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Mission Fidelity

A CALL FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS TO REMEMBER THEIR WHY

SEEING OUR SCHOOLS MATURE into their second and third generation is a blessing. Timothy Christian School celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, and Vancouver Christian School its 75th. These milestones and the maturing of our schools present a vital reminder for school leaders and board members to reflect on our institutions' founding mission and vision and gauge our faithfulness to those founding ideas. Inspired by the thinking and writing of my friend and Christian Schools Australia leader, Darren Iselin, this article will review some of the factors necessary to avoid mission drift.

There are plenty of books and articles that document the risks of Christian education institutions drifting away from their core vision into some weaker form of Christian secularism (Benne, 2001; Burthchaell, 1998; Dosen, 2001; Harris, 1993; Hull, 2003; Marsden 1994; Wagner, 1990). What is less documented and less common but still concerning is the mission drift of Christian institutions toward

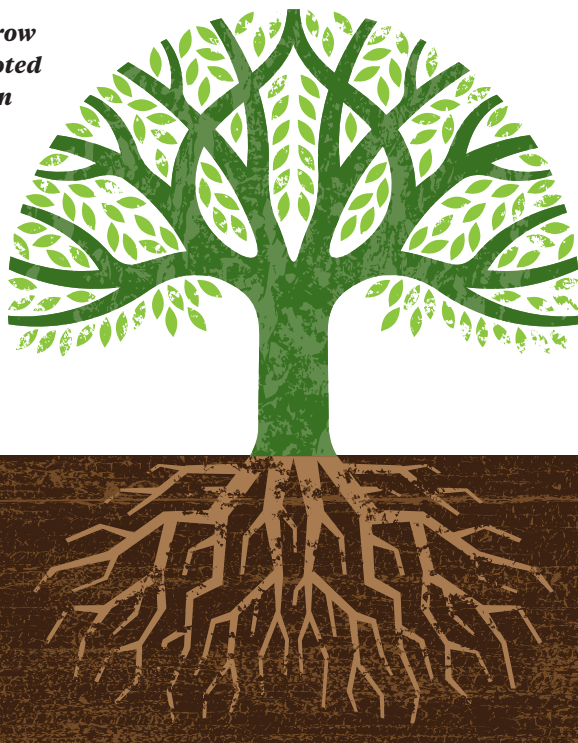
hardline Christian fundamentalism. Both a drift to the "left" and a drift to the "right" are examples of Christian schools that have forgotten their founding vision and have not worked to maintain their position as core to the purposes and practices of the school.

Founding Phase

Organizational theorist Schein (2004) identifies three phases of an institution's Story: the founding or pioneering phase, the midlife phase, and the maturing (or possibly declining) phase. In the founding or pioneering phase, the founders' vision is the *raison d'être* for the organization, and the people involved fully live out that purpose in all aspects of the school. Everything that happens is fully aligned with that core vision.

Furthermore, this clarity of vision and purpose often draws others in as a compelling and purposeful movement. Often these founders have absolute clarity on the "why" of the school, and that clarity sets them

As Christian schools grow and evolve, staying rooted in their founding vision is more vital than ever. This article explores the subtle dangers of mission drift—and offers practical wisdom for leaders seeking to stay true to their sacred calling.



and their school apart from those around them. They take risks, invest highly in time, talents, and treasures, and sacrifice greatly for the sake of the school. As Iselin (2009) notes, this phase of a school's Story is often accompanied by stories of God's sovereignty and His profound provision. This founding phase is often defined by a corporate sense of a deep conviction of God's calling and a concurrent willingness to pursue that calling even against what might seem at the time as overwhelming odds. These founding stories often take place in the opposite direction of the culture in which they exist and, therefore, display a strong bent toward conviction, creativity, and faithfulness to God's call above and beyond all.

Midlife

In the midlife or institutional phase, there is often significant leadership succession at both the head of school and board level and a movement toward redefining the founders' core values. In this phase, the school develops its institutional identity. This is

where the school solidifies its core values or begins to drift. Schools that solidify their core values intentionally develop practices, habits, routines, and rituals that draw them back time and again to the founding vision of the school. This includes the telling and retelling of the founding narrative and creating artefacts (art, displays, symbols, logos, etc.) that remind everyone of the school's vision. The school leaders must then put weight and meaning to these stories and artefacts, thereby ensuring the core founding vision becomes central to the school's culture. I think of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) wherein God calls His people to speak His commandments constantly to their children to ensure the true Story of God and His people is passed on from generation to generation.

On the opposite side of schools that institutionalize their founding vision are schools that begin to institutionalize a "new" identity. As our schools mature, grow in size, and gain resources, they often experience success in varying fields (enrolment,

academics, athletics, and the arts). This success can slowly come to define the school rather than being a by-product of the core vision. The school then becomes known for its program success, and those programs then begin to colonize the founding vision, competing for time and attention. Schools in this phase often see themselves with intentions to grow and extend the original vision. That focus on institutional growth then begins to become part of the core purpose, and with that comes the temptation to compromise core values to increase enrolment and strengthen programs.

Maturity Phase

In the maturity and potential decline phase (note: decline here refers to vision and not enrolment!), the school becomes more bureaucratic, systemized, and efficient, all potentially stifling the living out of the school's founding vision in fresh and counter-cultural ways. Schools in this phase tend to institutionalize the risks that developed in the midlife phase. "Growth as purpose" and "program success as core ideology" have now become, consciously or subconsciously, the filters through which decisions are sifted – schools in decline lock in their systems and bureaucracy around non-core ideology. Things like fundraising, enrolment growth, athletic success, school rankings, etc., now become the stories, artefacts, and symbols of "faithfulness" and take up significant space in the school's spoken and written media. Let me be clear: all these components in a school are good things! However, they are not the central vision; they only serve under the school's core founding purpose.

Contrary to what we might think, the movement



Flourishing schools don't just talk about their mission—they live it, weaving it into every practice, every decision, and every story told.

toward secularization does not often occur with some significant event but slowly, with a drift in focus and attention toward what might be good for the school but not essential to its calling. As our schools charge tuition and compete with other schools as an option for parents, we need to be mindful of the pressures the market puts on us and ensure we stand strong in our convictions rather than bending under the pressures of economic growth. This bending can be seen when worry arises about our Christian convictions' impact on enrolment.

Schools that have matured well in this phase institutionalize the work done in the mid-life phase, remembering their founding stories. They take the stories, artefacts, and symbols representing the core vision and make them filters through which programs are approved and

supported, success is defined, and all decisions are sifted. Flourishing schools in this phase are explicit in their distinctiveness and core values, which are tied to the founding vision!

How, then, does this maturing come to be? Leaders and board members are key. They are tasked with ensuring mission fidelity and mission sustainability. Let me suggest a list of guiding questions that I believe will help leaders and board members ensure such mission fidelity:

1. The role of the Bible and the place of Jesus –

Is the Bible central to the school's work, and does Jesus' birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection permeate all of school life? This means that the Story of God and His people is strongly embedded in the curriculum, daily practices, and all programming. Chapels and

mission trips are good but do not constitute a thoroughly Christ-centred Christian school.

2. **Mission and vision pervasiveness** – Are the school's mission and vision statements consistent with its founding vision and mission, and are they communicated repeatedly at every opportunity? Flourishing schools know their vision and ensure it guides them in every step.
3. **Strategic planning** – Does the school participate in ongoing strategic planning to ensure its goals and objectives are clearly aligned with its mission and vision? A strategic plan explicitly addresses how the school will deepen and strengthen its commitment to its mission and vision.
4. **Hiring and onboarding** – Does the school leader have a deep understanding not only of Christian education but also of the vision and mission of their specific Christian school? The latter can be learned, but it must be prioritized. Second is the hiring and onboarding of teachers that the head of school oversees. Teachers are the living curriculum and the most explicit embodiment of the mission in our schools. Developing strong onboarding practices that dive deeper into the heart of the school instead of a simple orientation is essential for mission sustainability.
5. **Celebrations and awards** – What gets attention and focus in our schools? Are we rewarding students and teachers for mission-focused accomplishments? Do we take time to celebrate the ongoing implementation – even furthering – of the founding mission? Simply put, we celebrate and reward what we value.
6. **Artefacts and symbols** – When someone walks the halls of our school, do they see evidence of the mission and vision being lived out? Do the artefacts and symbols draw our attention back to the core mission and vision? What we display on the walls and in the hallways of our schools also speaks to what

we value and provides a great opportunity to surround our students, staff, and families with reminders of the school's existence.

7. **Ongoing professional development** – How much of our professional development is focused on rooting our staff and their teaching in the Story? Thoroughly Christian schools talk, talk, and re-talk about how to integrate faith and learning in meaningful and thoughtful ways that are both true to God's Word and capture the imagination of our students.

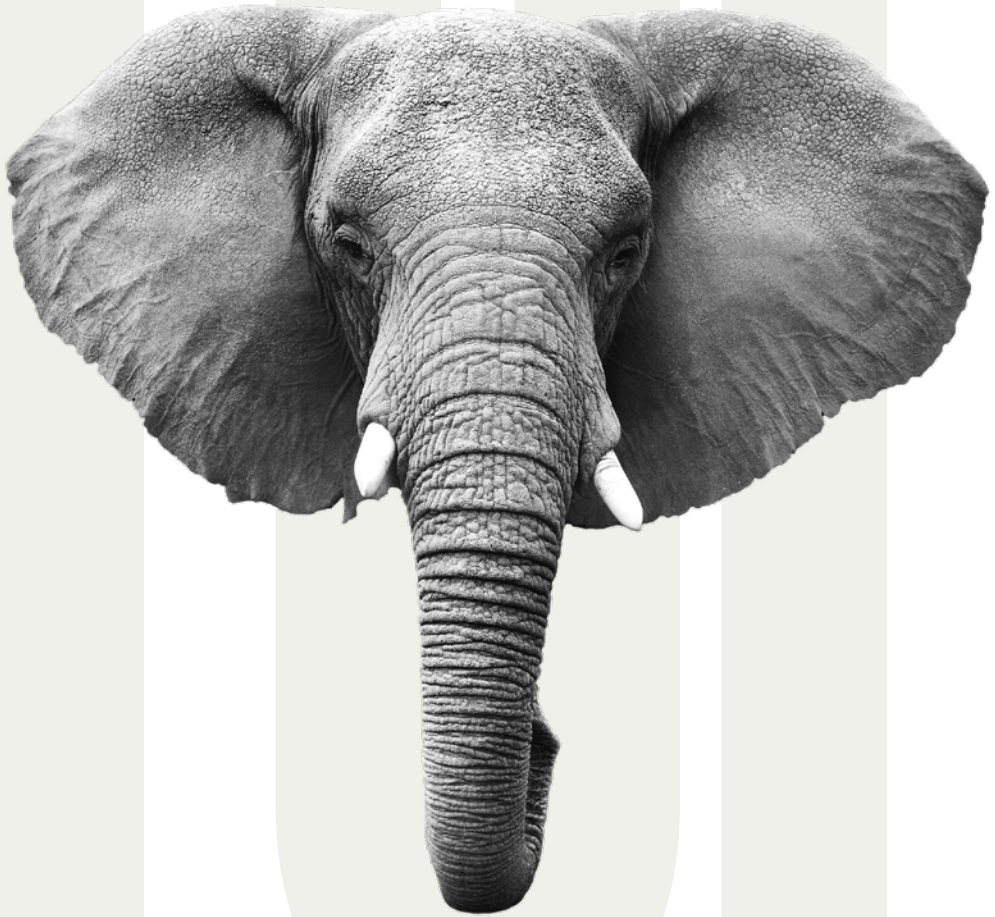
May our schools be found to be faithful to their founding visions of raising up children to love and serve God and work for the good of the Kingdom! I would love to discuss the ideas on this list and how SCSBC might help support your school strengthen its focus. 🌈

DAVE LOEWEN
SCSBC Executive Director

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TUITION INCREASES:



Tracey Yan

The Elephant in the Christian School Board Room

By flipping the tuition discussion on its head, the decision becomes quite simple.

THE FINANCE LEADERS of SCSBC member schools meet regularly to discuss current topics of interest. Every January or February, invariably, the question is asked, “How much are other schools increasing their tuition by next year?”

When SCSBC does a financial health review of a member school and one of the recommendations is to increase tuition rates, boards will often respond with “won’t we lose students because families won’t be able to afford it?”

Neither of these questions is inherently wrong to ask. It is important that a school’s tuition rates are somewhat comparable with others in its geographic area, and that its cost structure is not out of line with similar schools. It is equally important that Christian education be financially attainable for families that desire this opportunity for their children.

But often, these questions are born from a sense of fear. . . fear that the school isn’t being stewardly enough with its tuition dollars or fear that families will leave because they can’t afford the fees. Sometimes the questions arise from a sense of pride. . . pride in being frugal, doing more with less, not

becoming a school for rich people, or even pride in trusting God to provide the school’s needs.

School boards should instead flip the tuition question on its head. Rather than deciding first how much tuition should increase, and then squeezing expenses to fit that revenue, the school should start by evaluating the resources needed to deliver its mission at the desired level of excellence. What resources are required to support the needs of its students, to compensate its staff fairly, and to maintain its school facilities? Those questions should be the primary drivers of the tuition decision, with rates set at the level needed to achieve those goals. The school’s budgeting process should move the discussion in that direction before making final decisions about fee increases.

Plenty of research has been done to examine the correlation between tuition rates and enrolment. All have found there is virtually no relationship between the two. The reality is that parents who value Christian education for their children are unlikely to change that decision because of a tuition increase, especially if they can clearly see those funds are improving the outcomes for their children and supporting the retention of excellent staff. If they do

not see the evidence of that value, then the enrolment decision becomes a different discussion altogether, no matter what the tuition rates are. Tuition dollars must still be spent wisely and effectively, creating a value proposition that parents will support. Alternatively, if schools underprice their tuition, it can create a perception that the educational experience they offer students is not of the quality that students deserve and parents expect.

Affordability concerns are certainly valid, especially in today's environment of high inflation, rising housing costs, and concerns about job losses due to possible recessions and trade wars. But the school board should not presume to make financial decisions for school families by assuming no one can afford a tuition increase. Most families, as noted above, will not change their enrolment decision because of this. In fact, the increased fee revenue will provide more funds to help those families who are truly in need of financial assistance. Every school board should ensure that it has a robust tuition assistance program with proper policies and procedures that direct funds to worthy families. Affordability concerns are also tempered somewhat by the ability of Canadian religious schools to issue donation receipts for the religious portion of education in accordance with regulations of the Canada Revenue Agency.

Board members are typically parents themselves, and they may bring their own biases into the

tuition discussion because it affects them personally. However, boards are tasked with leading the school

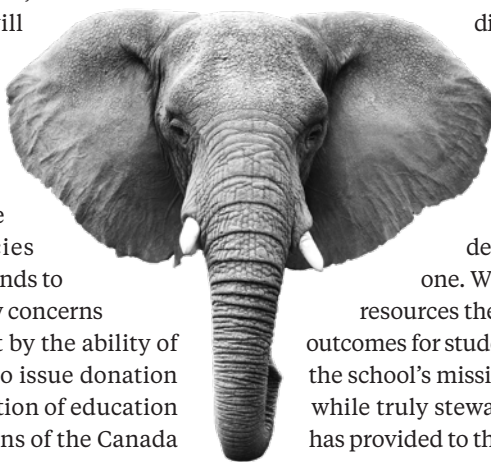
and thinking strategically about its financial sustainability and how it achieves its mission. A decision to keep tuition rates low next year may provide temporary relief for current families, but what does it mean two or five or ten years from now? What is the cumulative effect of those low tuition increases on future students, on staff retention, and on the condition of the school facilities? Boards must ensure that their financial planning process extends beyond the annual budget to a multi-year plan for achieving its strategic goals.

The concerns that are raised during the tuition discussion all have elements of truth and are worth talking about. Repeated excessive tuition increases *are* problematic and impact affordability, school communities *should* have empathy for those in difficult financial circumstances,

and boards and administrators *must* ensure that programs deliver cost-effective results. But if the focus shifts away from a scarcity mindset, then the tuition decision becomes a very simple one. When schools understand what

resources they need to achieve the desired outcomes for students and staff, they can deliver the school's mission and vision with excellence while truly stewarding the blessings that God has provided to the entire school community. 🌈

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TRACEY YAN

SCSBC Director of Finance



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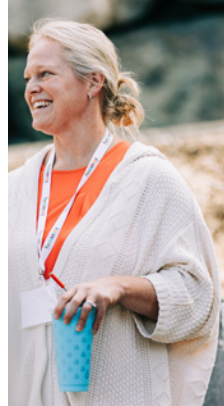
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Kristie Spyksma

Emergency Preparedness Rooted in Mission and Community

SOONER OR LATER, every school administrator will be faced with an emergency situation that necessitates an immediate and sustained response in order to protect students and staff, both physically and emo-

tionally. While it can be painful and disturbing to contemplate, it is important that school leaders prepare themselves and their staff to recognize and act in situations that require such a response.

Consider the following scenarios →



Emergency Preparedness Rooted in Mission and Community

A teacher is informed by a student that another student has a knife in her backpack.

A principal receives an evening call saying that a staff member has been in a fatal car accident.

A parent tells a homeroom teacher that their child's classmate has been talking about taking his life.

An eighth-grade student discloses that someone is distributing intimate images of him online.

A teacher calls the office to report a gas leak.

A group of students show a staff member a threatening message that is circling online.

These scenarios cause an immediate and understandable emotional response, which can include any combination of fear, anger, grief, and confusion. In some cases, an immediate response is essential. In most cases, a timely response is required. At the same time, the blend of complexity and heightened emotion can make it extremely difficult to carry out an appropriate response. Because our ability to think clearly and systematically is significantly reduced in a crisis situation, education, practice, and debriefing are crucial to emergency preparedness.

As leaders of Christian schools, our approach to emergency preparation and response must be rooted in our school's mission and vision. When we invite each member of our school community to play their part in emergency preparedness, we are inviting them to live into their identity in the body



Emergency Preparedness Rooted in Mission and Community

of Christ. As we practice and debrief emergency protocols that help keep us safe, we embody God's call to care for each other. In this context, schools best protect their community through regular attention to emergency preparation and procedures and by educating different members about their roles and responsibilities in crisis situations.

From its beginning, the SCSBC has sought to provide advice, support, and encouragement to school leaders as they navigate various challenging circumstances. About two decades ago, the desire to provide practical support in emergency preparation and response led to the creation of the first emergency management resource. Since then, the School Emergency Handbook has undergone several significant updates to reflect changing needs of member schools and new recommendations from the government. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Child Care has placed a high priority on schools having clear safety protocols and procedures, which include both preparing for emergencies and responding to them in appropriate ways.

As the SCSBC team planned for the most recent update to the School Emergency Handbook, it became clear that a website would be the most effective way to keep information current in the rapidly changing field of emergency preparedness. The new website was launched for member schools at the beginning of March after undergoing a testing process involving volunteers from our schools around the province. In its present form, the Handbook site offers resources and guidelines that will help schools to prepare for various emergency situations and to respond to scenarios such as those described above. It also offers guidance for schools in the aftermath of a crisis, as they seek to provide care and support to students, staff and families who are processing their

grief and loss. Within a “preparation, response, and recovery” framework, the School Emergency Handbook provides information, tools, and forms to support schools in the following areas:

- **Emergency Management**

Natural disasters and structural emergencies that impact student learning and school operations

- **Critical Incident Response**

Supporting the school community through the death or serious injury of a student or staff member

- **Threat Assessment**

Recognizing and responding to threats or acts of violence

- **Child Protection**

Supporting students and families when online safety has been compromised

In addition to these topics, there are recommendations for building emergency response teams, communicating effectively in a crisis, and educating and training staff, students, and parents.

Emergency preparedness in Christian schools isn't just about safety — it's an act of discipleship, care, and community.

Emergency preparedness can consume a great amount of time and energy for school leaders and their teams. It can be difficult to prioritize preparing for events that may not occur for some time, or even at all. It can also be tempting to keep staff discussion of crisis response to a minimum in order to avoid the added stress of considering the possibility of such occurrences. Teachers may limit student conversations about emergency response to those mandated in school policy, so as not to add undue stressors to the lives of students already dealing with many anxieties. In reality, however, both staff and students experience less anxiety about emergencies if they know what is expected of them and how they will be cared for. They are empowered to meet an

Emergency Preparedness Rooted in Mission and Community

When emergency preparedness is prioritized appropriately, it can provide staff and students with opportunities to build resilience that will help them to recover in the aftermath of a traumatic event. The following principles can serve as a helpful framework for school communities who seek to **BUILD RESILIENCE** in the context of preparing for emergencies:

1. Normalize the effects of traumatic events on our spiritual, social, emotional, and physical well-being.
2. Invite staff and students to identify both internal and external resources individuals can draw on when facing adversity.
3. Reflect together on the role each person can play in building a supportive community. Name and celebrate the ways this is already evident.
4. Perform emergency drills only within the context of student education. Provide opportunities for students and staff to debrief and reflect afterwards.

emergency situation after they have participated in different scenarios and have had the opportunity to debrief them. Our schools care most effectively for students and staff by educating them about what to expect and keeping them informed about how the school will respond to different safety or emergency situations.

In closing, as SCSBC schools engage in the work of caring for students, staff, and families through emergency preparation and response, they do so within a larger community. The School Emergency Handbook is just one of the ways in which this is evident. As we look ahead, we continue to seek ways to support each other in this work through ongoing training opportunities, sharing of resources, and,

Whether schools are early in the emergency preparedness process or are seeking to update emergency plans already in place, it is important that administrators avoid taking on too many things at once. The vital work of emergency preparation and response must be done collectively, one step at a time, and in a way that reflects each school's particular culture and environment. As school leaders identify the **NEXT STEPS** in this process, they are encouraged to begin by asking the following questions:

- How can our mission and vision frame our work?
- How can we identify and involve staff members who have a suitable skill set?
- How might we engage the parent community?
- How can emergency preparedness help us to build student and staff resilience?
- Given our school's particular context and needs, what is our next priority?

most of all, the encouragement we receive from each other. 🌱

KRISTIE SPYKSMA

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Safe & Caring Schools*

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Opening



Doors

For decades, Herb Krul has been on a mission to help SCSBC schools unlock new career opportunities for their students. From skilled trades to work experience programs, he's breaking down barriers and making career development more accessible than ever.

FOR OVER 45 YEARS, Herb Krul has guided students toward meaningful futures. As the SCSBC Career Development Coordinator, he promotes career programs in independent schools across British Columbia. His work has helped many students explore careers in skilled trades, health sciences, technology, and beyond. In addition to his role as a career education teacher, Herb coordinates various apprenticeship and work experience programs, including the Skilled Trades BC Program and the Ministry of Education's Work Experience (WEX) Enhancement initiative. Working part-time for SCSBC, Herb provides ongoing support to independent schools province-wide.

A Career Built on Advocacy and Opportunity

Herb's background is as diverse as the programs he champions. Spending most of his career at Timothy Christian School, he contributed to launching apprenticeship and work experience programs. His experience in career development and skilled trades allowed him to extend these opportunities to

independent schools, ensuring students had access to hands-on learning experiences.

A key milestone in his journey was securing a grant for the Youth Work in Trades Support program, which helped independent schools establish themselves as a recognized "district" for trades education. This initiative continues to be a part of his work today.

Expanding Opportunities with the "District" Model

One of Herb's notable initiatives has been the development of the "district" model—a strategy designed to make career development opportunities accessible to all independent schools, regardless of size or resources. Six years ago, he received calls from parents who were seeking guidance on skilled trades programs for their children. Recognizing a resource gap, he worked to facilitate a successful district application for the Youth Work in Trades Support Grant.

This success paved the way for further funding opportunities, including a collaboration between SCSBC and the Ministry of Education's WEX

Opening Doors: Herb Krul and Career Training Options for Your Students

Enhancement initiative. This initiative, announced by the Deputy Minister of Education, provides funding for full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to enhance career development, support students, and strengthen industry relationships. Herb used the “district” model to help ensure independent schools had access to these resources.

The SCSBC partnership with KLC, a distance learning school, has also played a role in expanding access to apprenticeship programs, WEX opportunities, and service-based programs. This collaboration enables students from 27 different independent schools to participate in courses and experiences they might not otherwise have access to. A revenue-sharing model helps ensure that independent schools receive financial support to designate FTE time for career coordinators.

Comprehensive Support for Schools

Herb supports independent schools in several areas:

1. **Skilled Trades BC Programs** – *Raising awareness about career opportunities in trades, clarifying misconceptions, and promoting programs like Youth Explore Trades Skills, Youth Work in Trades, and Dual Credit options.*
2. **Work Experience (WEX) and WEX Enhancement** – *Helping schools build connections with school districts, employers, and community groups to strengthen student work experience opportunities.*
3. **Service-Based Programs** – *Developing strategies that integrate Grade 10–12 courses with service initiatives, such as short-term mission trips, allowing students to earn credits while participating in these experiences.*



Herb works with schools to ensure these programs are not just accessible but aligned with the values and educational goals of each institution.

A Partner in Career Development

Herb’s commitment is reflected in his practical approach to supporting schools. Whether answering questions about available resources, connecting schools with Ministry of Education and Skilled Trades BC contacts, or guiding educators on securing funding, he is available to assist. He is particularly focused on helping schools with dual credit access, Youth Work in Trades funding, and organizing resources for parent nights, teacher professional development, and community events.

Beyond logistics, Herb maintains involvement with students and educators. He conducts in-class visits, presents to school boards, and takes part in staff professional development events, conventions, and workshops.

Looking Ahead

Herb’s career reflects a consistent effort to ensure students have access to practical career pathways. His work with independent schools focuses on equipping them with resources and support to help students explore their options. Herb is a resource for schools, parents, and students seeking guidance on career development programs, bringing decades of experience and a focus on student success. 🌟

Put Herb to Work For You!

If you are curious how Herb can help your school, please reach out to him at herb.krul@scsbc.ca or 604-316-6128

Navigate Conference 2025



This year's theme was Compass Points, and how we can stay focused in a changing world.

APRIL SHOWERS DID NOT hamper the energy and enthusiasm of the nearly 90 advancement and finance staff, administrators, and board members who gathered at the Coast Tsawwassen Inn in Delta, BC, for the 2025 Navigate Conference on April 7–8.

This year's event provided opportunities for growth, connection, and inspiration. Attendees dove into rich learning experiences tailored to their unique roles, participated in dynamic discussions, and found moments of worship and fellowship that reminded us of why we do what we do and who we do it for.

Dr. Steve Brown, president of Columbia Bible College, opened the conference by challenging us to lead ourselves well in a VUCA world – one that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. He encouraged us to stay rooted in Jesus and serve as a calming, non-anxious presence for others in this time of constant change.

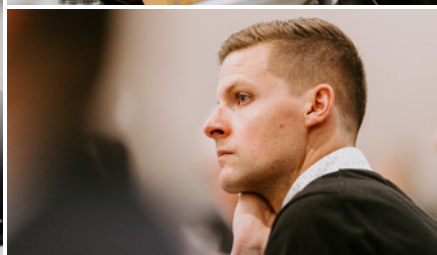
Attendees pulled out their laptops for hands-on practice during the AI workshops, testing out some

practical ways to use AI in their finance and advancement roles while recognizing the ethical and operational risks that come with these tools. Other sessions focused on leader engagement in development work, harnessing the power of storytelling, understanding cyber risks and insurance, and building high-functioning finance teams. And of course, our always highly anticipated table talk sessions provided invaluable times to share, reflect, and connect with peers.

We are deeply grateful to our generous corporate sponsors – Christian School Foundation, Christian Education Benefits Solutions, Westland Insurance, Acera Insurance, Volkenant Law Group, Manning Elliott CPAs, and TD Commercial Banking – whose support helped make this conference possible and accessible.

We're already looking ahead to next year's conference – tentatively set for April 13–14, 2026, again in beautiful Tsawwassen. Whether you joined us this year or missed out, mark your calendars for next year's event.

Let's keep navigating forward — together! 🌈





*Use the QR code
to view more
photos from the
2025 Navigate
conference.*

Save the Date! 25 October 2025



CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION,
COMPASSION,
& CRITICAL
THINKING

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LEADERS, AND
BOARD MEMBERS
NEED FOR TODAY?

SCSBC 26TH ANNUAL **LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

with **Beth Green**, Provost & Chief Academic Officer
at Tyndale University, Toronto

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any general feedback you may have about
The Link to contact@scsbc.ca

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