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Unified diversity?



On October 15, 2016, the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College was invaded by school board members from across Ontario. Some entered the building physically, others digitally, but in all, 35 people took over the college for the morning with the purpose of sharing best practices and learning how LCRSS schools are operating throughout Ontario.

The first session of the morning was led by Cornell Feenstra, an experienced board member from the Attercliffe school community. Br. Feenstra was quick to point out that, while he agreed to speak, he did so knowing that he would be speaking through the lens of experience, not necessarily expertise. That being said, the experience of serving multiple schools (John Calvin Smithville, ACRES and Guido de Brès), in multiple roles (Secretary, Chairman, and on the Education Committee), gave Br. Feenstra a foundation upon which he grounded his comments and his questions.

One of the main themes running throughout the morning presentation was this: **There are significant benefits of being together under an umbrella organization like the League, and yet there is a distinctive beauty of being apart and having our own identity as school societies.**

In terms of the benefits of being together, Br. Feenstra spoke of the many things schools have developed on their own, like handbooks and common policies. It was suggested that school boards could request the League make handbook template that gives a nod to the various innovations found in individual schools- while providing a basis for best practices.

While he was speaking, Br. Feenstra continued to ask questions designed to make those in attendance think. How often do board chairs of the different societies discuss things together? Do treasurers ever interact with each other? Do board secretaries ever compare notes? Is there an opportunity for the League to facilitate the organization

of events such as these? Are there things that we can do together to help train the next generation of school board leaders?

Br. Feenstra also emphasised during the presentation that there are real advantages to having our own identities as societies. There are advantages to having school board members work through the hard questions of why our local schools operate in the way that they do. We have a new generation of parents coming into leadership positions in our schools. Br. Feenstra asked us to consider these questions: **How do we get them to "buy-in" to the idea that our education system is a privilege and that the benefits are life-long?** We have a 3rd generation that has not experienced the struggles the founders went through to ensure that their children received a Bible-based instruction. What are we doing as societies to motivate, enthuse and stimulate the love for covenantal education?

These questions are best answered at the local level. It goes back to a statement that was part of the 'Kampen Report' released in 2000. It was observed in the report that every generation should take the opportunity to rearticulate what covenantal education means to them. The beauty of working alongside other schools and church communities who work on the same topics is that there is expertise available for societies to tap into and people who are able to help guide this articulation.

Br. Feenstra's closing words are encouraging: **Through all the joys and struggles of board and committee work we may have our multiplicity in the way we do things yet the uniformity of purpose keeps us together and working for the same goal. Our basis is God's word and the promises he has given us through the work of His son Jesus Christ. In our work as school societies within the framework of the League let us continue in His service. As a well-known preacher once said, "It is impossible to serve God without serving one another."**

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Government Update



League of Canadian Reformed School Societies Inc. Committees:

Assistance for the Special Child (ASC)

Compensation Committee

Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Educators (CARE)

Government Contact Committee (GCC)

Pension Committee

Professional Development Committee (PDC)

Though the main focus of League schools is education, every board and principal knows that there are many government ministries affecting the operation of our schools. In the past year our schools have had to respond to policy changes from the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, in addition to changes implemented by the Private Schools Branch of the Ministry of Education. The following is a brief update on what has been happening in each.

The **Ministry of Labour** requires all businesses to update workplace policies through the implementation of Bill 132. This bill requires businesses to include gender discrimination as a basis for a sexual harassment claim schools there must be written policy that stipulates how all claims will be investigated by the employer. The League was able to help schools implement this by providing a policy sample that schools could use and remain both compliant and in harmony with God's word.

The **Ministry of Health** has also renewed the pressure it is putting on schools to ensure that children are being vaccinated. Most schools have received updated guidelines outlining when students without up-to-date vaccination records (or official exemptions) will be suspended by.

The **Ministry of Environment and Climate Change** issued a request for input into changes

in how schools conduct tests for lead contaminants in their tap water. This would translate to a significant increase in cost for many schools because all sources of drinking water would be tested instead of just the end of the line. Both the League and many individual schools have responded with feedback.

Finally, the **Private Schools branch** of the Ministry of Education, planned a change in procedure that would require secondary private schools to submit their course outlines prior to their inspections. The request from the branch was to have these ready by the end of June, two months earlier than had been the deadline in the past. This change put a lot of pressure on Secondary school teachers who would be expected to have next year's plans ready for inspection just days after having finished their current school year. After conversations with individual schools, as well as organizations such as the LCRSS, the deadline was amended to the end of July. This date, while still difficult to meet, gives staff more time to submit, while still allowing the inspectors the additional time needed to review the material in a thorough way.

No one wants to be school treasurer?

As a question, the above title is rhetorical; rephrased as a statement though, it might be true.

This may be because keeping financial records is such a specialized skill. It also bears a lot of responsibility in terms of tracking account balances, setting budgets and determining (with the help of others) the rate of tuition if the school is to operate in the black. It is also one of the board positions which requires consistent, long term focus if it is going to be done well.

The League invited Jeremy Jagt, a past treasurer, to lead a workshop on treasurer best practices at the recent League Learning Day. The following points were highlighted:

- Do not work alone- develop a team in your school that includes a book keeper;
- Plan who your next treasurer will be before your current treasurer retires;



- Encourage the use of Pre-authorized payments;
- Look for premade tools like the Time Allocation Spread Sheet from the OACS- it maximizes the charitable donation portion of tuition and provides support for CRA questions;
- Speak to other school treasurers to both share and learn together;
- Consider becoming members of the Canadian Council of Charities.

Much more was shared during the workshop as Br. Jagt encouraged those in attendance: **Under God's care, and working together, they will have what they need for their important, and necessary work.**

League of Canadian Reformed Schools Inc. Executive:

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Vice-Chair

Leanne Van Bostelen
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