

Task Force on Lutheran Schools

Report, Recommendations, and Discussion/Study Topics

Introduction: We commend and thank the 2011 Synod Convention delegates and the *Conference of Presidents (COP)* for establishing the *Task Force on Lutheran Schools (TFLS)*. The TFLS members consider it a privilege to serve our Savior and our synod through this work.

As the subtitle above implies, this document will serve a few purposes. Some portions have a “report feel” to them. Recommendations are embedded in various places. We also weave in some topics that are meant to be more foundational and philosophical in nature and are intended to create discussion and study opportunities for congregation and school leaders. Our hope is that our pastors, principals, directors, teachers, and lay leaders will use this document and other resources provided by the TFLS and the *Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS)* to assist them as they work to strengthen their school ministries. We also recognize that each congregation and school is blessed with uniquely gifted called workers and lay people, and so we also pray that schools will work more proactively with each other to learn from each other.

Blessings result when God’s Word is rightly shared and taught. For more than a century and a half, our schools have had the privilege, honor, and blessing of teaching the saving message of salvation through Jesus to throngs of children and their families. There is much to celebrate, and there is much for which to give thanks and praise to God. We should humbly give thanks to God for using our schools as his instruments to share his Word.

We should thank him for giving us his Word so that we can know the way to heaven. We should thank him for the countless pastors, teachers, and staff ministers who have lovingly and humbly labored in the public ministry. We should thank him for our strong worker training system. We should thank him for the countless supportive lay people who have a love and passion for Christian education as it is carried out in our Lutheran schools. The ungodly philosophies that abound in our society make our schools all the more important. To have our children sit at the feet of Jesus for every aspect of their educational program is a tremendous blessing.

While we must remain mindful of the bounties of God’s goodness in the past, and while we in faith know that many more blessings are always on the horizon, we must continue to “get about the work” that he has called us to do. Identifying and addressing challenging issues confronting our schools is a good thing to do. It is always a blessing when people and organizations, while being respectful and mindful of the past, look forward with a spirit of developing a culture in which ongoing improvement is the norm. The process involved with improvement itself is a blessing, as are the products that result. A culture of growth and improvement can become “just the way we do things” when church and school leaders are always asking, “How can our Lutheran schools best carry out Gospel ministry?” We certainly embrace the truth that the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is what changes hearts and motivates people for Christian living; yet, the school is just that – a school. It is a formal educational setting. Schools can and should strive for excellence in all aspects of their operations as they carry out their work. “Excellence” will look different in each school setting. “Excellence” to us means stewarding a congregation’s resources, talents, and time with which they’ve been blessed by God in ways that help the congregation carry out its work.

To this end we submit our plans to God. We pray for his leadership and direction. We submit to his will. We acknowledge that our lives and our plans are in his hands. We look to seize opportunities he provides. We ask him to bless our efforts in his name as we carry out the work he has called us to do.

The Scope of Our Work: Defining and determining the scope of our work was a significant challenge. Ours is a school system comprised of autonomous organizations; each with different settings, opportunities, and challenges. We focused on early childhood ministries and our traditional Lutheran elementary schools because these are the ministries that assist local congregations in carrying out their mission and vision.

Also a factor is the role of our task force related to the congregation as a whole. Because our schools are ministries of congregations, we recognize that “as goes the congregation, so goes the school” (leadership, governance, funding philosophy, purpose of the school, traditions, etc.). While issues relating to the congregation as a whole are significant, tackling those issues in detail was beyond our reach. We are focusing on school ministries with the hope that congregational leaders will consider the broader picture of how congregational ministry can be improved. With that said, the next section of this document takes a philosophical broad look at the congregation as a whole before moving specifically into addressing our schools.

A Word about the Congregation: What a blessing it is that our congregations preach the truth of God’s Word in its entirety! God’s Word is the change agent, the effective tool. With that truth as our cornerstone, we also know congregations and schools are organizations. They plan and then work to carry out those plans. They make decisions as to how to carry out their work of nurture, outreach, and evangelism. So, before determining how their Lutheran school is to be utilized, congregational leaders need first to engage the entire congregation in determining what it is they want to do. The mission is the same for every congregation, which is to proclaim God’s Word in all its truth and purity. The church carries out many functions in striving to do nurture, outreach, and evangelism. As members are served with and through the Word, they are equipped to be ambassadors for Christ. While this overall mission – as commanded us by Christ – is the same for all of our congregations, each congregation functions in a different setting. Each has its own history and traditions. Each has a different makeup. Each has unique called workers and lay people with all of their diverse gifts. Each faces its own difficulties and challenges. Each is presented with unique opportunities for ministry.

The uniqueness of each congregation implies a uniqueness of vision for the work that each congregation can do as part of the overall mission of the Church at large. It is valuable for congregational leaders and members to have a clear understanding as to why they exist and what work they are to do. Satan will stop at nothing to lull a church into complacency, to have church leaders spend time and energy on non-essential activities, and to chip away at a congregation’s zeal to do the work that matters. Without meaning to do so, it is possible for a church to be so caught up in the daily, monthly, and annual operations of the “organization”; that it loses its focus on what is most important. Sadly, when this happens, Jesus’ words to the pastor at the church in Laodicea can ring true. He accused that congregation of being lukewarm – that they were neither hot nor cold – and that he was about to spit them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:16).

When a congregation is not clear on its vision and its ministry plan in light of Christ’s command to preach, teach, and baptize, it is simple to see how and why dissonance becomes the norm among people who have strong opinions about the matters of the congregation. Certainly, rifts can also occur when there is a clear vision, but those rifts are more effectively overcome when all own the vision and

direction of the congregation. When all own the vision, differences of opinion and healthy debate among God's people lead to blessings, because those involved acknowledge that they are all pulling in the same direction. When there is not a shared vision and plan, these activities become hurtful, and sometimes personal. This erodes relationships and hampers planning efforts. The congregation not only is handicapped in simply operating, but many ministry opportunities also go unnoticed. Much of the healthy debate and harmful arguing and bickering in congregations relate to the allocation of limited resources. Lutheran schools are expensive, so it is no wonder that in times of financial stress, the school is often discussed as a "cost" rather than in terms of "investment." The tremendous ministry opportunities the school could assume as part of the congregation's overall plan can be easily missed in a climate of financial stress.

What a blessing it is when church leaders and members pull together to do the hard but tremendously rewarding task of getting about the real work of the church on earth. It takes time and focus to do the job right. All activities must be based on the unshakeable foundation of God's Word. Bible study, with a strong focus on adult spiritual growth, is so very important as people work to develop and carry out their congregation's ministry plans.

Stating the vision of the congregation is not a one-time project, however. It really never ends. Just as with school development, the blessings often result from the process of the work rather than just the product itself. If congregation members immerse themselves in developing a ministry plan, spending time in Bible study and prayer, having meaningful conversations with fellow members, and fellowshiping with Christian brothers and sisters, tremendous blessings – by the grace of God – will result. The Word of God is the Word of the omnipotent God; it is mighty. It will be effective anywhere it is shared and taught properly. We are to be faithful with the Word. We as God's people have been entrusted to carry out the work, but we dare not use a faulty definition of the word "faithfulness" as an excuse for not doing all we can – with God's guidance, and by his grace – to carry out the work he entrusted to us.

Some would see that WELS is not growing in membership and infer that called and lay leaders are not carrying out their duties well enough. Some would see that WELS schools' total enrollment has dropped dramatically over the past decade and then question the efforts of schools and their staffs. This is dangerous. We must remember that God's Word will never return to him empty, but it will accomplish what he desires, and it will achieve the purpose for which he sent it. (Isaiah 55:11). God will accomplish what he will accomplish. We are to preach Law and Gospel faithfully. In short, we must not rest on the false assumption that numbers indicate success and failure in spiritual matters. With that being said, we should never weary of looking for more opportunities to share the Gospel with the people in our flock and with those lost in spiritual darkness. While the Word of God is the sole effective agent, church and school leaders can be creative in planning ways to reach more people so they can be impacted by that Word.

Once the vision and direction of the congregation is set, then ministry plans can be developed. Here is where the question "how" should be asked again and again. How can we best train and equip our own members? How can we best reach out with the Gospel to the whole world and also to our local community? From these key questions will flow other questions and ideas about the utilization of the school in assisting the congregation in carrying out its plans.

We also must remember that we don't know the future, we can't control the comings and goings of called workers and lay people, and our operational ministry plans are fallible because they are

developed by sinful people. Still, we plan. We seek guidance and direction from our God, and we are flexible as new challenges and opportunities invariably arise. We remember our mission is to teach and preach Jesus, but our vision setting and ministry planning is likely going to be changing over time. We believe this to be a good thing, though, because these are opportunities to consider how to address challenges and opportunities in ways that carry out the church's prime mission.

We are truly blessed: Our Redeemer has paid for our sins. The Holy Spirit has convinced our dead hearts that Jesus indeed is our Savior. Our Creator has enlisted us to serve him, and he assures us that he is with us and will bless us and our efforts. As we each look to the cross and see that our Beautiful Savior has died for our sins, we are motivated to do all we can to love him, please him, and serve him to the fullest with the gifts, talents, and blessings he has bestowed upon us. What a remarkable blessing it is that Almighty God would permit and command us to do such important work!

The Purpose of the School: Once the vitally important foundational work of setting the vision of the congregation and developing the ministry plan has been accomplished (again, an ongoing process), the role of the school can be firmly established in light of those overall congregational plans. Church and school leaders need to answer some key questions as they determine how to utilize their school. Following are examples of such questions:

- Why does our Lutheran school exist?
- What is its purpose and mission?
- Whom do we wish to serve with our Lutheran school?
- How will our Lutheran school help our congregation carry out its mission of nurture, outreach, and evangelism?
- How and where does our Lutheran school fit into the overall ministry plan of the congregation?

When these and other foundational questions are answered as part of the overall congregational planning process, leaders are much better equipped to give focused attention to determining the role of the school because it is viewed as an integral part of a congregation's ministry.

Called Worker Personal Spiritual Growth: Why wouldn't called workers demonstrate that their spiritual growth is their highest priority? We know the answers: the attacks in all of their various forms that come from the unholy trinity – our sinful nature, this sinful world, and our evil enemy. Yet, even with the relentless attacks of our enemies, we have amazing freedom in determining what it is we do with our time. We prioritize our day, weeks, months, and years with activities that we determine to be most important. To illustrate, consider how we deem sacrosanct a play-off game for our favorite sports team, a dinner engagement with dear friends, or an annually treasured week of vacation. Nothing short of an emergency would derail those plans. Yet, a daily appointment with the One who fashioned us is skipped if something better comes along – or, worse yet, isn't even on our list of things to do. Why is this? How can this be? Interestingly, though, we would not be able to find even one called worker who would say anything is more important than regular time devoted to personal spiritual growth, but then how many give evidence of that belief in their daily living? We leave this to each called worker to self-assess.

Why is this so important? Our called workers are divinely called by God himself. He has tapped each called worker for service in the public ministry. This is a great privilege and responsibility. If we are going to serve with an agape attitude in all of our ministry activities and with all those with whom we interact, there is nothing but the Word of God itself that will provide both the proper motivation and the appropriate principles that govern our thoughts, words, and actions as we seek – motivated by the

Gospel – to fulfill all of our responsibilities as well as we are able. Called workers need to be spiritually healthy – yes, certainly for themselves and their families – but also so they are equipped to serve others with joy and eagerness. How hard the devil works to discourage us and to lead us to despair! How often we must be driven back to the Word!

Satan will stop at nothing to get leaders in Christ's church to falter, to give up, and to lose focus. It is imperative that we each spend regular and scheduled time in personal Bible study. Not only will we become even more solidified in our faith, but also we will be equipped to handle, with our Lord's help, the seemingly endless string of challenges, frustrations, and disappointments that arise in our work. We will more readily see the joys and privileges associated with our work. In addition, our students will be blessed through our growing Christian maturity, and the students' parents can learn from our example. We, whom God has selected to serve publicly in his kingdom, need the nourishment that can be provided only by his Word. We are motivated to stay and grow in God's Word by what he has given us in Christ. May the power of the gospel message encourage and lead us all to continue taking in God's Word during devotional times with him. And as we continue to fix God's Word in our hearts and minds, our very lives will be sacrificial and devotional.

We know it is the Holy Spirit who works through Word and Sacrament to create, sustain, and grow faith; and we know his work isn't "measurable" in our human terms; this is his domain. Where we are empowered, though, is in determining what we do with our time and what level of effort we invest in our various activities and responsibilities. Stating that our spiritual well-being is our highest priority isn't enough; putting that statement into practice is our desire. May our great God, for the sake of his Son Jesus, forgive us for those times that we despise his Word and do not seek to hear and learn it. May he help us live lives in which personal spiritual growth efforts are simply "what we do." Our synod, districts, and our local congregations have many resources to assist us with these efforts.

We also encourage our called workers to connect with a colleague or lay person (at their local congregation or someone residing elsewhere) to create an accountability system regarding spiritual growth activities. Something like this might not be for everyone, but there may be those who would benefit from such a system. Maybe they – through avenues such as phone, email, and video links – can plan times to discuss their thoughts and insights with each other as they grow in the Word. Knowing they have an appointment with a brother or sister in Christ could be an encouragement to help keep them focused on this most important activity.

Relationships among Called Workers: We rejoice that many of our congregations have called workers who work well together, who support and encourage one another, who handle conflict and issues in a God-pleasing manner, and who all pull together for the greater good of carrying out the congregation's mission and vision. We thank God for this and ask him to continue blessing them with peace and unity.

We also know that many of our congregations have unhealthy relationships among called workers. We recognize that these issues are complex, but we also know the Word is powerful and is effective. We encourage all of our struggling called workers teams to work through their issues with humility and with an evangelical spirit. We implore them to see their colleagues as those for whom Jesus died and serve them accordingly. Jesus Christ has won the war against sin, death, and Satan; yet battles for individual souls still rage. How sinful we are when we allow personality conflicts, resentment, jealousy, and self-righteousness to invade ourselves and our schools and negatively impact the very work we have been called to do! All of our called workers are bound to Christ through their baptism, and they are

connected by faith with each other as well. The implication is clear – we are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Why would we not strive to live and work in harmony with one another?

Professional Growth: In every profession, continuing education is important; and it is expected as well. The process and the product are blessings for the person growing in his/her field of work, as well as for everyone served by the person who is growing. Our principals, directors, and teachers must continue to grow professionally. This is especially true for our principals and directors, most of whom received no formal pre-service training in school leadership and administration. Our boards of education and congregations also need to be made aware of the importance of this, and they need encouragement in supporting their workers' professional growth efforts. The funds spent on professional growth are "investments," not "costs."

Sometimes congregations become frustrated when they invest in a called worker's professional growth efforts, and then that worker accepts a call to serve elsewhere. Some might feel cheated that a different congregation reaps the blessings of the investment they made. We would have two thoughts to share regarding this concern. First, professional growth is not just about the product (the credits, the degree, the certificate, etc.); it is also about the process. While the worker is growing professionally, the congregation is reaping blessings. That worker is energized and is applying new learning to his or her responsibilities, thereby strengthening the school. Secondly, as a synod – walking together to accomplish a greater mission – we consider it a blessing to our body when our workers are strengthened, regardless of how long the Lord of the Church sees fit to position them in their ministry locations.

The WELS New Teacher Induction (NTI) program, a support system for beginning teachers, principals, early childhood ministry directors, and trained instructional mentors is a recent development aimed at supporting our workers; and it is already leading to blessings for new workers, mentors, and schools. NTI was the focus of the January 2013 *WELS Connection* video. We encourage congregations with schools to learn more about this program, to support it, and to utilize it.

The synod's *Continuing Education for Called Worker* Committee (CECW) is doing excellent work in addressing this important topic as well. They will be providing resources for beginning teachers, veteran teachers, and school leaders (principals and early childhood ministry directors). We strongly recommend that every congregation with a school review the materials produced by the CECW and implement plans for the ongoing professional growth for their teachers and principal/director.

WELS Schools – Local Autonomy or a School System (or Both)? Are we a system or not? We've often referred to ourselves as the fourth largest non-public school system in the United States. As part of their discussions about this question, we encourage congregational and school leaders to ask the great Lutheran question as a follow-up: "What does this mean?" We would suggest adding five words to this question: ". . . for our church and school?" What does it mean for our church and school that has local autonomy, but is also part of a larger body?

Does a school system mean there should be a system wide, structured accountability plan? If so, we are not a system. Does a school system mean that each school participates proportionately equally in the financial support of the greater organization? If so, we are not a system. Does a school system mean that each school follows an agreed upon process of ongoing improvement? If so, we are not a system. Does a school system mean that each school implements a common curriculum? If so, we are not a system.

We are systemic in that we have unity in faith and confession – the greatest blessing! We are systemic in that we agree to follow a common practice pertaining to the assignment of new teacher graduates from Martin Luther College and to the movement of called teachers from school to school throughout our synod. We are systemic in that every WELS school teaches its entire curriculum from a scriptural foundation.

Whether we are truly a system or not, we suppose, depends on each person's definition of the word. Local autonomy, a model of ministry we treasure, can have an ugly underbelly if the result is a culture that lacks appropriate accountability and lacks proactive improvement planning. A few examples:

- The congregation has a *Board of Education* that doesn't understand its role. Maybe it micromanages and therefore ties the hands of its principal. Maybe it doesn't see the need for policy creation and a process for systematic policy review. The principal is then "on an island" as he tries to manage the various issues that arise on a regular basis.
- The third grade teacher refuses to change her curriculum in one or more subjects to conform to school-wide curriculum improvement plans. The principal is frustrated but can do nothing about this. She's been doing it this way for twenty plus years and won't change.
- The athletic director finds it to be a great challenge to secure coaches, so he is hesitant to hold coaches (called or lay) accountable for poor sideline behavior and/or for an obsession with winning instead of using athletics as a means to help carry out the school's mission.
- A principal doesn't believe curriculum study and improvement planning is necessary. Some teachers go "over his head" to the board, but they do nothing. Frustration and resentment build.

Mentioned earlier is the fact that our congregations and schools cooperate related to our practice of teacher, principal, and director calls – a practice and process led and overseen by our District Presidents. When congregations receive call lists, each candidate is to have a recent assessment report (one or two years old). Teachers are rated on classroom instruction, classroom management, relationships, and professional characteristics. Principals and directors are rated on spiritual leadership, educational leadership, professional relationships, administrative characteristics, and professional characteristics. As of the writing of this report, we did not have the "turn in" statistics available for the 2012-2013 school year. Here are "turn in" rates for the 2011-2012 school year:

Early Childhood Ministries: 10.4% of Director Assessments and 11.5% of Teacher Assessments.

Lutheran Elementary Schools: 44.4% of Principal Assessments and 50.3% of Teacher Assessments. (The preceding years show similar numbers).

Since congregations typically value these assessment reports when extending calls, one could assume that all of our schools would submit these reports annually, or even biannually – this is what schools in a system would do. When schools do not submit these important documents, all the CLS can do is encourage and remind school leaders to take care of this task. The CLS has no authority to demand these forms. The TFLS strongly encourages board members to see to it that these reports are submitted on an annual or biannual basis. The same is true with the CLS annual request for school statistics. This data is valuable in helping the CLS better serve schools. 10% of Lutheran Elementary Schools and nearly 25% of Early Childhood Ministries did not turn in their statistical reports for the 2012-2013 school year. We can do better at fulfilling our system expectations.

We are in no way recommending that we create a synod-wide school accountability system that would take away local authority and in its wake establish a culture of a synod-wide enforcement/consequence system. But what we are recommending is that each school (and, with it, the congregation) creates, implements, and sustains a system of accountability that flows from the mission and vision statements of the church and school. When role definitions and the structure of accountability are clear and agreed on by all, the proper foundation has then been laid to tackle the tough issues that do arise in carrying out the operations of the school. We would add a note here that the CLS has excellent resources for training the school's *Board of Education*, which can be modified to fit local needs.

The WELS School as an Outreach Tool: Perhaps one of the most significant issues facing our schools is whether or not to use the school as a tool to assist the congregation with its outreach and evangelism efforts; or determining how to be an outreach-minded school if that is what they have determined they want to do. Most (but not all) agree that early childhood programs are appropriate outreach and evangelism tools, but there is significant debate about the role of the Lutheran elementary school in this work (and the Lutheran high school as well).

We believe that the Lutheran school can be used as an appropriate and effective tool for outreach and evangelism as part of the congregation's overall ministry plan, but we believe there are some components that must be integral in any school's plan for this to work well. We believe there can be disastrous results if this is implemented poorly and/or for the wrong reasons. We strongly advise against a system that enrolls children from outside of our fellowship without any "leg work" being done in advance with every interested family. From the point of view of prospective families, they're just looking for a good school – a service (whether they're in the invisible church or not). They want to make sure there are good academics, a safe campus, well behaved students, healthy parent involvement, and many other attributes. If our schools don't take the time and energy with every searching family on an individual basis, it is no wonder problems arise. Then, as these problems arise, word spreads, and the concept of using the school as an outreach tool gets a black eye. Here is a sampling of some situations that have arisen in schools that did not have a thorough pre-enrollment education process about the school's purpose, policies, and expectations:

- A group of parents demands representation on the school board.
- A group of parents demands exemption from the Tuesday/Thursday catechism class for their children, a class which is a stated part of the curriculum.
- Students pass out flyers to their classmates for an activity at a church outside of our fellowship.

Our schools are positioned beautifully to provide educational services and settings that people in our communities are looking for. But as they spend time getting to know our schools, they must learn who we are (and who we are not). We can do this in a loving, humble, gentle, and evangelical way.

Before we go any further, here are some factors that should not be the drivers to using the school as an outreach tool:

- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by financial considerations.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by declining school enrollment.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by declining church membership.

- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if it is not intentionally part of the congregation's overall outreach and evangelism plans.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by anything other than the desire to teach Christ and him crucified.

Here's an outline one model that has worked extremely well, assuming the proper motivation is prompting this work and it is part of the congregation's stated plan:

1. Following a campus tour, a thorough student application is received by the school, which prompts . . .
2. . . . the principal to make phone contact to set up an initial visit. We recommend the principal making a home visit, but a visit at the school office will suffice. The principal gets to know the family, and the family gets to know him. The principal learns their story, because every family has one. Regardless of what the family might have listed on the application regarding church membership and denomination (if anything), through friendly questioning and conversation, the principal gets a sense for where they are spiritually. He uses this visit to explain the various policies and conditions for enrollment (maybe the required *Bible Information Class* [BIC] so parents will learn what their children will be taught, maybe the requirement that students who enroll do so into the entire curriculum, a stated willingness by parents to support the school policies, etc.). He answers the many questions they have. He sets the tone with them, helping them to see his school is bible based and that God's Word is the sole foundation for all that is taught at the school and for all activities, instructing them that the school works to assist parents with their God-given parental responsibilities. This visit invariably becomes an opportunity to share faith and teach Jesus. If the family is strong in their non-WELS church, the principal will have them consider that the school might not be the best fit for them, that there will be confusion for the child (which is why the BIC is required), that students and families can't undermine what we teach because we're inviting them in to our "homes," so to speak. Maybe the family will still want to come and is willing to comply with school policies in letter and in spirit. Maybe the principal will learn that the family is part of a church roster, but hasn't attended in years and is not being shepherded. Maybe he will learn the family is Christian, but has no church home. Maybe he'll learn that they are not yet in the family of God. Even though we like our black and white categories and our pecking order in our enrollment policies, the principal will learn that each family is unique and is not so easily "slotted" into our premade categories. The principal will form an opinion about the "fit." And as the principal prepares to end that first visit, he tells the family to talk about it and to let him know at their convenience if they'd like to go to the next step in the process, which is . . .
- 3 . . . a similar visit with the pastor. When the principal hears from the family that they are interested in continuing the process, he gives a copy of the application to the pastor, which is his cue to contact the family to set up his visit. Here again, we recommend a home visit, but a visit at church will suffice. This, too, is a friendly visit to help the family determine if the school will be a good fit for them. It also affords the pastor an opportunity to talk a bit more about why taking the information class is so important, and it helps in starting a good relationship. As the pastor finishes his visit, he instructs the family to contact the principal if they'd like to move on to the next step, which is . . .
4. . . . having the application go before the *Board of Education* at its next meeting. The principal and pastor will have compared notes before the meeting and will have determined if they will recommend enrolling the family. At the board meeting, the pastor and principal share their thoughts, using the opportunity to reteach the board why it is they do what they do. After the board decides on the application, . . .
- 5 . . . the principal contacts the family to let them know of the decision. If accepted, he tells them to watch their email and mail for registration materials and that the classroom teacher will be calling for a summer home visit. Following that phone call, . . .

6. . . . the principal gives a copy of the application to the school secretary and a copy to the classroom teacher. When the teacher receives that application,

7. . . . he/she can be assured that all of the upfront work has been done and that he/she can focus on building relationships and talking about classroom matters. The teacher contacts the family when it comes time to set up home visits, knowing he/she won't have to deal with questions and concerns that would have already been addressed by the principal, pastor, and board.

The investment of time in the above model is significant, but in our opinion, crucial. We also need to remember that success should not be measured by how many children actually come, or how many end up joining our churches. All we can control is our effort, our focus, policy/procedure creation, and the like. The Lord will send to us whom he will send, and we will joyfully teach them the truths of God's Word. We leave the creation of faith to the Holy Spirit. We leave the correction of error to the Holy Spirit working through the Word. And, when some families are led by the Spirit to confess a faith in fellowship with ours, we gratefully and joyfully receive them into our church membership. Our work, though, is to proclaim Jesus. We can do just that through our schools extremely effectively. We are Lutheran by what we teach, not necessarily only by who sit at our desks. Some voice concern that these "outsiders" will negatively impact our WELS children and our school culture. While there could be some instances here or there (just as WELS children can negatively impact other WELS children), we believe the fear is largely unfounded, especially if thorough upfront work has been done for and with each prospective family.

Sometimes "nurture" vs. "outreach" is a topic for debate. Congregations who use their school solely to educate their own member children might call themselves "nurture" schools. Congregations who use their schools as outreach tools to create evangelism opportunities might call themselves "outreach" schools. We would challenge those who see these two purposes as either/or to instead view them as both/and. We would encourage those who think about this topic as it applies to their own situations to see the commonality between the two; that commonality is *teaching*. Regardless of the audience, God's Word is taught in all of its truth and purity. Whether that child is a WELS member or not, God's Word is used to teach, to encourage, to discipline, to comfort, and to apply in countless other situations. It is true that the non-WELS student might lack some of the background knowledge that member children have, but that highlights even more the opportunities to teach Jesus to those who don't know him. To show that this isn't a black and white, either/or issue, consider this scenario, which happens in schools all across our synod: An un-churched fifth grade boy comes to your school after all of the preliminary work has been done. This child doesn't know Jesus and what he did. While under the school's care, the Holy Spirit gives the boy the gift of faith. Doesn't the school now serve a nurturing role in conjunction with its reaching out role? Does our definition of "nurture," which typically is understood as serving WELS children, leave room for children who do come to faith while in our midst and who therefore are nurtured along by our loving, Christ-centered teachers while at our school? Maybe this child joins our church; maybe he doesn't. If he doesn't join, has the school done its job? If the school is laden with the burden of member creation, then one might answer "no" to that question. But if the school's role is simply to proclaim our Beautiful Savior to the children who come, then "yes." And, even if this boy had not come to faith, the school has done its job, because its teachers have proclaimed Jesus.

Some congregations who do use their schools for outreach really do struggle with how to deal with children from other Christian churches. Before digging into this topic, though, we first remember that un-churched doesn't necessarily mean unbeliever. There are children and families who are members of the invisible church, but who are not part of a visible church. And there are many un-churched people lost in spiritual darkness. But what to do about the "other-churched?" How to think about them? They

are the people – because they are Christian – who are looking for excellent Christian schools; so they want to learn more about our schools. We know each congregation needs to sort this out for themselves. They need to create philosophy statements, policies, and procedures that guide them if they determine they will enroll these children. This, though, isn't always a black and white issue either. Another scenario that happens in our schools: A little girl from another church body is enrolled in your school, again, after the pre-enrollment work has been done. She belongs to a church that teaches that God is usually angry because we're bad; at least that's the message she gets. She's afraid. She doesn't know Jesus really is her Savior and really did die for her. She learns about the real Jesus from her second grade teacher. While in your school's care, that little seed of faith she might have had begins to take root and strengthen by the Spirit's power. Or, maybe there was no faith, but the Spirit gives that precious gift as the teacher patiently and lovingly teaches Jesus and prays for the little girl. Could we now say this is a nurturing ministry even though she isn't on our church roster? And she's actually on another church's roster? We suppose it depends on how one defines "nurture."

Schools who do enroll "other-churched" children will want to be sure they are doing the important upfront work as outlined above. In wrestling with this overall topic, congregation and school leaders also need to discuss the application of fellowship principles as they relate to the school's ministry and be prepared to convey any information to prospective parents, so it doesn't come as a surprise later. We do want to appropriately apply those principles, but we do not want to make rules that are not supported by Scripture. It is absolutely critical that parents have a clear understanding of who our school is – and who we are not. As mentioned earlier, we believe some sort of BIC component is crucial for parents of all children from outside of our fellowship (un-churched and "other-churched"). Who is to say God in his providence isn't leading a family to a place where God's Word is proclaimed accurately, where Law and Gospel is taught and applied appropriately? There will be those who will remain adamant in their error, but these situations are usually discovered and handled during the principal and pastor pre-enrollment visits; and many of these families figure out for themselves that the school won't be a good fit for them. But there are also many families, even though they might be members somewhere else, who are really searching and struggling and wanting to learn more. When they come to a BIC, our pastors don't pressure them to join our churches, nor do they speak maliciously against their churches. Our pastors do what they do best: they humbly, gently, respectfully, and resolutely teach God's Word. They point to Scripture as the authority in all things. They trust the Holy Spirit to work as he sees fit. We don't believe that "sheep-stealing" is a fair accusation because these families came to our schools with their eyes wide open (because of the work done in advance by the principal and pastor) and because they have been given the rationale as to why it is so important they learn what their children will be learning (not that they will always believe or agree with what is taught; that is the Holy Spirit's realm). If we indeed have been blessed by God to see his Word as infallible, we can understand why God might lead people to us – people with all kinds of backgrounds and experiences. Our schools can be the perfect intersection points that our God uses to connect people to Truth. We acknowledge this can be a controversial issue, but we think this is a great topic for discussion and study by all of our churches with schools that will be used to assist the congregation with outreach and evangelism.

We realize many well-meaning church and school leaders refer to non-WELS children as "tuition students." We humbly suggest using a different term (whether or not these families indeed pay a fee closer to or at the actual cost of education). These are people with souls who will spend eternity either with Jesus or apart from him. As families come to learn more about our schools, we can see them as people whose paths have been directed to intersect with the path of our school – maybe "for such a time as this." If our schools are places where Jesus is proclaimed, we can see how the Lord might – in

his providence – direct people to us, people who haven't had the blessing of being raised in the faith or being in a place in which the full counsel of God has been properly taught and understood.

The Role of the Principal: The following comes from the synod's *Continuing Education for Called Workers* Committee:

The school principal has a profound impact on a school's success and can account for up to one-fourth of the variation of school-level factors in student achievement (Liethwood & Riehl, 2005). At one time the principal's chief role was a resource or task manager. His primary concern was the efficient operation of the school (Shipman, Queen, & Peel, 2007). Today's principals must be visionary leaders who are held accountable for school spiritual guidance, teacher and student learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and community relations. They provide instructional, community, and visionary leadership (Shipman et. al, 2007). To expect these abilities of a beginning teacher, or even an unprepared veteran teacher, is unrealistic.

That is why most school systems have established standards that principals must achieve before assuming the position. To achieve these standards candidates must be experienced teachers, have a degree in educational administration (36 – 60 credits), and complete a field experience of 320 hours. Using a graduate degree as an indicator for principal preparedness, WELS principals (21.5%) lag behind their peers (Public, 98.5%; LCMS, 69.4%). The CECW is focusing on supporting existing WELS principals and planning for the recruitment and training of future principals.

One of the more significant issue facing WELS schools is the definition and the role of the principal (and much of this is applicable to directors of early childhood ministries as well). Our historical model of the principalship has been defined and practiced as a male teacher who serves as principal "on the side." Considering the complexity and challenges of operating an excellent Lutheran school, the principalship needs to be viewed differently. Instead of being a teacher, who maybe gets some *Administrative Release Time* (ART) to tend to principal duties, he needs to be viewed as a principal, who might also do some teaching. Principal first – not teacher first. This will rub many of our principals the wrong way because nearly all of our principals went to (D)MLC with the desire of serving Jesus in the public ministry as a teacher. Teaching is their first love. As a matter of fact, a study done on the WELS principalship in 2003 showed that out of 285 respondents, 36% of them, if they could choose, would prefer to be teachers and forego being principals. In a 2008 study, 38% of 255 respondents answered the same way – "forget the principalship; let me teach." Why is that?

Before we pursue this topic further, glance below at a sampling of the responsibilities that often fall to the school principal:

Staff Development
Promotion of the School in the Congregation
School Budget/Financial Matters
Cultivation of School Prospects
Strengthened Partnership with Colleagues
Long-term Master Planning
Campus Safety
Strength School's Spiritual Focus
Teacher Care
School Legalities and Compliance
Communication with Fellow Principals/School Leaders
Strengthen Board of Education

Curriculum Development
Supervision of Instruction
Promotion of the School in the Community
Parent Communication/Involvement
Development of New Programs
Ongoing Professional Growth
School Discipline
Strengthen School Culture/Climate
Work with Individual Students and Families
Policy Development, Review, Revision
Manage Support Staff
Office Management and Organization

Manage Volunteers
Manage the “Daily Press” of Phone Calls, Emails, Visitors
Manage School Calendar/Activities
Conflict Resolution

Work with Pastor and Congregational Leaders
Crisis Management Plans
Manage Faculty Issues
Faculty Spiritual Growth

Two descriptors often come from principals themselves when considering their take on the principalship: “Overwhelmed” and “Under-prepared.” The studies in 2003 and 2008 report that principal attitudes are deeply impacted by the reality that they don’t have nearly enough time to be school leaders. The term *Administrative Release Time* isn’t a good descriptor anymore. ART implies some time here and there – away from the classroom – to do things like ordering books, filling out purchase orders, and doing many of the maintenance tasks associated with operating a school. The CLS offers a standard as part of its accreditation process that says principals should have a minimum of two hours per day of ART per each group of 75 students. This standard needs to be reviewed in light of the challenges facing the principalship and our schools. We urge schools that don’t meet this standard to work toward achieving it as a minimum goal.

We recommend doing a 180 on our view of the principal, seeing him first and foremost as a school leader, not as a teacher who also has been tasked with school administrative duties. Rather than saying we need to “free him” up to do some administrative work, we need to see him as being first and foremost the school leader and that he does some teaching as is necessary and appropriate. The principal must have the time resources to be able to manage well the responsibilities that fall to him and to be the forward moving servant working toward achieving the plans of the congregation as they relate to the school. If the majority of his time and energy is spent as a teacher – a calling that also has many pressures and responsibilities – how can he be effective at both? We won’t get into the negative impact on health, personal well-being, and family.

Our classroom teachers need a tremendous amount of support. These dedicated and talented servants are facing many challenges in today’s classrooms. This is not to minimize the very real challenges faced by the workers of yesteryear, but times have changed. Gone are the days of the traditional family. Here are the days of family strife, divorce, unrest, and dysfunction. Gone are the days of automatic support from the parents for the teacher. Here are the days of challenge and confrontation. Gone are the days in which throwing spitballs was a typical student misbehavior. Here are the days in which aggressiveness, violence, disrespect, and defiance are the common inappropriate behaviors. Simply stated, teachers need help. If the principal himself is dealing with these same issues in his own classroom, while scrambling to tend to the press of the principalship, he will be in no position to offer meaningful support to the teachers on his staff. Principals need to grow in their awareness of the needs of their teachers; principals are there to serve them, too. But they need the time to do this. Research is clear that the school will only be as effective as the principal. The same can be said for the classroom; the classroom will only be as effective as the teacher. (In this context, we don’t equate the word “effective” with its meaning when discussing the work of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. “Effective” in this context relates to professional qualities involved with education). Providing principals with the necessary time resources and a realistic position description will be a blessing to the school and congregational ministry.

As mentioned earlier, nearly 40% of our principals would prefer not to be principals. Besides the lack of time being a contributing factor for many, another factor is the lack of training. Systemically, we have no pre-service training in the areas of school leadership and administration. Martin Luther College (MLC) trains teachers (along with staff ministers and pre-seminary pastor track students). Because of

the rigorous requirements MLC faces in producing certified teachers and in keeping their accreditation status, they simply have no room in their program for pre-service training in this area. We are thankful that MLC now offers a post graduate degree in the area of school administration and leadership. Candidates study a core group of courses relating research to the principles of elementary education, and they choose an emphasis in one of the following areas: Instruction, Leadership, Special Education, or Educational Technology. We also commend the CLS for providing and promoting the ten *Leadership Modules* that have been well received by school leaders thus far. Congregations need to be willing to support the ongoing professional growth of their principals.

The Continuing Education for Called Workers committee has also identified the role of the principal as a critical issue in WELS schools and congregations. They are encouraging the development of resources that assist with school leadership development. They have identified three key themes: 1) Strengthening Principals; 2) Supporting Principals; and 3) Preparing Principals. We recommend that these plans come to fruition and that excellent resources are developed to assist in these efforts.

We also believe these resources need to be developed with the director of early childhood ministries in mind. As mentioned earlier, much of the information in this section is applicable to them as well as they, too, are often tasked with being lead teachers while trying to direct the entire ministry including working with licensing, financial, and staffing issues. Many of our early childhood ministries are serving as excellent tools for nurture, outreach, and evangelism. So critical is the work of serving these young parents who entrust their children to our ministries of early childhood – building relationships with them, communicating with them, supporting them, and encouraging them. Directors also need the time, resources, and training to be able to carry out well all of the many responsibilities of their ministries.

It is somewhat ironic that in most school systems, the principalship is a goal that is sought as a desired career step. The WELS system has many men who would prefer not to be principals, but who do serve as principals because they see the need and, most significantly, because the Lord of the Church himself called them to these positions. Our synod is indeed blessed in that these men see the need for their gifts to be utilized as principals. They serve knowing it is what the Lord wants them to do, for he has called them to do it. Yet, one can conclude that the principalship in WELS is not necessarily a position that is seen as desirable by many serving in the position now (or by those who might receive calls to serve as principals). It is safe to say that the lack of training creates tension and frustration, and the lack of time intensifies those issues. Another factor, frankly, is that the position is extremely challenging – even when training and time are available. One might conclude that if the WELS had an improved model of principal training as well as the necessary time resources to fulfill the role well, that a greater number of our men would be more receptive to the idea of entering into and remaining in the principalship. An added blessing would be that principals were viewed by our synod and local congregations as school leaders first, who also might do some teaching.

The *Conference of Presidents* (COP) knows that the CLS strongly recommends that MLC graduates are not assigned into the principalship; yet, the reality is that congregations have needs, and the COP is called upon to fill those needs. Sometimes the COP needs to assign graduates into the principalship. We are thankful that they are actually placed as “principal apprentices.” Congregations know upfront that if they are assigned a principal who is newly graduated, that they will need to support a mentoring program that is supplied by the CLS. The current fee for that program is \$500 per year for two years. Ideally, this practice of placing graduates into the principalship would cease, since the MLC graduate

hasn't even established himself as a teacher yet; but this apprentice program is a good "in-between" step until we can avoid the practice altogether.

As a realistic definition of the WELS principal begins to emerge, the role of the principal will be viewed differently. The end goal, though, is not to elevate the perception of the principalship to gain respect for the position in and of itself. Rather, the goal is to create a scenario in which the WELS principal can be as equipped and supported as possible in carrying out the important work that his school does in support of the congregation's overall ministry plan. As the perception of the principalship begins to match reality, the need for time resources and training should become apparent.

School Improvement Planning: Delegates will see a memorial to synod in convention, titled *Improvement Planning in WELS Schools*. This section of our document is intended to provide a bit more background to the memorial.

We believe the best way to create and sustain a culture of ongoing improvement is through the accreditation process. Besides the overriding goal of assessing all facets of the school ministry and developing a systematic plan of improvement, the self-study process will cause school leaders to study carefully the school's purpose, philosophy, and enrollment policy. Schools will benefit not only from the product, but from the process as well. A related benefit of the self-study is the widespread involvement of various segments of the congregation who will learn more about the school and take ownership of it and its ministry. The CLS offers an accreditation program called *Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod School Accreditation* (WELSSA). Many of our schools are reaping the blessings associated with using this tool. Some schools choose to use an accreditation process offered locally, which might carry "more weight" in the eyes of the people they serve. We commend any school for undertaking the accreditation process, whether it is done using WELSSA or another appropriate accrediting agency.

Included the BORAM (p. 63) is a document created by the Task Force for Lutheran Schools, titled *Foundational Principles and Guiding Statements for WELS Schools*. While the thorough self-study and accreditation process is the best format for self-analysis and improvement planning, we offer this document as a tool for discussion, study, and improvement planning as well. The reader will note that some words and phrases are underlined; these words and phrases will be "clickable" on the newly-designed CLS website and will point the user to resources that we pray will be helpful. (We offer a word of thanks to the many teachers, directors, principals, and pastors who offered improvement suggestions during the development of this document.)

Another resource that will soon be unveiled is *Foundations*, which will be published by *Northwestern Publishing House*. A more thorough introduction of *Foundations* follows this document, but we list here the six objectives:

1. Reestablish God's Word as the bedrock for Christian education.
2. Serve as a powerful witness for Jesus as the Lord of life and our Savior from sin.
3. Reassert the proper application of law and gospel as the basis for the motivational model used in WELS schools.
4. Reorient WELS schools to a supportive role that assists the work of parents in training their children in body, mind, and spirit.
5. Provide opportunities for non-member parents to participate in group Bible study during their children's first years in a WELS school or childcare center.

6. Embrace the parent-teacher partnership as a critical component of the Christian education model.

This is yet another tool that can be used by church and school leaders to evaluate and improve their church and school ministries.

Resources for Congregations/Schools: Another task we undertook was identifying and reorganizing many of the excellent resources that already exist that would help school leaders. Some resources might need the “dust blown off of them,” and some will need some revision work; others need to be put into electronic format. We also identified areas for which new resources need to be developed. Identification of those areas will likely not prove to be a major challenge; the challenge will be in seeing through the process of creating these resources where none exist. This will be time and labor intensive work. The CLS plans to provide leadership in developing these resources.

Redesigned CLS Website: Our task force worked with technology personnel at the synod office to redesign the CLS website, making it more interactive and user friendly. This site hosts the foundational document; a resource bank; forums for teachers, principals, directors, board members, pastors, etc. to share ideas and resources, ask questions, get input, etc.; and other helpful items. We hope this website will be “living,” so that possibly the “another 3-ring binder on the shelf” syndrome can be avoided and that many people will use it and will benefit from it.

As an aside, regarding technology: We learned that the technology used to assist CLS personnel in developing call lists for the *Conference of Presidents* is limited and lacks user friendliness, and is therefore unnecessarily time intensive – even time wasting. Time, like dollars, is a limited resource and must be stewarded as efficiently as possible. We learned that efforts are underway in developing new software for this work, and we applaud those efforts. It is our prayer that work will move along quickly in this area.

Funding WELS Schools: God’s people want to share all of his truths, including teaching Christian stewardship principles. As Christian stewardship principles are taught, and as the Word of God works in people’s hearts, the response of gifts of time, talents, and treasures is the fruit that appears. With that truth in mind, we also realize that operating high quality Lutheran schools is expensive; this is no secret to the many congregations who struggle with this issue on a regular basis. A logical place to begin addressing this issue would be in view of the overall ministry plans of the church. Ministry priorities arise out of ministry plans. If the school is to serve a significant role in the nurture, outreach, and evangelism efforts of the congregation; and if it is to offer excellence in Christ-centered education, then the school will be viewed as a priority. Rather than seeing the school in terms of “cost,” members will view it as an “investment.”

Many congregations practice the belief that the formal Christian education program – the school – is the responsibility of the congregation as a whole. Some have implemented “book fees” to provide some income, while retaining the spirit of the philosophy of having the school funded primarily through the congregation’s budget. Some have made this issue into “right” and “wrong.” We must be slow to judge practices that are not specified in Scripture. There is certainly wonderful rationale for the concept of a high percent of congregational support, but there is also rationale for instituting a tuition program at some level. Tradition can become a stumbling block when there is an unwillingness to review it in a God-pleasing way and in light of what the congregation would like to do.

The driving force for school tuition, though, should not be the lack of money, or money in and of itself. That is very short sighted and will likely result in increased tension. The driving force should be the ministry plans of the congregation and the allocation of resources in carrying out those plans. Church leaders will have to ask themselves some tough questions, such as:

- To what extent can the congregation carry out its ministry plans if a large portion of the ministry plan (budget) is designated for the school?
- Because of limited funds, how does it help the church or the school ministry if the large portion allocated to the school is not sufficient to run a quality school?
- How do we consider the fact that some of our families are blessed with the financial means to contribute a greater amount toward the cost of education, while other families lack the ability to do so?

Many schools must operate on a bare bones budget. It is a challenge for them to improve the effectiveness of their ministry if there are not funds for adequate teacher salaries, curriculum materials, classroom equipment, technology needs, professional growth activities, and additional staffing to allow the principal to have more time to tend to his school leadership responsibilities. One thing is obvious—education is not free. It takes strong financial resources to run a school well. How these things are paid for is a matter of adiaphora. There is no biblical mandate about how to “train a child in the way he should go” in the context of formal Christian education; however, as schools seek to cover the cost of education, it is wise to consider several biblical principles and several matters of good common sense. The TFLS realizes that any funding model has its positives and its areas of concern. We realize there is no one best way to fund Lutheran schools.

Perhaps one of the most important facts to understand is cost of education. The phrase itself is rather nebulous and can vary greatly in calculations, depending on how it is defined. But regardless of location or setting, there needs to be an understanding by local leadership of what it costs to educate one student in *that particular school*. Cost of education is *not* what families pay for tuition or how much a church contributes toward school expenses. The cost of education is *the total actual cost per child in that particular school*. In our WELS schools, there often seems to be a misunderstanding of how much education actually costs.

The following is a very simplistic look at some of the various funding models that exist, along with accompanying thoughts:

Assume that the average WELS classroom can hold twenty students. In that classroom you will have a called worker. That called worker has benefits such as salary, pension, insurance, and housing allowance. Then that classroom needs materials: curriculum, books, paper, art supplies, computers, etc. There are often costs involved with cleaning the room (janitor, general manpower time, cost of floor waxing/shampooing, etc.). There are also costs for utilities. With these considerations, we can do an *estimated* average WELS student cost of education:

WELS called teacher package:	\$55,000
Curriculum, books, supplies:	3,600
Standardized Tests:	400
Insurance:	1,000
Utilities:	1,600
Mortgage (in full or shared w/church):	1,000

Administration (such as secretary):	5,000
Misc. Costs:	<u>400</u>
Total:	\$68,000

This estimate is certainly on the very low end of cost of education. (Again, this is a simplistic example intended to help congregational leaders with the important work connected to funding the school.). So, for that particular classroom, assuming twenty students, the cost of education is **\$3,400**.

Now take this example to the next level of considerations. Let's assume a typical WELS Lutheran elementary school has four classrooms, but not every room is full. Perhaps the school is only at 75% capacity. With that scenario we can do another calculation:

Enrollment (75% enrollment of a capacity of 80)	60 students
Total estimated expenses for four classrooms	\$272,000 (\$68,000 x 4 rooms)
Estimated cost of education per student	\$4,533

Each school may differ on how it calculates cost of education; however, regardless of the setting, some costs are unavoidable in schools, such as the called worker package, the utilities, and the insurance.

Thus, we may come to a generalization as follows: Educating a student in a Lutheran elementary school generally costs \$3,500-\$5,000. But if a classroom has a called worker, then the cost per student *must be* at least \$3,000 just to cover the costs associated with the teacher.

Using these considerations, we'll apply them to three different funding model options, identifying some potential pros and cons of each:

1. School Supported by Offerings Alone

Some churches may desire to support the ministry and expenses of a school only by offerings and not by any tuition. If that is the funding plan, the following should be considered:

Possible Pros

1. It communicates clearly a message that the church and school are one ministry.
2. It communicates clearly that the congregation supports the formal Christian education of children.
3. It is an opportunity for teaching and practicing first-fruits giving that support the entire ministry plan of the congregation, including the school.
4. It *might* remove possible divisions with church vs. school mentality.

Possible Cons

1. It *might* not teach families to appreciate the actual cost of education.
2. It *might* lead families to take for granted the education provided by the congregation.
3. It might be a good practice in theory, but rarely do families of a congregation completely "make up for it" by adding the actual cost of education to their regular offerings.
4. It is nearly impossible for a congregation alone to support a healthy school these days with the current cost of education.

Now assume this average congregation wants to support its average school by offerings alone. If we use the average cost of education number above of about \$4,000 per student, this would mean that in this

scenario of 75 family units and 75 students, each family would have to increase offerings \$4,000 per year over and above regular offerings to the Lord (\$333/month/family). Or in other words, such a congregation would have to increase normal church offerings by \$300,000 to support 75 students.

Thus, the intentions of funding a school by offerings alone may be good and faithful intentions. However, it may be nearly impossible with the cost of education in America today and it may levy a burden on the congregation that is unbearable and insurmountable.

2. School Supported by Tuition Alone

Some churches may desire to support the ministry and expenses of a school only by the tuition alone and not by any church offerings. If that is the funding plan, the following should be considered:

Possible Pros

1. It teaches parents to appreciate the actual cost of education.
2. It leads parents to truly appreciate the value of Christian education.
3. It does not put added burdens on the offerings of the congregation, enabling the congregation to carry out more ministry.
4. It allows for a clear and accurate cost of education to be published and recognized.

Possible Cons

1. In many WELS school settings, many families cannot afford the full cost of education, especially in multiple-child families.
2. It *might* lead to divisions, such as a church vs. school mentality.
3. It does not teach the congregation the value and importance of Christian education.
4. It *might* lead a congregation to forget that the school is a ministry arm of the church.
5. Though a family might have a first-fruits attitude of faithful giving to the Lord, it puts an undue burden on member families to give offerings *and* pay full tuition.

For illustration purposes, consider an average WELS family that earns \$60,000 a year in total income. Faithfully and joyfully, this family with two school-age children gives 8% or \$4,800 a year in offerings to the Lord. But in this “tuition only” scenario, this family of three would be giving over \$12,000 a year in both offerings and tuition; this might not be doable for such an average family.

In addition, in a “tuition only” scenario, there lies the potential for a great divide to take place where “the church” wonders what the purpose of “the school” is and “the church” wonders if “the school” is cutting it or worth it. The spiritual and financial ramifications of a tuition only school must be seriously considered.

3. School Supported by Offerings and Tuition

Some churches may desire to support the ministry and expenses of a school by both offerings and tuition. If that is the funding plan, the following should be considered:

Possible Pros

1. It teaches parents to appreciate the actual cost of education.
2. It leads parents to truly appreciate the value of Christian education.
3. It does not put added burdens on the offerings of the congregation, enabling the congregation to carry out more ministry.
5. It allows for a clear and accurate cost of education to be published and recognized.

6. It communicates clearly a message that the church and school are one ministry.
7. It communicates clearly that the congregation supports the Christian education of children.
8. It is an opportunity for teaching and practicing first-fruits giving that support the entire ministry plan of the congregation, including the school.
9. It *might* remove possible divisions between “church” and “school.”

Possible Cons

1. In many WELS school settings, some school families cannot afford the full cost of education, especially in multiple-child families.
2. It *might* lead to divisions yet, such as a church vs. school mentality.
3. Though a family might have a first-fruits attitude of faithful giving to the Lord, depending on the family situation, it might yet put an undue burden to give offerings *and* pay tuition.

Assuming once more that the average cost of education is about \$4,000 per child, a church might consider splitting the cost of education with the tuition charged each family. Or as another example, the church might contribute \$1,000 per child toward the cost of education.

This would still call for first-fruits giving by the congregation in support of this important arm of its ministry (i.e. Christian education and outreach). At the same time, it would teach parents the true value of education and alleviate any undue or insurmountable burdens for the congregation.

This could be the most feasible scenario for a school to remain in operation while a church maintains “ownership” of the school. It has a good balance to it and is the most achievable scenario as the great cost of education these days is considered. The level of tuition would be developed after careful study of the entire ministry efforts of the congregation. Maybe tuition could be phased in at a low level, and then increased to the desired level over time. Planned and managed properly, this tuition income would help the school increase its effectiveness, while also decreasing the pressure on the church budget, thereby allowing other ministry efforts, according to the vision of the congregation, to be carried out effectively.

Another facet of a funding model could be one in which families who have the financial ability pay a tuition fee closer to or at the actual cost of education, while the congregation establishes an annual line item for tuition assistance to help families who are unable to pay the tuition rates. Many resources are available for creating and managing a tuition assistance program. In this scenario, the congregation expends fewer dollars for the operation of the school, even with the establishment of a tuition assistance program.

Finally, no matter what plan is employed, leadership must be sure that the total contributions of the congregation per child plus the total tuition charged per child covers the actual total cost of education.

Third Source Funding

A debate-arousing topic in WELS is third source funding. This is another concept that can mean a lot of different things, depending on how one defines it. For the sake of this document, we will consider third source funding as any school support that is not from member offerings or school tuition.

There are many different sources of third source funding such as:

- Government-funded school choice programs
- Government-funded preschool programs
- Government aid for those needing financial assistance
- Military aid to families with active duty parents
- Grants from public or private foundations
- Gifts from members of the community
- Gifts from WELS members of other congregations
- Busing provided by the local school district
- Free/reduced lunch programs funded by the government

And there is “implied” third source funding with things like tax exempt status for property and the parsonage allowance for male called workers.

We advise against making the blanket statement: “We must accept no third source funding.” Rather, church and school leaders are to be “innocent as doves yet shrewd as serpents” when it comes to third source funding. Each scenario or source of funding needs to be considered independently. Questions need to be asked, such as:

- Will this really affect our thankful offerings or could this be all the more reason to give thanks and give more to the Lord?
- Is the source of funding (e.g. government or foundation) given with any strings attached?
- If we receive government funding, will they put any restrictions on our teachings and practice?
- Can this gift be received while still maintaining a focus that the school is supported as a ministry of the church (i.e. by offerings and/or tuition)?
- Will this funding lead to dependency upon it?

To be sure, third source funding needs to be considered very carefully and cautiously. However, to assert that all third source funding is wrong or sinful would be unwise and not supportable by Scripture. There are *descriptive* passages of Scripture to guide us in such manners, but not necessarily *prescriptive* passages of Scripture.

We urge each congregation to discuss their current funding model and rationale for using it. Analyze tradition through the lens of scripture. If – after discussion, study, and prayer – leaders conclude that no changes are needed, they will still receive benefit from having gone through the process of self-analysis. They may find, though, that they can reshape their funding model to better serve their overall congregational ministry plan.

For some additional thoughts related to this topic, please go to <http://blogs.mlc-wels.edu/wels-educator/> This is a blog discussion at Martin Luther College’s website. There the reader will find an article titled *Is the Funding Model of WELS Lutheran Elementary Schools Sustainable?* The article and reader comments can discussion resources for congregation and school leaders as they determine what model is best in their unique setting. In time, more resources and discussion starters will be made available at the CLS website.

Another idea that is slowly gaining traction in some parts of our synod is the concept of association elementary and/or middle schools. We would encourage exploratory dialogue and study among church and school leaders who are located in areas that would be conducive to a joint school supported by multiple congregations (this has been the Area Lutheran High School model for many years).

School Governance: The typical governance model employed by our congregations places the *Voters Assembly* as the ultimate authority. The group below that is typically the *Church Council*. Reporting and accountable to the Church Council are usually the various boards and committees, including a *Board of Education*. The principal is typically accountable to the *Board of Education*, and the teachers are accountable to the principal. We did not locate or create a suggested new model of governance (although the synod's *Congregation and Ministry Support* group might have some resources for congregations to use in implementing a new governance model). For our purposes, our encouragement is that each congregation and school study their governance system and work to improve and clarify, if necessary, the definition of the various roles. Especially important is role definition to support the members of the School Board. The CLS has excellent resources to assist with these efforts.

Staffing at the Commission on Lutheran Schools Office: The mission statement of the CLS is *to guide and assist WELS congregations in advancing the Gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran Schools*. Appropriate staffing levels at the CLS is vital in leading, supporting, and serving a large and diverse system such as ours. In light of the CLS mission statement, and considering the critical issues and ministry opportunities that lie before our schools, the TFLS has determined that the CLS office needs additional staffing. The CLS, currently staffed by talented and dedicated servants, lacks the personnel infrastructure to meet the needs of our congregations and synod as a whole. We believe an additional *Associate Director* is not a luxury, but rather a necessity. The TFLS has submitted a memorial to synod requesting an additional *Associate Director* for the CLS. The floor committee dealing with our work will be provided a detailed document that shares the many functions, duties, responsibilities being carried out by the personnel at the CLS office. That document will also share important ministry that is not being carried out because of the lack of sufficient staffing.

Voluntary Supplemental Contribution Program (VSCP): Beginning in July 2007 all WELS Lutheran schools (early childhood, elementary, and high school) were asked to provide an enrollment-based contribution to support the work of the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. Financial challenges faced by the Wisconsin Synod resulted in severe budget cutbacks across every WELS ministry division from 2003-2010. The new program was established to ensure full staffing of the CLS office and restoration of defunded support services. A synod-wide feasibility study was conducted to explore alternative funding sources. Input from local leaders in every district led to the proposal of an enrollment-based fee system. The plan was presented at district conventions. Based on feedback from the districts, the fee system was replaced with a voluntary contribution plan which makes all CLS programs accessible to every school, but features a two-tiered pricing plan where contributing schools receive significant discounts on subscription services.

The most important benefit you can claim by means of your school's contribution is the satisfaction of knowing you are making a difference by contributing to the greater good of WELS schools. Your contribution helps to preserve and strengthen support for an important form of gospel proclamation in our world—WELS Lutheran schools. The CLS supplemental contribution plan is an opportunity for WELS schools to demonstrate their commitment to walk together as a school system. WELS budgetary support for the CLS is no longer sufficient to cover the salaries of our office staff and basic office operations. Your school's contribution is vital to ensure the most basic and assumed synod services for Lutheran schools such call list development, the *Team Ministry Process*, *New Teacher Induction*, the testing program, the *Common Core Task Force*, resource partners, general resources, training, personal assistance, and district coordinator services continue into the future. Your school's contribution will ensure that basic

and important services are available for all WELS schools and will establish the opportunity for such services to grow and be strengthened.

Contributing schools will receive tangible benefits such as a complimentary electronic subscription to quarterly newsletter Parents Crosslink (currently \$3.75 per copy); a complimentary subscription to Learn360 - the new online library of education videos; one annual on-site visit from your school counselor; and preferred rates on all CLS services, subscriptions, and event registrations. Some schools may find their overall costs will actually be reduced by contributing to CLS. For any questions or concerns about the CLS Support Contribution program, email the CLS office at clsoffice@wels.net.

The following chart displays statistics from the five year history of the program:

Year	Budgeted	Support Received	Contributing Schools
2008-2009	\$170,000	\$166,892	255 (out of 526 schools – 48.4%)
2009-2010	\$140,000	\$138,000	205 (out of 521 schools – 39.3%)
2010-2011	\$140,000	\$149,008	203 (out of 516 schools – 39.3%)
2011-2012	\$142,000	\$145,321	207 (out of 515 schools – 40.2%)
2012-2013	\$148,000	*\$149,954	*201 (out of 521 schools – 38.5%)

*As of January 21, 2013

The contribution amount per student is the same as it was last four school years (\$7.50 for LES and ECM, and \$4 for LHS).

Below is a summary of the 2012-2013 supplemental contributions by district (reported as of January 2013). “Total Schools” means total educational units – ECM (without LES), LES (with or without ECM), and LHS

District	Total Schools in District	Percent of Schools that Participated in the VSCP
AZ/CA	36	36.1 (45.7 in 2012)
D/M	11	45.4 (33.3 in 2012)
MI	56	28.5 (26.3 in 2012)
MN	76	30.2 (37.6 in 2012)
NE	36	44.4 (50.0 in 2012)
NW	69	44.9 (50.7 in 2012)
PNW	20	30.0 (31.5 in 2012)
SEW	97	46.3 (51.6 in 2012)
WW	69	42.0 (37.6 in 2012)
SA	34	29.4 (23.6 in 2012)
SC	13	46.1 (64.2 in 2012)
NA	4	25.0 (20.0 in 2012)
Total	521	38.5 (41.1 in 2012)

In the spirit of “walking together” as a synod, and as schools that share a common mission and confession, the TFLS recommends that every WELS school participates in this *Voluntary Supplemental Contribution Program*. We don’t believe the per student cost to be exorbitant, and we believe the increased funding supporting CLS ministries will result in blessings to all of our schools.

In Closing: To close, we reiterate what we stated at the beginning: We pray this document and accompanying resources will stimulate discussion, study, and improvement plans as we work together to serve our Savior Jesus and the children and families entrusted to our care in our schools.

Task Force Members:

Stephen Granberg, Chairman

Dawn Aswege

Philip Huebner

Robert Klindworth

Linda Martens

Timothy Mueller

Scott Schmudlach

Phillip Sievert

Advisory:

Cynthia Holman

Greg Schmill