



Edmonton Society for Christian Education Handbook

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Edmonton Christian Schools

Preschool to Grade 12

Who We Are

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1. Overview

This document provides an overview of the Edmonton Public Schools alternative program at Edmonton Christian Schools (ECS). It outlines **who we are** by defining the role of the school, parents, students, and the Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE).

Edmonton Christian Schools is a non-denominational Christian alternative program for Preschool to Grade 12 students in the Edmonton Public School Division, operated in accordance to Section 21 of the Alberta School Act, and in partnership with the Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE). All programming is based on the curriculum determined by Alberta Education and is taught from a Christian perspective. The program is based on a general Christian faith rather than emphasizing or promoting a particular denomination or division of the Christian faith (GAA.BP Delivery of Student Programs of Study, <http://epsb.ca/ourdistrict/policy/g/gaa-bp/>). Students are given every opportunity, in all classes, to actively play their role in God's Story while also supported in achieving their academic goals.

2. School Vision

Accepting Christ's Invitation to Live for Renewal

3. School Mission

Responding to God's Grace, Edmonton Christian Schools challenges students through Christ centered education to actively play their role in God's story.

4. Core Values

- 1. We are a learning community where students are encouraged to be joyful Christ followers.**
Every student has inherent value and a unique calling within God's world. Our deep hope is that students live out their purpose to the Glory of God and in doing so, will discover and play their role in God's story, both at our school and in the world.
- 2. We are a place where a deep relationship with Jesus Christ can be fostered.**
At ECS, a relationship with Jesus Christ is modeled and encouraged in everything we do. We know that faith that does not walk the talk is no faith at all. Everywhere and in every way we can--from academics, to drama, to sports and service projects--we seek to meet God in a personal, relational way.
- 3. We care deeply for our students.**
Relationship is at the heart of what we do. We pursue an atmosphere that is defined by God's love, peace, and grace. Where there is discord, restorative practice will be used to bring healing.
- 4. We value parents as full partners in the education of their children**
At ECS, we don't educate students on our own. We welcome the involvement of parents as together we nurture young people to play their role in God's story as people transformed by renewal.

5. We value participation in the worldwide story through both Public and Christian education.

We are part of a Christian education movement that changes the lives of students in a way that renews communities in extraordinary ways. We know that membership in this type of community is where our Vision and Mission can grow and flourish.

5. History of Edmonton Christian Schools

Edmonton Christian Schools opened to 25 students in 1949. A dedicated group of Christians wanted their children to attend a school in which the name of Jesus was honoured above all else. The metaphor for the school was that of a three-legged stool: home, church, and school partnering to raise their children in the Lord.

God blessed these efforts, and the school grew swiftly to 1000 students, mostly families from the Christian Reformed Church. By 1967 ECS had three K-9 campuses and a high school.

Challenges arose. Due to high tuition fees, student enrolment plateaued and then slowly declined. In 1994 the East campus closed. The continued survival of the schools, and the ESCE itself was questioned.

In 1999 the Edmonton Society for Christian Education partnered with Edmonton Public Schools to become a Christian alternative program within the public school division. God blessed that decision; enrollment climbed and ECS expanded its reach within the community. The percentage of families from evangelical and mainline churches increased significantly, and students were enriched within a vibrant ecumenical community.

Between 2003 and 2006 ECS renovated its high school campus and built a new school in the Northeast quadrant of the city. In 2020, ECS rebuilt the West school campus. Currently, there are 1500 students from Preschool to Grade 12 attending ECS.

6. Statement of Faith

We believe that Edmonton Christian Schools must provide an education that is shaped by a faith rooted in Scripture. Scripture, the divinely inspired and authoritative word of God, provides insight for every dimension of life. Christian education, therefore, tells us how to understand ourselves in relationship to God, to others, and to the natural world.

We believe that God, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) created and continues to maintain the entire universe. Early on, our first parents rebelled against God. Since then all human lives have been twisted, impaired, and marked by the suffering that stems from this broken relationship. The heart of the Bible's message, and the reason we understand the gospel to be such good news, is the revelation that God has not abandoned the creation but has determined to set things right!

We believe the redemptive intent of God finds its centre in the life and work of Jesus Christ. In the person of Jesus, God executes a just punishment against the sin of humankind, and graciously offers forgiveness to all. Because he suffered and died, Jesus Christ reconciles sinful people to their Creator, and fulfils God's promise to restore the whole creation. By his resurrection and ascension to his heavenly throne, Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Lord of the universe.

We believe this world and all who live in it belong to God. Although our world remains troubled and flawed, the work and victory of Jesus give us hope. We eagerly wait for the day when Jesus Christ returns and is publicly

acknowledged as Lord of all. On that day, the redemptive purposes of God will be complete. God will erase every vestige of sin and suffering. Until that day arrives, the Holy Spirit of God works faith in us and inspires us to live in ways which acknowledge the truth of the good news in Jesus.

We believe that our place in God's world is one of special privilege and responsibility. Made in God's image, we human beings are called to responsible stewardship: loving others and ourselves and developing and preserving the resources of creation. Since the entire universe is the Kingdom of our Lord, every dimension of life must be understood in relationship to Him.

We believe that formal education finds its place within this broad framework of understanding ourselves in relationship to God, to others and to the universe. We believe that children must be afforded the opportunity of learning about themselves, others, and the universe, all in relation to the God who created, who maintains, and who one day will fulfill the redemptive work begun in Jesus Christ. In order to fulfill this goal, and to fulfill our responsibility as a Christian community, our children must have schools in which this faith perspective is integrated fully into the curriculum and is modeled by teachers who personally share its convictions.

We believe that education involves the acquisition and mastery of knowledge, and the development of a critical, discerning mind, both of which need to be rooted in the framework of the Scripture's story. This will enable students to take their places in society as responsible citizens, with both academic and spiritual integrity.

7. Devotions, Chapels, Prayer, Religious Studies Classes

Devotions are a daily classroom expectation at Edmonton Christian Schools. Devotions include prayer that may be teacher or student-led during morning devotions, saying grace at lunch, singing Christian songs and choruses, as well as spontaneous prayer at any time by students or teachers for a person or some issue or event. Bible reading is also integral to devotions at ECS.

Chapels are also a regular part of what we do at ECS. Chapels are a time of corporate worship intended to foster unity among all students and teachers, and to encourage students in the faith. Chapels are spiritually sustaining and nurturing, and of a non-denominational nature.

8. Why This is so Important

We have the privilege of doing something special for our students and for Christian education in the Edmonton region. It is exciting to teach and encourage students to play their role in God's story and to be Kingdom builders. The context in which this is done is non-denominational and is based on Christian principles set out in Scripture.

The intentional work that our teachers and students do in grappling with real world problems engages students in positive, faith-affirming ways. Research, done by the CARDUS think tank, shows that when students are engaged in this kind of learning, they are significantly better equipped to have an impact for Christ in the future. They are more likely to be active in church, to volunteer in the community, to relate well with family and to be a force for good in our society as active citizens.

We want our families to treat ECS as a meaningful educational choice in the city of Edmonton. We know that if we are clear and positive about our program, we will grow in numbers and impact. Most importantly, our families will experience a life of joy in knowing what each of their children are good for in God's world.

9. Teaching Practice Within a Christian Perspective

See the Story, Live the Story - Teaching for Transformation

The hand of a fourth-grade student shot up in response to the teacher's question about how the teaching for transformation (TFT) program had affected them.

"No bells," he declared, "no bells!"

"No bells," the student repeated.

The teacher was confused, so she asked the student to share what he meant. He explained that there used to be a need for bells because there were classes for math, social studies, science, and other subjects, but now all their subjects were about learning God's story and their place in it. "We don't need bells anymore because it's all about God's story!" he concluded.

Abraham Kuyper, a 19th century Dutch theologian and politician, is famous for declaring that "there is not a square inch of the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'mine!'" This grade 4 student's response shows that he and his classmates are developing a way of seeing and living in the world that is consistent with this all-encompassing view of Christ's lordship over all of creation.

Christ's redemptive act touches all things, redirecting them to their God-designated purposes. Someday, all things will be fully restored, but the work of renewal begins now, and we are privileged to be coworkers with God in this process. That's where teaching for transformation (TFT) comes in.

The TFT program, as developed by the Prairie Centre for Christian education (PCCE), provides a framework for the development of authentic and integral Christian learning experiences that are grounded in a transformational worldview with a focus on seeing and living out God's story. The TFT program's design, practices, and tools are being used by over 50 schools worldwide to develop powerful Christian school learning experiences. Thus, at Edmonton Christian Schools, we are part of a world-wide Christian curriculum development endeavour.

The Three Core Practices of TFT

The primary goal of education at Edmonton Christian Schools is to challenge students through Christ centered education to find their place in God's story.

Core Practice Number 1- Storyline

TFT makes clear that every unit and every learning experience tells a story. The TFT program tries, using the story discovered in each unit of study, to create a powerful and compelling image of God's story. This is the story of God's good **creation**, humanity's **fall** into sin, God's **redemption** in Jesus Christ, and God's continued work through us to **restore** all things to their original good intent. The TFT program invites students to imagine their place in God's story now. The TFT program does this by connecting the story of each unit with opportunities to tangibly practice living in the grand narrative. Each student and teacher will begin to create a personal "storyline" and articulate how they see themselves living in God's epic drama.

Core Practice Number 2 - Biblical Throughlines

10 THROUGHLINES

GOD WORSHIPER Students will be encouraged to understand that worshiping God is about celebrating who God is, what God has done and is doing, and what God has created. It is literally about standing in awe and wonder of God and God's promises. Students should see this worship as a way of life.

IDOLATRY DISCERNING An idol is anything that replaces our primary allegiance to Jesus and his Way of living in the world. Students need to learn to "read" a worldview by asking questions about what is being portrayed regarding culture, values, and belief systems. Through the curriculum, students will be challenged to identify, understand and lay bare the idols of our time (and times past). But this is not the end. Students need to test these ideas against the transformational worldview and to be modern day "prophets" who point to the Way.

EARTH KEEPERS Students will be challenged to respond to God's call to be stewards of all creation. Caretaking can so easily succumb to exploiting. We need to reclaim and relearn how to respectfully treat the world/universe and all things contained in it. This is a matter of respecting God.

BEAUTY CREATOR Students will be encouraged to create beauty that praises God and enriches our world. Creation shouts that our God is a God who loves diversity, complexity, and creativity. As image bearers of a creative God, students will glorify and praise God by creating that which is beautiful and pleasing. This offering of creativity isn't optional – it's a joyful duty that students offer as a sacrifice of praise.

JUSTICE SEEKER Students will be encouraged to act as agents of restoration. The world is not as God intended it to be. God is working now to root out injustices and we need to be co-workers with God to see these injustices. We need to enable students to join God and act as agents of restoration by both identifying where God is at work and responding.

CREATION ENJOYER Students will be encouraged to celebrate God's beautiful creation and give testimony to the presence of God in creation. Creation enjoying is looking at, talking about, and studying creation. Ordinary things become extraordinary when seen in a new way.

SERVANT WORKER Students will be encouraged to join God and work actively to heal brokenness and bring joy to individuals and to culture. Being an image bearer means having the ability and responsibility to discover, respond to, develop, use, and improve the world in which God has placed us. We need to cultivate the desire and ability to offer hope, healing, and restoration to this world and its people.

COMMUNITY BUILDER Students will be encouraged to be active pursuers and builders of community in their classrooms, in their neighbourhoods, and in the global village. Students need to learn to pursue shalom – to be active and eager examples of peaceful shalom filled communities. Our classrooms should be communities of grace where students learn to walk and work together in peace. At ECS we use Restorative Practices to maintain community.

IMAGE REFLECTOR Students bear the image of God in their daily lives. Being an image bearer isn't something we DO. Image bearing is what we ARE. We reflect God's image! And we learn to see God's image in others. The more Christ – like our actions are, the more clearly Christ's light shines in a dark world.

ORDER DISCOVERER Students see God's fingerprints all over creation. When we read the creation account, we read the story of God creating order out of chaos. There is purpose in God's creation, and we can discover this amazing order within creation and to make use of it to further unfold and develop creation's potential.

Core Practice Number 3 - Real Work, Real Problems, Real Audience

"It is nothing but a pious wish and a grossly unwarranted hope that students trained to be passive and non-creative in school will suddenly, upon graduation, actively contribute to the formation of Christian culture."
(Nicholas Wolterstorff)

Classrooms at ECS should provide students with authentic opportunities to practice living the kingdom story. Such practice becomes a habit shaping who we are. Christian philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff, strongly

urges that students must be given the opportunity to do God's work now – to be active and creative in God's story. Meaningful work creates a sense of purpose in their lives and draws students more powerfully to God's story. As the practice suggests, real world experiences form the students' hearts and actions as well as their minds, equipping them to become people who live and breathe God's story. Research and experience suggests that authentic teaching and learning are required to foster engagement that touches both students' minds and hearts.

10. Conduct, Professional Development, and Hiring Practices

Principals, teachers, educational assistants, and non-teaching administrative staff live and support the philosophical and theological underpinnings of ESCE's shared beliefs as outlined in the Vision and Mission, Core Values and Statement of Faith. All staff are presented with an invitation to sign the Statement of Faith as an indicator of their support of the ESCE Vision and Mission.

Staff are committed to endeavour to live a Christian lifestyle, to exemplify a Christ-like character, to model the pursuit of the restorative characteristics as listed in the ECS throughlines, to heed the call to be a disciple of Christ, and to continue to develop their God-given gifts and abilities. As a part of a Division modified schedule, teachers have an opportunity to attend at least one Christian education conference, supported by Society funds, and have an opportunity to participate in one or more on-site Christian professional development days per year.

When hiring a school **principal**, the following process is followed as closely as possible:

- Principal vacancies at ESCE will be communicated throughout the principal assignment process by the Superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools.
- To support the success of students, the Division must ensure the most suitable principal is placed at each school. There are a variety of considerations in determining principal assignments including the unique needs of a school. The needs of the Division are the primary determining factor for principal placements.
- The Vision and Mission of the Society are an important factor when determining candidate suitability for an ESCE location.
- When a principal assignment is necessary at an ESCE location, the ESCE Board will be invited to have a conversation with the potential candidate(s). The input of the ESCE Board will be requested and considered.
- The final selection decision is made by the Superintendent and is consistent with Edmonton Public Schools principal staffing processes.

11. Transportation

Kindergarten and elementary students who live within the Edmonton limits and within the area where Edmonton Public Schools provide services to Edmonton Christian Schools, may be provided with Edmonton Public Schools yellow bus transportation. Furthermore, conditional rider service may be available to junior high students. For families choosing to use yellow bus transportation, bus passes must be purchased at the beginning of the year (annual passes) or at the beginning of each month (monthly passes) from Edmonton Public Schools. Parents must make sure that applications for bus service are submitted annually to their children's school, as the service is not automatically renewed each year. It is the responsibility of the parent to insure that all bus fees are paid and up-to-date.

ESCE may provide school bus services for students living outside of Edmonton. Families are encouraged to apply for bussing to ESCE.

12. The Role of the ESCE Society

Edmonton Public Schools recognizes and supports the commitment of the ESCE to provide a program of studies to students in an educational setting which operates in accordance with the Vision and Mission of ESCE. Annual memberships are offered to families and individuals, which allows them the privilege of electing their ESCE representatives, as well as to vote on important issues concerning the Christian program.

ESCE exercises its role in the following ways:

1. support Division staff as they implement and maintain the Division Strategic Plan (Vision, Mission, Values and Division Priorities)
2. establish and monitor The ESCE Vision and Mission Statement
3. verify that the integrity and intent of the Edmonton Christian Schools program is consistent with The Vision and Mission Statement
4. work with the Division principals in the Edmonton Christian Schools and program staff to implement strategies to maintain The Vision and Mission Statement and The Core Values Statement
5. support parents seeking enrolment for their child(ren) in a Christian faith school
6. may provide input and participate in the selection of principals for the Edmonton Christian Schools, with the mutual intent of appointing principals who support The Vision and Mission Statement and The Core Values Statement in both principle and practice
7. collect fees from its members in support of programming in the Edmonton Christian Schools and to fund the office of the Society and its activities

13. Role of the School

It is the role of each ESCE school to:

- provide the Alberta curriculum in congruence with the Christian education to students in an educational setting which operates in accordance with The Vision and Mission Statement
- encourage and support all ECS staff to continuously live and support The Edmonton Society for Christian Education's Vision and Mission and The Core Values statement
- support Division staff as they implement and maintain The Division's Vision and Mission and The Core Values statement
- support parents seeking enrolment for their child(ren) in a Christian faith school
- support staff in their commitment to ongoing Christian professional growth

14. Role of Parents/Guardians

It is the role of parents/guardians to:

- be committed to the Vision, Mission, Core Values and program of the school
- support the school through prayer, encouragement, involvement, and attendance at school and Society functions
- model a Christ-like attitude in communication and interaction with school personnel and other parents
- encourage their children to participate fully and respectfully in the school's integral Christian program, which includes devotions, bible classes, religious studies, and service
- support and reinforce the school's expectations
- provide a home environment that supports the Christian school program

15. Role of Students

It is the role of students to:

- be committed to the Vision, Mission, Core Values and program of the school.
- participate respectfully and fully in the school's integral Christian program, which includes devotions, bible classes, religious studies, and service
- respect fellow students, school personnel, school property, and constantly challenge themselves to make choices that reflect a Christ-like behaviour
- pray for other students at the school
- with the gifts God has given, take responsibility for their own learning, i.e. complete assignments, be on time, etc., with the understanding that the school is a community of grace ready to support and encourage them
- follow the school's rules and understand that discipline, encouragement, and correction are used to restore rather than punish

16. Admissions/Enrolment Policy

Information about both admissions and registration processes for students new to our Christian Program and forms are available at the schools or from the ESCE office.

Parents are also encouraged to attend a new parent information session.