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FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: COUNTRY CASE STUDY FINAL REPORT

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FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: COUNTRY CASE STUDY FINAL REPORT

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ACRONYMS

CAFI	Centers for integral care for children and the family
CAIPI	Centers for the integral care of the early childhood
CONANI	National Council for Children Protection
ENI	National Immigrant Survey
FBO	Faith-based organizations
FBS	Faith-based schools
INFOTEP	National Institute for Professional Technical Training
MINERD	Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this country case study is to understand the role of faith-based actors in education development in the Dominican Republic. This effort is part of a broader study of faith-based education in the Latin American and Caribbean region. The study aims to produce an overview of the role, contributions, challenges, and opportunities of faith-based education in the Dominican Republic and to inform future education programs and policies. The study placed a particular focus on services for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth in the LAC region over the past 30 years.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Dominican education system has historically been related to faith-based organizations. The study presents how those historical roots have evolved into their current level of involvement in the system. Dominican faith-based organizations have a central role in the education system, with religious orders and congregations managing public schools and influencing education policy since the colonial era. Since the early 20th century, their responsibilities and roles have only expanded with distinctive contributions that citizens value. Their long experience working with marginalized communities qualifies them as a strong partner within the education system. This study will provide information about faith-based organizations' specific contributions to these communities and identify opportunities to enhance their outcomes.

OBJECTIVES

1. To inform USAID's strategy, activity design, and implementation on faith-based education, particularly in the LAC region.
2. To contribute to the global knowledge of faith-based education programming and advance the evidence base for the USAID Education Learning Agenda.

BRIEF METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The main objectives of the country case study were to understand the role and contributions of Faith-Based organizations and their challenges and identify partnership opportunities to improve education outcomes. The analysis focused on Faith-based organizations that serve poor children in marginalized communities or vulnerable children due to other conditions. To accomplish this goal, we gathered and synthesized information from three different sources: interviews with faith-based organizations, an analysis of secondary data, and a literature review of local studies.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

1. **What is the role and contributions of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth (e.g. those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration, affected by violence, girls and boys, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural and urban, etc.)?**
 - Faith-based publicly funded schools serve over **200,000 students, which represent 10.6% of public enrollment** and 8.2% of all enrollments. The total enrollment increased in recent years

due to new agreements between faith-based private schools and the Ministry of Education to receive public funding.

- **Managing polytechnical schools is one of the distinctive contributions of FBSs to the system.** They receive 33.9% of all publicly-funded school enrollment in Secondary level technical education and 2.9% of all Secondary education.
- In the school year 2020-21, 16.1% of all students in the country attended private schools. These students are distributed in 2,977 schools nationwide (27.8% of all schools). Although there are no official statistics of what proportion of this are faith-based, **experts consider that about half have some form of religious affiliation.**
- Faith-based publicly-funded schools **focus on marginalized areas** where education is insufficient or precarious. Over 80% of their enrollment is classified as urban or marginal.

2. **What are the challenges faith-based schools face in regards to achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?**

- Faith-based publicly-funded schools fund most of their activities with public funds from the Ministry of Education. However, **funding for some operational aspects is unreliable.** The constraints to receive funds directly are still common in all schools of the public system.
- Students' **learning gaps worsened after the COVID-19** pandemic quarantine period. They identify literacy as the most precarious situation.
- Similar to other publicly-funded schools of the system (public and secular publicly-funded), faith-based publicly-funded schools face **limitations to accommodate vulnerable students.** In particular, students with disabilities and immigrant children. These limitations include infrastructure not inclusive for disabled students and not having bilingual teachers.
- There are private faith-based schools that serve low-income communities. These often struggle to finance their operations.

3. **How do faith-based schools compare to state-run schools in terms of resources (and sources), accessibility (urban/rural), safety, parental and community engagement, perceived advantages and disadvantages, quality and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations, adaptability to shocks (e.g. COVID, violence, migration), and curricular differences?**

- Communities **perceive faith-based schools as higher quality**, and consequently, the demand for services is significantly higher than what they can accommodate.
- Some faith-based schools **control admissions to their schools with tests and family assessments.** This practice leaves the service out of the reach of the poorest students in the community. However, they are located in highly marginalized areas; thus, their students are disadvantaged, even with the control of admissions.
- FBSs and state-run schools have similar limitations to accommodate students with disabilities, access MINERD's funds, deal with violence, etc. However, **FBSs are better at leveraging funds** from other sources such as their church network, private donors, small business activities, and parents' voluntary contributions. They influence the selection of their teachers to ensure alignment with their distinctive mission.

4. What are the effective ways and opportunities for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with faith-based organizations to leverage/improve education outcomes?

- Some faith-based groups have worked with communities for decades and live there, making them knowledgeable of its most pressing needs. They have learned to formalize this in internal reports and documents. **They could be useful partners to co-design initiatives in their communities.**
- **Accommodate students with challenges.** Faith-based groups reported the need to help serve students with learning gaps (pandemic), students with disabilities, children that work, undocumented youth, and students that cannot speak Spanish.
- **Support to expand Technical Education.** The highly demanded service requires significant investments, and faith-based schools understand that partnerships are needed to further develop the service.
- **Improve the administrative capacity** of faith-based groups to access funds. The knowledge transfer between INGOs and local FBOs is insufficient and leaves FBOs unable to directly access public funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For government

- Strengthen partnerships with Faith-based schools to increase the offer of Technical Secondary Education
- Approach faith-based networks to discuss agreements to manage community Centers for the integral care of the early childhood (CAIPI – Spanish Acronym) and Centers for integral care for children and the family (CAFI – Spanish Acronym)

For donors

- Provide specific investments to current faith-based schools that offer technical secondary education
- Support school reinsertion programs

For faith-based actors

- Work on a national protocol for inter-faith relationships for faith-based public schools
- Evaluate internal policies for controlling admissions

INTRODUCTION

FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Dominican formal education, schools, and traditions have historically been connected to faith-based organizations. The country's social and political context has shaped the nature of this connection throughout history. However, faith-based organizations have consistently contributed to improving education in the country through private or public channels. This report describes the role and contributions of faith-based organizations in the Dominican Republic education system, what services they offer and how the education community values them. The study will also discuss the main challenges these organizations face, how they manage them, and how they affect their outcomes.

The main goal of this effort is to highlight the influence and work of faith-based organizations in advancing education in the country. The analysis will help inform what strategies can enhance their position in supporting disadvantaged children and communities. The report is structured in four parts, an introductory section that describes the historical and policy context in which faith-based organizations operate. The second part describes the methodology and specific research questions that guided the analysis. Lastly, the third- and fourth parts present Findings and Recommendations, respectively.

BRIEF HISTORY

This section briefly describes the relationship between faith-based organizations, education, and government. Historically, the Catholic Church was critical in promoting and administering educational institutions. An increasing share of the population has recently affiliated with Protestant denominations (Evangelical and non-Evangelical), leading advocates of these religions to demand a more official role within the publicly-funded education system. Understanding the historical role of faith-based organizations since the inception of formal education in the country may help understand their current positions, influences, and demands.

Colonial Era (1492-1821). The first educational institutions on the Island of Hispaniola opened in the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church was at the center of the most salient initiatives. The Convent of the Order of Saint Francis established the first formal school in 1502. Later on, The Order of the Dominicans founded a seminary that offered education services (House of Apostles) in 1509 (Dongil, 2022). The original purpose of these schools was to teach the children of Spanish authorities, but later the schools opened to the general public. In 1538, the Society of Jesus inaugurated the first university of the Americas, Saint Thomas Aquinas¹, has grown to now become the largest public university in the country (Dongil, 2022). The Order of the Dominicans managed most educational institutions that emerged during that time (Ceballos-HD, 2013).

Post-Colonialism (1821-1865). In the aftermath of the separation from Spain, the country had three major historical stages: the Haitian Occupation (1822-1844), the First Republic (1844-1861), and Colonial Annexation (1861-1865). Long wars characterized the transition between periods, which affected the growth of educational institutions (Saez, 2008). However, at the same time, political leaders started recognizing education as a public matter instead of just a religious one. For instance, they passed the first Organic Law of Public Instruction in 1845, establishing that each province should have at least one publicly funded school (Saez, 2008).

¹ Later administered by the Order of the Dominicans.

The Second Republic and Hostos (1865-1916). The arrival of the Puerto Rican scholar, Eugenio María de Hostos, in 1879 and his liberal ideals led to the inauguration of a new curriculum, the foundation of new schools, the promotion of women's education, and especially, advocacy for a secular education (Lluberes, 1983.) Initially, Hostos founded the Normal School to train teachers without a religious background to serve those ideals. For years, the liberal movement led by Hostos advocated reforming the education law and separating schools from religion, with rejection from Catholic leaders of the time (Demorizi, 1972). The resulting law (1895) allowed schools to teach Religion and Sacred Scriptures only at the primary level. A subsequent modification (1918) to that law reaffirmed and expanded secularism in schools (Demorizi, 1972). Although the number of state-run secular and private secular schools did increase in the late 19th century, partly due to the liberal movement, in most cases, those schools also taught Catholic subjects (Lluberes, 1983). Moreover, in the following decades, the local leadership of the Catholic Church promoted the establishment of new congregations and Orders in the country intending to increase religious education (e.g., 1907: Order of Sacred Hearts of Jesus; 1910 Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy, 1927: Augustinian Order; 1925 Franciscan Order; among several others.) Almost every congregation/order would open at least one Catholic school upon arrival (Lluberes, 1983).

Third Republic, dictatorships, and the concordat (1916-1978). In the early 1900s, other religious groups that had been doing missionary work in the country started organizing into churches. In 1919, the Board for Christian Services of Santo Domingo was formed in New York by leaders of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal (Brothers United in Christ) churches (Roca, 2020). The board's purpose was to create and fund the Dominican Evangelical Church, which was independent of each of their denominations and is still functioning. However, other forms of Protestantism had emerged before this date (Lluberes, 2021), especially in rural areas and towns outside Santo Domingo (e.g., Adventists of the 7th Day). The growth of Protestant churches at the beginning of the 19th century led to the creation of a few Protestant private schools and non-profit educational organizations. Notably, Protestant leaders founded the Evangelical Institute (1927) in Santiago de Los Caballeros, the Dominican Adventist School (1948), and Central Evangelical School (1958) in Santo Domingo, among several others.

In 1951, the Trujillo dictatorship modified the Education Law and added “Christianity” as a pillar for public schools, although without eliminating previous dispositions on secularism (Lluberes, 1983). In the following years, the Trujillo Dictatorship (1930-1961) approved a concordat (1954) with the Vatican State, declaring Catholicism as the “official religion of the Dominican people” (Concordat Vatican-DR, 1954). Under this agreement, the government started sponsoring the Catholic Church’s activities in the country. The government required public schools to teach the Catholic religion at all levels of instruction. Catholic leadership assumed the direction of the Normal Schools founded by Hostos and other prominent secondary schools in Santo Domingo and Santiago (Lluberes, 1983). The funds derived from the Concordat also allowed the construction of a national parishes network (Pons, 2010). That network contributed to the proliferation of Catholic schools since they had the benefit of using land that belonged to the parishes for the new schools.

Democracy, urgency for expansion (1978-present). In the 1970s and 1980s, the Dominican government urgently needed to increase primary enrollment and literacy (Alvarez, 2000). However, the country’s limited education budget constraints and deficit of trained teachers that goal (PREAL, 2015). In such a context, faith-based organizations contributed to expanding the public offer. New religious organizations emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Catholic and non-Catholic) (e.g., Fe y Alegría). For the most part, these also focused on supporting the government’s mission of expanding the public offer in the lowest-income places of the country (e.g., Sugarcane plantations, marginalized neighbors of Santo Domingo.)

At the same time, more Protestant denominations, such as Baptists and the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints (1978), started organizing in the country in the 1970s through the 1990s (CJCLDS, 2018). As the religious composition of Dominican society became less Catholic in the 1990s, Protestant organizations had an increasing role in providing education services. Still, their contributions were more heterogeneous² than those of the Catholic Church and, until recently, did not receive systematic government funding. In the last decades, Protestant churches have created alliances to negotiate with the government and have succeeded at reaching steady public support for specific activities, including the management of public schools.

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to Lluberés, (2021), by 1920, over 98% of the Dominican population was Catholic. The non-Catholics concentrated in areas that received immigrant workers from other Caribbean islands³ (Lluberés, 2021) In 2005, a survey showed that only 57.2% of the population identified as Catholics. In the same study, 25.0% of the population were Evangelicals, and 12.7% were not religious (LatinoBarometer, 2005). Results of the same survey for 2020 showed that 52.5% of the population identified as Catholics, 21.3% as Evangelicals, and 22.4% as not religious (LatinoBarometer, 2015). These results indicate a sharp decrease in Catholicism in favor of not affiliating to any religion and Evangelicalism in the last century.

Moreover, in 2017, the National Immigrant Survey (ENI- Spanish acronym) identified 847,979 immigrants living in the country, out of which 750,174 (88.4%) are Haitian immigrants (ONE, 2017). According to the study, only 30.9% of Haitians immigrants identified as Catholic, 21.5% as Evangelical, and 28.9% reported No religious affiliation (ONE,2017). Similarly, 37.9% of immigrants from other countries identified as Catholic. Thus, the incoming population is also less Catholic and religious than what has traditionally been.

The change in the country's religious composition might imply that Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) will have to be flexible with the spiritual components of their programs. Those adaptations might mean making all the spiritual activities optional and making concessions when needed (e.g., uniforms.) That religious component is still very present in everyday activities. It may be as explicit as having a prayer hour; or implicit like only celebrating Catholic holidays.

² The main role of the Catholic Church in the education system is that they administer publicly funded schools. However, in the case of Protestants, since the funding they could access was less consistent, and they are different groups with different leadership, they had various roles, depending on the circumstances. More affluent churches would have a school (e.g., Adventist Church), and smaller congregations in marginalized neighborhoods would focus on after school programs at their temple, or vocational trainings.

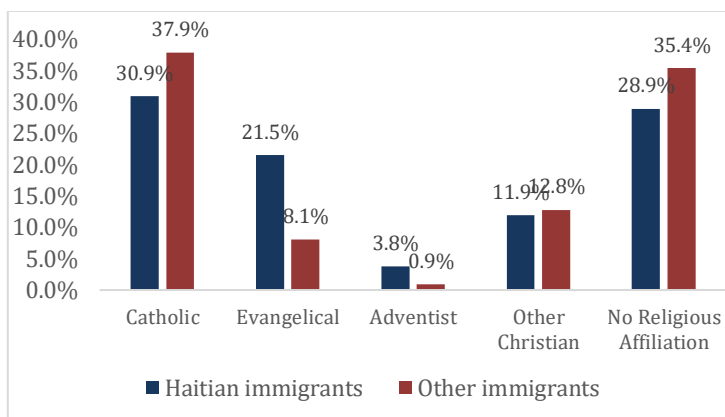
³ E.g., San Pedro de Macorís received immigrants from nearby islands to work in the sugarcane plantations.

TABLE I. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Religion	2015	2020
Catholic	57.2%	52.5%
Evangelical	25.0%	21.3%
Adventist	1.9%	0.9%
Jehovah’s Witness	1.1%	0.4%
Mormon	0.6%	0.5%
Protestant	0.9%	0.4%
Not affiliated	12.7%	22.4%
Other	0.6%	0.6%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%	1.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: LatinBarometer 2015; LatinBarometer 2020

CHART I. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF IMMIGRANTS 2017



Source: ENI, 2017

POLICY CONTEXT

The DR’s current **General Law of Education (66-97)** does not include specific considerations over faith-based schools. The Law mentions several articles that directly affect faith-based schools’ services. First, parents have the right to teach religion as they see fit to their children (Art. 22). However, under the same chapter, the law allows public schools to teach religion following “International Agreements.” To avoid participating in such activities, parents must send a letter expressing it (Art. 25). Another mandate of the law is that publicly-funded schools’ services and lunches must be free of charge at all levels of instruction (Art.7). That is, they cannot request from parents any mandatory payment. Schools can be classified on three types according to their financing structure:

- **Private schools.** Private funds finance all their operations. These funds commonly come from tuition fees. Private schools may or not be faith based. They also may serve low-income communities and finance their operations (or a portion of it) through donations.
- **Public schools.** Public funds finance all their operations and infrastructure. They are considered public and are not allowed to charge any form of tuition. The managing personnel is secular and hired directly by the government.
- **Publicly funded schools.** Public funds finance all their operations or a portion of their operations. The school is administered by a private entity that may or not be faith-based (a religious congregation, a pastor, a church, etc.). These schools are considered public schools depending on the agreement they entered with the government to receive the funds. For the most part, they are classified as public, and are not allowed to charge tuition fees.

In addition to the General Law of Education, all schools in the Dominican Republic must adhere to the **Norms for Harmonious Coexistence in Dominican Public and Private Schools** of 2013. The MINERD and the National Council for Children Protection (CONANI- Spanish acronym) enforce the manual. These norms regulate interactions between school personnel and students, protect students from being expelled in the middle of the school year, protect students from discrimination, among others. In particular, the manual *forbids removing pregnant teenagers* from schools. According to UNFPA (2020), the Dominican Republic's fertility rate for adolescents between 15-19 was 91 for each 1000, the highest in Latin America (UNFPA, 2021). Thus, this regulation protects a significant share of female students in the country.

Although the current Dominican Constitution establishes that the country's government is secular, as of 2022, the **Concordat** is still in force in the Dominican Republic and grants privileges to the Catholic Church's work and its priests. The Concordat is informally thought of as the legal basis for public funding agreements of Catholic schools. For decades, the Ministry of Education has had a public-private partnership agreement with the Catholic Church, where the schools would receive public support to offer services free of charge. These schools are often called semi-official and are usually managed by religious congregations (e.g. Salesians, Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, or Augustinians). Although most of these schools are Catholic, the current system allows other non-profit organizations (both faith-based and secular) and other religious organizations to operate schools under the same conditions.

In 2013, the Dominican government embarked on a series of reforms to the public education system following an unprecedented budget increase. As part of those reforms, several private faith-based schools became publicly-funded in the following years, including over 100 non-Catholic schools (Ulloa, 2014). The policy intended to increase the total number of tuition free seats in the country. After a transition period, these new schools would have similar conditions to the existing publicly-funded faith-based schools.

The conditions of these agreements often consist of the Dominican Ministry of Education (MINERD) covering most operational expenses. That includes covering the payroll, providing meals (student breakfast and lunch), infrastructure repairs/maintenance, books, uniforms, and a monthly allowance that varies depending on the school size (based on enrollment). The monthly budget is paid quarterly and intends to cover the schools' daily operations. In exchange, the organization would administer the school in adherence to MINERD's regulations and the National Council of Education mandates. In practice, these agreements have historically confronted issues related to the commitments on each side. For example, on MINERD's side, authorities often delay delivering some portions of their agreed contributions. These delays significantly affect school operations because schools cannot request funds or books from students' parents. On the side of FBSs, they have struggled to follow some of MINERD's regulations: control of admissions, expelling pregnant students or requesting parents to pay small contributions.

Another important implication of receiving public funding is that infrastructure modifications and hiring teachers become centralized. The public education system recruits teachers in collective calls in which they must pass MINERD's entry exams. Although local experts desired the collective calls because they grant an evaluation process and more transparency, the execution of the policy is often inefficient (Arias, 2022). As a result, public schools must wait for teachers longer than they would with direct hiring. In summary, although the schools in these cases make the final decision, the pool from which they can select has already been filtered by MINERD.

Regarding religious practices, there is no prohibition to praying or teaching bible studies to students in the public sector. Furthermore, the country passed a Law for Bible Instruction in Public Schools (44-00)

in 2000 to mandate bible studies in public schools and more recently added the bible to the reading plan for the school year 2021-2022. It is important to highlight that the Concordat explicitly allowed the Catholic Church leadership to oversee education in the country. Even though these aspects of the Concordat are no longer enforced, the cultural remnants of the practices it allowed are still in place regardless of whether the public school is faith-based. Those remnants can be as strong as teaching religion in all levels of instructions⁴ or as symbolic as hanging a picture of the Virgin Mary in the hall or a small cross over the chalkboard.

⁴ The curricular design of each level of instruction includes Human and Religious Formation, the class is mandatory, and it includes competency goals analysis of Bible books (e.g., Psalm)

STUDY QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The main goal of this study is to understand the role and contributions of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in the Dominican Republic. To accomplish this goal, we used regional and country-specific research questions to guide the research process. We gathered data from various sources and synthesized it to derive conclusions and recommendations.

Research Questions

Q1 What are the roles and contributions of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth?

- What are the types of Faith-based schools in the country? What are the services offered by FBOs that are not schools?
- How are Faith-based schools contributing to advancing education? What are the most common services they offer?
- What are the qualifications of the personnel that provide services? In the case of schools, what proportion of their personnel is hired by MINERD?
- What are the differences between Faith-based public schools and private Faith-based schools?
- What is the perception of the quality of their services by the community? By MINERD authorities?
- How are these services perceived by beneficiaries and by authorities? How do they choose beneficiaries? What government officers oversee their operations?
- How current are religious practices in their services?

Q2 What challenges do faith-based schools face regarding achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?

- What are the main challenges associated with their target population?
- How do they fund operations aside from public funds?
- How have hurricanes and storms affected their services in the past year?
- How had they coped with COVID-19? How did they fund technological improvements for the quarantine? How did they cope with the waiting time for MINERD's distribution of "Cuadernillos" and tablets?
- How do they handle religious diversity?
- Is religious affiliation a constraint to reaching beneficiaries?

Q3 How do faith-based schools compare to state-run schools' accessibility (urban/rural), safety, parental and community engagement, perceived advantages and disadvantages, quality and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations, adaptability to shocks (e.g., COVID, violence, migration), and curricular differences?

- What are the advantages of belonging to their religious network? In terms of access to resources?
- What are the differences in management between faith-based schools and other public schools?

Q4 What are the effective ways and opportunities for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with faith-based organizations to leverage/improve education outcomes?

- What are partnership opportunities for Donors? For the government?
- What strategies should faith-based organizations adopt to strengthen strategic partnerships?

- In what areas of education would partnership opportunities be most beneficial to improve the learning outcomes of disadvantaged students?

Data and Analysis

To address the research questions, we analyzed and consolidated information from three sources:

Interviews (10). The purpose of the interviews was to gather information on the role of FBOs from different perspectives. Informants answered questions related to their *Leadership, Scope and market share, Relationships with government, Financing, Services to marginalized populations, Perceived advantages and limitations, and Priorities and opportunities.* The interview information was synthesized to create categories of answers, and we used it to draw the main findings. The data from the interviews also allowed the development of three case studies that portray the functioning of typical FBOs of each type: Schools and nonprofits.

The informants for the interviews were chosen based on how accurately they represent the reality of most institutions of their kind. The informants were distributed as follows:

- Three non-profit organizations work in marginalized neighborhoods and provide educational services.
- Three Faith-based Schools (FBSs). One non-Catholic and two non-Catholic
- Three networks of faith-based schools that provide support to schools and represent them in negotiations with the government (one Catholic and one non-Catholic)
- Government officials from MINERD

Secondary Data. We used existing official data to analyze the Faith-Based schools' scope and compare them with the other state-run schools. The first source of data was the enrollment administrative data from the MINERD. All public schools in the country have a profile in the SIGERD⁵ platform, where they enroll students. We used the nationwide database to compare faith-based schools with other state-run schools. The second source is the National Test results database, which includes the students' results and school characteristics. Since the databases do not classify schools based on religious affiliation, we developed a strategy to identify them. We have enrollment data for school-year 2020-2021 and were able to consolidate a list of 526 schools⁶. With the resulting list of schools, we compared test scores between them and the rest of the public schools⁷.

Limitations

Faith-based schools are not clearly identified within the Dominican education system. The difficulty in identifying them prevents us from making an official cut between faith-based and the rest of the public schools. Moreover, we acknowledge the existence of a small number of schools owned by faith-based nonprofits, but since they are sponsored, they are considered private and thus are not part of our analysis.

⁵ This is MINERD's official management system (SIGERD), known in Spanish as Sistema Integrado de Gestión Escolar.

⁶ The MINERD uses congregation names in the registry of schools. With their official names, we could classify Salesians, Parroquial, and Fe y Alegría (Jesuits). We also added semi-official schools and a list of private schools that became public in recent agreements. The latter we know has the largest representation of non-Catholic schools.

⁷ We used school characteristics to do a Propensity Score Matching of the identified schools with other schools of the system.

FINDINGS

STUDY QUESTION I: THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION

- I. **What are the role and contributions of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth (e.g., those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration, affected by violence, girls and boys, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural and urban, etc.)?**

Summary Q1

Market share. We identified over 200,000 students, equivalent to 10.6% of all public enrollment attending FBSs in 2020. FBS participation in the public sector increased significantly in 2017 due to multiple agreements between the government and religious groups. We also know based on interviews that faith based constitute a significant portion of all private schools. However, the statistical information is not available.

Distinctive contribution. FBSs are major contributors to technical education at the Secondary level. We estimate that they receive 33.9% of all public enrollment. Additionally, other schools recognize them for having the highest quality technical programs.

Marginalized populations. Faith-based groups and schools focus on highly marginalized areas where public education is insufficient. They create connections with the community and have detailed knowledge of their needs.

Non-school typical services. Faith-based groups' standard services include out-of-school education support, child protection, reinsertion, and vocational training to improve income generation.

Conclusion: FBSs have been essential contributors and partners with government to increase the coverage of educational services in a context of a highly congested public system. Faith-based organizations focus on highly marginalized populations often out of reach from social policies.

Limitations: The public system does not classify schools according to their religious affiliation. Thus, numbers are an approximation estimated for this study and might slightly underestimate the total number of faith-based public schools.

Faith-based Education: Market share

The analysis of official secondary data suggests that in the school year 2019-20, approximately 10.6% of all publicly-funded school students attend a faith-based school. These students represent 8.2% of all enrollments including private schools. For the same school year, we identified 526 faith-based publicly-funded schools, serving 204,098 students. Fifty-six faith-based schools are located in rural areas and receive 6.6% of faith-based students. Overall, identified FBSs represent 12.0% of publicly-funded school enrollment in the Initial level (Pre-K, 7.4% of Primary, and 12.9% of Secondary. Information is not

available by religious affiliation. Identified FBSs also contributes 7.6% of the K-12 adult education system enrollment.⁸

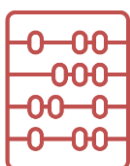
TABLE 2. SUMMARY STATISTICS OF FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS



526
Faith-based public schools



200,000+
Students



12.0%
Initial



7.4%
Primary



12.9%
Secondary

Source: authors using MINERD (2018a)

Note: based on the author's identified schools for the school year 2019-20

Private Faith-based Education

Private schools. It is important to highlight that the system has private schools that serve low-income populations. However, it is impossible to distinguish which ones are faith-based or to classify them according to the income levels of their students using official data. Moreover, the meaning of religious affiliation in the private sector is less clear. Schools may identify as religious, but that does not mean that religious activity is present in their regular operations. Moreover, religious affiliation in the private sector does not necessarily imply that a religious group manages the school. In the school year 2020-21, 16.1% of all students in the country attended private schools. These students are distributed in 2,977 schools nationwide (27.8% of all schools). Although there are no official statistics of what proportion of this are faith-based, experts consider that about half have some form of religious affiliation. However, as mentioned before, the nature and implications of this affiliation varies greatly across schools.

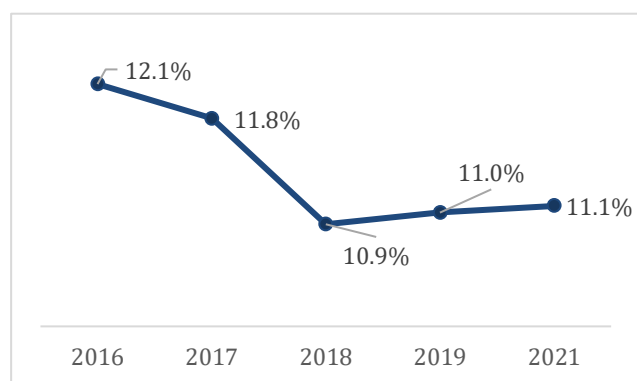
Experts consulted also noted that 51% of all private schools in the country operate without MINERD's authorization. The two most common constraints to getting the approval are inadequate infrastructure and untrained personnel. They consider that small private schools serving in marginalized neighborhoods (regardless of religious affiliation) are prone to having those constraints: "They struggle to satisfy the teacher training requirement because they want their teachers to be from their religion, which does not matter to MINERD, as long as the person has the required training... they struggle to have, for example, an appropriate playground for students in the initial level, separate from other students." A network of private religious schools consulted also reported that most schools in their network that serve low income neighborhoods struggle to get stable streams of income to cover their operations. This is consistent with them not being able to afford the infrastructural improvements required by MINERD.

⁸ The adult education system receives youth from age 14, and that it is often an alternative to accommodate students that need a flexible schedule such as teenage mothers (UNICEF, 2014).

Transition periods. As part of the agreements between private faith-based institutions and MINERDs, some schools were going to gradually reduce the tuition (IEAL, 2020). During this transition period, the schools would receive MINERD’s support, and a significantly reduced tuition from parents. In these transition periods the schools were considered to be public, but their operations resembled that of private schools.

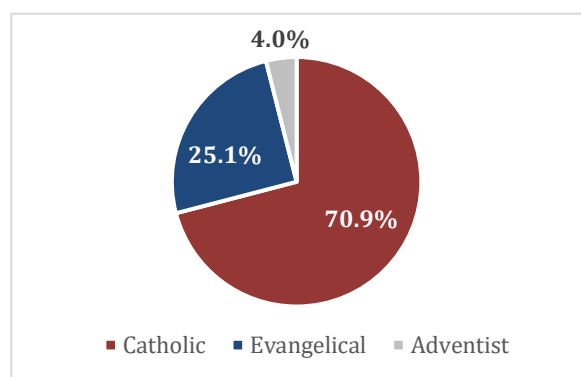
Universities. Faith-based higher education institutions are heterogenous, and all private. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MESCYT), 38 higher education institutions operate in the country, and nine have a religious affiliation. In 2021, these nine institutions received 58,800 students, representing 11.1% of all higher education enrollment (MESCYT, 2022). The market share of FB institutions has remained relatively unchanged in the past six years. Catholic institutions have 70.3% of all Faith-Based students, while Evangelicals have 25.1% and Adventists 4.0% (MESCYT, 2022). Eight of the nine institutions are universities, and one is a technical institute; four operate outside Santo Domingo Greater area; all institutions are private.

CHART 4. STUDENTS ATTENDING FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITIES 2016-2021



Note: Information not available for 2020
Source: MESCYT institutional statistics 2016-2021

CHART 5. ENROLLMENT IN FAITH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (2021)



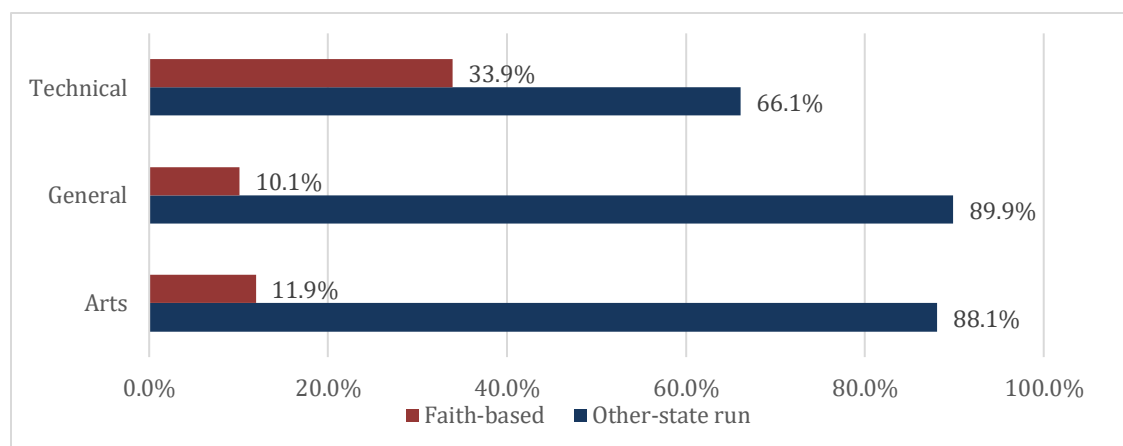
Source: MESCYT institutional statistics 2021

Roles and Contributions of Faith-Based Schools

Faith-based schools have historically contributed **to increasing publicly-funded education** in marginalized communities. They specialize in marginal urban areas with a shortage of public-school seats. Interviewed FBS stakeholders shared numerous stories of schools that started or expanded per the community's request. The requests often respond to realities such as insufficient space in existing schools or not having a school at all, which leads students in the community to walk long distances to reach a school. For instance, an FBS stakeholder shared that, when the government renewed the neighborhood of “La Barquita” in 2018, the government evicted most residents of a dangerously located community on the Ozama riverbank in Santo Domingo. Some residents were able to secure a new residence through a government project. However, many of them, including undocumented families, moved to the neighborhood across the river since they did not qualify for a new residence. The influx of residents put pressure on the existing schools in the community. The only secondary school in that neighborhood is faith-based. “They had to work with the community to expand services and accommodate the incoming residents.”

Another important contribution of Faith-based schools is their leadership in advancing **technical education**. Interviewed FBS representatives perceive that, due to their legacy and long-standing tradition within the school system, faith-based schools are perceived by government authorities as good resource administrators. Since technical education often requires additional resources, their efficiency makes them better candidates to offer the services. In terms of quality, respondents highlighted that the most successful polytechnical schools are faith-based and mentioned the Loyola polytechnical schools of Dajabon and San Cristóbal as examples. In the school year 2019-20, faith-based schools received 33.9% of the technical education students in the country.

CHART 3. FAITH BASED CONTRIBUTIONS TO SECONDARY IN ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOL YEAR 2019-20, BY SECOND-CYCLE TRACKS



Source: authors using MINERD, (2018a)

Faith-based schools operate in highly disadvantaged contexts, and they believe that religious education serves as **emotional support** for vulnerable children. Spiritual practices vary across faith-based schools depending on congregations and religious affiliations; however, they are always part of their routines. However, the religious component extends beyond the children’s participation in such practices since they are, they say, not mandatory. Faith-based school leaders ensure that they are able to choose their personnel. Their level of influence in staff selection decisions may vary depending on the agreement with MINERD and has evolved as the hiring practices of MINERD have become more transparent. FBS stakeholders reported that they try to pick highly committed and religious teachers (not necessarily their own religion) who align with their principles. They reported that highly motivated personnel (religious sisters and committed lay teachers) that believe education is an “act of faith” rather than just a job are more prone to provide students with support and attention they may not receive elsewhere. They consider this a differentiating factor since most public schools “*don’t have an appropriate number of psychologists if any...and these students are extremely vulnerable.*”

Lastly, faith-based schools are often considered examples of success and have **pedagogical leadership** within the education community. For instance, while all schools had to wait for MINERD to send printed material for students to use at home, several FBSs developed provisional material to reduce the interruption of instruction. MINERD revised and approved the material before implementing it. This effort resulted in their students receiving material two months ahead of other schools. Similarly, another network of FBSs created a literacy guide for the first cycle of the Primary level to address specific issues of their community. MINERD reviewed and approved the material, and they used it when there were delays in book distribution. Additionally, they reported that researchers choose them frequently to analyze their practices as case studies, which allows them to have statistics and analysis “free of charge.”

Case Study #1

Program: Ave María Polytechnical School

Location: Sabana Perdida, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Faith Affiliation: Catholic (Ave María congregation)

Mission: Provide high-quality education services to the lowest-income families. They provide education from the 7th - 12th grades, locally called 1st-6th grades of the Secondary level. According to local regulations, the polytechnical provides the first cycle of regular classes (1st-3rd grades) and a second cycle (4th-6th grades) that includes technical education. Students can choose between Marketing, Nursing, Informatics, and Accounting.

Beneficiaries. The polytechnical is the only school that offers an extended day schedule (class days of 8 hours) in its municipality. Thus, the demand for services is high, forcing them to increase classroom sizes. The main vulnerability of their students is poverty and violence, and it is common for students to come from dysfunctional families. For instance, they currently have three surviving children of femicide episodes (their father killed their mother and is now in prison).

Background: Ave María is a public school that belongs to the Catholic congregation of the Ave Maria sisters and has over 20 schools located in poor neighborhoods, mainly in northern Santo Domingo. These schools include polytechnical, primary and secondary schools, and a school orphanage. The congregation's leadership is part of the bishop conference, which has a unit to coordinate relationships with MINERD. The polytechnical Ave Maria started in 2003 with less than 200 students and now is one of the most demanded schools in their municipality. Since it is now the largest school in the network, the director of all Ave Maria schools has her office there.

Organizational structure: They function as a regular public school. The principal and other internal authorities are nuns from the congregation. In their 10-year agreement with MINERD, they are allowed to choose their principal. The principal of the school reports to the regent director of their congregation. MINERD hires and compensates the teachers and personnel (90-95 employees). If hiring a new teacher, they can choose from a pool of candidates selected by MINERD.⁹ The local education district oversees their functions and makes visits to ensure their practices are adequate. Each visit focuses on a specific subject that could be pedagogical or administrative. The school has a linkage unit that connects students with private companies that are hiring or having internship programs. The linkage unit has successfully helped graduates find their first work experience in the field they studied.

Funding. The MINERD covers 85% of their operations. That includes their personnel being on the public teacher payroll, receiving school breakfast and lunch from the public entity in charge, and teachers receiving training, among others. Additionally, being a polytechnical school, they receive funds from MINERD to support the maintenance of the technical workshops. The other 15% is covered with donations, revenue from the cafeteria, and small business activities such as selling notebooks.

Distinctive contributions: Technical education, extended day schedule secondary school, Linkage unit to industries.

Key statistics: 1,087+ students, 65% females.

Role and Contributions of Faith-based Groups

Faith-based publicly-funded schools have a relatively constant funding source and a very narrow specific objective: provide educational services in marginalized communities. However, numerous religious groups work in those neighborhoods to support education, child protection, and youth development.

⁹ MINERD sends them options of teachers that passed the entry examinations.

These institutions can coordinate with faith-based schools to support their mission and are often nonprofits that work from the church of the community.

According to consulted groups, the most distinctive contribution of faith-based groups is to support literacy in **after-school/Saturday classes**. The sessions are held at a non-profit or a church and are directed by trained personnel. The groups and the local school authorities often work together to identify children within the school who need this service the most. During the same visits, the groups offer recreation programs such as sports, games, playing musical instruments, and other artistic activities. A nun that leads a group reflected that the recreation activities are “*just as important as the literacy classes. . . children [in marginalized areas] are stripped from their childhood completely, having to work, take care of younger siblings, and carry emotional traumas.*”. The other groups that reported engaging in similar activities justified them with reflections along the same lines. One group uses recreational activities to teach environmentally friendly practices and noted that religious values include respect for nature.

Faith-based groups' second most popular role is **child protection** in the community. That includes programs to prevent pregnancy, parent training, violence prevention, protection against sexual exploitation, and protection for abuse victims. There is a close relationship between the organization's leaders and the community. Consulted groups have detailed information on community protection needs, sometimes more formally with diagnostic studies, and other times by knowing its residents for long periods, including various generations. A consulted group highlighted that families in the community communicate their needs and problems even if they know that the organization cannot meet them, but in the hope that they will connect them with someone that can. Examples provided included legal counseling in facing a sexually abusive relative or healthcare needs for a family member with disabilities.

Faith-based groups also implement **school reinsertion** programs for children out of school. A consulted group highlighted that in the neighborhood they work, Las Caobas – there is a high proportion of children out of school because they are working or taking care of smaller siblings. School reinsertion programs start providing leveling classes, although in some cases, the children have never attended school. The faith-based groups work together with the schools of the community to find them a placement for the following school year and accompany them in the enrollment process. A group reported that this is especially important for undocumented children to ensure their rights are respected.

Consulted groups also provide educational services to teenage mothers, who do not study or work, a growing segment of the population after the pandemic (Ramírez, 2021). The programs aim to prevent other pregnancies and improve **their qualifications for employment through vocational training**. An example provided was training certificates for commercial cooking, which allowed them to get a formal job in a nearby industry. The aim of improving income generation capabilities also extends to parents, youth out of school, and undocumented immigrants. Consulted groups highlighted that undocumented immigrants do not get certifications for their training. Thus, they help them get a qualification with an emphasis on entrepreneurship.

Vocational training is a large component of their budget as they must enable space and negotiate with the government for accreditation. It is important to note that this vocational-technical education is not the same as that schools offer at the Secondary level. This service only requires approval of 8th grade, and it is mainly accredited by the National Institute for Professional Technical Training (INFOTEP - Spanish acronym) and MINERD. Consulted faith-based groups reported that they adequate their spaces to the government's requirements and then applied to become an Operational Center of the System (COS). INFOTEP then pays the teachers of the centers, and they recruit beneficiaries and maintain the space up to standard.

Although Faith-based groups receive students from different religious backgrounds, they have elements of their religion in the programs. A group leader noted that religious conversion is not the purpose of their initiatives, but that religious education helps develop dignity and self-esteem. A Catholic group reported that most of their beneficiaries are Evangelical because they are of Haitian descent and “they tend to be Evangelical.” Moreover, one Baptist organization said they work with other community religious groups for specific goals, including Catholic sisters .

Case Study #2

Program: World Vision Dominican Republic

Location: C. José Joaquín Pérez, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Faith Affiliation: Christian (no specific denomination)

Mission: World Vision has two focus areas in the DR: Child Protection (Child labor and violence prevention) and advancement of education. They also incorporate support for children in emergencies and improve parents' income generation capabilities. The institution supports the MINERD in key initiatives to improve literacy in primary-level students. The specific programs include:

- Training for parents to improve income generation and increase parents supervisory role in their children's education.
- Supplemental classes implemented outside the schools and in-classroom (in partnership with MINERD).
- Prevention sessions to reduce teenage pregnancy and to reduce violence;
- Advocacy for education, the institution is part of the National Education Pact, among several others.

Beneficiaries: They use internal measurements to identify the most vulnerable children in the communities where they work. These measurements include children whose parents are immigrants, children who work, and children who do not attend school. Religious affiliation or being a Christian are not requirements for participation. Beneficiaries are traditionally located in rural areas, but they have expanded to urban areas in recent years. Their services are available for children between 5-18 years old.

Background: World Vision was founded in 1950 but arrived in the Dominican Republic in 1989. The institution brought its characteristic model of private individual donations for children and their work implementing specific child protection programs.

Organizational structure: World Vision DR has seven offices nationwide, with approximately 110 collaborators in the main Santo Domingo office and another 90 distributed in the other six. Program implementation also relies on volunteer work and local church partnerships.

Funding. The primary funding source for World Vision is private donations, followed by international cooperation agencies for specific projects. Additionally, they have received government support to implement a small initiative.

Distinctive contributions: Advocacy for children's rights, literacy improvement, protection in emergencies (e.g., hurricanes, COVID-19), promoting respectful coexistence for children in schools at the border with Haiti.

Key statistics: 7 provinces, 18,000+ beneficiaries, 200+ beneficiaries with disabilities

Case Study #3

Program: Caminante Proyecto Educativo

Location: Los Coquitos, Boca Chica, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Faith Affiliation: Catholic (Jesuit)

Mission: Child protection, vocational training, and school reinsertion. The institution works in partnership with schools and government agencies supporting the children of the municipality of Boca Chica and nearby neighborhoods. The programs include:

- Support victims of commercial sexual exploitation (psychological attention, school reinsertion, vocational training, etc.)
- Support children with incarcerated parents (psychological attention, school supplies, etc.)
- After-school program for lowest performing children of the community (School principals refer these children to the program)
- Prevention of second pregnancy for teenage mothers (vocational training, counseling)
- School reinsertion for children that work (in partnership with local schools)
- Protection of unaccompanied migrants (13-17 years) that are homeless (food, hygiene, advocacy for them to authorities, psychological attention)

Beneficiaries. Most beneficiaries reach the foundation referred by local authorities. For instance, the immigrant children arrive at the organization through Politur (Touristic Police Department) and the principals of the local schools.

Background: The founder encountered a diagnostic study about sexual commercial exploitation in the municipality of Boca Chica, which motivated her religious institution to start the foundation. The institution was founded in 1994 to prevent sexual exploitation linked to the touristic activity of the zone and to support survivors in the months following their rescue. In recent years, their work has expanded to all vulnerable youth in the area.

Organizational structure: Caminante has a directive Board that changes every two years and sets strategic priorities for the institution. Their personnel include directors, psychologists, social workers, and teachers. They hire specialists for specific programs and have the support of volunteers from the community. The organization owns a vocational training center in partnership with the National Institute for Technical Education (INFOTEP). The center allows Caminante to provide beneficiaries with official basic technical certificates from INFOTEP. Caminante oversees operations and recruits beneficiaries, while INFOTEP provides trainers. Caminante also relies on resources owned by churches in their congregation, such as auditoriums, buses, and classrooms, among others.

Funding. The institution receives a yearly allowance from the government. Additionally, the institution receives funds from churches and implementing partners of cooperation agencies.

Distinctive contributions: Vocational training (certified by incumbent government office), school reinsertion, teenage pregnancy prevention, support of immigrant youth.

Key statistics: 1,500 active beneficiaries

Faith-based Actors

In addition to religious schools and non-profit organizations, religious leadership plays a vital role in education policy development in the DR. Religious leaders have two important roles: to **negotiate school network agreements** and to **participate in the National Education Council**.

For the first role, Catholic leaders negotiate with MINERD agreements that provide public funds to a school or a network of schools. In turn, the school or school networks often have to become public and free of charge. The length of the agreements and the number of schools varies considerably. For instance, the Bishopric of La Vega province signed a 25-year agreement in 2014 to receive support in one school in exchange for the school being free of charge during the length of the contract (Ulloa, 2014). Similar examples are the Salesian community that signed a five-year agreement in 2014 for 11 schools; the Fe y Alegría Jesuit group renewed a ten-year agreement in 2017 for 65 schools. Notably, the Catholic Bishops Conference signed in 2017 for 127 schools to become publicly-funded (Ulloa, 2014). These previous negotiations may be renewals of prior agreements, but they can also be new agreements for private schools to become public.

Although these agreements have traditionally been made between Catholic leaders and MINERD, there are also agreements with Evangelical leadership. Notably, in 2018 the coalition Dialogue Table and Representation for Christian Equity (MEDIREC) agreed to transition 134 private schools to the public-funding system in exchange for the same kind of support (MINERD,2018d). In the agreement, just as it happened with Catholic private schools, they agreed to gradually reduce the tuition until becoming free of charge. These 134 schools included Adventist, Baptist, and Evangelical schools and were initially extended for ten years. A similar agreement was reached by the National Coalition of Evangelical Churches (CODUE) for 38 schools in 2017.

After agreements are in place, these actors lead the interactions between the schools in their network and the MINERD. The leaders also oversee the overall operations, manage donations, and help them fulfill MINERD's financial requirements. These leaders are often religious sisters, priests, or pastors.

The second role of faith-based leaders is to participate in the **National Education Council (NEC)**, the maximum education authority in the country. The council oversees the enforcement of ordinances and creates new regulations regarding education in the country. All council decisions include a representative from the Catholic School's Association, from the non-Catholic association, and one member of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (IEAL, 2020). For the case of the Evangelical Association, the leaders from each denomination take turns attending the council's meetings. Faith-based actors also participated in agreements between the government and society regarding the education reforms of 2013. Religious leaders and faith-based school associations also have seats in school districts (IEAL, 2020).

In addition to those two major roles, these religious associations also advocate for their interests to be reflected in the national curriculum for public schools. The most prominent examples of these efforts are promoting Bible readings in school (DL, 2021) or opposing sexual orientation classes with gender ideology in schools (Mercedes, 2021).

Case study #4

Program: Fe y Alegría leadership

Location: Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Faith Affiliation: Catholic

Mission: Oversee the functioning of the 65 schools in their network and coordinate relationships with MINERD.

They negotiate the agreement with MINERD, renewed every ten years, and serve as a communication channel between schools and government authorities. They also create internal policies for the network and support them in specific crises. The Fe y Alegría leadership also helps start new schools in the neighborhoods that need it (helping to identify the land, getting public support, etc.)

Beneficiaries: Communities, Schools, and Students. Communities approach the institution to start Fe y Alegría schools in their neighborhood. The community leaders see in the institution an expedited process to initiate a school to improve existing shortages. The leadership also identifies areas where they see the need and have the opportunity. After the schools operate, they oversee their functioning and represent them as part of their network (e.g., negotiate with MINERD to get new teachers when needed). Lastly, Fe y Alegría leadership oversees internal regulations regarding the treatment of students within their network, such as ensuring that their schools accept students from different faiths.

Background: Fe y Alegría is a Venezuelan Jesuit institution that was founded 60 years ago. In 1990, the regional leadership of the Jesuit organization decided to take Fe y Alegría to the Dominican Republic. They already had other emblematic schools in the country (Loyola schools). They started with four schools in marginalized neighborhoods, with funding from the MINERD.

Organizational structure: The institution reports to the regional Fe y Alegría international organization and to the Jesuit leadership in the country. Fe y Alegría has one national director and deputy director that have an office in the national pastoral office. They have a small team that supports their advocacy functions and helps coordinate specific programs that they may implement in their schools. All school principals within their network report to them and seek support in making demands to MINERD. Most of these principals and school leaders are religious sisters from local Catholic congregations.

Funding. Local Catholic leadership supports their work, and International Catholic agencies support specific programs within their schools; MINERD funds regular school operations. Fe y Alegría leadership also receives a yearly allowance that the government provides to formally incorporate non-profits. The allowance is used to cover the needs of schools within their network that the MINERD has failed to fulfill (e.g., buy books, hire substitute teachers, cover missed payments to newly hired teachers, etc.)

Fe y Alegría leverages support for crises from different actors of society. For instance, they found support to create printed material for their students during the first stages of the pandemic lockdown. They also lead the creation of didactic resources to improve literacy in the first cycle of primary education. The funding to create these resources does not come from MINERD, and they use other sources.

Distinctive contributions: Expansion of the network to the most marginalized areas, 21 polytechnical schools in their network.

Key statistics: 65 schools – 22 extended day schools – 44,000+ students

STUDY QUESTION 2: CHALLENGES FACING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS

2. What are the challenges faith-based schools face in regard to achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?

Summary Q2

Resources. Some of the funding schools should receive through the agreements with the State is unreliable for most public schools. That includes the late payment of newly appointed teachers and books. Faith-based non-profits also struggle to access dependable sources of funding.

The Covid-19 aftermath. Children returned to schools and were promoted to the next grade while taking virtual classes. FBS stakeholders reported that many students did not have adequate access to the internet and now have important gaps in competencies for their grades.

Limitations for inclusion. They are not ready to accommodate students with disabilities, a problem that most public schools face.

Weak family structures. Children in highly marginalized areas have complex family contexts that jeopardize their learning. They noted how a significant proportion do not live with their parents.

Dealing with immigrant children. FBSs reported the need for bilingual teachers to meet the demands of immigrant students, and other Faith-based groups noted the difficulties of trying to support unaccompanied immigrant minors that work on the streets.

Conclusion: FBSs struggle with the same difficulties that other public schools face. In addition, their population, in most cases, is more complex than the average population of a public school. They lack support to accommodate children with disabilities and immigrant children.

Challenges

Funding reliability. Consulted schools highlighted that MINERD's operational funds are unreliable if the school is not officially incorporated and has a School Board. When the school becomes publicly-funded, it can no longer charge parents or request mandatory contributions. However, some schools mentioned asking for minor contributions such as detergent or small donations from parents. Although payroll is always on time, when teachers are appointed to the school, it takes months for them to receive their first paycheck. These delays are not particular to FBSs. A consulted leader reported that they use money from donations to their network to at least cover transportation allowance in the months with the missing payments.

Performance issues. We compared results in two standardized tests implemented in the last grade of Primary and Secondary levels. We compared students' test scores from the identified students attending publicly funded faith-based schools with similar students attending state-run public schools in the system. The first evaluation is the Diagnostic Tests that the MINERD gave to 6th-grade students nationwide in 2018. The second evaluation is the National Tests, which students must approve in the last grade of secondary school to graduate. FBS students performed lower than comparable¹⁰ students in other public schools in both evaluations. Although most differences are statistically significant, they are negligible considering the mean and standard deviations of the tests (See Appendix). Results for the Diagnostic Tests are not statistically significant for Natural and Social Science. These comparisons control for students' and school' characteristics available in the administrative data of the tests. It is important to highlight that, on simple averages, FBS students perform higher than students from other schools. However, the differences disappear and become negative when comparing for student characteristics. Moreover, since FBSs tend to control admissions, their students may not be comparable to students from other public schools in unobservable characteristics, as discussed in the sections below¹¹.

¹⁰ The identified FBS compared with a selection of other state-run public schools. The selection method is Propensity Score Matching using logistic regression with student and school characteristics.

¹¹ It is important to note that due to data limitations, this analysis do not control for unobservable student characteristics (See Appendix for more details). The comparisons only consider students attending the identified publicly funded faith-based schools and compare them with students from public schools.

TABLE 3. PERFORMANCE DIFFERENCES IN STANDARDIZED TESTS¹²

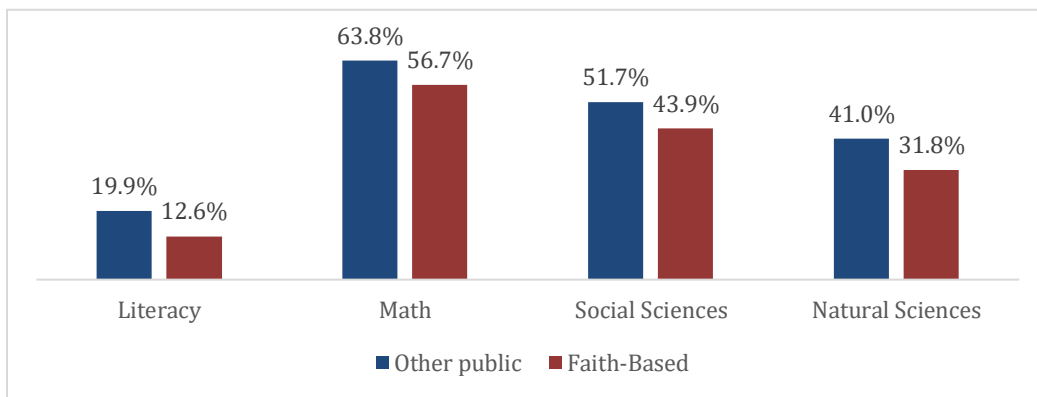
Diagnostic test (2018)	FBS-Other public schools
Literacy	-1.74
Math	-0.09
Social Sciences	-0.99
Natural Sciences	-2.09

Note: Max. score 350
 Source: Diagnostic Tests 2018 – Data; MINERD, (2018b)

National tests (2018)	FBS-Other public schools
Spanish	- 0.51
Math	-0.42
Social Sciences	-0.33
Natural Sciences	-0.30

Note: Max. Score 30
 Source: National Tests 2018 – Data Source: MINERD, (2018c)

CHART 2. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN THE LOWEST PERFORMANCE LEVEL IN THE 6TH-GRADE STANDARDIZED TESTS BY SCHOOL TYPE



Source: MINERD, (2018b)

Access to books and resources. MINERD spent ten years without distributing books to public schools.¹³ The FBSs also have the challenge of finding books and content that align with their beliefs. For instance, one FBS noted that they review all the material before it is available to the students. This effort consumes a significant amount of time for teachers and school leadership. Many FBS stakeholder also mentioned “gender ideology” as something to which they are opposed as a “non-negotiable”; thus, they review material and look for explicit and implicit elements that contradict their beliefs. Similarly, they assess the quality and content of books they receive through donations.

Cost of expanding technical education. Technical training is a distinctive service of Faith-based schools and nonprofits. Schools focus on technical education at the secondary level,¹⁴ and nonprofits on vocational training that does not require secondary education. However, they agree that expanding the offer to other skills requires significant investment in workshops and machinery. Currently, workshops

¹² The identified FBS compared with a selection of other state-run public schools. The selection method is Propensity Score Matching using logistic regression with student and school characteristics.

¹³ After the data collection ended in 2022, MINERD made digital books available.

¹⁴ Some polytechnical schools also offer vocational training for their students and other youth of the community.

are sponsored by the government. FBS stakeholders explain that the high cost of some workshops' makes them a low priority for authorities in the context of the many other needs the system has. They emphasized, *"We need to create partnerships to develop new titles, for example, electricity, refrigeration, mechatronic. We would have demand for them."*

Change of authorities. Faith-based groups reported that changes in appointed officials jeopardize agreements made with past authorities. Since the programs they design are not part of a law or an official agreement, the new authorities might not approve or honor previous agreements. However, what happens more frequently is that they require the programs to start from the planning stages again, which seriously delays the execution of the project. Consulted groups mentioned as an example: *"Since this new government started, we have had three different heads of CONANI, every time a new person comes in, we have to start meetings again, introducing our organization and our goals. These things take a lot of time and meetings... it is like going back to square one."*

COVID-19 adaptation. Faith-based groups and schools consulted described their experiences with COVID-19 as extraordinarily damaging to children's educational outcomes. They noted that the lack of technological equipment and internet in the children's households harmed their ability to keep up with the school year. *"Now they are promoted to 2nd or 3rd grade and don't know how to read, not that they do it poorly, it's that often they don't know at all."* FBSs made efforts to make didactic material available, both custom-made and the one distributed by MINERD. FB non-profits distributed educational kits that did not require any technology. A study about Dominican education during the pandemic found that 8 out of 10 students received the "cuadernillos¹⁵", and 7 out of 10 had access to classes on the TV, but only 2 out of 10 primary and 4 out of 10 secondary level students had access to digital equipment for distance learning (IDEC, Ideice, WB, USAID, 2021). According to the same study, the average study hours were low for all levels of instruction, with only 32% of secondary level students and 14% of primary level students studying over four hours per day (IDEC, Ideice, WB, USAID, 2021). The situation is more difficult for early grades of the primary level (1st-3rd). Interviewed FBSs reported that now that children are back in school, a high level of effort is needed to compensate for the time lost.

Accessing funds for LGBTQ minorities. Faith-based non-profit organizations rely on donations and grants to fund their activities. Some of them receive small government payments, but for the most part, their projects are financed through grants. Interviewed non-profits expressed that when the requirements of those grants include supporting LGBTQ populations, they feel they are not even considered. Non-profits reported having several LGBTQ beneficiaries and that they are welcome in their institutions. They acknowledge that it is understandable, but inaccurate, to assume that their religious affiliation would, in every case, mean they would not work with these populations without stigmatizing them.

Parents' religious affiliation. FBSs are upfront regarding their religious affiliation and the implications when the parents enroll their children. Since schools are often in high demand in communities, parents do not want to miss the opportunity when they do get a seat. However, once the students are enrolled, parents may have issues with the religious practices of the school. For instance, a consulted Catholic school does not require children from other religions to attend catechism classes. Nevertheless, attendance at Mass and some other religious activities are mandatory. Another school reported that sometimes the student agrees with the religious expectations of the school, but when the parents hear about it they get upset.

Access to grant funds. FB groups struggle to access grants from cooperation agencies if they are not religious donors. They attribute that to the fact that they cannot hire administrative personnel with the

¹⁵ The MINERD created didactic material to distribute during the quarantine while schools were closed. These "slim books" or "cuadernillos" included lessons for each grade and were distributed by schools.

qualifications to get such grants. They complained that there should be a better way to transfer capabilities to their organizations. They also argue that sometimes funding agencies favor larger institutions, whose plans are disconnected from the communities with the most pressing needs: *“It is like giving the community a shoe that does not fit.”*

Challenges Specific to Marginalized Populations

Unaccompanied immigrants. Consulted Faith-based groups reported a wave of minors arriving in the country through the southern province of Elías Piña that came without their parents over the past year. They said that their ages range between 13-17 years old. According to one group, when police officers are deporting them, the CONANI is present to grant that their rights are respected. However, it just slows down the deportation for a few hours, and they are deported like adults (according to the organization without violence). After a few days, the minors return to the same spot, working on the streets. The faith-based group offers them lunch two times a week and access to restrooms and hygiene products, but they are uncertain about how to help them. Most of them are homeless, and some pay for nights in a house in the community. The situation has been repeating for months since the beginning of 2022. Other groups reported incidents with unaccompanied minors hanging out around school premises and working as shoeshiners.

Inclusion. Faith-based schools reported that in their religious mission, they want to include students with disabilities, but the reality is that they do not have the conditions to meet these needs. A FBS reported that they have one student in a wheelchair and that his classmates must carry him upstairs and downstairs whenever he needs it. Another FBS said that another school in their network focuses only on students with intellectual disabilities and struggles significantly to find qualified personnel. Most public schools face the same challenges in serving that population segment (Bonilla, 2019). As a result, there are important gaps in the educational attainment between citizens with disabilities and citizens without disabilities. In 2018, 92.4% of individuals with disabilities between 5-21 were not attending any form of education versus 16.4% of individuals without disabilities (IDEC,2021).

In addition to the challenges associated with serving students with disabilities, they also struggle to serve Haitian children. A FBS reported needing teachers who speak Creole as a second language to help these students better, but MINERD is in *“Denial of the imminent need.”* They said bilingual students help when possible, but a systemic solution is needed.

Child labor. Faith-based groups working on school reinsertion say that these programs are challenging. They initially attract the children to afternoon programs with recreational activities and then work with the local schools to find a seat for them. When successful, the children stay in school for only one year. A faith-based leader reflected that these children’s work meant an important income stream for their families. If that income is not replaced, they will end up working again: *“If you don’t give them something to compensate for the money they are losing, it is not sustainable. They will go back to do it regardless of what authorities from the Ministry of Work say.”* Another group mentioned that providing food helps improve retention rates in specific contexts and that they were successful with shoeshine boys, a common occupation for working children in the country. However, they acknowledged that providing daily food increased the program’s cost.

Dysfunctional families. Faith-based schools and groups reported their target population’s main challenge is in their homes. Their students not only have low income but also feel that, too often, they come from families that lack “structure.” One FBS reported that *“[it seems like] most of these kids do not live with either of their parents.”* They described students with relatives or neighbors, students with incarcerated parents, or students whose parents are in Haiti. Another reality is that mothers that work cleaning houses and taking care of children tend to sleep in those houses. FB groups reported that their

children are taken care of by the eldest sister of the house. Working with these populations is extremely difficult as they need more than the instruction to excel in their classes, and their resources are limited. In particular, the number of psychologists and counselors is limited for the ever-increasing enrollment. Moreover, a FBS reported they threatened to expel the student to make the parents attend a meeting at least once a school year.

Teenage pregnancy. Out of all child protection services, pregnancy prevention was noted as the most “disappointing” by a group leader. He pointed out how sometimes they worked six years with a child who still ended up pregnant by age 14. Teenage pregnancy is particularly harmful to education attainment. The (UNFPA, 2021) reports that 7 out of 10 adolescent mothers between 15 and 19 were in school when they got pregnant, and only two continued studying after their child was born. Two consulted groups have opted for providing second pregnancy prevention and are more hopeful about those programs. These groups noted that “*greater social changes are needed to prevent teenage pregnancy, and some are outside our reach.*”

Victims of sexual assault. FB organizations reported encouraging victims to report their aggressors to the authorities. This support includes providing access to professional psychologists and medical care and accompanying them to the authorities. FB groups mentioned that convincing them to report their aggressors is challenging. The more vulnerable victims are, the more likely it is that they will not report aggressors or would pursue informal financial settlements without involving the authorities.

STUDY QUESTION 3: COMPARING FAITH BASED SCHOOLS TO STATE SCHOOLS

3. How do faith-based schools compare to state-run schools in terms of resources (and sources), accessibility (urban/rural), safety, parental and community engagement, perceived advantages and disadvantages, quality and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations, adaptability to shocks (e.g. COVID, violence, migration), and curricular differences?

Summary Q3

Quality. FBSs are perceived as higher quality because they have better spaces and teach values. Test scores do not conclusively support that notion.

Religious education. Although in general parent’s value religious education, those with different religious beliefs to the ones of the school struggle to follow the protocols and rituals enforced by religious schools. FBSs are upfront with the requirements from the beginning. However, some parents see the admission as an opportunity and accept them initially but later show discomfort.

Control of admissions. FBSs report that they evaluate students upon enrollment and feel the need to do so because of the high demand for their services and to ensure parental commitment.

Resources and strong management. FBSs and state-run schools have similar limitations to accommodate students with disabilities, access MINERD’s funds, deal with violence, etc. However, FBSs are better at leveraging funds with their church network, donors, small business activities, and parents' voluntary contributions, and they influence the selection of teachers.

Conclusion: For the most part, FBSs and state-run schools share similar struggles and operate under similar conditions. The most important differences are perceived quality, religious affiliation to their curriculum, control of admissions, and ability to leverage additional resources.

TABLE 4. COMPARING FAITH-BASED AND STATE-RUN SCHOOLS

Categories	Faith-based schools	State-run schools
Perceived advantages and disadvantages	Adv. Higher quality, better spaces (clean and taken care of), Respect for religious leaders Dis. They cannot accommodate special needs	Adv. No religious adaptation and relatively easy to enroll. Dis. Perceived as lower quality, and as they demand less of the students
Quality / perceived quality (learning outcomes - test scores, attainment, retention)	FBSs have a high demand for being perceived as of higher quality. Test scores are higher at the primary level.	Test scores are higher at the secondary level.
Resources	Support from MINERD, but they also leverage other resources within their network.	Support from MINERD
Accessibility	Have less presence in rural areas Not equipped to accommodate students with disabilities	Have more presence in rural areas Not equipped to accommodate students with disabilities
Safety	They make extra efforts to prevent robberies and to keep students safe, but it also varies depending on the neighborhood and school.	Varies depending on the neighborhood and level of instruction.
Parental and community engagement	Adv. The effort to secure a seat often means highly engaged parents. Dis. Parents need to align with religious beliefs, which causes friction.	Parents' involvement varies greatly depending on the school

Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages

Faith-based schools are recognized popularly for having **higher quality** than state-run public schools. However, the elements with which consulted actors define higher quality are not only pedagogical. A consulted school received 700 applications for the school year 2021-22 for 400 available seats. They highlighted that parents were looking for “*Christian values, which are also socially desirable for non-religious people, such as respect, humility, and discipline.*” In summary, perceptions of FBSs’ higher quality include:

- *Better environment:* Although they face similar funding challenges to other public schools, their infrastructure is perceived as “well-kept” and cleaner than other schools.
- *Values:* An Evangelical FBS reported that parents are just as interested in values as they are in academic matters, and when they approach them, they are looking for the school to support their parenting.
- *Trustworthiness:* Parents also trust their management more because they know that the religious leaders of the school are there more due to personal convictions, not just for the salary. “*If a nun asks for a small contribution in detergents, the community believes them; they do not question them like they would a regular principal.*”

Additionally, FBSs carefully choose their teachers from a pool of MINERD-approved candidates that already went through the entry testing process. They place a lot of importance on selecting teachers that align with their values, not necessarily with their religion. Although they admit that they have made

mistakes in the past, they ensure that the successful cases outnumber them. When explaining their “values,” a FBS reported that they look for hints of resiliency when evaluating a candidate because they will probably be more disciplined. In addition to teachers, they look for those characteristics in other school personnel such as administrative and clerks. FBS stakeholders insist that it is essential to work with teachers that match their level of commitment.

FBSs have a reputation for having more quality than other state-run schools for all the reasons explained above. Test scores show statistically significant differences between FBSs and other state-run schools. These differences are favorable for FBSs in the case of the primary level and to other state-run schools in the case of the secondary level. However, FBSs practices of controlling admissions are a strong source of bias for these comparisons. FBSs conduct evaluations of children and families that other state-run schools are not allowed to do. FBSs emphasized that the control of admissions is necessary mainly due to the large volume of applications they receive. When asked about the results, a FBS network leader was not surprised since they have been subject to these analyses before, with the same results. They argue that they are not striving for higher test scores because their schools, for the most part, serve the poorest of the poor: *“When they compare us with the rest of the system, and ‘control for income,’ they are not getting the full picture. These kids are not only poor, but they are also marginalized. Two students may have the same income level, but one lives in a community without access to public health, and the other does. That makes our students more vulnerable.”*

Resources

Other local studies of public schools serving marginalized students in the country have found that the principal's social capital is key to achieving better outcomes (Ramos, 2019). FBSs use their contacts within their religious community to enhance their work. Their religious network allows them to find extra resources (auditoriums, buses, chairs, etc.) that they can borrow, donations, and contributions of church leaders and volunteers in case they need them. A FBSs also reported that they organize small business projects, such as selling notebooks at the beginning of the school year, and they profit from the cafeteria. Lastly, they reported that parents occasionally make voluntary contributions for specific purposes, such as Christmas decorations.

Parental and Community Engagement

In terms of community engagement, faith-based groups and schools pride themselves on belonging to their communities. They highlight that, in most cases, they live in the community and have been present there for several generations. A faith-based group noted that *“projects come and go,”* but their commitment is a *“proven constant”* with over 25 years of serving their community. Others note that the schools have grown with the community. What originally were poorly constructed improvised classrooms are now well-established buildings.

FBSs require parental engagement (PTA meetings, extracurricular activities, etc.), which they commented that most parents appreciate. Parents from other religions often experience issues. All schools and groups cited examples of the many students/beneficiaries from other faiths they receive. However, the extent to which students from different religions must comply with their religious practices is unclear, which confuses parents. For instance, a Catholic FBS highlighted that they have issues with the uniform in a community with a high concentration of Pentecostal families. Their students use the official public-school uniform, which requires both boys and girls to wear pants. In the tradition of the Pentecostal church of the community, females do not wear pants. The FBS reported that they make concessions with other things but that the uniform needs to be respected. These frictions are a

more common problem that apply more to Catholic FBSs. In the case of Protestant schools, since most of them were initially private¹⁶, their enrollment mostly aligns with their professed religion.

According to FBSs consulted, they tell parents upfront about their religious affiliation and the implications of that. However, FBSs also agreed that parents agree to comply with the religious practices because they want to access what they perceive as better education. The government does not have a specific policy on what the schools are supposed to do in such cases. The **Norms for Harmonious Coexistence in Dominican Public and Private Schools** do not clearly define how these situations should be dealt with further than prohibiting religion-based discrimination (Art.5 and 19). FBSs create their own protocols, and consequently, the extent of religious activity varies significantly even across schools of the same religion.

Control of admissions. FBSs receive large volumes of applications for admission each year. They reported that they “*don’t promote [the school during] inscription season, and it still is overwhelming.*” They said the high demand is more prevalent in schools that offer technical education, as parents perceive that their children could get a job right after graduation. In such a context, they often have to create admission filters to choose among the applicants. Those filters can result in not admitting children with the lowest income background. A FBS reported that they require active commitment from the parents, if the parents do not engage enough with their children’s education, they are warned they will be “*invited to retire from the school.*” Two schools confirmed that they request grades from previous years and give entry exams. A consulted FBS recognized how this could be exclusionary, and they usually reserve a quota for children from the lowest income sectors and ensured it was a common practice. In the case of technical schools, an interviewed school considers the poorest of the poor may not take advantage of this quota, as parents need to have certain levels of commitment to endure the enrollment stages and processes.

They explained that some of these Primary schools are in such marginalized communities that they think that even with admissions control, their students are still highly disadvantaged. A FBS in one of the lowest income neighborhoods of eastern Santo Domingo expressed that they make efforts to attract the mothers of the most disadvantaged students to apply to their school. Nonetheless, they think that some degree of parental commitment is needed for the student to succeed, which justifies the control of admissions in their rationale.

Sexual education. Many FBSs have a strong position regarding issues of gender identity (e.g. trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming, etc.). Some FBS stakeholders spoke of a “*gender identity agenda.*” They reported that they carefully verify that all the class material teaches sexual education in line with their principles: “*The gender issue is a non-starter for us. We carefully evaluate all programs that reach, because sometimes the [gender ideology] messages are hidden, and there are things that we don’t approve. . .we offer classes and conferences with Christian professionals that offer counseling with our faith in mind.*” They are not open to exploring any form of gender identity education in their curriculum. It is important to note that this is also a reality for other public schools. However, other public schools might not be as thorough in maintaining the information out of the students’ reach.

Accessibility

State-run schools have a higher presence in rural areas, and 15.8% of those schools’ enrollment is in rural areas, whereas 6.0% of FBS enrollment is in rural areas (MINERD, 2018a). However, a Catholic network highlighted that they have schools in remote rural communities. A protestant FBS reported that they also have schools in remote rural communities, but they might be classified as private and

¹⁶ Some protestant schools are still transitioning to public and still charge tuition.

supported with donations. In terms of accessibility for students with disabilities, as mentioned in previous sections, they face the same struggles that other public schools do to serve them properly. FBSs expressed having students with motor impairments and autism. It is common for public schools in the country to admit these students, as instructed by MINERD, but there is no special planning to accommodate learning needs (Bonilla, 2019), and they cannot afford to adapt their infrastructure.

Safety

FBSs consulted expressed that they are exposed to the same kinds of environments as the rest of the communities. Thus, they are extra careful with protecting their assets. In terms of the safety of children within the schools, they pride themselves on the fact that security in their infrastructure is one of the top reasons families describe them as higher quality than state-run schools. They recognize that children from violent environments have incidents with each other, but “*not more than what other schools would experience.*”

Consulted FBSs mentioned that there was a fear from parents and personnel when classes reopened after the pandemic. One of the schools opened, and the principal was able to reduce anxiety by improving cleaning protocols and making masks available.

STUDY QUESTION 4: PARTNERING WITH FAITH BASED SCHOOLS AND ACTORS

4. What are the effective ways and opportunities for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with faith-based organizations to leverage/improve education outcomes?

Summary Q4

Take advantage of their community connections. FB groups and schools have critical information to reach disadvantaged populations. They can be partners in co-designing initiatives and counseling youth who do not study or work, or school reinsertion programs.

Accommodate students with challenges. FB reported the need to help serve students with learning gaps (pandemic), students with disabilities, children that work, undocumented youth, and students that cannot speak Spanish.

Support to expand Technical Education. The highly demanded service requires significant investments, and FBSs understand that partnerships are needed to expand the service.

Conclusion: The most effective way to partner with FB schools and groups is to pay attention to the specific shortcomings and challenges they know their services have. These groups understand community needs and what services need to be improved (e.g., accommodate students with disabilities), expanded (e.g., Technical Education), or reformulated (e.g., school reinsertion initiatives)

Donors

Faith-based schools and organizations know the specific elements that would increase the scope of their work (e.g., bilingual teachers in Spanish and Creole, etc.). However, they struggle to make significant investments using traditional channels. In the case of MINERD, some elements of their funding are unreliable for all schools in the system. In the case of donors, faith-based schools and organizations recognize that they do not have the technical personnel to create proposals and qualify for grants. These

organizations have been part of programs financed with those funds and regret that there are no serious efforts to transfer these skills to them. A first approach to engage with FBSs is to revise the strategies of knowledge transfer or create them if they are not in place.

Faith-based schools and organizations' close relationship with the community can be an asset for donors. This relationship allows them to 1) have a clear inventory of what is needed, 2) have a curated selection of initiatives that they know are effective in the specific context of the community they serve, and 3) gain the respect and trust of the community based on their consistency and long-term commitment to them. A second opportunity is to co-design initiatives with coalitions of faith-based schools in specific geographic areas.

Government

Faith-based groups and schools' operations and planning are affected by constant changes in authorities. Although these changes might be inevitable, incoming authorities need to be aware of the value of their role in the communities. Government must consider this unintended negative effect as part of the decision-making process of changing the officials. At the same time, key institutions within the education sector should have transition committees to ensure continuity in services and agreements.

Additionally, delays in operational funds harm FBSs' ability to offer high-quality services. Public schools need a decentralized school board to receive funds for operations directly. In 2021, only 22.7% of all public schools had a decentralized school board (IDEC, 2021). Although this represents an improvement to previous years (IDEC, 2021), it leaves a significant proportion of schools receiving funds from their school districts and experiencing delays. The situation does not affect polytechnical schools, but it does affect smaller schools outside of Santo Domingo, including FBSs.

Faith-based Organizations

While public private partnerships with faith-based schools in the DR are long-standing and have grown in recent years, there are social trends that may challenge this arrangement. As society in the DR becomes increasingly pluralistic, both religiously diverse and with a growing number of non-religious adherents, there may be challenges to the current public-private partnership arrangements with faith-based schools. While the inclusion of public-funding for Evangelical schools may have partially addressed perceived inequities, questions and potential tensions remain.

Questions may range from the autonomy (versus state regulatory control) of religious schools over issues like staff hiring/firing or the content of sexual education. There may also be increasing demands from parents and students who do not adhere to the religious beliefs of the schools to opt out of religious programming. These questions are both political and legal and will likely be worked out and evolve over time.

Partnership Opportunities in Foundational Skills

Dominican authorities decided to re-open public schools for in-person classes in September 2021. Post-pandemic learning gaps are an important challenge for public schools. FBSs reported that virtual education significantly improved during the quarantine but that not all students had reliable sources and access to the internet. In particular, a FBS said that the most disadvantaged children did not have access to virtual resources during the quarantine. Faith-based groups in the communities support local schools by adding hours of literacy instruction in the afternoons and weekends. There are near-term partnership opportunities to augment and institutionalize these valuable efforts by faith-based groups.

The communities highly value faith-based schools' services, often leading to higher demand than available seats. However, this opportunity might be out of reach for a population segment. Public schools, specifically FBSs, struggle to accommodate students with disabilities. Aside from specific small-scale initiatives (UNDP,2021), most public schools do not have the means to accommodate special needs. As a result, there are significant gaps in educational attainment between citizens with disabilities and the rest of the population (UNDP,2021). If given the task, FBSs could be a strong ally in the community to improve the situation. In particular, in partnering with MINERD to improve the infrastructural and pedagogical constraints.

FBSs are open to receiving Spanish-Creole bilingual teachers in the geographic areas where the proportion of Haitian immigrants is larger. The provision of services to that segment of the population is challenging without proper communication mechanisms. These limitations often cause Haitian immigrants to repeat grades because they do not understand the language (UNESCO, 2021). Additionally, the enrollment of undocumented Haitian students in schools is challenging and depends significantly on the school personnel and their understanding of current regulations (UNESCO,2021). Creole-speaking personnel may help improve these challenges for immigrant children and increase their parents' engagement in school activities. Partnerships to support advocacy for immigrant educational needs and direct funding for bilingual teachers or aides may help improve the situation.

Finally, one of FBS' most valued contributions is technical education (secondary level), and they cannot meet the demand for it. FBSs technical secondary schools increase the employment possibilities of their graduates. Even though expanding the offer of these schools is part of the government's long-term plans (MINERD, 2020), there are short-term elements that can augment their impact, such as donating a workshop or improving a community vocational training school¹⁷. For instance, a FBS reported, "We need to create partnerships to develop new titles, for example, electricity, refrigeration, and mechatronics. *We know they would have high demand, but those workshops require millions, and the equipment is expensive.*"

Partnership Opportunities in Crisis and Conflict Situations

Immigration. The situation in Haiti over the past years has created new instances of vulnerability for adolescents and children. Faith-based groups have the proximity to the situation and the intention to support unaccompanied (and accompanied) immigrant minors. This support includes providing them with food and hygiene and attempting to protect their rights in deportation efforts. In a context of a social debate over the migratory decisions of the government (Castropé,2022), these organizations could be allies in protecting children's rights without being perceived as political actors in the discussion. The two main challenges reported were: 1) the cost of providing lunch to the children that work on the streets and 2) legal counseling to protect their rights in deportation processes. These two challenges could be a start for partnerships in support of this vulnerable group.

Violence and emotional support. FBSs reported that their schools receive children experiencing traumatic experiences in their homes. These scenarios are characteristic of the context in the neighborhoods where FBSs are located. A FBS reported that psychologists and counselors work full-time in their schools. However, the number of psychologists per student experiencing trauma may not be adequate. Any program that increases psychological support for children experiencing trauma could be beneficial.

¹⁷ In the Dominican Republic, community training schools are local workshop that commonly work in partnership with the INFOTEP to provide vocational training. This education only requires completion of 8th grade as prerequisite. The other two forms of technical education in the country are 1) Professional technical training, which is offered in the second cycle of secondary, and two 2) Higher technical education, which is offered in universities in a 2-year format.

in these contexts. For instance, FBSs mentioned that they serve children whose parents are incarcerated. Partnerships to support those specific situations would be welcomed by school networks.

Reinsertion support. Consulted FB groups agreed on the difficulties of reaching lasting results with their reinsertion programs. FB groups reported that these programs require significant effort and consistency. However, after children are finally enrolled in school, they often only remain for one year. The reason they identified is unrelated to their academic performance or adaptation to the school. They consider that the financial contribution to their households represents an essential part of the families' budget, ultimately forcing them to return to work. There are opportunities to institutionalize these FB groups' work and create linkages to government programs. For example, once the children are incorporated into the system, FB groups could have some form of accreditation that allows them to expedite their enrollment into the government's conditional transfer assistance program.

Partnership Opportunities with Youth and Workforce Development

Entrepreneurship. Vocational training in the communities is offered to improve income-generating capacities. Undocumented individuals are welcomed in community schools, but they may not be able to receive a certificate afterward. The FB groups reported that they try to promote entrepreneurship for this group. However, their income levels and lack of access to the formal financial system constrain entrepreneurship for these populations. Partnerships to improve the entrepreneurship opportunities of undocumented individuals would help improve the outcomes of these programs.

Reaching youth in need of counseling. The number of youths that do not work or study increased during the pandemic. According to official data, the number of individuals between 15-24 years old with these characteristics increased by 44.2% in 2020 compared to the previous year, 59.0% of these individuals are females (ENCFT, 2020). According to UNFPA (2021), only 2 out of 10 teenage mothers return to school after they give birth. FB groups consider that their precarious economic situation exacerbates the situation when they have a second child, and thus focus on helping them prevent repeat teenage pregnancies. FB groups' close contact with these populations can help reach them to provide counsel and connect them with other programs that may help them.

Technical secondary where the offer is still low. Despite the high demand for technical secondary education and its perceived value, there are provinces where its offer still fails to meet demand. For instance, in 2020-2021, the 9th educational region¹⁸ only had two polytechnical schools that received approximately 500 students out of the more than 15,500 students enrolled in the secondary level. Partnerships with faith-based networks could help identify schools to be adapted to providing technical education.

Childcare and early childhood. As mentioned above, the DR has a high rate of teenage pregnancy and low coverage for public early childhood education. The coverage for children 3-5 in 2019-20 was 57.8%, although it has been increasing in the past decade (IDEC, 2021). Recently, the government started an aggressive initiative to improve coverage for ages 3-5 enabling more sections of the grades kinder and pre-kinder that serve children of ages 3 and 4, respectively (INAIPI, 2022). Additionally, the government plans to add more Centers for Attention to Early Childhood (CAIPI) and Centers for Attention to Children and Families (CAFI) to the current 629 community centers operating in the country (INAIPI, 2022). The government has recently started agreements with non-profit and civil society institutions to fund CAFI centers managed by third parties. A consulted FB group mentioned that they are evaluating with authorities the possibility of opening and operating a CAIPI in their community. There are 29 CAFIs

¹⁸ The country is divided into 18 educational regions. The 9th one is called Mao and is located in the northwest part of the island.

and 1 CAIPI under these agreements (INAIPI,2022), and faith-based groups expressed interest in these partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Recommendation 1. **Eliminate the constraints that cause funding unreliability.** Increase the urgency of the efforts to create decentralized school boards nationwide. If this effort eliminates the delays in their payment, it will eliminate FBSs' need to rely on small contributions from parents.

Recommendation 2. **Strengthen partnerships with FBSs to increase the offer of Technical Secondary Education.** Technical schools are willing to expand their capacity, which would mean offering expanded services and more seats in quality technical schools. FBSs are already a valuable partner and could be essential in expanding this service.

Recommendation 3. **Approach faith-based networks to discuss agreements to manage CAIPI and CAFI.** Faith-based nonprofits are already offering some of the signature services of the CAIPI and CAFI (e.g., Parent training/counseling.) A partnership with them would allow them to expand their services and with institutions that the community is already familiar with.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

Recommendation 1. **Specific investments to current FBSs that offer Technical Secondary Education.** While significant public investments are needed to meet the demand for Technical Secondary Education, there are specific needs that would improve its outcomes in the short run. FBSs reported that new workshops/infrastructure would enable them to improve their services. New workshops/infrastructure would also allow other schools in their network to start offering the services in low-coverage areas.

Recommendation 2. **Leverage FBO knowledge of the community to design initiatives.** Interviewed FBOs consistently showed a deep understanding of the specific needs of their community in a wide variety of aspects. These included health conditions, educational attainment, immigration status, and violent incidents. Some of these institutions have documented this as diagnostic reports of their community. However, when donors implement initiatives, for the most part, FBOs are not involved.

Recommendation 3. **Support school reinsertion programs.** After almost ten years of educational reforms and investment, there are still over 16% of children and youth aged 5-21 outside of the school (IDEC, 2021). The reasons range from not speaking Spanish to child labor and teenage pregnancies. These programs are expensive and require more funding than what small non-profits usually administer. FBOs have demonstrated experience in this area and know what strategies work for their community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAITH-BASED ACTORS

Recommendation 1. **Work on a national protocol for public private partnerships.** The protocol would create a clear line regarding the commitments of each party, including a legal framework for PPPs with FBSs so that they are not subject to ad hoc changes with new administrations.

Recommendation 2. **Evaluate their policies for controlling admissions.** Other state-run public schools are not allowed to control admissions. FBSs could enter an agreement that sets specific quotas

for the community's most disadvantaged children. This agreement would bring clarity to the highly heterogeneous process.

Recommendation 3. Inter-faith networks for coordination and advocacy. Faith-based organizations and schools work together within their communities regardless of religious affiliation. That is, churches from different religions coordinate efforts, and serve beneficiaries from different religions than the one they profess. The creation of a network for coordinating interactions with the government may positively influence their outcomes. Such networks have already formed in the past for very specific reasons, such as advocating against a sexual education reform. The recommendation is to strengthen the existing relationships and formalize a nationwide space of collaboration.

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APPENDIX

AI. KEY INFORMANTS

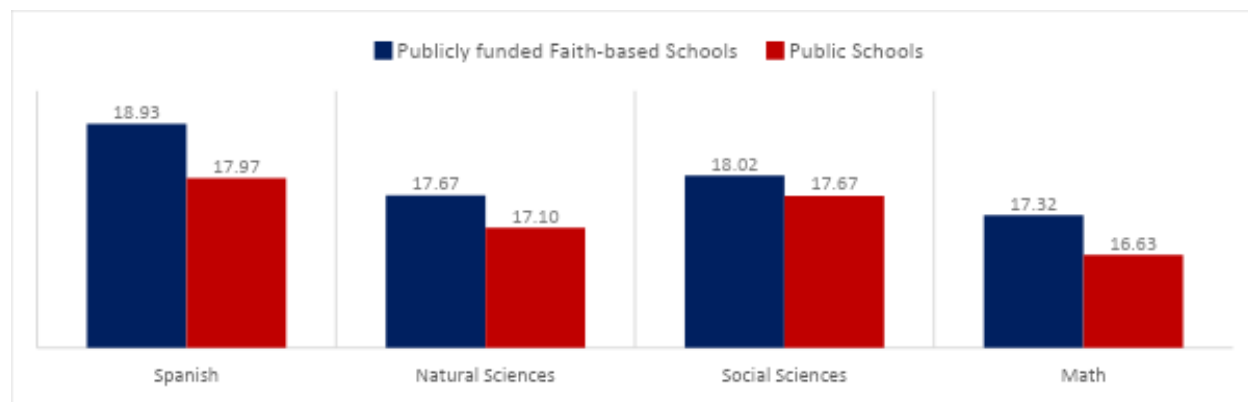
Table 1. Key informants from the faith-based education community

Informants	Type	Notes
Fe y Alegria	Association of Catholic publicly funded schools	Run a nationwide network under agreement with the Ministry of Education
Nacional Association of Christian Schools (ACSI)	Association of Protestant schools	Provide technical support to a national network of protestant schools.
National Association of Adventist Schools	Association of Adventist schools	Run a nationwide network of private and publicly-funded Adventist schools
Polytechnic Ave María	Catholic publicly funded school (Secondary)	A large polytechnical school located in a low-income neighborhood of Northern Santo Domingo.
San Lorenzo School	Catholic publicly funded school (Elementary)	A small elementary school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Eastern Santo Domingo.
Evangelical School Adonai	Evangelical publicly funded school	A large elementary school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Eastern Santo Domingo.
La Merced Foundation	Faith-based non-profit organization	Small nonprofit focused on school reinsertion and other educational projects located in a semi-rural low-income community.
Caminante Education Project	Faith-based non-profit organization	Mid-size nonprofit located in a semi-rural low income community. They focus on youth protection and educational projects.
World Vision	Faith-based non-profit organization	Large nonprofit that manages large programs with international organizations and the government. They work in partnership with protestant churches for specific projects
School Regulation authorities	Authorities from the Ministry of Education	Long term public officials from different areas of the Ministry of Education

A2. TEST SCORE COMPARISONS

National Tests (12th Grade)

Chart 1. National Tests mean by school type



Source : MINERD

Table 2. Descriptive statistics National Tests

Subject	Publicly funded faith based*		Public school**	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Spanish	18.93	4.26	17.97	4.05
Natural Sciences	17.67	3.31	17.10	3.19
Social Sciences	18.02	3.25	17.67	3.17
Math	17.32	3.67	16.63	3.41

Source: MINERD * N= 134,429 ** N=11,611

Table 3. Propensity Score Matching results: Publicly funded Faith Based vs Public Schools

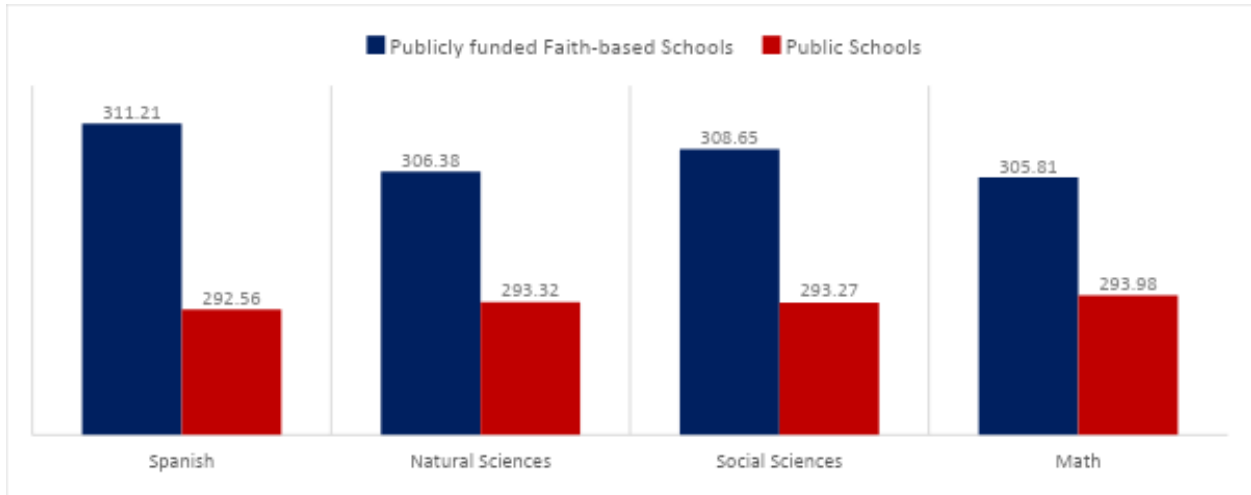
Subject	Difference	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
Spanish	-0.513	0.058	-8.790	0.000	-0.627 -0.399
Natural Sciences	-0.421	0.052	-8.080	0.000	-0.523 -0.319
Social Sciences	-0.331	0.456	-7.260	0.000	-0.420 -0.242
Math	-0.304	0.052	-5.840	0.000	-0.406 -0.202

Source: MINERD

Note: Propensity Score Matching using (1) nearest neighbor. Matching based on a Logit treatment model. Independent variables: Students' sex, age, whether student attends to a Polytechnical high school, the average score of their peers (school), the size of their school (in terms of students), whether school is on a rural area, whether the student attends an 8-hour schedule school (Extended Schedule School), whether their school is located in the greater Santo Domingo area.

Diagnostic Test (6th grade)

Chart 2. Diagnostic Tests mean by school type



Source : MINERD

Table 4. Descriptive statistics Diagnostic Tests

Subject	Publicly funded faith based		Public school	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Spanish	311.21	49.05	292.56	47.28
Natural Sciences	306.38	48.94	293.32	46.85
Social Sciences	308.65	49.37	293.27	47.09
Math	305.81	48.25	293.98	47.57

Source: MINERD *N= 119,560 **N= 9,339

Table 5. Propensity Score Matching results: Publicly funded Faith Based vs Public Schools

Subject	Difference	Std. Err.	z	P> z 	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Spanish	-1.744	0.840	-2.080	0.038	-3.391	-0.098
Natural Sciences	-0.097	0.901	-0.110	0.914	-1.863	1.670
Social Sciences	-0.986	0.892	-1.110	0.269	-2.734	0.762
Math	-2.092	0.894	-2.340	0.019	-3.845	-0.339

Note: Propensity Score Matching using (1) nearest neighbor. Matching based on a Logit treatment model.

Independent variables: Students' sex, age, the average score of their peers (school), the size of their school (in terms of students), whether school is on a rural area, whether the student an 8-hour schedule school (Extended Schedule School), student's household socioeconomic index, schools' average socioeconomic index.