

# State of the Schools in Central Illinois District, LCMS

Report to: School Administrators and Boards  
CID Board of Directors  
CID Convention

## **SCHOOL VISITS: 2002-2003 TERM**

The purpose of visiting the Lutheran schools across our District is to allow me to personally know how Lutheran education is being carried out in the Central Illinois District. On-sight visits not only provide the opportunity to directly observe each program in action but these visits also provide me the opportunity to discuss local issues and respond directly to questions and concerns from various teachers and administrators.

During the 2002-2003 school term I implemented a plan to learn more about our schools than could be achieved through observation alone. My focus has been to meet individually with as many teachers as possible. Through a simple survey I was able to learn about each school and program from the perspective of the teachers who minister there on a daily basis.

The interview procedure was quite simple. I asked administrators to work with teachers in scheduling time in which I could sit down privately with each teacher on the faculty. Teachers were assured that their specific responses would be kept confidential. I asked only four questions. The questions were deliberately left open-ended; there was no attempt to lead the interviewees toward any desired response.

I have shared the results of this survey with all the schools in CID. My intent for this report, as it relates to the schools, is to challenge the school administrators to engage their faculties in discussing the report for the purpose of using the findings as a goal-setting tool for each school. I also received input that will allow me to establish and refine goals for my work within our District.

Results reflect input from **245** personal interviews.

The following categories reflect the high priority issues for those interviewed. The ranking of responses was based on the frequency of responses.

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## **Top 10 Things Teachers Celebrate in CID schools:**

- 1. The children**
  - a. Their joy and excitement about learning
  - b. Seeing them grow in body, mind, and faith
  - c. The love they so easily share
- 2. My fellow faculty members**
  - a. Mentoring and support I receive
  - b. Concern shown for each other
  - c. We are like a family

3. **Sharing Christ**
  - a. I can integrate God into everything I teach
  - b. Hearing the children witness
  - c. Seeing faith grow in children and families
4. **Great support from parents**
5. **I just love to teach**
  - a. I love my subject
  - b. I love the age of my students
  - c. It's a challenge to find the right approach to meet a student's needs
6. **Enjoying the look on children's faces when they learn something – when the *light bulb clicks on***
7. **My principal**
  - a. Is supportive of me
  - b. Leads by example
8. **My pastor**
  - a. The school is an important ministry and he shows it
9. **The freedom - with control - that my principal allows me in my teaching**
10. **Teaching children who want to learn**

Summary Comments:

The great joys experienced by many of the teachers interviewed include the daily contact with the children. Yes, there are some who provide many challenges, but the general feeling is the joy of observing the joy of learning that the children demonstrate. The warmth and free acceptance of each other and their teachers is a constant boost to many of these teachers.

A second joy for many of these teachers is focused on the people with whom they work - their fellow faculty members. Many comments speak of the family feeling among the teachers, the support they receive within this family, and the true concern as individuals as well as believers redeemed by Christ.

Another of the great joys for teachers is their privilege to share Christ's love and teach of Him to the children every day. Their faith interaction includes the wonderful joy of praying with the children and observing the children as they grow in their prayer life.

The teachers also truly appreciate those many parents that do all they can to thank the teachers. This is demonstrated through words of thanks, volunteering to help whenever and wherever needed, and supporting education through their follow-up at home.

**Top 10 Things that Frustrate Teachers in CID schools:**

1. **Expectations/work load is too great**
  - a. I'm torn among too many duties, spread too thin
  - b. I'm burning out but no one is listening
  - c. Stuff keeps getting added, but nothing is ever removed
  - d. Our principal is overwhelmed with teaching and administering
2. **Gap exists between teachers and the board**
  - a. Board overrides teacher advice and actions
  - b. Board is micro-managing, doing the principal's job
  - c. Board presents no clear direction to follow
  - d. Lack of communication between teachers and board
  - e. Too many added tasks assigned through method of "Oh, by the way..."
  - f. Conflict of interest and lack of consistency with regards to policies

3. **Gap exists between teachers and principal**
  - a. Support for teachers inconsistent or not visible
  - b. Principal seems hard to approach at times
  - c. Policy and discipline not always followed through by principal
  - d. Things just aren't getting done
  - e. Leadership is negative rather than positive
  - f. Observation and evaluation of me just doesn't happen
  - g. I'd like more input, guidance, and direction from my principal
4. **Not enough time to carry out the job of teaching**
  - a. No time to breathe
  - b. I'm always with the children, no time to effectively plan
5. **Congregation faces financial problems**
  - a. Cuts the school program to save money
  - b. Focus is on money rather than on ministry
  - c. Vision limited by concern over funds
  - d. There is never enough money; we can't get things we need for classroom
  - e. No stewardship program in congregation, but school pays the resulting penalty
6. **Lack of complete support from my congregation**
  - a. Distance between church and school is both physical and philosophical
  - b. Bottom-line support from my pastor just isn't there
  - c. School is portrayed openly as not being worthwhile
  - d. Little of no public recognition of or thanks to teachers
  - e. Congregation members openly fighting against the school
7. **Parents who aren't on the same page as the school**
  - a. Don't follow through with religious training at home
  - b. Don't cooperate with the school's program
  - c. Try to always fix things for their children
  - d. Lack of support and trust from some families
8. **Communication among faculty is weak**
  - a. Teachers aren't free to talk about frustrations
  - b. Poor use of tact when pointing out another teacher's faults
  - c. Rumors and gossip that can be hurtful
9. **Lack of cooperation among faculty**
  - a. Can't or won't compromise and work together as a team
  - b. No consistent application of discipline plan
  - c. New ideas shot down simply because "We haven't done it that way before"
10. **Conflicts that interfere with the work of the ministry team**
  - a. Pastor and principal don't work together
  - b. Pastors won't cooperate with other pastors
  - c. Conflicts and lack of cooperation between parishes in the area or association
  - d. Teachers not respected by our pastor

Summary Comments:

Put quite simply, a great frustration for many of the teachers is the combination of rather heavy expectations and work loads. Teachers in Lutheran schools are often involved in many duties and activities outside the actual classroom. Most of these extra duties would simply not get done if not for the teachers, so they buckle down and do them. The down side of this is that the teacher's family life often suffers.

***Challenge for the congregations:** Study the work load of the church workers. Determine what each task requires in order to be successfully accomplished. Discussion and consideration should be*

*directed toward developing realistic expectations for the teachers along with ways and means to provide volunteer or paid assistance to adequately meet the prioritized needs of the school and congregation.*

Teachers are frustrated when they sense a lack of support from their board of education and/or their principal. This lack of support may come in several forms: poor communication; no defined expectations; micromanagement by boards; little or no direction, observation, or evaluation of teachers; lack of support on discipline issues; negativism; and basic ineffectiveness of board or principal.

***Challenge for boards and administrators:*** *The principal is the key to a happy staff. Teachers are the number one satisfaction factor for any school; they will make or break a school's success, word-of-mouth reputation, climate, and effectiveness. Knowing this, the principal must set the tone for the faculty, serve as the educational leader, function as the head cheerleader for the faculty, and lead the faculty as a parent leads a family. To do this, the principal must find ways to establish and maintain a relationship with the faculty that reflects and models professional respect and courtesy along with Christian love. Professional respect includes listening to the teachers; allow them to provide input and reaction to school issues. The principal then needs to help the board of education understand their role as an extension of the principal's: honor, respect, and publicly support and applaud the teachers.*

Another frustration is the lack of congregational support for the school. The support issue generally focused on financial reasons but could also include philosophical or emotional support. The congregation may seek to save money by reducing the school's program rather than seeking to increase overall stewardship response from the members. For example, when a teacher's already low salary – on the average significantly below the CID recommended base salary – is further reduced by \$5,000 or more in order to provide medical coverage for a spouse, it becomes a serious challenge for that teacher to be able to remain in that ministry role. The pastor may be perceived as not being in support of the school. There is the additional factor that some congregation members simply do not assign any value to the school program. These individuals display an attitude that Christian education need only be a spotty, occasional activity...that should be enough for any church member. An additional factor that impacts the support issue is ongoing conflict among pastors and congregations as they relate to the school. Congregational *feuds* and personal or professional schisms between pastors get in the way of the mission of congregation and school.

***Challenge for the congregations:*** *Get everyone on the same page. Review or develop the congregation's mission statement. Determine how the school program serves the congregation in relation to that mission statement. The congregation can then...*

- *formally decide the role of the school within the congregation's mission,*
- *establish the congregation's goals to achieve that mission, and*
- *determine ways and means to effectively and aggressively provide support for the accepted mission of church and school.*

Communication gaps, whether they be between teachers and their boards of education, between teachers and principal, or among teachers on the faculty provide a lot of frustration for teachers. When communication breaks down the perception is that support is no longer there, nor are the teachers or their Christian education task seen as having any value.

***Challenge:*** *boards, administrators, and teachers must all work to maintain open, honest, and positive communication. Every Lutheran school is involved in a ministry that must be based upon forming Christian relationships with a variety of groups. As St. John writes in I John 4, "Dear friends, let us love one another." As the individuals in a school and congregation work toward loving one another, they will enhance the ministry of the school and the congregation. Improvement in this area can be assisted through employing resources suitable for individual study as well as workshop and retreat settings.*

Finally, some parents who do not walk the same path as the school provide a lot of frustration. These parents are not active in their faith, nor do they follow through with their responsibility for the faith development of their children. They may also challenge anything the school does to work toward the spiritual, moral, and educational growth of their children. “My child is always right,” is the rule and “I will make certain he has his way,” is the goal of these parents. The teacher, who is generally considered by this type of parent to be the one in the wrong, is seen as some evil force that must be defeated.

**Challenge:** *The school and congregation can regularly offer guidance and instruction in the skills necessary for successful Christian parenting. Effective steps to encourage, train, and support families in the school and congregation will take the combined effort of the school staff and the evangelism workers in the congregation. Schools will need to clarify their policies so that all parents should have no doubt as to the mission, goals, discipline standards, and expectations of the school. The school leadership should then be ready to stand in full support of those policies.*

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### **Top 10 Dream Goals of CID Lutheran Teachers**

*Focus of teachers when given complete authority and unlimited funds:*

1. **Add to or upgrade facility**
  - a. Add classrooms to the school
  - b. Increase the size of my classroom
  - c. Purchase furniture that is new
2. **Add full-time specialists to the teaching faculty**
  - a. Music teacher
  - b. Art teacher
  - c. Physical education teacher
  - d. Foreign language teacher
  - e. Computer instructor
3. **Address technology needs**
  - a. Add a computer lab
  - b. Upgrade current computer lab with new (not used) equipment
  - c. Provide Internet access
  - d. Wireless technology
  - e. Provide necessary training for faculty and staff
4. **Provide all the classroom materials teachers need in order to teach**
  - a. Too many items have to be purchase out of teachers’ pockets
5. **Add teachers and aides to help children with special needs**
  - a. We often enroll too many children with needs we are not capable of meeting
6. **Build a gym – a new one or a second one**
7. **Provide release time every day for teachers**
  - a. For planning and preparation time
  - b. Provide lunch and recess break from constant supervision of students
8. **Improve salaries and benefits**
  - a. Pay my co-workers what they are worth
  - b. Apply the CID recommended salary base
  - c. Provide health coverage for spouses and families
  - d. Do all this so no teacher’s family has to struggle
9. **Build a new school facility**
  - a. With the church right next door
  - b. With a large, grass playground

**10. Increase enrollment of the school**

- a. Implement a good marketing plan
- b. Eliminate roadblocks that stifle growth and potential
- c. Improve our enrollment *evangelism* within congregation as well as community

In general, as you can see, the focus of these teachers is not self-serving or desirous of *taking care of #1*. The focus is predominantly directed toward the program of the school: to improve the education program and to assist each other in being able to carry out their task as Christian educators. In general, their intent is to make the educational experience of their students as beneficial an experience as possible.

The one exception to the rule in these top 10 responses is item #8 which speaks of the salary and benefits issue. Very simply put, these teachers feel that financial struggles, often placed on them as a congregation's method of balancing the budget, may not impact the personal commitment to ministry but can impact a teacher's ability to live where he/she is asked to serve.

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**Top 10 Requests: What Can the C.I.D. Administrative Assistant – Education Do to Assist Teachers and Schools?**

**1. Facilitate communication among schools and educators**

- a. Sharing of resources and ideas
- b. Enhance potential for future interaction among schools
- c. Provide information about great teaching and program ideas

**2. Visit us in our classrooms**

- a. Be visible to teachers and students
- b. Provide feedback on how we are doing
- c. Encourage our principals to do this also

**3. Provide professional development training, conferences, and workshops**

- a. Sharing time for teachers of similar grade levels or subject areas
- b. Topics that challenge us with cutting edge skills and ideas

**4. Be available to congregations and schools needing advice or assistance**

**5. Talk with teachers; listen to and learn about us**

**6. Provide support and encouragement**

- a. Be a spokesman for Lutheran schools
- b. Be an advocate for teachers at conventions and conferences
- c. Be a leader in helping us feel appreciated for the ministry service we provide

**7. Assist us with teacher certification and recertification issues**

- a. This is proving to be a real problem for some of our teachers
- b. Offer qualifying classes or workshops in the district
- c. Establish CID standards of excellence or professional growth requirements

**8. Provide assistance in identifying funding options and ideas**

**9. Assist schools in increasing the number of quality, synodically trained teachers and administrators**

- a. Help congregations understand the necessity and value of LCMS educators
- b. Encourage the involvement in the teacher colloquy program
- c. Keep providing funding assistance to teachers seeking colloquy involvement

**10. Provide training and advice to boards of education**

- a. Understand proper development of policies
- b. What is proper function of board and board members

- c. Encourage observation and communication to assure accurate and effective decision making

I will continue to use this list of requests to structure my personal goals as I seek to effectively carry out the responsibilities of my office as I serve the schools and educators of our district.

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My prayer is that this report can provide the groundwork for our congregations and schools to address issues that affect each ministry's ability to effectively carry out the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior.

Yours and His,

Glenn W. Goeres  
Administrative Assistant - Education