

 **CAIS LEARNING SERIES**

Long-Term Disruptions: Problems, Strategies & Opportunities

PART 2:

Resource Guide for CAIS Schools
February 2021



Canadian Accredited Independent Schools
CAIS.CA / BOARDINGSCHOOLS.CA

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1- Introduction

In the spring of 2020, education faced its biggest disruption in a century when schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. School leaders around the world were largely unprepared for the challenge of educating their students with physical schools closed. Within two weeks of the school closures, CAIS recognized the need to ensure that the critical lessons from the COVID-19 crisis would be captured and embedded into long range planning for future disruptions. CAIS partnered with education thought leader and facilitator Grant Lichtman to develop a collaborative five-week program in which more than 100 participants representing 80 CAIS member schools joined. These participants self-selected into Deep Dive Teams to research and share findings mainly focused on our schools' academic and learning programs. The final report was issued in July.

A survey of participants revealed significant interest in initiating a second round of Deep Dives in the fall of 2020 focused on non-academic offices and responsibilities within our schools. CAIS issued a call in October for the Long-Term Disruption Part 2, and approximately 85 participants representing 55+ CAIS member schools self-selected into five areas of focus:

- Advancement
- Business and Finance
- Organizational Talent Strategy (HR)
- Physical Spaces and Facilities
- Student Recruitment and Retention

Participants attended three synchronous 90 minute virtual meetings and then worked in teams to research and share findings. In addition, CAIS organized special team-specific one-hour virtual meetings with outside experts in each of the focal areas to help the Deep Dive Teams launch their work.

The goals of this second series were to:

- Share big lessons learned during the pandemic that impact non-academic departments.
- Forecast obstacles and opportunities that could impact our schools over the next 6-36 months as we recover from the pandemic but are still seeing the impacts ripple across both education and our stakeholder communities.
- Share resources and ideas for how to best embed the lessons learned during the pandemic into our longer-range school operations.
- Co-design a template that schools can use to better adjust and align tactics and strategies to new operating realities.

Following this introduction, the second chapter of this report is a synthesis and summary of responses from the Deep Dive Teams to a series of prompts aimed at unveiling key lessons that apply across our school's major non-academic departments. It is clear from the responses to these prompts that the vast majority of participants believe that our schools will benefit from significant changes in how these departments collaborate across functions as we commit to learning from the difficult lessons of 2020-21.

In Chapters 3-7, each of the five focal areas will be addressed, with each chapter containing three basic elements:

1. Recommended points of specific focus over the next 6-36 months, including challenges, opportunities, and metrics that should guide our decisions.
2. A summary of the comments and advice from the outside experts who provided expertise to the Deep Dive Team.
3. A library of resources generated by each Deep Dive Team, as well as those provided by our outside experts.

A key goal of this series was to create a “template” that can be used as a starting point that each school can customize. In the final chapter, we describe how schools might best use this [template](#) to develop a roadmap for navigating the next several years as we recover from the pandemic experience and create more flexible, collaborative, and resilient school communities.

◇ How to Use this Resource

As with the first report issued in July 2020, the amount of data collected and analyzed over a short time was staggering. The intention of these reports is to share a summary of the work and provide next step suggestions for schools as they recover from the current crisis and prepare for the longer-term. Likely, some of our collective assumptions about learning, our customers, and our world will be challenged.

As we move past the crisis stage, many of the lessons we are learning from our largely successful response can and should improve student learning, community engagement, organizational effectiveness, and the often precarious business model of our independent schools. Many of the findings in these reports strongly echo those of the [CAIS 2051 Project](#).

These reports are by no means a rigid playbook. We are just beginning to understand the best practices of a future when physical campuses and classrooms may not be a central organizing element of what we call “school.” We hope that school leaders use these reports as a “portal” into a much larger discussion and resource base around how schools should prepare for a future that is unknowable but will likely include more online and hybrid learning, customers who have adjusted their own lives, and a world that has grown both accustomed to, and weary of, virtual connections.

Resources that the Deep Dive Teams submitted in their reports are listed and linked in the relevant sections. Although School Leaders will likely find relevance in the comprehensive report, they may wish to refer working groups to specific sections to gain insight into immediate priorities. CAIS has compiled general resources on managing organizations and successfully responding to the pandemic that can be found [here](#).

◇ Acknowledgements

The pursuit of continuous whole school improvement is central to the CAIS mission. This value is evident not only within each member school but also across the association. The content of this report is the result

of the commitment of busy school leaders who understand that we are better together. The outcome is evidence that our community's diversity, day/boarding, large/small, urban/rural, single-gender/co-ed, is our greatest strength, allowing us to bring multiple perspectives and insights together in the service of a common challenge. The participants' shared commitment is to the continuity of excellence in teaching and learning and the long-term strength and permanence of independent schools in Canada. An acknowledgement of the school leaders who took part in this project is at the end of the report.

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2- How Our Schools Should Operate in the Future

It has been clear for at least the last two decades that schools are generally more rigid, inflexible, and slower to change than most other organizations. Schools typically have compartmentalized organizational structures and highly vertical reporting and decision-making systems, which inhibit value-based transformation and can threaten long-term sustainability in normal times; they are particularly dangerous during a crisis.

CAIS schools were mostly able to move with incredible speed and enthusiasm to meet the immediate challenges of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. Meeting the most demanding challenges required collaboration, flexibility, nimbleness, and quick decision-making. Their success gives us confidence that we can and should learn from the lessons of 2020 and employ a range of new practices to create a long-term culture that values flexibility over rigidity; growth mindset over fixed mindset; distributed leadership and over strong vertical reporting; cross-functional collaboration over rigid departmental boundaries; and trial over inertia.

Each Deep Dive team was asked to discuss and respond to four prompts that involve all-school, cross-functional operations and practices. Following are a summary of the main findings and recommendations to these four prompts:

Prompt #1: How should our departments and departmental leaders interact and collaborate both during and beyond a crisis?

Along with “flexibility”, the most often cited term in this multi-department series of deep dives was “cross-functional collaboration”. With the speed and all-school disruption of the pandemic, we now clearly recognize that operating in strict departmental silos was never a good practice and is a particular threat when the school needs to move swiftly to address a crisis. Cross-functional collaboration has become a hallmark of effective 21st century organizations that are proactive, nimble, and dynamic, even when a crisis is not imminent or in process (ref. [Team of Teams](#), by Stanley McChrystal). Our Deep Dive Teams came up with three areas in which departments and leaders can more effectively interact and collaborate:

Communication and Interactions

- More frequent “touch base” meetings to ensure we are collectively on top of emerging issues.
- Increased frequency and consistency of communications that include a wide distribution amongst community stakeholders, even if they are not in the required “chain of command”.
- Shared data in a common format to capture and circulate key inputs from a wide group of people, not just departmental leaders.

Leadership Structures and Practices

- Multi-departmental “table-top” planning for various possible operational challenges and developing policies ahead of a crisis, not after a crisis has hit.
- Document successes and failures from the current crisis; make sure they are available and used when a subsequent event occurs.
- Include new positions and a wider range of voices at the leadership table. This does not require the Head of School to have more direct reports, only that more people may be in the room during discussions of goals and tactics with wide-ranging impact. (Ref: [Creativity, Inc.](#), by Edwin Catmull)
- School leaders must learn and model best practices of inter-departmental collaboration, cross-functional communication, and distributed leadership. This will require coaching and professional development for leaders whose experience is primarily in a highly vertical, rigidly departmental organization.

Strategic and Tactical Planning

- Strategic planning, goal setting, and tactical implementation should be diverse, inclusive, and transparent. Strategic plans are ineffective if the long-range goals are not reflected in actual routine practice throughout the school. While the responsibility for the oversight of strategy ultimately resides with school boards, implementation is the role of school leadership teams and staff, particularly in a disruptive event.
- Budgeting, admissions, advancement, facilities, and marketing are interactive elements that require inter-departmental collaboration, not just amongst department heads.
- Cross-functional teams should review and update strategic and tactical plans at least annually and more frequently if events beyond the school’s control are moving quickly.
- No ideas are off the table; schools should promote thinking that looks over the current horizon and contemplates events that may seem unlikely in the moment. School leaders must receive training and support in how to be effective with both the challenges of the moment and planning for a less knowable future.

Prompt #2: How might we increasingly and more effectively align the evolution of the learning experience (academic departments) with the work, planning, and support of the non-academic departments?

Many of our schools have either already made a commitment to transform the learning experience in response to the demands of a rapidly changing world or are now viewing such changes as an imperative for long-term success. These transformations are driven by the recognition that the traditional value propositions of many independent schools are under threat. Many of these changes are captured within the concepts of “deeper learning”: a learning experience that is more student-centric, inquiry-based, personalized and differentiated, connected to the world beyond campus, and aligned to the interests and passions that drive both students and teachers to relish learning. These changes in the learning experience will require supportive changes from the non-academic departments as schools realign strategies, goals and tactics to effectively deliver what lies at the core of all schools’ value: great learning.

Cross-Functional Coordination

- Include faculty in virtual and face-to-face events involving parents, alumni donors, and prospective parents.
- Include both academic and non-academic staff in ongoing strategic and tactical planning. This planning will take place more frequently than the traditional five-year strategic planning cycle, and staff will require time for thoughtful participation.
- Use design-based planning tools that stimulate thinking outside of traditional boundaries. Many of our staff are not sufficiently trained or comfortable in this modality of team-based, cross-functional creative thinking and design.
- Create opportunities and expectations for academic and non-academic staff to “shadow” each other.

Meetings and Communication

- Meetings should breach departmental boundaries. Issues, decisions, or just routine operations that impact on and would benefit from more diverse inputs should access both academic and non-academic team members.
- Prioritize diversity and transparency in goal setting and planning. While some data or information at all schools must be held confidential, we should be more open with sharing most data and more transparent in how decisions are made.
- Encourage team members to use social media tools and video to share more frequently across traditional departmental boundaries. Our stakeholders are becoming increasingly reliant upon social media, which can help bring about consistency of mission and message if used effectively.

Prompt #3: How, when, and who should be reviewing the school’s strategic directions and tactical plans in light of disruptions and changed conditions?

Traditional independent school strategic plans are updated every five years. Dashboard reports are typically generated annually for the head of school to report progress to the Board. In many schools, goals and tactics are not substantively recreated or realigned within the typical five-year window; in fact, in many schools the five year plan is viewed as nearly sacred and failure to meet goals is seen as independent of changing conditions in the market and on the ground. Because of the severity of the disruption, the pandemic has impacted many schools’ strategic plans. But we can also use this opportunity to realize that, even lacking a major disruption like the pandemic, five-year planning cycles are no longer well synchronized to the rapidity of other changes in the world.

Review Cycles and Timing

- During a crisis, school “war rooms” meet regularly, perhaps even daily, to adjust school operations and goals in real time.
- After disruptions and crises, leadership teams gather broad input to debrief, coordinate, adjust, and update plans as needed. The frequency of the “war room” meeting may be reduced, but the interactions and collaborations should be maintained.

- Regular cross-functional meetings structured around deep dives into areas of the school operations that are “fragile”, taking time to identify and reflect on uncertainties.
- The balance of crisis response (short-term adjustments) and longer-term strategy work should be revisited quarterly by the school and Board leadership to make sure that supports are being shifted appropriately in light of changing conditions and forecasts. Goals and resources (budgets, admissions and advancement targets, use of reserves, capital campaigns) may need to be realigned more frequently as conditions change rapidly. Quarterly meetings should be maintained post-crisis to ensure the school's strategy is "living" through implementation plans.

Who Owns What Part of Strategic and Tactical Adjustments?

- Strategic implementation is the purview of the school leadership team, overseen by the Head of School.
- Effective, flexible implementation that is responsive to changing conditions will include more team members than just the Senior Leadership Team. Team members below the level of departmental leaders will have the ability to interact across departmental boundaries; this is the nature of effective distributed leadership.
- All members of the school professional staff realize that they have a role to play in making tactical adjustments, not only for their own work but in sharing successes and failures quickly across silo boundaries, so those lessons are captured as the school makes organization-wide adjustments to strategic and tactical plans.

Planning, Coordination, and Response

- Tactical goals need to tie back to the school's strategic direction. Plans may need to be adjusted much more frequently than on the normal cycle, depending on what external changes are impacting the school.
- Regular tabletop exercises can predict or at least identify potential gaps in the school's desired strategies and real changes on the ground.
- Identifying potential risks that might impact strategic and tactical goals should be part of regular leadership and board meetings.
- Strategic plans should clarify that adjustments may be made in real time due to unforeseen circumstances, and leadership teams must build in capacity and processes to make those adjustments.

Prompt #4: How can schools build more flexible, nimble planning and response into their overall culture?

The most common words and phrases used by all of the Deep Dive Teams involved the concepts of flexibility and nimbleness. These are what most helped schools navigate the challenges of the pandemic, both early in the spring of 2020 and when school returned in the fall. Educators now realize that our schools have been unnecessarily rigid in our approach to planning, coordination, and implementation of much of what we do, and that this rigidity is not aligned with the general rate of changes in the world

around us, let alone during a crisis. The deep dive teams all agreed that we must adopt specific practices that amplify flexibility and break down rigidity.

Structural Realignment

- Empower working groups to generate solutions and disperse decisions from the Head of School downward. Distributed leadership is a set of well-tested skills that are not widely used in schools that will provide fruitful professional development in the coming years.
- Review operational silos to find opportunities to reduce communication barriers and improve resource and idea sharing. Seriously consider reducing the number of operating departments and lines of reporting.

Meetings and Communication

- Employ a wide range of systems to gather inputs from the community, and focus on open-ended listening, not directed response. Give frequent feedback to the community on how these inputs have been heard, considered, and used to make course corrections.
- Consider a leadership level “advocate for challenges and change” who is responsible for keeping the leadership team focused on opportunities for more flexible operations and breaking traditional norms.

Discussion, Design, and Decision

- Train staff in principles and practices of design thinking. Make clear the distinction between sessions that are focused on the discussion of challenges and opportunities, the design of possible solutions, and decisions to move forward with a solution or pilot.
- Continually reinforce the idea that the school supports a growth mindset and values flexibility. Reward or recognize staff who are eager or willing to make changes and help others change. Give leadership responsibility for tactical planning and response to people who do not have a leadership title but show an affinity for inclusiveness, collaboration, and flexible thinking.

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3- Advancement

In the first days and weeks of the pandemic in spring 2020, many schools' initial response was to pull back from or cease fundraising efforts to avoid placing additional stress on our stakeholders. That initial reaction waned very quickly, and many schools moved forward aggressively with fundraising, albeit often with a re-worked message and changes to ongoing campaigns. The response from donors at most schools was generally good: "We are not going to abandon our school when it needs us most".

Those initial responses will now need to be strategically aligned with what will almost certainly be adjustments to schools' strategic plans and value propositions. Communication lines and methods have been forever changed by our collective experiences of social distancing and video-based connections. Long-term marketing, admissions, and financial impacts of the pandemic will be factored into adjusted philanthropic goals. Capital campaigns and plans for new facilities will be reviewed and may be significantly changed as we adjust our ideas about what "school" may look like in the decades to come.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

Challenges

- **Shifting priorities:** Fundraising for new buildings may be put on hold as we reassess the role our physical campuses will play in the decades to come, and how facilities will best serve our students and teachers. Raising money for financial assistance may take on a new priority due to families' changed financial circumstances and renewed priorities around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Fundraising for reserves takes on new importance as we count up the cost of major disruptions both in terms of lost revenue and added expenses.
- **Community fatigue:** Our teachers, who are amongst our most important fundraising ambassadors, are burned out. Parents and students are fatigued from virtual and hybrid learning, virtual meetings, and constant adjustments to what and how they are learning. Some families are not convinced of the full efficacy of virtual or hybrid learning for their tuition dollars.
- **Community building:** When events are cancelled and some traditional avenues of communication are disrupted, managing engagement and expectations brings a new set of challenges. Parents need to feel empathetically heard and understand how the school is dealing with the crisis. The school will benefit from listening and being in tune with the changing needs and demands of stakeholders.
- **Pivot from short term crisis/survival mode to long-term thinking:** All independent schools will need to review their long-range value proposition and the case for supporting the school. Schools may see long-term adjustments to local markets based on how public schools respond to crises like the pandemic, and as some parents recognize that lower-cost virtual learning options may have a significant role to play in their children's education.

- **Competition for donations:** Many organizations have been focused on the needs of the community during this time of stress, and donor resources have been stretched in many directions. We simply don't know what the ripple effect will be, if any, in future years.

Opportunities

- **Stakeholder engagement:** In times of disruption, a key challenge is keeping the community together and aligned. Key tactics include recurring cycles of feedback through tools such as pulse surveys and Zoom calls. These should not be one-offs, but consistent ways that the school leadership hears from stakeholders, acknowledges their views and identifies how they are being responded to. Transparency on questions on topics such as strategy, challenges, finances, and emotion (frustration, pride, loss, happiness) will garner a stronger, more collective sense of “being in it together” and is likely the most important outcome of a robust stakeholder relations programs in these times. Find ways to make parents feel more involved by creating opportunities to assist as volunteers, e.g., building something at school, supporting teachers and staff or helping with or hosting virtual events. Offer more small group activities that are outdoor-based, such as hiking outings, drive-through events, golf or Frisbee golf outings. Offer a broad range of virtual programs for alumni and parents, including career programming, speakers, contests or games, forums on important community issues, or social events.
- **Shift from in-person to video or phone calls:** The pandemic has become a good reason to reach out to people, despite being uncertain at the beginning of how and when to connect. Don't default to emails; prioritize phone calls for check-ins or updates about changes to events. Virtual meetings have proven to be even more effective as the ROI is easier to measure and higher. Many major donors are more accessible and we are more often able to reach multiple family members. Even older donors are embracing technology, with many keen to talk more frequently now.
- **Tactics for maintenance or even acceleration of donations:** Our schools are a node of community at a time when people are feeling isolated. Increase contacts and conversations, both virtual and in-person. Elevate strategic donor research. Understand the different impacts of COVID-19 on your donor population, including capacity changes. Don't be afraid to move the solicitation cycle forward and ask for donations, even over Zoom; donors understand the need and are willing to give. Use digital video and multimedia tools that are now widely available and increasingly acceptable. Focus on needs that emerge from the pandemic that can be easily understood, such as financial aid and faculty support, endowment growth, and building reserves. Forward-fund or front-load the Annual Fund; include funds raised this fiscal year in next year's fiscal budget.
- **Focus on parents and the Parents' Guild:** Parents want frequent and more open communication on the needs and expectations of the school and their children as conditions change. Parent groups have become an even more critical partner in school operations. Increase engagement with the goal of building or enhancing a long-term symbiotic relationship. Parents have a new appreciation for what teachers do each day. Find ways for boarding and international parents to feel more connected to their students' daily experience and also consider the special needs these families have in terms of travel to and from school.
- **Functional integration:** Identify where existing synergies exist across departments (advancement, alumni, administration, communications) and determine where potential opportunities lie. Work to

integrate external facing teams to allow for flexibility and forward-thinking action. External-facing teams must be able to articulate what changes are happening in real time, and why decisions are made in the best interests of the students and the school.

- **Redeploy resources:** There is an increased expectation that parents, employees, donors and others will be heard more, and the school will be more responsive to these requests/comments/views. Redeploy Heads of School and Board members from face-to-face events that have been cancelled to virtual contacts with key people in the community. School stakeholders want interaction and to be heard. The Head of School and Board leadership can and should provide an ear for this.

! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch on the School's Radar Screen

External Indicators

- Local employment rates and rate of business closures
- Interest from international students; drivers of interest related to health and DEI issues.
- Ministry guidelines for physical distancing and student density, and the impact on tuition revenue targets.
- Rise of new competition, including other education options for target market families.
- Level of community engagement in advancement efforts.
- Market and geopolitical stability

Internal Indicators

- How are faculty and staff adapting to a changing teaching/learning climate?
- Faculty and staff turnover due to rapid change
- Impacts on the learning experience and student performance in key areas like grade-level expectations for literacy and numeracy.
- Annual giving dollars and participation percentages.
- Major gift engagement; appetite for capital projects vs. financial aid
- Engagement levels with families and alumni.

Advice from Advancement Specialists

Courtesy of Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)

“If we want to plan to weather disruption, there are only two things we can do: give our schools a strong financial footing and allow for maximum flexibility to be able to respond to crises.”

Forward-fund your annual fund

Forward-funding refers to the practice of including funds raised this fiscal year in next fiscal year’s budget. All funds raised in the current year are included in next year’s expenses. Budgets are then built on real, not projected numbers. It allows for a cushion for second asks and the ability to react to a financial downturn. It requires strong collaboration across offices and will take a few years to achieve.

Front-load your annual fund

Front-loading relies on raising approximately 75+% of your total goal by December 31. It necessitates strong volunteer leadership, a culture of philanthropy at the school, and a clear deadline to generate urgency: “100% in 100 days”. Summer planning is crucial. The first day of school is your sprint start! Front-loading can help schools eventually forward-fund the annual fund.

Fundraise for “boring” things like reserves

Reserves are usually built through strong financial management, but COVID has given us a strong message if a school needs to more immediately build reserves. Big capital projects may need to be reimaged and those requests redirected to building endowment or general fund reserves.

Fundraise for financial aid

Financial aid will also be essential to meet both temporary economic challenges related to a crisis as well as the longer-term challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Many schools saw increased FA requests this year, and it is often an easier “ask” than reserves as it supports members of the current school community in need. Remember: If you give away \$1M in financial aid, you need \$22.5M in the bank to fund it fully.

Integrate your external teams to allow for flexibility and forward thinking action.

True integration means you have a highly collaborative team of Development/Advancement, Communications, and Enrolment/Admissions. These cross-functional teams have a clear understanding of how revenue is generated and managed, key performance indicators and goals, and articulating these to donors. They support each other’s work on tours, at visits, and in all external materials. Members of these teams meet regularly, give school tours, sit at lunch with an alum, and can describe in detail the marketing initiatives of the school.

Resources

- 8 Concrete Things To Do:
<https://www.amyeisenstein.com/8-steps-successful-fundraising-during-coronavirus/>
- Harvard Business Review: Bigger Picture
<https://hbr.org/2020/04/nonprofit-fundraising-in-the-age-of-coronavirus>
- From The Offord Group:
http://www.theoffordgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Offord-Group-Independent-Schools-Advancement-Metrics-Impacted-by-COVID-19_final.pdf
- GG+A:
<https://www.grenzebachglier.com/2020/08/11/survey-advancement-offices-and-fundraising-continue-remote-models-with-unpredictable-return-to-in-person-events/>
- From Good Works:
<https://eab.com/insights/blogs/independent-school/covid-19-impact-on-independent-school-advancement/>
- US Advancement Metrics:
<https://isminc.com/advisory/publications/the-source/private-independent-school-business-officers-covid19-coronavirus>
- Thoughts on Zoom meeting fundraising best practices:
<https://npengage.com/nonprofit-fundraising/zoom-donor-meetings-best-practices/>
- Thoughts on Building Donor relationships in a virtual world:
<https://www.gailperry.com/building-virtual-donor-relationships/>
- School's Toolkit: Integrating Your School's Advancement Office:
<https://www.case.org/resources/schools-toolkit-integrating-your-schools-advancement-office>
- Integrating Advancement:
<https://www.case.org/trending/issues/november-december-2020/integrating-advancement>
- Independent School Business and Finance Implications:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CBSHWUiTuloQFcvZgLk-kaoHtgU6FIFt/view?usp=sharing>

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4- Business and Finance

School leaders have increasingly recognized the fragility of the independent school business model over the last two decades. The pandemic exacerbated this fragility with disruptions to family health and finances, the greater economy, and the overall value proposition of organizations that charge tuition for students who suddenly could not come to school. At this point in the pandemic, we are a long way from understanding all of the implications of these disruptions and how they will manifest over the next 1-3 years, let alone in the much longer-range future of K-12 education.

Perhaps one data point sticks out more than all others from these serious deep dives. In their report tailored for this CAIS collaboration, NBOA Executive Director Jeff Shields shared a remarkable statistic from pulse surveys they had collected during the last major disruption, the Great Recession of 2008-2009. Early in that event, many schools responded that they planned fundamental long-term adjustments to their financial models in response to the recession and likely future disruptions. These included increasing class sizes and decreasing the rate of salary increases. Two years later, in a follow-up survey, *fewer than half of those schools had actually followed through with these changes*. This lesson should not require additional articulation as we decide if we will, indeed, learn from the lessons of the past or not.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

Potential affordability of independent schools

- Applications may have increased during 2020 as public schools were slower to adjust to the crisis. We will need to closely watch the admissions pipeline in the next 6-36 months to see if it reverts to pre-pandemic levels.
- Anticipated increased demand for financial assistance, though as of the fall of 2020, many schools are not seeing the anticipated large increase in applications.
- Re-emphasis on the school's unique value proposition, and adjustments in light of new market realities.

Increased customer service and communication

- View decisions through the lens of "How do we better serve our families?" Parents and students have been through a traumatic experience, as have our staff members, and their needs have changed as part of this crisis.
- Exploit opportunities for increased automation, space reduction or repurposing, and outsourcing as the workforce pivots to remote working. This pivot is likely permanent across many sectors. Technologies will evolve to help in this transition.

Increased opportunities for collaboration amongst CAIS schools

- With the rapid rate of change imposed by external conditions, we should increase our mentoring and networking, including sharing data, resources, common applications, and general communication strategies.
- Increased collaboration has been evident at the Head and Business Officer level across CAIS schools.

! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch for on the School's Radar Screen

- Retention for September 2021, with special attention to concerns at boarding schools with large international student populations.
- Economic ripple effect of 2020, which will likely be seen in Q1 2021 and beyond. This will probably not impact high net worth families but could very much impact those closer to the middle class.
- Increase or decrease in the number of tuition installment plans over the next year.
- Rates of annual giving relative to previous years.
- Rates of funding from Provincial or Federal sources specifically related to COVID disruptions and added costs.

◇ Advice from Business and Finance Specialists

Courtesy of NATIONAL BUSINESS OFFICERS ASSOCIATION (NBOA)

Will we repeat or learn from responses to the Great Recession?

In 2008-2009, the Great Recession caused a major disruption in the economics of independent schools that continue to rely almost exclusively on tuition and philanthropy from a dwindling demographic. In 2010, NBOA sent out a survey to their business officer membership. It asked, *"In response to the economic decline, what strategies did you implement?"*.

- 26.4% responded that they were going to increase the average class size, but only 11.7% actually did.
- 58.8% responded that they were going to decrease planned salary increases, but only 32.3% actually did.

2020 Financial Impact of COVID Pulse Check

- 87% of schools opened for full in-person or hybrid instruction on campus in the fall.
- 39% of schools reported full enrolment; 37% mostly enrolled; 24% under enrolled.
- Only 19% of schools are anticipating a surplus in FY21; 51% are anticipating a deficit in FY 21.

2020 Governance and Leadership Pulse Check

- 92% of respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that their Trustees understand the financial challenges confronting their school and are governing at the appropriate strategic level.
- 97% “agree” or “strongly agree” that leadership teams are responding appropriately to the challenges of COVID-19
- 79% “agree” or “strongly agree” that their school has sufficient procedures in place to ensure business continuity in cases of major disruptions.
- 79% “agree” or “strongly agree” that their school has a clear financial plan to deal with the effects of the current pandemic.

(Source: NBOA Pulse Check Survey October 2020; 219 total responses.)

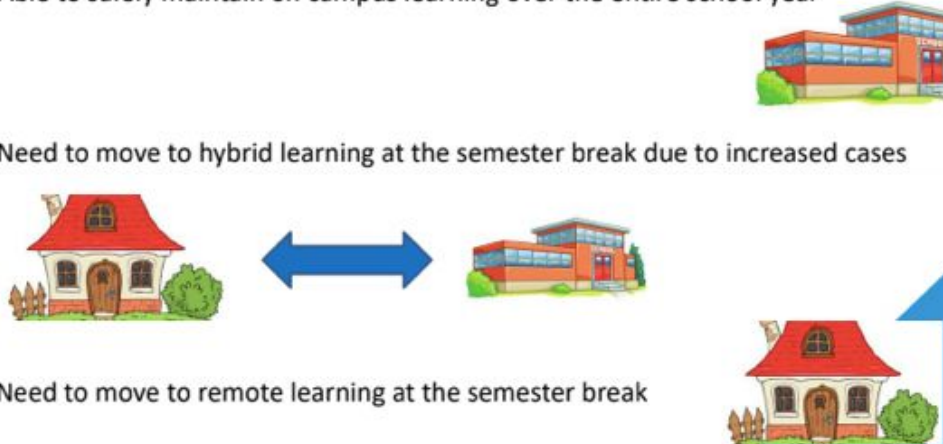
Multiple Case Budget Evaluation

We must be more proactive in forecasting the impacts of potential disruptions to our traditional business model and annual budgets. Remember: the COVID-19 pandemic was not only possible but probable. We knew that at some point in time, such a pandemic would occur; we just did not know when. We have to do a much better job of proactively preparing for major disruptions. NBOA suggests that this starts with determining several situations that are most possible, predictable or foreseeable.

Planning Starts with Developing Your Scenarios

NBOA
National Business Officers Association

- Start with determining several situations that are the most possible:
 - **Case A:** Able to safely maintain on campus learning over the entire school year
 - **Case B:** Need to move to hybrid learning at the semester break due to increased cases
 - **Case C:** Need to move to remote learning at the semester break



→ Then, create scenarios and tactical variants for other situations that might arise:

Planning Starts with Developing Your Scenarios

- Create scenarios for other situations:
 - **Case D:** Able to hold annual fundraising gala in person with distancing protocols
 - **Case E:** You decide to have a hybrid event with some people at the venue and others participating online.
 - **Case F:** The local situation has been unstable to date, so you determine that holding a virtual event will be safest for all concerned.

→ Finally, evaluate all, or at least the most possible scenario combinations, for likelihood and reasonableness before moving into modelling. For example:

NBOA Academy

- Type: Middle/Upper School
- Enrollment: 440
- Operating Budget: \$9,605,000
- Endowment: \$4,000,000
- Financial Aid Budget: 15.2% of Gross Tuition
- Gap per student = \$1,798 or 8.2%

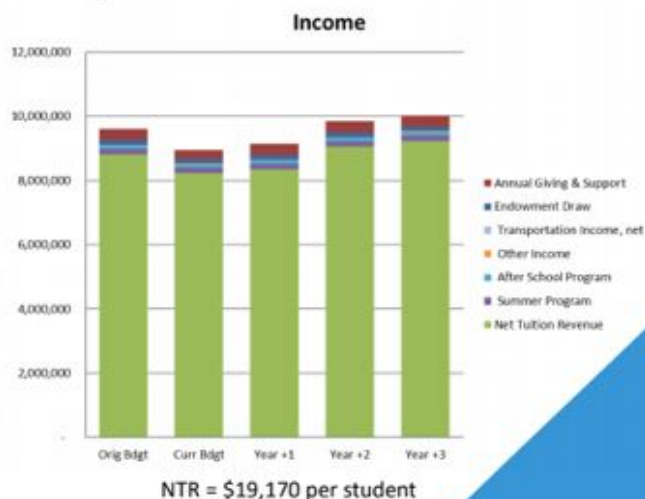
Income

NTR = \$20,032 per student

NBOA Academy – Scenario 9



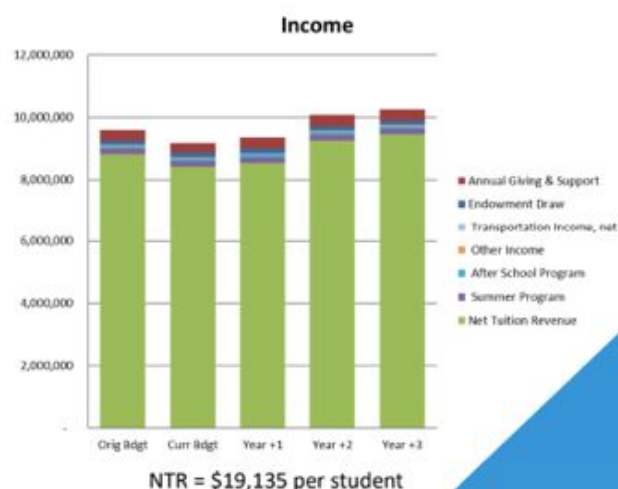
- ½ years tuition from 10% of lower grades not collected
- Board agreed to a 1.5% tuition increase
- Financial Aid Budget increases by 5% of Gross Tuition
- Expenses are mostly flat with some adjustments
- Gap increases to \$2,917/std or 13.5%



NBOA Academy – Scenario 1



- Enrollment: stays flat because they were able to return to campus
- Board agreed to a 1.5% tuition increase
- Financial Aid Budget increases by 5% of Gross Tuition
- Holds all other expenses flat except for PPE and distance learning technology
- Gap increases to \$2,707/std or 12.4%



NBOA has a number of canned tools to help with this planning and modelling that flow directly into a multi-year budget model. This kind of multi-year and multi-variant planning is no longer an option as we face the potential of changes that are both rapid and have a significant impact on both short and long-term viability for many of our schools.

Resources

- Survey of [**CAIS Admission Professionals: November 2020**](#)
- “[**Best practices for an unusual US admissions cycle amid coronavirus**](#)”, by Hamilton Boggs, Chara Krishnan, Samvitha Ram and Jimmy Sarakatsannis, April 2020, McKinsey & Company
- [**Thrive: How Schools Will Win the Education Revolution**](#), Grant Lichtman
- [**Presentation by Heather Hoerle**](#), Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer, The Enrollment Management Association -- November 17, 2020
- [**2020–2021 NAIS Trendbook**](#)
- Presentation PPT:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CBSHWUiTuloQFcvZgLk-kaoHtgU6FIFt/view?usp=sharing>
- <https://www.netassets.org/netassets/blogs/net-assets/2018/11/13/declarations-of-independence>
- <https://www.netassets.org/blogs/net-assets/2020/10/19/the-rise-and-reinvention-of-merit-aid>
- <https://www.netassets.org/netassets/blogs/net-assets/2019/10/22/foundations-of-flexible-tuition>
- <https://www.netassets.org/viewdocument/effects-of-tuition-increases-on-enr>
- <https://www.netassets.org/blogs/net-assets/2017/02/28/study-tuition-increases-dont-dampen-demand> <https://www.nboa.org/publications/industry-guidance>
- <https://www.nboa.org/publications/books>
- <https://www.netassets.org/netassets/blogs/net-assets/2019/10/21/reflecting-pull-financial-aid-turnarounds>

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5- Organizational Talent Strategy

The global challenge presented by the pandemic is a human one: the pandemic threatens the physical, social, and emotional health of all school stakeholders, and our stakeholders are what a school, at its core, is about. These human impacts of the pandemic will change and evolve, some very quickly and others more slowly over a longer period of time, as we respond to, and then rebound from, the most turbulent days of 2020.

While school leaders have always realized the importance of building and supporting a human-centered school culture that supports the school's vision, the pandemic brought human resources and wellness to the top of the radar screen. Most teachers and staff have never endured any professional experience like the COVID pandemic, particularly alongside their own and their families' personal challenges during this time. We have expanded the boundaries of what our educators can do when needed and also found some limits to what we can ask.

We also are seeing how effective organizations better serve the needs of a rising generation of employees who expect, and thrive on, a personalized employment experience. Schools that shift in the direction of these two trends will find that they are able to attract the talent they need to support their culture and value proposition in the years to come.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

- General wellbeing of our employees and their families
- Ensuring that employees have a clear understanding of the school's value proposition and how it might be changing
- Aligning an evolving strategic model with workforce planning
- Communicating with our employees: how often, when, and how
- Aligning health and safety policies in real time as conditions change and we are more proactive about future disruptive events
- Managing working from home; policies that consider employees working in different physical locations and under a range of health conditions
- Employees are burned out this school year. Need to balance immediate wellness priorities with forward thinking and planning over the next 1-3 years

Challenges:

1. Relative to the experience of most professional educators, the current environment is almost constantly changing. Teachers are burned out from making these constant shifts. And working in an online environment lacks much of the personal connection that teachers find satisfying.
2. It is difficult to contemplate moving ahead with strategic and annual goals given the immediate challenge and focus on COVID related demands.
3. Building community is more difficult when we are limited in our face-to-face connections. We are early in understanding how to best leverage virtual connectivity for community building.
4. Change of focus on professional development to support employees to most effectively use and stay up-to-date with virtual technologies and their best uses in the classroom and office.
5. Maintaining a full faculty/staff roster; hiring enough supply teachers; finding coverage for supervision.
6. Families still expect a 100% program despite the factors that are clearly beyond our control. We want employees to meet high expectations but are not sure how, or even if, that is possible.

Opportunities:

While the pandemic has been challenging and, in some cases, traumatic for our employees, the fact that we have moved through it and are still operating effectively gives us a shared experience of trial, resilience, and success. It creates a large number of opportunities for school professional staff to exhibit the kind of growth mindset and transformation that many have been seeking for the last 1-2 decades. It allows us to make changes over the next 1-3 years with a sense of optimism, and less fear, than we had before we overcame the most significant challenges of 2020-21.

Because schools are human-centric, almost everything we might do touches on the area of talent strategy. Schools should not think they can or must tackle all of these at once, but these are good areas for consideration.

Purpose, Culture, and Values: As we rebound from the immediate quasi-chaos of the pandemic experience, school communities should take the time to re-focus on their collective purpose and core values. This will include embedding the lessons learned during the pandemic and reprioritizing our work. Effective organizations will take this opportunity to remove things that do not directly align with their strategic goals and differentiated value proposition.

Competencies and behaviours in the COVID and post-COVID environment: Schools will increasingly focus on finding, hiring, and supporting staff who can work effectively in a post-COVID world. We will prioritize individuals who will positively contribute to a school culture that values empathy, resilience, self-motivation, flexibility, and dependability. Performance management and professional development will be tied to the exhibition of these qualities.

Employee experience and recruitment: Effective schools will create policies and lived experiences for their staff that excite and attract the kind of talent who will work well in a more flexible, dynamic workplace.

The relationship between the school and the individual will become more personalized and less formulaic. Our staff will feel valued and heard; they will feel an authentic connection between the school's vision and goals and their own lived experience.

Leadership: Titular leaders will model the skills of awareness, vulnerability, empathy, and compassion that we expect from our staff, particularly during times of crisis. They will clarify and model expectations, including how to reduce the burdens that people place upon themselves or are placed on them by the school as we align our work directly to what is most important and jettison non-strategic efforts. We will provide increasing levels of leadership training for directors and managers as they learn to better support the physical, social, and emotional health needs of all employees.

Wellbeing: Schools will very actively increase the focus on both self-care and organizational care of our employees. We will ask employees how the school can contribute to their wellness and increasingly support them in meaningful, more personalized ways. A strategic wellness program will be accessible to all employees with more extensive support, training, and resources.

Communication: Real-time connections are increasingly important to the rising generation of educators. We will use shorter, more frequent pulse-type surveys to keep engaged with our staff and very clearly demonstrate that people are heard and that their input results in some level of discussion and action. Policies that impact our staff (which is most policies) will be clear, easy to understand, and highly accessible to all employees regardless of their physical location. While the pandemic has taught us all the value of virtual communication, and there is no doubt that this will form a new set of communication platforms, we recognize that virtual communication will never replace a personal, in-place connection when possible.

Operations: Shifts in how we teach, learn, and accommodate students, staff, and families during and after the pandemic crisis will ripple through our schools well after the medical impacts are behind us. We have a new respect for how our schools can and must operate with the health and safety of employees and students as a key factor that may, at times, also be a moving target. Day to day procedures will be set, followed, and enforced, with consequences for non-compliance. Employees will become more familiar with risk management and will participate in decisions about how the school will most effectively operate in service of in-place and remote learning as conditions may dictate.

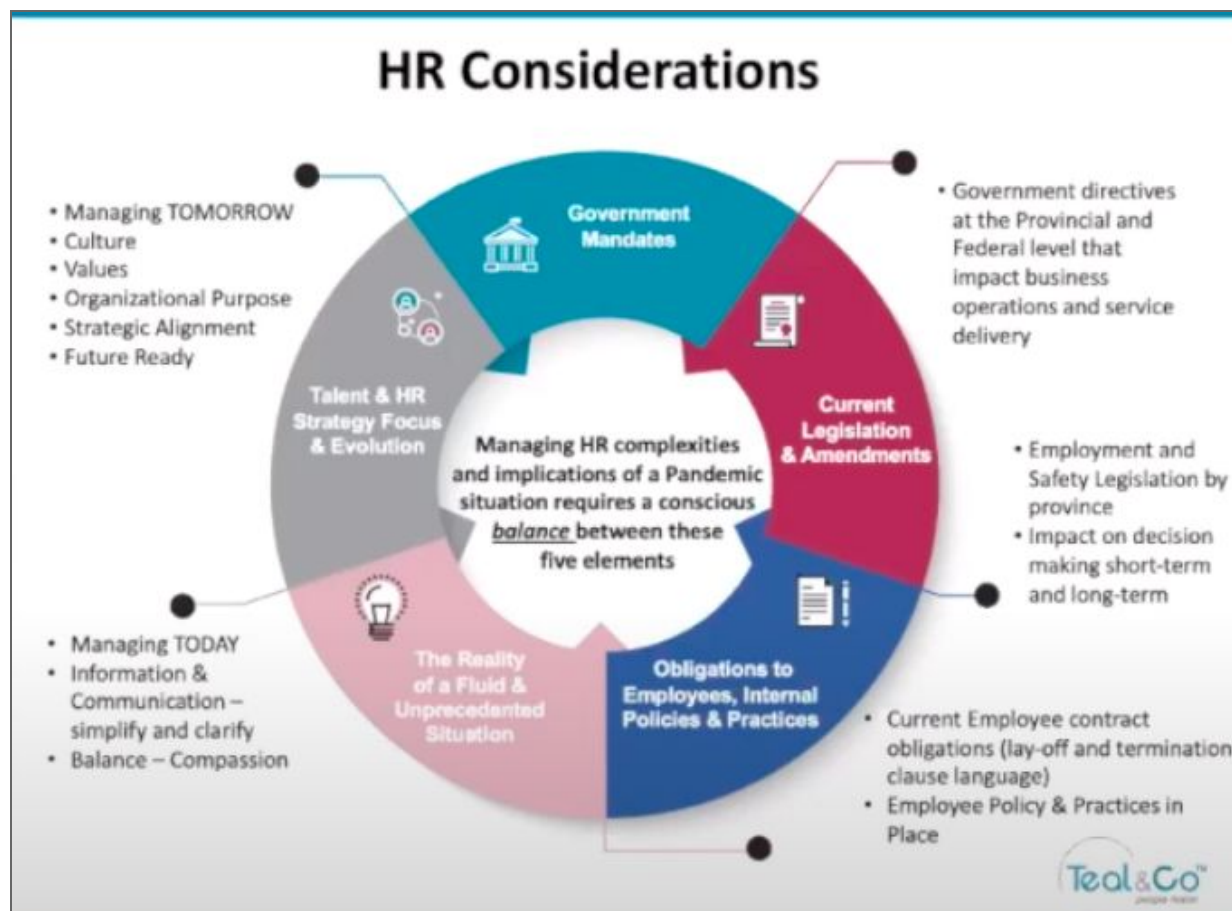
! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch for on the School's Radar Screen

- Attraction (number of applications) and retention (number of departures, early retirements) of faculty and staff
- Internal interest in leadership roles
- Number of staff accessing EAP/attendance records
- Staff satisfaction through culture surveys
- Staff seeking accommodations related to short term disabilities

◇ Advice from Human Resources Specialists

Courtesy of Teal & Co. Inc.

Human resources are at the core of any school's strengths. There are always competing forces that drive HR decisions, and during a disruptive event, some of those forces become unbalanced relative to "normal" times.



During a crisis or a period of organizational stress, we have to balance what we can and cannot control. We also have to balance what must be managed today with what we likely will have to manage in the future, giving bandwidth to both.

Flexibility is everything

Schools will increasingly focus on the evolving skill set requirements of employees and potential hires. They will prioritize hiring those who can adapt, change, and learn on the job. Agility, adaptability, and resilience are now non-negotiable competencies. Faculty and staff must have job or subject-specific expertise. These skill sets are not only more common, but also easier to "train up" than are the more innate soft skills that are critical to managing and embracing change.

Digitization

In the current era and with tools already available, HR administrators can perform much of their work from any location, and staff can access their personal data and report to supervisors remotely. Schools that do not have these capabilities should invest in them. Personal data should be available and easily accessible to those who need it in real time. Human resource databases are updated frequently, as the HR function needs to be able to provide these data for decision making and real time pivots.

Employee Wellbeing

Remote work is here to stay, and this may well include administrative functions traditionally housed on campus, particularly if the pandemic uncovered the need for more space for classrooms and flexible learning spaces. All schools should have updated policies in place that consider remote work for faculty and staff. Our employees are our most valuable resource, and keeping them engaged virtually when they cannot come to school is essential to their wellbeing. Personal health and safety are paramount as employees cannot perform well if they don't feel well, are unhealthy, or feel unappreciated. Programs to support employee wellbeing are no longer optional. Empathy, listening, frequent communication, and authentic feedback are critical leadership qualities in organizations that hope to attract and retain the best employees going forward.

Going Forward

The employee experience is central as talent management helps drive an organization's overall enterprise transformation. HR is becoming more automated, more data centric, more consultative, and more agile. However, only 30% of companies are actually making progress in these areas, many of which have exploded in importance during the pandemic.

The Evolution of HR			
The evolution of Human Resources			
	Industrial HR 1.0	Internet HR 2.0	Digital HR 3.0
Key focus	Compliance Administration design Programs and jobs	Process excellence Standardization Self-service Shared services	Employee experience Cognitive Personalized Transparent
Organization	Functions, Service Centers, HR Partners Geographic	COEs, Shared Services, HR Business Partners Mostly globally standardized	Offering Managers, Intelligent Chatbots, Pop up squads, HR Business Partners
Design driven by	Best practice benchmarking	Process experts	Design thinking with users
Decisions driven by	Intuition	Analytics with historical HR data	Actionable insights with predictive AI and rich external/internal data
Key area of measurement	Job evaluation Performance assessment Attrition rates Employee satisfaction	Headcount Competencies Diversity representation Efficiency metrics Employee engagement	Critical Skills Leadership pipeline diversity Inclusion Attrition rate NPS, Pulse surveys

Source: Accelerating the Journey to HR 3.0: 10 Ways to Transform in a Time of Upheaval, IBM, Oct 2020


Teal & Go

Video player

Action Areas to Consider:

Ten Action Areas		
Action area	Implications for the enterprise	Impact
1 Measure employee performance continuously and transparently	Clear and continuous coaching and performance conversations are essential to proactively address workforce and performance issues.	Very high
2 Invest in the new role of leadership	The role of leaders requires new and different skills and behaviors. Predict strong leaders with analytics and invest in their development.	Very high
3 Build and apply capabilities in agile and design thinking	HR must be equipped to help design and manage agile teams through operations, rewards, performance management, and workplace productivity tools.	Very high
4 Pay for performance—and skills—in a fair and transparent way	The old model of pay for tenure prevents growth, innovation, and hiring of top people.	Very high
5 Continuously build skills in the flow of work	Employees and leaders must be learning all the time, with both formal and informal learning embedded in the culture, coupled with capability academies for deep skills.	High
6 Design intentional experiences for employees	Today's workforce expects meaningful employee experiences that are highly personalized, responsive to their needs and constantly improved.	High
7 Modernize your HR technology portfolio	The move to a Cloud-based architecture enables speed, scalability and flexibility.	High
8 Apply data-driven insights	People analytics is now essential to understanding, managing, and continuously improving organizational performance.	High
9 Reorient and reskill your HR business partners	HR must act as strategic advisors, trusted coaches, and data-driven problem solvers.	High
10 Source talent strategically	Top talent can come from novel sources, so companies must look inside and outside to find the best hires to remain competitive.	High

Source: Accelerating the Journey to HR 3.0: 10 Ways to Transform in a Time of Upheaval, IBM, Oct 2020



Resources

- <https://hbr.org/2014/01/building-a-game-changing-talent-strategy>
- <https://www.mercer.com/what-we-do/workforce-and-careers/hr-transformation.html>
- <https://www.cais.ca/cais-connect/webinars/hr-strategy>
- <https://talentmap.com/>
- <https://talentmap.com/project-covid/>
- <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/compassionate-systems-leadership/>
- [not myself today](#)
- [Parent Survey](#)
- [Student Survey](#)

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6- Physical Spaces and Facilities

The single biggest change to education brought about by the pandemic was the shift to virtual learning. Many CAIS schools made this change, which many people found very challenging and uncomfortable, in a weekend, a few days, or at most a couple of weeks. Frankly, many thought we would fail; that learning would suffer dramatically without seeing each other in person.

And when we were tasked with planning a return to school under a thick menu of directives from the ministry and health officials, with myriad recommendations for re-opening shared by educators and consultants around the world, the job seemed impossible. We simply could not see how we had the time, space, people, technology, and knowledge to completely upset our traditional uses of time and space to educate all of our students across a range of in-person, virtual, and hybrid modalities.

Yet, we largely succeeded, beyond our own expectations and on most counts. The consensus is clear: meeting on campus face-to-face unfettered by all of the pandemic-related restrictions is much better than not, but we also learned that a lot of great learning could occur outside of our traditional classrooms. In fact, over the last two decades, many schools have been testing how physical spaces can better serve the kind of student-centric deeper learning to which we aspire, and we found evidence of that with some of the lessons learned during the pandemic. These lessons will push any forward-leaning school to challenge some basic assumptions about everything from the buildings on our campus (after our teachers, the most expensive element of any school) to walls, furniture, the impacts of light, air, and more. The pandemic is causing us to take a serious look at many elements of the traditional school “operating system”, and our use of physical spaces should be on the top of that list.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

- Connecting the community at a time when our campus may not be an option as our traditional point of common connection.
- The role of capital projects and fundraising; assessing the need and support for new spaces and building projects amidst interruptions and supply of building materials.
- Impacts on boarding students, including cost, time, and space related to quarantines, and family confidence in safety of our living conditions.
- Revamping spaces to meet distancing and safety protocols while providing access to technology, wifi, and security.
- Cost and time needed to maintain the air quality in buildings of varying ages and sizes.
- Changes to food services, including preparation and delivery, cost of reusable containers, increased food waste, and recycling/garbage.

- The mental health of students and employees who are no longer able to move around freely and interact with their peers. Loss of gym spaces and the need to maintain students' physical wellbeing.
- The viability of temporary classrooms and shelters during winter and inclement weather.
- Additional workload on maintenance and cleaning staff in terms of both cost and personnel count.

! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch for on the School's Radar Screen

- Facilities staff-to-student ratio as we adjust to new and varying directives on density, cleaning, and health procedures.
- The rate of room design and repurposing of marginally-used spaces around campus
- Community risk tolerance via pulse surveys of staff and parents
- Number and nature of administrative office spaces; flexibility of those spaces; number of employees working on campus and remotely.

◇ Advice from School Space, Plant and Facilities Expert

Courtesy of Dr. Robert Dillon

Where students learn matters. Almost all discussion about transforming schools has been about “what” and “how” students learn rather than “where” students learn. Learning science tells us that better learning takes place in welcoming and exciting spaces, where kids prefer to be. These spaces have evolved dramatically from the rows of desks facing forward that still typify many schools and classrooms.



Spaces are part of a student's Care Team, alongside teachers, parents, advisors, health practitioners and peers. How we use our physical spaces can either accelerate or decelerate stress for students and teachers. Students are returning from the pandemic wary and somewhat fearful of what the world holds for them. We should re-evaluate things like class location and student density and not simply return students - who are wary and fearful - to the same rooms we had before the pandemic.

Flexible and agile environments were recognized as better for learning well before the pandemic. Many schools found in 2020 that spaces can be converted and serve multiple needs. Large spaces like libraries and hallways can be adapted to serve multiple purposes. Furniture should also have more than one purpose within the learning environment. Writable surfaces and novel furniture that kids can move around allow students to be physically active and take a more personally engaging role in their own learning.



Flexible/Agile

Healthy spaces are humane spaces; they contribute to emotional and physical health through the use of natural light and fresh air and enable students and teachers to move around during the class time. Learning science tells us that students get overwhelmed with too many visual distractions on the walls, floors, and ceilings, so healthy spaces have many writable surfaces that invite collaborative, vertical learning. Balance screen time and green time by taking advantage of outdoor meetings when you can. Even calming slideshows of nature on a big screen TV or wall screens can help calm students and teachers and lead to better learning.



Nature Soothes and Heals

All square footage needs to support learning. All of the spaces in our schools, from classrooms to offices to public, multipurpose, and outdoor spaces can be tuned to support learning. We don't have to tear down walls or build new buildings; purpose and uses can change with low-cost renovations to create fantastic, flexible learning spaces. Hallways sometimes make up 1/3 of the school's footprint and almost always have extensive vertical surfaces that can be turned into anything from a writable collaboration wall to a climbing

gym. Teachers who “own” their classroom with a large teacher desk typically absorb 20% of classroom square footage, an area that is particularly precious for urban schools or any school that needs to reduce student density.



Resources

- [Science reference for schools](#)
- [Re-looking Spaces](#)
- Ventilation Guide <https://schools.forhealth.org/>
- Covid-19 Report <https://schools.forhealth.org/>
- <https://keepmesafe.myisss.com/Home/UniversitySearch> - Mental Health app for Student 14 plus
- <https://www.cleanerairforschools.org/>
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/122WT3NRNjM2XZAFnqcflKRgSihtBpryD/view?usp=sharing>
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TFIK0xKXRRqdurMVwSYU2kDRoK4r3Hyx/view?usp=sharing>
- https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1XUP6bM3-fduZh_Y4BfjchXxS8u8hcMnPyS71FyHCpA/edit?usp=sharing

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7- Student Recruitment and Retention

Admissions is the lifeblood of all schools. With students comes funding; with strong admissions demand, schools have the flexibility to achieve a wide range of aspirational goals. The pandemic caused enormous anxiety amongst all independent schools as we waited for evidence that families would or would not choose to stay as we shifted to all-virtual in the spring and whether they would choose to return in the fall. For many CAIS schools, the news was good, and in many cases, this was tied directly to the problems that large public districts encountered in shifting to virtual or hybrid learning. There was generally a bump in admissions demand in 2020-21. To the extent that this bump was due to problems in the public sector, that bump may dissipate as we recover from the pandemic in 2021 and 2022. To the extent that schools can communicate a powerful value proposition to these new families, some may choose to stay.

Independent schools around the world, some prodded by the pandemic and others already moving in this direction, are exploring how to enroll students virtually from a distance. These efforts will likely increase as comfort with virtual learning, and increased platform sophistication makes distance learning easy and effective. Admissions offices will need to upgrade their capabilities, some dramatically, to effectively identify, communicate with, and ultimately enroll those families for whom the school is a good fit.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

Affordability

Many of our schools are in markets that are undergoing, and forecast to undergo further, demographic change in the coming decade. On top of this, the pandemic has caused economic disruptions in the short term, which may have much longer implications for local, regional, or national economies. There is little encouragement that, overall, more families will find our schools affordable in the future, though this will vary by market. The middle class in Canada is shrinking, and most schools that enroll international students have already reached the point where more international enrolment might be unattractive to both Canadian and international families. These external factors suggest that many schools will see an increased demand for financial assistance. This will be particularly acute for schools that are serious about expanding the diversity of the student body as fewer families in underserved communities can afford our tuition. All of these suggest that schools should re-emphasize creating and delivering a strong, and even perhaps unique value proposition, even if this means deviating from traditional goals and vision elements.

Increased Customer Service and Communication

Admissions is no longer about telling your school's story; it is about engaging with families to find out exactly what it is that they want from a school and finding a fit with families who share in your differentiated value proposition. We see increased use of tools like, "What job are we hiring the school to do?" Websites must be designed so visitors can find what is different and exciting about your school within the first 30

seconds. Admissions efforts will be increasingly tailored, sophisticated, and use granular digital marketing and communications processes.

Collaboration is Key

Enrolment planning and target setting should be collaborative across the school leadership team. Admissions needs to plan seamlessly with the academic and business leaders, particularly as the school responds flexibly to what may be changing conditions over the next few years. There is evidence that families want an admissions process that is easy and fast. This suggests that schools should collaborate on common applications and testing practices. Colleagues from schools that are not in direct competition will benefit from increased mentoring and networking, including sharing data and communication strategies.

! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch for on the School's Radar Screen

- Retention values for September in the years 2021-2023
- Evidence of the local and national economic ripple effect of the pandemic beyond 2020
- Changing timelines for families making decisions to inquire, apply, and accept a contract
- Shared demographics and psychographics (suggested Environics-type survey data by region, perhaps facilitated by CAIS) that allow schools to drill down on:
 - ◆ Local geographic and demographics
 - ◆ Income
 - ◆ Social values and attitudes

◇ Advice from Enrolment Management Expert

Courtesy of Enrollment Management Association

The business model of independent schools is unsustainable and it is starting to show. Independent schools face multiple financial sustainability challenges; the pandemic accentuated these by bringing many of them together at one time in an unprecedented way.

Enrollment Management Disruptors

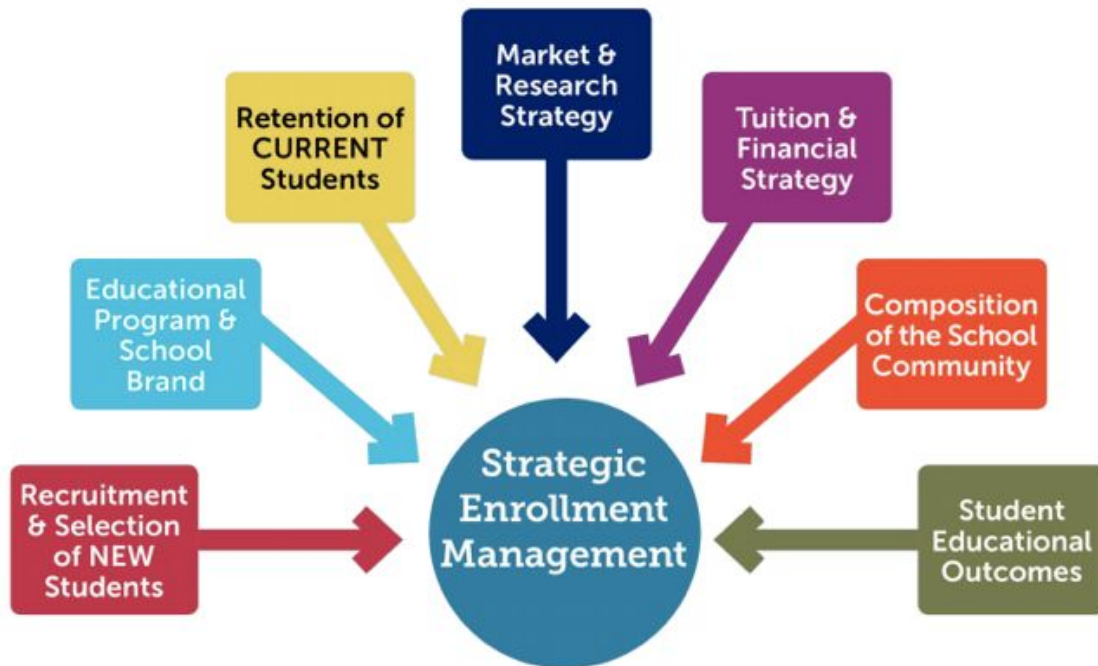


While a 2020 pulse check shows many schools had positive enrolment bumps from the pandemic, are those permanent or, more likely, temporary?

- 36% of schools were over-enrolled
- 24% of schools were slightly under-enrolled
- 28% of schools hit their target
- 13% of schools were severely under-enrolled

(Source: EMA Pulse Check September 2020; 319 schools responding)

The shift from admissions to enrolment management is happening, but not fast enough. For many schools, the admissions process has become far more complex than the traditions of viewbooks, admissions testing, and student interviews.



As we move towards an integrated system that involves multiple traditional departments, graphics like this prompt us to ask: How might you support your Head of School to become the Chief Enrolment Evangelist? Does your enrolment leader have a seat at the leadership table, and are all members of the leadership team involved in coordinating effective enrolment management? Does your school have a formal student retention committee?

Families’ perspectives on independent school value are not shifting; they have already shifted. Word of mouth and websites represent 90% of sources for parental research into which schools they will choose. Families want the application process to be easy; 56% used a common app this year. Affordability is the highest priority of considerations in the application process. International families are increasingly concerned about pandemic-related travel and systemic racism.

Schools are already making some dramatic changes. Some are embracing virtual learning by enrolling students from around the world in virtual courses, hosting specialized online courses by experts in non-traditional learning fields, or partnering with fully online schools and colleges. Others are partnering with businesses and nonprofits in the community to create new both on and off campus learning opportunities that amplify an element of their value proposition. Some independent schools have begun to model, and in some cases implement, significant tuition roll-backs as a means to simultaneously lower cost and increase enrolment.

Resources

- Expert session recording:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qK9FcwYPk0-XlcDAVFSSowWqzj6oVhRR/view>
- Inshatrix Western Canadian Consumers and Covid-19:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jfJ6W2h9bbRURiUN8xKz6vHiqq2jPjt_/view?usp=sharing
- Metric Perspectives blog: Resources for PS marketing: <https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/>
- Link to Google Insights Report and Metric Webinar from April:
<https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/preparing-for-a-successful-private-school-recruitment-campaign/>
- Google Insights Article on Customer Journey usage for media spend:
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-ca/consumer-insights/consumer-journey/navigating-purchase-behaviour-and-decision-making/>
- Article on Google Attribution:
<https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/analyzing-conversion-paths-with-google-attribution/>
- Diversity data by Google: <https://bit.ly/3fCuJQ7>
- Google Vertical Trends Report:
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1G2PC-V6HSgXb-x6awwoG1WZVoRasUCs5kuuVDVVxx24/edit?usp=sharing>

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8- Marketing and Communications

If there is a nexus of school operations being transformed by 2020, it is our marketing and communications systems. In one year, we are experiencing not only the incredibly disruptive COVID-19 shutdowns but also elevated concerns around systemic racism and justice and economic dislocations that may have long-term impacts on our customer base and markets. Alongside all of this, our families are being exposed to, and getting more comfortable with, virtual connectivity while also experiencing the discomfort of isolation from some of their closest friends and peers.

The [CAIS Long-Term Disruption Part 1](#) report has a chapter on Communications that focuses largely on internal school communications amongst current students, staff, and parents. This report focuses more on external communications, specifically on how marketing communications will evolve due to converging influences of the 2020-21 crises, alongside the very rapid and robust evolution of digital, data-driven marketing tools and tactics.

Many of our schools have shifted their communications focus to their websites over the last decade. This portal serves as a school's introduction to the community and public face to current and future customers. However, all sectors, including education, are just beginning to see the power of data-driven analytics in identifying, connecting with, and building loyalty amongst families with whom they share common values and goals. Though our communications staff are under a heavy burden this year, we must do more to upgrade our capabilities for marketing challenges and opportunities that extend well past the end of the current crisis.

! Recommended Points of Specific Focus or Concern Over the Next 6-36 Months

- Maintaining enrolment numbers. As the economy adjusts to COVID-era influences, job security now and in the future will challenge families to make a long-term commitment to tuition-based institutions.
- Raising funds for philanthropic support when many in our school community are possibly struggling financially, and there are many worthwhile community needs due to the pandemic.
- Maintaining our value-add to families if we are forced to go online continually; how do we maintain our expected level of service during a shut-down crisis.
- Fewer in-person touch-points with our broader community; difficulty maintaining our community mindset when people are so isolated from one another.

Challenges

- Balancing and clarifying school communications between the frequent updates that are required due to changing conditions at school with longer-term messaging around value, missions, and the brand.
- Defining a clear marketing strategy for next year and the following year in what will likely be a market and education landscape with many unknowns.

Opportunities

- Community engagement on virtual platforms can actually be easier and more accessible for many customers, from local parents and students to international families.
- Families are used to, and in fact, want, more frequent communication, and multilateral engagement, than before the crisis.

! Indicators or Metrics we Might Place and Watch for on the School's Radar Screen

- Positive or negative feedback on the frequency and clarity of communication from the school.
- Feedback and concerns from parents as their students navigate a more complex and new learning system.
- Participation and levels of engagement in virtual meetings

◇ Advice from Marketing and Communications Expert

(Courtesy of Metric Marketing)

Big Lessons During COVID-19

Since the start of the pandemic in Q1 2020, just over half of western Canadians expect to:

- Work from home more often
- Travel less for work
- Take fewer out of country vacations
- Reduce participation in registered activities like sports, music, and fitness

Parents and high school-aged students will do a LOT more:

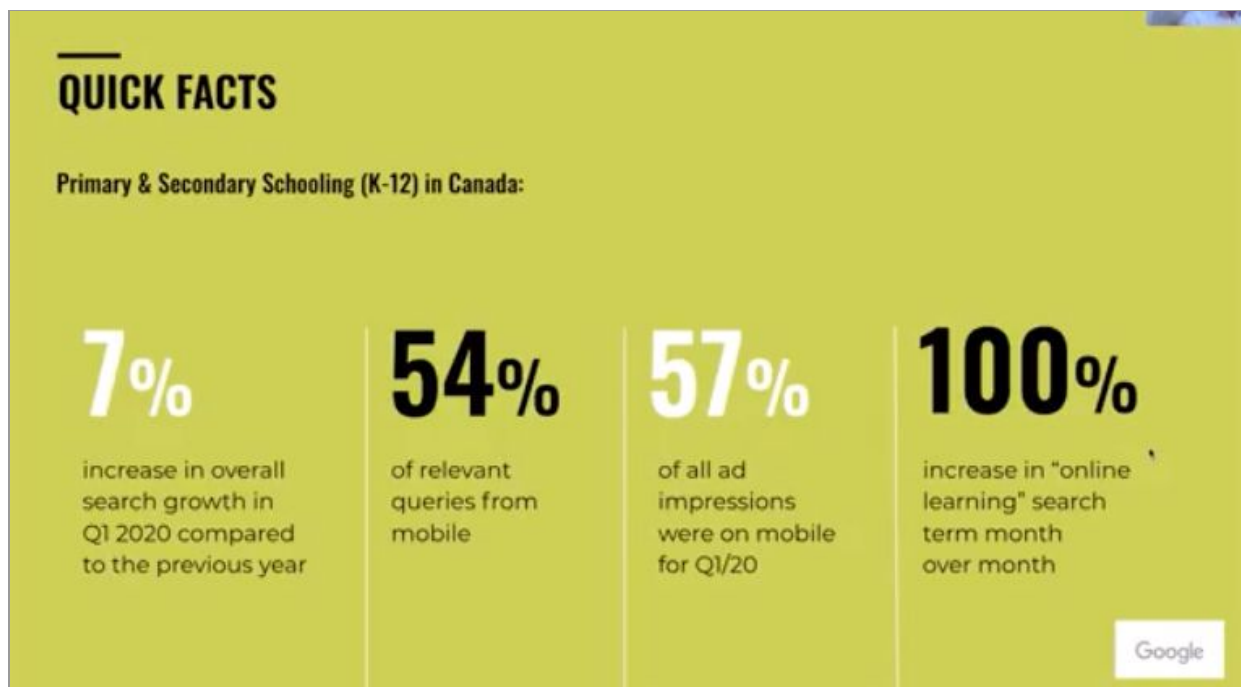
- Spending time on their phones
- Watching streaming services
- Watching YouTube
- Listening to streaming services

New apps that Canadians have started to use a lot more:

- Zoom
- FaceTime
- HouseParty
- WhatsApp
- Skype
- Google Hangouts

Where People Are Searching For Education Information

Using Google metrics, we find that people are using more online resources searching for more educational options than they ever have before. Schools have access to these metrics and must start to focus on what the data can reveal about a school's digital presence in an increasingly differentiated marketplace of education options.



The biggest increase in queries is on a mobile phone, but when potential customers move on to fill in a form or participate in an online event, they shift to their tablet or computer. Queries about schools converted to click-throughs with a 40-50% increase in clicks related to education searches in Q1 2020 and a 42% year-over-year increase in Q3 2020.

Digital Measurement

Good measurement is Step #1 of an effective digital advertising capability. We have to customize our data analytics, or we will never be good at digital marketing and communications, which is a must going forward, well beyond the end of the pandemic.

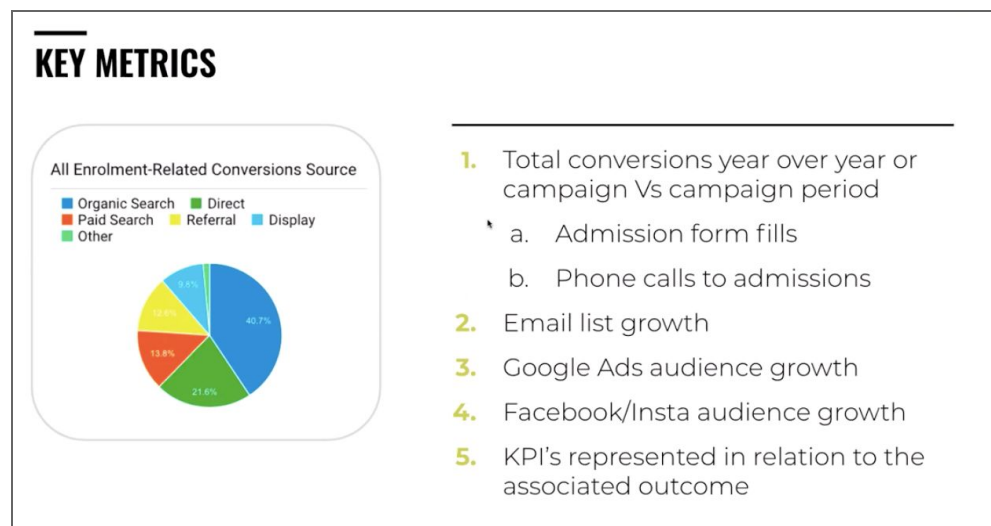
Create a detailed measurement plan tailored to your school and market by:

- Identifying your objectives
- Planning goals
- Developing key performance indicators (KPI)
- Assessing metrics and segments

EXAMPLE MEASUREMENT PLAN												
OBJECTIVES	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS				ADMISSIONS		CURRENT FAMILIES				INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT	
WEBSITE GOALS	Reinforce All Advertising		Support ABC Campaign		Phone Calls	Form Fills	Seasonal CTA		Donation Submissions		Boarding Form Fills & Phone Calls	
KPIs	Branded Traffic	New Visitors	Branded Traffic	New Visitors	Admission Page Visits	Brochure Downloads	Claims Processed	Abandon Claim Process Rate	Payment Processed	Abandon Payment Process Rate	Boarding Section Sessions	Boarding Retargeting List Additions
METRICS	Sessions	% New Sessions	Sessions	Click to Call	New User Sessions	Number of Downloads	Number of claims	Funnel Bounce Rate	Number of Payments	Funnel Bounce Rate	Clicks Boarding Link	Clicks Boarding Landing Page Link
SEGMENTS	Traffic Sources	Traffic sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources	Traffic Sources
	Geo	Geo	Campaign Geo Target	Campaign Geo Target	Geo	Sessions With Downloads	Device	Device	Device	Device	Geo	Geo
	Device	Device	Visit More Than 3 Pages	Visit More Than 3 Pages	Repeat Visitors	Converters	Repeat Visitors	Repeat Visitors	Repeat Visitors	Repeat visitors	About Us Page Views	About Us Pages Views

Key Metrics to Track Over the Next 6-36 Months:

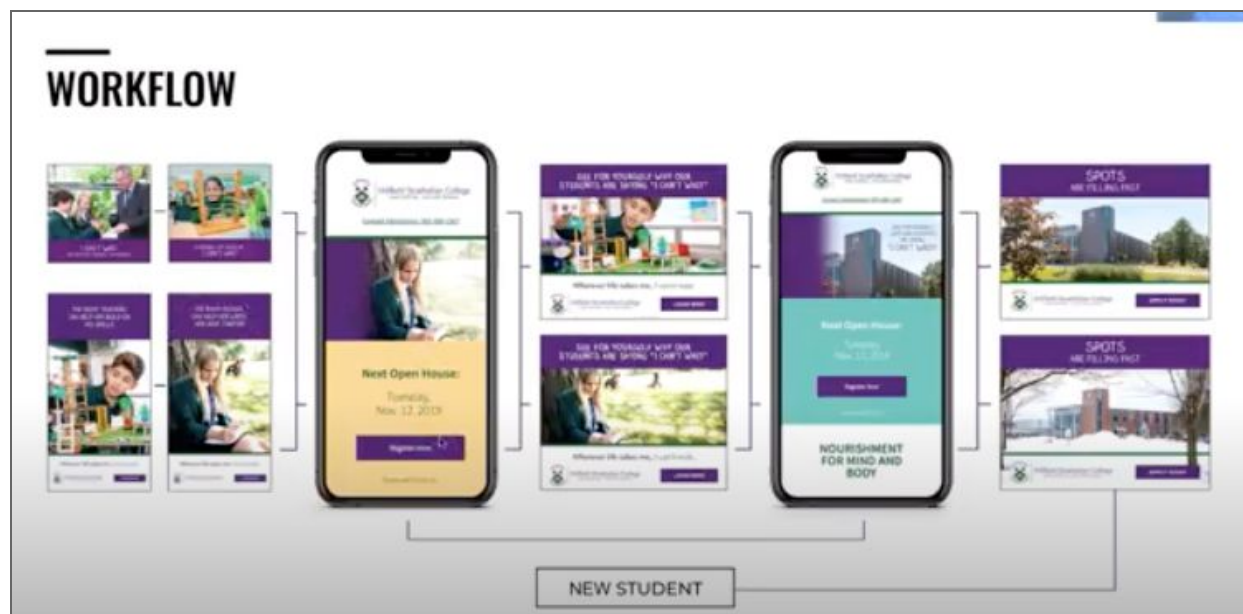
Total enrolment conversions year-over-year is the most important metric a school can track. Next is “audience growth” on platforms like Facebook and in Google searches as more school investigation is done digitally.



These metrics allow a school to determine the cost per conversion for each segment of a digital marketing campaign or ad spend and continue to refine a mar/com strategy focused on where customers actually are spending time and attention.

Laser Attention on the Full Customer Journey

Effective marketing in an increasingly digital world relies on moving customers along the well-tested customer journey from a first connection with the school through enrolment and long-term loyalty. This experience is vastly different from the past when admissions relied on a word-of-mouth connection, a viewbook, and giving a campus tour. Messaging, brand, and individual campaigns have to fit and flow across a range of digital devices, allowing a more personalized experience for both potential and current customer-families.



Resources

- Metric Marketing session recording
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K3FMa7CCb_8mUjRFFDrhr0TMcoqT29pa/view?usp=sharing
- Insightrix Western Canadian Consumers and Covid-19:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jfJ6W2h9bbRURjUN8xKz6vHigg2jPjt_/view?usp=sharing
- Metric Perspectives blog: Resources for PS marketing: <https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/>
- Link to Google Insights Report and Metric Webinar from April:
<https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/preparing-for-a-successful-private-school-recruitment-campaign/>

- Google Insights Article on Customer Journey usage for media spend:
<https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-ca/consumer-insights/consumer-journey/navigating-purchase-behaviour-and-decision-making/>
- Article on Google Attribution:
<https://metricmarketing.ca/perspectives/analyzing-conversion-paths-with-google-attribution/>
- Diversity data by Google: <https://bit.ly/3fCuJQ7>
- Google Vertical Trends Report:
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1G2PC-V6HSgXb-x6awwoG1WZVoRasUCs5kuuVDVVxx24/edit?usp=sharing>

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9- The Template

One goal of this project was to design a simple, flexible tool to help schools identify, reflect upon, and potentially modify their current strategies, tactics, and metrics to benefit from the lessons learned during the pandemic year. This tool, which we call simply “the template”, is being shared alongside publication of the report with the strong probability that as users provide feedback on the template to CAIS, it will be updated and re-shared with refinements.

The template is an Excel spreadsheet that each school can download and tailor to their own timelines and purposes. The template features tabs that align to the chapters of this report.

Overview

We know that a key to success in a rapidly evolving and increasingly competitive education marketplace is strong alignment across your school’s value proposition: from aspirational, differentiated vision and systems-wide implementation, to the classroom-level learning experience of the individual child and their family. The template is designed to help schools identify, modify and strengthen these alignments using lessons learned during this transformative year, as seen through the lens of each individual school. School teams that find the tool useful can easily replicate it to be used on an ongoing basis well past the current year.

The template currently contains eight tabs. The first tab is a quick reference user guide. The second tab focuses on all-school leadership practices. Tabs 2-8 refer to specific departments or functions at the school.

In Column A of each tab, schools are invited to enter all-school goals and strategies that are relevant to the focal department or function of that tab. These will likely come directly from your strategic plan, vision statement, or other all-school guiding documents.

In Column B of each tab, schools will enter evidence of how they are currently meeting or aligned to each strategy or goal, as seen through the lens of the respective department or function.

In Column C, we have entered two sections of inputs from the collective work product of this report series.

- At the top of Column C, in the Orange section, we have listed key opportunities and challenges from the disruption experience as identified by the multi-school deep dive team and our outside experts. Schools can also add additional opportunities and challenges that they may have recognized that were not cited by the teams.
- In the Green section of this column, we have added suggested metrics identified by our teams and experts that schools may want to review or include going forward to better refine strategies and plan tactics over the next 1-3 years and beyond.

In Columns D-F, the template follows the two tracks begun in Column C:

- The Upper Track invites schools to identify adjustments to tactics (Column D), often at the departmental level, that they may make to increase alignment with core strategies in light of the challenges and opportunities in Column C. They may also identify adjustments to all school strategies (Column E) in light of current or evolving challenges and opportunities. In Column F, schools will forecast or report indicators or evidence that progress towards the suggested realignments that have actually taken place and/or been effective.
- The Lower Track invites schools to build on metrics suggested by the deep dive teams and our experts or to add metrics of their own. In Column D of the Green section, schools will create objective or subjective measurable values for the metrics that they adopt and record those values for the current year or any future year in which the template is being used. In Column E of the Green section, they will forecast goals for each metric at some point or series of points in the future. In Column F of the Green section, schools will identify the adjustments that were made to either achieve the goals associated with this metric, or explain how the goal itself was modified.

Suggestions for Use

Decide how to distribute ownership of the template. A typical default might be to ask the head of each department to fill in their respective tabs, possibly with input from their direct reports. One of the biggest takeaways from this year, from nearly every team, is that our schools lack effective cross-functional collaboration; that our work in, and not across silo boundaries inhibits the kind of nimble, flexible planning and implementation that these times demand. With this in mind, we encourage you to consider the following options:

- Assign initial inputs and longer-term tracking to small cross-functional teams.
- Create opportunities for frequent review and feedback by people who are NOT in the specific department.
- Pair department members with trustees or faculty members to own, track, or advise on each tab.

Tailor the template based on your school's experience. Add rows and columns where they are helpful. Change column headings if you use language that is different from that in the generic template.

Decide how frequently to use or refer to the template. Will you only use it when you encounter a major disruption? Or will you use it as a planning tool, perhaps annually or semi-annually? Should all departments review and use the template on the same schedule, or might some departments experience a disruption, or have a need to review alignments of strategy and tactics due to an event that does not similarly impact others?

Feedback

CAIS welcomes feedback on how your school is using this template. Your feedback will be used in future updates.

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10- Acknowledgements

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