



Brantford Christian School

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Creating a Strategic Plan for BCS

Brief Background Information about BCS:

Brantford Christian School is an independent Christian elementary school in Brantford, Ontario that has been equipping children for life by providing excellent instruction in a safe and stimulating academic environment for over 57 years. It is situated on a stunning property on the banks of the Grand River, and currently enrolls over 280 students from families who live in the City of Brantford as well as surrounding cities and towns including Paris, St. George, Mt. Pleasant, and Alberton.

Brief Background Information about my time at BCS:

I joined Brantford Christian School in August 2016 after the former principal (of 10 years) passed away following a three-year battle with cancer. During the three years he had periods of time when he was well enough to be in the school and other times when he was not. Two vice principals had stints as acting principals during the absences as together the three formed the Administrative Team. The school year following his passing in July 2015 an internal team was put in place which included a part-time principal from another nearby Christian school who was onsite one day per school week providing support to the acting principal and the vice-principal. While those four years were difficult on so many levels for the whole school community, the school enrolment grew to over 200 students for the first time and the beginning of a facility expansion

plan was created which evolved from a \$1.1 million addition of two classrooms to a \$2.1 million addition of 4 classrooms.

In my first year at BCS the capital campaign was launched and the architectural planning for the expansion was completed. Due to a combination of thorough planning, a significant increase in enrolment that year, and the early success of the capital campaign, the BCS board and membership decided to increase the scope and budget of the \$2.1 million project to instead plan for the largest expansion possible on our property, with a \$3.5 million budget.

During these first years as principal at BCS, I initiated many changes to the curriculum, updated school policies, revamped the assessment structure, and restructured the governance model and roles (job descriptions) of staff members. However, the capital campaign and the expansion project were where the board and administration placed the most time and energy during these first three years. The expansion was completed in spring of 2019 and although the campaign continues to raise money to pay off the remainder of the balance owing, last year the decision was made to shift our focus to intentionally doing a thorough audit of what we are doing as a school, in the hopes of creating a multi-year strategic plan.

Over the three years prior, as a result of the restructuring of the governance model, the board had already moved from a management/operational board to one in the "Crow's Nest" model, a move that allowed significant time at each monthly meeting to be spent on visioning. For the first two years, much of the visioning involved the capital campaign and the facility expansion, but other topics included transportation (bussing), fundraising, and promotions. While these times of visioning certainly lead to

many fruitful discussions and ideas, and some decisions were made to change course or further develop areas of the school, these decisions did not involve the input of other stakeholders, such as members of the school staff, the families, or key donors and long-term supporters of BCS.

In spring of 2019 I was excited to be offered a place in the Van Lunen Fellows Program and hoped to have the opportunity not just learn about how to effectively lead the creation of a new strategic plan for BCS, but also the opportunity to do it as my Applied Project.

The summer session at Calvin University started me in the right direction, as it enriched and deepened my understanding of strategic planning. That summer session also helped me to see more fully and clearly the path to creating a strategic plan for BCS, while having it guided at least in part by feedback and input from the stakeholders of the BCS community.

The path included reviewing the Vision, Purpose, and Mission statements in the fall, having the stakeholders in our community complete the Parent Satisfaction and Referral Survey created and offered by GraceWorks Ministries in the winter, and then creating year one of the strategic plan by the end of June 2020 with years two and three being created over the summer and into the fall.

Due mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic, only part of the path has been travelled as described below and much of the journey lies ahead.

What did you do and what still needs to be done:

This fall, the board and administration completed a brief review of the vision, purpose, and mission statements. The revised versions of these statements [are found on our website](#).

In late January and early February 2020 the Parent Satisfaction and Referral Survey was completed by the members of the school community. At the beginning of April I received the results of the survey back from Graceworks. But given the COVID-19 pandemic and all the challenges it brought both I and the members of the Board have had very limited time to work on unpacking the extensive results and comments from the survey. Our school year officially ended on June 17 and the very next day the provincial government announced that schools should plan for every possibility for September – a full return to school, a partial return to school, or remote learning at home. Since that announcement, the focus of the Board and I has been to begin to plan for the 2020-2021 school year given those unpredictable possibilities.

Creating these fall plans will continue to be a priority over the coming weeks, since they need to be completed by the beginning of August so that the staff members have enough time to plan accordingly and so that families can also make their plans and decisions.

That said, there is certainly still a need to continue to work on the creation of the strategic plan, so we hope to resume work on the plan in mid-August when the review of the survey will be completed and when the first year of the strategic plan will be created. It is hoped that the 2020-2021 school year will be Year 1 of the plan even

though the effects of the pandemic are likely to be felt throughout it and could change the plan significantly. The hope is to create years 2 and 3 of the plan during the fall.

What did you learn and what are you still learning?

While obviously the COVID-19 Pandemic changed my course over the past number of months, I learned a lot prior to it about strategic planning and also learned more about BCS and how the various stakeholders perceive it as shown through the results of the Parental Satisfaction and Referral Survey. More specifically, I learned from the survey results that on the whole our community is very satisfied with what we are presently doing and offering at BCS, and also that they are with us in moving forward in the direction we are going. This was most clearly shown through the very high referral score we had (92). The survey showed areas of strength in principal leadership, caring and professional staff, Christ-based curriculum, strength of community, communication with the community, and the use of technology. Areas for improvement or further development were in the areas of student discipline, teaching of life skills, continuing to update curriculum, and improving parent and teacher communication. Overall, I was not surprised by the results of the survey and certainly see opportunities to work on further building on our strengths and also addressing those areas we can improve or further develop.

What difference did it make and do you think it will make?

So far the efforts of this year have provided us with a good start on the journey of creating the multi-year strategic plan. The review of the vision, purpose, and mission statements provided a good opportunity to reflect on the big picture while the

Graceworks survey allowed us to see how we were doing both with respect to living out those statements and also in the various specific areas of the school. Members of the staff and the school community have been interested in the work so far and are excited to see the development of the plan, especially as the focus for everyone for the past four years had been so strongly focussed on the facility expansion and its supporting capital campaign. When completed, the strategic plan will make a big difference in helping to intentionally shape the future of BCS as we endeavour to faithfully fulfill our vision to educate each child to serve God in every aspect of their life.