
STRATEGIC PLAN

2005 – 2010

prepared exclusively for

South Christian High School

160 68th St. SW ♦ Grand Rapids, MI 49548-7198 ♦ (616) 455-3210

Mr. Larry Plaisier, Principal

Mr. John Pluger, Director of Development

Group Facilitation, Report Preparation, and Strategic Planning Services By



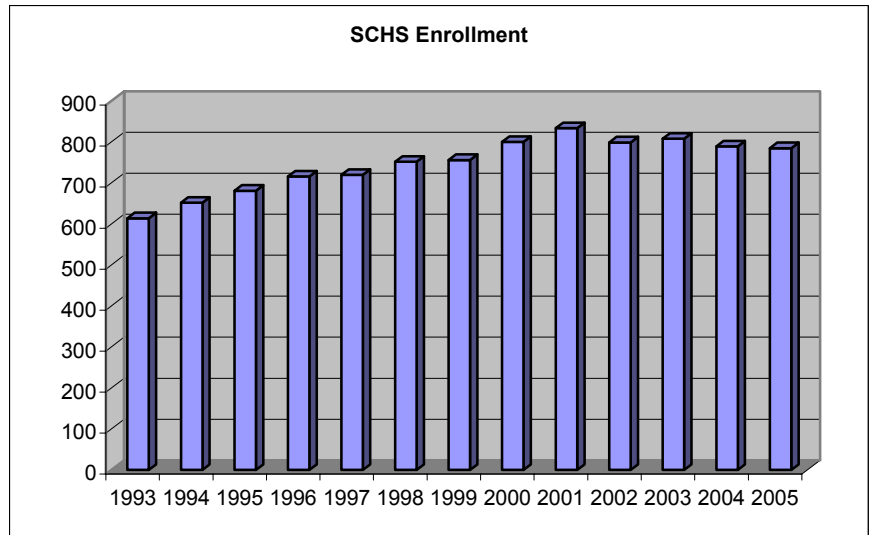
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| 3350 E. Paris Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49512-3054

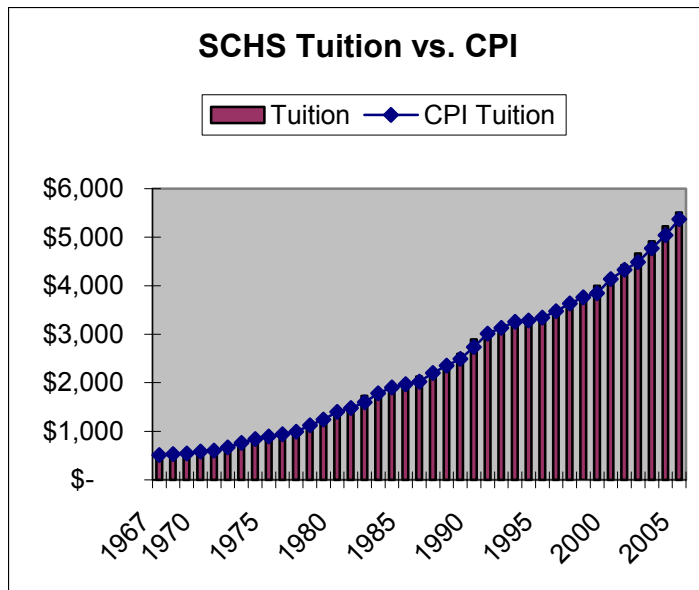
Introduction

South Christian High School (SCHS) is a 50-year-old high school on the growing south edge of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. It serves the population of several suburbs, and it draws students from five feeder schools in the surrounding area.

Enrollment has held relatively steady the past several years, hovering in the range of 800 students. The fact that enrollment has reached a plateau for the past six years is, according to many people, directly attributable to an obvious lack of physical space. Others point to general competitive pressures from other schools, enrollment declines in the feeder schools, and a weak regional economy. Clearly, a combination of some or all of these factors is at work.



Tuition has increased through the years at a rate closely matching the inflation rate (see chart below). Thus, despite being at nominally high levels, the current tuition represents a cost only a few



percentage points above what the equivalent adjusted tuition cost was in 1967. What has also remained constant, however, is that parents continue to pay nearly 100% of the costs of education.

The school facility is crowded, given that it was designed for only 640 students, and the current property is fully developed, with no room for expansion. So while the current buildings are by no means outdated, in disrepair, or beyond their useful life, the current facility is simply overtaxed. In response, a 130-acre piece of property has been secured and plans are in place to eventually relocate the school to the new campus on Kalamazoo Avenue.

The three issues mentioned here—enrollment, facilities, and tuition—intertwine to form the heart of any discussion regarding the future of South Christian High School. But because of the varying interpretations of the data, the school community has not yet settled on a clear consensus for action.

For instance, some make the case that the overcrowded conditions at the current campus, the recent enrollment plateau, the demographic shift of the school population and surrounding community to the south, and the opportunity to offer current and future students the best possible education, all argue for a move to the new campus as soon as possible. Others, however, read the same data concerning tuition, facilities, and enrollment, and conclude that SCHS's enrollment plateau is only a prelude to the enrollment challenges that the feeder schools are now experiencing. They also note that the poor overall manufacturing economy in West Michigan does not show signs of a quick turnaround and that the current campus has many years of useable life remaining. To them, the wiser choice is to remain in the current facilities for the near future and make adjustments to the current buildings as needed.

This range of opinions was mirrored in the Committee's discussions, and also in the conclusions and recommendations that follow. But the Committee also searched to find specific areas in which the school can and must move forward strategically.

Summary of Process

The Committee was selected by the school administration in conjunction with the Board, and it represents a broad cross-section of the SCHS community. The Committee met four times from March–May, 2005. Minutes of the four meetings are available upon request. Committee members joined for a 30-minute prayer time prior to each meeting. The Committee was able to engage in spirited discussion and yet come to agreeable conclusions with no significant factions. The members of the Strategic Planning Committee were:

Rod Alderink	Marla Huizing	Carol Meyer	Dave Smies
Tammy Born	Leanne Jansen	Bob Otte	Ila Wilson
John DeBlaay	Naomi Lyzenga	Larry Plaisier	Jeff Youngsma
Jim DeKorne (CSI)	Jeff Meengs	John Pluger	

Because this was an update and renewal of a previous strategic planning process, the core purposes and goals of the school were still considered valid. Thus, the mission, vision, and core values were agreed upon in advance and not explored in detail. Those statements are published in this report for reference.

At the initial meeting, the mandate for the committee was outlined and the qualities of a good strategic plan were explored, which included the following factors:

- Future-oriented
- Specific
- Concise
- Measurable

Committee members were encouraged to challenge assumptions when necessary, embrace differences, and suggest ideas, but to do so in a manner that was constructive, helpful, and biblically guided.

Context of Deliberations

At least two other important documents contain recommendations and planning schedules that should not be ignored. The school's accreditation process with the North Central Association has requirements and goals which will require time, energy, and funds to complete, and will also directly impact and contribute to at least one of the initiatives in this plan. Further, the comprehensive pre-campaign study conducted by the Timothy Group regarding the Kalamazoo property should further inform and illumine the recommendations contained in this report.

Summary of Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations can be stately succinctly as follows:

- Find ways to limit tuition increases for parents
- Address student overcrowding while keeping a long-range vision
- Help families understand the school's true mission, purpose, and value
- Continue to promote spiritual vibrancy in students and staff
- Keep South Christian at the forefront of educational excellence
- Explore ways to expand the curriculum to include a trades program

The initiatives are listed in the order of importance as ranked by the Committee. A few surely have overlapping goals, while some (such as facilities expansion and limiting tuition increases) may seem to be at odds. However, the Committee is convinced that all of them must be addressed to fully develop South Christian High School in the immediate and long term.

Clearly, the Committee agreed that SCHS was a very good school with a solid history of success and that radical changes were not needed in program or focus. However, the Committee believes that by paying attention to the six initiatives identified in the report, South Christian can not only remain a very good school, but also become the exemplary school God intends for it.

Mission, Vision, and Organizational Values

Mission and Vision are foundational to the planning process. These statements outline the purpose for the school and a description of its preferred future. The Committee accepted the existing mission and vision statements of South Christian High School, since they had been recently adopted and had received widespread concurrence.

The mission and vision statements and the core values list for South Christian High School are stated here:

Mission

South Christian High School will provide a Christ-centered education, equipping students to serve God to their greatest potential.

Vision

South Christian High School will offer an excellent academic program, rooted in Biblical beliefs and values. Within the framework of academic study and extra-curricular activities, SCHS will challenge students to know Biblical foundations, to demonstrate Christian values through a life of service and holy living, and to experience a personal relationship with Christ. SCHS will encourage students to reach their full potential by providing opportunities for them to develop as whole persons, maintaining a healthy physical, social, and emotional sense.

Organizational Values

- Centrality of the Christian faith (Reformed perspective).
- Compassion and respect for all people and God's creation.
- Commitment to family values.
- Consistent focus on academic excellence.
- Caring attitude of servanthood.
- Careful stewardship of all resources.
- Community involvement.

SWOT Analysis

Identifying the (S)trengths, (W)eaknesses, (O)pportunities, and (T)hreats to the school provides a snapshot of the current school system as well as its environment. The Committee identified the following items as they examined the school and its surroundings. These were grouped into the main categories of Purpose, Personnel, Program, Facilities, Finances, and Families.

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission is maintained consistently North Central Accreditation – Phase II- integrate faith in every area of learning 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing others to define us
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christian teachers Solid administration Continuity of staff How we react to issues/discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is pay high enough? Are teachers/staff as bold in their Christians faith as they could be? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise the bar in academics Shared time issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared time issue People think that we should have not sin/issues/problems
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good academics Good music programs Good variety of student activities Inclusive education program Good test scores We are different from public school between 8 – 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drama works around sports schedule Band concerts on Sunday, only night available Grade inflation No Skills program We are still dealing with teenagers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrate what we are doing, make people more aware Make all students feel level of support that athletes do, in whatever areas they participate Money follows ministry; if people see God at work, they will invest More counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of being a ‘sports’ school Not known for strong music program Charter schools doing well – marketing themselves as similar to Christian schools
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full utilization of facilities Sports Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facility is maxed out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new building with learning of today in mind Put in more vocational training opportunities 	
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No debt Favorable tuition compared to other Christian schools Phase I completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With no debt, people can become complacent not wanting to consider what God may want us to do Current attenders are the only ones financing current education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundation endowment New ways to finance education People with sizeable assets haven’t yet seen the vision of funding Annual fund drive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depressed economy
Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent support-attendance at events Broad range of church backgrounds Growing area Loyal alumni Good quality students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/families that don’t have the same priorities as the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7,000 + alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families create a reflection within the community

Strategic Initiatives

The Strategic Planning Committee was charged with carefully examining the future possibilities for South Christian High School in light of its past history and present status. Out of the many possibilities and options considered, the committee identified the six initiatives listed here as the most strategic tasks to be undertaken by South Christian High School in the next five years.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: FUNDING MODEL

Goal

Keep tuition affordable for families, so that a South Christian High School education remains accessible to a wide range of students in the Christian community. Explore all possible ways for funding the school in addition to a primarily tuition-driven model.

Tasks

- Generate possibilities for funding which may
 - Create more “shoulders” on which to carry the cost (churches, grandparents, corporate, IRS)
 - Improve relative worth (explain and educate regarding the value)
 - Make payment options more accessible (payment plans, tuition gift certificates)
 - Reduce operational costs (find ways to become more efficient)
- Establish an Annual Fund.
- Benchmark tuition to a particular standard, e.g. % of income, or CPI

Responsibility

- Finance Committee
- Development Office

Time Lines & Reporting

- Decision on Annual Fund at July Board meeting
- Annual updates to Board

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- Cost increases to parents do not exceed the annual CPI.
- Creative ideas for new fundraising have been developed.
- A list of definite actionable items is approved by the board by December 2005.
- The targeted goal for fundraising increases annually.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: FACILITIES EXPANSION

Goal

Create space for a full range of educational services for a student body of 900 students, and design and implement a facility plan that will provide for the next 50 years academically and technologically.

Tasks

- Communicate with faculty, parents, and others regarding the need and the options available.
- Publish a detailed comparison of costs, advantages, and disadvantages of renovation vs. new construction.
- Set a date by which the school community will finalize its commitment to the new property (i.e. pursue capital plans immediately, or temporarily adjust current facilities before pursuing a capital campaign at a later date).

Responsibility

- Advancement Committee
- School Administration

Time Lines & Reporting

- Monthly updates to Board

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- A consensus decision is reached by October 2005 regarding facility plans.
- A facilities action plan is in place that reflects the current and future needs of the school.
- The current property is sold within the next five years.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: DEFINE PERCEPTIONS

Goal

Communicate to parents in the community what a South Christian High School education means for their students.

Tasks

- Create a mission advancement position to oversee enrollment and recruitment.
- Define the five key ideas/items SCHS wants people to know about itself.
- Use existing forums to communicate the message: 8th grade parent orientation, new family orientation, faculty orientation, other events, etc.
- Form a marketing committee in conjunction with a group from SSCSF.
- Provide a limited number of free tickets for events such as drama and sporting events to invite key people into the facility.
- Increase visibility beyond sports, including drama boosters, etc.
- Start getting students to identify with SCHS at a young age.
- Recruit parents/staff to act as hosts who are willing and able to discuss Christian education with others in small groups and in homes.

Responsibility

- Promotions Committee
- Administration
- Advancement Committee

Time Lines & Reporting

- Ongoing – regular reporting to board.

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- A person has been designated to oversee this aspect of mission advancement.
- Parent surveys demonstrate that parents are aware of and place a high value on the variety of opportunities for students at SCHS.
- Alumni surveys indicate that students realize the worth of a SCHS education.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4: REFORMED DISTINCTIVENESS

Goal

Maintain an intentionally Reformed educational stance that will foster a complete world and life view and promote authentic and active Christian living.

Tasks

- Each year review the mission, vision, and core values of the school with the student body.
- Provide professional development opportunities and accountability for staff in teaching from a Reformed and Christian perspective.
- Continue to increase the involvement of students in leadership roles in chapel.
- Encourage students to clearly articulate their personal faith in Christ.
- Conduct exit interviews with a cross section of graduating students.
- Require seniors to produce a portfolio senior project that includes goals and a summary of what they learned. (This is a goal being looked at in the North Central Accreditation process)
- Continue to refine the operational definition of "Reformed."
- Establish school themes for each year.

Responsibility

- Administration
- Education Committee
- Spiritual Activities Team

Time Lines & Reporting

- Administrator reports semiannually to Education Committee

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- Students will articulate a world and life view upon graduating.
- Student-initiated involvement in service continues to increase.
- Surveys of alumni demonstrate lives of character, service, and commitment.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Goal

Keep South Christian High School on the forefront of technological integration and academic excellence.

Tasks

- Provide a strong investment in professional development.
- Consider weighted grades for honors and/or AP classes.
- Consider other forms of college credit.
- Continue to use and promote state of the art technology.
- Survey alumni for success in college and career.

Responsibility

- Education Committee
- Faculty
- School administration
- Curriculum Committee

Time Lines & Reporting

- Ongoing – updates to Education Committee

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- Several measures at SCHS continue to be better than other area schools, including
 - Dropout rate
 - Graduation rate
 - MEAP scores and overall test scores
 - Employment rate
- KCTC students continue to score above comparable students.
- The top students are stretched academically.
- Technology (hardware and software) is on an ongoing and incremental upgrade schedule.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: TRADES CURRICULUM

Goal

Provide a Christian-based program in career and technical education. Explore the possibilities of partnerships with other schools and organizations in this effort.

Tasks

- Establish a Task Force of interested people.
- Investigate cooperative ventures with businesses and other educational facilities.
- Research the best that has been done in this area, and design a Christian trades curriculum.
- Discover the level of interest among parents and future students for this program.

Responsibility

- School Administration
- Newly-formed Trades Task Force.

Time Lines & Reporting

- Annually for five years, reporting by administration to board

Key Metrics

We will know we are making progress on this initiative when ...

- A task force has been created, with a person who has agreed to spearhead the investigation.
- An agreement is in place outlining the terms of a trades partnership with other area Christian schools.
- At least \$100,000 has been donated to initiate a Christian trades curriculum.
- Students are receiving a Christian perspective on trades as a part of their gaining marketable skills.

Conclusion

Given the process used to develop this plan, SCHS can have a great deal of confidence that the important issues impacting the school's future have been identified. What will need continual attention throughout the life of this plan are the benchmarks against which the school will measure success in those areas.

Those benchmarks will provide fruitful avenues for discussion as the Board, administration, various committees, and others involved in planning wrestle with what will constitute success for each of these initiatives.

The Board and administration will also need to carefully examine the costs and revenue sources associated with each of the initiatives. These initiatives have been identified as strategic, meaning that they are more than just interesting explorations or welcome additions to the program. Instead, they are essential to moving South Christian toward its desired future, and thus must be funded fully to be accomplished fully.

For the most part, the initiatives can be fulfilled through shifts in focus, priorities, and accountability within the existing staffing and resource structure, and therefore are not expected to put a financial strain on current operational or capital budgets. However, the decisions that are reached as a result of those initiatives—e.g. remodeling the current facilities or embarking on a capital campaign—may initiate significant financial implications, and should be addressed accordingly.

This strategic plan is nominally identified with a five-year period, although the next planning process should begin no later than Year 4, in order to smoothly transition into the next cycle.

No one can see the future. Each of us must make decisions that provide us the best opportunity of moving closer to the purposes that God has laid out for us. And in all cases, we depend on the Lord, who has been faithful for the 50 years of the school's existence, and can be relied upon for the next 50 years as well.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5–6)