



TENDING THE TEACHER PIPELINE

**An Analysis of the Teacher
Pipeline in Christian Schools**

ACSI 
STRONGER TOGETHER
2023

Alison Johnson
Matthew H. Lee

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Association of Christian Schools International
P.O. Box 62249, Colorado Springs, CO 80962
www.acsi.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alison Johnson Alison Johnson is a Research Fellow at ACSI and Ph.D. student in education policy and research. Formerly, she taught in public and private Christian schools.

Matthew H. Lee, Ph.D. is a Senior Fellow at ACSI and clinical assistant professor at Kennesaw State University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Empirical research consistently documents evidence of the important role teachers play in student outcomes as measured by everything from standardized test scores and graduation rates to civic and noncognitive measures. While some research has examined the composition, preparation, and prior experiences of public school teachers, very little has been done to consider teachers in private schools, particularly private Christian schools. If we believe teachers are important to student learning, we should strive to understand who they are in the hopes of finding effective teachers for Christian schools.

In the fall of 2021, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) piloted a survey on spiritual formation in Christian schools. While the primary purpose of the study was to develop a validated instrument for understanding spiritual formation and biblical worldview development, the survey also featured questions about teachers' professional experience, demographic characteristics, and educational background. These questions provide rich, descriptive evidence of teachers in private Christian schools.

This report summarizes our first set of findings with respect to the teacher pipeline. Altogether, we collected data on 982 teachers broadly representative of ACSI membership and considered their demographic characteristics, prior experience and certification, educational attainment and spiritual formation, and current work as a teacher. Some of our main findings include:

- Teachers in private Christian schools are predominantly female and White, though teachers in international schools are more diverse with respect to ethnicity.
- Teachers in international schools tend to be younger and less experienced than teachers in U.S. schools.
- About three-fifths of our sample has attained a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education, and another third has gone on to attain an advanced graduate degree.
- Many teachers attended a private Christian college or university for either their undergraduate or graduate studies. About three-fifths of the sample attended a private Christian college or university at some point in their educational careers.
- With respect to reasons for choosing their educational institutions, desired program or faculty, a faith-based program, proximity to family, and affordability were among the top reasons for choosing an undergraduate institution, while desired program or faculty and flexibility were the top two reasons for choosing a graduate institution.
- When it comes to teachers' own spiritual formation, we observe some differences when comparing teachers who ever attended a faith-based higher education institution and teachers who never attended a faith-based higher education institution. "Ever attenders" were more likely to report personal study, friends and mentors, and campus ministries as playing a major part of their spiritual formation while "never attenders" were more likely to state that they experienced little spiritual growth as undergraduate or graduate students. Both "ever attenders" and "never attenders" were more likely to report that church played a major role in their spiritual formation as graduate students than as undergraduate students.
- The most common bachelor's degree was in the field of education, with nearly half of all U.S. teachers majoring in education as undergraduate students.
- Teachers are involved in student life outside of the classroom. Three-quarters of U.S. teachers and nearly 90 percent of international teachers report some involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Teachers report having the most influence over professional development, teacher evaluation, and student spiritual formation, but very little influence over their own spiritual wellness.
- Teachers believe faith has a major influence on their school's statement of faith, mission statement, and school culture, and less influence on their school's dress code, special education and inclusion, and philosophy of diversity.
- Teachers believe spiritual formation is the top reason why a parent would choose their school, and also that partnership with parents is the biblical foundation for Christian education.

These data provide important insights into the incredible work being done by Christian school teachers. We hope this report will prove helpful for teachers and leaders everywhere as they carry out their missions to prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2021, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) piloted a survey on spiritual formation in Christian schools. While the primary purpose of the study was to develop a validated instrument for understanding spiritual formation and biblical worldview development, the survey also featured questions about teachers' professional experience, demographic characteristics, and educational background.

Altogether, 982 teachers representing 33 ACSI member schools in the United States (878 teachers) and abroad (104 teachers in international schools (English-speaking schools outside the United States serving children of expatriates and other students) in Cambodia, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Tanzania) completed the survey. The schools that participated in the pilot study are broadly representative of ACSI membership. Twenty-nine are based in the United States, with the remaining four outside of the US. Twenty-nine are accredited by ACSI, while four are unaccredited members or accredited by another organization. The vast majority are PK/K-12 schools, with one PK-8 school. Two-thirds (22 schools) are covenantal while 11 schools are

missional. Roughly two-thirds (23 schools) are governed by an independent board and the other ten schools are affiliated with a church.

The schools are also broadly representative of membership by enrollment, tuition, and division. Six schools (18 percent) are in the smallest enrollment bracket, enrolling between one and 200 students; eight schools (24 percent) enroll between 201 and 400 students; eleven schools (33 percent) enroll between 401 and 700 students; and eight schools (24 percent) enroll over 700 students. The average tuition for these schools was \$10,174, with a median of \$10,000 and a range of \$6,200 to \$16,410. The Eastern US Division had the greatest representation, with 14 schools, followed by Central (11 schools) and Western (four schools).

With respect to teachers, we analyzed a rich set of respondent characteristics, including information on demographics, prior experience and certification, educational attainment and spiritual formation, and current work as a teacher. We share our findings in this report.

Teacher Demographics

Teachers in our sample were disproportionately female (79 percent in the US and 73 percent internationally; see Figure 1). By ethnicity, teachers in international schools were significantly more diverse than teachers in the US, where

88 percent of teachers identify as White (see Figure 2). In international schools, 26 percent identified as Asian, six percent as Black, one percent as Hispanic, and 11 percent as multiple races/ethnicities or another race/ethnicity. The sample featured a mix of early childhood, elementary,

Fig. 1: Teachers' Gender

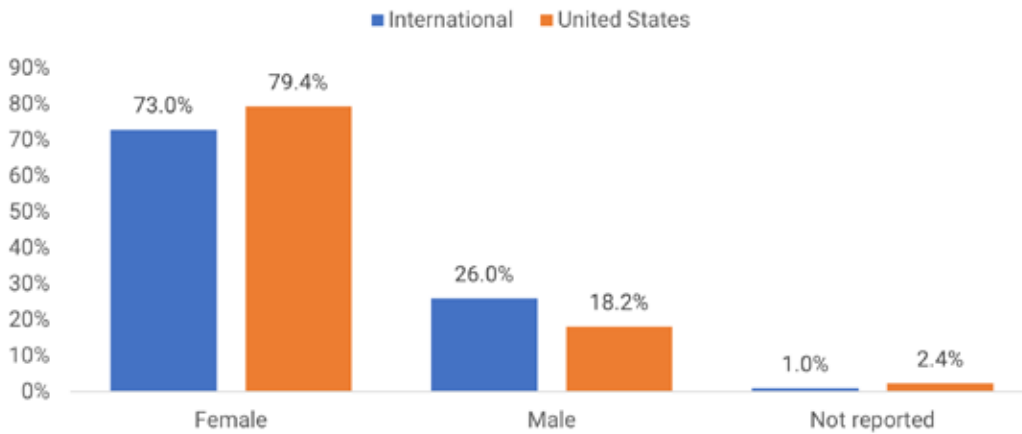
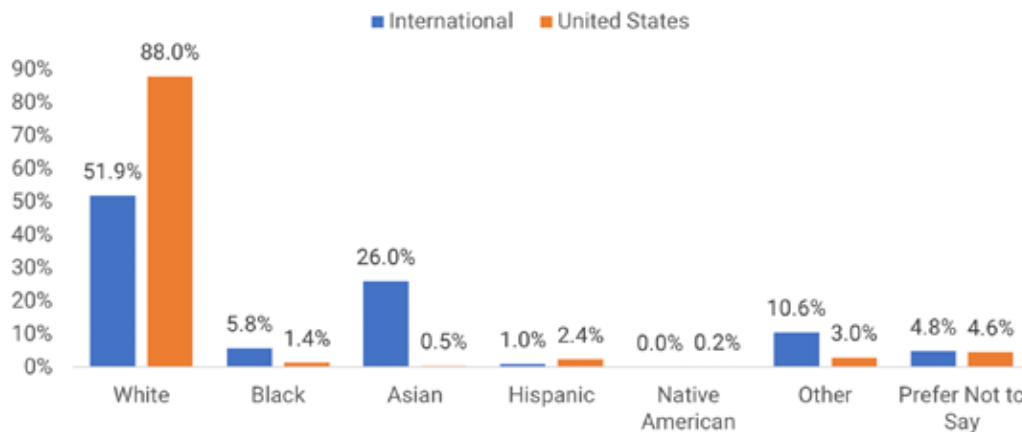


Fig. 2: Teachers' Race/Ethnicity



middle, and high school teachers, as well as experience teaching a broad range of content areas (see Figures 3 and 4).

International teachers tended to be younger (see Figure 5), less experienced (see Figure 6), and less likely to be

married (correlated with age; see Figure 7) than US teachers. The average international teacher was 41 years old, with a median age of 40 years, while the average US teacher was 46 years old, with a median age of 46 years. Similarly, the

Fig. 3: Percent of Teachers Currently Teaching Each Grade Level

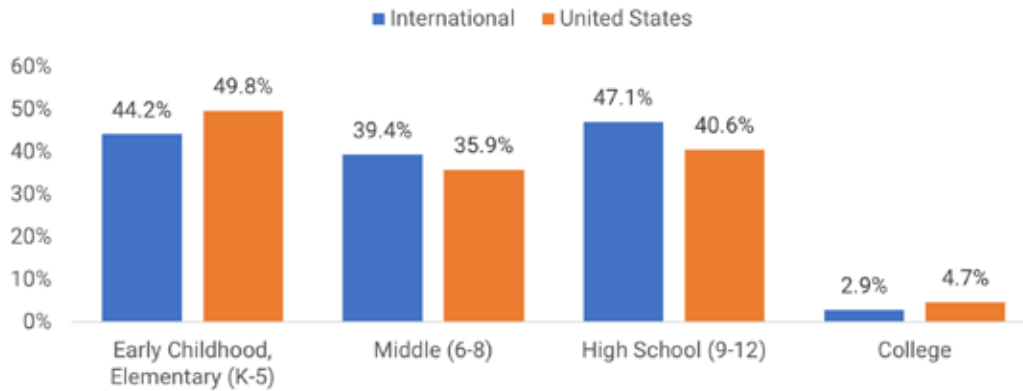


Fig. 4: Content Areas Ever Taught by Teachers

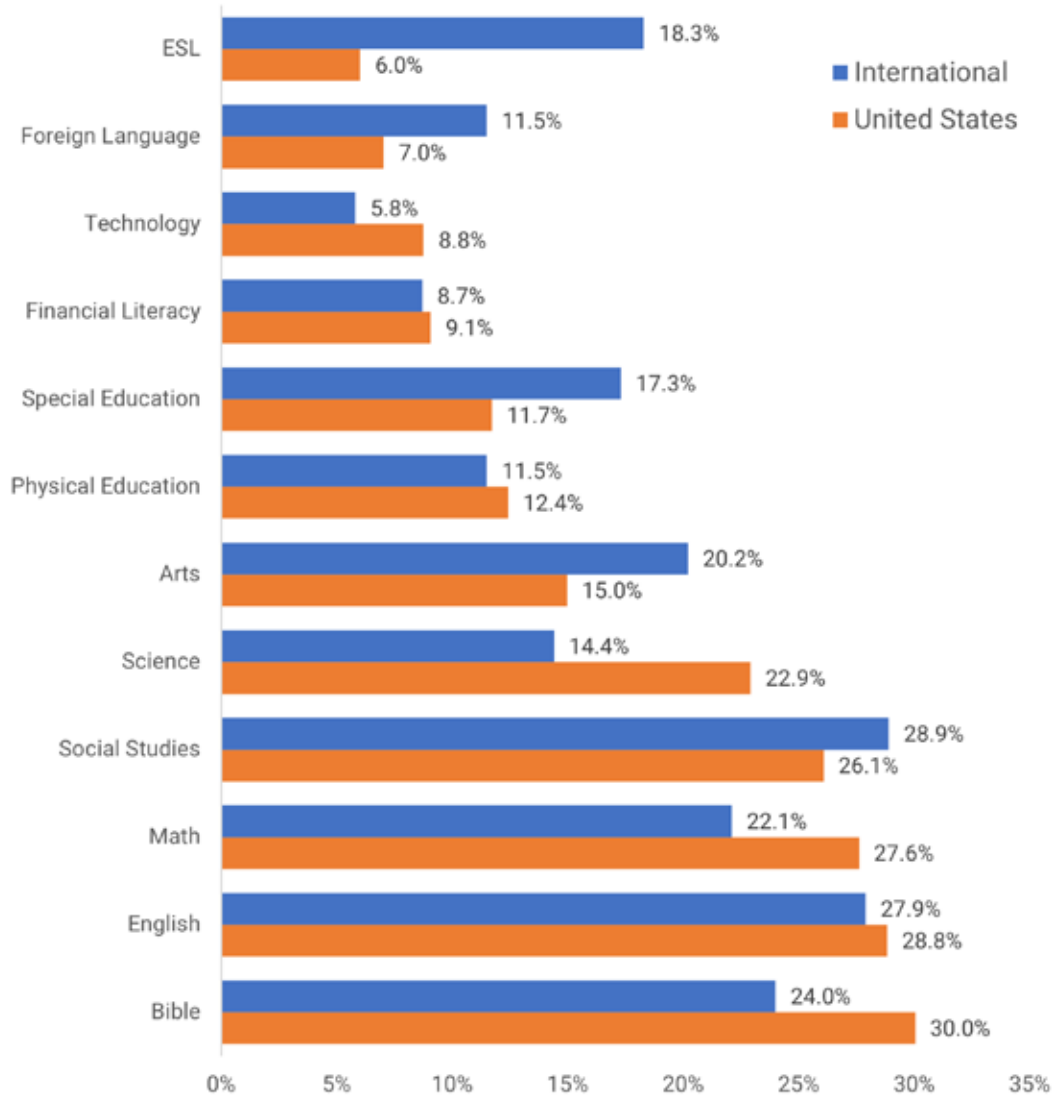


Fig. 5: Teachers' Age

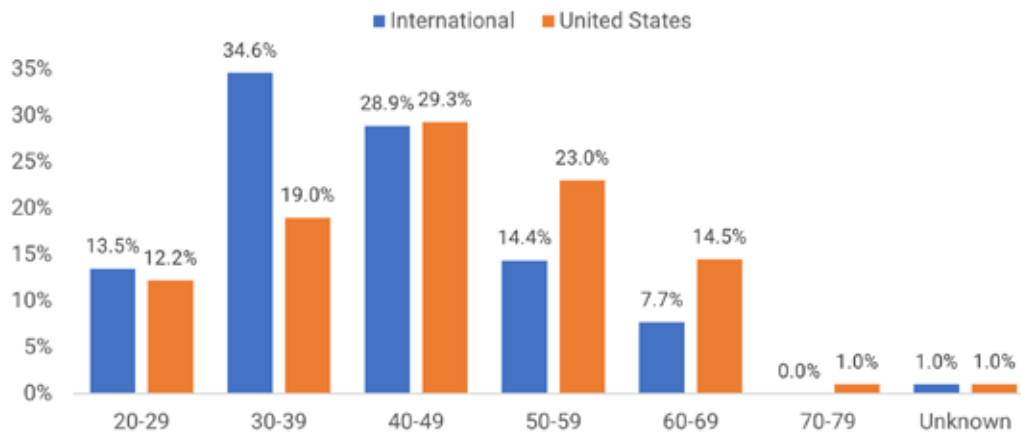


Fig. 6: Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience

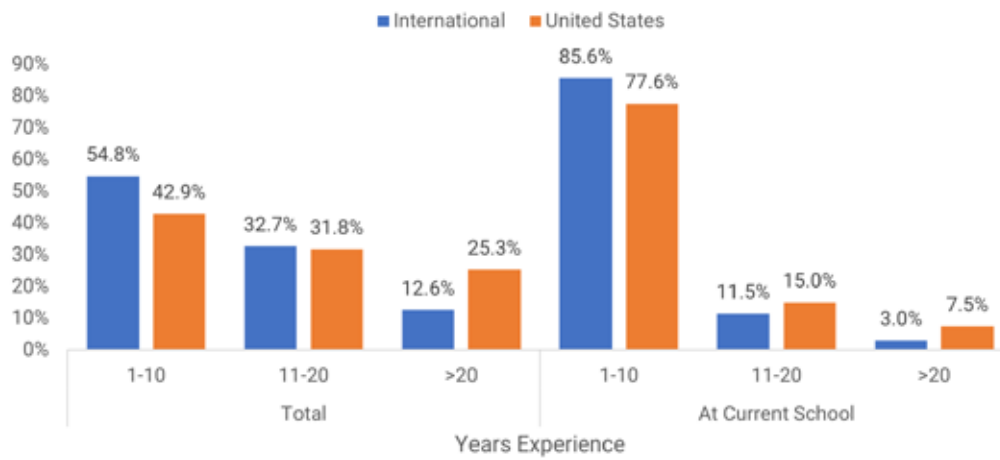
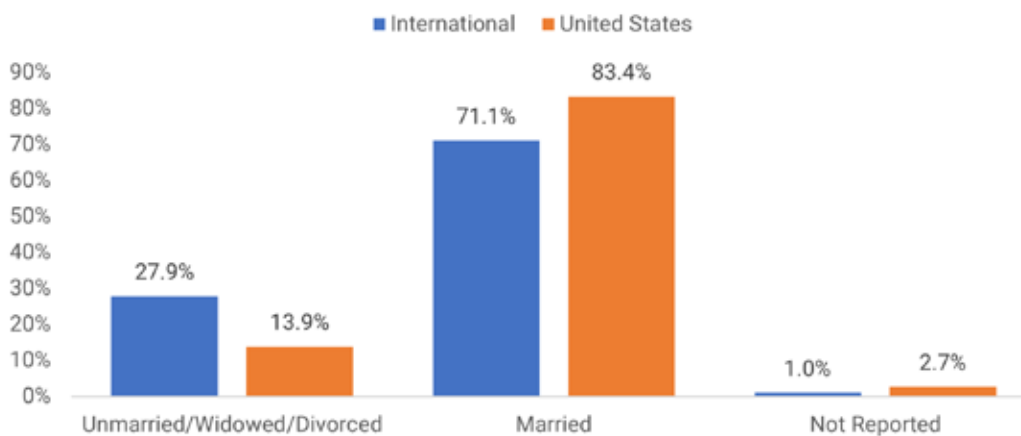


Fig. 7: Teachers' Marital Status



average international teacher reported 12 years of teaching experience, with the median experience at 10 years, while the average US Christian school teacher reported 14 years of experience, with the median experience at 13 years. Seventy-one percent of international teachers reported being married, whereas 83 percent of US teachers did the same.

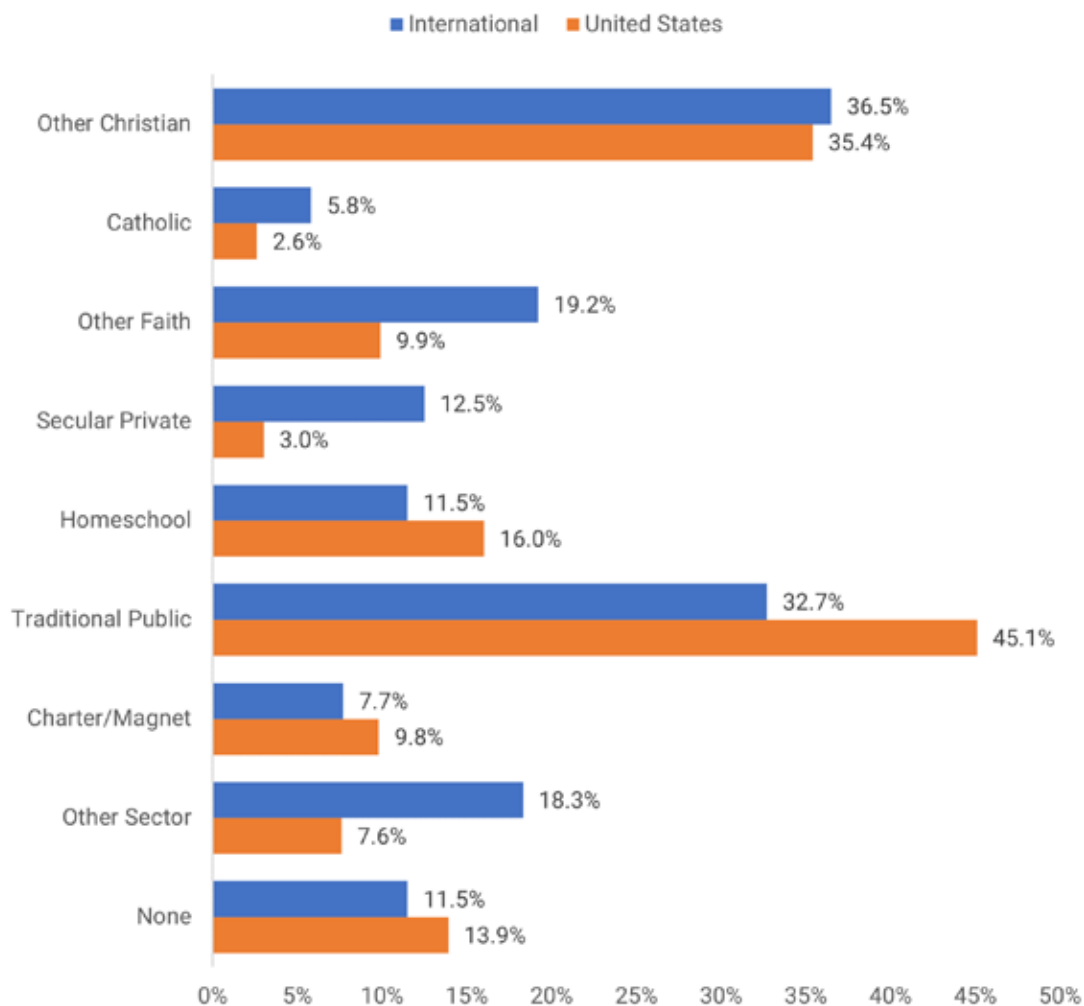
Prior Experience and Certification

With respect to prior teaching experience, US teachers were more likely to report teaching in the public sector than international teachers (see Figure 8). Forty-five percent of US teachers and 33 percent of international teachers reported teaching in a traditional public school

and another 10 percent of US teachers and eight percent of international teachers reported teaching in a public charter or magnet school. Among teachers with prior private school experience, the most common was teaching in another Christian school (roughly 35 percent for both US and international teachers). Other reported sectors included homeschooling, higher education, Catholic schools, or other faith-based schools.

There were some differences with respect to employment status and certification as well. US teachers were more likely to be employed full-time (85 percent) relative to international teachers (79 percent). US teachers were also

Fig. 8: Teachers' Prior Experience by Sector



more likely to be certified by ACSI (60 percent for US teachers versus 33 percent for international teachers) or the state (45 percent for US teachers versus 40 percent for international teachers), while international teachers were more likely to obtain an alternative (19 percent versus five percent) or other certification (11 percent for US teachers versus four percent for international teachers; see Figure 9).

Education and spiritual formation

US and international teachers reported similar educational backgrounds, both with respect to highest level of education as well as type of undergraduate institution.

Roughly three-fifths of the sample holds a bachelor's degree as their highest degree (see Figure 11). Another 35 percent have obtained a graduate degree: 31 percent hold a Master's, and just under 4 percent hold either a specialist degree or a doctorate. Just under half of the sample attended a public college or university, while two-fifths attended a private religious college or university (see Figure 12). Figure 12 [above/below] is a Sankey plot, a combination of stacked columns with flows that indicate changes in the population in two points in time. In the first column, we teachers' undergraduate institutional sector, whether private religious (dark blue), private nonsectarian

Fig. 9: Percent of Teachers Certified in Each Category

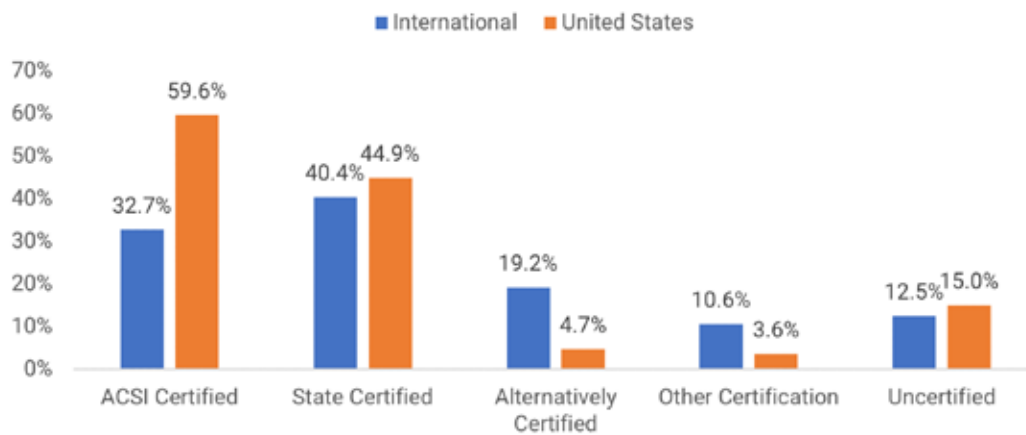


Fig. 10: Teachers' Highest Level of Education

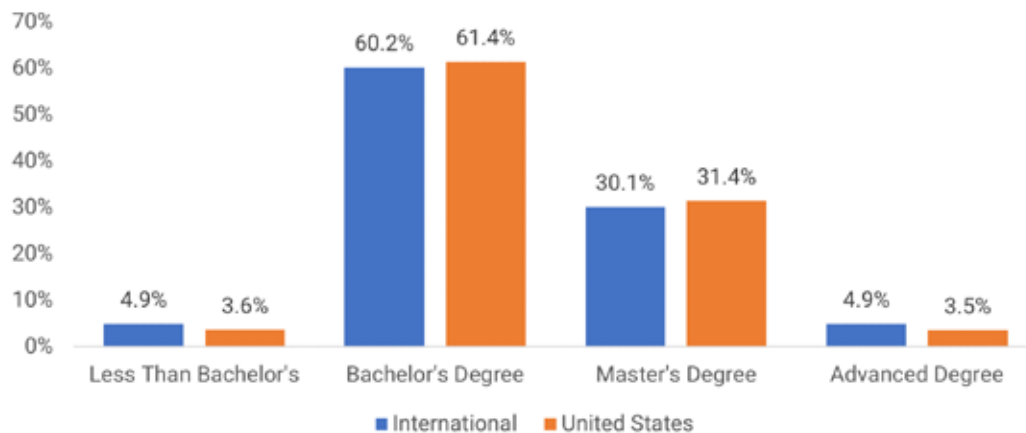


Fig. 11: Teachers' Undergraduate Institutions

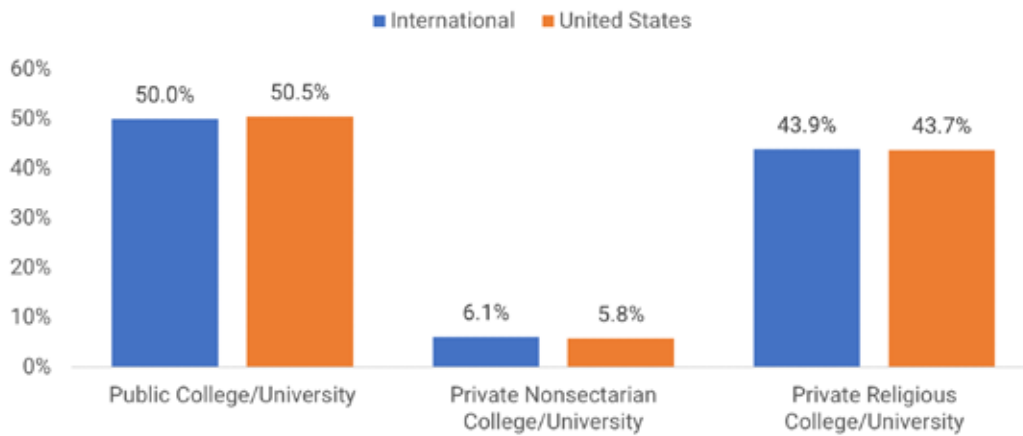
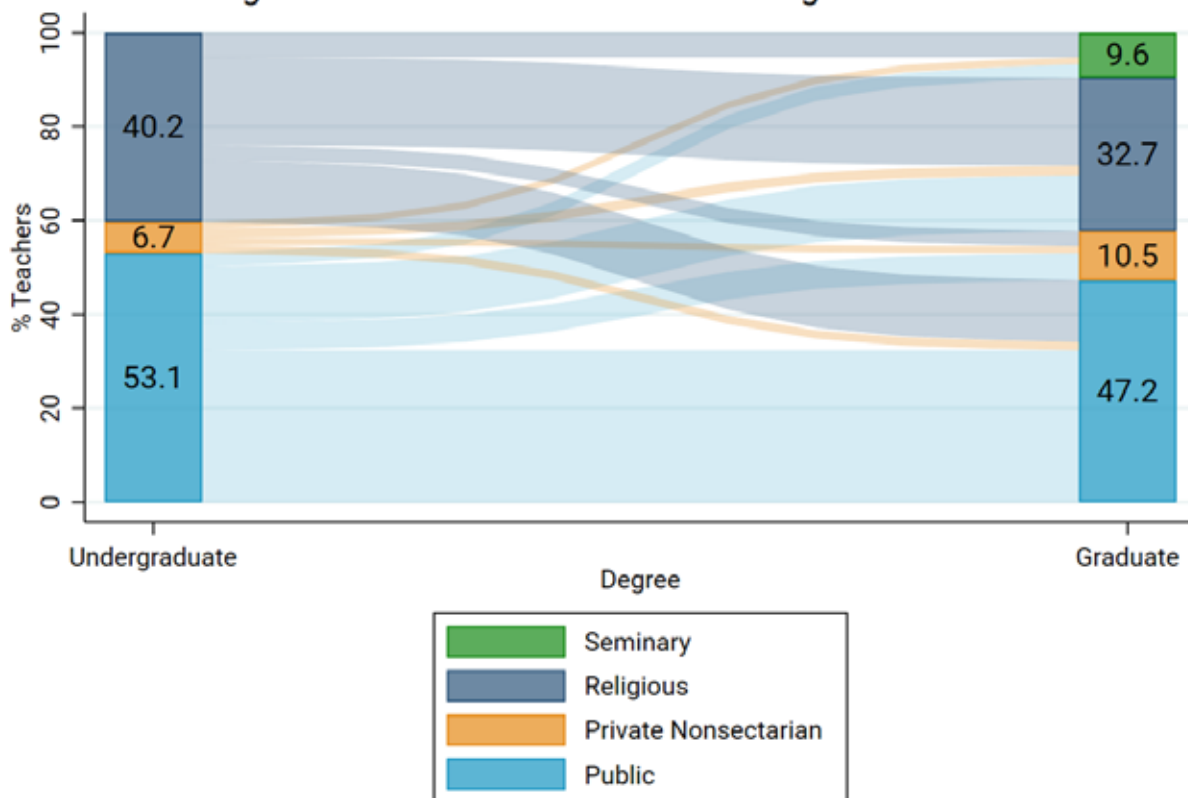
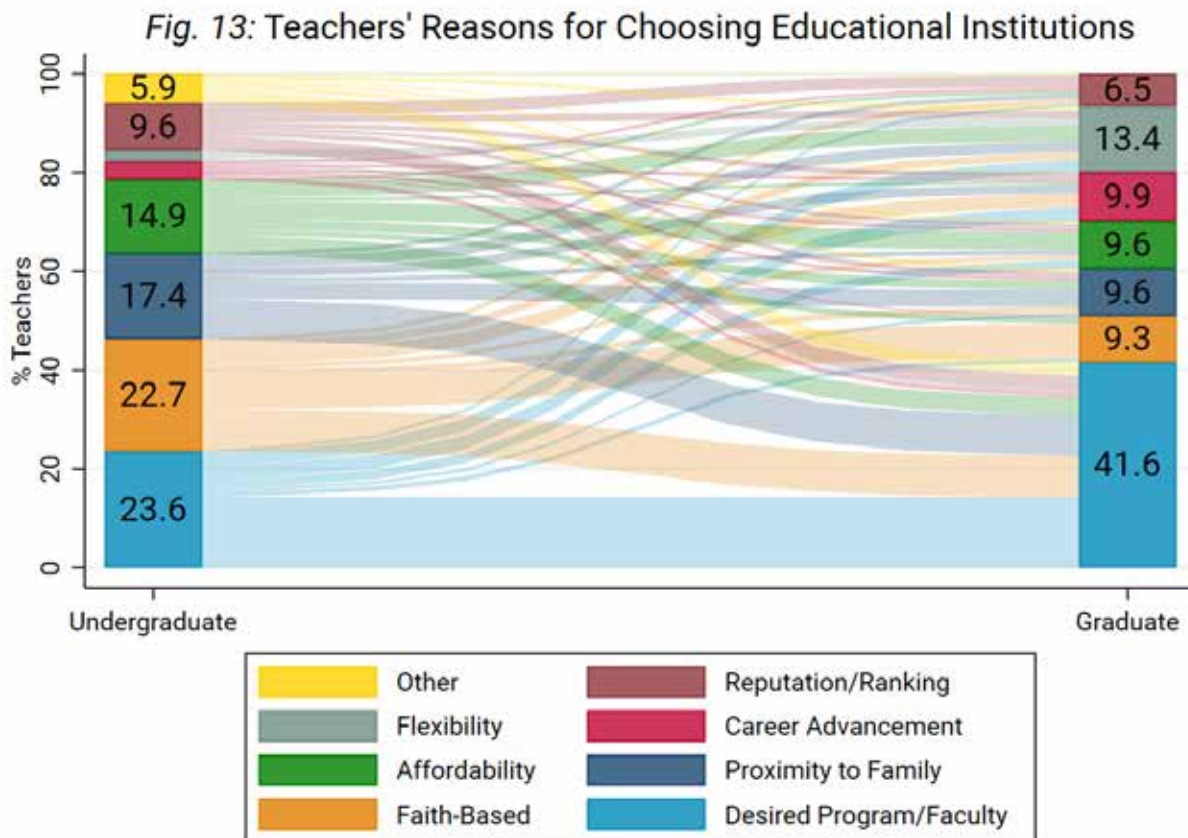


Fig. 12: Teachers' Graduate and Undergraduate Sectors



(orange), or public (light blue). Roughly half of the sample attended a faith-based university and half attended a nonsectarian university, either private nonsectarian or public. In the second column, we plot teachers' graduate institutional sector, adding seminary (green) to private religious (dark blue), private nonsectarian (orange), or public (light blue). Again, roughly half of the sample attended a faith-based graduate school (either seminary or private religious) and half attended a secular institution (either private nonsectarian or public). It is also noteworthy that a substantial proportion of the sample switched sector from undergraduate to graduate school (as indicated by the thick flows). Two-thirds of our sample attended a religious higher education institution at some point during their postsecondary studies.

Teachers (both international and US) who went on to earn a graduate degree favored public colleges and universities for their undergraduate degrees (53 percent versus 40 percent choosing religious and seven percent choosing private nonsectarian) but were less likely to choose public for their graduate degrees, relative to their undergraduate degrees (see Figure 13). Among teachers in our sample with graduate degrees, 10 percent earned them from a seminary, 33 percent from a religious college or university, 11 from a private nonsectarian college or university, and 47 percent from a public college or university.

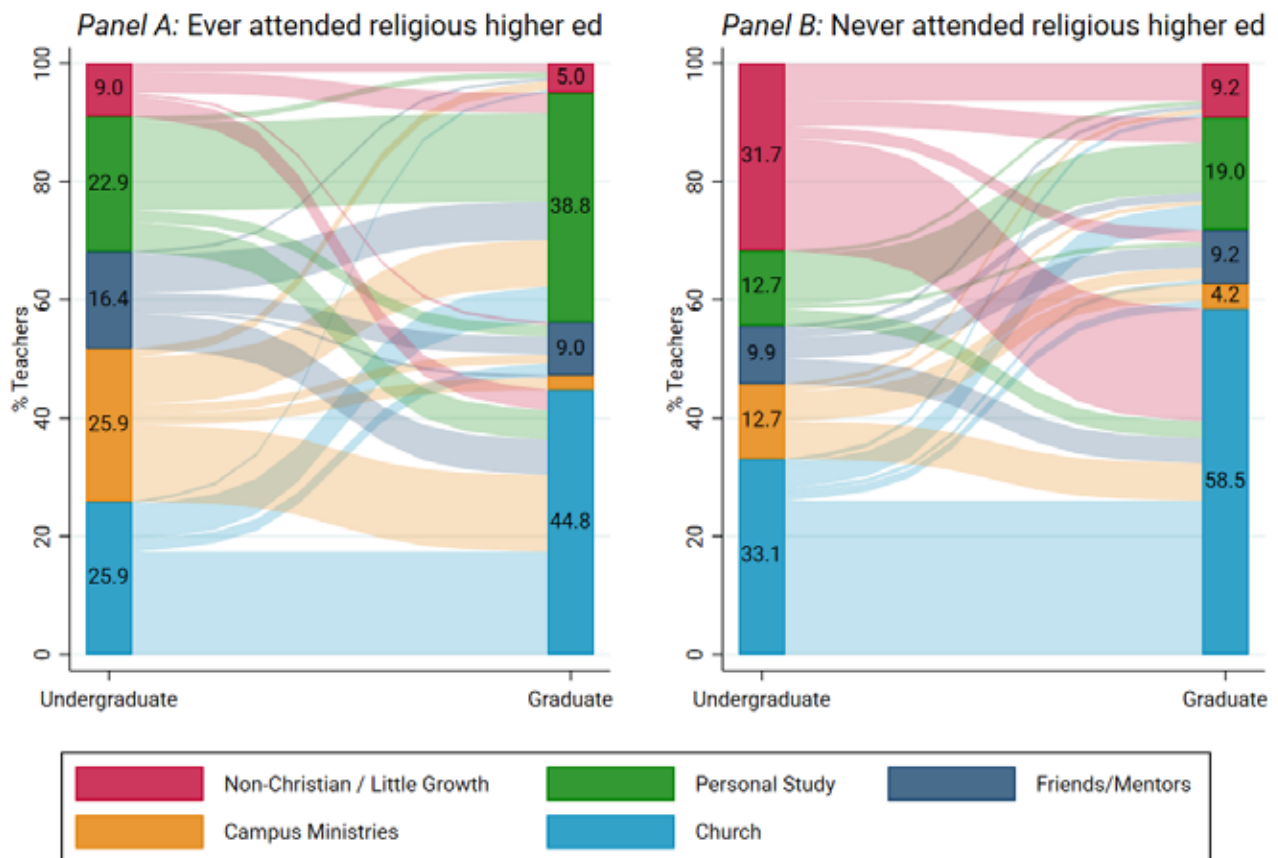


Among teachers holding advanced degrees, the most common reasons for selecting their graduate institution were a bit different than reasons reported for selecting an undergraduate institution (see Figure 13). Teachers' top self-reported primary motivations for choosing their undergraduate institutions included desired program or faculty (24 percent), faith-based education (23 percent), proximity to family (17 percent), and affordability (15 percent). For choosing their graduate school, teachers were much more likely to say that desired program or faculty (42 percent), flexibility (13 percent), and career advancement (10 percent) were important reasons. Relative to their undergraduate institutions, teachers were much less likely to say that choosing a faith-based program (nine percent) or a program close to family (10 percent) were important considerations.

By focusing on a subsample of teachers with undergraduate and graduate degrees, we can glean some insights into how teachers themselves describe their spiritual formation and how those patterns may change from college to graduate school. In total, 343 teachers provide feedback about their spiritual formation as both undergraduate and graduate students. We divided this sample into those who attended a faith-based institution for undergraduate or graduate school (Figure 14, Panel A) and those who attended a faith-based institution for neither undergraduate nor graduate school (Figure 14, Panel B). Roughly three-fifths (201) of these teachers ever attended a faith-based school and two-fifths (142) never attended a faith-based school.

A few similarities between these teachers emerge. A larger proportion of both “evers” and “nevers” report that church and personal study played a much greater

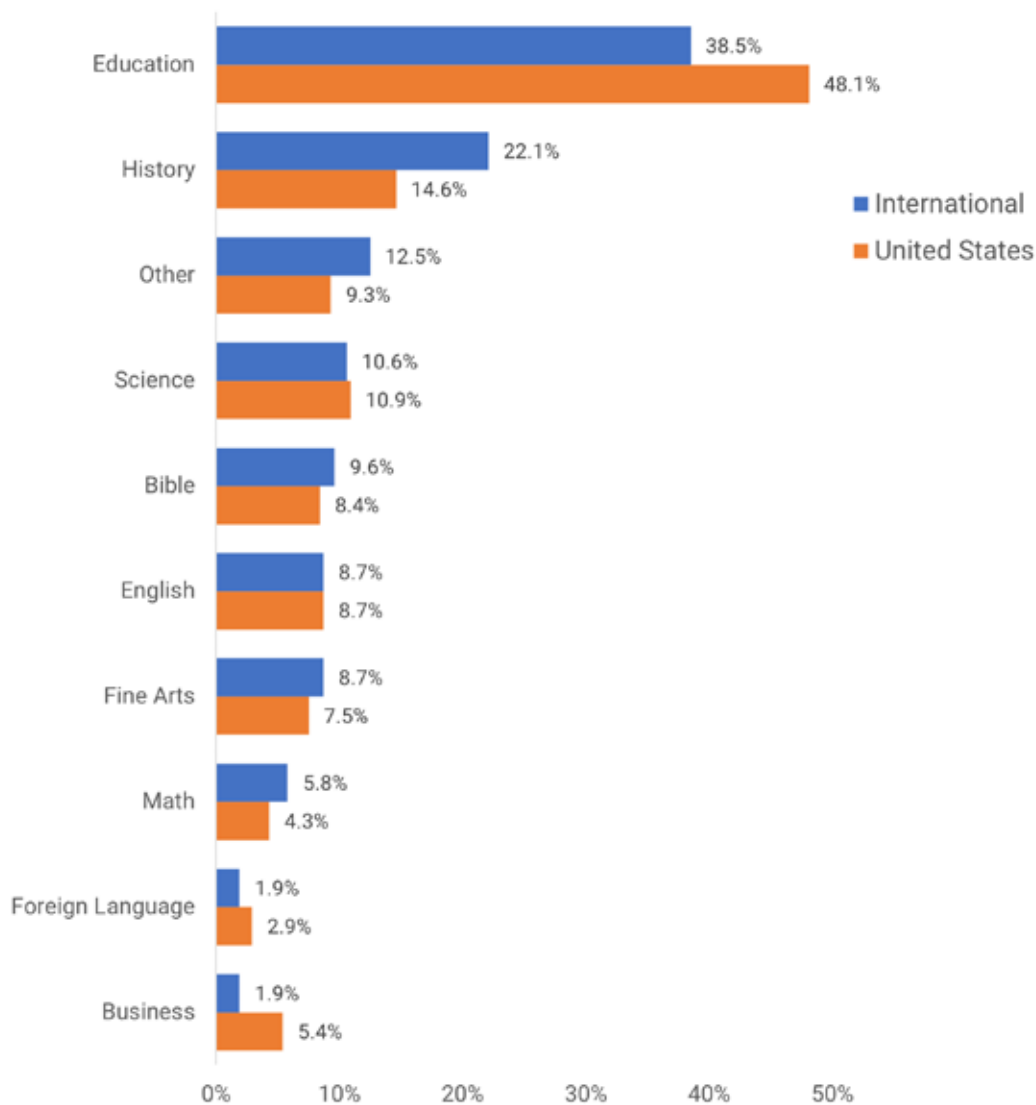
Fig. 14: Teachers' Spiritual Formation During Schooling



role in their spiritual formation as graduate students than as undergraduate students. Among “evers,” the proportion reporting that church played the greatest role in their spiritual formation rose from 25.9 percent as undergraduates to 44.8 percent as graduates, while the proportion for “nevers” rose from 33.1 percent to 58.5 percent. Similarly, the proportion of “evers” reporting that personal study played the greatest role rose from 22.9 percent to 38.8 percent, while the proportion of

“nevers” rose from 12.7 percent to 19.0 percent. A smaller proportion of both “evers” and “nevers” report that campus ministries and chapel played the greatest role as graduate students than as undergraduates. Finally, the proportion of both “evers” and “nevers” reporting they were not a Christian or grew little spiritually declined from college to graduate school, from 9.0 percent to 5.0 percent for “evers” and from 31.7 percent to 9.2 percent for “nevers.”

Fig. 15: Areas in Which Teachers Hold Bachelor's Degrees



Some important differences arise as well, providing clues as to how attending a faith-based higher education institution may play a role in teachers' spiritual formation. "Evers" are much more likely than "nevers" to report that campus ministries and friends or mentors played the greatest role in the spiritual formation as undergraduates, but not as graduates. "Nevers" are three times as likely to report they were not a Christian or grew little spiritually as undergraduates. Finally, for both college and graduate school, a greater proportion of "nevers" report church as playing the most important role for their spiritual formation. Taken together, this descriptive evidence suggests that, as far as spiritual formation is concerned, attending a faith-based undergraduate institution is more meaningful than attending a faith-based graduate institution.

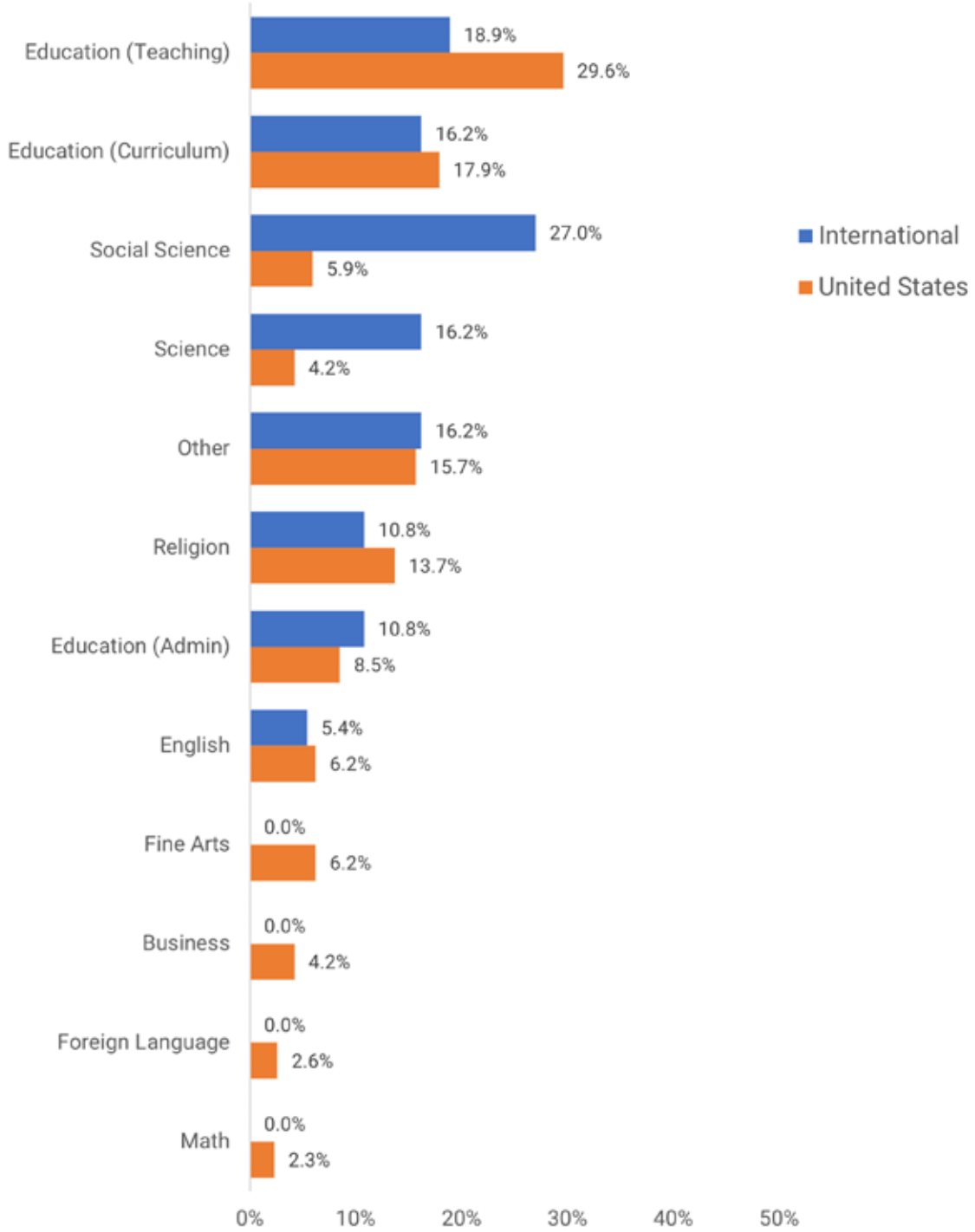
With respect to undergraduate degree, US teachers are more likely to hold a degree in education, while international teachers are more likely to hold a degree in a specific academic field (see Figure 16). Forty-eight percent of US teachers and 39 percent of international teachers hold a degree in education. In contrast, international teachers are more likely than US teachers to hold a degree in history (22 percent versus 15 percent), theology or religion (10 percent versus 8 percent), fine arts (9 percent versus 8 percent), and

mathematics (6 percent versus 4 percent).

Among teachers whose highest degree is a master's, specialist, or doctorate, the most popular master's degree programs are in the education field. While US teachers favor master's degrees in teaching (30 percent) compared to international teachers (19 percent) and slightly favor curriculum and instruction (18 percent) over international teachers (16 percent), international teachers favor administration (11 percent) over US teachers (9 percent). International teachers also significantly favor master's degrees in social science relative to US teachers (27 versus six percent), as well as master's degrees in science (16 versus four percent). Teachers in the US slightly favor master's degrees in religion (14 versus 11 percent), and hold master's degrees in areas that international teachers do not (fine arts, business, foreign language, and math). Both international and US teachers have roughly the same shares of master's degrees in English and other areas.

In our sample, 24 teachers reported having an education specialist degree (21 US teachers and three international). Of the 17 teachers in our sample that reported having a doctorate (16 US and one international), six held them in religion, three in science, two in education leadership, two in social science, one in law, one in math, and two in other fields.

Fig. 16: Areas in Which Teachers Hold Master's Degrees

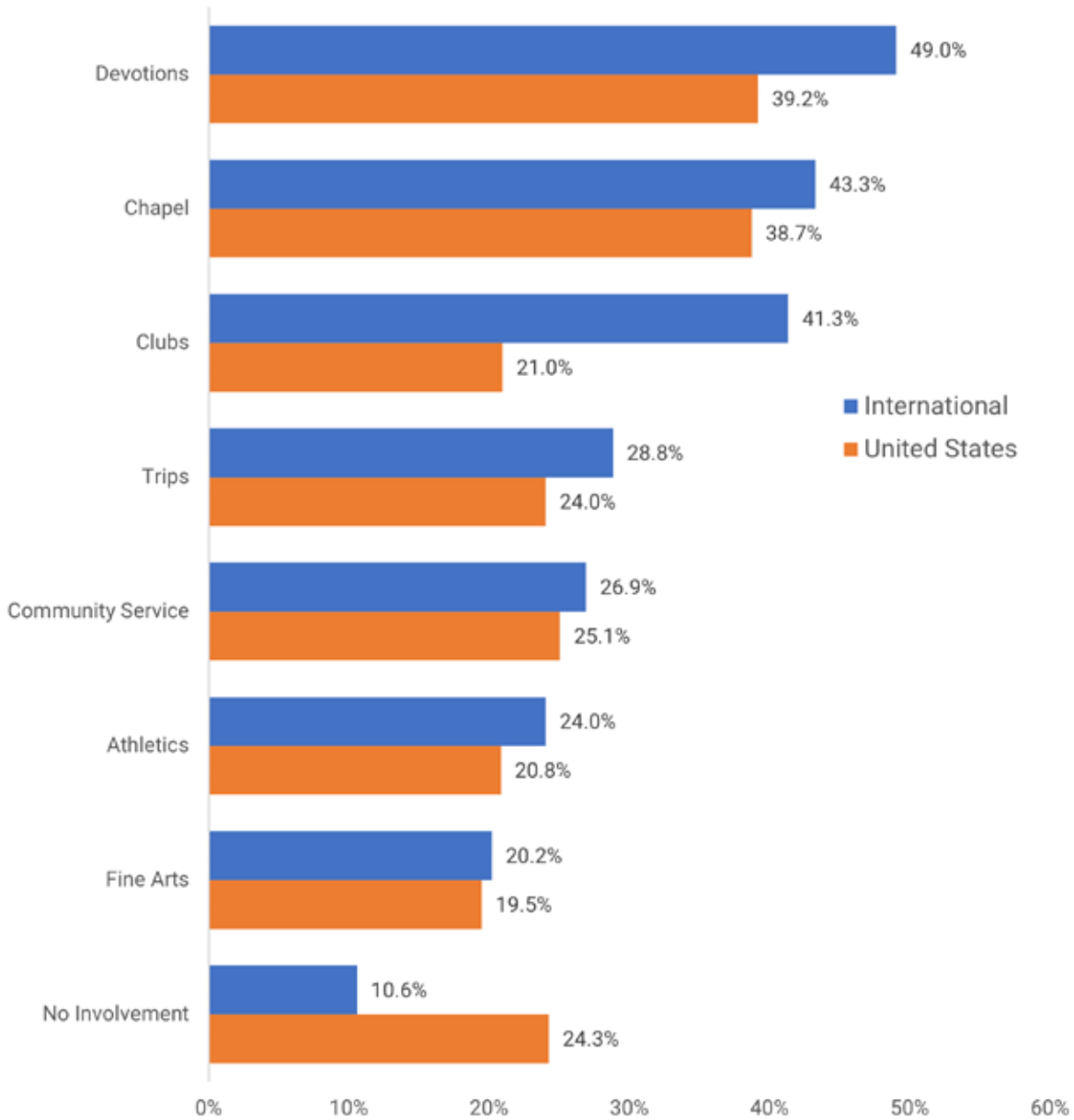


Extracurricular involvement

International teachers report higher levels participation in every category of extracurricular activities relative to US teachers, especially devotions (49 versus 39 percent), chapel (43 versus 38 percent), clubs (41 versus 21 percent),

and trips (29 versus 24 percent). While only 11 percent of international teachers report they are not involved in extracurricular activities, 24 percent of US teachers report no involvement.

Fig. 17: Teachers' Involvement in Extracurricular Activities



Influence

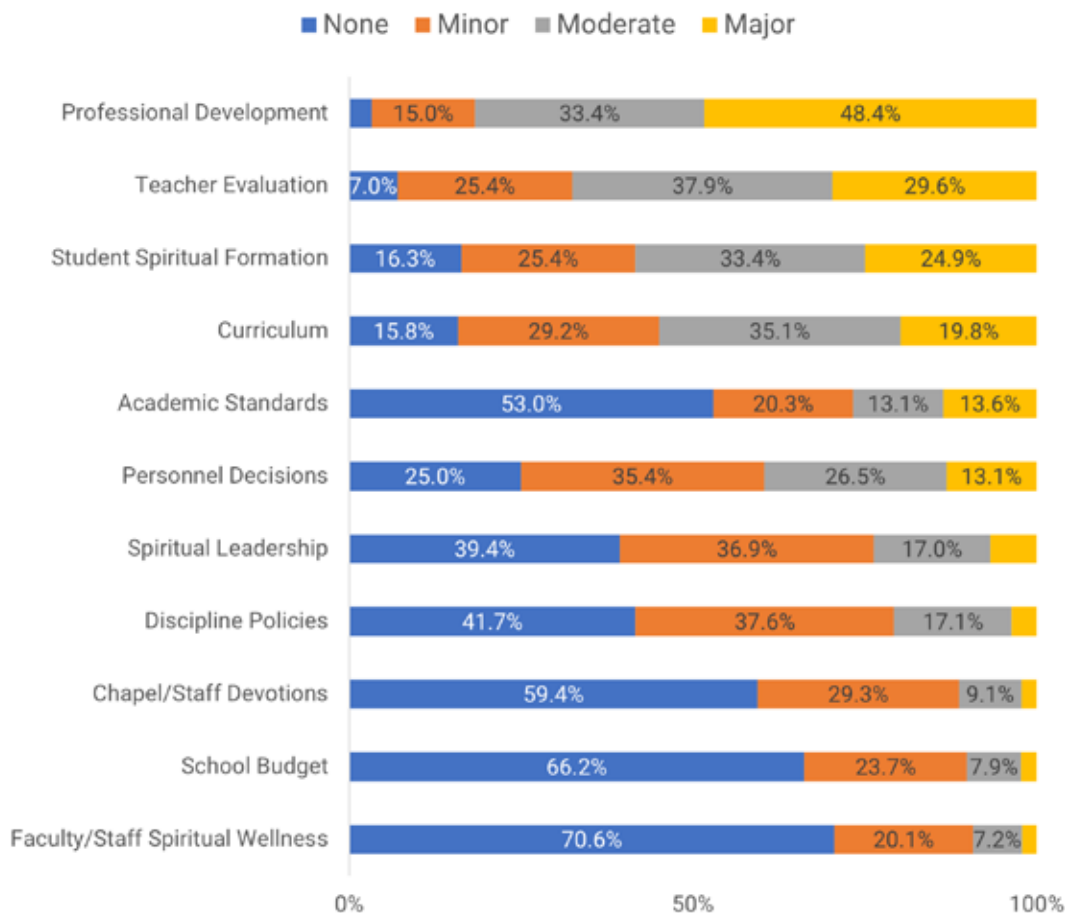
Teachers' self-reported influence over aspects of school life varied significantly (see Figure 18). The majority report having no influence over discipline policies (71 percent), teacher evaluation (53 percent), professional development (66 percent), and curriculum (59 percent). The majority report having little to no influence over student spiritual formation (79 percent), spiritual leadership (60 percent), and personnel decisions (76 percent). Teachers do report having moderate to major influence over chapel and staff devotions (82 percent), school budgets (68 percent), and academic standards (55 percent). International and US teachers report roughly the same amount of influence over

several aspects of life in their school, although international teachers report having more influence over curriculum (only 30 percent report having no influence while 63 percent of US teachers do).

Educational philosophy

In terms of how much teachers report that various aspects of their school's mission and philosophy is informed by their Christian faith, teachers report faith most heavily influences the school's statement of faith (80 percent say it is majorly informed by faith) and mission statement (79 percent majorly informed; see Figure 19). The mission and philosophy aspects least informed by faith, according to

Fig. 18: How Much Influence Teachers Report Having Over Various Facets of School Life



teachers, are the school's special education program and inclusion policies (35 percent report it is not informed or minorly informed by faith) as well as the dress code (36 percent report it is not informed or minorly informed by faith). Fifty-two percent report the school's profile of a graduate is majorly informed by faith, 58 percent report parent and family relations are majorly informed by faith, 60 percent report the school culture is majorly informed by faith, 63 percent report personnel decisions are majorly informed by faith, and 52 percent report the discipline policy is majorly informed by faith. Only 35 percent report that the philosophy of diversity is majorly informed by faith, with another 33 percent reporting it is moderately

informed by faith; only 46 percent report that the school's engagement with social issues is informed by faith, with another 32 percent reporting it is moderately informed by faith.

Next, we turn to the influence of faith on academics (see Figure 20). As we would expect, the Bible curriculum is the subject reported to be most informed by faith, with 80 percent of teachers reporting it is majorly informed by faith and 10 percent reporting it is moderately informed by faith. However, five percent (47 teachers) report it is minorly informed by faith and 6 percent (51 teachers) report it is not informed by faith at all. The second-most faith-informed subject area is science, which 50 percent

Fig. 19: How Much Teachers Report Faith Informs Aspects of School's Mission/Philosophy

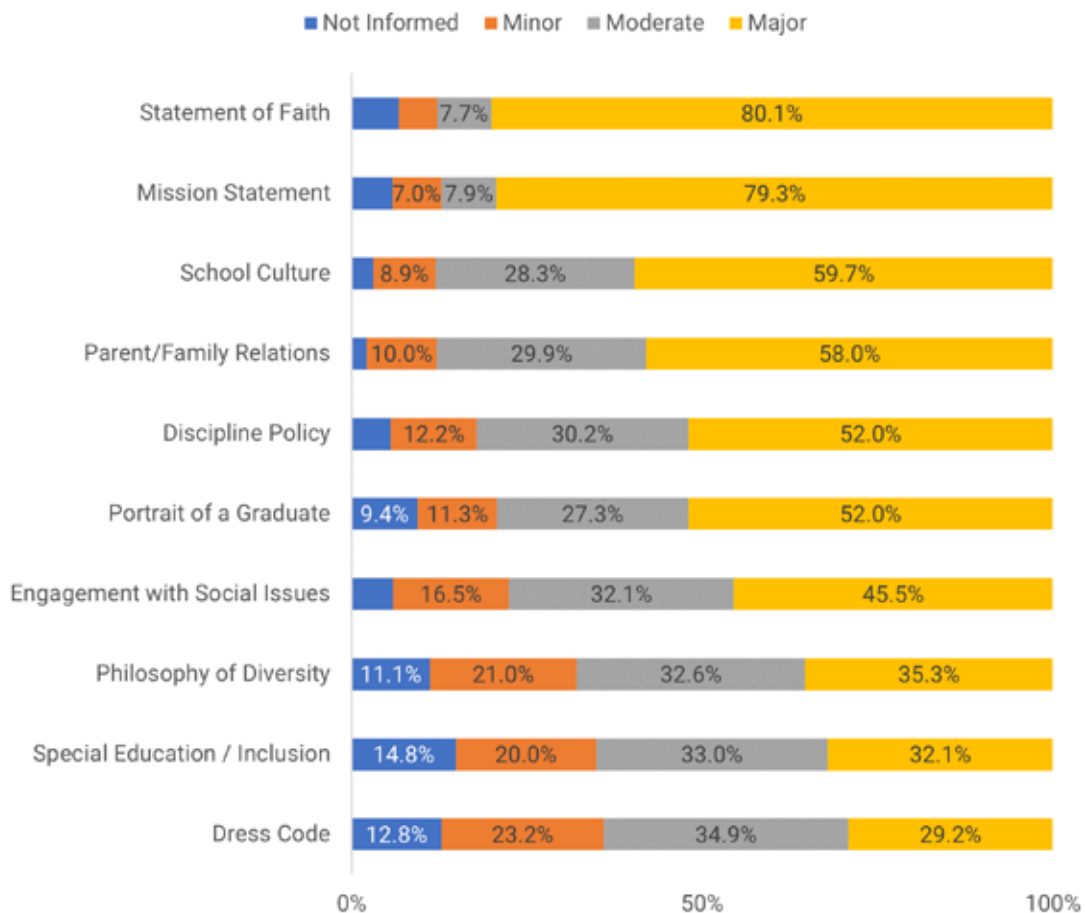
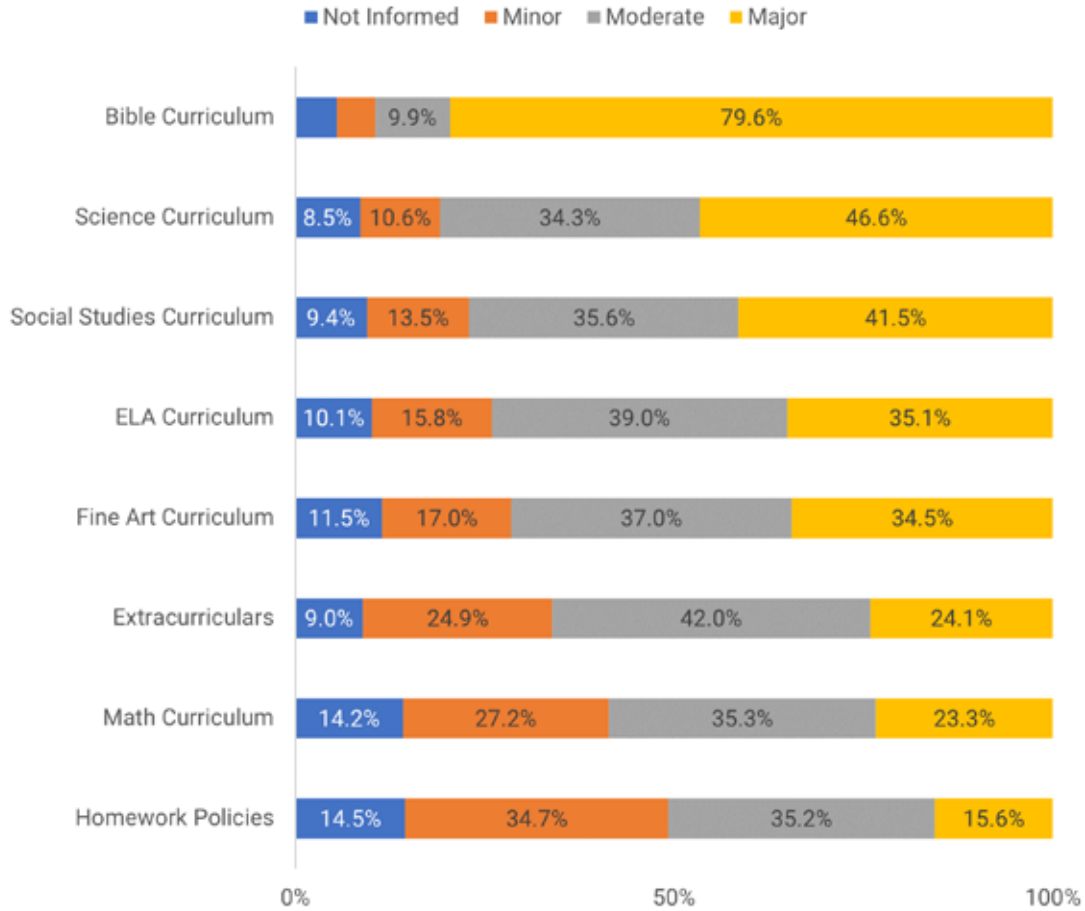


Fig. 20: How Much Teachers Report Faith Informs Aspects of School's Academics



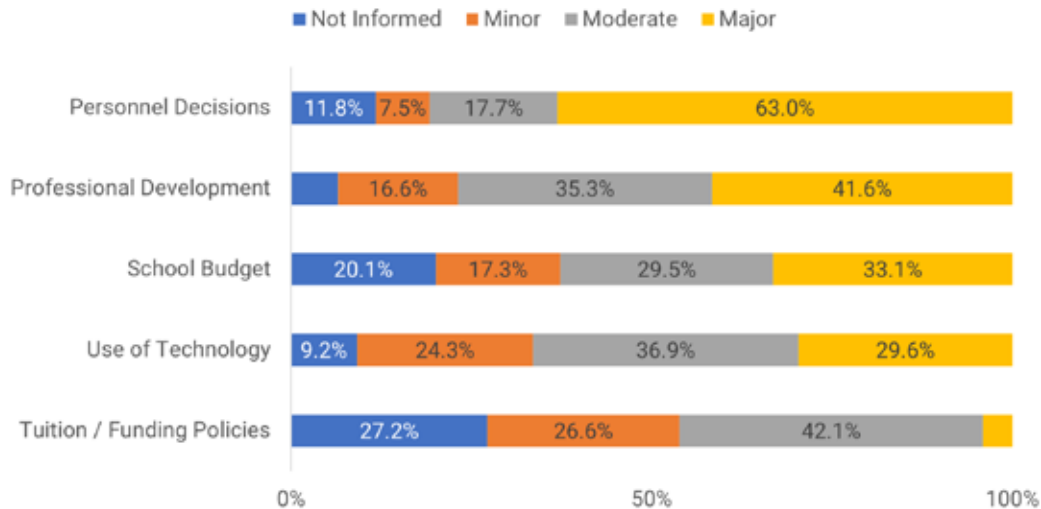
of teachers report to be majorly informed by faith and 34 report to be moderately informed by faith. The academic subject area reported to be least

informed by faith is math, with 41 percent of teachers reporting faith has no or minor influence. The majority of teachers report the ELA curriculum to be majorly (35 percent) or moderately (39 percent) informed by faith, the social studies curriculum to be majorly (42 percent) or moderately (36 percent) informed by faith, and the fine art curriculum to be majorly (35 percent) or moderately (37 percent) informed by faith. Most teachers report that faith moderately (42 percent) or minorly (25 percent) informs extracurriculars in their school, and moderately

(35 percent) or minorly (35 percent) informs homework policies.

Teachers also reported how much faith informs operations in their schools (see Figure 21). Teachers were least likely to report that tuition and funding policies are majorly informed by faith, with 42 reporting them to be moderately informed, 27 percent minorly informed, and 27 percent not informed by faith. On the other hand, 33 percent of teachers reported that their school budget was informed by faith, with 30 percent reporting it is moderately informed by faith. Most teachers report professional development to be majorly (42 percent) or moderately (35 percent) informed by faith and use of technology to be majorly (30

Fig. 21: How Much Teachers Report Faith Informs Aspects of School's Operations



percent) or moderately (37 percent) informed by faith.

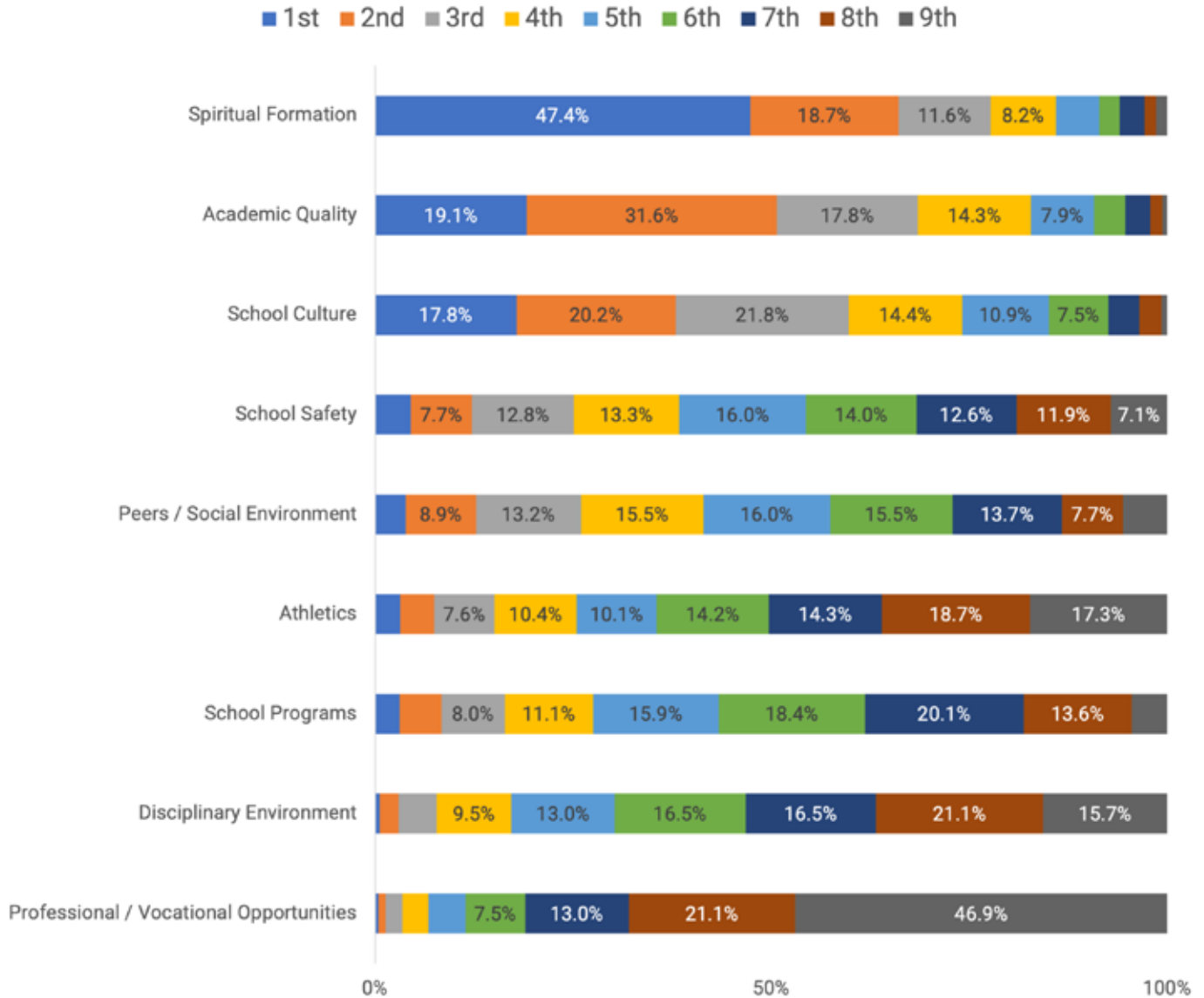
Teachers reported the reasons they thought a parent would choose their school, ranked from one to nine in order of importance (with one as the most important and nine as the least important; see Figure 22). Although the ranking was evenly distributed for several variables, we do see a few patterns emerge. As the top reason parents would choose

their school, 47 percent of teachers suggested that spiritual formation, 19 percent suggested academic quality, and 18 percent suggested school culture. The reasons teachers generally ranked as least important were professional and vocational opportunities (47 percent), athletics (17 percent), and disciplinary environment (16 percent). The results were similar for both international and US teachers.

Table 1: How Teachers Ranked the Reasons a Parent Might Choose Their School

	Percent Ranked Most Important	Percent Ranked Second Most Important	Average Rank (Scale of 1 to 9)
Spiritual Formation	47.4%	18.7%	2.5
Academic Quality	19.1%	31.6%	3.0
School Culture	17.8%	20.2%	3.4
Peers / Social Environment	3.9%	8.9%	5.1
School Safety	4.5%	7.7%	5.2
School Programs	3.1%	5.3%	5.6
Athletics	3.2%	4.3%	6.2
Disciplinary Environment	0.6%	2.3%	6.5
Professional / Vocational Opportunities	0.4%	0.9%	7.7

Fig. 22: How Teachers Ranked the Reasons a Parent Might Choose Their School (Most to Least Important)



Finally, we asked teachers to answer the following question:

Which of the following statements best describes your understanding of a biblical philosophy of Christian education? [choose only one]

1. Christian education takes place in partial fulfillment of the Great Commission to make disciples.

2. Christian education takes place through obedience to God's command to love neighbor.

3. Christian education takes place in partnership with parents, who are charged with training their children.

4. Something else

While the majority (66 percent) of US teachers identify partnering with parents as their biblical philosophical understanding of Christian education, the most popular philosophy for international teachers (48 percent) was fulfilling the Great Commission, which only 24 percent of US teachers identified as their philosophy (see Figure 23). More international teachers than US teachers (21 versus seven percent) reported fulfilling the Great Commandment (loving your neighbor) as their philosophy.

Discussion

In this final section, we highlight a few key findings from our report and draw concluding thoughts from the analysis.

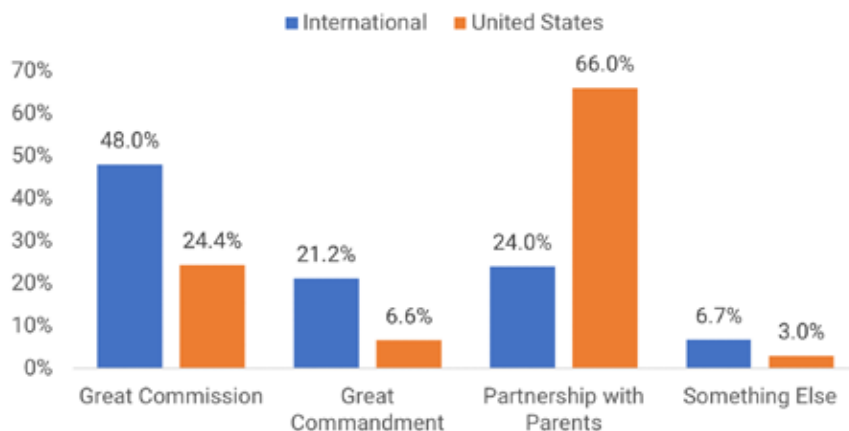
First, one unique contribution of this descriptive report is that it is, to our knowledge, the first to provide evidence of teachers' perceptions of how faith informs practice in Christian schools, as well as the philosophy of education of Christian schools. Previous studies focused on Christian school leaders' perceptions of how faith informs practice and found some similar patterns (Lee et al., 2021; Lee & Cheng, 2021). A smaller proportion of teachers and leaders report that faith influences math curriculum, homework policy, or dress code, relative to other areas of school life. Teachers and leaders both perceive spiritual formation to be the most important goal of Christian education, followed closely by academic quality. Vocational

preparation, in contrast, tends to be lowly regarded compared to other goals. As a whole, leaders are more likely to agree that faith has a major influence on most aspects of the Christian school.

Teachers' perceptions of the philosophy of Christian education provided some insights as well. Most teachers in US Christian schools stated that partnership with parents was the philosophical basis of Christian education. In contrast, the modal international Christian school teacher reported that the Great Commission was the philosophical basis. This finding may be unsurprising, given international Christian schools' history of serving the children of missionaries and expatriate populations. It is also consistent with other work on ACSI's international Christian schools, which found evidence of a strong desire for evangelism among international schools (Shuman and Price 2022).

Second, we draw the reader's attention to Christian school teachers' credentials and degrees. Nearly half of all US teachers and two-fifths of international teachers in our sample reported a bachelor's degree in education. Education was also the most common graduate degree, with 29.6 percent of U.S. teachers holding a degree in teaching (18.9 percent international), 17.9 percent in curriculum (16.2 percent international), and 8.5 percent in leadership (10.8 percent international). (The exception here

Fig. 23: Teachers' Philosophy of Education



is that 27.0 percent of international teachers reported a social science graduate degree.) While most public schools in the US are under legal compulsion to hire teachers with education degrees, this pattern among teachers in private Christian schools, which are not under the same legal constraints, suggests that Christian schools may be mimicking public school practices (Burke 2016), even though research documents little evidence of a relationship between an education degree and teaching effectiveness (Goldhaber 2019).

Finally, one concerning observation relates to faculty wellness. Over 90 percent of teachers in our sample reported having very little influence over their own spiritual wellness, with 70.6 percent reporting no influence and 20.1 percent reporting only minor influence. Considering that faculty wellness was a major concern for Christian schools during COVID and that most schools reported not having an intentional plan to address this

concern (Swaner and Lee 2020), school leaders would do well to actively confront this challenge, for example, by promoting practices that help protect the Sabbath for teachers (Cheng et al. 2023).

One way in which school leaders may gain these insights into their own school's spiritual formation to identify such challenges is by administering the Flourishing Faith Index (FFI), which ACSI plans to make available later this school year. The FFI builds on the work of the Flourishing School Culture Instrument (FSCI) as a validated survey tool for measuring spiritual formation and biblical worldview development in Christian schools. The FFI includes such validated constructs as Spiritual Growth, which measures how supported administrators, teachers, and staff feel in their own spiritual health and growth, and Sabbath-Keeping, which measures the extent to which school policies help the school community keep the Sabbath.

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PO Box 62249 | Colorado Springs, CO 80962 | www.acsi.org | research@acsi.org