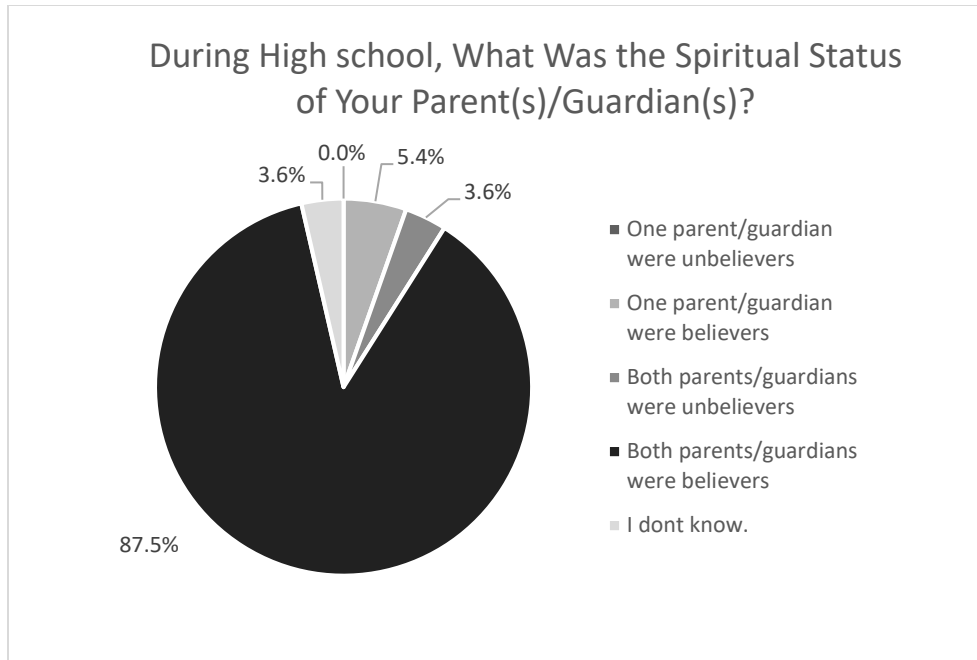


Figure 13. Alumni: Parent/guardian spiritual status.

Academic excellence. Alumni responses were mixed when referring to whether they were academically prepared for college or career paths. Seventy-eight percent felt they were properly equipped, and many mentioned the area of English as a strength. One alumnus said, “Great English department- I felt ahead of the game when I got to college.” Another replied, “Overall decent academic standards . . . and I could write a better English paper than anyone I met my first year of college.” A different responder answered, “My education at [MDA] served me well in many ways. Math and English (specifically writing papers) prepared me very well for college and grad school.” Another said, “Academically, I was well prepared in English/Literature” One alumnus stated, “I felt as if I was presented with the best possible opportunities for learning. At a public school I might have had more access to a larger variety of things, but at [MDA] I was challenged and pushed to success.” Another said, “[MDA] was an incredible school

and prepared me academically for everything college threw at me. I am thankful that I attended [MDA].”

Unprepared for science and math. Many alumni responded saying they were unprepared specifically in the areas of math and science. One said, “Math and Science left something to be desired.” Another said, “Academically, I was well prepared in English/Literature, but not with math. All other subjects were average.” A different alumnus responded, “The teaching at [MDA] was ok, but not outstanding. With the lack of specialized educational tracks, it was difficult for students who struggled academically to succeed.”

Several alumni specifically referred to a limited view of science as only being presented with things that aligned with the Bible. One alumnus stated, “As a college student, I felt wholly unprepared for university study, particularly in science.” A different responder replied:

Science was extremely inadequate, as we were not taught anything outside of the Bible. I vividly remember watching children’s sing along cartoons about dinosaurs as a form of “education.” We graduated with very little foundation of actual scientific discoveries and were not prepared for higher education in this subject.

Another individual gave a lengthy response and an example of the result of feeling inadequately prepared. He/she said:

As a current college student, I have become more and more aware of how poorly equipped I was when it came to science classes. I think it is unfair for the science curriculum at [MDA] to only teach rebuttals to evolutionary thought, because by

doing that, students never truly learn why other people believe other things.

When I stepped into my first bio class my freshman year, I was sorely disappointed that my high school teachers would leave out such a large part of every science course. My college professor assumed everyone knew the ins and outs of evolution, and in most cases, he wasn't wrong. However, I, the private school kid who paid more to receive a better education, suffered as a result (or rather, my GPA did). Sure, you might not believe evolution is fact. However, leaving it out of science classes only hurts your students in the long run. In addition to being aggravating and almost detrimental to my grades, I have no way to refute what an evolutionist believes because I have no idea what they believe. I might be able to talk on the four points I was taught to refute in biology class, but when they bring up a fifth point I have no prior resources and therefore I cannot speak to the topic.

I have to say I feel behind the rest of my (non-Christian school attending) peers now that I never had a real science class besides [teacher's name removed] chemistry class (or anything taught by [teacher's name removed]). I learned a lot about Creationism apologetics, however, which I have found to not be useful in any scenario.

A different responder also referred to creationism and evolution:

I wish that young-earth creationism had not been taught as absolute fact from the science classroom - i.e. Ken Ham videos as curriculum. Even if it was promoted as the most likely view or the teacher's personal belief, I wish I would have received at least some non-derisive exposure to old earth creationist and theistic

evolutionist views, and some general humility and open-mindedness towards not being absolutely sure about everything regarding some of these issues.

While there was evidence of former students feeling unprepared for the post-high school classroom in regards to science, most alumni successfully continued to higher education or trade schools. Over 66% of alumni continued their education and received a trade certificate or earned a degree, with over 9% earning advanced degrees. Figure 14 displays the varying level of education reported by participating alumni.

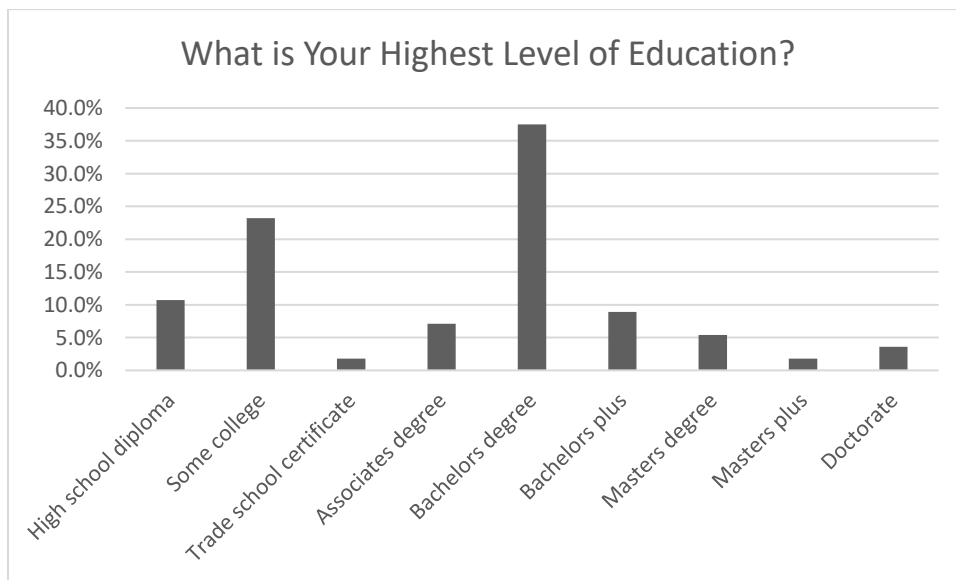


Figure 14. Alumni: What is your highest level of education?

Distinguished athletics. A few alumni reflected on their time at MDA and mentioned athletics. One alumnus said, “I was able to enjoy a growth spurt of [MDA]. Adding facilities, improving staff, and growing classes. I see that it continues to grow. The athletics continue to become stronger, the teachers improve.” Another athletics pillar strength mentioned was the relationship many alumni had and continued to have with former MDA coaches. One alumnus said, “I loved the coaches and most of the teachers; most of these coaches I still consider to be mentors/leaders to me today.”

Two alumni acknowledged that there was or could have been needed growth in this pillar since their years of attendance. One said:

There was also the challenge for students to find support to grow their artistic, athletic, musical, or other interests as the offerings of extracurricular activities was very limited. But, I'm hoping this has changed with a few more years and significant growth under its belt.

The second alumnus replied, "I was able to enjoy a growth spurt of [MDA]. Adding facilities, improving staff and growing classes. I see that it continues to grow. The athletics continue to become stronger, the teachers improve."

Conclusion

The researcher conducted surveys and interviews to collect data from willing participants of MDA's over 100 staff and faculty, 86 then-current senior students, and utilized a previous survey of over 900 alumni at the time of research. Through each stakeholder group's feedback, the researcher sought to answer the research question how, if at all, does MDA fulfill its mission? The answer to the research question, along with the three sub-questions, is be answered in Chapter Five. Chapter Five also includes triangulation of each stakeholder's data, which will result in the researcher's recommendations for the study school, as well as recommendation for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

This research study explored the overarching research question, “How, if at all, does Mission Driven Academy (MDA) fulfill its mission?” The researcher utilized surveys and interviews with three stakeholder groups. For the purposes of this study, stakeholders were defined as then-current MDA staff and faculty, senior-class students, and alumni. Primary data were collected from staff and faculty, as well as senior-class students. Secondary data were utilized from a previous survey distributed to the over 900 alumni that existed at the time of research.

The researcher created the primary data survey and interview questions. Each question was designed to relate to one or more of the study school’s five foundational components, referred to as the Pillars of Excellence. The five pillars were: (a) Artistic Expression, (b) Relational Development, (c) Spiritual Growth, (d) Academic Excellence, and (e) Distinguished Athletics. Definitions of each of these pillars can be found in Chapters Three and Chapter Four. Secondary data survey questions were designed to gather feedback and data on alumni’s overall MDA experience and persistence in the faith.

The collection of primary and secondary data allowed the researcher to conclude whether MDA was fulfilling its mission to “partner with families in equipping students with a Christ-centered education, empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God.” (Researched Institution, 2016e, p.1). Based upon these findings, the researcher makes recommendations to the study school, as well as recommendations for future research.

Analysis of Research and Sub Questions

The overarching research question, “How, if at all, does Mission Driven Academy fulfill its mission?” was answered utilizing three sub questions and three stakeholder groups. The three sub questions addressed were:

RQ1: How do stakeholders perceive that Mission Driven Academy equips students with a Christ-centered education?

RQ2: How, if at all, do graduates of Mission Driven Academy live the mission post-high school, as evidenced by career choice, volunteerism (short-term mission trips and community outreach), persistence in the faith, and legacy?

RQ3: What is the perception of current students concerning the application of the pillars of excellence at Mission Driven Academy?

Through the data collected from the three stakeholder groups, the researcher was able to answer each of the sub questions. The analysis of each sub question is provided in the following sections.

RQ1: Analysis of students equipped in a Christ-centered education. The researcher used survey and interview questions to explore sub question one to discover stakeholders’ perception of how MDA equipped students with a Christ-centered education, empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God. Overall, 83.33% of staff agreed-to-strongly agreed that classes were taught from a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview. It was discovered that 85.72% of senior students also agreed-to-strongly agreed that classes were taught from a Christ-centered worldview. In regards to a foundation of faith, 57.14% of staff felt that MDA successfully equipped students to enter the college or career field with a solid foundation of faith. Of participating alumni,

87.6% reported to still claim an active, Christian faith. These overall data points affirmed that students were equipped upon leaving MDA with a Christ-centered education and foundation of faith.

RQ2: Evidence of alumni living the mission. The researcher utilized a previously distributed alumni survey to find evidence that MDA alumni were living the mission post-high school; therefore, answering sub-question two. These conclusions were drawn, as evidenced by career choice, volunteerism (short-term mission trips and community outreach), persistence in the faith, and legacy. For the purposes of this study, legacy was defined as MDA alumni that chose to send their children to MDA. Figure 15 categorizes how the 79% of alumni reported their volunteer efforts.

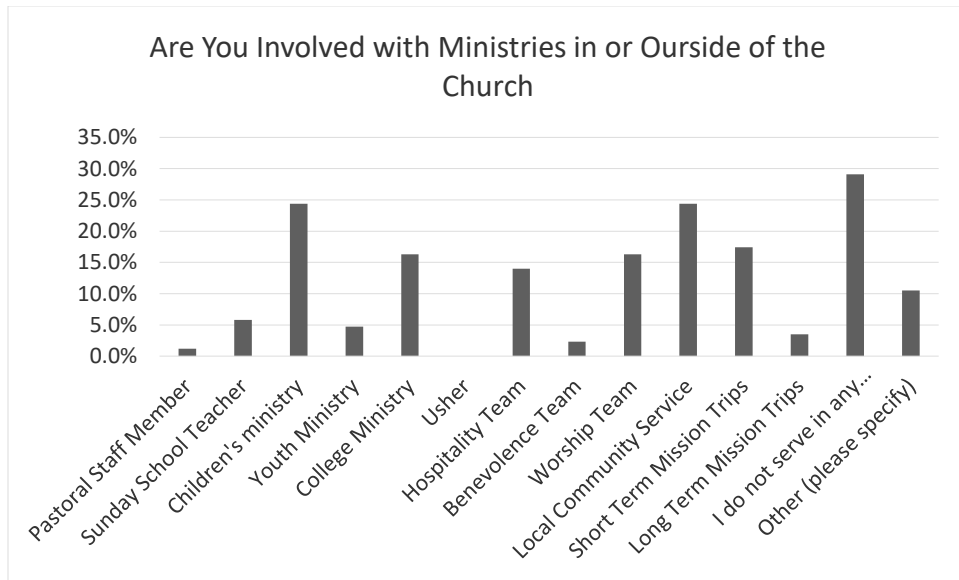


Figure 15. Alumni reported volunteerism.

Five percent of reporting alumni then-currently worked in ministry at the time of the survey. Legacy families included 3.4% of responding alumni, and 60.7% said they would choose MDA for their children. There was enough evidence to conclude that a majority of alumni continued to live the mission of MDA post-high school.

RQ3: Analysis of student perception of the application of the Pillars. The researcher surveyed senior-class students to explore sub-question three to identify the students' perception of the application of the Five Pillars of Excellence. Of the participating seniors, only 18.9% agreed-or-strongly agreed that they knew what the Five Pillars of Excellence were by memory. Of participating senior-class students, 72.9% agreed that MDA was committed to the growth of the distinguished athletics pillar, but a substantial number of respondents felt there was an over-emphasis on this pillar. They also felt that growth in fine arts was not a focus of the school. Only 33.3% of students stated that MDA was dedicated to growing classical and fine arts.

Academically, 64.9% of students felt appropriately challenged in their courses. However, only 40.5% believed there were multiple courses offered. Many students stated a lack of variety in electives, while others noted there were too many graduation requirements, prohibiting the opportunity for electives.

Spiritually, 58.3% of students agreed-or-strongly agreed that MDA was dedicated to every student's spiritual growth. Of the participating students, 72.2% believed that MDA had teachers and staff dedicated to every student's spiritual growth. Relationally, only 24.3% of students felt that MDA was dedicated to providing for local and global needs. However, 56.7% believed that MDA had staff and teachers dedicated to building relationships outside of the classroom.

Overall, data suggested that students' perceptions of the pillars were not equal. Data supported their perceptions and feedback that some pillars were given more attention. However, each pillar, apart from artistic expression, appeared to be adequately fulfilled when explored individually.

Triangulation of Results

Feedback from the three stakeholder groups presented common themes and data. The triangulation of these results was organized into each of their corresponding Pillars of Excellence. The triangulation of the stakeholders' feedback reflected the adequacy of how, if at all, MDA fulfilled its mission.

Artistic expression. Artistic Expression had the smallest amount of feedback in both staff and alumni responses. However, then-current students felt strongly that the arts programs were not a priority or funded in a way that showed the school valued them more or equally as other programs, specifically athletics. Nearly 67% of then-current students did not feel as though MDA was dedicated to growing and teaching classical and fine arts. Staff ratings of the importance of each pillar affirmed students' perceptions, as artistic expression was ranked the lowest of all five pillars.

The single piece of alumni data geared towards the artistic expression also trended as the lowest scoring in terms of MDA's preparation. Less than 55% of alumni felt artistically prepared after leaving MDA. This lack of focus and program availability seemed to be a trend regardless of when students attended.

Rationale and reflection. The alumni survey questions were not geared towards specific programs, other than academics. Therefore, with the exception of one question, alumni participants were not prompted to reflect on their classical or fine arts experience at MDA. However, it is important to note that the arts programs had slowly evolved since the first graduating class of 1998. Experiences through earlier graduating years pertaining to the arts were different and smaller in variety than those of the senior class at the time of research. However, the senior class perception of a lack of attention and

dedication to the growth of the artistic pillar was valid and pertinent; thus, reflecting in the results of the student perception sub-question.

Relational development. All three stakeholder groups reported relational development, in terms of personal relationships, as a notable strength within MDA. More than 90% of both then-current staff and students reported that staff and teachers were dedicated to building relationships with students. Alumni data provided extensive feedback that discussed relationships that continued far beyond graduating from MDA with not only former classmates, but also with staff and coaches. This data further affirmed adequate fulfillment in this pillar.

A weakness consistent with staff open-ended responses and then-current students was in regards to local and global community service. Student responses reflected their desire for more local service opportunities, and staff replied with a need and desire to provide more opportunities. However, the open-ended responses and Likert scale responses varied in perceptions. While only slightly less than 10% of staff disagreed-or-strongly disagreed that MDA was dedicated to providing for local community and global needs, over 24% of students disagreed-or-strongly disagreed. Despite then-current staff and students reporting a lack of opportunities and focus on service, only 29% of alumni reported to not serve locally or globally in some way at the time of research. Of the remaining 71% reporting that they served locally or globally, a majority did so within a church or ministry.

Rationale and reflection. The strength of personal relationships throughout students' years of attending MDA, as well as the continuance of them post-high school, made MDA unique. The evidence affirming that this strength has remained, even

through the school's growth, is especially significant. Staff and student perception of a lack of focus on local and global service was evident; but, alumni appeared to have a desire to serve post high school, with the majority volunteering within their churches or other ministries. Research supported this data. Pennings et al. (2014) reported that Evangelistic, Protestant students were more likely to serve within their church congregations than those who were not religious. While MDA may certainly have played a part in influencing the desire to serve, there was not enough evidence to support alumni service as a direct result of MDA's relational development pillar.

Spiritual growth. Over 80% of then-current students and staff both agreed-to-strongly agreed that classes were taught with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview. They also agreed that staff and teachers were dedicated to helping each student grow spiritually. However, data from alumni revealed that many did not feel they were prepared for the secular world, or for defending their faith against opposing views post-high school. Likewise, less than half of then-current seniors agreed-or-strongly agreed that they felt prepared to defend their faith in a secular setting, affirming that students were leaving feeling unprepared and unaware of opposing views. Many staff open-ended responses also referred to not equipping students adequately in this area.

An additional triangulation piece from all three stakeholder groups was the existence of legalism. Many stakeholders referred to a culture of being unaccepted or unloved when Christian beliefs were questioned or challenged in the classroom. Some alumni respondents replied that they felt, because of the existence of this environment, it directly influenced why either they themselves, or other alumni classmates, had walked away from the faith.

Rationale and reflection. These pieces of data were important to MDA. While students were being taught from a Biblical worldview, curriculum and classroom discussions were not preparing them for other worldviews. This may have been a substantial factor in equipping students to adequately fulfill the mission statement. However, the perception from both students and staff that teachers were dedicated to each student's spiritual growth correlated to the strength of personal relationships in the relational development pillar.

A narrow-minded and legalistic environment was important to address. Many alumni felt that staff focused on moral behavior more than grace and a genuine interest in students' lives and hearts. As MDA grew and evolved, many of those specific moral behavior responses became fewer from the more recent graduates. It could be there was a much heavier presence of legalism, based upon morality for the alumni in earlier years. However, a perceived environment of legalism had increased in terms of students experiencing an unacceptance of differing beliefs.

Academic excellence. Majority of both staff and alumni concurred that MDA adequately prepared students for post-high school. While there was a significant lack of preparation mentioned by alumni in the areas of science and math, many mentioned the strength of the English department. There was also a correlation between staff and then-current students, which implied a focus placed only on providing for the needs of college-bound students. This suggested a lack of focus on students as individuals and on their passions and gifts.

Rationale and reflection. It was key to note that an inadequacy in science was an overwhelming response by alumni. Alumni stated that they felt unprepared for the

college classroom, not only in content knowledge, but also in their ability to defend their faith against the differing science views. They specifically referred to not understanding views outside of creation well enough to adequately defend their beliefs. There was a need for balance in the science classroom for Biblical worldview, through the teaching of other worldviews.

Distinguished athletics. There was a strong parallel between staff and students who discussed an over-emphasis of athletics. While Likert-scale responses reflected MDA was dedicated to the growth of this pillar, many felt that other areas, specifically the arts, grew at the detriment of this focus. Senior class students overwhelmingly felt the arts were overlooked, specifically because of a hyper-focus on athletics. A few alumni responses referred to a lack of athletic and extra-curricular activities. However, many of those responses were from earlier graduating years, before the growth of the athletics program.

Rationale and reflection. MDA felt that the growth of an athletics program would benefit enrollment. While that had been true to some extent, the data from then-current staff and students implied an unhealthy balance that created a void for artistically inclined students. Many students desired a variety of fine arts opportunities and funding. While the schools' extra-curricular and fine arts programs had grown over the years, there had not been the focus on their growth pace equal to the athletics.

Unexpected Findings

There were several unexpected findings throughout the research study. Each finding was organized per its corresponding pillar. There was an additional section

provided for unexpected findings within the mission and vision, as well as for alumni feedback.

Unexpected mission and vision findings. The first finding was that MDA did not have a written, formal vision statement. As an employee of the school for several years, I knew that I had never seen one written. However, it became even more alarming that the school existed since 1980, but a vision statement appeared to not be a vital or foundational piece throughout seasons of change and growth. Upon further questioning throughout the data collection phase, the superintendent responded that the MDA school board had tasked him to informally establish a vision statement. In his opinion, that informal vision statement was summed up into one word: Excellence (K. Currivean, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

It was concerning that close to 50% of the staff and faculty claimed that MDA was fulfilling its vision when one did not exist. This would further the possibility of mission drift, as almost half of the teachers were working towards a vision that reflected their own, individual perception. This may not only lead to mission drift, but it may also lead to an unintended disunity within the school.

Another unexpected find from staff, student, and alumni feedback was the emerging theme that MDA had experienced a loss of identity. Many staff responders referred to the desire of growth resulting in a sacrifice and compromise of accepting families that were not mission fit. Because of the perceived acceptance and the continued enrollment of the missionally unfit families, it called into question by both staff and students as to whether MDA was truly committed to being a discipleship model. Teachers felt this compromise in the classrooms through lack of communication with

families, along with understanding some students would go home to an environment that did not partner with the one they experienced at school.

At the time of this research study, a family was said to be mission fit if at least one parent or guardian professed a faith in Jesus Christ. At the middle and high school levels, a student could profess his or her personal faith without a parent or guardian and gain admittance. Families were also required to present a pastoral reference letter at the time of initial enrollment that stated they attended the pastor's church regularly and were involved. After the letter was received at the time of a student's initial enrollment, there was no accountability to ensure families maintained church attendance or involvement. Many teachers referred to students and families who clearly did not stay involved in church or show evidence of a walk with Christ.

Alumni feedback showed a perceived loss of identity compared to when they were students; so much so that some alumni would not consider choosing to send their kids to MDA, even though they would consider a Christian education. One alumnus stated his belief in the loss of identity as a loss of vision saying:

I would seriously consider other options. I do not feel that [MDA] has maintained the same values and goals that it had when I was attending. During my time the schools and the board were far from perfect, but I feel as if the direction has strayed from what the school was originally created for.

A different area of loss of identity discovered through open-ended responses was the loss of a one-school mentality. MDA claimed to be one school, but two campuses. However, the repeated responses from staff of a lack of knowledge to things that happened at the campus opposite of them showed there was a disconnect from the one-

school mentality. One staff member acknowledged the goal was to be one school, but responded the desire to keep events separate. He/she said:

Even though the goal is to be one school, I think it is important for each school to have their own time to share with one another through Christmas gathering or instead of weekly meetings, maybe one of those could be used to gather the teachers together to go over a topic without being structured as a meeting.

Claiming to be one school, but having staff that did not desire to do things as such, or staff that did not know what the other campuses did in terms of foundational components of the pillars, created a disconnect that could have eventual, negative ramifications.

Only 18.9% of then-current students claimed to have known the Five Pillars of Excellence. Considering these pillars were foundational components in the way that MDA fulfilled its mission, more awareness of the pillars was expected. These results posed the questions if families were aware of these pillars, and whether they were communicated in any other way other than the school's website.

Unexpected artistic expression findings. The overall lack of data and feedback on activities and programs within the artistic expression findings was significant. The only time the arts were referred to was through negative feedback. No stakeholder referred to artistic expression being a strength of the school. Instead, the times it was mentioned were in reference to there being little focus specifically to fine arts and the arts were constantly overshadowed by the athletic programs. Then-current students had the most to say about this imbalanced approach, and staff rated artistic expression as the lowest pillar of importance to MDA. Alumni also felt the least prepared artistically.

These perceptions were significant, as there was a growing desire within the student body to have a variety of fine arts opportunities.

Unexpected spiritual growth findings. Legalism was a common theme mentioned throughout all three stakeholder groups. Students mentioned there was an overabundance of focus on rules, rather than on more important areas, such as academics. They mentioned there was a bias to those who had differing beliefs. Staff and faculty also responded seeing an un-loving environment for students who questioned beliefs, which resulted in students being too fearful to speak up or voice opinions. Alumni also referred to the existence of legalism, especially in the area of moral behaviors. Many saw the ways staff focused more on following the rules and moral parts of the student handbook, rather than focusing on the individuals and their hearts or spiritual state.

The researcher found it surprising that although all stakeholder groups mentioned legalism and the negative effects it had, it did not seem that relational development suffered. The researcher believed this could be a result of the majority of teachers not embracing a classroom culture of legalism, but instead one of trust. Clearly there were staff and faculty who had shown enough love and grace to compensate for those who intentionally or unintentionally created a culture of legalism.

Another unexpected finding was that a large percentage of alumni, along with then-current students, were not prepared to defend their faith post-high school. While there was a recognized focus for content areas to be taught through a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview, this did not translate into preparing students for opposing views. The researcher believed a misunderstanding existed that when one taught from a Biblical worldview, it was automatically preparing students to defend their faith. This was not

necessarily true. While it was recognized that all students did not leave MDA desiring a relationship with the Lord, the school had a responsibility to educate students through a Biblical worldview, which should have incorporated opposing views.

Unexpected relational development findings. An impressive strength at MDA was the relational development that occurred among staff and students and students and their peers. The overwhelming response from alumni that many continued to have relationships with former teachers, coaches, and classmates was substantial. The fact that this piece had not changed over the years, and the significant growth MDA had experienced since its first graduating class of 1998, was noteworthy.

It was also surprising to see the strength of relational development through data and feedback from alumni, but simultaneously reporting that staff had ordered the relational development pillar as the second to lowest pillar of importance to the school. The researcher speculated that staff may have felt the lack of importance and focus in this area to the governing body of MDA, but they are able to bridge the gap in and out of the classrooms through the relationships they built with students.

Unexpected academic excellence findings. A surprising find was that only 27.03% of students could agree-or-strongly agree that MDA adequately prepared them for the ACT. This was unexpected as MDA students who participated in the ACT scored on average five points above the national standard. A misconception of what preparation looked like for the ACT clearly existed.

Another significant finding was the overwhelming response of alumni who felt they were inadequately prepared in science. Not only did they feel inadequately prepared in general science knowledge, but also from differing worldviews of science that opposed

Biblical teachings of creation. One alumnus stated that he/she felt personally prepared with four points of rebuttal to evolution, but then the evolutionist brought a fifth point, and they did not know how to respond. Others felt they had zero preparation in terms of other secular views of science, and even felt they were misled because of the omission of those views. These statements came from alumni who still claimed to be active Christians, as well as those who did not, which was significant. Again, teaching through a Biblical worldview did not mean curriculum automatically incorporated opposing views or how to defend one's faith. The responses came from graduates spanning a variety of years, so there was not a significant improvement or decline in this program over time.

A different finding was within staff feedback. Teachers requested more Biblical worldview training, specifically by departments. A better understanding of Biblical worldview within their content area would help them to more easily implement it within the classroom. It was concerning when one staff member said, "We try to present them with information about the world and convince them that they have the power to impact their world, wherever God leads them." While overall that statement was true, the use of the word 'convince' showed a level of misunderstanding what Biblical worldview is. The greatest depth of understanding in Biblical worldview exists when the student is able to respond to the teacher and answer questions from an understanding of the world through a Biblical lens. Convincing students does not allow ownership of their faith. They are not arriving at their own decision when someone is trying to convince them of truth. This is consistent with the response from alumni, that many felt Biblical truths were pushed upon them, rather than presented to them as their own decision.

Another response from a staff member that indicated a misunderstanding of Biblical worldview was, “I feel we give them tools, especially how to defend their faith and answer tough questions with Biblical answers.” Again, the statement is not altogether untrue. However, the misconception that Biblical truths and Biblical worldview are the same is an extreme disconnect. This also aligns with why then-current and former students felt unprepared to defend their faith in the secular world. Responding with Biblical truths to someone who does not view the Bible as absolute truth is not sufficient. These situations are where students were finding themselves post-high school.

Unexpected distinguished athletics findings. The amount of references from staff and students indicating that more focus was put on athletics than other programs was overwhelming. The fact students felt that if you are not an athlete, you do not have a place at the school, should be disheartening to the administration. Many students discussed their desire for more fine art opportunities and variety of academic programs. However, they felt that the attention was placed on athletics in lieu of those two other areas. Staff responded similarly, discussing the imbalance and over emphasis of athletics, rather than focusing on growth of other programs.

Unexpected alumni findings. There were several noteworthy findings within the data and feedback from the alumni survey. The first finding was the encouraging percentage of former MDA students who claimed to still be active Christians post-high school. Even though 28.1% of alumni claimed to have had a point where they walked away from the faith post-high school, 87.6% still claimed an active Christian faith. Of those 87.6%, 84.4% claimed they felt they were impacting the world for the glory of God

in some way. Their responses as to how they felt that they impacted the world varied from working directly in ministry, to raising children in a godly manner. This data showed the success of MDA's mission to empower students to impact the world for the glory of God, as well as alumni's understanding that they could accomplish this in any environment or profession they chose.

It was also interesting to find that of the 87.6% who still claimed to be Christians, 85.4% of them would consider Christian education for their children. However, only 60.7% of those considering Christian education would consider choosing MDA. This is a notable difference. Some stated their explanation was that they lived out of the area, and some said it was a lack of finances. Two stated a lack of diversity politically, spiritually, racially, and artistically. Others referred to the school's loss of identity from where it was when they attended, as discussed in the earlier section, "unexpected mission and vision fulfillment findings."

Several alumni responders also replied that they would not choose MDA because of how closed-minded and sheltered it was. Many stated that they wanted their children to understand views other than just Christianity, for them to be more prepared post-high school, as well as know how to interact with people who had differing beliefs. Some mentioned that they felt it was too judgmental and did not want to subject their children to that environment.

Many alumni also referred to their contempt of what they perceived as indoctrination with Biblical, Christian truths. Some felt they were at a disservice educationally, because spiritual or religious curriculum took precedence over academics. Most respondents with this perception stated they wished religion was taken out of

content areas outside of Bible classes. The researcher feels as though these responses indicated a clear misunderstanding of MDA’s mission and purpose. The partnership with families and the pursuit to educate students with a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview was often why families choose MDA. The responses were also surprising that the respondents only blamed the school for indoctrination, but not their families.

Figure 16 displays the level at which alumni felt that MDA prepared them according to the Five Pillars of Excellence:

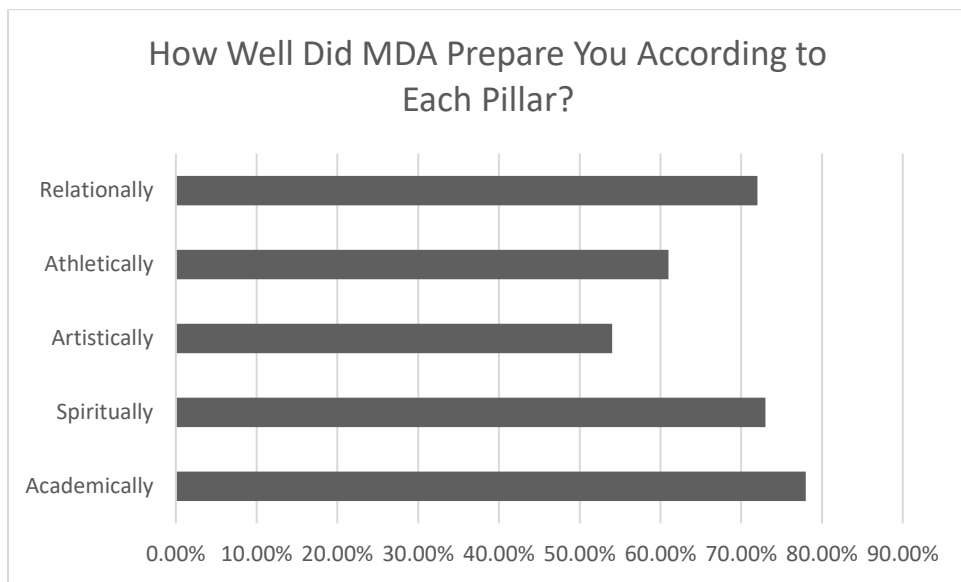


Figure 16. Alumni: MDA preparation according to the Five Pillars of Excellence.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the data collected, there are several recommendations for not only MDA to consider, but recommendations for other private, Christian schools. Each of these recommendations would directly benefit mission fulfillment, to the fullest extent. The recommendations are broken down and presented in the correlating MDA pillars, as well as an additional section for recommendations for mission and vision fulfillment.

Mission and vision fulfillment recommendations. The first and most important recommendation for any private, Christian school is the development and communication of a written, formal vision statement. Continuing without a vision statement may lead to mission drift. Gabriel and Farmer (2009) reported the importance of creating a vision statement first, because “you need to know where you want to be before you can determine how you plan to get there” (p. 1). A school needs to identify where it is headed as an organization first. Once they have identified that vision, then a mission can be created. The mission statement should be one that tells how an organization will reach its intended goal, or vision. Once each of these statements are created, each should be formally documented and communicated to stakeholders. Understanding an organization’s vision allows employees to understand where it is desiring to go in the future, as well as uniting the stakeholders to move toward a common goal.

The vision and mission statements of private, Christian schools are what set them apart from other religious or non-religious schools. Families often specifically choose discipleship model, Christian schools based upon common doctrinal beliefs and moral values that are shared by both the school and other like-minded families. It is essential for these schools to be steadfast in their visions and mission in order to maintain the integrity in which families chose them.

A very clear distinction should be made between the mission statement and the vision statement, as they are different. While a vision may change as an organization sees growth or inevitable changes over time, the mission in which they seek the current vision should remain the same. Many MDA staff and faculty responded that they felt MDA was fulfilling its vision by quoting parts of the mission statement. Others stated

that they did not understand the difference between the mission and vision statements. There was an understandable confusion on the staff's behalf considering MDA did not have a formally written or communicated vision. However, once a vision is adopted and formally written, MDA should be intentional in first, communicating the newly created vision, and secondly, ensuring stakeholders understand the difference between the vision and the already existing mission statement.

Another recommendation that directly affects MDA's mission statement, is for MDA to evaluate and decide whether they should continue operating under a discipleship model. Staff often referred to the lack of partnership with families and lack of spiritual growth of students, because their home environment was not one that would be described as missionally fit. Therefore, they felt as though their impact was limited. It would benefit MDA for the school board and administration to understand that a perception existed that families and students were consistently accepted and enrolled despite evidence that they were missionally unfit.

Once the decision has been made to remain a discipleship model or change to an evangelistic model, MDA should clearly communicate and define the chosen model with all stakeholders. Should the school board desire exploring a change in model, stakeholders should be significantly invested in the investigation, discussions, and research of the proposed change. A change in model would then result in a necessary change to its mission. Should MDA and its stakeholders choose an evangelistic model, it could no longer claim to "partner with Christian families" as the mission statement then-currently stated. An evaluation and reconstruction of the mission statement would be necessary with this change.

Should MDA remain dedicated to a discipleship model, it is a recommendation that an improvement be made during the interview process to clearly communicate what being mission fit looks like in day-to-day operations at MDA. This would give families a realistic, long-term perspective beyond simply submitting the proper paperwork at enrollment. Providing families with examples of how the school may handle different situations academically, spiritually, or behaviorally, would communicate their role, the student's role, and the school's role, to truly partner together before issues arise. This clear communication sets an expectation of a family's responsibility to partner with the school, and the school's responsibility to partner with the families. The upfront communication to families allows the school to operate within its mission, holding staff, families, and students accountable. It also allows staff and faculty to confidently react to situations accordingly, knowing they are covered under a pre-communicated understanding.

MDA would benefit from taking into consideration the percentage of active Christian alumni that would consider a Christian education, but would not consider choosing MDA. An investigation into the common themes that emerged as to why they would not choose MDA would be beneficial. Recommended programmatic changes and creating a clear vision could result in a difference in this area.

A two-part recommendation to improve the disconnect that exists between the MDA campuses is to continue creating opportunities for staff and faculty to coexist in as many ways possible, and strive to return to the original vision of being located on one campus. MDA was the only non-denominational offering in the area at its inception. However, at the time of research, several other non-denominational preschool,

elementary schools, and middle schools existed. The one unique identifier to MDA was that a student could start in preschool and never leave the school until they graduated high school. No other Christian school offered this one-school approach, at the time of research.

It would benefit MDA to strongly consider returning to the one-campus vision that previously existed. This one campus vision would not only benefit internally, but would also allow the preschool and elementary to directly feed into the middle and high schools, making a more sustainable enrollment model. The physical, visual of all levels being on one campus would markedly improve the disconnect that then-currently existed, and more easily allow for staff and faculty to build relationships across the grade levels. It would also cultivate more community between students, and allow mentorship opportunities to take place more conveniently, without the added complexity of being on separate campuses. Programs and departments would also have more opportunity to interact and truly operate as one school in regards to curriculum. The internal benefits of one campus could potentially benefit externally to the community as well.

According to MDA's school board at the time of research, spiritual and academic growth were the two most important pillars of the school (Researched Institution, 2016f). These two were said to go together in order for the school to maintain its vision. Figure 17 displays the pillars as they were presented at the time of research.

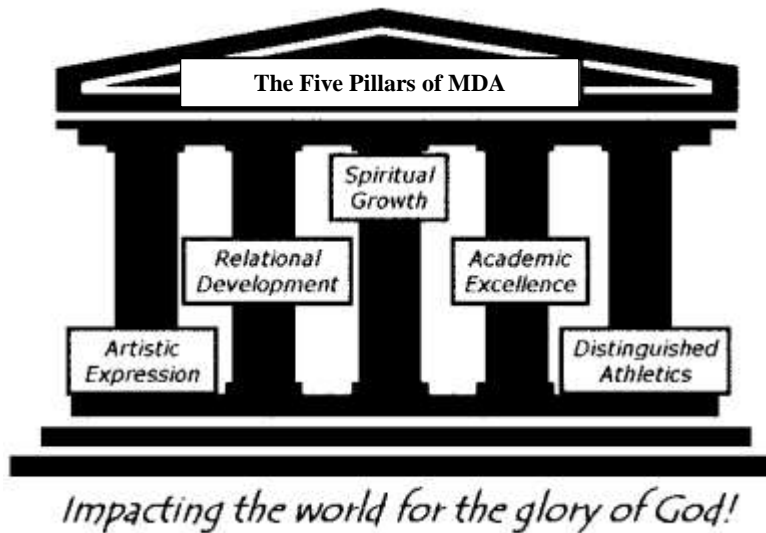


Figure 17. Five Pillars of Excellence. Adapted “Purpose” from MDA website, 2016. Reprinted with permission.

Considering the program evaluation, including the feedback from stakeholders, it is recommended that MDA revise the Pillars’ order of importance. The mission statement, discipleship model, and focus on Biblical worldview in each of the five pillars suggested that Spiritual Growth was, and should be, the most important pillar. Without a focus on the spiritual growth of each student, all other areas cannot be addressed with the excellence that MDA strives to reach. This spiritual growth concentration is what sets MDA and other Christian schools apart from other non-religious, private schools. Families have an assumption based upon the mission statement, doctrinal statement, and discipleship model that their child(ren) will be guided and supported spiritually. Therefore, the eternal, spiritual state of each student should be viewed as a larger and more important piece than any other area. Figure 18 reflects this recommended revision.

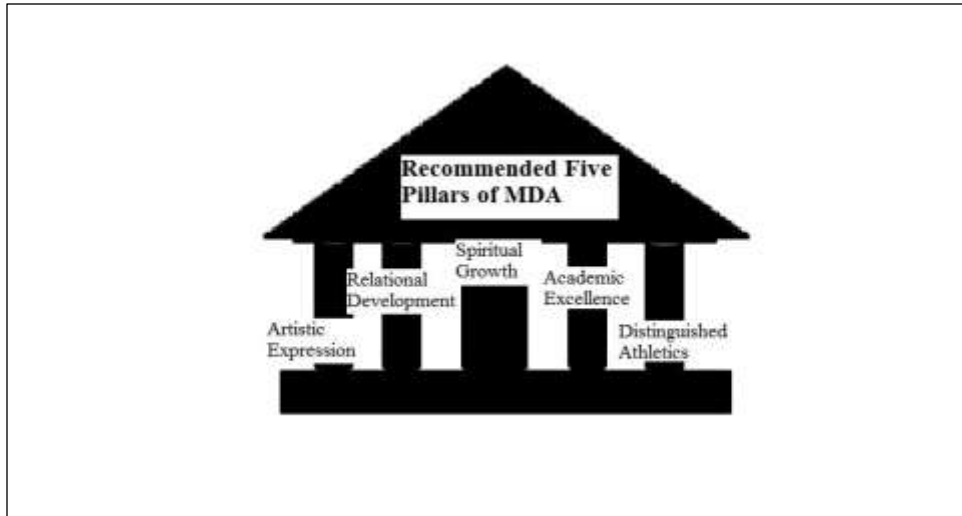


Figure 18. Recommended Pillars of Excellence revision.

This revision illustrates a wider Spiritual Growth pillar to indicate the importance and central focus of each student's spiritual life. The remaining four pillars are of equal size, symbolizing equal importance.

Artistic expression recommendations. MDA would benefit from taking a focused look at the fine arts programs. Looking for ways to concentrate attention and possibly additional funding for this pillar would help to present a more balanced approach to all pillars. Recognizing that there is a growing number of students in the student body that desire more fine arts opportunities would draw more focus to developing the whole child equally through the five pillars. This would also aid in changing students' perception that if "you're not an athlete, you're not involved by default," as one senior stated. Desiring to assist students to find and excel in their passions and gifts that they are uniquely created for requires MDA to pursue and communicate a balanced approach to all pillars.

Relational development recommendations. Relational development is a unique and essential piece of any school, private or public. The impact that staff and faculty can

have on students can be life-changing and essential to a student's success. A focus on ways to cultivate strong relationships with students would be beneficial to any school, regardless of any religious affiliation. However, relational development is especially important for private, Christian schools. While teachers can be influential mentors in both private and public sectors, teachers within a Christian school have the unique opportunity to be spiritual mentors, as well. This type of relational development is pertinent to the spiritual maturity that Christian schools and the families they serve desire their students to experience. Creating effective avenues, resources, and opportunities for staff and faculty to build these relationships is crucial to a Christian school's mission and purpose.

Considering the strength and longevity of personal relationships evidenced at MDA among teachers and students and students with their peers, it is recommended that the staff and faculty continue to focus on building and cultivating those relationships. It is also recommended that there be accountability in place for staff and faculty to obtain resources that enable them to reach all students relationally. Additionally, ensuring that staff and faculty are intentionally allotted the appropriate time and opportunities to build these relationships is essential to sustaining this pillars' strength.

The researcher believes there is a strong association between the existence of strong relational development and the evidence that many alumni report to still be active Christians that have gone on to be successful post-high school. Without the strong relationships that were built at MDA and the encouragement and influence of impactful believers, a foundation may not have been as easily or as strongly set for students as they

entered the college or career path. Maintaining and continually improving in this area will continue to set MDA apart as a unique place to send one's child.

Spiritual growth recommendations. MDA staff and students alike would benefit from evaluating the legalistic culture that clearly exists. Recognizing the staff that clearly promote an environment of love and grace could provide collaboration opportunities of how they implement and foster that environment. It is recommended that MDA provide resources to staff that would help identify what type of environment exists within their classrooms. Helping them to understand what their perceptions of their classroom environment are, compared to how students perceive it would be an excellent way to evaluate strengths and weaknesses that exist. To continue cultivating the strong relational development that has existed, the researcher believes a self-study in this area would benefit MDA as a whole.

Another considerable area of growth would be in creating an environment in which students feel safe in asking questions that may contradict a Christ-centered, Biblical worldview. The researcher firmly believes that this is a built-in opportunity for teachers to prepare students for opposing views. Teachers need to intentionally facilitate and allow opportunities for students to have these discussions. They need to allow and foster an environment that enables students to question what they are learning and utilize higher-order thinking to seek out the answers themselves.

MDA can provide an environment in which students are able to question their beliefs within a safe setting where families trust the teacher will guide them back to the Bible. In the then-current culture, it is important for students to choose their faith and claim it as their own. Then, when they are confronted with opposing worldviews after

high school, they can stand firm in their beliefs and give intelligent, thoughtful answers as it would not be the first time in which they have been confronted with such thoughts or ideas. The researcher believes that should MDA implement this recommendation, there would be a decrease in student perception that legalism exists, due to the unacceptance of questioning or differing beliefs in the classroom.

Academic excellence recommendations. A factor unique to private, Christian schools is the integration of Biblical worldview throughout content areas. While some Christian schools may reserve Biblical truths and principles to moral issues and Bible classes, it is vital that students are prepared to see all content through a Biblical lens, if they are to have a persistent and bold faith post-high school. However, it is just as important that academic content not be censored or over-spiritualized so much that other worldviews are not discussed. Christian schools must provide resources and training for teachers in order to implement Biblical worldview both confidently and well.

Even though MDA students scored above the national average ACT score, the fact that only 27.03% felt prepared to take the ACT is important to note. It would benefit MDA students to understand ways in which they are being prepared throughout the curriculum to succeed at the ACT. It would also benefit MDA students to have or know of already existing resources available to them that would help in their confidence of being adequately prepared. Relieving students of the anxiety of not feeling prepared alone may improve their overall score, which in turn could raise MDA's average to more than five points above the national average.

An additional recommendation for academic excellence is taking a constructive view of the science curriculum. More focus on presenting science through a Biblical

worldview with the addition of including secular worldviews should be considered and implemented. While opposing views are discussed in the then-current curriculum, it is evident that students continue to leave unprepared for the college science classroom. Discussions and worldviews should be presented in a way that allow and facilitate the opportunity for students to think for themselves, but within a safe environment. This provides a way for students to understand Biblical truths, understand why they believe what they believe, and arrive at those decisions on their own. Many alumni referred to feeling as though teachers presented Biblical truths as the only theory that existed. This did not allow or prepare students to decide to accept these truths for themselves, nor did it prepare them for other theories that existed in the secular classroom.

Many staff members mentioned the desire for better Biblical worldview training was specific to their department. It would benefit MDA to hear from its staff on their desire in this area and provide content-specific training. This would help the confusion between Biblical truths and Biblical worldview that exists. Better training and better understanding would help teachers to see opportunities and ways to implement worldview discussions, both formally and informally with students. This would result in better preparation and a more solid foundation for students as they enter the secular world post-high school.

Another academic recommendation is to present more trade school and non-college options for students. Staff expressed a need to see and foster a climate driven towards each individual student's gifts and passions, rather than a focus on college-bound students only. Only 28% of then-current students agreed-or-strongly agreed that they had been provided with adequate trade school opportunities. If MDA believes that each

student is uniquely created, then ensuring all students have an opportunity to be successful post-high school is vital to encouraging each student to find their passion and gifts, regardless if it is college or career.

One recommendation that came from a staff member was concerning professional development opportunities. She said:

Collaboration is just so important and useful as well. I just personally really benefit from bringing people in or sending people out. It's exposure to different things that gives you different ways of doing things. We always enjoy hearing from each other because it's easy to become an island by yourself. But, there are things other people do in their classrooms that would help me in mine.

I think the past two years we have tried to do that and are doing better. I just think we need a strategy. When you're teaching all day long, you don't know what's out there in the world of resources. So it's like we need someone who can bring those resources in and say "Hey, here's some different things to use and how you can use them." We need help with that.

Offering more opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other builds community as well as tools and resources. The staff member's recommendation of providing someone to help with providing new resources to teachers specific to their curriculum would also benefit overall academic excellence and is a noteworthy suggestion.

Distinguished athletics recommendations. It is a recommendation that MDA communicate less of a focus on athletics and more on other programs, specifically the arts. Students should feel their individual passions and gifts have an opportunity to thrive

and grow at MDA. Since not all students will be athletes, communicating more avenues for them to pursue other activities and passions is vital to the success of MDA being able to develop the whole child in all five pillars. MDA should consider how to make programmatic changes to ensure a more balanced approach to the pillars, or they need to evaluate how their communication, or lack of communication, has played a significant role in the perception that they desire to grow athletics over other programs. If they do in fact desire to primarily grow athletics, the reasoning as to why should be better communicated, so that families and students can choose MDA accordingly. When an equal care for each pillar is presented, families and students assume that will take place. Their perceptions at the time of data collection for this research did not support this.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research in Christian schools emerged from this study. The driving force of any Christian school is their mission. Christian schools are unique in why they exist, the families in which they serve, and the ways, financially and physically, in which they are able to function.

The first recommendation for future research is a comparison between the persistence of faith from students who attended a discipleship model, Christian school, and students who attended an evangelistic model, Christian school. It would appear that students who attended a discipleship model school would be more likely to have a higher percentage of alumni exhibiting a persistence of faith post-high school than those of an evangelistic model. Data collected through this research could benefit both models and allow for programmatic and curricular changes that would positively impact students' spiritual lives and their ability to persist in the faith post-high school.

An additional recommendation for future research would be to investigate the factors that contribute to lower academic scores in evangelistic Protestant schools. Identifying these factors could lead to programmatic changes that would allow these schools to improve and be more competitive with Lutheran and Catholic schools, as well as continue giving an advantage over public school students. Improving academic rigor within evangelistic protestant schools balanced with a Biblical worldview would continue to create the already unique culture that exists within them.

A third recommendation for further research within Christian schools would be to investigate the average percentage of legacy that exists. Understanding what factors are more likely to encourage Christian school alumni to enroll their own children in the same schools they attended would be significant for future planning and development of then-current and future Christian schools. This research could also encourage programmatic changes or continued implementations that would continue to benefit students.

There are several recommendations for future research involving instrumentation. After analyzing staff responses to whether they believed MDA fulfilled its vision, I would have instead asked them to state the vision. This would have allowed a clearer understanding as to what the perceived vision was for the 42% of staff who responded that they believed MDA was fulfilling it. Another change in the design of the survey questions would have included considering the roles of support staff. Questions may have unintentionally implied content-area driven thinking or mainstream classroom environment thinking, rather than programmatic or inclusion of utilizing support staff.

Three instrumentation changes for student surveys were identified, as well. It would have been beneficial to know if students attended MDA simply because their

families wanted them to, if it was their choice, or if their families chose MDA for them initially, but they were happy with that choice. This information would also offer clarity to the perception that many alumni reported when they negatively reflected on feeling indoctrinated by the school. Students who do not desire to be at MDA will more than likely resent the focus on spiritual growth, therefore feeling as though it is forced upon them or feeling indoctrinated. Understanding this may help staff and faculty in their approach to students and add to their understanding of academic or social behaviors.

A second change to student surveys would have been to include the alumni survey question with regard to whether they considered themselves to be an active Christian. This question would have helped in a comparison to the alumni data. Understanding what percentage of students leave claiming to walk in faith and comparing to what percentage maintains a persistence in faith post-high school would be a beneficial piece of data for MDA. Based upon those findings, additional research could be conducted to find why or when students depart from the faith, which could institute programmatic changes at MDA.

The third change to student surveys would have been include the staff survey question that asked respondents to order the pillars according to how they perceived they were displayed by MDA. While the feedback they gave implied some ordering, the data could have been compared to staff perceptions for better triangulation. It would have also brought better clarity of student perception towards all five pillars.

Conclusion

The intent of this research study was to explore the congruency between mission and practice at MDA. The study used data and feedback from the perception of three

stakeholder groups (then-current staff, then-current students, and alumni) to evaluate the fulfillment of the school's mission statement. The study utilized the school's five foundational components, referred to as the Five Pillars of Excellence (Artistic Expression, Relational Development, Spiritual Growth, Academic Excellence, and Distinguished Athletics), to evaluate programmatic and mission fulfillment. Results of the study revealed additional research opportunities for further research that would specifically benefit Christian schools and fulfillment of their mission and visions. The specific results of this research study concluded that MDA was fulfilling their overall mission in equipping students in a Christ-centered education and empowering them to impact the world for the glory of God.

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Appendix A

Parent Letter

Good morning, Senior Class Parents!

My name is Allison Bearden, and I serve as the [elementary school] assistant principal and the MDA curriculum coordinator. I have had the pleasure of teaching many of your students in elementary or middle school!

Just as we are encouraging our students to be lifelong learners, I too am dedicated to continuing my learning. I am currently an EdD student at Lindenwood University where I am pursuing my doctorate in Instructional Leadership. I am requesting your senior student's help in my data collection as they have a unique perspective. I feel strongly that their perception of their MDA experience, no matter how long they have attended, is vital to my study which ultimately will benefit our school.

I am in the final stages of my degree and dissertation. My dissertation explores if our school fulfills its mission statement. The study will use data given by current students, staff, and alumni. I think your student's perspective is important in whether or not mission fulfillment is taking place.

I will be attending their advisory period on December 1st, and they will have an opportunity to take a paper survey. In order for them to be allowed to take the survey, the attached consent and assent form must be signed and returned by the advisory period on December 1st. If your child is 18 years of age or older, they will fill out and sign the form titled "Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities". If your child is under the age of 18, you will need to complete and sign the form titled "Informed Consent for Parents to Sign for Student Participation in Research Activities".

All answers will be anonymous. At no point in the study will your child's identification be requested or reported.

If you have any questions regarding your child's participation in this study, or additional questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail, or by phone at [phone number removed].

Thank you so much for your consideration in helping me collect data! I believe their perspective is vital to accurate data collection and vital to helping us as a school better partner with you and other families in years to come. I sincerely appreciate you and your student's time.

Have a wonderful day!

Miss Allison Bearden

Appendix B

Staff Interview Questions

1. How do you believe that LWCS fulfills its mission in equipping students with a Christ-centered education?
2. What is some evidence that students are understanding content within a Biblical worldview?
3. How well do you think students are able to persist in the faith post high school in the college or career fields?
4. When you say that 50% are playing a game... how do you know that and what do you think about that missionally?
5. What are some of the strengths of LWCS education?
6. What are some examples of ways that you see the district partnering with parents?
7. Do you know the pillars?
8. Do you feel all of the pillars of excellence are equally important to staff, administration, and board? Why or why not?
9. What are we not doing as a school that we should?
10. Are there any other thoughts that would be beneficial to LWCS? Or anything you wish you could change/grievances?

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 12. LWCS has staff and teachers dedicated to helping each student grow spiritually.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 13. LWCS has multiple course offerings from which students may choose.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 14. LWCS has a variety of honors courses in which students can enroll.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 15. LWCS appropriately challenges students in each class.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 16. LWCS provides teachers who are appropriately equipped to teach their subject area.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 17. LWCS provides classes that are interesting to students.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 18. LWCS provides teachers who keep students engaged in coursework through a variety of ways (i.e. using technology, engaging discussions, enjoyable activities etc.)**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 19. LWCS prepares students for the ACT.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | Cannot Answer | | |
- 20. LWCS offers a variety of sports programs.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 21. LWCS provides knowledgeable coaches for athletes.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | Cannot Answer | | |
- 22. LWCS athletic coaches are strong spiritual leaders.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | Cannot Answer | | |
- 23. LWCS provides adequate facilities to practice and play each sport.**
- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|----------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree |
| Strongly Disagree | | | |
- 24. LWCS has a competitive and successful athletics program.**

Vitae

Allison Leigh Bearden is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and a firm believer in the value of being a life-long learner. After attending a private, Christian school kindergarten-12th grade, she attended Lindenwood University and earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. She later continued at Lindenwood and obtained her Master of Arts in School Administration, and now her Doctorate in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Andragogy.

Allison remains passionate about the important role and impact Christian education plays in students and families lives. She wishes to influence other Christian schools through her research to examine the effectiveness and the congruency of their mission and practice. May all their decisions be mission-driven and have a positive, eternal impact on students and families.