



# FAITH BUILDERS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, INC.

Discipling the head, heart, and hands

Issue 121

Fall 2016

## CHALLENGES AND GRATITUDE

### A SURVEY OF CONSERVATIVE ANABAPTIST SCHOOLS

The Christian school movement resulted in independently operated schools in many communities. How are we doing?

Matthew Mast has worked at Faith Builders since 2006. He has devoted much of his work during this time to the development of events, resources, and studies that benefit conservative Anabaptist schools and the broader Anabaptist community. In this article, Matthew summarizes and reflects on a recent study of conservative Anabaptist schools conducted by Faith Builders.

A primary way in which Faith Builders fulfills its mission is by training men and women to teach in Anabaptist schools. This work brings us into contact with teachers and principals from around the country. These interactions often include discussions about the needs and opportunities facing conservative Anabaptist schools.

To understand these needs and opportunities in a broader context, Faith Builders conducted a survey of conservative Anabaptist schools during the first half of 2016. 150 schools from conferences and fellowships often represented at Faith Builders' events were invited to complete a four-page survey. Representatives of sixty-two schools completed the survey.

These schools reported enrollment ranging from four to 248 students, with an average enrollment of 66. Half of the schools reported enrollment of 50 or fewer students. Together, these 62 schools serve over 4,000 students.

These sixty-two responses, coming from various geographic regions and from large and small schools, provided more

information for us to use in considering the needs of the schools we serve. In addition, this information confirmed that the conversations we have with teachers and principals represent the needs and opportunities of many schools.

The four needs and two areas of gratitude identified in this summary of our survey may offer guidance for school boards, school administrators, church leaders, parents, and others who care about the schools that train our children.

#### Primary Needs

We evaluated the needs of schools using the following process. First, respondents were asked to evaluate their level of satisfaction with the curriculum materials they use. Second, they were asked to rate a list of eight possible challenges. They were also invited to respond to the general question "What are the challenges you face in operating the school?" Finally, respondents were asked "What does your school board spend the bulk of their board meetings discussing?"

From the responses to these questions, we identified four primary needs in conservative Anabaptist schools.

#### 1) Teachers

By multiple measures, the challenge of finding and keeping qualified teachers is the primary need of our schools. When rating challenges, ten respondents said that this is a big problem for their school, while only four said it is not a problem at all. Eighteen said that it is an issue for them, though not a big one, and a majority of other responses listed it as a problem. On the general question of challenges, 40% of respondents listed issues related to teachers as one of the challenges they face. The responses range from "finding qualified teachers" to "retaining staff long-term" to "poor teacher vetting and hiring."

In addition, over 35% of respondents described challenges related to developing and supporting the teachers in the school. A teaching principal at a smaller school described the challenge of "balancing teacher workload with a quality learning experience." A principal at a larger school highlighted the challenge of teacher burnout. From a school board perspective, finding teachers was the second most-frequently mentioned item that boards spend time discussing. Recruiting and keeping teachers continues to be one of the primary needs of conservative Anabaptist schools.

**THE 62 SCHOOLS  
REPRESENTED IN THIS  
SURVEY SERVE OVER  
4,000 STUDENTS.**

*continued on next page*

## REACH 2017

MARCH 23-24, 2017

REACH brings together fifty conservative Anabaptist ministries and Kingdom-workers from all walks of life. The program includes over 100 breakout sessions addressing a wide variety of ministry-related topics. Ministries share their vision and work in breakout sessions and displays. General assemblies tie the entire event together with worship, messages, and prayer.



### Event Information

**Capacity** 2,200  
**Location** Calvary Church,  
 1051 Landis Road  
 Lancaster, PA 17601

### REGISTRATION OPEN

More information and registration is at [reach.fbep.org](http://reach.fbep.org). A paper registration form is also available.

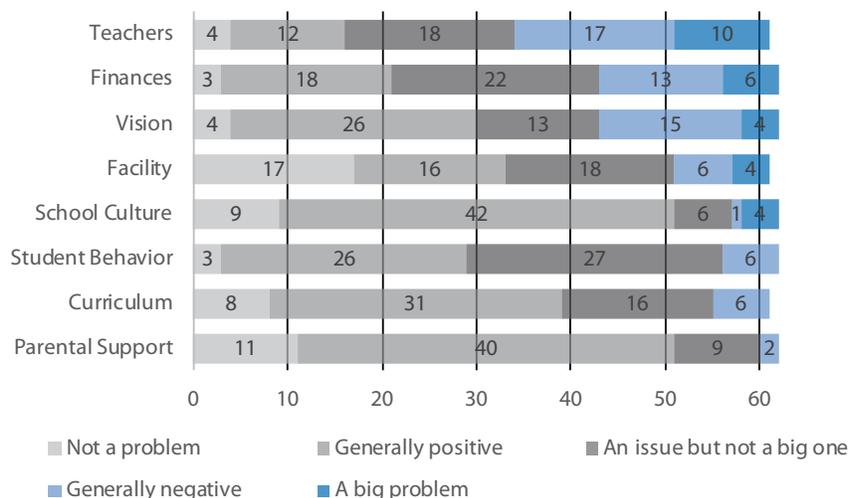
## 2) Financial Sustainability

A second primary need of these schools is the financial demand of operating a school. In the rating of challenges, six respondents said that this is a big problem for their school, compared with only three who said it is not a problem at all. Twenty-two said that it is an issue for them, though not a big one. On the general question of challenges, nearly half of the respondents mentioned some dimension of the school in which finances presented a challenge. An administrator stated that they face the challenge of “setting an affordable tuition that also meets the operating budget.” Another respondent highlighted the

challenge of “properly compensating staff.” Forty-eight percent of school boards surveyed indicated that finances and fundraising receive significant attention during meetings.

A complete summary of challenges is charted below. Initially it may seem that a relatively small number of respondents experience difficulty finding and caring for teachers or with financial sustainability. However, these numbers increase in significance when seen in the context of the overall ratings. No respondents indicated that parental support, curriculum, or student behavior were “a big problem.”

### RATING OF CHALLENGES



## WINTER TERM

JANUARY 2 - FEBRUARY 3, 2017

Winter Term offers coursework and personal development for all seeking spiritual growth and sound teaching. Come for two, three, or all five weeks.



### APPLICATION AVAILABLE

More information and an application is at [www.fbep.org/wt](http://www.fbep.org/wt). A paper application is also available on request.

### CLASSES OFFERED IN 2017

Church Growth .....	Allen Roth
Church Planting .....	Allen Roth
The Sermon on the Mount .....	Brandon Byler
Beginning Choral Conducting .....	Brandon Mullet
Listening to and Enjoying Good Music.....	Brandon Mullet
Music Fundamentals .....	Brandon Mullet
Music in the Life of the Church .....	Brandon Mullet
Women of Faith.....	Carolyn Roth
1 Corinthians.....	Dave Yoder
Women Caring for Women .....	Janelle Glick
Becoming One in Marriage.....	John Coblenz
Helping the Depressed .....	John Coblenz
Pastoral Care .....	John Coblenz
Issues in Church Leadership.....	Melvin Lehman
The Kingdom of God.....	Melvin Lehman
Historical Theology.....	Stephen Russell
Modern Church History .....	Stephen Russell
Anabaptism as Worldview.....	Steven Brubaker
Reading the Bible.....	Steven Brubaker
Music Theory I .....	Wendell Glick
	Brandon Mullet

## 3) Exceptional Learners

Though student behavioral issues are not reported as a big problem, 26% of respondents listed issues such as motivation and behavior as a challenge they face in operating the school. This seems fairly typical and is not a large area of concern. The greatest need in relation to students comes in serving special needs students. Twenty-seven percent of respondents listed the challenge of special needs students in their classrooms. Respondents state that they lack the knowledge needed to help these students; they are also challenged to find the right staff to work with special needs students. Four respondents indicated that this issue demands a significant portion of school board discussions, with at least one aspect of this being financial: how do we pay for the additional staff or space needed to serve special needs learners? A veteran teacher and principal observed, “The elephant in the room is

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special needs students. Probably every school has students they don't know what to do with." School boards and teachers need resources to help them serve special needs students effectively.

#### 4) Church History Curriculum

In their listing of challenges, 17% of respondents described challenges related to finding and implementing curriculum. Responses to this question revealed a clear area of need: a church and Mennonite history curriculum for grades 7-12. On the rating scale we used, all other content areas in grades 1-12 were on the overall side of satisfaction. In comparison, church and Mennonite history received numerous dissatisfied responses, resulting in a negative overall rating.

While respondents identified other areas of need, the four primary needs in our schools are teachers, financial sustainability, exceptional learners, and church history curriculum. These needs call for creative solutions that fit the context of schools with 50 or fewer students. Drawing from survey response, we believe that in order to navigate these problems, every school needs at least one individual (whether principal, administrator, or lead teacher) who will anchor the process of finding solutions.

#### Areas of Gratitude

Survey responses highlighted two aspects of conservative Anabaptist schools which merit gratitude. First, the schools in our survey enjoy **strong parental and church support**. Nearly half

of the respondents mentioned patron and church support as something they like about their school. They describe "a great community of parents to work with" and "a core of very supportive, engaged parents." We note with gratitude that no respondents said they have a big problem with parental support. In fact, 82% of respondents reported positive relations with parents. This strong relationship between parent and school calls for gratitude from all involved.

A second area of gratitude is **school culture**. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that they enjoy their school's culture. Survey responses described this: "It's a safe place to learn and grow," "Our school is small enough that the staff and students know each other." Respondents expressed gratitude for "good relationships between staff and students," "a culture of grace," and "a relaxed atmosphere." Eighty-two percent of respondents report a positive school culture, while only a few experience it as a big problem. This pervasively positive school culture is a reason for gratitude.

These two areas of strength are significant as we consider the future of conservative Anabaptist schools. As teachers and school administrators safeguard the trust placed in them by parents and church leaders, and as they nurture the positive school culture that exists, they will find opportunities for fruitful service and development. Indeed, this foundation will provide the stability needed to navigate challenges facing the school.

#### Conclusion

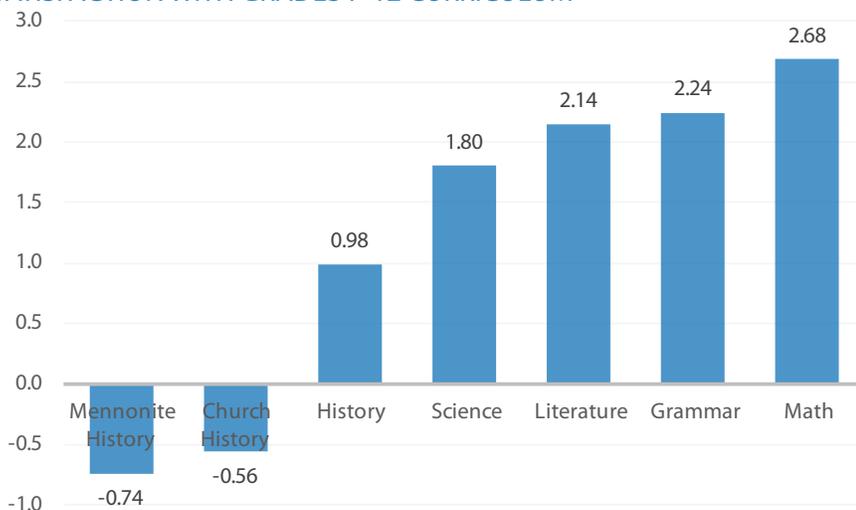
This survey revealed that there is much in conservative Anabaptist schools for which to thank God. By and large, parents and churches support the schools that are educating their children. Teachers bring committed energy to their work, cultivating a positive school culture. Academic curricula meet many needs in the educational program of the school.

Opportunities abound for the investment of energy and vision in the future of Anabaptist schools. The development of materials to teach church and Mennonite history would fill a need in the academic program of many schools. Increased effort is needed to help our schools effectively serve special needs learners in the classroom. Creative solutions must be cultivated to solve the financial challenges faced by our schools. School boards, school administrators, and church leaders should consider ways to identify and develop teachers and keep those teachers in the school long-term. Significant investment of resources in these areas is needed, not only to sustain what currently exists, but also to build on that foundation to serve the needs of the next generation.

Matthew Mast



#### SATISFACTION WITH GRADES 7-12 CURRICULUM



#### ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

JANUARY 26-28, 2017

This three-day retreat helps administrators build vision for their schools and become effective leaders. The conference costs \$195 for an administrator and \$295 for a couple. Meals & lodging included.



#### REGISTER ONLINE

Apply online at [www.fbep.org/acr](http://www.fbep.org/acr).

## Contact us

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Visit us on the web at [www.fbep.org](http://www.fbep.org)

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*Address Service Requested*



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### UPCOMING EVENTS & TERMS

#### TEACHERS CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 14 - 16

This event has reached capacity and registration is closed.

#### HEART & VOICE | NOVEMBER 11 - 13

Heart & Voice, a men's choir, will be hosted in Stuarts Draft, VA. The morning service will be at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship, November 13, 9:30 a.m., evening program TBD.

#### FBTI CHRISTMAS CONCERT | DEC. 11, 4:00 PM

#### WINTER TERM | JAN. 2 - FEB. 3, 2017

Details inside. Apply at [www.fbep.org/wt](http://www.fbep.org/wt).

#### ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE | JANUARY 26-28, 2017

Details inside. Register at [www.fbep.org/acr](http://www.fbep.org/acr).

#### REACH 2017 | MARCH 23-24, 2017

Details inside. Register at [reach.fbep.org](http://reach.fbep.org).

### FAITH BUILDERS NEWSLETTER

The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

### NEWS FROM FAITH BUILDERS

#### WELCOME

- » Thirty-two students began the Apprenticing Term on August 21. Thirteen of these students are in their second year of study. Nineteen have just entered their first year. We are delighted to welcome this group. Students are joined by nine volunteers serving in the kitchen, tech, housekeeping, and maintenance.

#### BOARD MEETING

- » The Faith Builders board, advisory council, pastoral council, and renovation committee met for three days, August 11-13. The men of these groups provide the insight and accountability needed to operate Faith Builders faithfully. We are grateful for their contribution.

#### RENOVATION

- » JD Nissley of Meigs, GA recently coordinated the removal of the large masonry chimney on the East Wing. Thank you for your work!