With steady growth, a stable faculty, and a supportive community, Belleville Christian School (population 105 students, 13 staff) began the hunt for land on which to build an institution of 21st Century learning to replace the elderly building it currently called home. When the project started, this vision was a distant dream, but Christmas Eve brought a surprise email. In the fall 2011, BCS becomes the owner of 6.5 acres of prime real estate, and this project becomes the philosophical blueprint for that facility’s mission and structural design.

Recognizing the value of a formal strategic planning process, the purpose of this project was to set the stage for such a process by engaging first in assessing our current strengths, then generating a vision around those strengths should they be more intentionally developed and afforded stable funding. The culminating exercise was then to share these ideas with our community and generate support, enthusiasm, and ultimately investment in the strategic planning process.

To achieve this, a group of 8 “visionaries” were selected and invited to participate and form the Home Group. The ideal members were considered to be influential risk takers in their chosen professions, with a demonstrated commitment to Christian Education. The Home Group met three times to walk through the Hedgehog process as outlined in the article by James Tracy, and identify 4 core strengths to be developed:

**The Smart School (Cyberschool)**

**The Green School**

**The Christian School of the Arts**

**Truly Special Education for All**

The 8 members of the Home Group divided into pairs according to their interests and formed an Expert Group around one of the cores. They spent 2 months researching what other schools were doing and the directions these trends were taking education in the 21st century. On two separate evenings, the EGs presented their findings to the HG and in some cases, shared their visions, models, designs, and theme songs. The final meeting of the HG summarized our accomplishments, evaluated the process, sought ways the ideas could be intertwined and be mutually sustaining, and made plans to hold casual social events to share the ideas with the stakeholders(coffee house, dinner parties, bbq).

Our intended outcomes were not overly ambitious, and by following the plan laid out by James Tracy, the team was easily able to meet these objectives:

- **Achieve clarity re what school is / is not**
- **Define who the school is (not) good for**
- **Define what the school can (not) become**
- **Identify our niche and own it**

The goals were pretty simple, but the project quickly evolved into an exercise in inspiring, unleashing, and capturing the imagination of a community. Consequently, as we approached the realization of this goal, there were several unintended results that profoundly enhanced the exercise:

- The launch of a monthly newsletter to be carried on by the newly struck capital campaign team.
- New investment in the purchase of technologies and initiatives that advance the core strengths of the school.
- Higher attendance at the recent membership meeting and year end BBQ suggesting greater community engagement.
- The down payment for the land purchase was raised prior to the motion to purchase the property receiving membership approval.
- Greater interest in the School Quality Assurance Program which is another precursor to the launching of the formal strategic planning process.

We learned that vision is not something people are born with. It is a cultivated entity, and even the most apathetic community can become engaged in your school when intentional efforts are made to bring them on board in an inclusive process. We learned that you have to clearly know who are, and who you are called to be, but also to give room to dream, stretch, and take risks because God delights in blessing us beyond our wildest expectations.

I would highly recommend this process to schools preparing for a formal strategic plan. I continue to believe that my concerns over launching the strategic planning process prematurely were valid, and that BCS is well situated now to strategically build a viable Christian institution of 21st century learning that will be unlike any other school in Ontario.

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**Belleville Christian School**  
Belleville, Ontario  
Jennifer Shoniker,  
Chief Operating Officer