

Lutheran Education Study Results

Concordia Plans



CONCORDIA PLANS

Introduction

As the largest employer type in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), and with the awesome responsibility of educating the future of the church, ministries involved in Lutheran education are key to the success of the LCMS. Concordia Plans (CPS) is committed to the success of Lutheran education. In 2018, one of the organization's primary goals was to study commissioned teacher employment trends. What started with that one single purpose turned into a much broader study of LCMS teachers, administrators and schools to learn ways in which they are excelling and areas that may need additional resources.

There were many reasons for CPS to focus on Lutheran education:

- Educational ministries continually indicated that commissioned teacher recruitment and retention is one of their biggest challenges. While CPS administers strong benefits programs that most of these employers offer, that is not always enough to keep teachers in LCMS schools. There are clearly other factors that are impacting the commissioned teacher's decision to join or stay at a school.
- Schools are important to the Concordia Plans and to the entire LCMS. More than 70% of the workers in the Concordia Retirement Plan (CRP) work at ministries connected to education. This includes stand-alone schools, churches with schools, churches with preschools and others. The health of these ministries is critical to the health of the Plans CPS administers. The health of the Plans is critical to the individual worker who plans to retire or requires medical coverage and to the retiree receiving a monthly benefit.
- Above all, LCMS schools need to thrive so that the love of Jesus can be shared with our youngest generation and schools can reach more families and communities with His word.

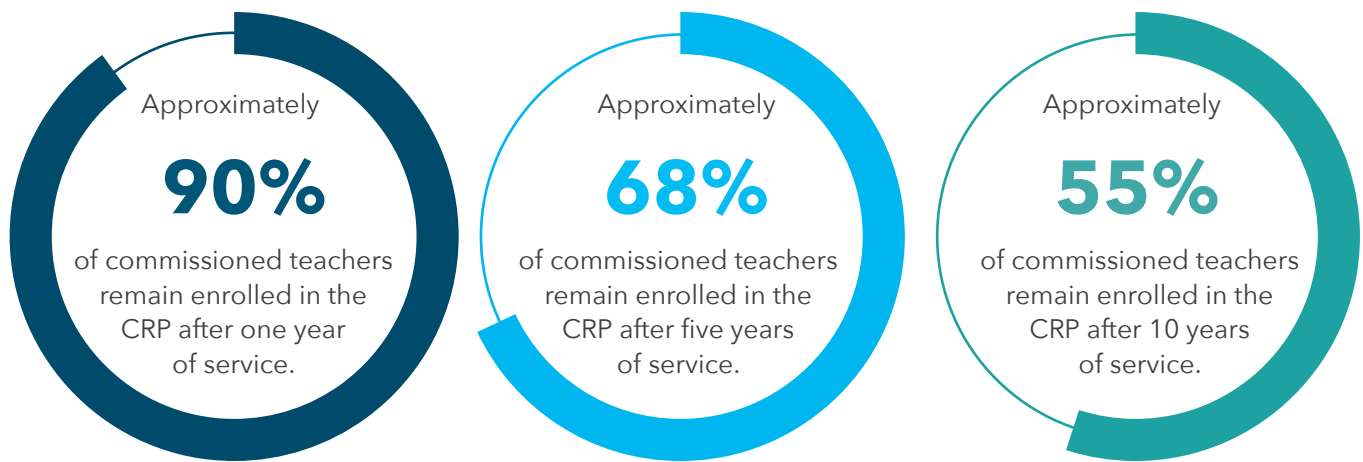
The initial study focused on identifying quantifiable trends around commissioned teacher attraction and attrition. But as the data was collected and reviewed, several additional questions rose to the surface concerning the “why” of teacher movement in the LCMS.

Salary was an anticipated primary pain point for LCMS teachers and for the administrators who hire, manage and too often lose them from their schools. Early research proved that to be true, but the research set out to learn what other factors and issues impact the work lives and tenures of commissioned teachers. Could addressing these factors possibly enhance commissioned teachers' work experience and potentially extend their longevity at their employer?

Quantitative Research – What do the numbers say?

As the majority of ministries in the LCMS offer the Concordia Retirement Plan, CRP data is a good indicator of Synod employment trends. In the data LCMS workers are classified by position and rostered status, among other factors. This aids in the analysis of the comings and goings of specific types of workers. In addition, some data from LCMS Rosters & Statistics was used in this study to help create a more complete picture.

The data shows that, in general, the rate of commissioned teachers leaving LCMS schools has remained steady since 2005. In other words, the rate of retention has remained consistent. Note that in most cases when a teacher leaves enrolled status in the CRP he/she has moved out of employment in the Synod. In some cases, though, that worker may have moved to a part-time position that does not qualify for CRP coverage.

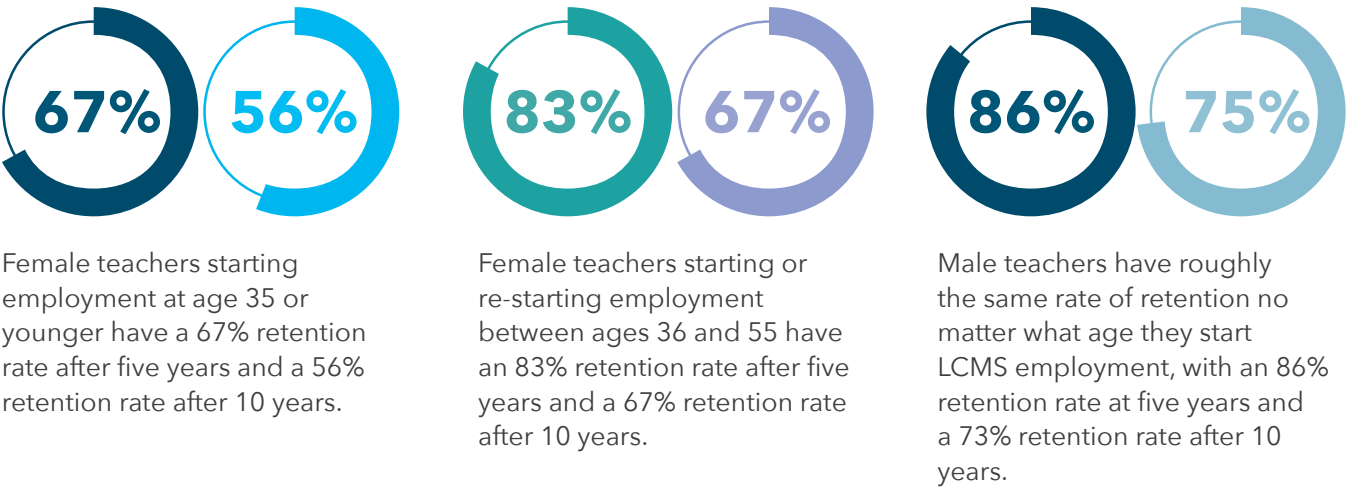


If teachers are not leaving at any higher rate than they were more than 10 years ago, why is it more challenging to fill teaching spots with commissioned teachers? The difference is the number of new commissioned teachers entering the system. It is important to note that the numbers below include teachers who were new to CRP coverage (in full-time employment) as well as teachers who may have had previous CRP service and were returning after a break in service.

	Commissioned Teachers Entering CRP Coverage
2005	392
2015	296
2017	194

One possible reason for the significant decline in the number of new commissioned teachers is the role that current LCMS educators play in encouraging young people to follow in their footsteps. The results of that question can be found in the qualitative research section of this report.

Employment trends among male and female teachers in LCMS schools differ, and there are some differences by age of the commissioned teacher when hired. The LCMS has significantly more female than male commissioned teachers, at roughly 77% vs 23% during the period studied.



There is no direct feedback to indicate why each teacher stays or leaves an LCMS position. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some of the younger females who leave employment in the LCMS are starting a family. Because the numbers include teachers who are re-starting their career after some break, some of the female teachers who appear to be starting their careers later (between ages 36 and 55) may actually be returning to LCMS employment after starting or raising a family. At that point their retention rates are higher.

The study of one representative cohort of teachers (2007) found that a significant percentage of “new” teachers had experience working in the LCMS. This is indicated by prior participation in the Concordia Retirement Plan. While CRP participation does not necessarily guarantee that a worker previously served as a teacher that assumption may be made in most cases.

- Of 448 total new commissioned teachers in the 2007 cohort, 257 were in their first year of service and that group had an average age of 27.6.
- In that cohort 191 teachers had an indication of previous service. That group had an average age of 44.1.

The fact that 43% of “new” teachers in the 2007 cohort had some previous experience indicates the importance of a good working experience and a strong total compensation package to appeal to teachers who have previously left the system. Returning to a familiar benefit plan, specifically the CRP where the teacher may have accumulated service, may be a positive factor in a teacher’s decision- making process about where to teach next. Schools should consider the different backgrounds and life stages of the commissioned teachers they are trying to attract, as the numbers show that those who come to a school later in life are likely to stay longer.

A closer analysis of that 2007 cohort shows the varied employment patterns of our commissioned teachers.

- As of 2017, 232 of those 447 teachers remain employed full-time in the LCMS. Some have stayed without interruptions to service (173). Others have left and returned to serve (59).
- From that cohort of 447 teachers, 215 are no longer employed full-time in the LCMS. Most of these had no gaps in service before their exit from LCMS employment (191), while others started with the 2007 cohort, exited, returned and then exited again all since 2007 (24).

The data repeatedly shows that the commissioned teacher workforce in the LCMS is always in transition. Some teachers start and stay until retirement. Many leave and return, serving in that second stint for a significant amount of time. Others have more complicated journeys. Each time a teacher leaves and decides to return, the LCMS school must be well-positioned to bring that teacher back and not lose him/her to a non-LCMS school or even a non-teacher position elsewhere. Creating a positive working experience and offering a strong total compensation package during that first stint as an LCMS teacher may impact that teacher’s willingness to return if that time comes.

Key Takeaways:

- Teachers are not leaving at any higher rate than in recent years, there are just fewer of them entering the system.
- There is no one-size-fits all employment experience of teachers in the LCMS, so schools need to consider those varied paths.

Qualitative Research - What do LCMS educators say?

Through focus groups, interviews and a survey, LCMS educators indicated strongly what they need and want from their working environment, and school administrators gave insights into possible areas for overall school improvement. Focus groups and interviews were conducted in the early part of 2018 with the survey sent in September. Teachers and administrators responded to different sets of survey questions.

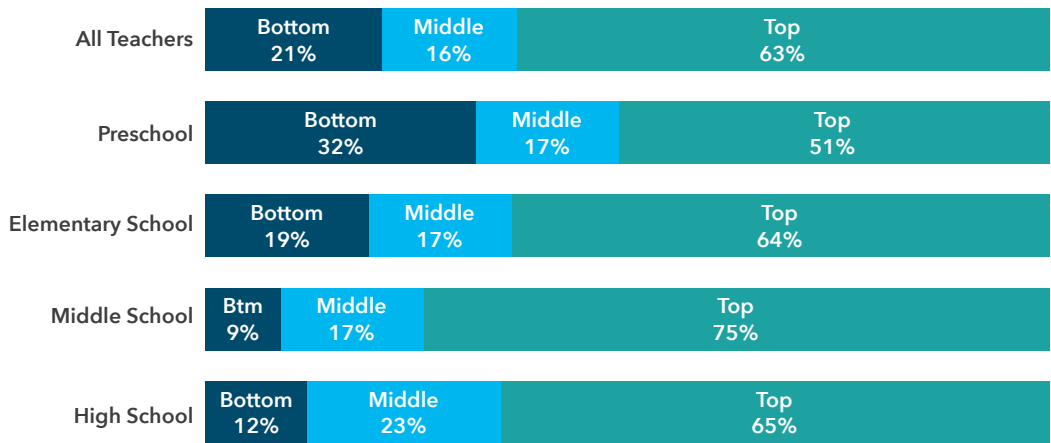
Aiming to get beyond the salary conversation, CPS identified what factors impact teachers’ job satisfaction. Specifically, teachers were asked two key questions and their responses to other questions were correlated to get a clear idea of their feelings, activities and intentions. Those key questions were:

- How likely are you to retire as an LCMS teacher?
- How likely are you to recommend becoming an LCMS teacher to a young person?

The challenges faced by school administrators, above and beyond staffing issues, were also explored. What would help them run their schools more effectively, and in the process, potentially make the work environment more appealing to commissioned teachers? What could help schools as they strive to grow and succeed, ultimately reaching more children with God’s love?

Likelihood to Retire as an LCMS Teacher

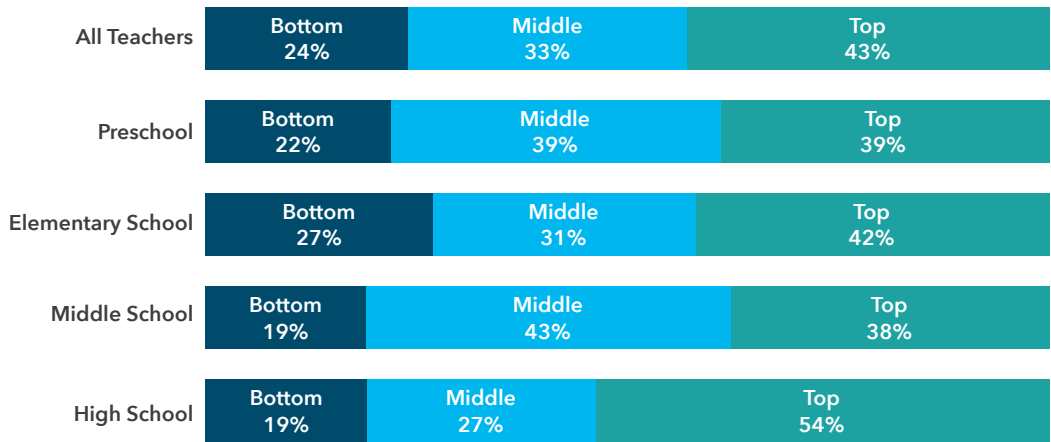
Overall teachers responded positively when asked if they intended to retire as an LCMS teacher. Those who answered a “9” or a “10” are in the top group and may be active promoters, meaning they are most likely to retire as an LCMS teacher. Those who responded a “7” or “8” are in the middle group, and may be passive on the topic, not really feeling committed either way. Those who responded with a “0” through “6” are in the bottom group and are likely not planning to retire as an LCMS teacher and may be detractors.



Due to the nature of some early childhood positions, it may not be surprising that the lowest percentage of promoters is the preschool teacher population. While the numbers are definitely more positive than negative, the number of teachers who fall into the “detractor” category may cause concern for some school administrators.

Likelihood to Recommend Becoming an LCMS Teacher to a Young Person

Early stages of the qualitative research indicated a very low likelihood of LCMS teachers recommending their vocation to young people. Survey results were more positive, although overall teachers are less likely to recommend the career than they are to see their own teaching career end in retirement from an LCMS school. The same top / middle / bottom scale previously described was used to categorize responses.



Perhaps the most promising piece of this data is that the highest percentage of promoters (top group) is in our high schools, with over 50% of high school teachers answering that they are likely to recommend a career in LCMS education. The opportunity to recommend a career in school ministry to high schoolers is powerful as they prepare to make college and career decisions.

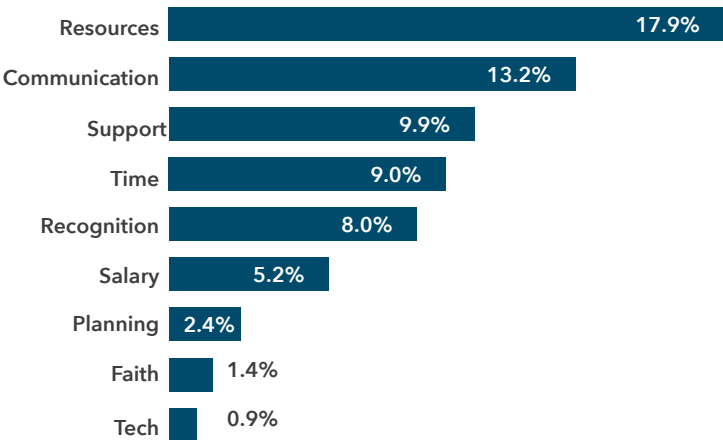
Key Learnings

A few key learnings emerged from the research with LCMS teachers and administrators. The key learnings are presented so that school staff and school leaders in the LCMS can reflect on what's included here and examine if that holds true for their own school community. The findings are not an indication of what is happening in every LCMS school, but instead are trends that were identified and may be good conversation starters for a school.

Learning #1 – Employment experience is key for teachers

A strong message from teachers is that their day-to-day experience and how they are treated as professionals is critical to their long-term future in the LCMS. They want to feel supported and respected and it is especially important that they feel that at the local school level. This speaks to the importance of positive leadership. Teachers also strongly desire the opportunity to get better at what they do and see a path for growth and advancement in their future.

Teachers responded to the open-ended question “What can the administration at your school be doing to better support you, beyond benefits and salary?” with the following responses:



While the availability of resources is likely tied to a budget that may be more restricted, the other top answers indicate that teachers desire a more consistent day-to-day feeling of support and appreciation. This may be an area in which a school leader could examine the current state of his/her school and possibly focus on self-improvement.

In response to another question teachers indicated that they have a strong desire for professional development and to grow as educators. The top areas in which they desire professional development are subject-specific and technology. The ability to grow professionally and feel supported in pursuit of that growth is likely a significant factor in the overall employment experience.

Several employment experience-related factors had a high correlation to teachers’ likelihood to retire as an LCMS teacher and their likelihood to recommend the career to young people, the two main points of study. Common factors with high correlation included:

- I have the support I need to provide the highest level of education to my students
- I have the opportunity for professional advancement
- I am respected as a teacher by the parents/guardians in my school
- My school provides me the opportunity to grow in my faith
- Support from school administration, school board and the LCMS (for likelihood to recommend) is critical

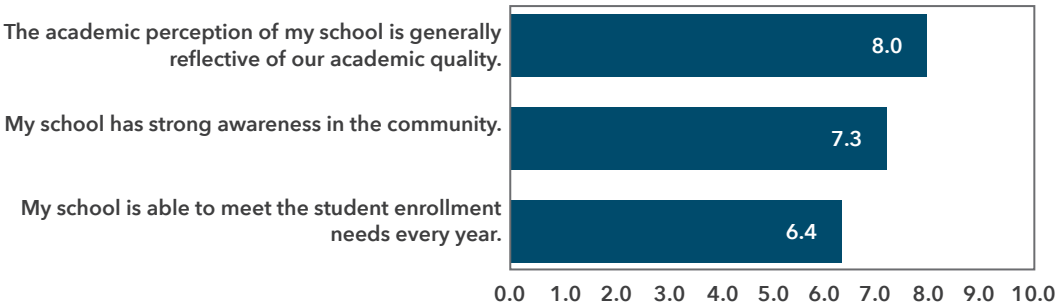
From these findings it is clear that while LCMS schools may not always be able to compete on salary, there may be other things school leaders can do to improve the employment experience and better meet the needs of their teachers. An educational leader who focuses on creating a professional environment that better meets these needs may have a better chance of retaining high-quality commissioned teachers, recruiting them if they decide to return to work and creating more stability in their school community.

Learning #2 – Schools are challenged to meet enrollment needs and struggle with awareness

One of the primary challenges for LCMS school administrators that repeatedly surfaced in research was the school’s ability to meet its enrollment needs. Enrollment challenges can impact the entire school community, and this study showed that the impact is certainly felt by teachers. During focus groups many teachers indicated that they feel they are “recruiting” students to keep their own positions for the coming year or to even keep the school open. The fall survey confirmed that, with teachers indicating that they feel burdened in this area.

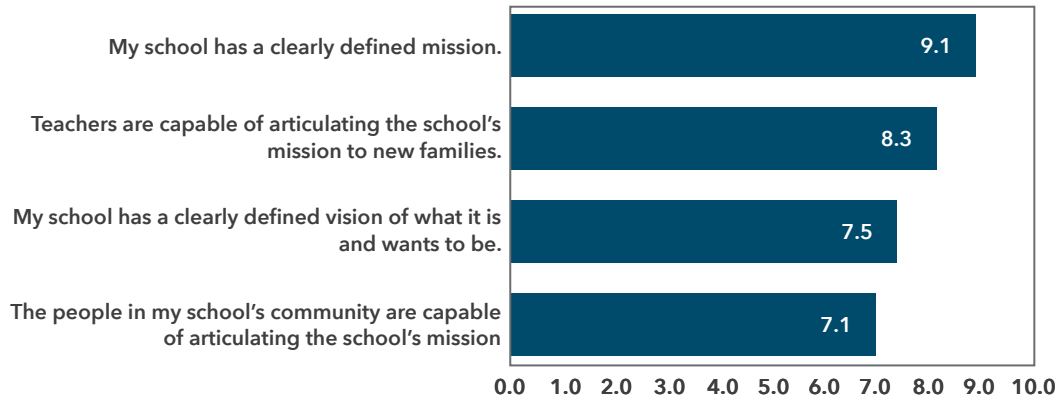
The problem of not meeting enrollment needs is complex and there are certainly many factors at play. Through the survey some potential issues were identified that, if addressed, may help with enrollment challenges.

School leaders who responded to the survey gave ratings about their school's academic perception, awareness and ability to meet student enrollment needs every year. Ratings are on a 10-point scale.



Through these responses school administrators are indicating that those who know about their school have an accurate perception of the school. But awareness is lower, and even with the most accurate and highest perception of a school's quality, if awareness is low a school will be challenged to meet enrollment needs. The administrators' responses reflect that challenge, and school leaders should consider how much time they are spending in actively building their school's awareness in their community, what resources they can leverage to help in that effort and how that could possibly impact enrollment.

School administrators were also asked about their school's mission and vision, as having a clearly defined direction for the school that the whole school community believes in and lives is critical to growing the work of the mission. Ratings are on a 10-point scale.



At first glance it's encouraging to see that administrators rated very highly that their school has a clearly defined mission. More important questions are about the quality and effectiveness of that mission and how it is used. While school leaders were not asked to rate their mission for quality, the numbers tell us how it is used. Administrators gave a lower rating when asked if their teachers can express the mission, and an even lower rating when asked about the ability of others in the school community to express that same mission.

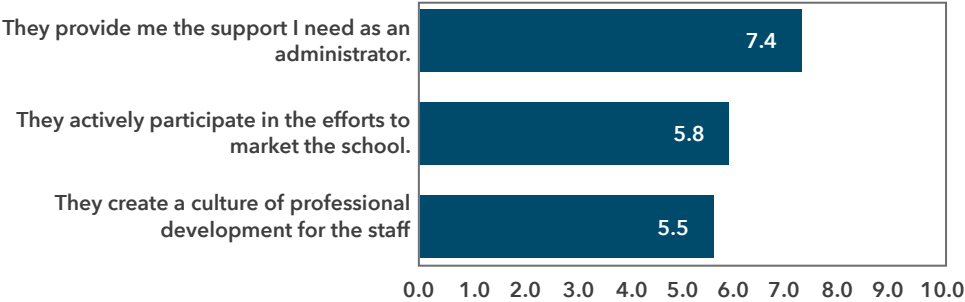
The schools that struggle in this area quite certainly have teachers, parents, church members and many others who are strong advocates for their schools. A lack of alignment on mission, however, can lead to a group of enthused advocates all telling a different story. Aligning a school community on a shared mission can only help. In some school communities, getting everyone on the same page and telling the same story to prospective families and community members could have a positive impact on enrollment.

The previous chart also includes a question about school vision. The rating from school administrators indicates that overall our schools have room to grow in this area. Just as with mission, schools need strong alignment across the school community to clearly know and state “this is what our school is today, and this is what we are working toward.” A clearly-defined school vision shows prospective families that the school is focused on getting better and in what ways. An aligned vision also gives current teachers, parents, donors and others something to work toward and rally around and can only help with enrollment challenges.

There are certainly many factors that can play into a school’s struggle to meet enrollment needs. But taking a step back and examining where a school community is on school awareness efforts and on an aligned mission and vision may result in positive changes that could impact the school in the long term.

Learning #3 – Increasing school board effectiveness could make an impact on school success

The first spotlighted learning focused on some of the things that school leaders might address to improve the working environment for their teachers. In some ways the leadership that is provided by the school board or governing body is just as important. Administrators answered questions about their board leadership on a 10-point scale.



Administrators gave their school boards fairly high ratings in the amount of support they provide the administrator, although there is definitely room for growth. The other numbers are an even stronger indication of the ways in which school boards can improve and potentially have a more positive impact on the schools they lead.

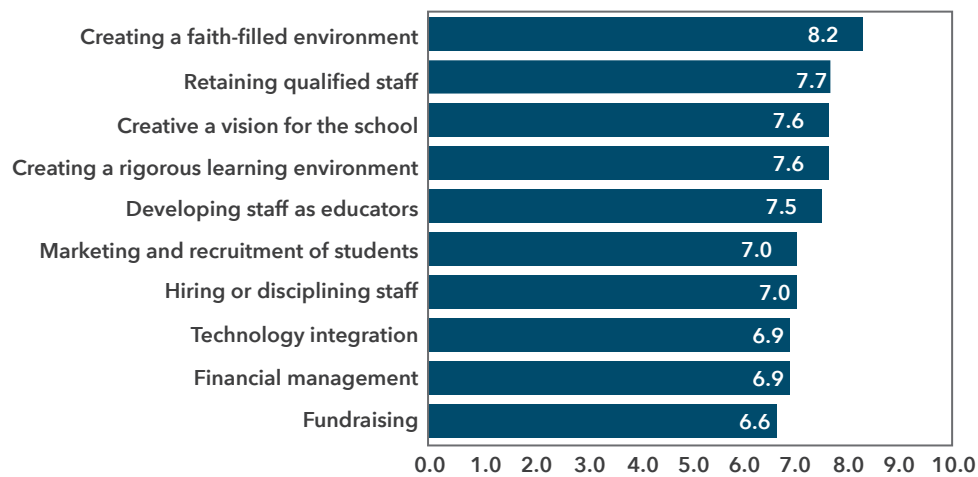
School boards that are more active in marketing their school could have a significant impact on their school community by helping to build awareness and ultimately in meeting enrollment needs. The term “marketing” is broad and can mean participation in school or community events, promoting the school in the community, being aligned with the school community on mission and vision and more. Involvement is key, and if others in the school community see that strong and visible leadership in school marketing is coming from the Board they may be likely to follow suit.

The single question about boards and staff may serve as a representation of the ways in which school board leadership impacts staff. In the survey teachers placed a strong focus on improving as teachers and wanting to grow. In many cases they need those opportunities presented to them because of financial or time commitments, or possibly they need to feel that they are part of a culture of continuous improvement. That kind of leadership can start from the top and work its way through the school administrator and to the teachers.

In the survey of teachers, school board leadership was identified as having the greatest potential to impact a teacher’s intentions to retire as an LCMS educator. This is critical as schools consider how they can retain highly-qualified commissioned teachers, the research question that began this study.

Additional Learnings

Administrators were asked in the survey to rate how equipped they feel they are to lead their school in several areas, with the intent of uncovering the types of resources school leaders may need to become more effective. The following chart shows their responses on a 10-point scale.



The results indicate that school administrators may lack sufficient training in key leadership areas such as fundraising, financial management and technology integration, and the impact of that lack of training may be felt by their staff and school. The inclusion of technology on the bottom part of this list is impactful because of how highly teachers rated their desire for technology-based professional development. While not every leader can be fully prepared to effectively lead in every way, if resources can be provided to better prepare current and future leaders in areas of weakness, schools may be able to improve.

There were several questions in the survey asked of both teachers and school administrators. In general, the two groups were fairly aligned in their responses, but there were three areas in which the responses were significantly different, with the teachers' responses being lower than the administrator's responses in all cases.

- I have the support I need to provide the highest level of education to my students. / My teachers have the support they need to provide the highest level of education to students.
- I am given the opportunity to pursue continuing education. / My teachers are given the opportunity to pursue continuing education.
- My salary is reflective of my skills as an educator. / My teachers' salaries are reflective of their skills as an educator.

The apparent disconnect between teachers and administrators on the first two items is consistent with the earlier findings that teachers are looking for more support as educators and the opportunity to grow as professionals.

Key Takeaways

- Teachers want to feel supported and respected as professional educators and desire the opportunity to grow professionally.
- Many schools are struggling with enrollment and looking at community alignment on mission and vision may be key to helping with that challenge.
- Board leadership can be a critical factor in addressing many challenges schools face.
- LCMS school administrators may need assistance with some key facets of running a school.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The 2018 Lutheran Education research project was completed to provide insights to school administrators, teachers and others invested in LCMS education. It is the hope of Concordia Plans that the results of the research can start conversations among these groups about how LCMS schools may improve on an individual school community level, and perhaps systemically.

Concordia Plans is using these insights to examine how it is serving schools and if there are any identified needs that can be filled through new resources or services. Expanding services to schools beyond the core benefits of health and retirement, CPS is looking to provide business solutions to ministry challenges, freeing up the time and attention of leaders so that they can focus on ministry.

Your feedback on the study is welcome, whether you have questions about the learnings or analysis or would like to share how you might use these learnings in your school community. Please contact Dave Kuschel at **David.Kuschel@ConcordiaPlans.org** with anything you would like to share.

Dave Kuschel

Dave is the Senior Director of Communications at Concordia Plans. He previously worked for ten years in public education as a communications director for two school districts and one education consortium. He is the proud dad of two daughters who have grown both academically and spiritually in LCMS schools from pre-K through high school.





QUESTIONS?

CALL 888-927-7526 **EMAIL** info@ConcordiaPlans.org

1333 South Kirkwood Road • St. Louis, MO 63122