



ECHOES

What are people saying about us?

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & ADVANCEMENT

Asking people what they think about you can be a dangerous thing.

What if they tell you the truth and it's not pretty?

But schools put a lot of effort into giving students feedback about the work they do, in order to help the students improve. So it also makes sense that a school would seek feedback from its

stakeholders, to see if there is room for improvement in what the school is doing.

That's why Smithville Christian High School embarked on an extensive survey in the spring of 2018, asking parents, students, staff, alumni, donors, and other supporters what they think. The survey, administered by Colorado-based Graceworks Ministries, is designed to serve Christian schools in assessing two things: the importance of various factors and the effectiveness of

the school in implementing those factors. Smithville Christian paid extra to have the survey tailored to its audiences, and sent out invitations to participate in May and June.

What did we learn?

We learned that our supporters think highly of us. So highly, in fact, that the survey's normal way of identifying factors in crucial need of improvement came up empty. There were a handful of

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Praise team at chapel





Small group discussion during Spiritual Emphasis Week

Continued from page 1...

items in the "Fix-Me" quadrant of our final report, but they were represented in grey ink, instead of the normal black, because they are so close to the cut-off point that they need to be "taken with a grain of salt," said Dan Krause, the Graceworks consultant who interpreted our results.

The purpose of the survey is to find out what needs to be fixed and to celebrate the things that stand out, said Krause. At Smithville Christian, there were 10 factors identified as strengths and dozens of positive testimonials.

In short, our respondents rated us 93 out of 100. We were ranked particularly high for our caring teachers, for developing students' faith, for Christ-centred instruction, and for creating a welcoming community where everyone belongs.

On page 3 you can see the list of our school's strengths, as identified by the

survey respondents, and on page 4, you can see a small sample of the feedback we received. Principal Ted Harris's thoughts on a key topic for which we received feedback – the quality of instruction provided by teachers – start on Page 6.

The survey also asked respondents if they'd be willing to serve on the school board, to help with fundraising, or make a donation. There was a gratifying willingness to do all of these things, and we will certainly be following up.

While the overwhelmingly positive results match the day-to-day feedback we hear from students, parents, and alumni, there were also some good suggestions for improvement. People would like to see us benefit more from the diversity that our international student program provides. They would like us to be more intentional about inclusion, and they want us to pay attention to things like air conditioning, and the comfort of student



Survey results by the numbers

• 417 responses — of which 208 were from students

• Of the 209 other respondents:

127 parents

55 alumni

8 alumni parents

7 grandparents

12 staff

• 4 decades: The alumni represent a broad cross-section of all four decades of our school's existence, including one from 1981.

• Net referral score (an indication of respondents' willingness to refer others to our school): 84 out of 100

• Quality gap: 0.21 – considered very low

• Satisfaction: 93 out of 100

uniforms. Not surprising in a small school, many people wished we could provide more course options. The leadership team is making note of the suggestions and will be addressing them as appropriate.

Receiving such a positive review ought not to make us smug. This is a snapshot in time, and only captures the thoughts of the people who had the time and inclination to tell us what they think. While we are grateful that with God's help we enjoy such a positive reputation, we have no intention of resting on our laurels or closing the lines of communication. Of course, we would like it if everyone could speak positively about Smithville Christian, but if you can't, we need to know why.

Because a survey like this requires a significant investment of time and money, we also need to be careful about when and

how we do our next survey. We hope people feel free to provide feedback to us at any time, but it's also good to be strategic about what and when we ask people to give us the gift of their opinions. We feel blessed to be able to serve such a supportive and appreciative community. Given that word of mouth from satisfied customers is the single biggest factor in a school's ability to successfully promote itself, we are encouraged by the results. We will continue to do all we can do keep earning your good reviews.

Do you want to see the evidence first-hand? Come to our Open House and Celebration of Learning on January 17, 2019. An information session for prospective students and their families is at 7 p.m. Open House from 7:30 to 8:30. Closing chapel from 8:30 to 9. See the invitation on Page 5. Everyone is welcome and the refreshments will be great! We hope to see you there.



Small group discussion during Spiritual Emphasis Week

Smithville Christian High School's top 10 strengths (as identified by survey respondents)

1. Christian worldview development
2. Bible curriculum
3. Educational objectives are clear
4. Students feel accepted by their peers
5. Qualifications of teachers (teachers are up-to-date on teaching methodology)
6. Individual attention provided for students
7. High academic standards for students
8. Safe learning environment
9. Principal provides staff oversight and accountability
10. Communication with constituents

The respondents to the 2018 satisfaction survey were asked, on a scale of zero to 10, how likely they were to refer a friend or colleague to our school. Those people who gave us a rating of 9 or higher were then asked, “What are the most important reasons for the score you gave?”

Here is a small sample of what students, parents, alumni and supporters have to say about Smithville Christian High School:

“All my children have been blessed by the solid Christian education they have received at Smithville Christian. The school has been part of my children developing into good Christian young adults – what more could a parent ask for!”

“Smithville Christian High School was an incredible place to learn and grow, educationally, and in my identity in Christ. Although some programs and classes offered at larger high schools were not available when I attended, I still felt that the quality of my education was high compared to many of my peers in my first year of university. My teachers were caring and supportive, and some became role models for my walk with God. Thank you Smithville Christian!”

“It’s an excellent school!”

“The staff. I LOVE knowing that my children are going to a school where the staff are not just there to earn a paycheck, but that they love the Lord and want to serve Him in their vocation of teaching. This love for the Lord translates into love for my children. My daughter has been built into by teachers and support staff who care about her as a student and as an individual in general. They take an interest in who she is and what is happening in her life, and they want to help her become the woman that God wants her to be... more like Jesus. I am so thankful for the opportunity for her, and my two younger children, to attend Smithville Christian High School. THANK YOU!!!!”

“I love to see my son grow in his faith and be surrounded by Christian friends.”

“The staff are invested in your child and their education. It’s a safe place to be and the technology in the school is amazing. The opportunities that the kids have at Smithville are so good!”

“The teachers at the school really care about the kids, and it is a faith-based school. My child struggles with depression, and I don’t think they would have received the same care and understanding in another school.”

“The focus of school is to give God the glory whether it be in subjects, chapel or extra-curricular activities. Great at making students feel welcome, guidance office very helpful, always seems to be great positive atmosphere when I come into the school.”

“Smithville Christian High is a very caring environment. The staff are very knowledgeable, compassionate, and approachable; they even remember the names of the students and their parents. The Resource teacher and the guidance counselling were excellent!”

“Wednesday’s spiritual assemblies are the best.”

“A fantastic school with amazing Christ-centered teachers and leaders that radiates a wonderful Christian atmosphere in a warm inviting building!”

“We love how inclusive the school is. And how the teachers are attentive to the students.”

“We are having such a positive experience. The teachers are invested in our children and know them well.”

SURVEY COMMENTS

You are invited to Smithville Christian High School’s
Open House & Celebration of Learning
Thursday, January 17, 2019



7:00-7:30 pm Grade 8 students’ and parents’ Information Session

7:30-9:00 pm Open House and Celebration of Learning

Find out about our MacBook-for-every-student program, plus art, worship, praise team, student testimonies and more.



We believe. You belong here.

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Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR



This fall we have been wading through the results of the survey that over 400 students, parents, teachers, alumni and other supporters completed last spring. This survey, called the Graceworks Survey, gave us hundreds of pages of data and comments about what people see in our school.

The survey was a source of great encouragement, giving us a lot to feel good about. As you will have noted

elsewhere in this issue, it did not inundate us with a wide array of things we need to address and improve, but one significant takeaway for me is that everyone pays attention to instruction. It is good for us to be reminded that we need to make sure the main thing remains the main thing.

The most important thing that happens in school is instruction. It's great to hear that students feel safe and enfolded here. It's great to hear that parents and students value the spiritual life program. We're glad that people like the building. But what happens between the bells in classrooms is the main thing we do,

and survey respondents had a lot to say about it.

We had stacks of positive comments about what our teachers do and about the education our students receive. More than half of the items that were referred to as our greatest strengths as a school connected to instruction. At the same time, the things the survey helped us target for improvement are also mostly pertaining to instruction. So the teaching that happens in our building is the thing that we celebrate most and at the same time, the main target for improvement. This is no surprise to me: we celebrate good instruction and

always have it as our main priority for professional growth.

Even so, this is a good reminder to me to stay focused. Our purpose statement reminds us that we "train students to live as responsible disciples of Jesus Christ." Though this happens wherever and whenever we spend time with students, it happens by design in the classroom. It's through instruction that the following focus themes happen in our building: Building Community, Worshipping God, Discovering Order, Getting Wisdom, Caring for Creation, Reflecting Creativity, Shaping Culture.

This is why I am spending more time where teaching happens this year and more time in conversation with those who do it. I schedule time with every employee for Coach and Connect sessions which give us opportunity to reflect on the overall work of all teachers as well as their alignment with our core

values (relating to Belong, Believe and Succeed). These sessions provide a useful platform to talk about instruction and to set goals for further excellence.

I am also spending a day a week out of my office and in classrooms. I am finding this to be a great way to remain connected to the experience of students and to enter into dialogue with teachers about their instructional practices. It's on those days in particular that I am reminded that, in my view, there is no better job than being a Christian high school principal. I get to walk into any learning situation in this school whenever I want, and what I see resonates with the encouraging feedback we received through this Graceworks survey about the instruction that happens in our building. Our daily instruction of students really is our participation in building the Kingdom of God, and it is worth celebrating.



GRADE 12 RETREAT

SILVER LAKE CAMP - SEPTEMBER 2018



Career Day 2018

BY LINDA BOOY-KORVEMAKER, STUDENT SERVICES

I believe that God has a plan that is bigger than each and every person and that includes each and every person. I believe that God has a purpose for each and every person and I believe that God loves each and every person for who they are and what they bring to this earth here and now.

On Wednesday, December 5, we hosted our biennial Career Day. As guidance counsellors we anticipate this day because it fulfills some of our key program goals and expectations.

It is amazing how many people shared and volunteered their time and talents with us. They believe in our students. We believe in our students. Our students are the next generation and they are a generation that brings hope.

The day began with chapel featuring Johnny Henderson. Johnny is a youth pastor at Central Community Church in St. Catharines who talked with us about having “A life of impact.” Through a mix

of humour and story he reminded us that we are all part of God’s story and we need to remember that it is God’s story. We play a role in this bigger story and we need to remember three key things: life is short, it’s not about us, and we have to do something.

After the chapel, students attended workshops to be led by experts, helping them get ready for the next steps after high school. Topics like finding God at university, apprenticeship training, what to expect at college and university, and taking a gap year, were just some of the possibilities.

In the afternoon, students could choose to attend three different career-specific sessions. We had guests and many alumni sharing their expertise in careers such as agriculture, real estate, starting your own business, nursing, journalism and media relations, marketing and sales, environmental science, architecture technology, construction trades, outdoor education, paramedic, plumbing, and social work, and that is not even half of the careers represented!

Career Day 2018 was a success because of the many people who poured into our students. From the teachers and volunteers who hosted, to the hands that prepared the hospitality and presentations. A guest who has never been in our school before left this comment on social media the next day. “I’d like to extend a sincere thank you to the amazing students at Smithville Christian High School for inviting me to speak at their Career Day event yesterday. :)

It’s always a pleasure chatting with students interested in learning more about the fitness industry, while exploring the varied educational pathways and career opportunities within it! If you have a passion for your career too, why not share your enthusiasm with the next generation? Don’t keep your spark to yourself. Pass it on...”

Our thanks to the many people who passed on their knowledge, wisdom, and experience to our students. It is our hope and prayer that the students, too, will someday pass on what they have learned as kingdom citizens.



“You can research a job, but talking with someone who does the job is so much better.” - Student feedback



A day without technology

BY JEREMY DEBOER, STUDENT COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST



On November 22, students and staff participated in a No Technology Day. This was a social experiment that the Student Council dreamed up on their fall retreat, and school administration agreed to let us try it out for the day.

We made a presentation to the students and staff prior to the event, explaining our plan and reasons. On the day, students were encouraged to leave their technology at home for a day, or in a locked closet in the building.

The purpose of this day was to show students what it would be like if

technology was not used for a whole school day. Teachers adjusted their lessons to accommodate for the lack of tech, and students caught a glimpse into the past. Chalkboard brushes and old-school pointers were brought out during class and board games and basketballs were played with at lunch.

At the end of the day, we asked students to fill out a survey regarding their experience.

The results of the survey showed us that 41% of students typically spend 3-6 hours a day on their technology. You would expect to miss something that you use so much in one day; however, 44% of people only missed their technology 1-3

times, and 31% of people didn't miss it at all. Not being distracted by screens, students found other ways to entertain themselves while spending time with friends. Eighty-nine percent of students either spent their lunch talking to their friends or playing in the gym.

We wanted to try this out with the students and we learned that by eliminating technology, students came out of their shells and experienced new opportunities. We hope that this experience helps students and staff to voluntarily put their phones away and enjoy a board game, play cards, and appreciate the world in front of them.

Welcome to three new staff:

Beth Tadeson teaches Science, Biology and Functions, and accompanies the Choir.

Derrick DeKlerk, Class of 2009, teaches Civics, Geography and Math, and is staff sponsor for Sr. Girls Basketball and Boys Soccer.

Erin Neufeld teaches English, Math, Drama and Music, and joins Will Lammers as a staff sponsor for Praise Team.

We asked them to tell us a bit about themselves by posing the following questions:

1. Tell us about the educational and work journey that got you to this place.

2. Tell us about your family.

3. What do you like to do for fun?

4. What do you like about teaching at Smithville Christian High School?

BETH TADESON

The path to becoming a teacher has been filled with many twists and turns and life-experiences. I completed a B.Sc. & M.Sc. years ago and have worked as a microsurgical technologist, a research coordinator & research associate at McMaster, a self-employed piano teacher to hundreds of students, and a home-schooling mom to two daughters. Two years ago God's calling in my life became undeniable and I went back to school to pursue a B.Ed. at Redeemer. The response of my dad (a retired history teacher) was "well, it's about time!" I fell in love with this school and its community when I supply-taught for a number of days in the spring. Helping grade 12 students with their portfolio presentations for several days made me rethink where I would ultimately want to teach. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God's provision was on my calling to join the Smithville Christian community.

It was exciting for me to be doing university studies at the same time as my daughters. While watching me complete my B.Ed. degree, my younger daughter changed her

career aspirations to take up her own calling to become a teacher.

When I can steal a few minutes out of a busy day, I like to kick back with a John Grisham novel in one hand and an espresso in the other. When I have a bit more time on my hands, I like to build stuff for my house. Most recently I made a beautiful coat rack out of a 2-inch thick piece of live-edge black walnut and a shelf out of barn-board, both found at the N.A.C.E. Construction Essentials store.

I love the sense of community that I feel here at Smithville Christian, both with students and staff. Sharing devotions with my grade 11 biology class is always a highlight of my day. I love the transparency that we can have in spite of the "messiness" of our lives. Becoming part of the teaching community has been a place where iron sharpens iron, and I look forward to connecting with my colleagues over lunch.

DERRICK DEKLERK

Following high school, I completed the Queen's-Trent Concurrent Education Program and a Bachelor of Arts at Trent University. I attended Queen's University to complete my Bachelor of Education. Following my education, I decided to explore the world and teach at the same time. I worked in Stockholm, Sweden, teaching Mathematics, and Manama, Bahrain, where I taught History and Social Studies. I am excited about returning to Canada and the Niagara Region.

I come from a large family and my parents still live in Dunnville. My siblings have spread

out, as far away as Toronto and Colorado. We are still very close and we enjoy time together. This summer I got married, and Colleen and I look forward to this new journey together.

I love sports, both watching and playing. I have played soccer for a good part of my life and am a committed fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs. I also enjoy fitness/exercise and running, reading fiction and playing board games. I love to experience new cultures through travelling and I love hiking to discover new places and wonders in God's creation.

I have enjoyed my time year thus far at Smithville Christian High School. My fellow staff members and administration have been a great help in getting settled in. I love Wednesday chapel and many other Co-curriculars here at the school. It is amazing to see students involved in their growth as students, as individuals, and as Christians. Students at Smithville Christian are very engaged in their learning and I am excited to see what the future has in store for both myself and this wonderful school.

ERIN NEUFELD

Read Erin Neufeld's profile in an upcoming issue of Echoes.

We also are pleased to welcome Meghan Korten, Class of 2006, who is working half days, along with returning Sheri Willms, as a tutor for international students. Rebecca Lott is teaching Canadian and World History on a short-term contract.



Growing need, great potential

BY MARLENE BERGSMA,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVANCEMENT

The Christian School Foundation is a tremendous blessing to our school.

We need more people to know that.

Why?

Since it was founded in 1997 by a group of visionary Smithville Christian High School supporters, donors have blessed our school through the Christian School Foundation with thousands of dollars of gifts that have gone towards the support of students who want to attend our school, but whose families need some financial assistance to make it possible.

But the need for such assistance only continues to grow, as more people learn about the blessing of Christian education and want it for their children.

Thankfully, the potential for the Foundation to help us meet that need is also great – if people know about it. That’s why Smithville Christian High School took an unusual step this year and sent copies of the Foundation’s 2018 annual report to every family with students currently enrolled at our school. We also sent it to a select number of grandparents and other supporters with whom we have had contact in the past few years.

In his accompanying letter, Principal Ted Harris invited recipients to explore the

annual report and to marvel at the way God is using generous people to bless students and families – at our school in particular and throughout the entire Christian education movement.

“We encourage you to consider how you can participate in the work of the Christian School Foundation in the years ahead,” wrote Harris. “There are many who have named our school in their wills, and this number is rapidly growing. It is our hope that all those who are considering how the resources they have acquired can impact the kingdom of God after they have gone would consider making a planned gift for Smithville Christian High School.”

Of course, our need for regular giving – both monthly and annually – continues year after year. We need to raise about \$200,000 a year to meet our annual bursary goal. You can use the Foundation website to make a one-time gift, or even better, a monthly contribution. Just go to www.christianschoolfoundation.ca and click on the Donate button. Choose our school from the drop-down list. Any gift of any size is gratefully received, and we especially love it when our alumni make even a small contribution – it shows that they appreciate their Christian education and are interested in paying it forward.

Perhaps you understand our need and want to help, but don’t have the cash flow now. That’s where the Foundation



Read the Foundation’s 2018 Annual Report under “Publications” at www.christianschoolfoundation.ca

is especially helpful – both to you and to us. Planning now for a gift – of any size – that you can give after you don’t need the funds anymore is a powerful way to bless us. Besides, we know that once you have made such a plan, we will be in your heart and in your prayers, yet another way for you to bless us.

Please consider using the Foundation to easily make a regular or annual bursary gift to us. And please consider whether you, or someone you know, should explore the possibility of a planned gift.

“We want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to think about the legacy they will leave,” wrote Harris.



We draw Christian schools and donors together to expand the influence of Christ in our culture.

www.christianschoolfoundation.ca



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