

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 more than 30 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.”

Do we deliver what we promise?



Assessing Spiritual Formation

“How do we know?”

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Causation challenges
- Measurement challenges
- Interpretation challenges
- Communication challenges

Assessing Spiritual Formation

- Causation challenges
 - What kind of students we get – cf. changing demographics at Grandview
 - 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?

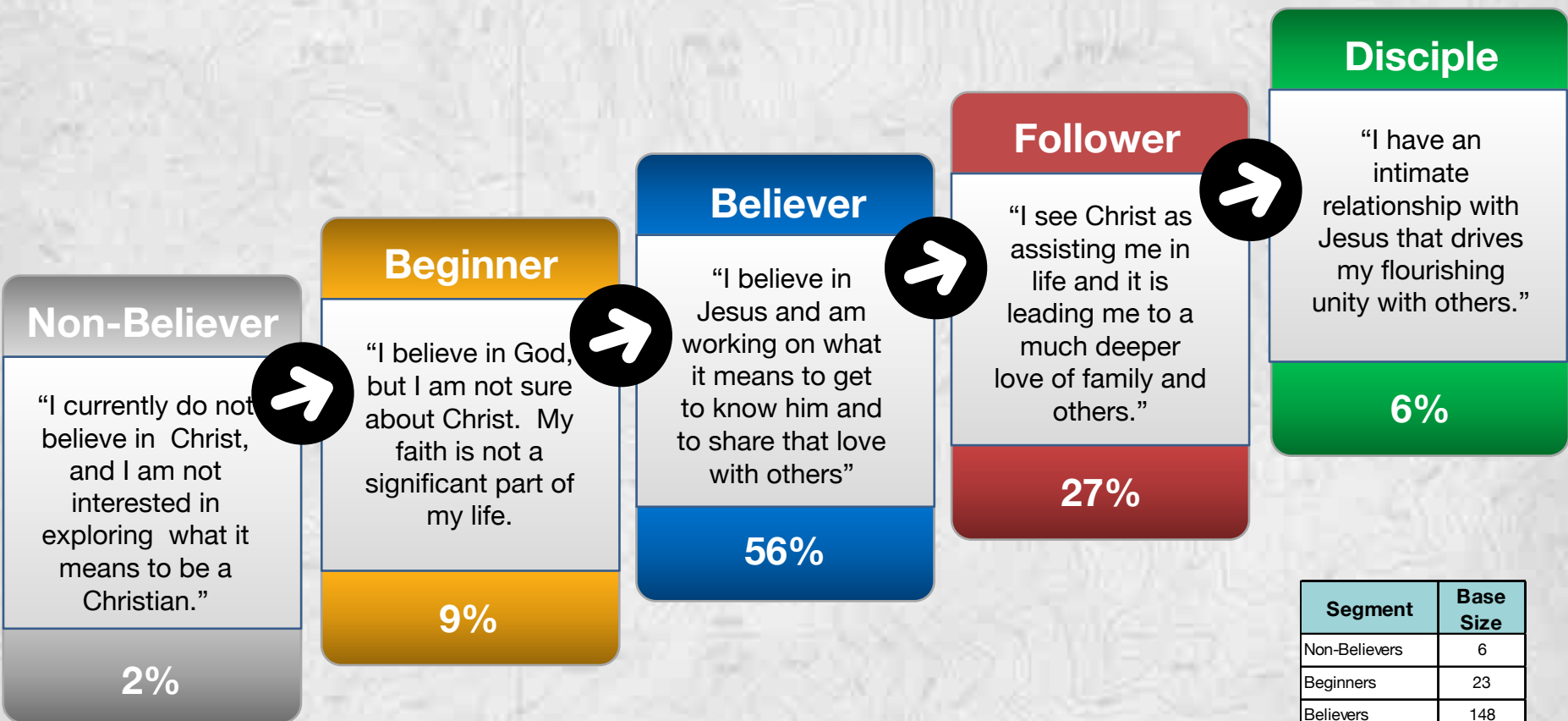
Assessing Spiritual Formation

- 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



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

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

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.

How do we gather 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.

How do we interpret 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.

How do we use 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

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Strengths

- Caring teachers, coaches and staff (atmosphere)
- Bible is integrated everywhere
- Positive peer influence**
- Missions week
- Service days

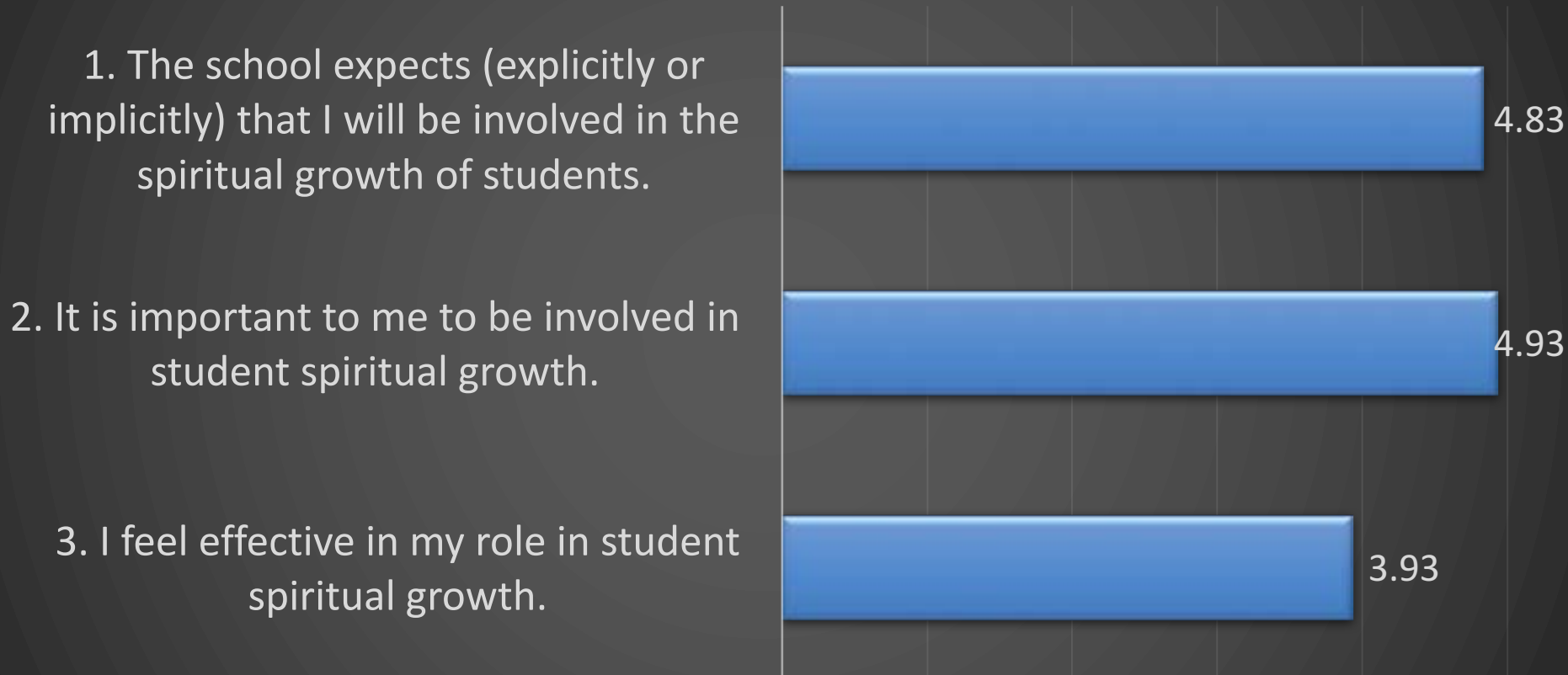
What do students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

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 staff say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

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



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

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.

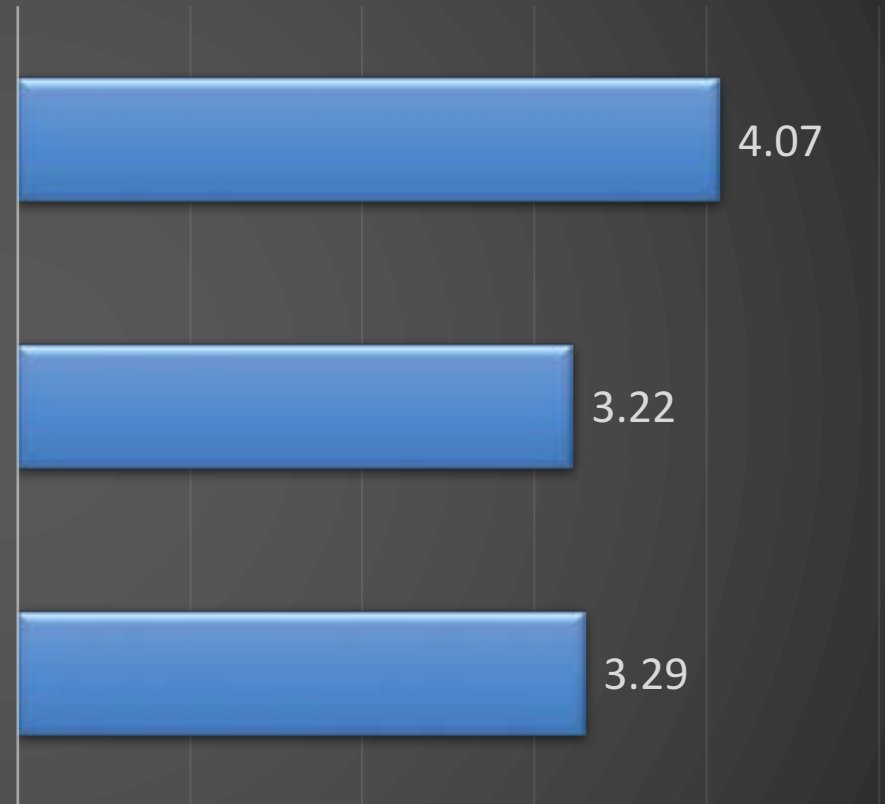
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5. My personal role in student spiritual growth is evaluated regularly.

3.22

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

3.29



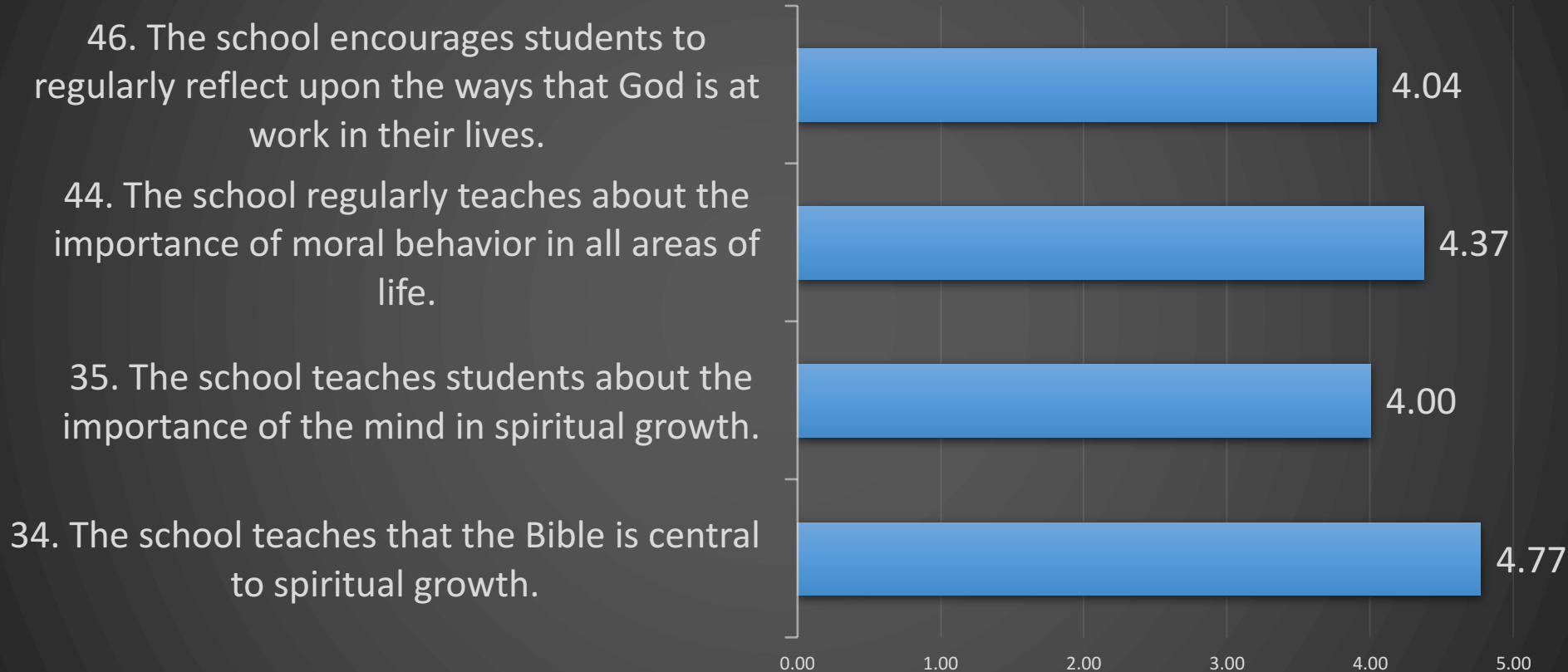
What do students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

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 staff say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

HOW DOES THE SCHOOL HELP STUDENTS GROW IN ALL AREAS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES?



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

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 students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

Room for improvement

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

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 students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

Student really miss the small groups

- One change – small groups (every time)
- “I liked last year better because of the small groups. I miss that because it was really fun.”
- “With small groups, I really looked forward to chapel.”
- “Add small groups back into the fold.”

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

Student really miss the small groups

- “Small groups give younger students someone to look up to.” (But they also want groups of peers.)
- “It was really helpful to have older kids helping us with our lives.”
- Several groups talked about the lack of spiritual relationships this year because of no small groups.

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

Character is often perceived as external behavior

- “What does a good Christian look like?”
 - Shirts tucked in, shaved, belts
 - Smiles, putting on a good show
 - “Others don’t last long here.”
- “You need to look at certain way to represent the school and Christ well.
- “People learn how to fake it.”

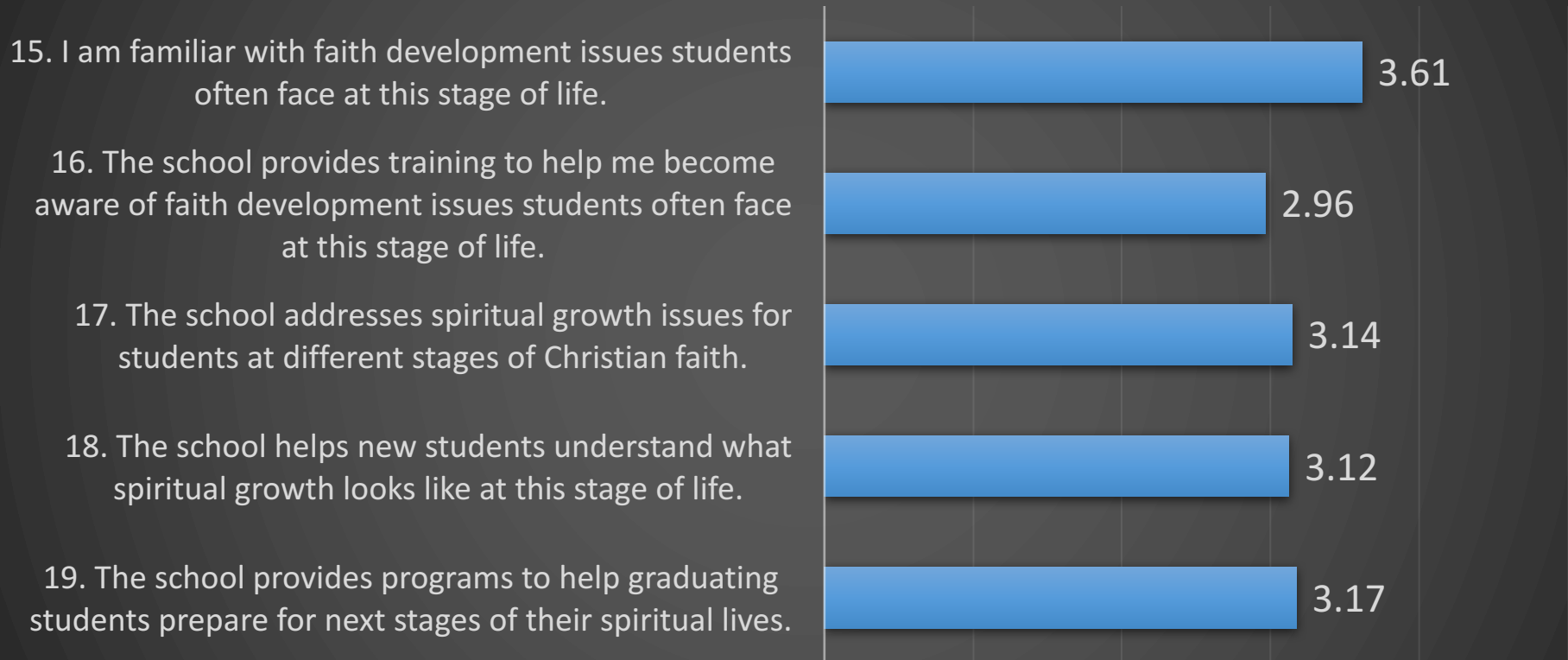
What do students say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

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 staff say about the spiritual environment at a typical Christian School

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



Opportunities for action

- 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)

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)?