

## Dear CCS Families,

As we launch into the second half of our school year, we wanted to “pick up where we left off” in December, and share the priorities we’ve identified for our Society and Calgary Christian School over the next 5 months.

While there are many interesting and important things competing for energy and attention, we recognize these things continue to happen in the context of the continuing pandemic. Considering all the special requirements, limitations, and changing rules, we need to recognize that this constant “pivoting” is no small feat. We want to commend our CCS staff for their selfless commitment to in-class learning, and also thank our community for their cooperation in supporting the extra steps required to keep classes running on campus each day.

Topping our list of priorities is approving a final design and securing the necessary funding for our new secondary campus physical education and events building. Over the next several weeks, we must complete the design and permit applications to allow for a construction start in 2022. In addition to securing long term financing, we are progressing in our Faithfulness Campaign, the \$3 million comprehensive fundraising effort to support this exciting building project along with other improvements at the elementary campus. To date, more than \$500,000 in gifts and pledges have been received. We are grateful for this strong start, and look forward to our entire community joining in this important effort in meaningful ways.

Internally, the ongoing work of our Board continues. In addition to refining our policy manual - which affects how our Board works and how the CSCE staff operate - we’ve also begun our search for new board members. Elections will be held at our spring Society meeting and our nominating committee is currently vetting interested candidates. If you or someone you know has interest in serving on the Board, please reach out and let us know by February 28.

As part of our oversight duties, we are also reviewing the CCS Faith Formation Program. It is our intent to not only assess how well our current K-12 program fulfills our mission, vision and values, but also encourage staff in further developing its potential. We look forward to sharing our observations and recommendations with the Society later this spring.

In follow up to the Society meeting on December 2, the Board and other school leaders have been asked by parents for more details regarding the inclusive student group that is in development for our secondary school. While our principal and executive director have responded personally to many of these inquiries through email, phone calls, and personal meetings, many of the same questions persist. We have also received reports of some inaccurate information being circulated within our community. In order to avoid confusion, prevent the spread of misinformation, and help set a context for healthy and productive community dialogue going forward, we want to clarify a few items.

First, to recap the original announcement: the Board was asked if a “GSA” (gay straight alliance) was being formed at the secondary school. In response, secondary principal Jadan

Barthel shared information about this new project. He stated that a new student group would be developed in 2022 to foster respect and understanding between students, and that this group is being developed at the request of students and arises from specific needs within our school. This group presents a unique opportunity for CCS to shape an inclusive “brave space” for students informed by our care for their well-being and our shared values as followers of Jesus. In concluding, he invited parents to respond and stated that there would be an opportunity in the near future for parents to voice their questions, hopes, and concerns.

While not all questions could be answered during the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, the correspondence we’ve received and conversations that leadership has conducted focus on a few key items. Here are responses to some of these recurring inquiries:

- An inclusive student group has been requested by students at the secondary campus.
- This group will be based on fostering care for and respect between students.
- The Board presented a statement to the Society in June 2021 regarding the CSCE policy that acknowledges biblical interpretation may vary - sometimes significantly - within the Christian faith, and that many such differences are permitted to co-exist within our school community. Agreement within our school is based upon the items stated within our foundational documents.
- All schools in Alberta - including private, public, separate, charter, and alternative - are required by law to form and support inclusive student groups when requested. Changing the status of a school does not prevent or eliminate this legal obligation.
- It would be our preference not to refer to this as a “GSA”, as some of these clubs have generated severe public criticism and bad press with their controversial activities. A name reflective of our shared values and the articulated purpose of the group will be considered.
- The term “Brave Space” has been used as a general holding term; it is not the group’s name or a euphemism. A “brave space” is any intentional meeting environment that has established rules of interaction between its members to ensure respectful discussion especially around controversial, difficult, or personal topics. The term is already in use with other groups that choose to abide by these courteous “rules of engagement”.
- As a student club, its purpose and activities will be rooted in the person of Jesus – who is the foundation of our mission, vision and values. It is not to be construed as an endorsement of a particular denomination’s doctrine, nor will it promote any kind of sexual promiscuity, political activism, or unexamined secular opinions. Rather, it is intended to be a place where students can interact with one another, under the guidance of a caring adult, in an environment of Christian kindness and mutual respect.

As stated in the original announcement, this is a project in development. Time and internal dialogue between students and staff are still required to provide greater clarity on the expectations and activities envisioned for this group. Mr. Barthel will provide written details to the parent community about the group including what it will be, what it won’t be, and how it will operate to ensure each student’s care and well-being. Thereafter parents will have

opportunities to meet in small groups to share their comments, concerns, and questions with the leadership. These groups are tentatively scheduled to begin March 3.

We recognize that this process has raised some significant and emotionally charged questions within our community. It is our intent to continue to approach these developments with respect and sensitivity; it is our expectation that those choosing to participate in this dialogue will do so in the same manner. While we may not all come to complete agreement in all things, we trust that we may continue to experience the unity of the body of Christ through these times of reflection, growth, and change. Please join us in praying for our community as we seek God's will in caring for all His children at Calgary Christian School.

On behalf of the CSCE Board,

Ken Siemens, Chair

Jon Halford, Vice Chair