

September 22, 2022

To: admin@saskschoolboards.ca

Re: Premier's Board of Education Award for Innovation and Excellence in Education

Members of the Review Panel,

Strong, Not Wrong is a strengths-based approach to management, learning, well-being, and engagement in Light of Christ Catholic Schools (LOCCS). LOCCS provides high-quality Catholic education to approximately 2000 students with schools located in North Battleford, Unity, and Spiritwood. All LOCCS schools are located on Treaty 6, the traditional territory of Cree Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Since 2017, *Strong, Not Wrong* is a core belief of Light of Christ Catholic Schools. The overall goal as a Catholic school division is to permeate our faith in everything we do; our goal of becoming a strengths-based organization is no different. We want everyone in the organization to work towards identifying and maximizing their individual talents and strengths within our Catholic faith. When this is achieved, we can then use the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned through the process to focus on how best to improve relationships, engagement, and wellness throughout the division.

The COVID-19 pandemic took a tremendous toll on students, staff, and administrators. This focus helped us to ensure that the individual and collective needs of our students and staff were attended to during stressful times. *Strong, Not Wrong* is the hope we need to thrive in the future. Thank you for considering our nomination package.

Sincerely,



Mr. Glen Gantefoer
Board Chairperson



Mr. Cory Rideout
Director of Education



The LOCCS Board of Education consisting of seven trustees, along with the Director of Education, are the key drivers of this organizational approach. Our Board is known for its strong support for professional development; high teacher, student, and community engagement; and an innovative learning environment where students develop the skills and abilities they need to meet their goals. Doing the same thing and expecting different results is not an option.

Our Board engaged in a strategic Planning renewal process during the 2021/22 school year and made substantial changes to our vision statement to align more closely with our strengths-based approach.

“Our vision is to create faith-filled school communities where our students and staff wake up every morning feeling inspired to go to school. When at school, we want our staff and students to be fully engaged in the learning process, feel safe and supported, develop their unique talents and strengths, and return home fulfilled and at peace at the end of the day.”

To this end, the Board meets tri-annually to review the strategic plan. *Strong, Not Wrong*, being a central piece to our strategic plan and an organizational driver within LOCCS is not only updated and reviewed at this time but also integral to each Board meeting as Board members lead and participate in a faith and strengths-based activity immediately following opening prayer.

As a high-priority initiative within our school division, the Board of Education receives regular running reports on this central driver that are presented at Board meetings. Additionally, a monitoring report is presented specifically to *Strong, Not Wrong* in March each year. These continuous, current reports are an integral component and expectation of the Board of Education and serve as an accountability piece for the Director of Education on this organizational philosophy.

One of the driving factors behind this initiative is the LOCCS Board of Education’s recognition of the importance of not wanting people to try to be someone they are not. We need them to be at their best in order to succeed at work. In 2017, the Board of Education recognized that the most important form of strengths investment lies with the individual. When individuals have their talents identified, understood, and integrated into their lives, the organization has greater potential to thrive. In other words, when we shift the focus from what’s wrong to what’s strong, individuals flourish.

The underlying principles of the strength-based approach include:

- everyone has strengths and abilities
- everyone grows and develops from their strengths and abilities
- when individuals and those around them appreciate and understand each individual's strengths, then the individual is better able to learn and develop.

The process to know, understand, and apply one’s strengths is as follows:

Name: The first step is to identify one’s top talent themes. This is done through participation in the Strengths Assessment. All Board members, staff members, all grade seven students, grade six students in our rural schools, any new students in each academic year, all clergy who work with our schools, and each school community council member complete this survey to determine their individual talent themes. As a result, everyone in LOCCS has or will identify their strengths and can continue to learn to apply them. In high school, student strengths are included in their Edsby profile, included on any award



certificates, and on graduation diplomas. All staff have their strengths included in their Edsby profile and email signature, on their name plates posted outside of their main work area, on portable name tags used at staff and division committee meetings, and included in their professional growth plans. This enables both teachers and students to continue learning more about their strengths throughout their time with us.

Claim: Once each individual receives their top 5 talent themes, the next step is to affirm their talents and strengths by learning more about them. During this step in the process, staff members are provided with both face-to-face and virtual P.D. modules; students participate in a variety of classroom-based activities to learn more about their talent and strength themes; and SCC members have access to virtual P.D. modules. A comprehensive resource bank has been developed for teacher use and is available in our Edsby Learning Management System. Furthermore, at the opening of each staff meeting, faith development event, and committee meeting, including Board and SCC meetings, members plan and participate in a strengths activity to better understand their own and their colleagues' strengths and talents. Additionally, these top 5 talent themes are an integral part of all LOCCS staff's professional growth plans and are a key component to staff learning more about their strengths, how they can use them in their roles, and how they can develop their unique talents and strengths.

Aim: Through training and education individuals develop their strengths. This is most easily accomplished in the context of a trusted relationship. Our Board has learned that this is only successful as a result of a culture of trust where high levels of engagement are evident. Developing our strengths is a focused, intentional process; it requires work and attention. Employees and students are encouraged to apply their talents in as many settings as possible. Focused time spent thinking about the experiences and reflecting on them ensures that individuals recognize that for a strength to truly exist, it must exist in action.

This is the message of the strengths-based approach to student and employee success, engagement, and wellness:

DO NOT TRY TO BE SOMEONE ELSE. STRIVE TO BE THE PERSON YOU REALLY ARE - - - FULLY AND COMPLETELY. THIS IS YOUR BEST AVENUE TO ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE. EXCELLENCE IS AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY AND INTEGRITY.

1. Most instruction for achieving excellence sends the message: "You need to become someone else, act like this person or that person, and then you will achieve." But the strengths-based approach says: "Be who you are to the maximum."

2. Most instruction for achieving excellence says: "Fix this, fix that, overcome this weakness or that weakness and then you will achieve." The strengths-based approach says: "Focus on strengths and manage your weaknesses."

3. Aligning our strengths, values, and beliefs toward important goals produces the power to make excellence a reality. This is why excellence is a reflection of identity and integrity.

Over the last several years LOCCS Board of Education has adopted, resourced, and implemented a strength-based culture that, like our faith, has been infused into every aspect of our school division. The LOCCS Board of Education's goal is to build an organization where our people learn to use and invest in their individual, God-given strengths, rather than focusing on their weaknesses. With this knowledge, the

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Board of Education strongly believes that our staff can better understand their students and help them to become the best version of themselves. A strengths-based school and school division culture has proven to lead to higher student and staff engagement, a greater sense of hope for the future, and has a positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of our youth and our staff. When individuals know their unique strengths, it provides a renewed sense of purpose and increased confidence. Increased self-awareness in knowing your strengths opens additional opportunities for continuous growth, both personally and professionally. For many years, The Board of Education has been on a journey to establish a foundational learning environment to facilitate the graduation of all students. The structural and pedagogical changes due to *Strong, Not Wrong* have resulted in continual increases in graduation rates for our students. The most notable growth has been in the First Nation and Métis (FNM) graduation rate. Our next steps in Strengths-Based Programming will include:

1. Results from studies on the effects of strengths-based programming are positive, but they point to the need for more rigorous efforts in helping students discover their talents and develop and apply strengths.
2. Thought needs to be given to a more comprehensive, academically substantive approach to helping students develop and apply strengths.
3. Students are making the greatest connections between their talents and (a) learning and academics, (b) careers, and (c) their relationships. Perhaps this should be the focus of a course of study involving systematic talent discovery and strengths development.
4. Outside of our School Community Council members, few parents have completed their own Strengths Assessment or followed up with the self-directed P.D. modules. Therefore, we wish to encourage more parents to participate in our strengths engagement evenings and professional development and complete their own assessment. Staff members have also encouraged their family members to complete the assessment and learn more about their strengths as well. This is something that we will continue to encourage.
5. A social media focus each Tuesday (#TalentTuesday featuring students) and Thursday (#ThemeThursday featuring staff members) has generated enthusiasm and curiosity in the community. We will continue to expand and grow our viewers. A radio media campaign features different LOCCS students talking about their strengths and how they are applied at school and in the community. This will continue and has generated a great deal of interest.

The sustainability of this framework rests in the hands of our teachers. Our Board has made a commitment to provide ongoing professional development and classroom instructional resources in Edsby in an effort to assist our teachers. Armed with a more robust arsenal of instructional strategies, our teachers can move forward in their practice and commitment to building strong relationships with their students using materials and methods that are highly relevant. With these components, placed within the framework we have developed at Light of Christ, our students will continue to know, understand, and apply their strengths in order to be successful, and relationships between students and staff, staff to staff, and staff to stakeholders will continue to improve as a result of greater collaboration and understanding. This leads to greater trust, welcoming and supportive cultures, and improved engagement and wellness at all levels.



The LOCCS Board of Education believes so strongly in the benefits of this Strong, Not Wrong initiative that in 2018 when they hosted the Provincial SCSBA Conference and Fall AGM, we provided strength assessments for delegates, followed by two days of faith and strengths-based workshops. The feedback received from delegates regarding this provincial conference was excellent.

Students and staff are purposeful when they can use their strengths to serve others. Learning about our strengths allows us to unlock our personal superpowers. The LOCCS Board of Education believes that when families, schools, and communities work together in positive and collaborative ways, a child's capacity to achieve their learning potential is significantly enhanced—and so are their general health, well-being, positive outlook, and sense of purpose in life. Students, staff, school community council representatives, and others in the community are deeply involved in our strategic planning and communications processes. As part of the planning process, involved stakeholder groups completed feedback surveys and participated in engagement sessions. Through this process, we gained context of how each group felt we were doing as an organization currently and where they felt the organization should focus moving forward. The Board believes that everyone in this stakeholder group be afforded the opportunity to share input and be able to evaluate the recommendations and direction set in the document. To this end, all new Board members, school community council members, students (Grade 8-12), and staff complete a survey and are invited to participate in reviewing the plan.

In order to support the plan and our involved stakeholders, a Strong, Not Wrong Family Discussion Guide has been developed. Additionally, each Tuesday and Thursday we feature either a student or staff member talking about their strengths and how they are applied in both the school and the community. These social media posts generated such enthusiasm in the community that they now form the contents of our promotional media on local radio. The goal is to get students and parents to discuss their strengths, how they use them, and how they can improve our entire community.

Community partnerships, particularly with our parent/guardian community and the local media have been key to our success. Based on feedback from the Board's strategic planning process and school administrators, an additional virtual P.D. module was created in 2021-22 for SCC members and interested parents. Administrators are now able to use this module during their orientation sessions with SCC members and during parent-engagement sessions. Additionally, SCC members or school administrators can request further face-to-face group P.D. during the school year. Other modules available for parents include topics such as Leadership, Mental Health, Self-Care, and faith.

In 2022-23, we will be making a series of videos available to our classroom teachers featuring First Nations Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other community members discussing their strengths and talents and what they believe all students should know as they grow and leave our schools.

The more we learn about our students, the more we understand them. Then, we can create experiences that they want and resources to support them in order to be engaged in both the school and the community.

We use a variety of assessment tools including the OurSchool survey, our student faith survey, and a one-question survey for staff to monitor our progress on an annual basis. Two assessment tools provided by Gallup specifically monitor student and staff engagement related to strengths. They are the Q12 for staff and the Gallup Student Poll for students. Specifically, we collect the following:

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- Number of StrengthsFinder Assessments Completed by ALL Stakeholders (Students, Staff, Parents)
- Q12 Engagement Scores
- 2022 Student Poll Results
- Gr 9 & 12 Student Faith Survey Results (Final 3 Questions)
- Anecdotal & Observational Feedback from Teacher Self-Assessment & Classroom Walkthroughs
- LOCCS Staff One Question Survey

The Gallup Student Poll measures the engagement, hope, sense of belonging and social-emotional learning of students in 5th through 12th grade across LOCCS.

The poll's results supply teachers, administrators, and community leaders with data that they can use to inform strategies for building school engagement and student success. Baseline data was collected in 2019. The poll was re-administered in 2021 and will be done bi-annually going forward.

The Gallup Student Poll measures student beliefs through 22 core items in the 4 key themes. COVID has been hard on our students. Our data reflects this so we continue to know that we must persevere with our *Strong, Not Wrong* approach, inclusive of these four focus areas.

Engagement: Students' involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Engaged students are excited about what is happening at their school and what they are learning. Engaged students contribute to the learning environment, and they are psychologically committed to their school.

Hope: The ideas and energy students have for the future. Hope has also been linked to student success in school. Hopeful students are positive about the future, are goal-oriented, and can overcome obstacles in the learning process, enabling them to navigate a pathway to achieve their goals.

Belonging: Feeling accepted and included as part of the school. Students with a sense of belonging know there is an adult on their side and feel like valued members of their learning community. This is new to the Student Poll. We are at 3.80/5 in 2022.

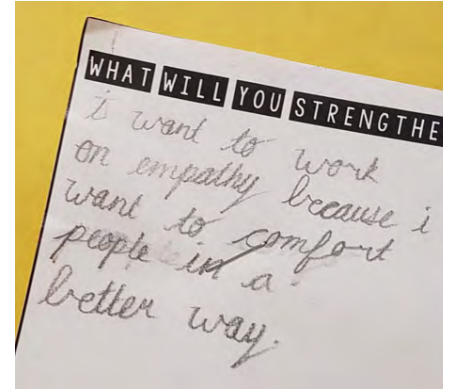
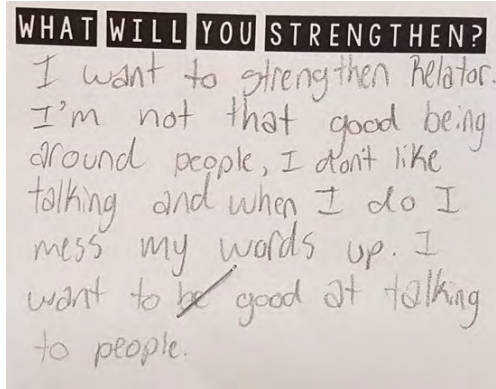
Social and Emotional Learning: How people learn to understand and manage emotions and establish positive relationships with others. This is also new to the student poll as well. Our baseline is 3.47/5.

Here is how some of our students use their strengths:

- "I use my strength every day to help aid me in everyday tasks, in school, with family and friendships. They also generally come in handy when I'm going through something hard in life."
- "I use my strengths to build myself. I am always trying to improve and become better. With my strengths I use them on a day-to-day basis without even knowing for example, competition; competing with myself to do better."
- "To motivate me to try new things"
- "I use my strengths to take action in what I believe in and what I want for my life by planning my future and executing my goals, I help people find their own strengths and work as a team leader"

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or equal partner, I can solve problems in my relationships with people at work, school, and home effectively and compromise.”



All employees participate in the Q12 Gallup Survey. This survey consists of 12 key themes about the workplace, workplace expectations, and workplace relationships. Through it, we are able to better gauge both trust and culture in our schools and the division office. Our baseline data was collected in 2018. In the 2021/22 school year, LOCCS had a 99% response rate. These numbers are impressive by all standards and indicate that employees find value in participating because of the actions that result throughout LOCCS. The questions are based on four areas:

- Q1 & Q2 - Basic Needs
- Q3 - Q6 - Individual Contribution
- Q7 - Q10 - Teamwork
- Q11 & Q12 - Growth

The three foundational levels, Basic Needs, Individual Contribution and Teamwork, focus on creating an environment of trust and support, which are pillars in successful organizations. The LOCCS Board of Education places high value on this employee survey as they understand how vital it is to ensure basic needs are met in order for employees to be motivated, develop as team members, and improve performance.

Here is a summary of our Q12 engagement data to date:

Year	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Spring 2022
Mean /5	3.93	4.07	4.10

LOCCS has consistently improved in all areas. In fact, Gallup has indicated to us that year over year, these results are extraordinary. In spite of COVID, the hard work is paying off.

Conclusion:

Throughout our journey, the LOCCS Board of Education has learned that there is no silver bullet, no one-shot deal, or no magic pill school systems can utilize to improve student and staff engagement, mental well-being, and achievement. It takes a focused, consistent, and sustained system-wide approach based on solid research and best practice in order to affect real changes in these areas.

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We also learned considerable time must be spent in the early stages; researching, setting direction, and defining the culture and expectations of the school division through strategic planning. Professional development plans and allocation of resources are critical. There must be a system-wide acceptance of the plan and a commitment to its purpose, otherwise, success will not be achieved.

Building relationships with staff and an organizational culture where continuous learning occurs, and change is accepted and not feared is key to success in the process. Data must be collected and utilized to direct our effort and decisions, but it should also be celebrated, as it validates the good work done by the people working for our students. This was not an easy journey, but it was certainly necessary for the success we have experienced thus far.

The framework outlined in the preceding pages allowed us to bring research into practice. The real value in this approach was the work done with our teachers. Teachers affect the most influence on our students and this student-teacher relationship has a major role to play in student engagement. Engaged students stay in school and students who stay in school, graduate.

New understandings since adopting a Strengths-Based Achievement to Excellence approach in LOCCS include:

- Our greatest area for growth is found in our greatest talents, not in our weaknesses.
- Our greatest talents hold the key to excellence.
- When people have an opportunity to use their greatest talents, they are more motivated, they come alive, and they often report feeling more full and fulfilled as persons.

The LOCCS Board of Education is proud of our SCC leaders, our employees, and most of all, our students. They are strong, not wrong!

*** A One-Page Summary of the LOCCS Student and Staff Engagement Plan is Attached ***

STUDENT AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT: CLIFTON STRENGTHS AND Q12



LOCCS LEADERSHIP

- Growth, Development & Support through 4 days of PD
- Coaching Practice - Name, Claim, Aim & Strengths Based Conversations
- Improved Q12 scores - Increase in Grand Mean by 0.05 by May 2024
- School Plans Include Strengths & Staff Engagement Goals Based on Data
- Gallup Leadership Training & Summit

LOCCS STAFF

- Bi-annual Q12 Survey
- Regular Staff Led Strengths & Faith Activities (staff meetings, PD, division committee meetings)
- SSOL (Student Services Online Learning) & Edsby PD modules
- Face-to-Face & Blended Strengths Workshops - New Staff
- Strengths Conversations 3X/Year with Immediate Supervisor
- Faith Mentorship Program & SSOL Faith Modules Include Strengths Based Reflection & Dialogue
- Strengths Permeation to be Supported through Staff Self-Assessment & Admin Walkthroughs
- Top 5 Strengths Posted In Various Locations & Platforms



STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY (SCC & PARENTS)

- SCC StrengthsFinder Assessment (Annually)
- JP11 Parents StrengthsFinder Assessment (Upon Request)
- SCC PD Following Election on Naming, Claiming & Aiming Strengths (SSOL)
- JP11 Parent PD on Naming, Claiming & Aiming Strengths (Upon Request)
- SSOL Strengths Introduction Self-Guided Tutorial
- Weekly #TalentTuesday Featuring Students in 2022-23 (diversity, wellness, faith, strengths)
- Weekly #WellnessWednesday Featuring Mental Health, Health & Wellness Tips
- Weekly #ThemeThursday Featuring LOCCS Staff (diversity, wellness, faith, strengths)
- SCC Parent Conference

LOCCS STUDENTS (ELEMENTARY)

- Completion of Clifton StrengthsQuest Assessment: Gr 6 (SP & RV)
- Completion of Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment: Gr 7 (EMBM, HF, ND, SM)
- Edsby Strengths Resources Group to Provides Supporting Materials for Classroom Use
- Strengths Permeation to be Supported through Staff Self-Evaluation & Admin Walkthroughs
- Gallup Single Sign On for All LOCCS Users to Support Easier Transition to JP11
- Bi-Annual Gallup Student Poll to Measure: Engagement, Hope, Belonging, Social & Emotional Learning
- Development of School Plans to Reflect Student Poll Data
- Student & Staff Top Strengths in Edsby Profile: Top 3 for Gr 6 (SP & RV) & Top 5 for Gr 7 (EMBM, HF, ND, SM)



JP11 STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

- Ongoing PD & Cultural Teaching: Strengths-Based Teaching, Mentorship with Students & Indigenous Teachings (the Medicine Wheel & Its Contribution to Individual & Team Strengths) & TRC Video Series
- Strengths Conversations 3X/Year to Include Dialogue Re: Strengths Permeation in Curriculum
- Three Strengths Questions Included Gr 9 & 12 Student Faith Survey
- Strengths Blitz: All New Students to Complete StrengthFinder Assessment
- Strengths Permeation to be Supported through Staff Self-Evaluation & Admin Walkthroughs
- Edsby Strengths Resources Group to Provides Supporting Materials for Classroom Use
- Immersion in Following Their Voices (FTV): Huddles, Observations, Goal Setting, Co-Construction Meetings & Final Reflection
- Student & Staff Top 5 Strengths in Edsby Profile
- Elders & Knowledge Keepers Presence in Schools
- Grade 12 Diplomas to Include Top 5 Strengths
- Awards Certificates to Include Top 5 Strengths

METRICS

- Number of StrengthsFinder Assessments Completed by ALL Stakeholders (Students, Staff, Parents)
- May 2024 Q12 Engagement Scores
- 2022 Student Poll Results
- Gr 9 & 12 Student Faith Survey Results (Final 3 Questions)
- Anecdotal & Observational Feedback from Staff Self-Assessment & Classroom Walkthroughs
- LOCCS Staff One Question Survey (baseline June 2021). Follow-Up TBD.

