

ANNOTATION

Quirk, Michael. "A Comparative Study of the Impact of Charitable Donations on the Financial Viability of San Miguel-Model Schools." EdD dissertation, De Paul University, Chicago, IL, 2010, 152 pp.

This mixed methods study sought to investigate the strategies of institutional advancement and financial viability in a unique set of alternative faith-based middle schools that serve economically disadvantaged minority students in urban settings (iii, 6-8). The purpose of this study was an analysis of the financial strength and advancement effectiveness of San Miguel-Model Schools (6). Four aspects of these organizations were analyzed in the course of this research: a) establishment and original foundations of each school, b) school finances, c) advancement strategies and systems, and d) motivation of donors (7). In addition to comparing the six schools in the sample to each other, the researcher compared these metrics to the standards for nonprofits provided by the Better Business Bureau, as well as the funding metrics established by the Nativity Miguel Network of Schools (8).

Group A of this study consisted of two schools, one school was established in co-sponsorship between the De La Salle Christian Brothers and another religious order, and the second school is a sub-unit of a larger educational institution sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers (8). Group B consisted of four schools, all of which were founded by individual Brothers with partial support from the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (8). The hypothesis of this research suggested schools in Group A will have a stronger financial position than those schools in Group B in the following areas: a) cost to raise a dollar, b) number of individual donors, c) unrestricted assets per student, d) greater support from foundations and corporations (13). The researcher also hypothesized that schools in Group A will have more positive indicators with regard to Boards and advancement programs, more experienced and a greater number of advancement personnel, and more frequent and sophisticated advancement strategies than those schools in Group B (13). In addition, the researcher hypothesized that donors are motivated by prior connection to Lasallian mission, while they are not motivated to donate due to federal income tax laws (13).

The review of literature depicts a history of Catholic schools in the United States (14-25), a brief history of John Baptist de La Salle and the foundation and development of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (25-36) and the distinct elements of the San Miguel- Model of schools. The literature review concludes with a description of standards and measurements metrics offered by the Better Business Bureau, as well as the Nativity Miguel Network, used to assess the overall effectiveness, financial and operational health of registered 501(c)3 charitable organizations (66-68). The researcher describes the methodology utilized in the study as a mixed method approach. The author describes the quantitative process of evaluating the financial records of the sample institutions, as well as the qualitative process of interviewing key leadership of the schools. In

addition, the qualitative analysis was augmented by sending a twelve statement Likert-style “Donor Motivation Survey” to key school donors.

Chapter 4 (80-105) presented the data analysis and results of the study. The qualitative responses to interviews were coded in six general areas: a) Advancement, b) Beginnings, c) Board, d) Chief Advancement Officer, e) Chief Executive Officer and f) Sponsor relationship (80). The complexity and significant amount of data required many of the areas to be broken down further to more selectively coded subsets of data.

The quantitative analysis of the annual reports and subsequent comparison to the Better Business Bureau Standards for Charities and Nativity Miguel Network showed that all schools in the study met the standards in Governance and Oversight, Finances, and Fundraising and Informational Materials (100). In reviewing the financial audit data, Quirk reports the data does suggest Group A and Group B were nearly identical, 79% and 80%, regarding cost of programs as a percentage of expenses (104).

In the concluding chapter, the researcher describes key findings from the study. The author posits that the data from interviews do suggest the financial planning and forecasting were minor concerns in the initial stages of the schools development, and that Advancement strategies were also underrepresented during the formation of the schools (106). To the surprise of the researcher, Group A schools conducted fewer special events and solicited donors more frequently than schools in Group B (107). Additionally, the research indicated a significant difference in the expectations of board member donation; and Quirk noted the difference is favorable for Group B and not Group A. The researcher also did not anticipate data that reported 60% of donor respondents did not graduate from a Lasallian institution or feel a previous association with a Lasallian ministry was a motivator to become a donor (109).

Based on the data presented and the interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative findings, the researcher’s original hypotheses were not supported by the data. There was no indication that schools in Group A had a stronger financial position than schools in Group B (112). In addition, the data did indicate there are only minimal differences between the sample groups in regards to Boards, Advancement Programs, Advancement Personnel, or Advancement Strategies (112). The data did indicate, however, useful insights into the refining of the donor survey to specific groups, such as board members (113). The research also suggests more deliberate communication by member schools of the Nativity Miguel Network could potentially provide some system-wide support of strategies for an integrated planned giving program (113).

Suggested future research related to this topic: a) a direct study of the Boards of Directors of San Miguel-Model Schools, b) research on training and continuing advancement education for Board members, c) further study of comparable educational organizations which have achieved financial stability, d) and a deeper study of how faith-based organizations conduct feasibility planning when considering opening educational ventures that rely heavily on charitable donations for operating support (115).