

## Christian Schools, Finances and Online Courses: Ready For a New Wineskin?

- A Christian school in Ohio closes its doors after 32 years of ministry due to finances.
- A Christian school in Arizona does not re-hire eight teachers (15% of its faculty) in order to balance the budget.
- A Christian school in Singapore reduces the variety of classes for students in order to only raise tuition by 4%.

These situations illustrate similar, financially-based decisions that are occurring in almost every school: public, private, and international. While financial stewardship has always been a hallmark of the Christian school movement, the decisions of the spring of 2009 are painful, and could lessen the impact of Christian education. The ripple effect of these decisions will have long term consequences.

Certainly, there are no easy answers to this complex, worldwide crisis. Relying on the government has probably never been a good idea and seems even less so now. This question and response recently appeared at: <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/> .

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**“Has there been any clarification as to whether or not federal money will be available for independent schools?”**

There's no money in the bill specifically for private or independent schools.”

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It is also becoming plain that providing the same answers to financial issues in Christian schools is not the long term solution. One answer with financial promise is to introduce online classes. This idea is a new wineskin, since the old Christian education model has been stretched to the point it can stretch no further.

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“Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” [Matthew 9:17](#) (NIV)

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Attracting new students and retaining old ones is likely the most significant financial gain that online courses can provide. Here are three examples provided by schools using online classes:

- A Christian school in California enrolls a new senior (\$7500 tuition), noting that having an online option swung the parents' decision since the course needs could be accommodated.
- A Christian school in New Jersey enrolls new students (\$6300 each) after offering an online summer school to the community.
- A Christian school in Colorado enrolls new students (\$8900 each) after offering online classes to the home school community.

Parents today seem to want it all. They are often willing to move to another schooling option--often one that does not have the same spiritual values as the home--when they think their child is not receiving the education they should be. Schools have tried to add to what was a rich curriculum that included Bible classes. This has stretched the schools much like the wineskins described above. Thankfully, there are new solutions available:

- "Using Sevenstar online courses allows us to be competitive with larger schools. We are able to offer our students a broader range of classes, even with a smaller enrollment. " Thad Cloer, Director, Oconee Christian Academy in South Carolina.
- A Christian school in Maryland reports they retained several seniors who would have left for other schooling options by forming a partnership with Sevenstar and offering the classes these students needed.

Often a school is simply able to have new and accommodating alternatives (truly new wine):

- The family of a competitive figure skater signs up to take online classes since she cannot fit all her classes into a traditional school day at a Christian school.
- The child of a Christian School Board Member does not graduate with their class due to failed courses. By taking online classes, they do graduate (late) and also receive college credit for one of the classes.
- A Christian school is able to offer AP Courses for the first time that are approved by the College Board.
- Families that want to get an early start on college are offered the chance to do so while the student remains in the school with an online Christian College Professor.

All of these examples are accomplished without the school having to spend money on classes. Parents not only pay the fee Sevenstar charges, but pay a fee to the school that can help fund other programs. Although not a typical example, a school in California charges \$1585 for a course that costs them \$475, with plenty of students enrolling. (A charge of \$550 by the traditional school would be more typical).

"We used Sevenstar this year to offer an AP US History class to one of our advanced students. We did not have to assign this class to another teacher, or hire another teacher to accommodate his request. That saved us approximately \$3300 as well as another room location. The added benefit is that we are able to now expand our course offerings to include other AP classes that we would have previously not been able to offer."

~ Elizabeth Anderson

With the capabilities of technology, online education and a partnership with a ministry like Sevenstar Academy, it is possible to create new wineskins for school funding and grow your school's programs and courses. Funding online courses alongside your brick-and-mortar campus is a new venture for most schools, but its flexible application allows you to fit your school's unique calling and set of resources.

As ACSI states in their "How to Start A Christian School Manual": "Your school is both a ministry and a business. Good business planning frees the school to pursue its ministry unhindered by financial frustrations" (79).

Consider some of the following options to stimulate the economy on your campus.

### Expense Savings

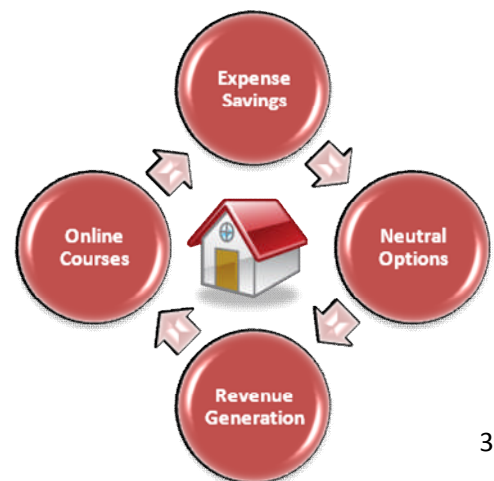
- Low Class Size Management
- Faculty Retention/Stipend
- Facility Usage
- Class Overflow Solutions
- Curriculum expansion without traditional costs

### Revenue Neutral Options or Revenue Generation Opportunities (you decide)

- Recovery Credit Offerings
- Dual-Credit College Courses (or AP Courses)
- Summer School
- Offering Dual-Credit College Course Program
- Provide online Home School Program to Community
- New Campus Enrollments Each Year
- Build Dynamic Summer Program for Community

Each of these funding options relate to different applications of online programs on your campus. Some will align with your school and some may not; however, regardless of your current tuition or expenses, these are opportunities to be more effective with your ministry and business to enhance your school.

Overall, with a new model and paradigm, your focus can return to the school and its ministry to the community.



Perhaps the financial reasons combined with the academic results create statements like this: “Online learning has grown at 30 percent annually over the past 10 years in the United States. It is estimated that more than a million American K-12 students are enrolled in some form of online learning. Clayton Christensen from Harvard Business School projects that 50 percent of all high school courses in America will be offered online by 2019.” ([Patrick 2008](#))

[Click here](#) to read more about the coming changes in education and see why the President of a major union says:

“The [Christiansen] book is brilliant. Most people pose the question of how we can improve the current system. [Christensen] poses the different question of how we can have a different system than what we already have.”

Are you ready to try pouring new wine into a new wineskin? Try a new answer and see things change for the better, both financially and educationally.



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#### **Additional Steps to Learn More about Online Courses**

- [Join a webinar](#) designed for schools that want to know more
- [Sign up](#) to receive a course catalog, newsletter, pricing, or a call

Additional Resource:

“Doing More With Less: Strategies for Success” from <http://www.k12perspectives.com/morewithless.asp>

“We need to reach as many students as we can with the life-changing message of an education founded on the Word of God and focused on Jesus Christ. Online courses provide a new method for the accomplishment of this vital mission! Sevenstar Academy provides students, parents, and schools with an online opportunity worth checking out.”

*Dr. Brian S. Simmons*

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