

May 2016 - Strategic Plan - “Look Up - Climb Up - What do we see?”
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With God’s blessings and guidance we have been on the right track at Medicine Hat Christian School in Alberta, Canada. It all started in the fall of 1982 with 34 students, 3 teachers, and a few parent volunteers all housed in two rented classrooms in the city. Then already by 1985, there were 116 students and plans to build a \$600,000 building in Ross Glen - a new subdivision of the city. The target opening date for the new building was September 2, 1986 and with God’s provision - it was a success. In 1995, another wing and eight classrooms were added to the building. In 1999, a gym was added. In 2011, another (junior high) wing was added.

It is now 2016 and the question is - what now? We have almost 300 students. How do we engage a changing demographic and a growing Christian school population? How do we monitor that our Christian teaching, Christian principles, and Statement of Faith are being upheld? Clearly, now is the time to look up, climb up, and get a proper view to do some serious planning.

Thanks to guidance from the Van Lunen Centre and Henry Contant (consultant) our school has been focused on a **strategic plan**. We have set goals for a flexible and dynamic plan for 3, 5, and 10 years into our future. This is an exciting time for our school community.

The first thing our Board (Society Executive) did in September 2015 was to reflect on our school history and mission. We needed to examine and understand our past before we could plan and think into the future. We discussed the school mission and what “*developing a Christ-centered community of learners for His joyful service*” actually means. We needed time to dream and create a Christ-centered vision for where the school could be in 5-10 years. One of the first items on everyone’s mind was our facility. Our challenge was that we might run out of space next year - let alone 5-10 years down the road. What was our plan for the building?

Next, since the mission of “Christ-centered community of learners” and “joyful service” is who we are as a school in our present state, what is our MHCS educational vision? A vision is what we want to achieve in the future for our students, staff, parents, and wider community. The vision of MHCS is literally transformational - “Teaching for Transformation” (TfT) is empowering transformation or change through Jesus Christ - change towards God Worshipping, Idolatry-Discerning, Earth-Keeping, Beauty Creating, Justice-Seeking, Creation-Enjoying, Servant-Working, Community Building, Image-Reflecting, and Order-Discovering. As a Society Executive and School Council we have talked about Teaching for Transformation in our classrooms but what is the plan for actually measuring successful integration of TfT? What percentage of everything that goes on at the school comes under the authority of Scripture? We need a way to measure and “keep score” of successes and growth in our mission and vision.

I was proud of our Society Executive in their next two actions. **Action one** - it was agreed to contact our Prairie Association of Christian Schools and ask if we could take part in the Christian School Growth Program. This would involve the Executive Director of PCCE - Elco Vandergrift - and a small team visiting our school during the school year to meet with Society Executive, the admin team, business manager, staff, and students to determine how MHCS is meeting the mission and vision. Is our Christian programming engaging students and parents in an impactful way? What evidence do we have? Through the School Growth Program students, staff, and parents would be surveyed through PCCE in conjunction with Cardus. Cardus is a think tank - an ideas lab for social innovation and has been intricately involved in research work around Christian schooling in North America. Having a long term agreement to continue with the Cardus surveys will allow us to track data and see trends which will help us continue to fulfil our school mission and vision. The Cardus surveys target grade nine students and parents, first year alumni, and a school administrator over a five year period.

Action two - consulting with Henry Contant to plan a MHCS Town Hall meeting for January 2016 was another excellent strategy. We needed to engage our parents and community membership to hear their suggestions, ideas, and feedback. Henry is a faculty member at the Van Lunen Center (Executive Management in Christian Schools Program) and a former Executive Director of the Society of Christian Schools in BC. He was also willing to work with Elco on the Town Hall which aligned with the Christian School Growth Program. It was a perfect match. A time was set for Friday and Saturday January 8 and 9. We had approximately 70 parents, staff, and community members attend and take part in the Town Hall.

Through the Town Hall two major themes emerged: (1) people were concerned about space and wanted to explore building expansion and (2) there was feedback around developing a high school at MHCS. We currently serve kindergarten to grade nine.

Soon after the Town Hall, two Task Forces were struck comprised of 6-7 interested parents and/or staff. Each Task Force was led by a Society Executive member and given a time-frame of mid-April to make recommendations to Society Executive. This was a short time frame but having this focus and sense of urgency was helpful in keeping the momentum going. It was exciting to see the engagement from parents even after the Town Hall; in fact, we had more volunteers than we needed for the Task Forces.

Results of Task Force #1 - Facilities/Expansion Task Force - led by Darren Turner:

- After various meetings and talking with two different architects - an architect was selected to present at our Spring Annual General Meeting on May 31. We are proud of the commitment and joyful service parents demonstrated through the Task Force. The plan is that the architect will share some initial drawings and help cast the vision for a future expansion. There has been discussion of possibilities such as building in phases: (A) four classrooms and open area, (B) more classrooms, and (C) another gym. For the

upcoming year we will make due with the classrooms we have and (as necessary) begin a process in September with the school district and Alberta Education if a modular is needed for 2017-2018. Since the Task Force, Society Executive has made contact with Zach Clark a consultant through Van Lunen who has expertise in Christian school capital campaigns. Society Executive is discussing the possibility of hiring a consultant and/or a development coordinator to assist us in these and other areas.

Results of Task Force #2 - High School Task Force - led by Ryan Schindel:

- After meetings and discussions the high school task force looked at programming options, budgeting, staffing, and connected with other Christian high schools. Ryan Schindel was able to gather information from the acting Associate Superintendent and principal of Medicine Hat High School which is our feeder high school. A recommendation Ryan made at our last Society Executive meeting is that we would not want to move into the virtual high school model but perhaps core courses could be offered at our school in some kind of partnership with the high school. Or staff could be shared between the two schools. Another recommendation was to expand slowly, first offering a grade 10, then the next year grade 11, and so on. A next step would be determining when and which class to start a high school. Presently, the grade five class (grade six next year) is the largest group of students in the school at 40 students. An additional survey for a targeted (classroom - parent) group is the plan for the future.

Strategic Plan:

What is the plan for Christian Education at MHCS?

- a) **Immediately:** Use the results from the PCCE Christian School Growth Program to benchmark how we are meeting our Christian mission and vision. Continue with Cardus surveys over the next four years to monitor progress.

- b) **Immediately and Year One / Two**: present the vision for MHCS - why we value Christian Education, why a facility expansion will benefit our students, benefit parents, the Church, the Christian Community, and the general community. Review governance structures to give parents and volunteers further voice to allow them to feel invested and engaged in the planning. Future architectural drawings will be presented, and a consultant and/or development officer will be hired to help build a strong MHCS capital campaign. Financial stewardship is key. Annual giving, wills and estate giving, and legacy giving need to be explored. A strong relationship with School District No. 76 will be upheld. If a modular is needed we will continue to collaborate with SD 76 and Alberta Education. Cardus surveys continue.
- c) **Year Three / Four** - Facility expansion begins. Shovel in ground. Continue planning addition of grade 10 (high school) and coordinate high school with the expansion project. The idea of both a “general” expansion and a “high school” expansion could create even more excitement and motivation in our community (eg. motivation for parents committed to high school and general excitement for more elementary and junior high space in the school). Another consideration is more room for preschool or early learning programming at MHCS. Early learning is a foundational piece to bring students and families into the school. Cardus surveys continue.
- d) **Year Five / Six** - Expansion complete (entire expansion - or in phases A-B-C). First grade ten class initiated. If in phases, coordinate expansion phases B and C as the elementary, middle school and high school grows. Final Cardus survey is in year five.
- e) **Year Seven to Ten** - As school grows, continue to expand (phase C - gym) and continue to move the same classes forward through high school - grade 10,11, and 12.

In conclusion, we see a strong future for Medicine Hat Christian School as we maintain our Christ-centered learning and focus. May we be like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24); if we lack wisdom and we ask God - wisdom will be given to us (James 1:5); and as Jesus said (Luke 14:27-35) may we be the salt of the earth - "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him...or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?...He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

NOTE: Look up, climb up, what do you see? The phrase "look up, climb up, what do you see?" relates to the video presentation for the strategic plan where a journey is documented. We need to reach a high vantage point to look ahead and see clearly the planning and direction our school needs to go. To God be the Glory.