Institutional Intentionality for Spiritual Formation

Who am I?

Rod Reed

- University Chaplain and Assoc. Professor of Theology at John Brown University

- 30+ years in ministry with secondary and university students

- PhD in Theology, with a research focus on how Christian schools structure themselves for intentional spiritual formation of students

- Assessment and consulting experience at nearly 40 Christian universities and high schools

Where we are going today

We will explore:

- A snapshot of ways to approach assessing spiritual impact.

  - What can we assess and what can't we assess?

  - How to report impact with integrity.

- Sample findings from assessments at other schools.

  - Student perspectives

  - Staff perspectives

- Examples of suggestions for improvement in approaches to spiritual formation

What are we talking about?

Spiritual formation:

- "Developing a way of life that is increasingly characterized by love for God and others."

- Sanctification – being conformed to the image of Christ

We make claims about our impact…

What do we promise?

- "… a college preparatory school offering students an accredited liberal arts curriculum in which they may develop in spirit, mind, and body."

- "… a Christian college preparatory school committed to achieving Academic Excellence, teaching Biblical Truth, and developing Christ-like character."

- "One of the top reasons for the existence of Christ-like schools is to provide an education that is effective in the spiritual development of its students."

Assessing Spiritual Formation

"How do we know?"

"Easy" answer – measure kids' faith

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Causation challenges
- Measurement challenges
- Interpretation challenges

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Causation challenges
  - What kind of students we get
  - Current church and family influences
  - Life circumstances outside of school

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Causation challenges
  - "I'm not sure our influence on the kids is as significant as we think it is. We are the benefactors of some great parents."
    - Christian School Teacher, Dec. 2015

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Measurement challenges
  - What do we measure?
    - Internal factors – Beliefs, knowledge, attitudes?
    - External factors – Relationships, practices, actions?
    - Institutional factors – Influences, satisfaction, "progress"?
  - How do we measure?
    - Surveys
    - Interviews
    - Stories

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Measurement challenges
  - What is the goal of spiritual formation?
  - What is the "real" work of the Holy Spirit?
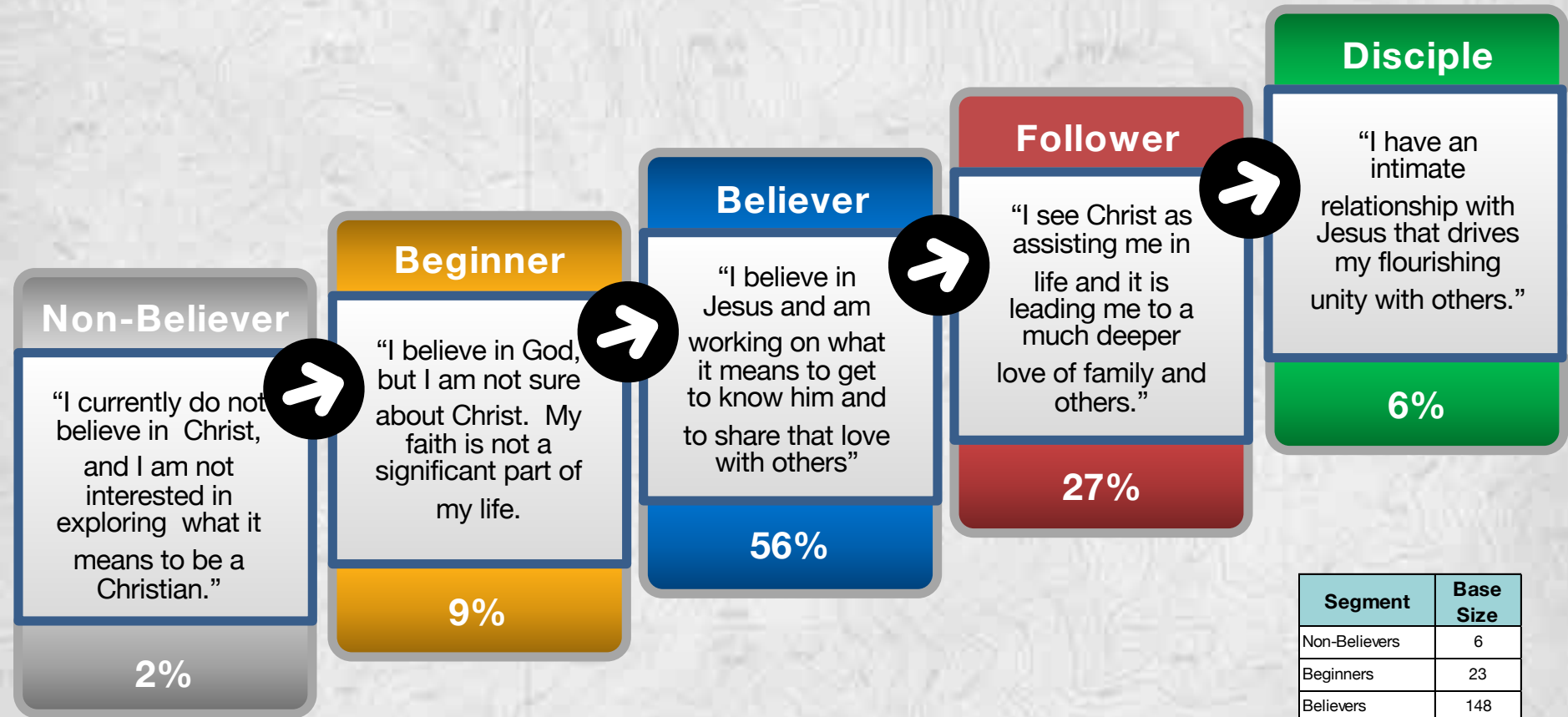 - To what extent can we measure the work of the Holy Spirit?

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Measurement challenges – examples from JBU
  - Student Relationships Assessment
  - Spiritual Transformation Inventory
  - University Spiritual Life Survey
  - Student Satisfaction Inventory

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Measurement challenges – examples from JBU
  - University Spiritual Life Survey

John Brown University Spiritual Continuum Profile

Non-Believer

"I currently do not believe in Christ, and I am not interested in exploring what it means to be a Christian."

2%

Beginner

"I believe in God, but I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.

9%

Believer

"I believe in Jesus and am working on what it means to get to know him and to share that love with others"

56%

Follower

"I see Christ as assisting me in life and it is leading me to a much deeper love of family and others."

27%

Disciple

"I have an intimate relationship with Jesus that drives my flourishing unity with others."

6%

Segment	Base Size
Non-Believers	6
Beginners	23
Believers	148
Followers	70
Disciples	15

REVEAL
Where are you!

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Interpretation challenges
  - What do the numbers mean?
  - How do developmental stages affect spiritual attitudes, beliefs and practices?
  - Are we preparing students for the next stages of life and faith? And does that preparation hurt our numbers?

Assessing Spiritual Formation

So what can we assess (and how)?

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- While we can measure indicators of spiritual formation, we cannot directly assess the actual work of the Holy Spirit (outcomes).

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Jer 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

- 1Sa 16:7b "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

- Pr 21:2 All a person's ways seem right to them, but the LORD weighs the heart.

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- While we can measure indicators of spiritual formation, we cannot directly assess the actual work of the Holy Spirit (outcomes).

- We can have more confidence in assessing the intentionality with which we foster an environment that is conducive to spiritual growth (inputs).

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- Roots vs. fruits

The spiritual impact of people and programs on campus

CCIQ ITEM	Mean	Mean Rating Description
Relationships with Students	5.71	Moderately Positive Impact
Trauma, Crisis, Ongoing Struggles	5.68	Moderately Positive Impact
Bible/Theology Courses	5.65	Moderately Positive Impact
Praise/Worship Sessions	5.60	Moderately Positive Impact
Academic Courses	5.55	Moderately Positive Impact
Study or Discipleship Group	5.54	Moderately Positive Impact
Relationships with Staff and Administration	5.53	Moderately Positive Impact
Short-Term Missions Trips	5.53	Moderately Positive Impact
Mentoring w/ Faculty	5.49	Slightly Positive Impact
Integration or Faith and Learning Courses	5.47	Slightly Positive Impact
Service Learning Projects, Internships, Practicums	5.40	Slightly Positive Impact
Ministry Opportunities	5.38	Slightly Positive Impact
Chapel Programs	5.27	Slightly Positive Impact
Formal Spiritual Direction/Mentoring	5.25	Slightly Positive Impact
Student Leadership Opportunities	5.21	Slightly Positive Impact
Study Abroad Programs	5.12	Slightly Positive Impact
Exposure Experiences	5.08	Slightly Positive Impact
Cultural Diversity in School Community	4.99	Slightly Positive Impact
Counseling Sessions	4.67	Slightly Positive Impact

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- If you are going to measure beliefs, behaviors and actions, you need to provide solid context for the data (longitudinal, demographic, benchmark).

- Need to gather and interpret data from a variety of sources.

Addressing Assessment Challenges

- Addressing causation challenges – work at isolating indicators of influence
  - Longitudinal research with the same groups of students
  - Pre-test and post-test assessments for individual classes and stages of education

Addressing Assessment Challenges

- Addressing measurement challenges
  - Clarify institutional goals for spiritual formation
  - Develop common language for spiritual formation
  - Recruit, equip and evaluate faculty according to institutional goals

Addressing Assessment Challenges

- Addressing interpretation challenges
  - Articulate goals for different educational stages
  - Identify appropriate (tentative) benchmarks for spiritual formation (internal or external)
  - Develop appropriate (tentative) goals for spiritual formation
  - Develop programs that target institutional mission and goals

Two examples

Types of data

From students – interviews of small groups of students from each grade of the secondary school, plus groups of athletes and student leaders. Ask questions about school culture, and how the school tries to help them grow spiritually.

From staff – electronic survey with questions about how you perceive the school's intentionality for spiritual formation.

Interpreting the data

Interpret data in light of institutional profile, values, outcomes and priorities.

Interpret data in light of developmental stages of students.

Interpret data in light of institutional resource realities.

Using the data

Use the data to evaluate/reflect upon institutional values, outcomes and priorities.

Use the data to evaluate programmatic approaches to students at different stages of life and faith.

Use the data to evaluate allocation of institutional resources – financial, personnel, programmatic.

What do students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Caring teachers, coaches and staff (atmosphere)

- "Teachers set a good example of what it means to look like Jesus."

- "It's pretty much everywhere."

- "It's our whole day."

- "This is a real place." Most of the teachers want you to succeed. They actually care about your spiritual life."
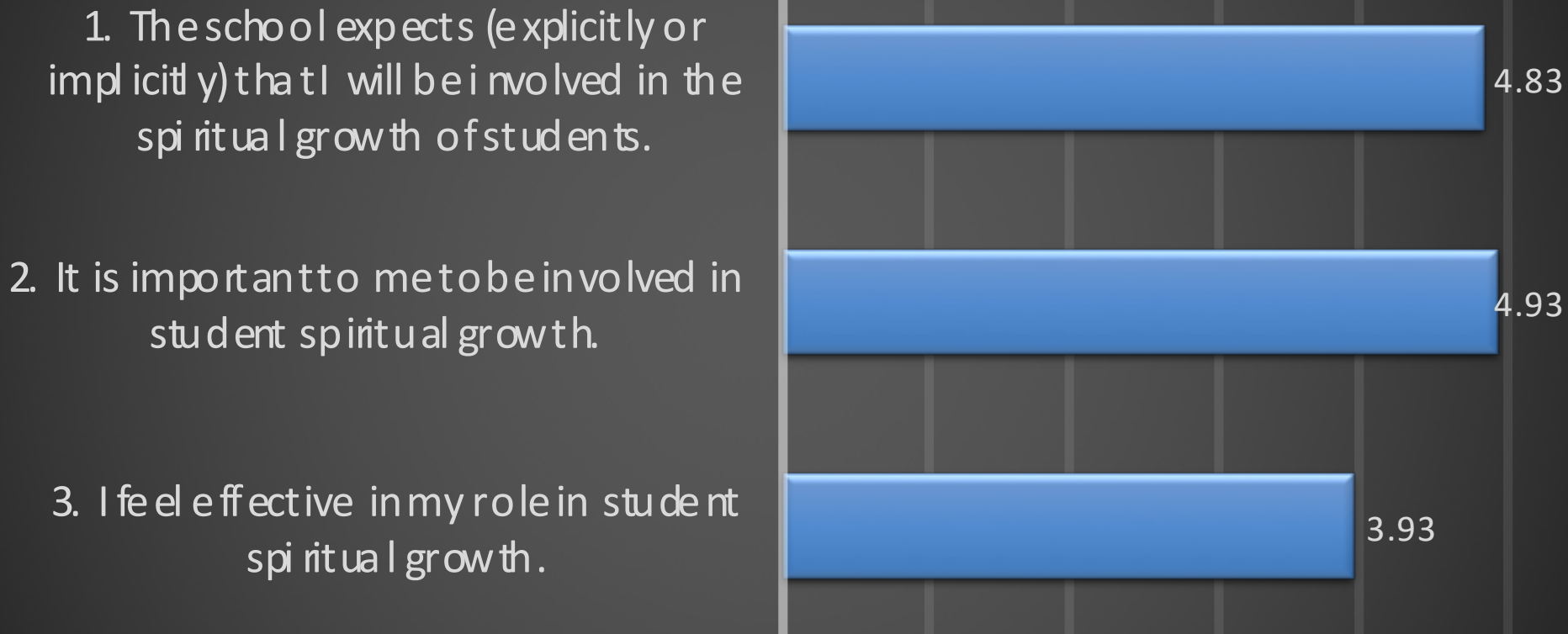
What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #2

Caring peer community

- "Everybody has somebody to talk to."
- "People notice and encourage each other. You can just be yourself."
- "We know each other. Even people from different grades watch out for each other, and ask how people are doing."
- "I can talk to a senior and we can get different aspects from different people."
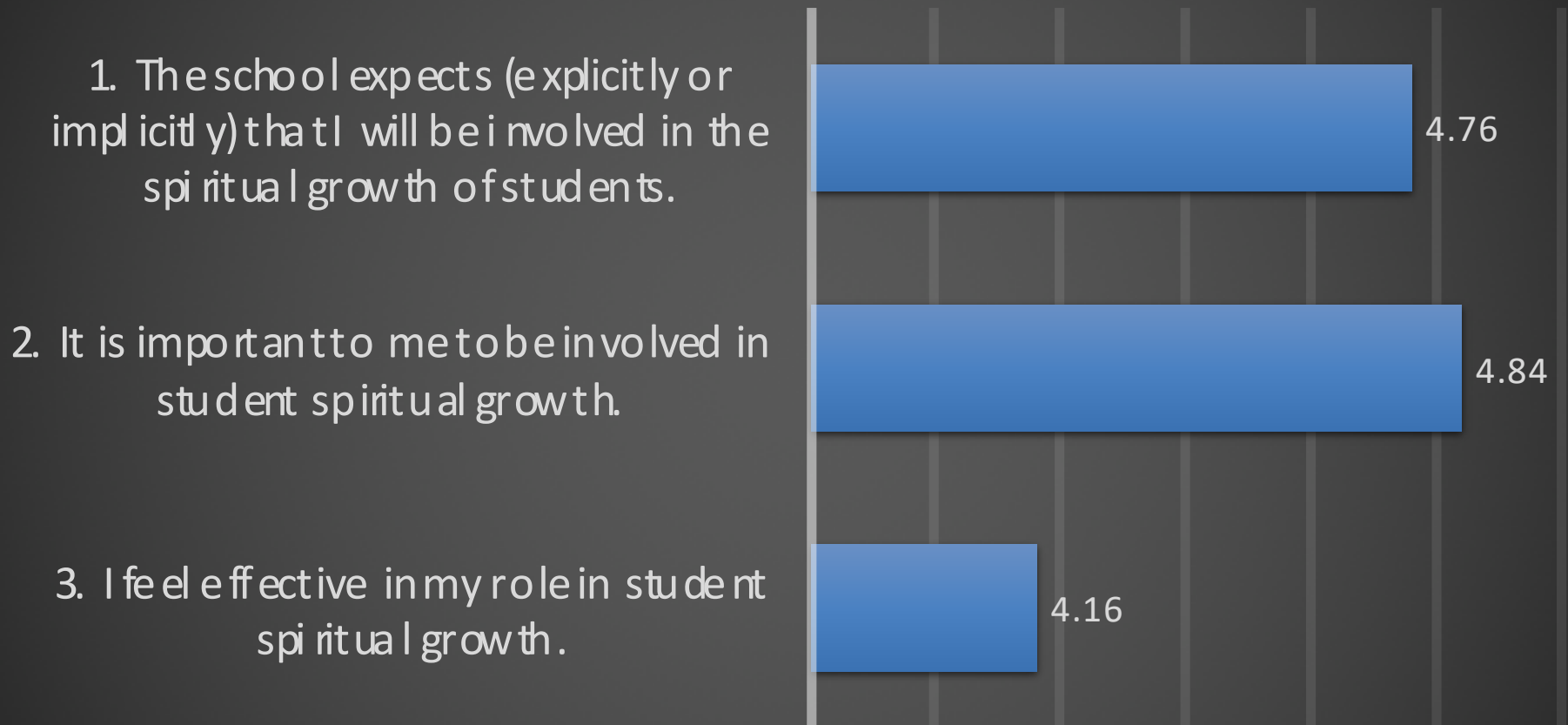- "We have a group chat and we share prayer requests that people pray for immediately."

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

WHO IS INVOLVED IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

1. The school expects (explicitly or implicitly) that I will be involved in the spiritual growth of students.

4.83

2. It is important to me to be involved in student spiritual growth.

4.93

3. I feel effective in my role in student spiritual growth.

3.93

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at a Christian School #2

WHO IS INVOLVED IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

1. The school expects (explicitly or implicitly) that I will be involved in the spiritual growth of students. — 4.76

2. It is important to me to be involved in student spiritual growth. — 4.84

3. I feel effective in my role in student spiritual growth. — 4.16

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at a Christian School #2

WHO IS INVOLVED IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

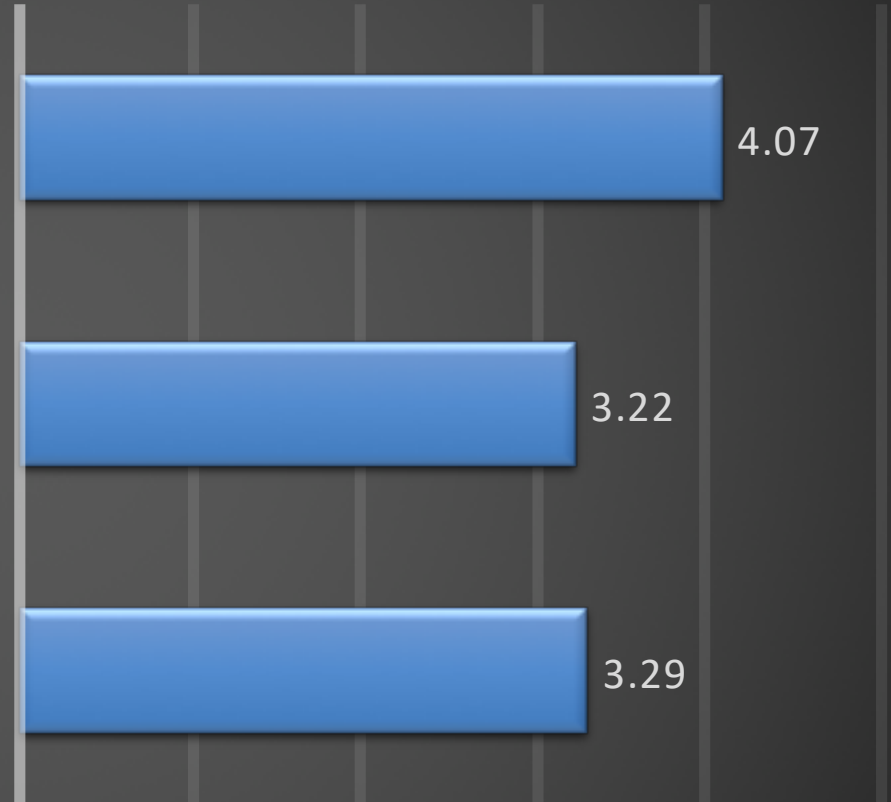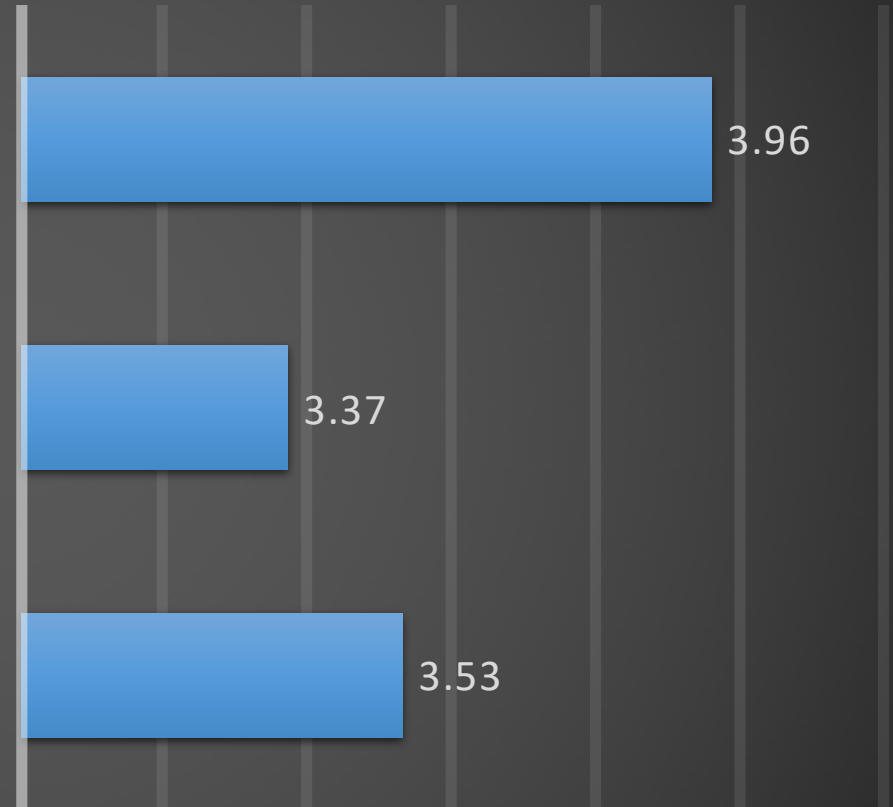4. The school provides resources to help me in my role in student spiritual growth. — 3.96

5. My personal role in student spiritual growth is evaluated regularly. — 3.37

6. My program's role in student spiritual growth is evaluated regularly. — 3.53

What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Bible is integrated everywhere

- "All of the teachers bring in the Bible in some way." (English, science)
- "We take time in the middle of class to talk about problems in the world from a biblical perspective."
- "My coach encourages us to read our Bible daily."
- "I know the Bible way more than I did before I came here."
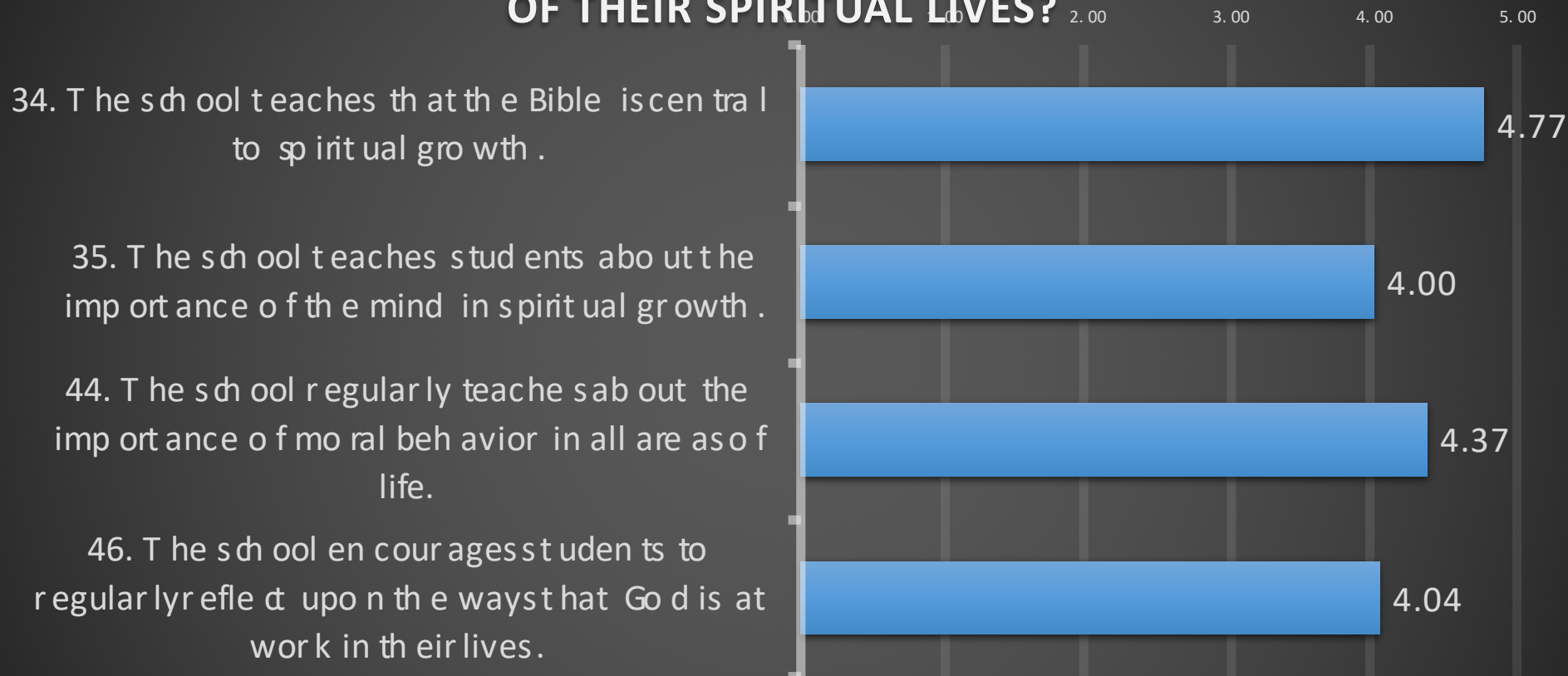- "All of our curriculum is based on a biblical worldview."

What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Bible is integrated everywhere

- "Teachers teach us biblical principles in all the classes, whenever they can."
- "Teachers are willing to talk about Christian topics in class."
- "All of our teachers can relate their subjects to God."
- "[Teachers have] All-around knowledge of what the Bible says and how it applies to all parts of life. They all do a good job of this."
- "Most of our teachers try to put Christ into everything."

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

HOW DOES THE SCHOOL HELP STUDENTS GROW IN ALL AREAS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES?
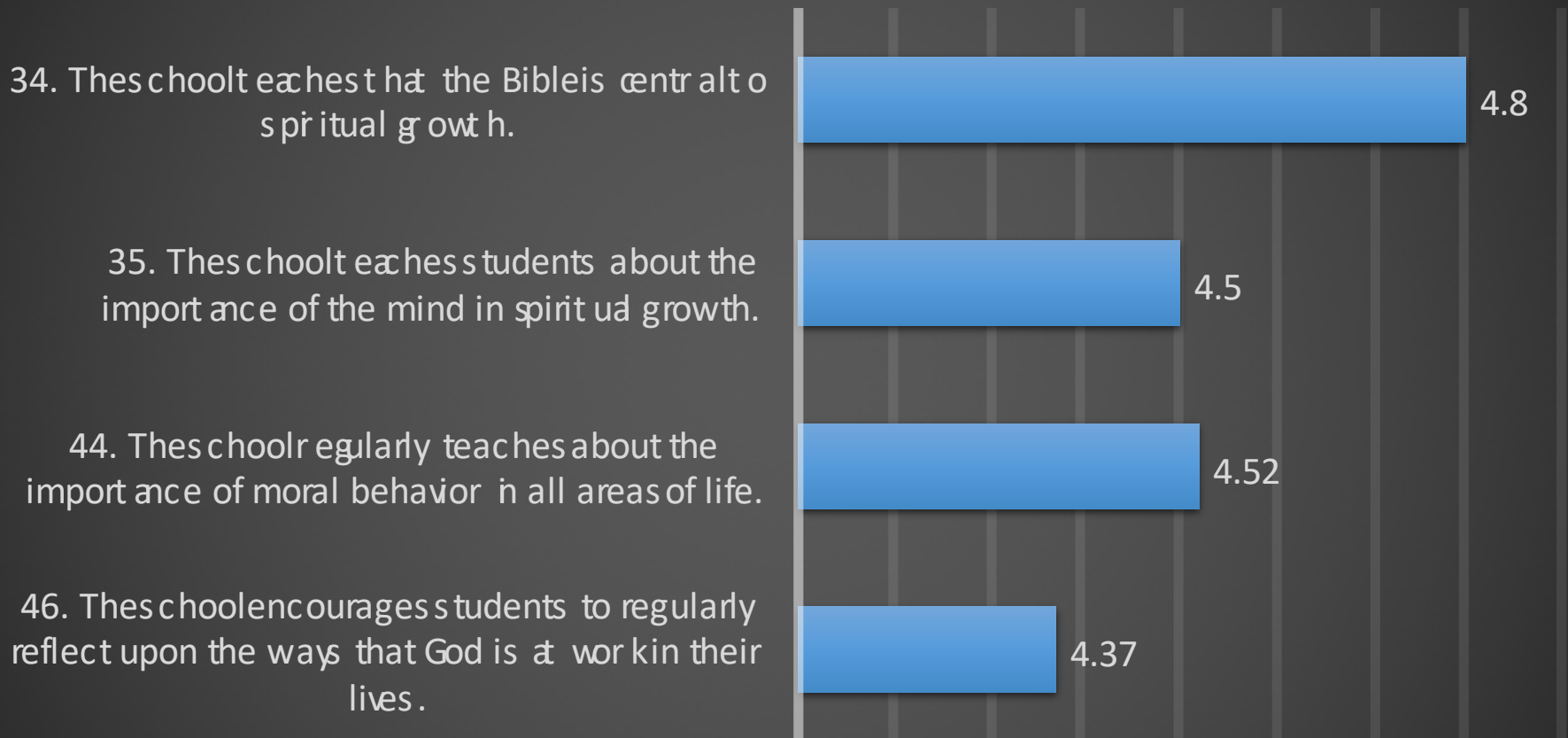
Question	Rating
34. The school teaches that the Bible is central to spiritual growth.	4.77
35. The school teaches students about the importance of the mind in spiritual growth.	4.00
44. The school regularly teaches about the importance of moral behavior in all areas of life.	4.37
46. The school encourages students to regularly reflect upon the ways that God is at work in their lives.	4.04

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Bible is integrated everywhere

- "Mr. Brown and Mrs. Gomez do this really well and don't force God and the Bible into the class unless it's appropriate. They focus on the content of the class first and then fit Scripture in when appropriate."

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Room for improvement

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Room for improvement

- Chapel is a mixed bag
- Student really miss the small groups
- Christian character is often perceived as external appearance.
- Leadership development is spotty
- Students need more help with transitions

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Room for improvement

- Chapel is a mixed bag, especially with older students

- More opportunities to discuss current events in light of faith

- More consistency by faculty in dealing with student issues

- Seeing Scripture as more than just a class topic

What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

Students need more help with transitions

- "In high school you start thinking about taking more responsibility for yourself, but it's really up to you."

- "Academic preparation is heavy."

- "Senior Bible classes focus on defending your faith in college and staying strong."

- "We don't go into depth in this."

- "The main thing is not conforming in college, stick with other Christians. They just tell you how difficult it will be."

What do students say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #2

Students want a different approach to Bible in middle school

- "In Bible class, we don't get taught much, we just get worksheet packets. We need more teaching so that we can understand the Bible."

- "We aren't necessarily ready for high school Bible class because of the teaching style."

- "Bible verses aren't very effective because people don't take it seriously."

- "We need more help on comprehension of the Bible, not just memorizing facts for tests."

What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #1

HOW DOES THE SCHOOL ADDRESS THE UNIQUE FAITH STAGES OF STUDENTS?

15. I am familiar with faith development issues students often face at this stage of life. — 3.61

16. The school provides training to help me become aware of faith development issues students often face at this stage of life. — 2.96

17. The school addresses spiritual growth issues for students at different stages of Christian faith. — 3.14

18. The school helps new students understand what spiritual growth looks like at this stage of life. — 3.12

19. The school provides programs to help graduating students prepare for next stages of their spiritual lives. — 3.17
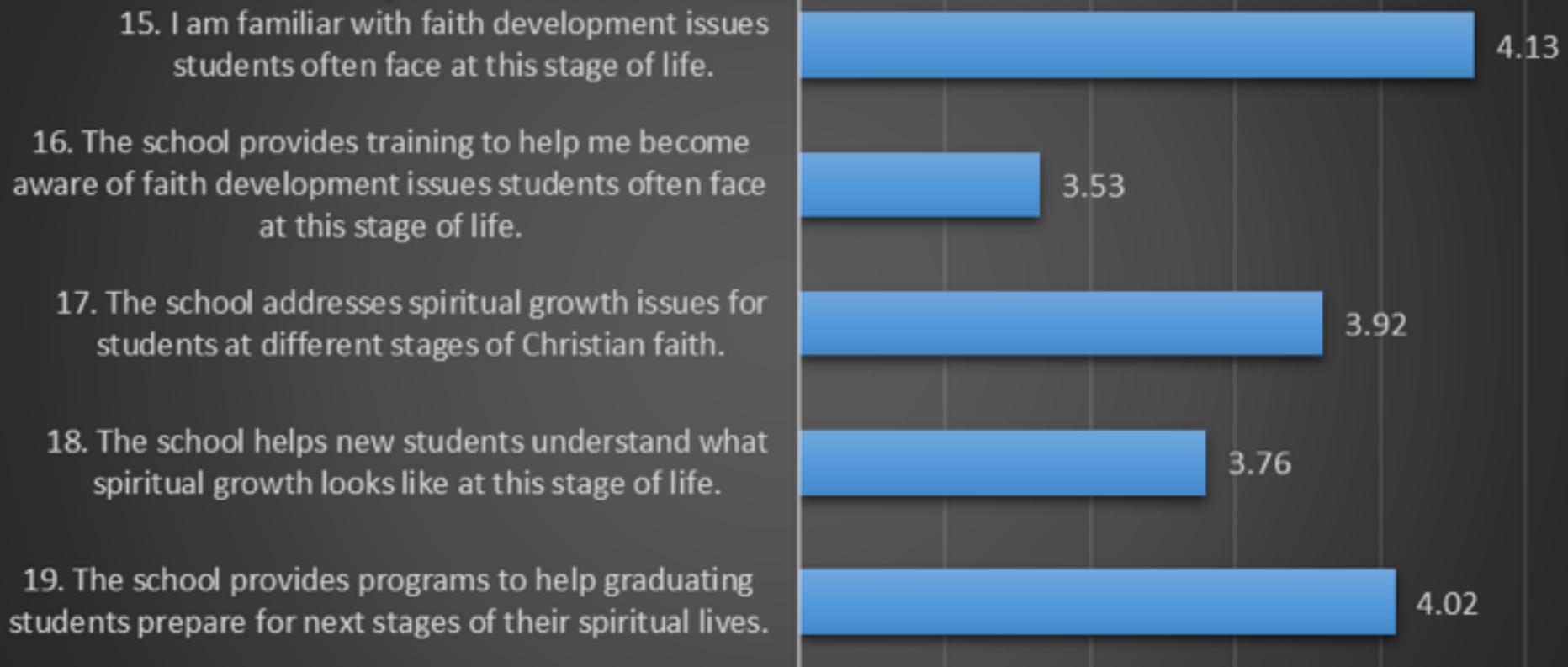
What do staff say about the spiritual environment at Christian School #2

HOW DOES THE SCHOOL ADDRESS THE UNIQUE FAITH STAGES OF STUDENTS?

15. I am familiar with faith development issues students often face at this stage of life. — 4.13

16. The school provides training to help me become aware of faith development issues students often face at this stage of life. — 3.53

17. The school addresses spiritual growth issues for students at different stages of Christian faith. — 3.92

18. The school helps new students understand what spiritual growth looks like at this stage of life. — 3.76

19. The school provides programs to help graduating students prepare for next stages of their spiritual lives. — 4.02

Opportunities for action - #1

- How/when to communicate the purpose of behavioral expectations

- Small group program

- Transitions into and out of high school

- Leadership focus on juniors

- Professional development for teachers (low-cost/no-cost)

Opportunities for action - #2

- Leadership development for chapel worship teams
- Professional development for teachers in helping students address current events in light of faith
- Differentiate approaches to Scripture as students mature – in and out of the classroom
- Evaluate how to better communicate the "why" of dress code for chapel.

Questions to consider

- What do you want your graduates to look like?

- How do you know if you have had a successful year/class?

- Do your teachers and staff have a common understanding and vocabulary of your desired outcomes for your students' faith?

- Do your parents have a clear understanding of your desired outcomes for students?

Discussion

- Questions, comments, arguments, insights?
- What takeaways are you thinking about?

Key assessment themes

- Context and mission
- Holistic approach
- Faith stages
- Communication
- Completeness
- Finances
- Influencers
- Success

Key assessment themes

- **Context and mission:** What is distinctive about our school, and how does that influence our approach to spiritual formation? (What is our school's signature on students' lives?)

Key assessment themes

- **Holistic approach:** How do we address the breadth of factors in spiritual formation?

Key assessment themes

- **Faith stages:** How do we approach spiritual formation in appropriate developmental ways (for this stage and the next)?

Key assessment themes

- **Communication:** How do we communicate spiritual formation goals?

Key assessment themes

- **Completeness:** Are approaches to spiritual formation comprehensive enough to meet institutional goals?

Key assessment themes

- **Finances:** Do we have adequate finances for quality programs that meet spiritual formation goals?

Key assessment themes

- **Influencers:** Have we identified and equipped primary influencers for spiritual formation?

Key assessment themes

- **Success:** How do we measure success in spiritual formation (each year and over time)?