

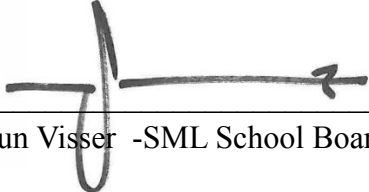
SML Christian Academy Education Plan 2021-22

ASSURANCE STATEMENT

Alberta Education understands assurance to mean “demonstrating to Albertans that the education system is meeting the needs of students and students are successful. Assurance arises from the combination of funding, policies, processes, actions, and evidence that help build public confidence in the education system. Assurance is achieved through relationship-building and engagement between all the education partners and by creating and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and collective responsibility.”¹

This document has been created with input from various stakeholders including parents, staff, and students of SML Christian Academy, as well as the congregational members of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Stony Plain.

As we recover from the pandemic we look forward to the learning that will take place at SML in the year ahead. May God continue to watch over and bless us during the school year.



Shaun Visser -SML School Board Chair

¹ Alberta Education Funding Manual 2020-21

THE MISSION

The mission of SML Christian Academy is to teach and model the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS

SML Christian Academy is an independent Christian school that is an integral part of, and operated by, St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church of Stony Plain. The School Board believes that:

1. The overarching goal of Christian Education is to help children know and trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.
2. Christian Education is primarily the responsibility of faithful parents.
3. Our main task is to assist parents in forming their children's spiritual life and values by offering a high standard of educational opportunities for all students through the use of available resources.
4. Our school is open to all children and families who desire the benefits of Lutheran education, regardless of race, religion, or social and economic standing. Each person possesses inherent worth and dignity and is deserving of respect.
5. It is essential for SML to promote a school environment of respect for God's Word, those in authority, for classmates and other people, for their bodies and God-given talents, for the learning process and the classroom environment and for our school, personal property, and the property of others.
6. Our school aims to provide a successful school, to provide a safe, caring, and orderly environment for learning.

VISION

The vision of SML is to provide an education that will develop the whole child: Spiritually, Physically, Intellectually, and Psychologically. Our purpose will be:

- * To provide a Christ-centered education.
- * To equip children and families for eternity.
- * To provide a safe, caring, loving, and encouraging atmosphere.
- * To engage students in the learning process.
- * To equip students with skills for life.
- * To provide a Christian/Biblical point of view in all curriculum.
- * To equip students to boldly confess the faith.
- * To equip students to be respectful citizens in their communities.
- * To provide all students confidence based on their saving relationship with the Lord and their God-given abilities.
- * To encourage supportive parents to assist in the mission of the school.
- * To provide training for children in the usage of technology in an ever-changing environment.
- * For teachers to stimulate learning, excite students to learn, motivate students to grow spiritually and academically, and engage students in non-threatening interaction with teachers and fellow students.

MANDATE

The mandate of SML is to provide educational programs that respond to the learning needs of its students based on a Christian foundation while maintaining the goals and objectives of the Alberta Program of Studies.

CONTEXT

SML is owned and operated by St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Stony Plain, Alberta. This congregation has existed in Stony Plain for over 125 years and has always had a strong emphasis on education. SML is one of the oldest schools in the province still in operation, and in 1905 when the province of Alberta came into existence, St. Matthew Lutheran School was the first private school to be registered with the province.

While the school was initially intended to serve and educate the young people of the congregation, in recent decades it has taken on a broader approach and is open to all students, no matter their religious background. Currently, about 75% of SML students come from outside the St. Matthew Lutheran congregation. This high number is due, in large part, to an elimination of student tuition starting the 2014/15 school year which made private education accessible to all.

SML has a strong connection to its stakeholders in the congregation as well as its parents. As outlined below, great effort is made to stay connected to these important groups and to allow the flow of communication to go to and from the school.

There is no question that the pandemic has affected the daily operations of the school. Self-isolation by individual students and teachers, as well as by entire classrooms, has made it more difficult for teachers to connect with their students. Government mandates to switch all K-12 classes in the province to remote learning in January and May have further contributed to this problem.

This Education Plan, in some part, attempts to address some of the concerns we have as we take inventory and recover from the pandemic.

Priorities

DIGITAL LITERACY/FLUENCY

(Creating vs. Consuming)

This priority is a carry-over from previous years as we have been working on this objective for the last two years. As we introduced a one-to-one Chromebook program in the grade 3-9 classes, we realized that we needed to take some time at the beginning of the year to help students use these powerful tools in helpful and proper ways. For the first eight weeks, we covered topics like Digital Communication, Digital Etiquette, Digital Law, Digital Health & Wellness, Digital Security, etc.

A website was also created to inform the parents of the learning objectives taught in the school and to encourage them with resources to use at home so that school and home could work together to help the students understand these important principles of digital literacy. [The website can be viewed here.](#)

The second year of this program (2020-21) focused on making the shift from Digital Literacy to Digital Fluency. The goal here is to guide the students toward becoming more familiar with the digital tools and to use them on a deeper, more productive level.

The desired end result of this, which will become a greater focus in the 2021-22 school year, is to enable the students to more often take on the role of *digital creators* as opposed to *digital consumers*. Using these tools to create uses much deeper thinking skills than when they are passive consumers of digital information. Creating also engages them in using what is often called *The 4 C's of the 21st Century*: Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication. These are the skills that many experts believe are necessary for today's work environment.

At SML we have already witnessed the benefits of this program. We were better equipped to weather the storm of the pandemic due to the digital hardware the students already had, and the knowledge and application of the various software platforms needed to endure the limitations and restrictions forced upon us by Covid-19. We look forward to evaluating and planning as this program continues to move us forward.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS (EFS)

Executive function is an umbrella term in neuroscience to describe the neurological processes involving mental control and self-regulation. Executive functions control and regulate cognitive and social behaviors like controlling impulses, paying attention, remembering information, planning and organizing time and materials, and responding appropriately to social situations and stressful situations.²

In recent years teachers at SML have noticed more students struggling with EFS and the added stress that the pandemic has inflicted upon students will certainly add to these struggles. When students are unable to find a worksheet amid a pile of papers in their desk, when they can't seem to get started on a project even though the teacher has explained the instructions three times, and when they take on various tasks instead of the one that is the most pertinent at the time, then students are struggling with EFS.

While the very topic of EFS can be very broad and difficult to comprehend, this year at SML we will make a conscious effort to improve EFS with every student in the school. In the older grades, this will be done by including the students in the process. Together the teachers and students will learn about EFS and then each student, with the help of the teacher, will assess their needs and choose one skill to work on. Strategies will be discussed to help the student achieve

² <https://www.edutopia.org/article/helping-students-develop-executive-function-skills>

their particular goal. Teachers will set an appropriate period of time to review those goals. At that point adaptations will be made if needed, and if not then a new goal will be discussed and set. In the younger grades teachers may want to look at the needs of the students as a whole, and then choose a strategy with the students to achieve that goal.

It is our plan that, over time, students of SML will be better able to cope with the varying demands that our culture places upon them. We want to see them be able to set goals for themselves and be able to achieve them. Addressing their EFS needs will certainly help us attain this.

RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Studies have shown that student learning, especially in the area of literacy, has been significantly affected by the pandemic. [One study, produced at the University of Alberta](#), showed that those who already had reading problems were up to six months behind where they should have been due to the effects of the pandemic on the school system.

During the last five years, SML has made use of an online reading tool called Learning A-Z. To a greater or lesser degree, this tool has been used by teachers in grades 1-6. The program offers thousands of different books at 29 different reading levels. Often it is used by students to read books either in the classroom or at home on a Chromebook or tablet. After reading each book the student takes an online quiz that assesses their reading comprehension for that book.

While some teachers have also used Learning A-Z to assess student reading levels at the beginning of the year, SML staff will make a more concerted effort to use this platform to its full potential. All students in grades 1-6 will be assessed at the beginning of the year using Learning A-Z as well as other tools like Fountas & Pinnell and the Student Learning Assessments (grade 3) from Alberta Education.

The teachers will then use the assessment and planning tools within the platform to monitor, adapt the levels, and encourage the students in their reading. At three more points in the year, teachers will formally assess the reading level of each student, and make adjustments as needed. Overall class averages of reading levels will be compared to those of that same class from the previous year to assess how the class is progressing as a whole.

Learning A-Z was chosen as the tool of choice for this program because of not only what it offers the teachers and the students, but also because of our familiarity with the program. This year, our goal is to make ourselves more aware of the program's abilities and use it to its full extent.

PREPARING FOR A NEW CURRICULUM

During the last few years, Alberta Education has been working on a new curriculum for grade 1-12 students in Alberta. This process has seen several revisions and delays, and the current

draft version has come under significant criticism from special interest groups as well as the general public. While the grade 1-6 draft is scheduled to start in the fall of 2022, many are questioning if this deadline will stand.

This uncertainty leaves teachers and administrators in a state of limbo regarding resources. Do we continue to spend precious funds to purchase expensive textbooks and equipment that may only be used for one more year? Teachers are also wondering how much time and effort to put into learning the draft curriculum and matching resources, if the current draft may be different from the one that is finally approved.

To help the teachers during this time of uncertainty SML will examine resources that are flexible in nature and will allow teachers to supplement their current program of studies, as well as help them transition to a new curriculum when it is finalized.

One such resource SML will test pilot for the 2021-22 school year is an online platform by Nelson Canada called Edwin. This platform covers the grade 5-12 Alberta curriculum of the four courses: Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science. The Edwin platform will assist teachers for the upcoming year, as well as when the new curriculum is approved.

Summary for the 2021-2024 Education Assurance Framework for SML Christian Academy, Stony Plain

School Priorities	Digital Literacy/Fluency	Pandemic Response -Literacy	Executive Functioning Skills	Preparation for a New Curriculum
Alberta Priorities	<p>Student Growth and Achievement</p> <p>Teaching and Learning</p> <p>Local and Societal Context</p>	<p>Student Growth and Achievement</p> <p>Teaching and Learning</p> <p>Learning Supports</p>	<p>Student Growth and Achievement</p> <p>Teaching and Learning</p>	<p>Learning Supports</p> <p>Governance</p> <p>Local and Societal Context</p>
Outcomes	<p>Students will continue their understanding of their digital environment and will become more fluent in their ability to use digital tools and ultimately become creators of digital products.</p>	<p>Students will increase their literacy level during the year to close any gaps caused by the pandemic.</p>	<p>Students will make notable improvements in the executive functioning skills that they feel are negatively affecting their learning.</p>	<p>Educators will search out and implement primary and supplemental resources that will help with the transition to a new curriculum.</p>

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School Priorities	Digital Literacy/Fluency	Pandemic Response -Literacy	Executive Functioning Skills	Preparation for a New Curriculum
Strategies for 2021 to 2024	<p>Teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -review digital literacy topics covered in previous years. -demonstrate new digital tools and provide opportunities (assignments, projects, etc.) for students to employ these tools. -emphasize and encourage the role of <i>creator</i> over that of <i>consumer</i> as students use digital tools in school. 	<p>Teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use the assessment tools of Learning A-Z to find the literacy level of each student at the beginning of the year. -reassess each student three more times throughout the year. -make use of the other tools in the platform to encourage and assist the students in their literacy development <p>The students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -spend time reading the books on the platform at home and at school, and follow up after each book with the reading assessment tools. 	<p>Administration and teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -find appropriate Executive Function Skills resources for each grade level. -Introduce the concept of EFS to the students. -Guide each student to choose an EFS that they could try to improve -Guide the students to create strategies to improve their EFS. -Periodically evaluate with the student their plan and, when appropriate, choose a new EFS to improve upon. 	<p>Administration and teachers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -seek out resources that will assist teachers with the transition from the current curriculum to the new one. -evaluate resources and make any changes or adjustments as needed.

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School Priorities	Digital Literacy/Fluency	Pandemic Response -Literacy	Executive Functioning Skills	Preparation for a New Curriculum
Local Measures for Reporting	<p>Satisfaction surveys completed by students, parents, and teachers.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence of digital projects created by students for a public audience (ie. presentations, podcasts, video editing/production, online interviews, science fair projects, coding, etc).</p>	<p>Reports generated by the Learning A-Z platform for each student.</p> <p>Reports generated by the Learning A-Z platform that compare the literacy level with that from the class in the same grade from the previous year.</p>	<p>Student self-evaluation surveys</p> <p>Teacher reflections on program success.</p> <p>Satisfaction surveys completed by students, parents, and teachers.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence of student success.</p>	<p>Satisfaction surveys completed by students, parents, and teachers.</p> <p>Staff meetings to discuss success of resources and to plan forward progress or fine tune resources used.</p>
Provincial Measures for Reporting	Pillar of Accountability Surveys	<p>Provincial Achievement Tests</p> <p>Student Learning Assessments</p>	Pillar of Accountability Surveys	Pillar of Accountability Surveys

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The primary stakeholders of SML Christian Academy are the members of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, Stony Plain, and the parents of the students of SML.

The members of St. Matthew are kept informed of events and decisions through several formal and informal communications. At the end of each calendar year, the principal and the school board chair give written summaries of the previous year and these are included in the church's Annual Report. These individuals also provide verbal updates and answer questions during the congregational voter's meetings which take place three times a year. School information is included in the church's monthly newsletter, and the principal gives weekly updates as part of the announcements before each Sunday service.

Likewise, the parents are kept informed of events and decisions through a variety of means. Emails are regularly sent out to all parents. The school also has an active Facebook page with over 500 followers. Video updates are posted on the school's Youtube channel every 1 to 2 weeks. These are some of the ways that general information is distributed to all parents.

Information pertaining to individual parents regarding their children is also sent out through a variety of sources. Three times a year report cards are sent home. Throughout the year parents can access the school's student information system, Sycamore, by computer or mobile app. Sycamore will provide parents with information about homework for their child, assignments due, and marks received for assignments and exams. Sycamore also contains the school calendar for the entire school year. Teachers also use other platforms like SeeSaw (grades K-3) and Google Classroom (grades 4-9) to keep students and parents informed on a daily basis. Twice a year, in October and in February, the school holds Parent/Teacher conferences where parents can meet personally with their child's teacher.

SML also has a very active Parent Advisory Council that meets about three to five times a year. While the principal often gives updates on the school at these meetings, they are also an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns to the administration. These meetings have proven to be very beneficial to the flow of communication between the school and home.

SML has also made use of Google Forms to create parent surveys at various times throughout the year. In the last year we have surveyed parents about their thoughts regarding online Parent/Teacher conferences, as well as the effectiveness of remote learning during the pandemic. The school has received valuable information from these surveys and we have used this data to help us plan for the future.

CONCLUSION

These have been very challenging times for educators and students everywhere, but we know that we have a God who will care for us and carry us through these times. As we implement this Education Plan we look forward to the next few years with hope and optimism, continuing to adapt and make adjustments as we go, knowing that we play an important role in the development of our students.