

GRAND RAPIDS

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

**2013-2018**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

Thomas DeJonge, Superintendent

Jill Bielema, President, Board of Trustees

June 17, 2013

*“Preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society”*

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# **Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan**

## **Letter from the Superintendent**

Dear Grand Rapids Christian Schools community:

When you plan a family trip, you probably don't leave the details to chance. You consult maps and websites, talk with friends, and come up with an itinerary to provide your family with a wonderful experience. Basically, you create a "strategic plan."

Like a family planning a trip, Grand Rapids Christian Schools provides our students with a wonderful Christian education when it is guided by a strategic plan that thoughtfully shapes our journey with students, families, staff, and members of our community. The 2008-2013 strategic plan included major initiatives such as strengthened educational programs, debt retirement, school consolidation, investments in facilities, and endowment growth. God richly blessed our efforts! Now it's time for us to look ahead to the next five years.

In March 2012 we initiated the development of a new strategic plan. A Strategic Planning Steering Committee was established to build the framework of the 2013-2018 strategic plan, and it did so with dedication and enthusiasm. After careful evaluation and many revisions, the Committee submitted a plan for review by our Administrative Council and our Board of Trustees. I am pleased to tell you that the Board approved the 2013-2018 strategic plan at its meeting on June 17, 2013.

Working together, these groups developed an exciting roadmap that will help Grand Rapids Christian Schools continue achieving its mission of preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society. As you will see, the strategic plan focuses on five main issues:

- Faith Nurture/Strengthening the Community of Faith
- Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
- School Culture
- Financial Stability
- Position/Reputation in the Community

I invite you to review the plan, and I welcome any feedback you may have. Your participation and vision are an important element of what makes our school community the wonderful place

it is, and we thank you for your commitment to Christian education and Grand Rapids Christian Schools.

Though we do our best to plan well for the future, we know that we live each day in God's hands, and we pray that God will guide us every step of the way as we carry out our work.

Sincerely,

Thomas DeJonge, Superintendent

# **Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan**

## **Board of Trustees 2012-2013**

Jill Bielema, '14 – President

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# Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan

## Mission Statement

*“Preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society”*

## Core Values

### Rooted in Christ

Impressing a strong knowledge of God, a love for His word, and an understanding that all we do is in honor of Him are fundamental to a Christian school education. Rather than measuring all aspects of program against worldly standards, we measure program against biblical standards in order to equip students to live out their faith in their relationships, character, and service to others.

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. “

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”

Proverbs 22:6

### Educated for Life

Passionate and dedicated Christian educators develop learning environments and implement effective and relevant instructional practices that engage today’s students and build a love for learning. What, when, and how we teach must effectively transition all learners to be effective

servants of Christ in today's society, which is global, digital and technology rich, and driven by innovation and creativity. What students learn from us must prepare them for what God calls them to do, motivate them to be the best they can be, and instill a love for learning that is lifelong. Further, we must equip them to be Christian leaders within their homes, churches, and communities on a local, national and international level today and for the decades to come.

“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

Deuteronomy 4:9

## Connected through Relationships

Relationships are essential to learning, and precede a student's ability to cognitively engage in the learning process. We must create a community of learning that starts with the student's personal relationship with Christ. Further, our learners must experience intentional, positive, caring relationships with parents, peers, and school staff. It is through meaningful relationships developed in a Christian context that students mature in their faith, strive to achieve, experience success, and fulfill their God-given potential.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 2:3-5

“...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

I Corinthians 12:25-26

“In our world, where many journey alone, God, by His gracious choosing in Christ, gathers a new community – those who by God's gift put their trust in Christ. In the new community all are welcome; the homeless come home, the broken find healing, the sinner makes a new start, the despised are esteemed, the least are honored, and the last are first. Here the Spirit guides and grace abounds.”

Contemporary Testimony, Paragraph 34

## United with Home and Church

Strong spiritual foundations are firmly established when Christian home, church, and schoolwork in partnership. Christian schools exist to assist parents to fulfill the biblical mandate to “train up their children in the way they should go” and collaborate with the church in teaching children in God’s truths.

“We are the family of God, serving Christ together in Christian community (church)... We offer our lives to building the kingdom, teaching and modeling the ways of the Lord so our children may know Jesus as Lord and learn to use their gifts in lives of joyful service (family). Serving the Lord in whom all things hold together, we support sound education in our communities and we foster schools and teaching in which God’s truth shines in all learning (school).”

Contemporary Testimony, Paragraphs 46 and 47

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:12

## Called to Serve

Excellence in God’s eyes is doing one’s best in Glory of Him. As a Christian school, we affirm that all that we do, the culture we establish, the relationships we build, the lessons we teach, and the activities we support must be defined within the context of whether they bring honor and glory to God. Service is an opportunity for Christ to be visibly revealed as the Lord of all things. Through service we engage in worshipping God and extending the love of Christ in transformative ways through our actions.

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:43-45

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”

1 Peter 4:10



# **Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan**

## **Executive Summary**

### Introduction

During the 2011-2012 school year, Grand Rapids Christian Schools Board of Trustees charged the development of a new five-year strategic plan. This was in response to the current strategic plan, which expires in June 2013. Gonser Gerber LLP assisted in facilitating the development of the 2008-2013 Strategic Plan. Given the School's experience with Gonser Gerber; its familiarity with Grand Rapids Christian Schools' mission, vision, and priorities; and the School's successful achievement of nearly all aspects of the current plan, the firm was asked to once again facilitate the development of the new plan.

The Board of Trustees retains ultimate accountability to ensure the successful completion of the strategic plan. Effective with its final approval of the Plan, the Board has charged the Superintendent with its full execution and will monitor Grand Rapids Christian Schools' progress throughout the Plan's duration.

### Summary of Process

In consultation with Gonser Gerber, the Superintendent determined that the strategic planning model for the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan would be coordinated by a Strategic Planning Steering Committee composed of the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Advancement Officer, Chief Education Officer, and Principal of Rockford Christian School along with the Superintendent (Appendix A). Ongoing consultation with the school leadership team, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, and others would inform the process.

The Steering Committee and the Grand Rapids Christian Schools Administrative Council met in March 2012 in a retreat to frame new statements of core values and to complete an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats Grand Rapids Christian Schools faces as it plans for its future. From that analysis, the Steering Committee met and identified five

strategic issues, which, along with the development of new core values, were shared with and further refined by the Board of Trustees over several working sessions in Fall 2012. Utilizing the input received through these steps, the Steering Committee prepared goal statements that would enable Grand Rapids Christian Schools to address those strategic issues. Each Steering Committee member was assigned one of the five goals and charged to establish and lead an action team composed of faculty, staff, board members and community members to create strategies to achieve their assigned goal (Appendix B). Upon completion of the action teams' work, the strategies were submitted to the Superintendent who refined the strategies; looked for overlaps or missing steps; and ensured continuity, alignment, and common voice. The final plan was reviewed with the Steering Committee, Administrative Council, and Board of Trustees for review and approval in June 2013.

# **Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan**

## **Strategic Issues**

The strategic issues as identified by the Grand Rapids Christian Schools Administrative Council resolved into five areas:

1. Faith Nurture/Strengthening the Community of Faith
2. Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
3. School Culture
4. Financial Stability
5. Position/Reputation in the Community

### Faith Nurture/Strengthening the Community of Faith

Rationale: In order to truly distinguish Grand Rapids Christian Schools within the community, it must be clearly evident that the development of a community of faith - one that nurtures faith formation - is its priority in the education of its students. This requires that priorities be well understood, boldly communicated, and clearly coordinated by all school staff. The issues in this area revolved around supporting staff in their ability to integrate faith in their subject or area of responsibility; emphasizing that distinction in all communications and in goal setting; advancing messages of partnership with parents, Christian organizations, and area churches; and instituting staff practices at all levels that furthers faith formation in the lives of students.

### Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum

Rationale: The issues in this area revolved around understanding how students learn; developing a process to implement content area standards; creating and utilizing facilities to enhance and strengthen instruction and student achievement; utilizing technology to enhance teaching, engage students, and deepen student learning; aligning school schedules with best instructional practices at all levels; encouraging collaborative, interdisciplinary, and cross department/grade teaching; creating appropriate physical space for learning; keeping up with or ahead of technology and utilizing it to make learning happen; encouraging interdisciplinary

study; and supporting the initiatives already established within the Learning Without Limits campaign.

## School Culture

Rationale: This strategic issue recognizes the importance of the culture within a school community and the significant and seemingly unique impact of that community as reflected by alumni of Grand Rapids Christian High School. The issues that relate to school culture revolved around developing a collaborative culture within each school and across all schools; distinguishing between and developing a mindset of Grand Rapids Christian Schools being a learning vs. teaching community; creating value-added diversity initiatives; building the capacity of all staff continuously; establishing service learning as a integral part of each student's school experience; and engaging in true partnership with parents as reflected by communications, relationships, relevant engagement.

## Financial Stability

Rationale: Though significant progress has been made to strengthen Grand Rapids Christian Schools' financial viability and sustainability over the past five years, the long-term vitality of the School's financial health continues to be an important priority. Increasing the percentage of revenue from tuition and establishing achievable percentages of revenue from Grand Rapids Christian Schools endowment funds, annual fund efforts, and other business revenues to cover the School's operational budget strengthens and secures Grand Rapids Christian Schools' financial position. Issues in this area also revolved around ensuring the proper maintenance of capital resources and facilities; recognizing that advancement is a critically important aspect in admissions, communications, and donor relations; and maintaining while also increasing donor support and strengthening alumni relationships.

## Position/Reputation in the Community

Rationale: Keeping enrollment strong and steady strengthens Grand Rapids Christian Schools and enables it to advance its mission within the community. To make this happen, Grand Rapids Christian Schools must become the school of choice for families. Issues in this area revolved around Grand Rapids Christian Schools' visibility and respect within and throughout

the community and benchmarking its curricular and extracurricular programs against national, top tier Christian Preschool-12 schools.

From these issues, the Steering Committee identified three strategic initiatives and developed five goals which, when completed, will enable Grand Rapids Christian Schools to address these strategic issues and advance its mission throughout the region.

# Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan

## Goals and Strategies

### FAITH NURTURE

#### GOAL A

FOSTER AN ENVIRONMENT THAT ENABLES STUDENTS AND STAFF TO GROW IN CHRISTIAN FAITH, ENGAGE IN CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER, ARTICULATE CHRISTIAN BELIEFS, AND PUT FAITH INTO ACTION.

1. Deepen faculty understanding of how to teach all subject areas in a way that is rooted in faith.
2. Establish a full time PS-12 position to ensure faith is effectively integrated in all subjects across all grades and a continuous focus on each student's personal relationship with Christ is a priority.
3. Foster consistent practices that ground faith in action.
4. Ensure a culture that nurtures the spiritual health of students and staff through engagement in prayer, worship, service, and faith practices.
5. Nurture a culture in which every student is able to have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and Christ-centered relationships with staff and peers.
6. Establish strong faith communications and build relationships between school, home, and church.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### GOAL B

ENSURE A CHRIST-CENTERED LEARNING COMMUNITY ACROSS ALL SCHOOLS THAT UTILIZES A COORDINATED CURRICULUM; FACILITIES; AND THE GIFTS OF STUDENTS, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY TO DELIVER AN EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

1. Ensure consistent understanding and application of instructional delivery of the core curriculum across all levels.
2. Increase opportunities for students and staff to utilize community resources and engage with community members across all grades both in and outside of the classroom.
3. Ensure smooth transition for students between elementary, middle, and high school levels.
4. Equip faculty to understand and serve students from diverse cultural, ethnic, denominational, socio-economic, and spiritual levels.
5. Create a coordinated service-learning plan that integrates service learning into the existing school day and curriculum across all grades.
6. Ensure Grand Rapids Christian Middle School facilities are aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational program models as outlined in Learning Without Limits.
7. Strengthen an environment where students identify and develop their gifts, demonstrate pride in their school, and know that they belong.

## GOAL C

ENSURE A DYNAMIC INSTRUCTIONAL CULTURE THAT EMBRACES COLLABORATION AND CONTINUOUSLY STRENGTHENS PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY TO MAXIMIZE STAFF TALENTS AND STUDENT LEARNING.

1. Establish Professional Learning Community at each school.
2. Create and institute a long-term professional development plan that focuses on:
3. Continue to develop and strengthen new staff induction programs to facilitate their becoming integral members of the GRCS community.
4. Increase the professional capacities of faculty interested in administrative leadership roles at GRCS.
5. Engage faculty and administrators in a collaborative review and development of a new model for staff evaluation.



## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

### GOAL D

CREATE A BUSINESS MODEL FOR FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THAT SUPPORTS THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND ADVANCES THE MISSION OF GRAND RAPIDS CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

1. Investigate and recommend best-practice advancement models used in private and faith-based schools nationally.
2. Align and distribute financial aid according to benchmarks that support admissions targets and maximize net revenue.
3. Develop an annual budget that reflects a minimum of 85% of operational expenses covered by tuition, 4-5% by endowment, 7-8% by annual fund revenues, and 2-3% from other business revenue.
4. Compensate faculty and staff at levels that attract and maintain high quality administrators, teachers, and support staff.
5. Determine long-term facility needs to support 21<sup>st</sup> century educational models and sustain targeted elementary enrollment.
6. Ensure current year operational revenues are aligned with current year expenses.

## GOAL E

POSITION GRAND RAPIDS CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN THE BROADER WEST MICHIGAN COMMUNITY AS A HIGHLY RESPECTED CHRISTIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION WORTHY OF CHOICE FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS, ALUMNI, AND DONORS.

1. Ensure parents understand the distinct nature of Grand Rapids Christian Schools' approach to Christian education, breadth of academic and co-curricular programs, and sense of school community.
2. Ensure that alumni recognize the Schools' relevance in society, how it is making a difference, and that it is worthy of support.
3. Identify and implement admissions strategies and develop marketing materials to increase awareness and enrollment in alternative model programs at the Evergreen Campus, Rockford Christian Environmental Program, and Spanish Immersion at the Iroquois Campus.
4. Develop a culture of philanthropy that provides members of the school community with an understanding that their support is needed, makes a difference, and is essential for our future.
5. Ensure the broader community is accurately aware of the high quality, accessible, and Christian education available at Grand Rapids Christian Schools.
6. Ensure Grand Rapids Christian Schools' enrollment reflects diversity including students from a variety of socio-economic levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, academic abilities, and geographic residences.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan**

#### **Strategic Planning Steering Committee**

Eric Burgess, Rockford Christian School Principal

Tom DeJonge, Superintendent

Jim Primus, Chief Financial Officer

Lon Swartzentruber, Chief Advancement Officer

Holly Windram, Chief Education Officer

## APPENDIX B

### Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2013-2018 Strategic Plan

#### Goal Action Team Members

##### Faith Nurture

###### Goal A

*Foster an environment that enables students and staff to grow in Christian faith, engage in Christ-centered relationship with each other, articulate Christian beliefs, and put faith into action.*

Tom DeJonge, Chair

- Julie Barrett – Rockford Christian School, Teacher
- Larry Borst – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Teacher
- Rod Brandsen – Holland Christian South Side Elementary School, Principal
- Peter Jonker – Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church, Pastor
- Eric Kuiper – Mars Hill Church, Pastor
- David Mosterd – Holland Christian High School, Teacher
- Sue Pluymert – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher
- James Rooks – Calvin College, Professor and Dean of Teacher Education
- David Smith – Calvin College, Professor
- Christian VerWys – Fifth Reformed Church, Youth Pastor
- Glenn Vos – Holland Christian Schools, Superintendent
- Jim Vos – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, Teacher

## Teaching and Learning

### Goal B

*Ensure a Christ-centered learning community across all schools that utilizes a coordinated curriculum; facilities; and the gifts of students, staff, and community to deliver an exemplary Christian education.*

Holly Windram, Chair

- Holly Haan – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher
- Sheryl Jo – Grand Rapids Christian Schools, Director of Support Services
- Mark Krommendyk – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Principal
- Jonathan Quist – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Teacher
- Sue Pluymert – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher
- David Smith – Calvin College, Professor
- Tim Stapert – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Teacher
- Stephanie Tanis – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, Teacher
- Dan Voetberg – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, Teacher
- Becky Werdon – Rockford Christian School, Teacher
- Mary Witteveen – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher

### Goal C

*Ensure a dynamic instructional culture that embraces collaboration and continuously strengthens professional competency to maximize staff talents and student learning.*

Eric Burgess, Chair

- Julie Barrett – Rockford Christian School, Teacher
- Diane Boerma – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, Teacher
- Ashanti Bryant – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, principal
- Gord DeKoekkoek – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Teacher
- Liz Kingma – Grand Rapids Christian Schools, Director of Curriculum
- Pat Knott – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher
- Kris Koster – Grand Rapids Christian Middle School, Teacher
- Sara Seth – Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, Teacher
- Krista Wright – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Teacher

## Financial Sustainability

### Goal D

*Create a business model for financial sustainability that supports the educational program and advances the mission of Grand Rapids Christian Schools.*

Jim Primus, Chair

- Larry Bos, Jr. – Northwestern Mutual Insurance, Managing Director
- Randy Damstra – RDV Corporation, Senior Managing Director-Head of Global Private Equity
- Paul Karsten – Pine Rest Christian Hospital, CFO
- Jared Kooistra – Kooistra Chiropractic Clinic
- Tom Rosenbach – Beene Garter LLP, Managing Partner

### Goal E

*Position Grand Rapids Christian Schools in the broader West Michigan community as a highly respected Christian educational institution worthy of choice for parents, students, alumni, and donors.*

Lon Swartzentruber, Chair

- Lyndi Bell – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Admissions Coordinator
- Kevin Broene – Grand Rapids Christian High School, Assistant Athletic Director
- Carolyn Groendyk – Grand Rapids Christian Schools, Director of the Eagles Fund
- Joe Jones – Grand Rapids Urban League, Executive Director
- Andrea Leistra – Munder Capital Management, Senior Investment Manager
- Amy Orr – Grand Rapids Christian Schools, Director of Admissions
- Heidi Storms – Calvary Church, Youth and Childcare Program Director
- Bill VanderBilt – Hope College, Vice president of Admissions
- Mike VandenEnd – Calvin College Director of Alumni, Parent & Community Relations