

# Education Plan for Hillcrest Christian School May 2024

## Accountability Statement

The Education Plan commencing September 1, 2024, for **Hillcrest Christian School Society** was prepared under the direction of the Board of Directors in accordance with its responsibilities under the *Private Schools Regulation* and the *Education Grants Regulation*. This plan was developed in the context of the provincial government's business and fiscal plans. The Board has used its performance to develop the plan and is committed to implementing the strategies contained within the plan to improve student learning and results.

The Board approved the Education Plan for 2024/2026 on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Original Signed  
Sharon Ambros  
Board Chair

## A Profile of the School Authority

Hillcrest Christian School had its beginnings as an outgrowth of an intentional Christian community. Since those early days of serving its own community, the school has become a center of education for numerous families. This includes both parents and children who do not necessarily adhere to the Christian faith but believe that the values held within the school system provide a healthy environment for their children. Parental feedback over the years indicates that we have a niche in our community as a school that provides support for students struggling emotionally and/or academically, by ensuring a low student to teacher ratio and a strong emphasis on Biblically based character development. The staff also attempts to address student issues on an individual basis by providing extra support when needed in conjunction with the students' parents. Some of these students, when ready, move back into the public system, while others prefer to remain in the school. We are glad to be able to offer this support to the families in the Grande Prairie area.

Our enrolment fluctuates between 45 and 70 students, from kindergarten to grade twelve. We offer the Alberta Education Program of Studies, including Physical Education, Music, Art, Drama, and Dance, as well as CTS courses and Work Experience.

Our student body consists of a wide range of academic, emotional, and social abilities. Our focus on student leadership and character development helps the students learn how to reach out to individuals first within the school community and then beyond. For those students who struggle, the staff attempts to address these problems and provide support where possible on an on-going basis.

We encourage our staff and students to attempt to live by the teachings of the Scriptures. This allows us to work towards fulfilling one of the most important aspects of our mission; that of offering Christ's love to students through the way that teachers teach and deal with conflicts that arise with the students. To be patient, accepting, encouraging, and giving of unconditional love while remaining firm in our expectations of the students and fellow colleagues, is an ongoing challenge that we work diligently to meet.

## Foundation Statements

### Vision

- To increase the quality and diversity of our program using a Biblical worldview as a framework in order to help prepare students for society's demands.
- To foster interest and provide training in the arts.
- To develop peer leadership training opportunities so that students are prepared to participate positively in their communities.
- To give our teachers opportunities and support for further training through seminars, etc.
- To develop in the students a keen interest and joy in learning.
- To continue to develop an atmosphere, in the school in general and in the individual classrooms, conducive to learning.
- To ensure open communication between parents/guardians and school administration/teachers regarding all aspects concerning students (course progress, discipline, goals).
- To ensure that parents and society members have access to school information.

## Mission

To set and maintain the highest level of professional, ethical, and educational standards for the students while granting them the opportunity to better understand the Christian faith and learn to live it out in their daily lives.

## Principles

- Students are responsible for participating in the achievement of their educational success.
- Teachers provide opportunities for all students to acquire strong reading, writing, and math skills with which to develop critical thinking and self-directed learning.
- Teachers must endeavor to be exemplary role models in lifestyle, attitude, conduct, and life-long learning.
- Students are entitled to a safe, secure, and caring learning environment where each individual is respected and valued.
- Education, incorporating a Biblical worldview, is an important building block in a student's development.
- The education process involves providing our society with creative critical thinkers and problem solvers, who are prepared with a strong moral base to participate in the world of work, postsecondary studies, life-long learning, and citizenship.
- In striving for quality educational programs, six dimensions of student development are considered: social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional, and spiritual.
- All students are challenged to learn and achieve through high learning expectations.
- The success of students is the shared responsibility of students, parents, school, church, community, and government.
- Parents have opportunities for involvement in important decisions about their children's education.
- All those responsible for decisions about education, including the expenditure of government education funds, school fees, fund raising monies, and donations are accountable to HCS society members and Alberta Education.

## Outcome 1 – Numeracy/literacy growth for grades 1-9

- Outcome 1A - Increase math proficiency so 50% of students will score 75% or higher on the Math Intervention Programming Instrument (MIPI) and our 3-year average of students who pass the grade 6 & 9 math PAT's will be 75% or higher.
- Outcome 2A - Develop cross curricula support to increase ELA levels to attain 75% grade level expectations with our in-house ELA tool, Logic of English (LOE) program and a 75% 3 year average of students passing grade 6 & 9 ELA PAT's

Numeracy and literacy proficiency is a concern across the province, as schools work to address the loss of learning experienced during COVID. Locally, staff have observed a decline in math and ELA performance with students at the grade 1-9 levels. Along with this observation, they noticed the general need for students to refamiliarize themselves with the social and mental structure/habits/skills required for successful learning. Examples of atrophied skills include meeting deadlines, applying focus, and navigating uncertainty. These concerns regarding the disruption in learning are a reoccurring theme at the school's society meeting. Both parents and community members indicated that they had observed the disruption and decline in learning over the past years. All stakeholders have expressed the desire to address the gap in learning.

Due to the small numbers of students, Hillcrest utilizes the Mathematics Intervention Programming Instrument (MIPI) for grades 1-9, and our own English Language Arts (ELA) evaluation tool for the elementary grades. The ELA evaluation tool is based on several different standard evaluation tools that track phonemic awareness, spelling and vocabulary, grammar, and reading and comprehension. These tools along with the PAT's and Diploma results give a better and more rounded picture of learning at Hillcrest. Staff use the MIPI and ELA evaluation tool to monitor student proficiency and address knowledge gaps on an individual level with students.

### Strategies

- To better prepare our students for grade 1, we provide 540 Kindergarten hours, instead of the 475 instructional hours that Alberta requires. This works out to an additional 11 days of classroom instruction.
- Review learning gaps of student groups as a staff and develop strategies as a team to address learning issues. This is especially helpful for addressing the lacking skills/habits necessary for successful learning.
- Enable professional development opportunities for literacy and numeracy.
- Ongoing implementation of new provincial curriculum.
- Continue using the MIPI and ELA evaluation tools to indicate and address specific learning gaps on an individual level with students.
- Assessments include monitoring and mitigating academic gaps specifically experienced by FNMI students.

### Measurements

- Evaluate student success periodically using in-house tools, such as LOE's and MIPI's, as well as PAT's, diploma exams, and high school completion rates.
- Participate in reviews and evaluations of new curriculum, to assess effectiveness.
- Responses from survey questions will provide satisfaction feedback from stakeholders on

- the school's work to address the gap in learning.
- Anecdotal feedback from parents and other stakeholders will be drawn from parent-teacher interviews and semi-annual society meetings.

## **Outcome 2 - Cultivate an Arts Focus within grades 7-9**

Hillcrest Christian School recognizes the value of the arts education in the lives of our students. Going beyond enrichment, to creativity and innovation, the arts unlock potential in students that no other subject can. Students, alumni, and parents have given feedback indicating the positive, formative impact exposure to the arts has had on their lives. They want to see the arts made a focus within the current school culture and curriculum.

We believe that increasing student exposure to the arts will have a wide array of possible benefits. Arts education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and innovation. It provides opportunities for students to develop empathy, kindness, and cross-cultural understanding. We want to provide instruction that will promote lifelong appreciation, understanding, creative expression, and active participation in the arts for our students. Additionally, student involvement in the arts is linked to higher academic performance, increased standardized test scores, greater involvement in community service and lower dropout rates.

### **Strategies**

- Enable staff to access art-focused professional development. This includes teacher-to-teacher mentorship from arts specialists.
- Focus Jr high course options towards exposure to the arts, including music, drama, and visual arts.
- Give students the opportunity to demonstrate skills to a variety of school stakeholders through school productions, performances, and art displays.
- Give grades 7-9 students access to supplemental art-based educational experiences. This includes activities such as visits to local art galleries, viewing local performances, and participating in community arts programs.

### **Measurements**

- Survey results from teachers indicating they feel sufficiently supported through PD opportunities related to the arts.
- Jr high students participate in publicly displayed arts-based activities at least once during the school year.
- Maintain high percentage of Jr high students enrolled in arts-related courses.
- A gradual improvement in baseline educational outcomes as measured by Provincial and school-based assessments.

## **Outcome 3 – Foster student's sense of community/belonging through ongoing implementation of school-wide activities.**

- Cultivate a faith-based school environment where students feel they belong; that they have a place where they are respected and supported within the school community. To specifically increase the sense of community and belonging through school-wide activities.

Hillcrest is committed to the whole child. This encompasses the academic, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of each child.

The school community has noted a lost sense of security and belonging in students, as an ongoing result of a post-pandemic culture. Over the last few years, public and private communication has often become polarized and divisive. Unifying traditions and touchstone events still feel unreliable. Students appear more reactive to change and loss within school and life. Meanwhile, a sense of isolation has been further entrenched through past cohorting and physical distancing. This has had a lasting impact on the students. Even after a period of “normal”, our students still display a lack of security and belonging found in community and relationships.

Day-to-day student feedback strongly indicates the value of school-wide events and gatherings. The desire to work, play, and gather as a larger group is continuously expressed across the grade levels. Parents have echoed this sentiment in conversations with school staff and at the semi-annual society meeting. They value the experience of cross-grade relationships formed through larger, school-wide activities. The parents and staff see this sense of community – of belonging – as having a positive impact on the growth and mental health of the children. They want to see it return as a hallmark experience of the school.

### Strategies

- Maintain school-wide weekly assemblies.
- Strengthen connectivity among students throughout the school by implementing programs and activities that encourage cross-grade interaction. This includes multi-grade clubs, led by school staff. It also includes major school-wide celebrations.
- Establish a rotational schedule of school celebrations so students can reliably anticipate upcoming events each school year.
- Create opportunities for parents to be involved in school activities to help establish a safe family atmosphere within the school.
- Develop relationships with community partners to become a respected and visible part of the surrounding community.
- Strengthen staff, students’, and families’ understanding of the relationship between spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health.
- Ensure all students are greeted at the school door each morning.

### Measurements

- Ongoing school-wide assemblies.
- Implement a variety of school-wide celebrations and events across the school calendar.
- Establish rotational schedule for larger school-wide events.
- Student, parent, and staff surveys that measure satisfaction with:
  - Student sense of community.
  - Student ability to identify safe staff when they need support.
  - Students feeling safe and cared for at school.
- Feedback solicited from stakeholders at semi-annual meeting.

## FNMI

While we have no data due to small numbers, our average FNMI enrollment over the years is approximately 2.5% of our student body. Even so Hillcrest Christian School has taken proactive steps to integrate FNMI education into the school. In the past school administration as well as a Board member and staff have taken part in the Commitment to Action seminars provided by AISCA in conjunction with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation from the University of Manitoba. The school has also had an elder come in before COVID to help us understand FNMI culture.

The school is continuing to prioritize First Nations Metis and Inuit studies via professional development, intentional teaching practices, and curriculum implementation.

Teachers use local resources like the Grande Prairie Museum to teach about the Grande Prairie and area First Nations' past.

We work with foster parents in conjunction with Child and Family services to ensure success for individual students through their Success in Schools Program. We incorporate the area's rich First Nations' heritage into the different educational aspects of the school's program.

## Stakeholders

As an independent school that charges tuition our parents are very involved in school life through our bi-annual meetings, volunteering, joining us for school celebrations, and time spent talking to staff. In a landscape of educational choice where parents are consumers, the fact that they continue to choose our 'product' is a testament as to how they view the school, teachers, and school authority leaders.

Because we do not advertise, many of our new families come from parent referrals which would indicate that the school parents are pleased with teachers, school leaders, and school authority leaders. The school's Board is comprised of parents and other individuals related to students in the school. The school board has two annual meetings per year where both members and non-members are invited. The meetings share information regarding school operations as well as continuing and newly implemented programs. Information is also shared regarding the school's relationship with Alberta Education, the results of last year's academic reports, along with a look at the future. Members and non-members are encouraged to ask questions and give opinions throughout this process.

Information gleaned from these meetings is discussed by the school board and administration. Where possible and applicable the feedback is integrated into our three-year plan. A good example of this is the strategy of establishing a rotational schedule for school celebrations so parents know in advance what is happening and can plan their home lives accordingly.

There is also "informal" feedback from parents on an ongoing basis through staff and administration. Parents are very involved with their child's education. The school does not have bussing, which means that there is a lot of parent-teacher interaction as parents drop off and pick up their children. Parents of children that struggle academically or otherwise are used as a resource to help the child succeed in the areas that they struggle.

This type of interaction has helped us develop our ELA program over the last few years.

## Budget Link

<https://www.hcsgp.ca/app/uploads/2024/05/HCS-Budget-2024-2025.pdf>