

Forecast of the Future:

Major Shifts and Trends Facing Our Industry and How Schools Can Respond

Canadian Accredited Independent Schools

Head & Chairs Conference 2024 | Keynote | Halifax

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An Opening Query

Why this conference exists: **to learn, to learn to lead, and to connect with others.**

Three Minute Huddle Up: Connect with a colleague or two near you and answer the following question:

- *How would you describe the top opportunities and challenges for your next five years for your school?*
- *Are you more “fearful” or “opportunistic” for your school as it relates to the future?*



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The Near-Term Future in a Nutshell...

- Declining birth rates
- Aging populations
- Growing cost of living
- Educator fatigue
- Talent shortages
- Divisive political environment
- Artificial intelligence
- Global trend away from democracy
- Environmental disruptions

How does an industry that broadly serves between 1% and 5% of school-age children respond if our **core business** is transformation of people and culture and our **client** is the future?

No, the sky is not falling...



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Three Goals for Today

1. **Go Backward (to Go Forward):**
Set Some Context for Innovation and Our Industry
2. **Strategy Continuum:**
A Framework Which Identifies Our Predisposition (or lack thereof) to Strategy
3. **Look to the Future:**
Who Will Navigate and Lead in this New World?



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Other Tavern Talks

Sunday 3:15 PM – 4:30 PM

Innovate to Advance and **Lead**: What Are the Leading Opportunities for Innovation and Market Leadership for Our Independent Schools?

Monday 10:45 AM – 12:15 PM

Why **Change** is Hard: Managing the Internal Change Needed to Thrive in a Changing World

Tuesday 10:45 AM – 12:00 PM

Innovation and Change for **Boarding** Schools



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A Deep Concern

I used to be concerned that we have too many private schools in mid-sized to large markets that are trying to do the same thing and competing for the same, full pay families. That was five years ago. Now, I have a different worry.

Independent schools – and many of the high tuition, small enrollment schools and colleges out there trying to live in that limited space – are on a path to irrelevance and extinction if they don't get creative.

I have often believed that independence is the greatest asset of independent schools. It is in their name. Independent schools, as well as most private schools, possess the freedom to choose their mission, their delivery mode, their access points, and the markets they choose to cultivate.

Can we move beyond trying to “find full pay families” and selective admissions as the holy grail of their existence toward true relevance in the coming decade?





Feb 7, 2024

WHY THE PRIVATE EDUCATION SECTOR IS STRUGGLING

The private education sector is struggling. You might not experience it directly at your school or college, but there are signs all around us that private education is, yet again, at another inflection point. The writing is on the wall, from softening demand, college closures and school consolidations.

<https://iansymmonds.org/blog/why-the-private-education-sector-is-struggling/>

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A Few Concessions

We are in a risky business called the **future**. Predictions are challenging, but the headwinds of change are stronger than ever.

The greatest threats to the future of our industry are **not** inside the schoolhouse.

I don't have all of the answers, but I have seen a lot. I've closed a few independent schools – and colleges/universities – in my career. It is not fun and I've learned some basic lessons.

I have a love-hate relationship with technology, and specifically social media.

Technology, innovation and ed-futurism are all very different things.

CAIS enjoys a wide distribution of schools and maturity levels.



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Some Guiding Truths I've Learned

Change: Education is a mature industry. The church, government, and school are the three most mature industries in most democratized societies and, generally, are not adaptive to *revolutionary* - but instead - prefer *evolutionary* change.

Industry: Our business model has dodged many bullets in the past. We are a curiously faddish industry that continues to seek the silver bullet to solve problems we have created. The financial model of high cost, low volume, selective admissions and diversity/inclusion is a sustainability tightrope that is incredibly difficult to walk.

Why We Exist: “The work of the school is determine by the needs of society.”
– Col Francis Parker

Strategic Asset: Independence



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A Few Informed Observations on AI

AI & AR are transformational tools for the education sector; they will bring rapid change.

These are not new technologies, but will challenge the existing educational models and could – if not *navigated* – render some schools obsolete.

Schools can't sit on the fence – to delay is to choose.

Please don't say the “*i*” word. It is akin to saying “*academic excellence*”. Just do it. And, BTW, is not innovative to stay relevant with current or emerging trends.

Ultimately, this is **not** about technology but, instead, another a major step-change in educational evolution and adaptation of tools.



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Three Ages of Education

1. **Knowledge Age** (1950s-90s, pre-digital, print era, traditional assessments that remain the foundation of current accreditation and credentialing)
2. **Skills Age** (1990s - early 2000's, MIT iTunes era, digital democratization of knowledge, skills & competencies)
3. **Adaptive/Assisted Learning Age** (current, access to, synthesis of, and creation of new understanding through AI and assisted, adaptive, immersive learning)

Houston, we have a problem, or we've got a bit of a sticky wicket. You will find natural tensions (contradictions) such as these throughout our educational systems.



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Current and Historic Education Industry Challenges

1. **Faddish:** Education is prone to fads and lacks effective change mechanisms.
2. **Changing Role of Education:** Societal shifts around the role and value of education.
3. **Assessment Tipping Point:** Existing systems and structures of measurement and accreditation are outdated.
4. **Talent Shortages:** There is a shortage of skilled educators due to exhaustion from the pandemic, retirement demographic shifts, COL, and a host of other factors.
5. **Financial Model:** The combo of high price, low volume and selective admissions is often not sustainable in the marketplace.
6. **Silver Bullet Panaceas:** We tend to rest our industry future on the next big idea. AI is not *it*, but will be part of the water, and a great ally or opponent.



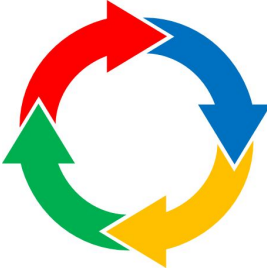
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The Education Innovation Cycle



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The Education Innovation Step-Cycle:

Innovation is the creation of a new paradigm, invention, or a new way of doing something. Innovation often brings new tools to bear on a task.

Integration is the bringing together of new innovations and advances into existing systems. It allows the new innovation to be blended or woven into some meaningful system or structure.

Convergence is the point of convergence where several systems or platforms, not just one, become integrated into a functional suite of accessible programs or tools.

Adoption is the final stage, marked by the widespread adoption of the new systems, creating a new normal.



THE STRATEGY CONTINUUM

Four Camps of Schools & Colleges

Why Some Schools & Colleges Thrive While Others Decline

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THE STRATEGY CONTINUUM | Four Camps of Schools & Colleges

1. Fatalities

“Never Had It”

2. Preservationists

“Don’t Get it or Somehow Lost It”

3. Adaptors

“Get It, Sort Of”

4. Disruptors/Innovators

“Get it, and Then Some”

Lo



Hi

What We’ve Learned Nearly 1500 Times Over:
Strategic Readiness to Advance Innovation



THE STRATEGY CONTINUUM | Four Camps of Schools & Colleges

Lo ————— Strategic Readiness or Capacity to Advance Strategy —————> Hi

Fatalities

“Never Had It”

- Operate in crowded markets
- Middle tier with duplication
- Not singular in offerings
- No leading position
- Short financial runway
- Lack of bench depth
- Leadership turnover

Achilles Heel:
Lack of Market Leadership

Preservationists

“Don’t Get It”

- Tied to old models
- Faculty-centric
- Internally minded
- Marketing will save them
- Operate in crowded markets
- Live in Glory Days lore
- Cash reserves declining
- Budget deficits
- Long-term leadership
- Mission over market

Achilles Heel:
Cultural Change

Adaptors

“Get It - Sort Of”

- Understand changing times
- Tied to old models
- Exploring new models
- Practicing integrated marketing
- Practicing SEM
- Deeper bench
- Managing fear of change
- Healthy cash reserves
- Mission pursuing market

Achilles Heel:
Incrementalism

Disruptors

“Get It - and Then Some”

- Seek opportunities
- Read the tea leaves
- Early adopters
- Don’t waste crises
- Externally focused
- Student-centric
- Hi-performing, stealth team
- Finds + of mission and market
- Cash reserves may be low
- Urgency is high
- Often lack money/status

Achilles Heel:
No Fear

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My Forecast of the Future: Skating to Where the Puck is Going

1. **Build Tailored Programs:** Schools are increasingly moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" approach and target distinct audiences with flexible, scaled programs and pricing.
2. **Be the Best in Something That Matters:** Focus on being unique in areas that matter most to the world, rather than being the largest, most expensive, selective, elite.
3. **Integration of AI and AR:** Schools must decide how to integrate these technologies to stay relevant and avoid obsolescence.
4. **Sunset Irrelevant Programs:** Eliminate outdated programs to free resources for future innovations, and incubate them to manage change.
5. **Grow Strategic and Generative Governance:** Governors/Directors should be solely focused on "what" and "what if" and using external expertise to guide the school.
6. **Interrogate and Define Your Core Business:** Know and exploit your core business. My guess it is not what you think it is.



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Three School Leader Categories of the Future

1. **Established and Well-Resourced Brands:** These are the few highly selective, well-endowed institutions with historical dominance. They can continue to lead by maintaining traditional business models of high price and selectivity with low volume. But, If they don't integrate emerging technologies, market share, influence and industry leadership will be narrowed.
2. **Innovative Brands Embracing Emerging Technology:** Smaller, nimble, tuition-driven institutions that adopt technology-based innovation. They focus on reducing costs while expanding access to education through digital means. These schools, colleges and universities will disrupt the status quo.
3. **Experientially-Rich, Immersive Place-Based Brands:** Schools and colleges with unique, location-driven experiences, offering distinctive environments and educational philosophies that capitalize on their surroundings.



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Current State of EdTech in Independent Schools...A Moving Target

1. **Good and Bad News:** AI introduces both opportunities and challenges, yet surprisingly few were seriously adapting, until recently.
2. **Lightspeed Change:** The pace of technological integration is rapid, won't wait.
3. **Less Than 5%:** Fewer than 5% of our existing North American indy schools had dedicated energy into integrating AI into learning models before 2023.
4. **The GPT Effect:** Nearly every strategic plan in our 2024 portfolio of clients has at least one strategic initiative around adaptive learning, AI, or AR. Many are developing incubation structures to support innovation in this area.
5. **The Newest Focus:** AI is exactly where health and wellness was five years ago or DEIBJ a decade ago.



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Fears & Opportunities:

I Have Independent School Fears:

1. Dismissing AI and EdTech as a fad. It's not. Knowledge has been democratized and is has not been our core business for a long time.
2. Lack of meaningful exploration of EdTech applications.
3. Outdated assessment, delivery, and pricing models persist.

I See Independent School Opportunities:

1. Independence is our greatest asset.
2. Our industry has demonstrated agility and nimbleness.
3. As global leaders in ed, we should be the leaders in innovative learning.



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On EdTech and AI: Why Indy Schools? Why Now?

1. Health, wellness, community-building, and ethical responsibility are deeply inherent in our core business. If not us, who?
2. Independence is our greatest asset. We are uniquely qualified to lead in this space, but can quickly lose market share if not careful. There is a quickly closing window of opportunity for both singularity and differentiation in our sector.
3. AI is not a panacea but - just like community building, character, discourse, research, synthesis, and all the other skills and competencies we've been teaching our graduates - this will quickly become "part of the water" of an excellent educational experience.

If you're not in the space now, you will lose out in the future.



Thank You.

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