

the link



***Strategic Planning as
Mission Advancement***

DAVE LOEWEN

Human?

DARREN SPYKSMA

***A Stroll Down the
Memory Lane of
School Finances***

TRACEY YAN

***Productive Struggle &
Purpose: Reimagining
Math in the Classroom***

KRISTIE SPYKSMA



Without intentional planning, even the strongest mission can drift into the background. Strategic planning equips boards to focus priorities, respond to real-world challenges, and ensure every step taken advances the school's core purpose.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

AS I HAVE OFTEN SAID, THE FOUR key areas that boards focus on in exercising their role in directing their school are:

1. *Budgeting* – ensuring expenditures align with mission, vision, and strategic direction
2. *Policy Development* – ensuring policies embody the school's mission and vision, and help set both direction and create guardrails to help ensure mission fidelity
3. *Principal/Head of School Job Description* – ensuring the head of school's job description is focused on moving the school towards greater and greater mission and vision fulfillment
4. *Strategic Planning* – identifying strategic priorities and goals to achieve the school's mission and vision with the school's leadership team

In this article, we will focus on the importance and core elements of the fourth key area: strategic planning. In almost all schools, there is a mission and vision statement, sometimes called a purpose statement or core purpose. These statements are

often inspiring and aspirational (and sometimes run-on sentences). These statements can animate the school's work. Still, if there is no intentionally organized, concrete action taken to fulfill the mission and vision, then they are simply hopeful ideas that, at best, give people a sense that the school has a purpose and, at worst, are completely ignored except by the custodian, who dusts them off a couple of times per year. Making the mission and vision come alive is where strategic planning comes in.

The strategic plan is the collection of strategic priorities and goals set in motion to make progress towards mission and vision fulfillment. The best way to bring clarity to the board's work of ensuring long-term mission sustainability is through strategic planning. A robust strategic plan drives hiring, budgeting, educational programs, growth and infrastructure, community engagement, fundraising, and even policy development, all aligned with the school's mission and vision. That is why the first step of the strategic planning process is mission and vision affirmation. Knowing and affirming these is central to the board's unity as a group and to its ability to create a plan to fulfill that mission and vision.

After this, gathering data is the next step in the planning process. Discovering what the community sees as the school's strengths, opportunities

AS MISSION ADVANCEMENT

for improvement, and hopes and concerns about the school's future direction. This can take place in the form of focus groups, town hall meetings, and parent and staff surveys. It is important to note that the data collected does not directly drive the plan, but it informs the board and leadership team about the community's perceptions and how those might need to be addressed in the plan. For example, there may be voices in the community who desire more university-preparatory classes and fewer arts

electives. The board may ultimately decide that this is not consistent with the school's mission and vision. But it is important that they understand the desire and then articulate the school's direction in the context of the mission and vision.

The data analysis stage also includes a review of environmental factors. This involves asking questions such as:

- *Has the local economy changed?*



Strategic Planning as Mission Advancement

- *Is the housing market or a lack of local employment opportunities a barrier for some families?*
- *Is there a new or competitive school alternative in the same market, or is a nearby school closing?*
- *Is hiring more challenging?*
- *Have any of the key supporting churches experienced challenges or internal divisions?*
- *Are there “hot button” issues that parents feel strongly about and want the school to address, and do any of these issues pose a threat to school unity?*

All these local “environmental” factors have the potential to impact the school, and the board and administrative team need to attend to them in their planning.

Finally, take time to reflect on the data. Ask the following types of questions:

- *How is the organization doing?*
- *Is there a culture of educational innovation and creativity?*
- *Are there clear policies, procedures, and organizational structures?*
- *Do staff feel valued?*
- *Are there resources to achieve good learning objectives?*
- *Does the parent community trust the school’s leadership?*

If there is a lack of organizational strength, it may be necessary to embed goals directly into the plan that address this. Without organizational strength, the strategic plan faces a high risk of failure. Launched and failed plans do not build trust in the parent and donor community, but a successful plan that achieves its strategic objectives does.

Once the board and administrative team have reflected on the data, they enter a discernment phase of identifying the big strategic priorities for

the next few years. Ideally, there are only three to four of these big priorities. This allows all members of the school community to keep those priorities top of mind. Too many strategic priorities and the plan risks becoming too cumbersome to implement successfully.

After this, the board sets goals to activate the plan. Ideally, goals will follow the S.M.A.R.T goal model: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. This process creates clarity, focus, and measures progress. Each goal also requires a champion. This can be a person or a team within the school. They are not necessarily doing the work to complete the goal; instead, they are ensuring that work on the goal continues. The board’s role is to stay goal-focused, and the administrative leadership’s role is to follow through with specific strategies to achieve those goals. While the goals are less likely to change, the strategies should be as flexible and adaptive as their implementation success is monitored and adjusted.

At this point in the strategic planning process, schools feel a sense of completion and satisfaction in their work. But truthfully, the work is just beginning. I often say five percent of leadership is planning, and ninety-five percent is working the plan: communicating strategic direction to all stakeholders, overcoming obstacles, creatively allocating resources, creating buy-in and a culture of innovation and forward progress, analyzing key metrics and both celebrating successes, adapting strategies as needed and ensuring the plan is central to decision-making. The plan needs to be reviewed and affirmed, or adjusted, by the board multiple times per year. As new realities emerge in the community, there must be a willingness to review both strategic priorities and goals to ensure they remain constantly relevant.

A prayerfully considered and rigorous strategic plan can clearly enable a Christian school to more faithfully and aggressively fulfill its mission and vision. 🌟

DAVE LOEWEN

SCSBC Executive Director



CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS CANADA CONFERENCE

5-7 OCTOBER 2026 | WHISTLER BC

KEYNOTE: REVD DR SAM WELLS
Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London

For more information, visit christianschoolscanada.com

REGISTER
TODAY!



INCARNATIONAL
EDUCATION IN
CANADA TODAY



Photo by Neill Okhrimenko / iStock

Tracey Yan

A STROLL DOWN

SCSBC SCHOOLS HAVE COME A LONG WAY

THE MEMORY

SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE

LANE OF SCHOOL

FINANCIAL BENCHMARKING REPORTS IN 2007.

FINANCES

AS SCSBC CELEBRATES ITS 50th anniversary this year, I thought it would be interesting to reflect on the journey from the past to the present by comparing financial benchmarking results for SCSBC member schools from the first year the reports were prepared, 2007, to the latest 2025 data. It was an eye-opening experience to see how our schools have grown, offering tangible evidence of how much God has blessed our communities over the course of these 18 years. For those of you whose schools are not SCSBC members, I encourage you to dig out a set of financial statements from 15 or 20 years ago to see for yourself how God has worked in your context and how past visions and strategic plans have come to fruition over the longer term.

In 2006/07, 33 SCSBC member schools generated \$30 million of tuition and collected \$36 million of basic government block grants. By 2024/25, those numbers had risen to \$108 million in tuition and an incredible \$91 million in block grants across 35 schools. Average tuition per student rose from \$3,041 to \$6,268, and the average tuition-to-grant revenue ratio has risen from 82% to 107%, showing schools have made crucial strides to raise tuition in concert with rising grants and higher costs. The benchmark goal has always been for parents to be at least equal partners with government in funding school operations, since the province of BC provides group 1 schools with 50% of the amounts paid to public schools. The ratio exceeding 100% shows that goal has been achieved for many schools.

In 2006/07, member schools spent \$69 million to educate students and maintain their buildings, of which \$49 million (71%) was staff compensation. By 2024/25, these numbers had risen to \$241 million and

\$178 million (74%), respectively. Operating expenses per student in 2024/25, at \$15,084, were more than double the \$7,074 in 2006/07, reflecting both inflation and the important efforts schools have made to increase compensation packages and improve working conditions for their staff. Schools can continue to attract and retain talented staff who are dedicated to the organizational mission by investing in salaries,

pension plans and other benefits, providing more preparation time, improving professional development opportunities, and better managing classroom size and composition. These investments, when combined with the many intangible benefits of working in a Christian school community, have made significant strides toward a more comprehensive remuneration package for school staff.

In 2006/07, schools had a total of \$24.7 million of long-term debt. With several SCSBC schools having built new facilities in the last 10 years, they now collectively hold \$140.7 million in long-term debt but own assets valued at about \$326 million. While large

mortgages can be intimidating for a school to take on, we can also see this as an amazing testimony to the vision that God has nurtured in our schools to grow the number of students and families they serve, and to how He has provided the resources to fulfill that vision. New buildings and renovations of existing facilities have resulted in total enrollment increasing by more than 70% over 18 years, from about 9,400 in 2006/07 to nearly 16,000 in 2024/25. Many schools now also offer preschool and daycare programs that help serve the needs of today's families.

We can see this as an amazing testimony to the vision that God has nurtured in our schools to grow the number of students and families they serve, and to how He has provided the resources to fulfill that vision.

We can see this as an amazing testimony to the vision that God has nurtured in our schools to grow the number of students and families they serve and how He has provided the resources to fulfill that vision.

A Stroll Down the Memory Lane of School Finances

Some of these expansion projects are reflected in the rise of donations and fundraising income, from \$5.5 million in 2006/07 to over \$15 million in 2024/25. During this time, SCSBC schools have expanded their development departments, improved donor and alumni connections, and launched successful capital campaigns, all of which are reflected in these numbers. Many schools no longer rely on this source of income to cover regular operating expenses and can direct it toward capital and special projects, enabling donors to see the direct impact of their gifts. The culture of giving evident in the early years of our schools has continued in many different ways.

When it comes to inclusive education, SCSBC schools have embraced their role in serving students' diverse needs. In 2007, member schools received about \$3.2 million in special needs grants and spent about \$3.9 million to address those needs, resulting in an average cost-to-grant ratio of 130%. Fast forward to 2025, and schools are collecting over \$25.6 million of inclusive education grants while spending about \$33.6 million, a similar spending ratio of 131%. Approximately 7% of students in member schools receive funding for inclusive education programs, a number which exceeds the estimated 5.8% of high-incidence students in the public school system.* This is a visible demonstration that all of God's children are valued as an important part of our school communities.

While some of these numbers and ratios can be explained by inflation and population growth, we can also pull some general messages and lessons from them:

- Parents have continued to step up each year to ensure that tuition, along with government grants, is sufficient to fund the schools' operating costs. This demonstrates the high

* J.P. Rozworski, *BC's Inclusive Education Funding Gap* (BCTF Research Report, British Columbia Teachers' Federation, October 2018), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/full-text/ED592575.pdf>.

value that families place on Christian education, and the faith they have in our schools to provide safe places where their children can learn and grow.

- Schools have made significant strides in improving staff compensation, including salaries that meet or exceed the recommendations in the SCSBC Compensation Report, as well as enhanced health and pension plans. This is especially important given the hiring pressures produced by staff shortages across many roles. As communities of faith, we want to ensure that staff are valued, treated fairly, and cared for in times of need.
- Schools have continued to embrace the diverse needs of students through inclusive education programs that have not only increased in size but also kept up with the latest skills and tools to serve these students well.
- Schools and their boards continue to develop a strategic mindset, following the vision that God has cast for the future. These plans do not shy away from major investments that enhance their ability to better serve more students and families. Parents and other stakeholders have come alongside this vision through significant donations to capital campaigns and ongoing fundraising efforts.

As we look back to see how far schools have come, we also try to imagine what can be accomplished in the future. With trust in God's provision, faith that allows us to envision His good and perfect plans, and some courage to make big choices and decisions, it will be amazing to see where the next 18 years take us. *Soli Deo gloria!* 🙌

TRACEY YAN

SCSBC Director of Finance



Photo by Edil Libedinsky / Unsplash

HUMAN

We shape our tools and then our tools shape us. – John Culkin

Darren Spyksma

As generative AI reshapes education, it brings both promise and unintended consequences.

EXHAUSTED BY HOW FAST TECHNOLOGY is changing? When new technology is created to help us in one area, it creates new and often more complex problems that need to be solved in other areas. The creation of plastic has improved the quality of life for thousands of people who have received superior medical care; yet we are dealing with unprece-

What would it look like for educators to navigate this moment with a deeper vision of what it means to be human?

ented plastic pollution because of this amazing technology.

As educators, we look to use or develop technological solutions to provide support in some of the trickiest or most administratively demanding areas of our work. We do this work using our guiding principles to discern where we should invest our efforts, while continuing to ask: “What problem or



Human?

problems are we trying to fix?” and “What problems might we be creating by creating the solution we chose?” Every time we solve a problem, we inevitably create a new, often more complex problem that needs to be solved.

The development of generative AI brings this reality to the forefront. In an evening, a teacher can develop a student’s individualized learning plan that allows the student to work at their own pace, on their own time, while providing the teacher with feedback on the student’s progress. This is amazing progress with great learning potential, and yet . . .

The potential problems this scenario creates are:

- 1. Embedded Individualism:** We are created to live in community. Part of living well in community is putting others before yourself. A completely custom, individualized learning program erodes community, further emphasizing the “it’s all about me” narrative that drives the market.
- 2. Instant Gratification and Self-regulation:** Students and increasingly their parents are unable or unwilling to self-regulate when something does not go their way immediately. Tools of instant gratification have and will continue to make the rich yet challenging aspects of healthy relationships impossible, because the perseverance, patience, and forgiveness necessary to form healthy, enduring relationships are difficult to sustain.
- 3. More Screen Time:** Children need more time outside, being physical, falling and scraping their knees. On a recent trip, I had the opportunity to visit “the log walk” at a park. It was a collection of fallen logs, some raw, some with cut steps and holds, placed at various angles, that invited participants to walk the logs. It was too inviting to pass up, and before long, I was falling off the log walk into the wood chips below, skinning my shins

in the process. “Dying” from a fall in a video game or learning simulation does little for my understanding of balance, of risk, and of real life. Providing more screen time for learning without an increase in physical learning has consequences and helps others create more problems than it solves.

As Christian schools, we need to develop and maintain a robust understanding of the theology of being human if we are to make discerning choices at the intersection of technology and learning. If we can answer what it means to be human, we can then evaluate tools and applications for their ability to support healthy human development.

How would you answer the question, “What does it mean to be human?”

Often, even in Christian schools, a definition of being human quickly devolves into a productivity list that includes the ability to create, produce, and some might try to be more Christian by adding the ability to worship. When we begin to define our uniqueness as humans in terms of what we do, we have missed the point. Not only does such a list exclude the developing embryo and the student with diverse needs who is fully dependent and non-verbal, but this list also forgets who is.

The answer to what it means to be human rests in God. God creates us and invites us into a relationship with Him. Our ability to create, worship, and produce is a part of what it means to be human, but only within the context of a God who loves us beyond measure, to the point of death. Our acts can and should be an act of gratitude and worship to the God who gives of Himself and sustains all things. Our productivity does not increase our humanity. What makes humans unique is the reality that before they have done anything, both in their lives and each morning, they are enough in God’s eyes, and it is through a relationship with Him that their full humanity can come alive. 🌱

DARREN SPYKSMA

SCSBC Associate Executive Director

AMPLIFY EDUCATORS. TRANSFORM LEARNING.



**Less paperwork.
More time with students.**

Amplify AI is an AI-powered platform built for schools, helping educators create high-quality IEPs, lesson plans, and learning experiences – faster and with greater clarity.

Amplify-AI



Create IEPs in Seconds

Turn student strengths, needs, and goals into structured, BC-aligned plans – ready to review and refine.

Plan with Purpose

Design lessons and units that integrate curriculum, faith, and meaningful learning in minutes.

Support Inclusive Education

Generate clear, competency-based plans that support differentiation, accommodations, and measurable growth.

Why Schools Choose Amplify AI

- Reduce administrative workload by up to 75%
- Strengthen consistency across teams
- Align with BC curriculum and standards
- Keep teachers in control – always

Built for Educators.

Designed for Impact.

Amplify AI supports your existing workflow – so you can focus on what matters most: your students.

Explore the platform
or book a demo:

AMPLIFY-AI.CA

PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE & PURPOSE



“I’m just not a math person.”

*“International students
are years ahead of us.”*

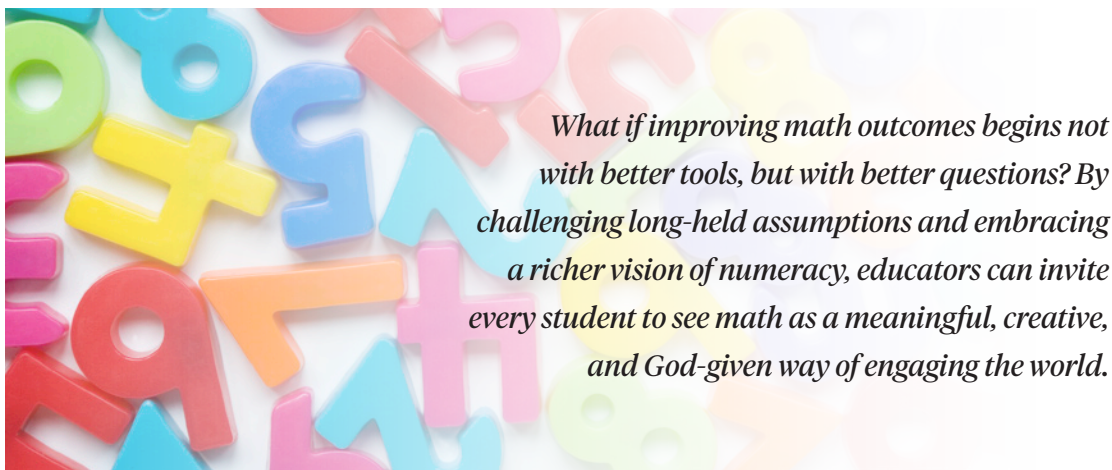
*“Let’s just get him a passing
grade so he can be done with it.”*

*“She’s just like me; I struggled
with math at her age, too.”*



HAVE YOU HEARD ANY of these statements – or said them yourself? From the traditional “three R’s” to modern “literacy and numeracy,” math has always been considered one of education’s foundational skills. Yet, despite a proliferation of math resources, assessment kits, and digital practice tools, falling math scores are a common topic of conversation across North America. Given all the resources available, where do we start to improve math scores? Or are there some even more important questions?

REIMAGINING MATH IN THE CLASSROOM



What if improving math outcomes begins not with better tools, but with better questions? By challenging long-held assumptions and embracing a richer vision of numeracy, educators can invite every student to see math as a meaningful, creative, and God-given way of engaging the world.

Some math educators are challenging the underlying assumptions in our society about our ability to learn math – assumptions reflected in the statements above. Stanford professor Jo Boaler is among the voices suggesting that the first step is to address the fixed mathematical mindset and see math in a different light. As educators engaged in Kingdom work, we must begin by affirming God’s intent for math and how math equips us to participate in his work of renewing all things. When we take joy in patterns and rhythms that frame God’s creation, math becomes a way for us to see

and celebrate our Creator. When we use number, shape, and space to build and create, we respond to God’s call to join him in the act of creation. When we critique the way statistics are used to manipulate or intimidate, we are participating in Christ’s work of naming and responding to injustice. Math helps us to understand ourselves, each other, and the world around us, and it is a gift of God to every person he has created. In this context, let’s consider some of our underlying beliefs about math and the most effective way to teach it.

Productive Struggle & Purpose: Reimagining Math in the Classroom

Redefining Our Terms

The study of math is often understood as focusing on finding the correct answer. However, true mathematics encompasses much more – from theories to variables to logic and reasoning. The term “numeracy” takes this a step further, referring to the ability to use math in real-world problem-solving and decision-making. In British Columbia, provincial assessments prioritize numeracy over rote learning.

What might happen if we made numeracy a starting point for math instruction, rather than the application at the end of the lesson?

From Repetition to Productive Struggle

There is a long-standing debate about the benefits of math drills and the development of math fluency. Dr. Boaler suggests that we redefine fluency as being comfortable with numbers and being able to think about them in different ways. She draws on current brain research indicating that mistakes are essential to building new connections in the brain. It is common for teachers to remind their students that mistakes can be an important part of the learning process. It turns out that they are necessary for it! When students are invited to solve challenging problems through trial and error and multiple iterations, they are learning to think like mathematicians. *If mistakes are necessary for growth, how might we build classroom cultures that celebrate productive struggle as evidence of learning?*

Show and Tell

To develop mathematical understanding, our students must learn to explain their thinking and support their conclusions with evidence. They need to hear the invitations: “Show me how you know” or “Tell me why you think so.” This requires providing multiple opportunities to use visualization and estimation skills. It also requires regular engagement in math conversations with peers.

How can we structure math classes so that students become accustomed to showing and sharing their mathematical thinking?

Everyone Is a Mathematician

If we believe math is primarily about finding the one correct answer, an incorrect answer feels like a failure. This perception lies at the root of the fixed mindset that shapes how math is seen in our culture. But if we view math as a process of logic and collaboration, an incorrect answer is simply the beginning of learning. When students apply reason to a situation, evaluate their decisions, and adapt, they are doing math. *How might we shift our mindset so that parents, educators, and students see themselves as capable mathematicians?*

We All Teach Math

In recent years, there has been a push to view literacy instruction as something done in all subjects by all educators. It is time to think about math in a similar way. Students flourish when they can use math to solve real-world problems of significance. These tasks can arise across many subject areas. As we seek to support our students in developing numeracy, we need our staff to take ownership of this task. *What would it look like to invite every staff member to participate in numeracy instruction?*

As God’s image bearers, our students are called to engage joyfully with creation through the gifts of reason and creativity. May we invite them into purposeful math tasks, in which they will see their Creator and participate eagerly in his work of renewal. 🌱

KRISTIE SPYKSMA

SCSBC Associate Director of Learning

References

- Jo Boaler, *Mathematical Mindsets* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016).
- Lainie Schuster and Nancy Canavan Anderson, *Good Questions for Math Teaching: Why Ask Them and What to Ask, Grades K–6* (Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions, 2005).
- “How to Teach Deep Mathematical Thinking,” *School of Practice*, podcast episode, Edutopia, March 17, 2026, <https://www.edutopia.org/podcast/how-to-teach-deep-mathematical-thinking/>

Navigate Conference 2026

*This year's theme was Rooted & Resilient,
how to exhibit faithful leadership in times of change.*



The 2026 Navigate Conference was one for the books! Over 130 advancement and finance staff, administrators, and board members gathered at the Coast Tsawwassen Inn in Delta, BC, on April 13-14. The meeting rooms were full of people and lively conversations, and our hearts were full of gratitude for everyone who took time from their busy schedules to engage with others and grow in their roles.

This event is a uniquely Canadian professional development opportunity for those working in development, admissions, marketing and communications, finance and human resources in our schools. The conference offers learning, connection, and inspiration from a faith perspective that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Shawn Neumann, an entrepreneur and advisor, opened the conference with a challenge to cultivate faithfulness when reality doesn't follow our plans. He shared how organizations can thrive in uncertainty when they have a culture of discernment and imagination for the future.

Attendees selected from a variety of workshop topics, including donor stewardship, marketing ideas, risk management, and retirement planning. Some spent time improving their AI skills, while others learned how advancement efforts are more effective as a team. Those working in human resources were encouraged to define responsibilities for HR tasks and delved into the legal intricacies of staff disability leave. Admissions staff were challenged to consider the legal and biblical perspectives on accommodation, as well as best practices in admissions and inclusive education.

We are always grateful to our corporate sponsors for supporting this important event, and especially to those who joined us during the conference – Christian School Foundation, Westland Insurance, Acera Insurance, Christian Education Benefits Solutions, Volkenant Law Group, and Manning Elliott CPAs.

We're excited to see what plans God has in store for Navigate next year – stay tuned for news for April 2027! 🌟





Use the QR code to view more photos from the 2026 Navigate conference.



EQUIP

INTRODUCING **EQUIP** - THE REIMAGINED SCSCB FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE!

Designed specifically for board members and school leaders, **EQUIP** offers a full slate of practical workshops focused on governance, society structures, strategic planning, faithful school leadership, and more! Come ready to engage, learn, and leave better equipped for the work ahead in your school community.

31 October 2026 | Stay tuned for more information!

The Link is the publication of

**Society of Christian Schools
in British Columbia**

22500 University Drive
Langley BC V2Y 1Y1

604 888 6366 telephone

Visit our website: scsbc.ca

All contents © copyright 2026; no part of the magazine may be reproduced in whole or in part without express permission.

Letters to the Editor

We invite questions, comments, as well as any general feedback you may have about *The Link* to contact@scsbc.ca

The Link is produced by:

Editor/graphic designer: Kevin van der Leek

Editorial team: Amanda Broadway,
Sarah Edgar, Cathy Kits, Dave Loewen,
Darren Spyksma, Kristie Spyksma,
Kevin van der Leek, Tracey Yan

Printed in Canada: Print It Group

Send all address changes to:

Circulation Manager, *The Link*
c/o SCSCB
22500 University Blvd
Langley BC V2Y 1Y1

kevin.vanderleek@scsbc.ca

ISSN 2563-1616

Online ISSN 2563-1624



Cover photo by Kevin van der Leek



celebrating 50 years
of God's faithfulness

FOLLOW US!

