

**The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality (2nd edn)**

Lisa J. Miller (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190905538.001.0001>

**Published:** 2024

**Online ISBN:** 9780190905569

**Print ISBN:** 9780190905538

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CHAPTER

## 8 Awakening Education: Nurturing Spirituality in K–12 School Culture

Amy L. Chapman, Lauren Foley, Jen Hebda Halliday, Karen Barth, Lisa J. Miller

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190905538.013.8> Pages 173–208

**Published:** 23 January 2024

### Abstract

This chapter presents the basic science on child spirituality paired with the findings of collaborative educational field research to culminate in the initiative for Awakened Schools. Basic science shows a child's spirituality to be an innate capacity, with roughly one-third of adult formation attributed to heritability and two-thirds attributed to environmental socialization. When the natural "spiritual core" of the child is supported, the likelihood of a lifetime of greater mental health and thriving, committed and meaningful relationships, and being outwardly effective in the world are all substantially increased. The traditional immersive places in society where spirituality has been fostered in children and adolescents are decreasingly engaged by families, mitigating their ability to fulfill that role. Thus, other youth-centered institutions must find ways to nurture children's innate spirituality to provide the necessary two-thirds socialization of the spiritual core. Schools thus offer a rich context to support the spiritual core, in a way that is constitutional and consistent with any given school's mission to focus or not focus on religion. This chapter presents the findings of a three-year qualitative study of 22 schools (private and publicly funded; religious and secular in mission) which intentionally have designed their relational cultures to be spiritually supportive. Our findings reveal 11 drivers of a spiritually supportive, or awakened, school culture. These 11 drivers are concrete and actionable, ready to be implemented by any school as well as other institutions (private or public; religious or secular) to nurture the development of spirituality in children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** [spirituality](#), [K–12 education](#), [school culture](#), [adolescence](#), [relational spirituality](#)

**Subject:** [Cognitive Psychology](#), [Psychology](#)

**Series:** [Oxford Library of Psychology](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)

## Introduction

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In the United States, one of the primary objectives of education is to prepare students to be informed, participatory citizens (Krutka, 2014; Mann, 1842). The progressive educational scholar John Dewey argued that American democracy required of its citizens an interconnectedness which worked toward the common good (Dewey, 1916, 1934; Rockefeller, 2009). Freedom is founded upon a deep interconnectedness with other humans and with all life: as Indigenous epistemologist Lilla Watson said of societal dynamics, “your liberation is bound up with mine” (1985). When we know ourselves to be part of a greater whole, our actions in the civic sphere reflect that understanding. The choices that we make, from voting to caring for the environment to our daily interactions with neighbors, are based on what would be best for the society, rather than only ourselves. In this way, we are only truly free when all members of a society are working for the collective welfare of the collective. In societies that have participatory forms of self-government, preparing students to inherit that self-government is a necessity. This must include creating a school environment that nurtures each student’s innate spirituality.

Although scholars have argued for the necessity of returning to this original purpose of education in order to prepare students to inherit self-government, most mainstream education does not do so (Chapman & Miller, forthcoming; Elam et al., 1996; Gleason & von Gillern, 2018; Heath, 2018; Krutka, 2014). Schools serve as incubators of spirituality before students set out to the wider world. They create the environment that provides the light and heat for spirituality to grow, and that environment also serves as a space in which students can reflect that light and heat back to each other. In this way, schools function as a microcosm of the larger society they are preparing students to enter and govern (Dewey, 1897). When schools design their environments to nurture students’ spirituality, they are preparing students to live in the wider world in ways that promote interpersonal, intrapersonal, and societal well-being.

The empirical findings of our three-year study show how some schools are cultivating such spiritually supportive environments. The schools in this study present a roadmap for intentionally designing school culture as incubators of students’ innate spirituality, schools we call “Awakened Schools.” These Awakened Schools nurture each student’s inner core; they also serve as a society in which students learn to make decisions that support the well-being of others and the whole.

## The Science of Spirituality

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### All People Are Born Spiritual Beings

Spirituality is a deep and innate human capacity through which we experience the sacred and the transcendent in the imminent (Kendler et al., 1997, 1999), which burgeons across the lifespan, particularly in adolescence (Button et al., 2011; Koenig et al., 2008). Twin studies have shown that every child is born with an innate capacity for spiritual life (Button et al., 2011; Kendler et al., 1997; Koenig et al., 2008); by adulthood, one-third of our inherent spiritual core comes from our genetic constitution, while two-thirds of our spiritual core is developed into being by our interactions with the people and environment around us (Button et al., 2011; Kendler et al., 1997; Koenig et al., 2008). Within the two-thirds contribution from the environment is the often rich and developmentally supportive practice of a family religious tradition. Spirituality is innate and then socialized. Religious observance can be seen as a rich environmental embrace of natural spirituality, as it is introduced and taught to the child.

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One way of exploring the common phenomenology, or lived spirituality held in the one-third heritable contribution, is through cross-cultural investigation of potential phenotypes. In a study of over 5,500 adults from China, India, and the United States, at least five common forms of universal spiritual awareness were

identified, potentially marking phenotypes of the one-third heritable contribution to innate human spirituality (McClintock, Lau, & Miller, 2016). Similarly, Benson and colleagues asked over 9,000 adolescents and emerging adults from eight different countries across five continents about their spiritual engagement (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen, & Roehlkepartain, 2012). For many of the adolescents and young adults in this study, spiritual engagement occurred even without participation in religious or spiritual practices; spiritual development appeared to burgeon from the inside out in common ways across cultures and religious backgrounds, including those who did not identify as religious, to include a sense of connection to a Higher Power, an imperative for service, seeking for truth and purpose, and a practice of prayer or meditation (Benson et al., 2012).

Like other aspects of human development, one's spiritual development surges during puberty. Along with biological puberty, there is a burgeoning of this natural spiritual capacity, through which there has been identified a 50% increase to the heritable contribution during adolescence (Button et al., 2011; Koenig et al., 2008). In other words, during puberty, there is a surge of spiritual development, alongside other lines of development (Koenig et al., 2008; Miller & Gur, 2002). The surge, or "biological clock," of the emergence of spiritual life in puberty has also been tracked cross culturally to indicate some universal potential phenotypes which are expressed developmentally. Both in countries with theism and non-theism, an intentional and loving greater universe is clarified into awareness with puberty (McClintock et al., 2016).

Neural correlates of spirituality have been identified which implicate the regions of attention, perception, orientation, and emotional bonding. Of note, the neural correlates of personalized spiritual experience have been shown to be consistent across people who are within and without a faith practice or religious identification (McClintock et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Newberg, 2010). By identifying the neural correlates of spiritual awareness, together with a phenomenological report, we can discern a cluster of perceptions which otherwise, in other states of awareness, tend to be held disparately. Specifically, in a state of spiritual awareness, a Ventral Frontal Temporal Network has been shown to be associated with a felt sense of love and connectedness with life, together with the awareness of unity or oneness sustained in the Parietal and Precuneus regions (McClintock et al., 2019). The uncommon simultaneity of awareness of oneness and unity on one hand, with individual locus of awareness and sense of individual path and purpose on the other, undergirds or holds the dialectic of individual freedom with collective compassion. The settling of these apparent appositives is essential to the balance of personal choice and responsibility with connected compassion needed in relational spirituality.

## p. 176 **Spirituality Must Be Nurtured, Not Taught**

As an innate and basic human capacity, spirituality is much like our innate capacity for language: it can be shaped, supported, or hampered, but it is not taught as the transmission of knowledge as might occur when learning something that requires lower-level thinking skills like recall. Spiritual motivations, perceptions, and relationality are supported, as the hardwired innate capacity is guided, presenting a distinct set of opportunities within the developmental windows of youth. However, the epidemiological findings on a heritable contribution suggest that a full and rich development of the spiritual core is dependent upon its nurturance by parents, grandparents, peers, and community. If the spiritual core is supported, encouraged, and guided, the innate capacity for spirituality blossoms into development and can be fully realized. The growth of spirituality hinges on its being supported, particularly in childhood and adolescence.

Religious observance often can be a powerful and successful pathway for nurturing natural spirituality. However, as at the national level, family attendance at religious services dwindles; children are no longer introduced to faith communities in the same way that they were decades ago (Smith & Denton, 2009). Houses of worship and other similar institutions offer a community and guide parents with a pathway to support innate spirituality in children; its absence reflects a dearth, leaving children without the

socialization necessary for the two-thirds contribution for spiritual development (Miller, 2015; Smith & Denton, 2009). Here is where, as a natural human capacity, intertwined with all other lines of development, attention must be paid to the spiritual growth of children and adolescents.

## Education Can Cultivate Spirituality

Given the scientific call to support a child's innate spirituality, our question then becomes: how might K–12 schools do this work? The necessity of an education that touches the deep spiritual core has been part of the holistic education movement for more than 20 years (Miller, 2000; for a review, Miller et al., 2018).

Originally, the most pervasive and broad-reaching movement in the United States for school-based social emotional learning (SEL), as formulated by Rachael Kessler, called for the nurturance of spiritual emotions such as transcendence, joy, and gratitude (Kessler, 2000); this was followed by the work of Linda Lantieri, a cofounder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), in her focus on “schools with spirit” (Lantieri, 2002). Kessler's specific conceptualization of Seven Gateways provides a guide for education. At the center of the Seven Gateways is “deep connection,” a term Kessler used to describe relationships that are caring and meaningful, foster belonging, and allow each person in the relationship to be seen and known. Students are effectively “seen into existence,” much as Parker Palmer wrote that students can be “listened into existence” (Palmer, 1999). Given this research, teachers are best viewed as *ambassadors*, guides who show the innately spiritual child and adolescent the world through the lens of spiritual awareness. When that is done, in keeping with Kessler's Seven Gateways, there is support for the spiritual core that is found in the relationship between teacher and students.

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## Relational Spirituality as a Pathway to Fostering Spiritual Development in Schools

Relational spirituality presents a way of understanding how spirituality may be fostered in young people. *Relational spirituality*, which has been defined as “ways of relating with the sacred,” includes how people connect with a transcendent being or deity, ultimate reality, or truth (Shults & Sandage, 2006, p. 161). This same connection with the sacred flows through relationships with human beings and all life (Thomlinson et al., 2016; Tucker & Swimme, 2011). Relational spirituality is in the connection between people whose relationships are grounded in seeing and knowing each other's full humanity (Buber, 1923/1970; Faver, 2004; Lahood, 2010).

Schools can provide environments in which these types of relationships can develop and thrive (Faver, 2004; King et al., 2011). Several components of relational spirituality apply to education, such as spiritual seeking and spiritual dwelling (Thomlinson et al., 2016). Schools are well situated to nurture the shifts between spiritual seeking, when people ask existential questions, and spiritual dwelling, in which one's relationship with the sacred is more secure, as this process occurs throughout childhood and adolescence (Thomlinson et al., 2016). Relational spirituality has also been shown to be a key component of spiritually supportive education because of its impact on school culture (Chapman et al., 2020). Institutions grounded in relational spirituality nurtured belonging and connectedness to others and upheld each person's inherent worth (King et al., 2011). Incorporating relational spirituality into education has the potential to be transformative because of its ability to foster interconnectedness among school community members.

Basic science calls forward a clear need for support of the spiritual core of the student, and work on relational spirituality provides a theoretical understanding for how this might be done. Within this framework, how might relational spirituality deliberately be brought into the social ecology surrounding young people? For children and adolescents, who spend at least two-thirds of waking hours in school or on school-related social networks or activities, schools are a foremost and impactful developmental context.

## Awakened Schools

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p. 178 This chapter presents empirical research that identified common ways in which K–12 schools can choose to prioritize support for students’ innate spirituality by creating a spiritually supportive culture, which is to say a culture that nurtures the child’s innate capacity for spiritual awareness. More specifically, we aimed to harvest thousands of hours of educational innovation living daily in K–12 settings, to offer a broad distillation in a conceptualization that might be adapted by any K–12 school. The level of analysis of this conceptualization was sufficiently broad to hold a diverse array of community culture and values yet still concrete and actionable; transparent and published to be used free of charge, as readily implementable by school leadership, teachers, and parents. We intended to empower school leadership and teachers with a conceptualization able to be adopted, adapted, and appropriated in a way that aligns with a given school’s culture, mission, and values. And yet, Awakened Schools have a common blueprint.

An Awakened School immerses each young person in a relational culture to nourish their innate spiritual capacity. These Awakened Schools intentionally engage the deep inner spiritual core of the child, realizing that loving relationship is the context in which spirituality is fortified. Spirituality is not taught in a program delivered through curriculum alone, it is embodied through the 10,000 exchanges in a school day. Awakened Schools provide students with both scaffolding and freedom, creating an environment that nurtures each child’s innate spirituality and yet also offers room for them to engage their spirituality in ways which are authentic to them. Awakened Schools foster wonder, awe, and reverence; they are grounded in loving relationships that see each person as sacred; they honor each student’s self-worth and inner wisdom.

## Methods

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To date, very little systematic research has been conducted on spirituality in K–12 education outside specific religious traditions. That said, a great number of schools in the United States nurture the spiritual life of children, some within a faith tradition and some outside a specific faith tradition. An inefficiency exists in the transfer of knowledge from the “living lab” of classrooms to a pedagogical conceptualization of support for the growth of natural spirituality in students, in a way that is culturally inclusive and constitutional. Such a conceptualization might be used by fellow schools, inform teachers trainings, and ultimately recast normative expectations around the possibility for student growth and development in a way that integrates the spiritual core.

In light of the emerging nature of the field, we designed research that would harvest the experience and acumen of master educators in K–12 schools. Contributing educators came from schools with mission statements within faith traditions and outside faith traditions, with our aim being to identify universal and transferable pedagogical practices to support spiritual development in K–12 students.

In the form of extensive qualitative research, we conducted visits to 22 leadership schools; 16 of which were independent schools (9 with religiously oriented mission statements) and 6 of which were public schools. Among the independent schools with religion in the mission statement, four were Catholic, two were Protestant, two were Jewish, and one was Sufi. The six public schools came from different cultural traditions: one was derived from a Black Panther tradition, another from the Muslim tradition. One of the public schools was interfaith driven, and three were silent on religious or spiritual life but had implemented mindfulness as a technique and were located in communities with a strong presence of family faith.

p. 179 Our data were collected through observations and through semistructured interviews with members of the faculty, staff, administration, and the student body of each school. In order to observe the culture of each

school, we joined the school culture, across academic, social, artistic, and service activities and experiences for spontaneous visits, curated discussions, and participated in routine daily events. More specifically, we sat in on classes and met and spoke with students in dining halls, in mindfulness classes, in the library, and in community service meetings. We met with disciplinary groups, attended communitywide meetings, and were on playing fields. We were in chapel services and other sacred spaces, and we were witness to sacred rituals.

Our intent was to be present throughout the school day in a variety of settings in which the culture of the school could be observed. In each space within a school we visited, we observed how people interacted with each other, including both students and adults in formal (e.g. classroom) and informal (e.g. hallway) settings. Additionally, we were attentive to how spirituality or spiritual practices were integrated into the school day, such as daily chapel services and regular and required classes which focused on deep reflections on spiritual topics.

In addition to our observations, we conducted semistructured interviews with a wide variety of members of each school's community to identify ways in which spirituality was embedded in school practice, curriculum and culture, faculty development and training, and parent engagement. We interviewed every school head. We met with psychotherapists, counselors, and physicians on campuses. We met with heads of community service, chaplains, and student wellness and student life leaders. We also interviewed classroom teachers, coaches, and members of each school's administrative teams. We usually were able to interview parents of current students and alumni of the school. We asked these different members of each school's community about how spirituality was embedded in school culture.

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2008). Following our school site visits, our research team wrote up field notes of these site visits to make a record of our observations; all interviews were recorded and transcribed. These coded interviews and the field notes of our site visits served as the basis for analysis by our research. Interviews were initially coded using an open coding process to allow codes to emerge from the data (Creswell, 2013; Glaser, 2012); we then applied conceptual coding to both interviews and field notes (Saldaña, 2016). Through this bottom-up, iterative process, we identified patterns across schools; this process generated a conceptualization of the commonalities across schools that support spiritual development. Findings were then sent to contributing school heads and fellows for comment and feedback; through this process of member-checking, the model was refined (Miles et al., 2014).

Pseudonyms have been used for both schools and individuals (heads, educators, or students) to protect the privacy of those who participated in our research.

## Findings on Awakened School Culture

The next sections present the findings from our empirical study of 22 leadership schools.

## The 11 Drivers of an Awakened School Culture

Our program of research identified 11 drivers of an Awakened Schools, defined as prioritizing an intentionally designed and instantiated spiritually supportive, school culture. Our conceptualization of the common 11 drivers found across Awakened Schools express elements that are conceptually developmentally significant to nurturing natural spirituality yet concrete and actionable. Educators' use of the 11 drivers creates and maintains a school culture that supports and nurtures the spirituality of children and adolescents. Two of these drivers speak to the awareness that Awakened Schools foster in their students, faculty, and staff: the *authentic being* and *transcendent practice*. Six of the drivers describe the ways in which schools encourage a sense of belonging in their students, faculty, and staff: *transformative relationships*; *integrated mission*, *aspirational values*; *inherent worth*; *ritual*; *intentional lexicon*; and *authorized keeper*. The final two drivers, *nature consciousness* and *meaningful learning*, speak to the ways in which schools foster connectedness among their students, faculty, and staff. Table 8.1 briefly explains each of these 11 drivers, which are further illuminated with support from interview and observational data below. ↴

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**Table 8.1** Drivers of Spiritually Supportive Culture

| Driver                       | Explanation                                                                                                |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transformative relationships | Building student–teacher relationships grounded in connection and love                                     |
| Inherent worth               | Seeing, knowing, and valuing every member of the school community                                          |
| Authentic being              | Committing to drawing out the deep spirit and creative expression of the child                             |
| Transcendent practice        | Cultivating practices that nurture and elevate an augmented form of awareness                              |
| Nature consciousness         | Facilitating opportunities to form deep, lived relationships with nature and all life                      |
| Meaningful learning          | Connecting knowledge and service                                                                           |
| Integrated mission           | Vertically integrating a lived and meaningful mission                                                      |
| Aspirational values          | Holding aspirational goals inside and outside the classroom                                                |
| Ritual                       | Promoting community identity and belonging among diverse staff and students through ritual and celebration |
| Intentional lexicon          | Fostering a school language rooted in interconnectedness, transcendence, and service                       |
| Authorized keeper            | Setting up a professional post for the embodiment and expression of core values                            |

### Transformative Relationships

Education definitionally means not to teach but rather to draw out, realizing the deep nature of the students. In Awakened Schools, relationships among adults, among students, and between adults and students in the schools are viewed as the matrix for growth and development. There is a field of awareness, love, trust, and a palpable sense of uniting together that buoys up the child's sense of being; this is a space of shared discovery and ignites in the child the hunger to learn.

At each school that we visited, these transformative relationships were present in our interviews with students, faculty, and staff, and also through our observations, both in formal and informal learning spaces.



This understanding of transformative relationships was well-described by a private school teacher who had been with their school for more than 30 years, who shared the following with us:

As an educator at Belvedere, a “deep way of being” is to look into the eye of a student you’re working with and feel that you’re really communicating. That you’re in the act of both listening and being listened to. That you’re sharing in that sense of awe of the universe. Sometimes the “universe” isn’t the great star field in the sky but instead the human spirit we all share. Belvedere has a “spirituality” of relationships.

Seeing relationships in this way moves beyond adversarial or transactional relationships, even beyond caring and meaningful relationships. Transformative relationships are grounded in an understanding that we are all deeply connected, and from that connection we are called to honor, value, and see the other person as a fully human being.

One of the areas in which transformative relationships were found to be most impactful was in the way they influenced disciplinary actions, as shown by the following quote, about a teacher and student at a public elementary school:

Derek’s attitude toward school and staff was dismissive at best. He had a tendency to bully other students verbally and used his body to gesture and intimidate. I met with Derek for 15–20 minutes every morning at the start of the day. We practiced breathing strategies, mindful minutes (meditation). Often we just talked. I introduced Derek to the singing bowl. One afternoon, I watched Derek storm into the building from the playground. When I arrived at my office door, Derek was in the hall crouched on the floor near my office door, his hands were balled into fists and his face, angry and tense. I offered my office as a space for Derek to sit. Derek accepted the offer, walked in and sat down next to the singing bowl. I sat and watched Derek strike the bowl and proceed to make it sing. His whole body relaxed, his face softened and his breath was more even. After a few minutes of striking and listening to the sound of the bowl, Derek was able to talk about the incident on the playground.

p. 182 In this anecdote, we see that of the many paths that this teacher could have chosen in response to Derek’s attitude and behavior, she chose to situate her responses in the context of their transformative relationship. As a result, she treated Derek as a whole person, and gave him the time and space he needed to discuss his experiences and feelings. This prepared the way for growth and development in ways that other alternatives would not have fostered.

Another example of the way in which growth and development can come through transformative relationships was shared by one of the faculty members at a private, nonsectarian high school:

This fall, I had a student meet with me to discuss the topic of his upcoming chapel. He was distraught and claimed he had no ideas. I realized he was upset and tried asking some different questions. Finally, he burst into tears and said that he was struggling with whether or not to come out (as gay) in this talk, and that was why he was so stuck. We had a long talk, and weighed the pros and cons of doing so, and he felt good about his ultimate decision. The relationship I had with this student allowed him to be honest and vulnerable—and it is this kind of relationship that I am most proud of creating—more than any program or syllabus or speech.

As seen in the example above, the power of transformative relationships lies in the fact that each member of the school community is seen, known, and valued. This deep care for each individual affects everything that occurs within a school, from interactions in the hallways to learning activities. One such example of a

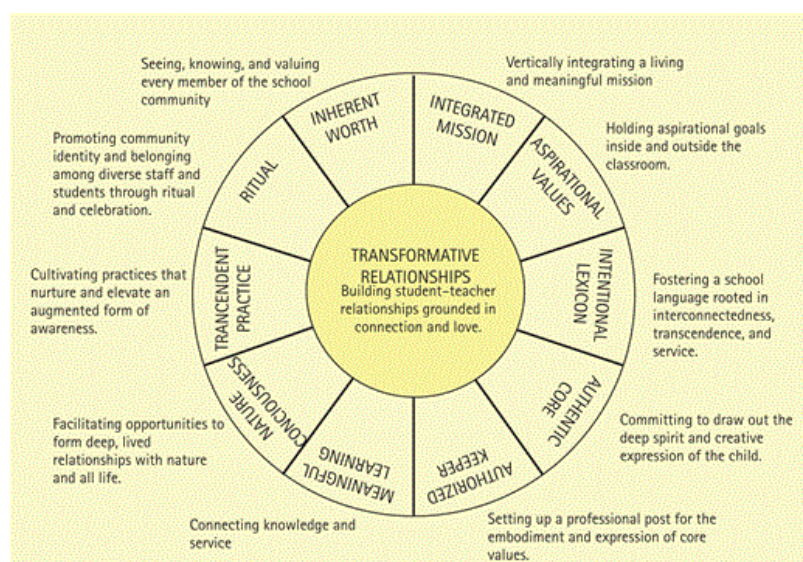


learning activity that was dependent upon transformative relationships was shared by a faculty member at a Catholic K–8 school:

I believe that life is defined and marked by transformative and defining moments which alter the foundation of one's life. One such moment occurred after a particularly difficult class. An 8th-grade class participated in a formal debate about privacy and the reach of government power in order to prevent violence. An 8th-grade student, whose father perished in the Twin Towers during the September 11th terror attacks, decided that he would offer his personal experiences when it was his turn at the podium. The student eloquently and passionately detailed his struggles and the pain he still has as a result of his loss. When he finished, his peers were silent. Some openly cried, some consoled him, others simply reflected on his words and respected his experience. Everyone was empathetic. Later in the school day, I checked in on the student. After some more tears, I was the one who needed to be consoled with a hug. I was so proud of this student.

p. 183 The core driver of an Awakened School culture is its focus on transformative relationships; each of the remaining drivers is connected to and flows from these relationships, as depicted in figure 8.1. ↴

**Figure 8.1**



Connections Between the 11 Drivers of Awakened Culture

## Inherent Worth

Each student is a being of ultimate inherent worth. A commitment by Awakened Schools to the inherent worth of each student holds that irrespective of academic performance or effort, pleasing or unpleasing ways, level of emotional intelligence, or any other outward expression, all students are valued. As teachers of beings of inherent worth, the faculty is endowed with a sense of a sacred trust. At a Christian school in an affluent and rather formal suburban setting, following a loud and busy day in a class, a first-grade teacher shared not exhaustion but exhilaration, “they are all just little Jesus’s, that’s what we say. We see the Jesus inside of them.”

Knowing that each child or adolescent has an inherent worth changes the way in which teachers interact with students (Chapman, 2019). We observed this in a variety of ways in the schools that we visited, but the most profound examples of faculty and staff interacting with students based on their inherent worth was best shown to us through the stories told by members of the school community. At one K–8 private

Christian school, the chaplain shared with us the way in which the school honors each member of the community through their process of addressing difficult behaviors:

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We address conflict and mistake-making with love since it is at the center of our spiritual life. Conversations begin with the assumption that the student is loved and that the community cares for them. *When love is the beginning point of difficult discussions, then adults are able to help students understand that we are here to help them be the best person possible. When students feel loved it does not take away the pain or the consequences of their actions, but it does remind them that they are part of a community.* As part of council, we also practice “restorative justice.” Restorative justice is an approach to achieving justice that involves those who have a stake in the offense to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible. It is also an effective alternative to punitive responses that brings together persons harmed with persons responsible for harm in a safe and respectful space promoting dialog, accountability and a stronger sense of community.

Centering interactions with children and adolescents on their inherent worth moves beyond singular disciplinary issues. Children and adolescents enter school with a variety of needs, but whether they are hungry, sick, sad, lonely, or hurting, honoring a student’s inherent worth means meeting them in ways that uphold their dignity. The following story, from a public junior and senior high school principal, shows the truly transformative nature of leading with a student’s inherent worth:

I met [Elizabeth] where her sex-ed teacher asked me to come and pull her from class because she didn’t know where she was or who was in the room. I came to know that she was abused for eight years by a family member who is currently incarcerated. Although she was referred to community-based therapy, she never attended more than a handful of sessions due to family inconsistency. Over the course of 3 years, we worked to establish safety with many ups and downs. During this time, Elizabeth had a serious suicide attempt and an inpatient hospital stay. She was chronically truant, smoking weed regularly, and repeated a grade. She knew she was always safe in my office and reached out regularly to build positive relationships with adults. She was a regular supporter and advocate to peers who experienced rape and sexual abuse. After three years and a period of relative sobriety, Elizabeth decided she wanted to write a book telling her story. She spent weeks writing drafts and we bought a blank book. She wanted to share her story with family and supportive school staff. We chose a date and invited folks to come. We made a plan to have snacks and drinks. We called her parents several times to prepare them for the story that she would share at school. On the anointed day, we set up the room with snacks and arranged the room for Elizabeth to speak. I sat next to her as she read the story of her trauma. The room full of family and invited staff cried as they listened. Elizabeth got a lot of hugs and apologies from her parents for not protecting her better. We ate cookies and juice. The next school year, Elizabeth worked to double up her credits so that she was no longer a grade behind. She got the highest grade in the school on her math benchmark. She is on track to graduate from high school on time.

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Grounding relationships with children and adolescents in their inherent worth allows school faculty and staff to see and know the complexity of a student’s experience. In knowing that experience, faculty and staff are better able to journey with each child or adolescent. This is clearly shown by the following example from a public high school:

Last fall, this 18-year-old boy emancipated himself from his abusive family, rendering himself homeless and destitute for the majority of his senior year in high school. Our faculty and staff, along with their friends and families, began supplying Jerry with clothes, food, toiletries, and anything else an 18-year-old boy would need to survive on his own. Three members of the faculty

became his lead advocates to ensure that all of his needs were met. His grade-level administrator took care of Jerry's financial, educational, legal, and medical paperwork. Her office became his safe place where he could study, eat, sleep, and store his meager belongings. One of his beloved football coaches helped Jerry navigate the world of NCAA sports and college applications. One of his teachers supported Jerry emotionally, encouraged him to take care of himself physically, and helped him schedule and attend medical appointments. She treated him like a son and encouraged her younger children to draw him pictures, bring him presents on holidays, and share meals with him. Although hesitant to accept assistance, Jerry was deeply grateful for everything our community did to support him.

This ability for adults to journey with students also took the form of companioning students in their relationship with a transcendent power in religious schools. The following example, from a PK–8 Catholic school, shows the way in which a faculty member identified and understood a student's distress and responded in a way that attentively valued the student:

Last year, I briefly mentioned in passing, "if God tells something, your job is to listen!" A student looked at me, eyes wide and straight up panicked. "But God doesn't talk to me. I can't hear him!" She started to cry and I calmly walked her over to the windows, which overlook our stretch of the forest. I asked her to tell me the three most beautiful things she saw. Then I asked her the three people she loves being with most in the world. I explained that God is always talking to her, but maybe not in words. The tree she loved is God jumping up and down to say "this! This here! I made this for you!" I explained how our families are perfect examples of God's love, and how when a parent hugs us, God's there too. Sometimes, God will shout, but others, we have to be very quiet to hear God's soft whisper of love.

## Authentic Being

The concept that "every child is seen, known and needed for who they truly are" was shared by teachers and heads of nearly every Awakened School we visited. The adults in these schools had an active regard for the authentic being of the student; recognition of each student's authentic being is a daily and primary goal of teaching in spiritually supportive schools. Teachers in these schools had a relational pedagogy of being: beholding as a way of being known and valued, seen and heard into being (Palmer, 2000).

p. 186 As the head of one of the private nonreligious schools said, "From the start, our mission was to 'find the promise that lies hidden' in every student, and that message of individuality, hope, and possibility guides us today." Attention to this natural teleology of a child's authentic being involves finding and valuing what makes each child unique and special, and honoring each child's inherent worth as they work to develop that authentic core. A story from one of the public schools in this study illustrates this:

Tomás came to us in 8th grade. He was deeply dysregulated and cursed at teachers and adults. He had been removed from his mother's care at age ten after she left him and his half-sister alone for several days. He was living with his maternal aunt. He did not know who his father was. His sister went to live with her father, and he had limited contact with her. His aunt cared deeply for him, they loved to cook together and shared a deep love for Beyoncé. He could not sit through a class period or go a couple days at a time without doing something worthy of suspension. He connected with therapy in school. We recognized attachment challenges and worked to form a healthy attachment with him. This involved tolerating his anger, where for weeks at a time he would come visit daily to express hatred and anger and refuse to cooperate. He has strong creative talent and joined the school sewing club. We got a sewing machine in the therapy office and brought in extra fabric so he could sew in his free time. He watched YouTube videos and taught himself how to work

the sewing machine. About three times a year, he would tell stories about the neglect, physical, and verbal abuse he received from his mother. After three years of building a caring relationship, we began to talk about how trauma impacts the brain, body, and development. I taught him about attachment styles, and we studied together what attachment style matched him. During this time, he built strong relationships with some teachers. By senior year, he was able to support the deans and mentor younger children. He successfully graduated from high school. Much to his shock, he returns regularly to school to help out and stay connected. He has a budding design and hair business.

Schools also help each student to access their authentic core by providing ways in which students can creatively express their deep, inner being in the context of a school community. Although these modes of expression of a person's inner core could be found in any number of schools, in Awakened Schools these creative outlets are named, identified, and designed as practices that cultivate a child's connection to their inner core. At two schools that are members of a network of Catholic schools, there is a common, daily tradition of the entire school taking time together for each member of the school's community to connect to their inner core. The practice is described well here:

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*Espacio* is a cornerstone activity in our spiritual lives. A term that literally translates to space, it is used as an invitation to mindfulness, interiority, and prayer. *Espacio* connects us to our Catholic heritage and tradition of our founding sisters, emerging from a desire “to deepen our interior life,” our capacity for contemplation and for listening to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and in our world; to discern in silence and welcome the action of the Spirit that transforms us, energizes us, and calls us to live our prophetic and educational mission. *Espacio* is not merely quiet time, not merely meditation, but an opportunity for all individuals, students and faculty, to listen deeply and feel more connected with existence around and beyond us.

At these schools, time is set aside for each member of the school community to connect with their authentic core. This space for each child's authentic core is intentional, consistently available, and woven into the fabric of the school's life. Another example of the ways in which schools create space for each student to access their deep, inner core comes from a K–8 Catholic school, which actively works to engage students' sense of wonder by connecting them with nature:

Our boys get outside. It's part of our learning principles and how you connect with your environment. It's a neat spirituality in children ... these children are born innately spiritual and creative. Unfortunately, systems that are in place can seek to beat that out and install some other rationale, that the wonder can get easily sucked away, right? I would hope that one of the things that we're trying really hard to do here is preserve that. The beauty of being in a [Catholic] school is that we can talk about God. Your God, my God, we've hosted bar mitzvahs here. A young man who graduated here, he's the first Muslim, devout to his faith, in a [Catholic] school. Anyway, how do we preserve that, nurture it, and foster it in a way that they're comfortable and confident?

## Transcendent Practice

Transcendent practices nurture and elevate spiritual awareness in children and adolescents by accessing their deep inner core and allowing for the expression of that core. These modes of expression can vary, from listening to music or creating art to silence, chanting, or the meditative practice of a labyrinth. One example of this type of expression in one of our public elementary schools was a mindful drumming group. A teacher describes this transcendent practice in this way:

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[We formed] a mindful drumming group. We start with calming breaths and then set an intention for our week. Each group member has a drum and our drum becomes our voice. We discuss the importance of not talking over one another, and letting our drum speak in rhythm with the group. On a recent morning, Robert, a student who is Spanish-speaking and speaks English as his second language, was bursting with excitement! He respectfully kept the tone and rhythm of the group but it was clear he had something to share. Robert asked if he could play a solo. I believe he found a part of his spirit that morning and he was sharing it with the group! Everyone in that room experienced the joy of Robert's spirit as he played his drum for us. Robert found a different way to speak and we found a different way to listen.

It is readily apparent from the way in which this teacher spoke of this mindful drumming group that awareness, belonging, and connectedness were all interwoven into the creative expression of music. In spite of a spoken language barrier, Robert was able to express his authentic core to others in his school through the common language and transcendent practice of music.

Other schools were more explicit about their purposes in choosing and implementing their transcendent practices. Several of the schools we studied taught their students mindfulness, the practice of coming to awareness of the present moment, including thoughts and feelings, in a nonjudgmental and attentive way (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). One of the schools that taught mindfulness was one of the private high schools with which we worked. As one of the teachers at that high school reflected:

Mindfulness has helped me understand that the way I was living life was not the only way to go about it. I've found it most useful in times of joy, where it can help me experience life fully, and in times of pain, both physical and mental, where it can help me see the transience of the sensations and find the strength to persevere. Additionally, in the time between extremes, mindfulness helps me remember to not take anything for granted, and that there is beauty in every moment of life. I am so grateful that Gloucester has introduced me to this practice.

In this school, the mindfulness program teaches practices that help each student learn to access and understand their authentic core; these practices are intended to be lifelong ways for each student to continue to nurture their own authentic core.

Transcendent practices at religious schools can take place during worship, as was described to us about chapel at a K–8 Christian school:

At the elementary opening chapel, two 6th grade students were asked to welcome the community back and speak about the value of chapel in their lives. One of the students began her presentation with the following words, "Good morning, everyone: My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am in 6th grade, and I have been at Fraser since Kindergarten. In the passage about Moses encountering God in the burning bush, Moses experiences the specialness of God. I'm growing up in a home with two religions, Christianity and Judaism. And as a result, I see how wonderful God is from two different perspectives. To me, chapel is a place where I can connect to God, feel spiritual, start my day off with others who care about me, and appreciate all that I have.

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At this school, it is clear that students of all faith traditions are welcomed, included, and invited to participate as coequal members of the school community. At a religious school on the West Coast, students are invited to participate in an experience at the ocean. The way in which one of the teachers described his experience in bringing students to the beach shows how both he and the students found the experience to be transcendent:



It was said, “Go out on the beach.” It was almost 45 minutes. Find your own space, sit on the beach for a half an hour, and just look out at the ocean and think about whatever. And I thought, “Oh, great. I’m just going to have to walk around and tell them to be quiet.” I walked on the beach, walked past about 20 of them, and they were just sitting there being quiet. So I got to sit down and be quiet. And I thought, “Where am I? What’s going on here?” Because they weren’t goofing around, they weren’t running about, they weren’t sitting so close that they could even whisper and not do it. They literally just found their own spots, sat down, and they were quiet. I was like, “This is extraordinary.”

## Nature Consciousness

Awakened Schools also emphasize nature consciousness as a way in which students can connect not only to their own authentic being but to a felt sense of oneness with nature and connection with all life. Schools that exhibit this driver create and facilitate opportunities to form deep, respectful relationships with the natural world. The schools we studied varied in the ways in which they made the experience of engagement with nature an important part of their school’s experience. For one K–8 Jewish day school, a teacher shared a story of how a student’s deepest connection to the authentic core came through an experience of being deeply connected to nature:

Throughout my years at Rubenstein, the time I felt most connected to myself was on the 8th grade retreat and I was lost on my own in the wilderness. I had gone for a run with two friends, but they wanted to go fast on a certain rocky section, so we said we would meet back at camp later in the day. I eventually got lost, and I couldn’t find the trail. At first I was panicked, but then I realized how awesome it was that I was on my own in nature! At this moment, I felt connected to myself and all of the nature around me. It was amazing. I could hear the water rushing down the mountain into the creek. All of the plants were beautiful, and I even saw a deer. At this moment, I felt very connected to myself and to nature.

Nature consciousness is built upon a sense of wonder, awe, and reverence of the natural world and all life, and this story illustrates the profound effects of nature consciousness on the cultivation of students’ spirituality. The cultivation of this wonder and shared sense of oneness with nature can be seen in the trip that 10th-graders at an Episcopal school take to visit caves in a national park:

One of the activities that we do with kids is to take them through a talus cave system, and that doesn’t seem so daunting at first, but there are several sections of the cave where one person can go at a time, and it’s a pretty tight squeeze. You’re pressed down on all sides by the rock, and certain people can’t actually fit because they’re too big, and you only know where to go because you’re being told by the person in front of you what the correct way to go is, so you have to trust the person in front of you. And you all have to be on board with what you’re doing, because otherwise someone can get hurt, and you don’t want to get hurt in the middle of a talus cave where you have to squeeze people through holes. A lot of groups that I’ve taken through those caves really come together because of that shared challenge, but usually it has to get to a tough place first before that coming together occurs. With the Fraser kids, they were together from the moment they began. They were singing throughout the cave, and when I suggested a moment of silence in the first room that was completely dark, they were all into it. They were all like, “Yeah, yeah. Shh. Turn off your voice.” And we sat there for a long time, and in reflecting upon the experience afterward, they loved it. They loved that moment of silence, which to me is the best part of the cave, this total quiet that you don’t get very many places in the world at all, that we get to sit in as a group in this shared sort of sacred experience for just a minute. And that being special to them was special to me.

Experiencing wonder and reverence in nature can even come in the classroom, as was illustrated by the story shared with us from a student at a K–8 Christian school:

One of the experiments we conducted that really filled me with wonder was when we looked at plant and animal cells through a microscope. There were so many cells in such a small space that it made me think about how we are all small parts of a larger whole. We are all part of something connected. Not all science experiments have answers, yet but most of them help us understand the world around us. Faith can help fill the gaps in our understanding. Science explains why things happen, but faith can help us deal with it emotionally.

Each of these stories show that interacting with nature connects each student's authentic core to the living beings that surround us in the natural world, which creates space in which children and adolescents are better able to know themselves and the world around them.

Spending time in nature was an integral part of the school experience at one of the independent boarding high schools that we studied. At this school, a defining characteristic of the learning experience was the Horse Program, in which students cared for and rode horses throughout their time at the school. Participating in the program is imbued with meaning, as students come to understand themselves and their place in their community through their interactions with the horses. A seasoned teacher describes the experience in this way:

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The fall brings with it another first: horse camping. Small groups of freshmen and riding instructors meticulously pack up horses and burros with supplies before heading out into the wilderness on horseback, generally spending a long weekend in the backcountry behind Belvedere before making the iconic ride “over the ridge” and back to campus. Looking back on his riding experience, senior Jacob Davis put it this way: “The entire freshman horse camping program leads to the freshmen learning again that, hey, it doesn’t matter who I am, what background I come from, we’re all in this together, we’re going to smell after a few hours on these horses, but that’s where most of the fun comes in.”

This experience is an example of the ways in which Awakened Schools build a deep connection with nature into the life of the school. Engaging with nature, and specifically with animals, on a regular basis, grounded in wonder and awe, has a transformative effect on child and adolescent spirituality.

## Meaningful Learning

The schools in our study understood learning to be part of the process of contributing value to the world and made conscious and explicit connections between knowledge and purpose. In other words, at these schools, learning and service were interconnected, which we term “meaningful learning.” Learning is presented as dedicated to a generative purpose. At a Catholic school in a technology corridor of the United States, where STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) is an energized academic area, computer coding and design were not taught as problem sets or as hypothetical academic cases. Rather, the STEM class visited a nearby children’s hospital where they saw young burn victims without limbs. The students in the STEM program figured out a way to use computer programs, searched online for downloaded applications, and used the new 3-D printer to create artificial limbs of the size and form that could help the children they had seen only a few miles away. Awakened Schools frame learning as the road to participation in the world in which they contribute in a purposeful and meaningful way. To create a lived awareness of meaningful learning, community service was the outcome of learning.

Another anecdote from a boarding high school, which illustrates this interconnectedness of service and learning, comes through the care given and meaning taken from participating in the Horse Program:



Walk on the Belvedere campus and you're bound to encounter a pretty unusual sight: students saddling horses and heading out for an afternoon ride, dust trailing as they hit the field or a nearby mountain trail. This is the Horse Program, one of the school's most unique educational experiences—and one of its oldest traditions. It can also be a source of uncertainty or anxiety for prospective students and their families as they navigate the host of other questions that come with considering boarding school. To be sure, there will be challenges: Getting to know an unfamiliar horse, rising early in the morning to muck a barn stall before class, handling difficult moments when your horse is stubborn or scared or ↵ flighty. But there will also be moments of accomplishment and wonder: Sitting horseback on a ridge near campus as our famous "pink moment" transforms the evening sky, clearing the final jump to win crucial team points in front of the crowd on family weekend, riding bareback into a cool watering hole during a horse camping trip in the backcountry.

This story clearly indicates that the Horse Program is an example of the complete integration of service and learning. Students must learn about the horses in order to care for them, and caring for them provides a space and activity in which students learn about nature, the horses, and themselves.

As seen in the above example, In Awakened Schools, service is not a set of discrete projects but rather is integrated into the fabric of school life. Another example of this comes from a private high school which describes how they connect with and support one organization each fall through multiple methods of outreach. A teacher at this high school described their practice this way:

We are currently preparing for our annual fall service program with a nonprofit that moves homeless families into permanent housing. Gloucester volunteers collect furniture and other home goods throughout the year, and then move them into the family's new home on a Sunday in the fall.

This focus on one organization allows for conversation, reflection, and learning about the issues that create the need for service. Meaningful learning occurs through the process of coming to know, intellectually and through practice, about the purpose and necessity of service.

In some schools, the development of meaningful learning was not as directly tied to service; rather, it was in the cultivation of connection between the student and the wider world. This can be seen from the following example from a K–12 Christian school:

Science is both wonderful, and mysterious. Wonderful, because with it, we can answer some of the biggest questions that exist such as, "where do we come from?" and "how did we get here?" We can also understand how gigantic and extraordinary our universe is. Mysterious because even with today's knowledge and technology, we have only just barely begun to understand it. To me science is very important because it allows us to understand nature, and for all my life I have been fascinated by nature's complexity. I believe that faith is closely tied in with science because from my point of view, I see God as more of a force, or energy that exists within everything and everyone and makes them who and what they are.

Another example comes from a Catholic high school. A faculty member there took students into an area of the city where the school is located and asked them to think about ↵ their roles in the community. Here, he described his process of facilitating this experience of meaningful learning for his students:

Well, you went to an area in a city, now, you're in a city; what's important to a city? What doesn't a city have a lot of? Trees and gardens, right? So you went in there and you helped create this space and clean it up and made it healthier for the plants. So I said, now you have a beautification going

on that affects the community, and it's been proven that people in the community who do things, who are stable and get involved in that community hold that community together, and have a dynamic impact on everyone around them. So I said, "Okay, so now guess what you just did: you stabilized a community by beautifying an area that would be wasted." So take it one step further, if you're helping life to grow here, does it not then have an effect globally? Does it not just begin to spread itself around? I said, "That's what you need to think about. You need to think about how your particular action in this particular space and time is not contained just to this space and time. It has an impact everywhere." It's basic quantum physics—this is quantum theology, if you want to put it that way.

As these examples show, the ways in which spiritually supportive schools design their learning experiences and activities is grounded in meaningful learning.

## Schoolwide Drivers

In addition to these Awakened School drivers, which speak to relationships and practices, we also identified schoolwide practices that nurture and support innate spirituality through a communitywide psychospiritual ecology. Five related drivers (integrated mission; ritual; aspirational values; intentional lexicon; and authorized keeper) direct aspects of schoolwide culture; these include ways in which schools are attentive to their values, mission, language, and community identity.

### Integrated Mission

Although most schools have mission statements, the mission statements at the schools we studied were deeply embedded in the practices of the schools. School leaders used the mission to help them in their decision-making. Other members of the school community spoke of the mission often, and they lived their missions in frequent and tangible ways. One example comes from a religious high school, where a teacher shared this story:

I think our school's Goal 3, "educating a social awareness which impels to action," was made most real for me at this sight. Goal 3 talks about seeing an issue in our communities, and being impelled to act. Each day when I see homeless people, I am called to serve them. Through this experience, I'm able to help feed those in need, and try to make change in our society. I think that required community service is good and it is valuable to personal growth.

p. 194 In this example, the school's mission statement becomes the foundation for service done by members of the school community for and with members of the greater community. The mission statement has also become ingrained into the consciousness of the teacher who shared this story; it is the mission of the school which prompts her to act and to think about her service in the way that she does.

Our research showed that the impact of integrated missions is not limited to the adults in the building; children, adolescents, and parents are strongly influenced by the mission as well. One of the more impactful stories came from a teacher at a Christian K–12 school, who described a situation which showed how the mission is integrated into how each person's inherent worth is at the forefront even for disciplinary matters:

After a disciplinary problem in the elementary division, the principal invited the parents to her office for a meeting. The principal knew that it was very common for parents in these situations to enter her office on the defensive. Sometimes parents would even start by talking about how great their child was and how the school did not really know the student that well. As the parents were

seated, the principal started by saying, “I want to tell you about all the great things that your child has done. Even though this is difficult, we want you to know that we love your child and everybody makes mistakes and this is one of those times.” As the conversation continued and the principal was able to discuss the disciplinary problem, she ended by saying that “we have made a 13-year commitment to you and your child, and we hope that you have made a 13-year commitment and we are all on the same team.”

The school’s mission of treating each child as intrinsically valued and the existence of relationships that carried this mission grounded the discussion, the principal, and the parents were able to speak in a productive and helpful manner. The conversation then had the potential to move not only the discussion but the growth and development of the child forward because of the school’s deeply embedded mission of honoring both the child’s and the parents’ inherent worth.

Other members of the local community can also be included in the lived practice of a school’s integrated mission. Parents of students at a public elementary school have worked to develop a garden program there, and in the process have also included several community partners:

Sprout has a parent sponsored garden and FIE Program (Food is Elementary). Classes plant in raised beds and harvest the food to prepare recipes from cultures around the world. The program is supported by a local grocery store located a block from school. Parents volunteer each Thursday to work with our 1st grade classes to prepare these recipes designed to introduce kids to healthy food and it’s preparation. A local farm is a partner in this project and students visit the farm on field trips.

p. 195 The intentionality of a school which has an integrated mission, such as including parents and other local partners in the school’s teaching and learning, also can extend to the financial operations of the school. The Equitable Financial Model practiced by a PK–12 independent school shows how all members of the school’s community affects all members of the school’s community:

We have a very wide expanse of socioeconomic variety at our school, including about 25 students who pay no, or almost no tuition, and about 25 who pay more than the required tuition through a program called the Voluntary Equitable Tuition (VET) program. Our equity director leads an equity circle that is made up of staff and parents. Equity circle has its own set of goals, somewhat akin to a strategic plan, of how to continually work to make our school culture more inclusive. Love in Action is a group of volunteers who work to provide some wraparound-style services for families who may be experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, lack of transportation, and so on.

This Equitable Financial Model also upholds another driver we identified, closely related to having an integrated mission, which was that Awakened Schools held aspirational values. Schools often spoke about their values, and their values influenced the goals that schools set for themselves, both inside and outside the classroom. Some schools lived out their values through the learning experiences they created for students. The director of community service at a K–12 Christian school develops experiential programs for students designed for students to appreciate and understand themselves, their community, and the natural world as interconnected and of great value. He described one such program here:

I run a trip for them in the summer, and everything is a first for them. First forest, first waterfall, first hike, first wildlife, all of this, first shooting star. Every night we have fireside discussion time, where we unpack the day a little bit. Everybody has a chance to speak and share their experience of the day, whether we’re learning about ocean tides and the moon, or we’re learning about the life cycles of trees and how they affect the life cycles of everything else in the forest. But it’s mostly connecting ecology and the story of life itself with the human story, and with their personal story.

Another religious school similarly puts their values into practice through learning activities. In the case of this Catholic high school, the school's recycling program is more than just one of the school's routines: it is an opportunity for students to learn about and practice the values of the school. A faculty member described this connection in this way:

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Getting kids to be aware of the environment and stimulating them to say, "Hey, this matters." How we recycle matters. Not that we're forced to—which we are, because the city here is a zero-waste city. Now they have to put teeth into it, so they're fining businesses that don't do it. If we don't, we're going to get fined, so we had to do it, but why? It's the invitation to extend the relationship beyond just me and my buddies to me and my world. Even the inanimate object, so the depth of relationality is incarnation. That's really what I find really interesting.

One of the schools in our study, which included grades 7–12, has as a core value the possibility of healing students who are in the midst of trauma. The school's principal described their focus on healing in this way:

Healing is always possible in the present moment. We are gifted in a school to be a community where when the conditions work, we get to have students with us for six years. Students show up living in all sorts of situations; the lucky ones have their needs met and show up ready to learn and thrive. Some show up in the middle of trauma. Many trauma therapy models say that healing isn't possible while the trauma is still happening. Our goal is to make sure students are safe while they are in school and to create the conditions where healing is possible.

For this school, the value that they place on helping students who are experiencing trauma to heal is foundational to the work of the school. This focus on healing is both hopeful and practical, aiming for something greater and also designing aspects of school life in ways that support that foundational value.

Other schools in our study also valued a thoughtful approach to the difficult aspects of life. One of the private PK–8 schools that we studied was very intentional about the way they addressed death. Because of the value the school placed on the inherent worth of each member of the school community, deaths within the school community or from within the families of members of the school community were honored, as was shared here:

Death is openly addressed, honored, and talked about at The Opal School. Students who have had a parent or other loved one who passed away have a safe space at school to talk about that experience, or not talk about it, but to be recognized. Kristen, the 6th grade teacher, explained how a student who experienced the death of a baby nephew was able to share pictures of the baby and talk about it in centering. Centering was a time and space that had the ritual space to hold those thoughts, without it seeming odd or like anyone was making a big deal about it. Because the ritual of centering happens every day, the teacher can use that time to do activities or have discussions that address current events in the students' lives or in the world.

Profound lived experience, sometimes at the edge of life and death, is so often grasped by a child as a spiritual knowing or even a discovery. Holding space and honoring a student's experience as worthy, and even central, to the school life nurtures the natural emergence of spiritual awareness.

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Awakened Schools elevate the importance of a regular space, time, and practice in which important aspects of a community member's life could be shared. All members of the school community understood and aspired to live by the values of upholding community members' experiences and creating a space in which those experiences could be named, honored, shared, and allowed the breathing space to pull the child forward in spiritual development.

## Ritual

Rituals and celebrations were practiced both schoolwide and in individual classrooms, fostering collective spiritual experience, common ground of spiritual connection, community identity, and a sense of belonging. The value placed on the sense of ritual and celebration was clearly seen in one K–8 Christian school, which had created a significant space on their campus for various types of rituals:

Our spiritual center provides a welcoming campus home and regular opportunities for the Fraser School family to develop helpful habits of spiritual practice and inquiry. We believe that good habits of prayer, mindfulness, and contemplative creativity are crucial to developing and sustaining a healthy and virtuous community. Completed in 2013, the center encompasses a meditation room, a prayer wall, the main sanctuary chapel with an altar, an ark that houses a Torah, and a meditation garden outside.

In religious schools, many of these rituals were rooted in a faith tradition, but in secular and public schools, the presence of ritual was also found to be strong. For example, while some of the religious schools began the day with a prayer service in their particular faith tradition, some of the nonreligious schools we studied began the day with an affirming ritual, gratitude practice, reflection, or contemplative practice including the common practice of mindfulness. Other schoolwide rituals occurred as they were needed, based on the season, school year, or events in the community. One of our school leaders shared an example of this last type of ritual from her private, secular, PK–8 school:

A few times a year a sacred fire is held in the outdoor classroom. The fire is lit in the morning and tended all day. Classes can come sit by the fire, parents, community members come and sit. They can remain quiet, talk, or tell stories. When a previous teacher committed suicide last year, we held a fire for the day as a way for people to process what happened, honor the teacher's life, and support one another. Again, because this is a ritual that we have regularly, it was graceful to hold.

One of the public middle schools in our study developed a new ritual following a traumatic death for their community, as their principal described here:

Our 29-year-old Chemistry teacher died suddenly after a heart attack while he was training for a race. A scholarship fund was created on Go Fund Me for a student who wanted to study science. It was gifted at graduation. The graduating seniors gave the teacher's family their class flag. On the one-year anniversary of the death staff wore his favorite color, purple, or bow ties. The scholarship will continue to be awarded annually with the recipient chosen by his widow.

In ritualistically carrying forward his memory, the school community had found a way to hold a shared, deep feeling for the teacher. In all these Awakened Schools, the inclusion of regular, ritual practice allowed this school to come together as a community in a way that was familiar and offered a practice through which members of the community could honor and process a tragic experience together.

Rituals and celebrations were centered around student experience; a place to gain awareness of inner life and build shared relational spirituality. In both religious and secular rituals and celebrations, students were given opportunities to lead and share. One example of this comes from a student at a Jewish elementary school, who describes the preparation and experience of preparing to take a leadership role in a prayer service:

One moment that I felt a sense of connectedness was in our fifth grade Tefillah (student-led prayer service). I was chosen to read a couple of sentences from the Torah. I studied profusely for a month and when it was the day of the Tefillah, I was ready. I was extremely nervous as I walked up to the

bimah (the area where the service is led from). I was the first to read and after the blessing for the Torah, I started. The countless hours of practice paid off and I was extremely proud of myself. I felt very connected with the school community and with my Jewishness.

The fact that this student was able to lead part of the school's ritual prayer service fostered for him a sense of belonging to the community. These rituals were also important in the schools as a place of deeply engaged meeting, where students shared their questions, beliefs, experiences, and pain with the community. In these examples, the importance of the ritual here was that the school community was coming together in ways that were familiar to them, important to their identity, and cultivated a sense of inclusion.

## Intentional Lexicon

At the most basic level, the use of a common, intentional lexicon refers to the fact that spiritually supportive schools have a language that allows members of the school community to locate spiritual awareness and relational spirituality and reflect on ways to support the inner core of each child. This intentional lexicon is unique to each school, consistent with its values, shared religious or spiritual understanding, and community language, which can be seen in the following example from a Christian PK–12 school:

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The foundation of our school culture is the acronym WATCH. Which stands for Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character and Habits. We have WATCH touchstones, a WATCH Tower, a WATCH Prayer, WATCH clothing and signage. It's the name of our literacy magazine. It's ever present and represents our core values. All programming is founded in it, and all students understand the premise of WATCH.

Each school's intentional lexicon can be based on language from a religious tradition or not; the critical factor is that all members of the school community know and use the language with ease.

The following example shows a way in which a religious school, in this case a Jewish elementary school, uses language to talk about spirituality in the context of their faith tradition:

As a grade we would all spend time in the Beit Midrash (the space in which the students gather for prayer and other assemblies) for Tefillah (prayer service). Standing there all of us in silence, praying or appreciating how grateful we were for our lives. We did this every week. Week by week I would just love to stand, look around and think, I am so lucky to have such a great class that I can lean on if I'm sad or just want someone to make me laugh; I know that my grade is there for me. As the years go on and I look back at my 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade experiences, I remember those moments and how grateful I am for moments where I can be with the people I love as a whole. I feel connected because maybe some people are thinking the same thing as me and some just thinking that this is boring but either way I cherish those moments. I feel connected when we are all doing the same activity.

This example shows the critical aspects of this driver which can be applied to any school: that the lexicon is known and used commonly among members of the school community and that the language is tied to the school's values.

Another example comes from a private, secular high school, whose language about spirituality was deeply connected to their practice of mindfulness:

The mindfulness program helps our students to better understand, accept, and interpret themselves and the world around them. In addition to the physical and mental skills practiced,



they also gain a vocabulary that helps them self-analyze and self-reflect. These are invaluable virtues that benefit our students in their time here, and will continue to do so in the years to come.

This example explicitly names the need and benefits of a common language to describe the practices that help each adolescent in this school to access and develop his or her innate spirituality. This can also be seen in this example shared by a parent from a PK–12 independent school:

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We had to put our family dog, Betsy, down about a month ago. We have two daughters, almost 4 years and 6 1/2 years. At first it seemed difficult to hold space for myself and husband to grieve and then also for our children to grieve. But then we just took cues from our children's daily centering. We made an altar, light candles for Betsy (and now all dead loved ones), speak openly about Betsy's death, have moments of silence and prayers for her. It is really a beautiful thing to watch our girls create their own space for grieving Betsy. Because of their experiences at The Opal School, they both know the importance of this focused honoring, praying, and meditation. And my husband and I have too!

Here, the spiritual language of the school provided a framework for a family that was grieving a significant loss. The salient and sometimes painful moments in community life, that are best understood on spiritual grounds, are held in community by a common language. As shared by a parent of a K–12 student who survived a tragic school shooting, “Build your arc before it rains.”

## Authorized Keeper

In nearly all Awakened Schools, a professional is employed and named by the school to embody and express the school's deepest values and lived mission; we have termed this person the “authorized keeper” of the school's core values. This professional post is not the head of school but rather someone who serves the school community in another capacity (mindfulness teacher, counselor, chaplain, dean of students, etc.). The person in this role holds on to the values of the school and helps the head or school or principal in making sure that the school's values and its collective focus on the inner child permeate the school. The authorized keeper is legitimized to speak up, privately or publicly, bringing a reminder to the community of an ethical or spiritual perspective when the focus shifts among fellow faculty or even senior administrators. For instance, at a disciplinary meeting in a highly resourced independent school, where two sophomore boys were to be punished for rudely dismissing the words of a guest speaker, the authorized keeper reminded the presiding faculty of the school's value on broadening, growth, and development over punitive measures. The response was additional learning for the two boys in the form of reading and discussion with an interested faculty member.

At a suburban Catholic high school, the role that functioned as the authorized keeper recently shifted, as described below:

In the Fall of 2018, the high school overhauled its administrative structure in order to attend to an often-stated need for greater clarity regarding behavior matters and conflict resolution. A new role was established: Chair of Community Life. The core of the role, shared by two longtime community teacher-leaders, has elements of both dean of students and director of student activities. The spirit of the role is less the traditional disciplinarian and more an attendant to matters of community wellness.

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At this school, the authorized keeper plays a role in all aspects of the community, a position that allows its holder to ensure that the people and programs of the school are focused on each student's deep inner core. In schools like this, the authorized keeper ensures that the school community and its various classes, programs, and activities are grounded in the school's values and mission.

In other schools, the role of the authorized keeper serves as the well from which others draw in order to connect to and access the school's mission and values. An example comes from a Christian K–12 school, where the Health Office serves as the authorized keeper of the school's values:

Members of the Health/Nurse's Office believe that because the students see how often the Fraser community promotes openness, they are able to trust in the faculty and staff to practice openness daily. The underlying trust the students have in the faculty and staff creates a safe place for them to communicate about uncomfortable topics they may not feel comfortable discussing at home or with friends. I strongly believe this openness and trust from the students stem from the foundation of faith the community keeps alive on campus daily.

These examples illustrate ways in which a school's authorized keeper is centralized in a position in which they would likely interact with all members of the school community. In other cases, the authorized keeper emerges, as was the case for a public high school English teacher, as explained here:

Upon learning of a beloved 16-year-old student-athlete's death, Dr. Talbot, an English teacher at the high school, decided to share his expertise in dealing with grief. Without thought of credit or compensation, Dr. Talbot trained 15 of his colleagues to specifically help grieving students, and incidentally, heal themselves. Dr. Talbot redesigned and condensed the grief recovery training into a three-week program in order to more effectively serve those who were grieving Matthew's death. Dr. Talbot and his committed teachers met every other day, while reading and completing assignments on the off days, to learn and practice the techniques presented in the Grief Recovery Handbook. In fact, Dr. Talbot presented each of the participants with a copy of the handbook free-of-charge, although he had personally purchased the books. The teachers met with Dr. Talbot before school learning the techniques prescribed by the book and baring their souls to themselves and each other. As a participant in the training, it was both the most excruciating and most rewarding life-training I have ever received. Matthew's death was a call to service for the high school faculty. We answered, and we will continue to serve those students, faculty and staff who are grieving, without compensation, without recognition.

In each of these cases, the authorized keeper serves as a phosphorous ring: members of the school community can seek this person out in order to keep their own inner core activated and alight.

## Discussion

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Spirituality is an innate capacity for an awakened sense of perception, but in order to fully develop, it must be nurtured by a child's relational environment, as established by twin studies (Kendler et al, 1997, 1999) and replicated in youth (Miller et al., 2000). The growth of one's spirituality is a developmental task of childhood and adolescence, which either by intentional cultivation or through a lack of attention is impacted by one's relational environment. Because those institutions where spirituality has traditionally been cultivated (e.g., religious communities) have seen declining participation in recent decades (Pew, 2015; Smith & Denton, 2009), other institutions stand poised to take on the role of supporting the development of spirituality in young people in a way that is constitutional and consistent with the values and voice of the school community. Schools that do this are Awakened Schools.

Awakened Schools open our eyes to the deeper nature of life. By engaging and nurturing this awakened seat of perception, Awakened Schools engage, nourish, and effectively socialize each child's innate spirituality, thus providing the environment in which that spirituality can fully develop. Schools are ideally poised to do this. Our findings show that it is within and through school culture where transformation happens: being

immersed in a relational school culture fosters and forms each young person so that this seat of perception is awakened and attuned to the world around us and beyond us in deep and lasting ways.

The 22 Awakened Schools in this study brought forward the once “hidden curriculum of a school”—its culture—and brought it forward to act as an agent of transformation for the entire school community. By centering the work and life of the school community on relational spirituality, each school in this study created an awakened, spiritually supportive, relational culture. This focus on relational spirituality allowed each of these schools to teach students to relate to others and to nurture in ways that draw deeply from the original purposes of education, but which are far too often absent from much of mainstream education today. This change in school culture oriented each school to the preparation of young people to live and actively participate in the world, resulting in the betterment of society, nature, and the individual.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the field of education. The purpose of education, as argued foundationally by Dewey and others, has been to prepare students to live and actively participate in democratic society (Dewey, 1934). Schools must create the next generation of citizens capable of inheriting political democracy, first by creating a social, moral, and spiritual democracy of civil society (Rockefeller, 1994). As Rockefeller’s prescient analysis on Dewey’s approach to religious faith and democratic humanism holds: civil society requires the ability of fellow citizens to engage on common ground in discussion and common purpose, even when facing a sharp difference of opinion. To prepare students for civic society, a school culture effectively is a pedagogical mini-laboratory for resolving inevitable conflicts and difficulties, the pathway through which is formed a sense of commonality, shared purpose, and the relational moral and spiritual democracy undergirding the political democratic process.

It is conceivable that an unbalanced focus on academic achievement of the past three decades in the United States has allowed this original purpose of education—the formation of democratic citizens—to recede from its prior place of primacy. The struggles of civil society and the inability to engage on common ground with people of different opinions might be viewed as a significant educational failure. If so, this failure may present an essential educational opportunity.

All schools carry this purpose of preparing students to be the future leaders of democracy, and all schools can become Awakened Schools. However, both the responsibility and opportunity of becoming an Awakened School is particularly imperative for public schools. Public schools reach a far wider section of our population, thus expanding the potential for leadership by cultivating in children a wider perception which sees and understands the connectedness of all life. As we look to schools to increase students’ informed and active civic engagement, we must ensure that the call to do so is equitably distributed and truly represents the depth and diversity that make up the United States.

The schools in this study succeeded in reclaiming that original purpose of education by grounding their a priori commitment to a functional democracy in preparing students with the necessary inner capacity of relational spirituality. If schools are to be the incubator of democracy, then each school must create an environment in which students can learn and practice living in an interconnected community, a mini-democracy unto itself as conceptualized by Dewey (1916). By intentionally designing a school culture centered on relational spirituality, any school is able to prepare young people to live and actively participate in civil society.

Further, these findings have implications beyond the field of education. This research presents a framework for organizations to create an awakened culture for themselves. The 11 drivers presented here are specific, concrete, actionable, and, foremost, transferable to any site of organizational life. Various sectors of society, such as the health sector, the service industry, and business, could implement this framework to design spiritually supportive cultures in their institutions.

The atrophy of the spiritual core in a generation of youth carries powerful, long-term collective implications for civil society; as such, it is necessary to find solutions among the collective to sustain democracy. We live in a time where there is enormous divisiveness amongst people who have traditionally been able to connect and to work together to uphold the type of social and moral cultural democracy that is essential for a political democracy (Dewey, 1897, 1934). This divisiveness is derived from the same basic issue of feeling disconnected and lacking awareness of deep and meaningful relationships that has shifted away from the traditionally relational culture in the United States. It is up to our educational, cultural, and societal institutions to take on the mantle of nurturing spirituality in children and adolescents.

## Acknowledgments

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We extend their greatest appreciation to Co-Chairs of the Board of the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education (CSE), Steven Rockefeller and Frank Peabody, The Fetzner Institute, particularly President Bob Boisture and Xiaoan Li, Ph.D., for the funding of the three-year study leading to this publication, as well as the ongoing convening of the CSE and the National Council for Spirituality in Education. The Collaborative for Spirituality in Education was formed by Lisa Miller, Ph.D., Steven Rockefeller, Ph.D., and Frank Peabody. We foremost acknowledge the collaborative intellectual contributions, insights, and efforts of the Heads, Fellows, faculty, students, and parents of the CSE K–12 Leadership Schools (see Appendix A), with particular investment of time and acumen by the following educational leaders: Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ and Paul Pryor Lorentz (The Sacred Heart Schools Network); the Reverend C. Julian Bull and the Reverend Norman Hall (Campbell Hall School); Drew Casertano and the Reverend Cameron Hardy (Millbrook School); Ivan Hageman (The East Harlem School); and Christopher Tate (Porter–Gaud).

## Independent School Leadership

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**Akiva School**

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Nashville, Tennessee

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**Brandeis School of San Francisco**

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San Francisco, California

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**Campbell Hall**

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Studio City, California

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**Convent School of the Sacred Heart of San Francisco**

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San Francisco, California

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**Deerfield Academy**

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Deerfield, Massachusetts

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**Middlesex Academy**

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Concord, Massachusetts

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**Millbrook School**

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Millbrook, New York

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**Porter-Gaud School**

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Charleston, South Carolina

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**Princeton Academy of the Sacred Heart**

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Princeton, New Jersey

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**Rainbow Community School**

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Ashville, North Carolina

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**Stuart Country Day School of the Sacred Heart**

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Princeton, New Jersey

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**Stuart Hall School of the Sacred Heart of San Francisco**

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San Francisco, California

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**Thatcher School**

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Ojai, California

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**The East Harlem School**

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East Harlem, New York

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**Trinity School**

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New York, New York

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## Public School Leadership

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**Brentwood High School**

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Brentwood, Tennessee

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**Bloom Elementary School**

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Louisville, Kentucky

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**Chalmette High School**

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Chalmette, Louisiana

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**Forte Preparatory Charter School**

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East Elmhurst, NY

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**Mastery Charter School—Shoemaker Campus**

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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**Murry High School**

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Charlottesville, Virginia

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**REACH Academy**

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Oakland, California

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## Appendix A List of Leadership Schools in The Collaborative for Spirituality in Education

### **Akiva School**

Nashville, Tennessee

### **Brandeis School of San Francisco**

San Francisco, California

### **Brentwood High School**

Brentwood, Tennessee

### **Bloom Elementary School**

Louisville, Kentucky

### **Campbell Hall**

Studio City, California

### **Chalmette High School**

Chalmette, Louisiana

### **Convent School of the Sacred Heart of San Francisco**

San Francisco, California

### **Deerfield Academy**

Deerfield, Massachusetts

### **Forte Preparatory Charter School**

East Elmhurst, NY

### **↳ Mastery Charter School**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### **Middlesex Academy**

Concord, Massachusetts

### **Millbrook School**

Millbrook, New York

### **Murry High School**

Charlottesville, Virginia

### **Porter-Gaud School**

Charleston, South Carolina

**Princeton Academy of the Sacred Heart**

Princeton, New Jersey

**Rainbow Community School**

Ashville, North Carolina

**REACH Academy**

Oakland, California

**Stuart Country Day School of the Sacred Heart**

Princeton, New Jersey

**Stuart Hall School of the Sacred Heart of San Francisco**

San Francisco, California

**Thatcher School**

Ojai, California

**The East Harlem School**

East Harlem, New York

**Trinity School**

New York, New York