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*How should we
respond to Bill
C-4? Does the new
legislation pose a
threat to the values of
our Christian schools?
Or is it an opportunity
for reflection and
humility?*

Ed Noot

Opportunity or Threat?

Bill C-4: Opportunity or Threat?

IN DECEMBER 2021, THE MEMBERS of Canada's Parliament unanimously consented to a motion to ban conversion therapy in Canada. Unanimous consent in Parliament is a rare occurrence, meaning no Member of Parliament, from any party, rises to question, debate, or object to a motion. The unanimous consent of Bill C-4 included several MPs who openly declare themselves as Evangelical Christians and have broad-based support from Christians in their constituencies.

As we consider the question of whether Bill C-4 represents a threat or an opportunity, I submit that we dare not decry this legislation and depict Christians as the victims, without first responding in humility, contritely owning our complicity in egregious and abusive forms of conversion therapy or 'pray it away' practices that cannot be theologically, psychologically, or ethically supported. Organizations committed to conversion therapy have closed shop, most notably Exodus International, after admitting failure in their aims and acknowledging the harm caused to many by their methods. Numerous blogs, books, and articles written by gay Christians and psychologists confirm the potential harm of conversion therapy.¹

Research into the effects of conversion therapy consistently highlights the staggeringly harmful outcomes in terms of self-harm, depression, and suicide.²

Threat

Many Christian leaders decry this legislation as potentially threatening the very core of Christian Churches and institutions. Concern has been expressed about the speed of approval and the lack of debate in Parliament along with the rather broad definition of conversion therapy. These voices are rightly concerned about the broad sweeping nature of this legislation and the lack of definition of key terms and ideas. The true impact of this legislation will take years, perhaps decades, to understand as it is interpreted by government employees, agencies, law enforcement, and the courts.

Christian leaders and organizations need to carefully analyze this legislation to discern how it may be applied and how it could potentially affect Christian-based organizations. We should sharpen our understanding of this legislation and seek to thoughtfully discern any impact it may have on current ministries, programs, policies, or procedures – our due diligence as leaders demands nothing less. We also need to exercise advocacy as needed to ensure that this legislation's scope is appropriately defined. SCSBC is supporting member schools with both analysis and advocacy on this matter.

We must also make our employees aware of this legislation, helping them understand both the misguided nature of conversion therapy along with potential ramifications.



57%

of transgender and non-binary youth who have undergone conversion therapy reported a suicide attempt in the last year.



42%

of LGBTQ+ individuals who have undergone conversion therapy have attempted suicide compared to 17% who have not participated in any conversion efforts.

1. *Blue Babies Pink* podcast by Brett Harman; *Washed and Waiting* by Wesley Hill; *Torn* by Justin Lee; *Gender Dysphoria* by Mark Yarhouse; *Embodied* by Preston Sprinkle, and the film *Boy Erased* by Garrard Conley and Joel Edgerton
2. Farmer et al, *Promoting Health, Justice, and Well-Being of Minnesota's LGBTQ+ Community: Banning Conversion Therapy*, April 2020 by the Department of Social Work, Minnesota State University Mankato

Bill C-4: Opportunity or Threat?

tions of Bill C-4. Even as we help our staff members embrace a robust and diligent duty of care, school policies and procedures may need to be adjusted to ensure full compliance with this new law. We must ensure that our employees are appropriately protected from allegations, charges, or prosecution by providing clear school guidance and monitoring compliance.

We must discern how we can meet our institutional mission in compliance with this legislation, and if we believe that our mission is threatened or compromised, we must advocate accordingly, seeking clarity and justice for all.

Opportunity

As much as Bill C-4 presents a threat, it also provides Christian schools with a genuine opportunity. Some Christian advocacy groups who have responded to this legislation have sadly overlooked the opportunity that Bill C-4 presents.

While most Christian schools have not been actively involved in conversion therapy or the promotion of such, nor have we been actively involved in denouncing this practice as manipulative, abusive, and harmful to the gay Christian community. We have remained largely silent, giving a degree of credence to the notion that sexual orientation is a choice that can be managed. Our silence has supported the notion of gay Christians will be mentally and physically healthier if they shift to a heterosexual orientation. We have objectified the gay community as 'them', diminishing the respect and honour they have as 'us'; namely, fellow image-bearers of God. We have implicitly supported the notion that gay and Christian are mutually exclusive.

The Christian community, writ large, has alienated and betrayed the gay Christian community by its support for or silent response to conversion

therapy. As such, an appropriate response to Bill C-4 would be to humbly own our complicity, seek forgiveness from the gay Christian community, and commit to reconciliation, moving forward in more respectful, honouring, and faithful ways. This

legislation offers us a chance to rebuild our relationship with the sexual minority community, committing to respect, belonging, care, and love as we engage in this complex journey together.

Conclusion

We now recognize that the Christian attempts to 'take the Indian out of the child' in Residential Schools were hopelessly misguided. So, too, has been the Christian attempt to change sexual orientation through coercive and manipulative means. The discovery of unmarked graves of residential school children calls Christians to humility, contrition, and reconciliation with our first nations communities, just as

the psychological and spiritual torment caused by conversion therapy calls Christians to seek a better story with our sexual minority communities.

The title of this article is, as I hope you've realized, a false dichotomy. Bill C-4 represents both a threat and an opportunity for Christian organizations. May we be blessed with deep understanding and large-hearted wisdom, guided by the greatest commandment so that we are filled with humility, grace, courage, and compassion as we navigate our response to Bill C-4 seeking to protect the right to hold, proclaim, and share religious beliefs while demonstrating dignifying respect and love to the sexual minorities in our Christian communities and beyond. 🌈

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An appropriate response to Bill C-4 would be to humbly own our complicity, seeking forgiveness from the gay Christian community, and committing to reconciliation, moving forward in more respectful, honouring, and faithful ways.

Managing School Finances in Uncertain Times

RECORD HIGH INFLATION, reports of the “Great Resignation,” predictions of rising interest rates, uncertainty about economic recovery after the pandemic, political and societal unrest both at home and abroad...the list could go on, but one thing is clear: it has become increasingly difficult to predict the future and make plans for the financial sustainability of our organizations. What can our schools do to combat this uncertainty and walk into the future with confidence? Let’s take a deeper look.

Inflation

Inflation is currently at levels not seen for thirty years, reaching 5.1% in February 2022. Inflation impacts schools from many sides, increasing expenses and creating upward pressure on salaries as staff struggle with the higher cost of living. But parents will also feel pinched by the higher costs of basic items, meaning they may resist the tuition increases that the school needs to balance its books.

Schools need to strike the right balance between managing expenses and increasing tuition. A focus on staffing efficiency and temporary limits to discretionary spending demonstrate to stakeholders

that the school is doing its part to steward its resources wisely. Meanwhile, parents will be more accepting of tuition increases when they know the bulk of those funds are going towards better compensation for school staff. Studies have shown that increases to tuition have little overall effect on enrolment demand (Independent School Management, Measuring Success and the National Business Officers Association, 2017), so boards should resist the fear that parents will flee the school in large numbers when tuition goes up. Schools are better off having an effective tuition assistance program than keeping tuition low across the board.

The Bank of Canada currently predicts that inflation will remain high through 2022, easing to 2.5% by the second half of 2023 and 2% in 2024 (Bank of Canada, 2022). The current high rates are mostly a result of supply chain issues which should resolve as the world moves out of the pandemic, but new strains of COVID-19 and war in Ukraine have added further uncertainty about how long this will last. Schools that have set aside some reserve funds in the past few years should be able to weather this period, but schools without cash or available credit facilities may need to adjust course a bit more.



Interest Rates

Interest rates in Canada are closely connected to inflation and are managed by the Bank of Canada through its monetary policy. Generally, the Bank of Canada raises its interest rate when inflation is above its target of 2% and lowers its interest rate when inflation is low. The Bank's monetary policy is future-oriented, since it takes time for policy decisions to work their way through the system and have an impact on inflation, so the Bank's interest rate is based more on where it expects inflation to be in the future rather than where it is now. As anticipated, the Bank of Canada raised its rates in March and April, and further increases in 2022 are expected. Schools with flexible rate debt are well-advised to consult with their financial institutions about how best to manage their interest rate risk in the coming year.

The Pandemic, Economic Recovery, and the Great Resignation

The Canadian economy appeared to be bouncing back as the approach to COVID-19 changed from a pandemic to an endemic virus, but rising costs and supply chain issues have muted this recovery to some degree. The Bank of Canada is forecasting growth at 4.25% in 2022 and 3.25% in 2023 (Bank of Canada, 2022). While there is no doubt of some ups and downs to come, particularly due to record government spending and debt levels and political conflicts in parts of the world, signs are that slow but steady growth will continue. This gives some hope for the continued growth of both enrolment and charitable giving as income and wealth are preserved in the long run.

The impact of the "Great Resignation" arising from the pressures of the pandemic, and the ongoing shortage of educational staff in BC means that schools ignore this phenomenon at their peril. Never has it been so important to steward our human resources to the same degree as our financial resources (Shields, 2022). Fair compensation and a good benefits package should be a key component of a school's strategy, but staff engagement is equally important. Research has revealed that millennials are different from their boomer parents when it comes to work. They value organizational culture, work-life balance, performance feedback, growth opportunities, and connection to a greater purpose equal to or more than annual salary increases (Gilbert, 2011). Schools that engage their staff on this level will be able to hire and retain the human resources they need to provide the excellent education that parents expect and students deserve.

Our Only Comfort

Schools can and should do their best to plan for the future, get good financial advice, and steward their resources well (both financial and human), but ultimately we all draw on the assurance that God is in control, He cares for us, and He will provide all that we need. When times are full of uncertainty, knowing that we belong to Him is still our greatest strength and comfort. 🌈

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The second year of the revamped summer **RESIDENCY: A PLACE FOR CHRISTIAN DEEPER LEARNING**. The Residency starts as a week-long intensive professional development opportunity equipping educators to implement Christian deeper learning into their current practice. Then school-based teams are supported throughout the year on an agreed-upon schedule.



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*What's keeping you
from being thankful?*

Grati



Photo: Dabby Hudson / Unsplash

Gratitude

GOD DESIGNED HUMANS to be interdependent. He also designed humans to benefit from showing gratitude for the positive impact of God, others, and nature. Social science research confirms this. Gratitude makes us better, more faithful human beings.

For Christians, the ability to live and maintain a gratitude-filled life comes from fidelity to and trust in a Creator. As we acknowledge, embrace, and deepen our understanding of and relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, we naturally feel an outpouring of awe and gratitude. Is it possible that what's holding you back from a life of gratitude is not your circumstances, but rather forgetting who each human being is in the eyes of God?

The pursuit of a “gratitude competency” is an invitation to filter all competency development through the lens of trust in God. It is also an invitation to align a provincial curriculum focused on competency development with a Christian school's vision for learning. By seeing gratitude as a natural outflowing of staff and classroom practice, life at school focuses on the interdependence of healthy community, the social unit of meaning. By regularly centring practices on gratitude, the entire community becomes oriented outside of self and focuses on the call to love God, neighbour, and therefore, creation.

The science supports it,¹ Jesus demonstrates it,² and yet we all know that living a life of gratitude is hard. Seeing gratitude as a competency invites staff and students into a more faithful way of being a community. Imagine if your students, staff, parents, and alumni are known in your community for their gratitude-filled countenance. Is there a better contribution to the common good? Interested in developing a community of gratitude in your city? Consider investing time in these key areas.

1. <https://www.happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>

2. Luke 24:13-32, John 6:1-14

Grati

COMMUNITY

- *Create a prayer and gratitude wall in a prominent place near the school's entrance. Encourage students, staff, and parents to post prayers and thanksgiving as they come and go from the building.*
- *Ensure gratitude plays a prominent role in social media posts, newsletters, annual general meetings, and other public communication.*
- *Invite ideas from parents, staff, and students on "Thankful Thursdays."*
- *Share learning stories with the broader community including testimonials from staff and students about what they are thankful for as they engage in Christian Deeper Learning initiatives.*
- *Include an opportunity for mutual gratitude during donor visits.*
- *Look for opportunities to show gratitude to the broader community by thanking tournament organizers and city employees who support the infrastructure in your community.*

STAFF

- *Encourage personal, specific expressions of gratitude as part of parent-teacher conferences and communications of learning.*
- *Participate in regular gratitude practices as a staff, such as secret gratitude partners (using a random name selector, staff are assigned a person to get to know or connect with over a set amount of time. At the end of the time, participants will be invited to share a specific point of gratitude regarding one aspect of what the team member brings to the broader school community).*
- *When parents share gratitude to an administrator about a teacher, encourage that parent to take the message directly to the teacher.*
- *As an administrator, plan for a culture of gratitude by developing a system for the leadership team to record specific moments of gratitude that can be shared by the team to board, staff, and community.*
- *Make a gratitude journal a part of a teacher growth plan.*
- *Handwrite thank-you notes and "thinking of you" letters to staff, families, and community members.*

***By regularly centering practices on gratitude,
the entire community becomes oriented outside of self
and focused on the call to love God, neighbour,
and therefore, all of creation.***

gratitude

CLASSROOM

- *Establish a gratitude jar and invite students to write down a story of gratitude from a moment in school during the week. Then share the content of the jars on Friday afternoon as part of a closing circle.*
- *Encourage and remind students to thank their partners at the end of collaborative work before returning to their individual learning areas.*
- *Model gratitude journals as part of the daily or weekly rhythms in the classroom.*
- *Model and support prayer as an act of gratitude to God in the learning environment.*
- *Show gratitude to students when you notice them having a positive impact on the learning environment, but aim to do it privately, being careful with public praise that can be seen as manipulative.*
- *Look for the opportunity to step aside and allow students to shine as positive contributors and leaders in the classroom.*
- *Spend time with the elderly and help students see value in a life well-lived.*

Practices of gratitude inherently support the development of reflective thinking and faith. A life of gratitude puts us into a professional sweet spot, where we get to exclaim with a friend of mine, Dave Mulder, “We get to do this!” Most importantly, a life of gratitude can reorder our learning story, pointing students away from learning as an individual achievement to learning as an interdependent act of communal faithfulness, a natural outflowing of our commitment to see all of life as worship and response to an amazing and faithful God. 🌱

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Jenny Williams

From “My” Students to “Our” Students

How can we establish a collective and collaborative response to supporting student well-being and success?

THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC, teachers have worked in isolation, and many educators feel like they are less able to support the increasingly complex needs of students. When we work together as a community and shift our perspective from “my” classroom and “my” kids to “our” school and “our” kids, we have more capacity to support student well-being.”

“Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment; it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any one of them can achieve alone.”¹

To facilitate a collective and compassionate response to student needs, we need structures to facilitate educator conversations and collaboration, where educators come together and discuss student strengths and needs, effective supports and practices, and ways to evaluate the success of these practices. “What schools most need now is to begin harnessing the power of collective intelligence that already resides in the school to solve problems.”²

Role of School Leaders

School administrators play a crucial role in shaping a school culture that fosters collective stewardship and shared responsibility for students, collaboration to solve problems, productive management of conflict, and strong relational trust. According to Eastwood and Lewis,

“Creating a collaborative culture is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their schools.”³

Collaboration is when a group of people share ideas from various perspectives to come up with solutions to challenges. The term collaboration comes from the Latin root words “com,” meaning “together,” and “laborare,” meaning to “labour.” Effective collaboration involves labouring together to develop ideas that will help meet challenges beyond one individual’s capacity to solve on their own. True collaboration happens within the context of trust, where educators can have open conversations about what is and is not working and engage in improvement and change.



School leaders who ensure that the structures and processes are in place to facilitate educators working together to address the learning needs of students will foster the development of “professional capital.”⁴ We rely on administrators to prioritize the budget, time, and processes needed for effective collaboration and problem-solving to support student well-being and success.

Establishing Collaborative Teams at Kamloops Christian School

Well-structured teams are needed to support effective and trusting dialogue among educators. This will increase the capacity educators have to meet the needs of students. The focus is on solving problems and developing effective practices that increase their ability to support student well-being and success. Kamloops Christian School has adopted the “Collaborative Response Model”⁵ to build four collaborative structures to construct a tiered or layered approach to responding to student needs.

The school built a collaborative response framework over three all-staff professional development days on developing effective collaboration, collaboration teams, tier 1 classroom supports and

strategies, and team meeting processes. They outlined three tiers of support for students in a menu of interventions, strategies, and accommodations for responding to students’ needs. Next, the school established four types of collaborative teams listed below. The staff co-created clearly stated norms and set specific meeting agendas to ensure consistent, purposeful, and effective collaboration within each team.

“What schools most need now is to begin harnessing the power of collective intelligence that already resides in the school to solve problems.”

1. Collaborative Planning Meetings

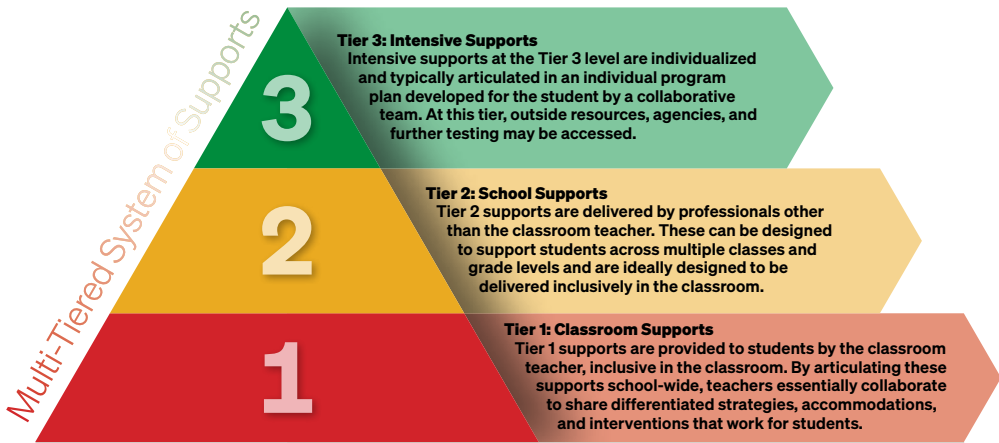
Weekly early dismissal meetings provide time for teachers to collaborate in grade-level teams to refine resources, lessons, assessments, and instructional strategies to support the students in their classroom.

“I am so pleased that we are making kids a priority in this school. I am blessed to be able to send my kids to a school where the teachers sit down intentionally and discuss ways they can help the whole student.”

TEACHER/PARENT,
KAMLOOPS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

“I find that Collaborative Response team meetings really do focus on how to collectively work on improving issues. It has been very effective to share what has worked in certain classrooms, and then make a plan for how we can consistently use that strategy across our division.”

TEACHER,
KAMLOOPS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



2. Collaborative Team Meetings

Monthly collaborative team meetings with administrators, a cohort of 5-8 teachers, and education assistants, ensure as much as possible was being done at a Tier 1 level in the classroom before accessing more intensive Tier 2 supports with more specialized support outside the classroom. The focus is on identifying the key issues in classes and working out

what additional accommodations, strategies, and supports can be implemented to address the needs identified. The hope is that emphasizing effective instructional supports in the classroom will reduce the need for more specialized support outside the classroom at a Tier 2-3 level. Refer to the diagram above for a description of each tier of support. A pre-meeting organizer for collaborative team

meetings provides Kamloops Christian School staff with a way to gather information about student celebrations and concerns. Participants know the agenda beforehand so each meeting is efficient and focused.

3. School Support Team Meetings

Every two weeks, administrators, a cohort of class teachers, learning support teachers and coordinators, and a counsellor meet to discuss students who need more specialized supports to succeed. A pre-meeting organizer is completed by staff before each meeting to give input about specific student celebrations, students of concern, and actions already taken. This pre-planning facilitates focused and productive collaboration to support students needing support at a Tier 2-3 level.

4. Case Consultation Team Meetings

Case consultation meetings with administrators, learning support teachers and coordinators, outside professionals, and the class teacher(s) are held to discuss planning for students requiring a more intensive level of support. This may be required when there is a crisis, such as a mental health crisis, serious behaviour incidents, or when the school needs support from experts outside of the school. The case consultation meeting facilitates a wraparound support model where the identification of needs, planning, and support is shared among home, school, and community agencies.

Collaborative Response – Pulling it all Together

The principal of Kamloops Christian School stated that she found the practice of collaborating is helping expand staff understanding of the unique strengths and challenges of students and build educators’ toolkit of effective strategies. The structure of collaborative team meetings is one of the key components for ensuring student well-being and success in a collaborative response model. The other two components are: establishing systems for gathering data & evidence and developing a continuum of layered supports. All three ensure a schoolwide systematic and sustainable school improvement process. Zmuda et al. (2004) provides observations about an effective school system,

“A competent system requires several significant shifts – from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, from an environment of isolation to one of collegiality, from perceived reality to information-driven reality, and from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability.”⁶

Taking a whole school community systematic collaborative response will enable schools to establish an effective and sustainable approach to supporting the needs of educators and students that will promote well-being and success for all those entrusted to our care. 🌱

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Business & Development Conference 2022

nurturing
TRUST

THE BUZZ IN THE ROOM clearly showed the excitement of meeting in person again at the Business and Development Conference. Held from April 4-5 in Harrison Hot Springs, this was the first full conference since April 2019. About 70 attendees, including school finance and advancement staff, administrators, and board members, gathered for worship, learning, networking, and fellowship focused on the theme of Nurturing Trust.

Plenary speaker Carson Pue shared his personal story and challenged listeners to trust God with all

their hearts and to find ways to build trust with both fellow staff and school stakeholders. Another 11 workshop leaders blessed us with their knowledge and expertise, helping participants build both professional and personal skills in a variety of topics including charity law, school advancement, human resources, and conflict resolution.

SCSBC is grateful to our conference sponsors: Christian School Foundation, Westland Insurance, and Manning Elliott LLP, Chartered Professional Accountants. We look forward to seeing everyone again in April 2023! 🌱



Photos: Kevin van der Laek



News & Events



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