IMAGINING POSSIBILITIES

Strategic Planning Survey Feedback Summary

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In October 2020, Calgary Academy, Headwater Learning Foundation, and Headwater Learning Solutions launched the first community consultation to begin development of three distinct 2021-2025 Strategic Plans. From October 26, 2020 to November 16, 547 participants completed the "Imagining Possibilities" strategic planning survey. Students, staff, alumni, parents, board members, and community members anonymously shared their thoughts on seven questions centered around what our learning community could look like by 2025.

We asked:

1. What should the future of education look like?
2. What does innovation in education mean to you?
3. What opportunities for educational improvement can we address over the next four years?
4. How would you describe CA today?
5. How would you describe a CA graduate?
6. What kind of school do we want to be?
7. How does CA make you feel?

A synthesis of the responses collected, which generated over 2,000 unique comments, is captured in the following pages. Responses were categorized and sorted and are presented in the following table by the frequency of each category. Then, a deeper analysis of responses to each question follows paraphrased into areas of strength and areas of growth.

What should the future of education look like?

KEY WORDS

- TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED LEARNING
- FLEXIBLE
- STUDENT-CENTERED
- ENGAGING
- RELEVANT

Technology will play a crucial role in the future of education. From enhancing and enriching learning to creating opportunities for those who have been left behind, technology is the great equalizer and the catalyst.

However, the technology must be designed with the student in mind and not used as a replacement for face-to-face delivery – it is additive. It also must be supported for teachers to be able to apply it well and consistently across grades and classes.

Students and adults both spoke of greater flexibility in the future of learning, including multiple delivery options. Students spoke of a desire for more "freedom-based" learning, assignments, and projects. Staff spoke about offering multiple paths to learning and showing evidence of growth, and greater utilizing non-traditional vehicles to aid learning (ex. art, movement, technology). This commitment to student-centered design will have an impact on traditional school structures, but both groups advocate the change is necessary.

Empowering students and connecting them to the community is a desired state for the future of education. Students should have a purpose at school beyond attending and completing assignments and should be empowered to use their voice to change the world. Greater collaboration between and among students and staff is a desired state, as is proactive problem-solving.

Parents and senior high students repeatedly raised the concepts

of ensuring students develop life skills, soft skills, and ensuring students are prepared for the world of work. These include coding, financial literacy, cooking, creativity, executive functioning skills, among others. Parents also emphasized the continued focus on education being more than strictly academics, and the importance of providing extracurricular opportunities to help expand student empathy, understanding, and awareness.

Other words used to describe the future of education: collaborative, passion-based, creative, equitable, safe, self-directed, student voice, higher achievement.

> *The future of education should focus on education, not on schools. It should be flexible, personalized, and interest-driven, not prescribed or overly structured. Education should reach students where they are – academically, and physically.*

> *School has looked the same for a very long time and I feel as though we must innovate and push the limits of what we expect learning to be. Students should love going to school or at least enjoy learning.*
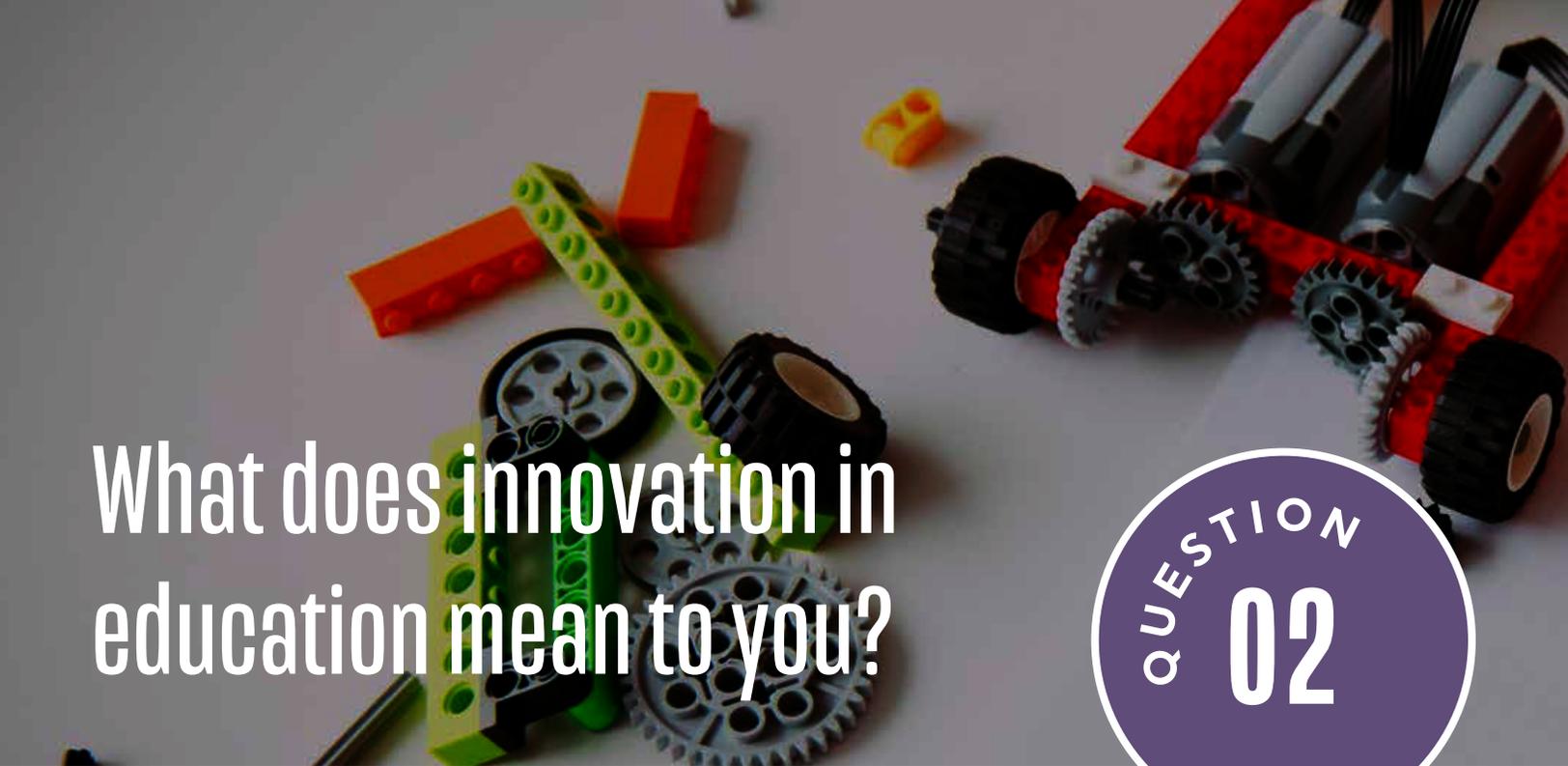
What does innovation in education mean to you?

KEY WORDS

- NEW IDEAS AND APPROACHES
- TAKING CHANCES
- ACCESS TO TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY
- FLEXIBILITY AND PERSONALIZED LEARNING
- STUDENT-CENTERED

Amongst students and adults, innovation was described as a commitment to new ideas and approaches and ensuring education is modernized – "seeing possibilities, not barriers."

The adults spoke of innovation "starting and ending with people" and reframing innovation from a technology-focused lens, to one of creativity. One commenter shared "it is a desire to create learner-centered experiences that enable students to thrive," while others reinforced the purpose of innovation to supporting the growth of learners and the development of human beings.

Students echoed many of these sentiments, speaking in terms of greater creativity in showing their learning, and in keeping the school experience fun. Students want their teachers to design activities and assessments around their learning styles and finding ways to ignite curiosity and interest in the curriculum.

This redesign of education must be balanced with keeping what works, and adhering to research-based best practices, and not sheer novelty.

Utilizing technology to make learning easier was spoken of by all stakeholders. From greater flexibility in teaching tools and methods, to leveraging it to improve access to materials, technology is a learning accelerator. Staff spoke extensively about the taking chances, experimenting, and the safety to take risks being crucial to successfully innovating. Parents and staff

noted modeling innovation as a key outcome of schools, and that students cannot learn to be innovative without the examples from their teachers and peers, and space and time to try new things.

> *Innovation means re-designing the entire education system around the learners we serve, not around the adults who work in it.*

What opportunities for educational improvement can we address over the next four years?

QUESTION 03

KEY WORDS

- MORE PROGRAMMING OPTIONS
- FOCUS AND ALIGNMENT
- REMEDIATION/LD
- STUDENT NEEDS

Overwhelmingly, the desire for more programming options was consistent across students, parents, and staff.

Parents are especially keen on robotics and coding, while students emphasized a desire for a foods/cooking program, shop class, law, psychology, additional languages, sports medicine, and others.

Students spoke at length about more opportunities for 1-on-1 support. "Connect Time" was frequently commented on by senior high students. All students expressed desire for more flexible projects and hands-on learning activities.

> *I think we need to re-focus on our LD students. We need to reclaim our position as the leaders in remediating LD students.*

Staff spoke at length about strengthening remedial expertise in house, noting the number of new staff in recent years has contributed to a loss of expertise.

Suggestions included more professional learning around remediation and universal design for learning, as well as clarity around the role the centres can play in supporting classroom teachers in developing targeted, purposeful skills lessons.

Staff spoke about the need for focus and alignment of priorities in multiple domains. From the variety of programs used across the school, to the number of initiatives tied to and stemming from the strategic plan, there is a strong desire to focus more on fewer ideas to mastery.

How would you describe CA today?

QUESTION 04

KEY WORDS

- CARING
- SUPPORTIVE
- FUN
- AMBITIOUS
- IMPROVING

Students describe CA most often in terms of their teachers, using language like "every teacher is kind," and "teachers try their hardest to help," and "staff are super helpful and kind." They often describe the school as a safe space where people can be who they truly want to be.

They describe it as a supportive community that tries to build students up to their best potential. Students in Grades 5-7 also described CA as "could be harder" and "very underrated." Adults describe CA as a place where the student's learning is the main focus, and again use words like caring, special, and safe.

Adults speak about the school as a place that ensures every student feels connected to the culture and capable of success. Part of the evolution noted in many comments was budding confidence in creative risk taking for both students and staff.

Staff and parents note the changing nature of CA, using words like evolution, growing, and change. They also speak about exciting things, improving practice, and commitment to innovation.

> *A school that provides every student with the chance to truly reach their potential – despite individual learning styles, interests and aspirations.*

> *It seems like we are on the brink of innovation and pushing to the next level of education, but there seems to be something that's holding us back from doing so.*

The flip side of the evolution and change are some criticisms things are moving too quickly. Staff in particular noted the need to focus on doing a few things very well, before moving on to new things.

Several staff note the school may be in danger of losing some of the core LD focus and expertise and raise concerns that some staff are not confident about how to meet the diverse student needs.

Parents seemed to pick up on this ambiguity, noting CA is "a great school but in a phase where it is not clear where it should go and what does it do that sets it apart" and "CA is not yet aligned to what it could be, but it has so much potential."

How would you describe a CA graduate?

QUESTION 05

KEY WORDS

- CONFIDENT
- WELL-ROUNDED
- PREPARED
- COMPASSIONATE
- SUCCESSFUL
- UNPREPARED

Overwhelmingly, students and adults describe a CA graduate as someone who is hard working, prepared for the future, and able to rise to challenges. Confident, able to self-advocate, and empowered with tools, strategies, and awareness of how they learn, CA graduates are well-rounded and REACH-worthy.

Many individuals noted that the struggles CA students may have had in their learning journeys can better prepare them for their futures. CA students can be "better prepared for real life than other many others" and have "overcome adversity."

Adults describe CA graduates as compassionate, REACH-principled citizens with a strong orientation to bettering their community. Staff speaks of graduates who "strive to be the best version of them that they can be" and who are "not afraid to ask for help along the way."

> **"Like they can do anything they want, and they learned how to do stuff even though they have a learning disability."**

There were some comments, particularly from the adults, that spoke of CA graduates struggling to find the success they'd hoped for in high school.

This was consistently framed around the supports received while at CA not continuing after they graduate, and experiencing difficulty being wholly independent learners or employees. The difficulty with finding the perfect balance of supporting students and pushing independence was noted.

What kind of school do we want to be?

KEY WORDS

- INCLUSIVE/WELCOMING
- REACH
- FUN
- EXPERTS/KNOWN
- LEADER IN LD

Both junior high and high school students used the words fun and safe to describe the school. Caring, accepting, and welcoming were also frequent descriptors.

"We want to be accepting everyone for who they are and making students successful in every way we can." Adults spoke of being "a school that aims to make the students feel safe, welcome, excited to learn, and motivated to do their best." Students and adults spoke of being a school that lives up to the REACH principles more consistently and that has a great culture.

Students and adults spoke of a desire for higher standards and expectations for both students and staff, a desire for the school to be seen as a highly ranked, expert in education. A respondent summarized this as the hope to be "the example of how education should be for all kids." Adults noted an already strong reputation for teaching and learning and desire to see it grow.

> *To be a school that provides students an accepting environment and the best ways to learn whether they are behind or ahead.*

For adults, responses to this question generated great disparity between a desire to lean into the school's history of LD excellence, and to move away from the limiting language of LD and focus instead on helping all students.

Students used language like "normal" or "not a special school" to describe their desired school state, whereas staff spoke were split between "providing support to those who can't get it anywhere else" and "supporting all learners to become the best version of themselves, whatever their gifts and skills may be."

> *To be a school that has the resources and capability to tailor a quality education for each student depending on their needs.*

> *"We don't want to lower our standards; we want to figure out how best to help students achieve the high standards that we know they are capable of achieving."*

How does CA make you feel?

KEY WORDS

- SATISFIED/EXCITED/HOPEFUL
- ACCOMPLISHED
- CONNECTED/WELCOMED
- DISSATISFIED

Themes across all stakeholder groups were very consistent. Respondents spoke of overall satisfaction with the school. Students used phrases like "I feel good about my grades" and "CA makes me feel happy and confident to learn," and "I feel like I'm going to be successful in whatever I do later in life." Parents spoke of relief in knowing their child is at a school that works for them, that they no longer need to worry for their child, and that they had made the best educational choice for their child. Staff and parents described pride as a key feeling. Excerpts include "I love what CA stands for and what it does. CA is a place of endless possibility" and "CA makes me feel lucky to be part of such a wonderful, accepting, supportive organization" and "I take pride that I work in a place where staff feel so deeply committed to helping students."

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> *CA makes me feel like there is hope for education. Education is ever evolving and think CA is working hard to provide meaningful learning experiences for students.*

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> *CA makes me feel happy and excited to learn. At my previous schools, I felt like a burden. Now I enjoy waking up in the morning and coming to school, ready to learn.*

Junior high students overwhelmingly used words like happy, welcome, and safe to describe how CA makes them feel. Senior students noted concerns with the reputation of the school, the distinction between Academy and Collegiate and its impact on their self-identity. This is echoed in adult responses, "sometimes the students talk down about themselves as a 'CA' kid," and "I would like CA to not be known as the school for 'not smart kids.' We shouldn't talk that way about the students."

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> *It should be just normal classes, because I'm smart and in academy and I hate that people think you have disabilities or that you are stupid in academy.*

What's Next?

The intention of this document is to provide a guiding framework for deeper conversations through stakeholder focus groups in January 2021. Participants will have the option to join cohort or cross-cohort focus groups to review and endorse the feedback overview and begin prioritizing the themes.

Following the focus group conversations, the feedback will be used to develop draft Strategic Plan Goals and Outcomes to be shared with the community. Participants will be able to share their thoughts on the Goals and Outcomes through a survey before detailed Strategy and Performance Measure development begins.

Appendix 1: Participant Demographics

PARTICIPANT GROUP	# OF RESPONDENTS
Students Grades 5-7	60
Students Grades 8-12	307
Grade 8	47
Grade 9	60
Grade 10	53
Grade 11	96
Grade 12	51
Staff	104
Parents	56
Alumni	13
Board and Community Partners	5

Appendix 2: Themes Overview

PERCENTAGE INDICATES THE FREQUENCY THE THEME APPEARED IN THE COMMENTS.

QUESTION	GRADES 5-7 60 RESPONDENTS
What should the future of education look like?	Students participated in a modified survey with fewer questions
What does innovation in education mean to you?	

GRADES 8-12 307 RESPONDENTS	ADULTS 180 RESPONDENTS
More/better technology (15%) Flexible (13%) Engaging (9%) Wellness (9%) Stay the same (9%) Learning focused (8%) Relevant (8%) Supportive (7%) Hands-on (7%)	Personalized (31%) Futuristic/technology (16%) Executive functioning (15%) Innovative/creative (14%) Critical thinking (13%) Hybrid learning (13%) Engaging (9%) Collaborative (9%) Fundamentals (9%) Accessible/integrated (7%) Resilience (7%) Wellness (6%) Flexible/fluid (6%) Soft skills (6%) Life skills (5%) Belonging (5%)
New ways of teaching (16%) Evolution (10%) Technology (8%) Engaging learning (6%) Real-world learning (6%) Creativity (6%) Flexibility (5%)	New ideas/approaches (27%) Personalized education (12%) Purpose driven (12%) Emerging technology (7%) Ever evolving (6%)

QUESTION	GRADES 5-7 60 RESPONDENTS
What opportunities for educational improvement can we address over the next four years?	Students participated in a modified survey with fewer questions
How would you describe CA today?	Fun (32%) Caring (27%) Awesome (18%) Supportive (13%) Safe (12%) Nice people (8%) Strong relationships (5%)
How would you describe a CA graduate?	Students participated in a modified survey with fewer questions

GRADES 8-12 307 RESPONDENTS	ADULTS 180 RESPONDENTS
More 1-on-1/support (12%) More class options (7%) More life skills (7%) Greater flexibility (7%) More hands-on/project learning (7%) Less tests (5%)	Programming (20%) Focus (6%) Assessment (6%) Remediation (6%) Health/Wellness (5%) LD (5%) Student Needs (5%)
Good/Great (30%) Helpful teachers (26%) Welcoming (7%) Student-centered (7%) Safe (6%)	Behind/improving (31%) Caring (16%) Student-centered (14%) Innovative (13%) Effective (13%) Ambitious (10%) Welcoming (6%) Supportive (5%)
Smart/successful (22%) Unprepared (7%) Prepared (7%) Confident (6%) Hard working (6%) Compassionate (6%)	Confident/passionate (39%) Self-advocate/awareness (32%) Competencies/skills/prepared (31%) Well rounded (18%) Supported (11%) Successful (8%) Not prepared for reality (7%) Compassionate (5%)

QUESTION	GRADES 5-7 60 RESPONDENTS
What kind of school do we want to be?	Fun (27%) Inclusive (22%) Friendly (18%) Safe (13%) Excellence (13%) Helpful (12%) Generous (8%) Fulfilling (8%) REACH (7%)
How does CA make you feel?	Happy (28%) Welcome (13%) Good (13%) Safe (12%) Excited (12%) Smart (8%) Supported (7%) Connected (7%)

GRADES 8-12 307 RESPONDENTS	ADULTS 180 RESPONDENTS
Successful (25%) Safe (21%) Culture (17%) Supportive (9%) Personalized (7%) Fun (6%) LD (6%)	Individualized/focused on learning differences (45%) Accepting/welcoming (38%) Innovative (22%) Leader in education (21%) Self-sufficient (13%) Student-centered (13%) Future skill building (9%) Engaging (7%) Employer of choice/stability (7)
Successful (37%) Satisfied (34%) Safe (31%) Dissatisfied (11%) Disparity (6%) Strong connections (6%)	Positive experience (65%) Accomplished (30%) Supported (24%) Hopeful for future (17%) Frustrated/disappointed (17%) Welcomed (10%) Relieved (3%)