

## LINN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

**MAY 12, 2025 at 6:00PM  
HELD AT ISAAC NEWTON CHRISTIAN ACADEMY**

Katie Warner, board president, opened the meeting in prayer and shared some opening remarks. She thanked attendees for making time to join, outlined the agenda, and explained that Q&A will be conducted using an online form instead of being asked and answered live.

Jesse Padgett, worship pastor at Maranatha Bible Church, led the assembly in worship, with two songs: We Praise You and Great Are You Lord.

Katie acknowledged all of the teachers and staff, and they stood to receive applause from those assembled. Katie acknowledged past board members and had them rise also. Katie introduced all current board members and identified their roles and committees. Katie then noted that Stephanie will be returning for a second three-year team and introduced the three board candidates, a brief biography of each was available as members arrived.

Stephanie Prochaska, board member at-large, shared the history of the Cornwell/Johnston Meritorious Volunteer Service Award. Stephanie presented the 2025 award to Theresa Appleby. Theresa's children attended Isaac Newton, she was a teacher at the school for a full decade, and later served as a classroom volunteer with Kindergarten and 1st Grade, not just helping students read but helping them believe that they can.

Dr. Dean Ridder, Head of School, reiterated the blessing that Theresa has been as she has served God and the students at Isaac Newton Christian Academy. He reported that the state of the school is **strong**, and he gave glory to God for that. Students are living the character of Christ and growing in academic excellence. God has assembled an amazing team of teachers and staff to enable the mission of Isaac Newton Christian Academy. There are 393 students enrolled for the current 24/25 school year. We have grown without compromising the mission of the school or the admissions standards, and have instead *increased* the standards for enrollment. New staff has been added to facilitate the growth of the student body, and they have each proven essential. Jennifer Mains, a licensed nurse, serves as the school nurse and cares for the physical needs of the children. Kristin Clinkinbeard serves as Upper School resource teacher. Stasha Padgett serves as Director of Communications. Beth Ngo serves as Director of Operations. Dalend Pearson is being added as the Lower School principal, starting with the 25/26 school year.

Dr. Ridder explained that the school worked with Christian School Management (CSM) for all of last week, to develop a strategic plan. CSM is a highly-respected organization and helped us prepare both a strategic plan and a strategic financial plan. The board will be approving the plan and communicating the details around implementation of the strategic plan.

Dr. Ridder thanked the school community for the support and engagement, and for preserving the quiddity of Isaac Newton Christian Academy.

Neil Gutschmidt, board treasurer, introduced himself and his successor, Amanda Lane. He identified one mission of the board: God-honoring financial stewardship. The strategic financial plan will enable a multi-year view of finances. Neil explained the three-legged stool of the operating budget: tuition (income), wages (expenses), and enrollment/capacity (efficiency). Isaac Newton Christian Academy is in a season of great strength.

The current financial landscape includes ESA, and the board has demonstrated a commitment to responsible increases in tuition cost while maintaining financial accessibility for families. Neil showed two pie charts: operating income (with tuition as the biggest source of income; gifts are separate because they should be above and beyond, not required to cover operating expenses) and operating budget (with labor, including benefits, as the biggest expense). The 24/25 operating income is 4% above operating budget, which is in the recommended range of 2-5% and will enable the reinvestment laid out in the strategic plan. Moving forward, the Strategic Financial Plan will broaden the horizon for stewardship of the school's resources beyond one year.

Katie thanked Neil for his service and highlighted the benefits of having skilled individuals contributing their God-given talents to the mission of the school. The board developed a strategic plan at the beginning of the 24/25 school year, and enhanced it to cover a full 3-5 year timeline with guidance from CSM. She explained that working with CSM was great, and the board is extremely pleased with the results. CSM has between 400-500 years of experience across their staff, and now was the perfect time to have CSM come in and help shape and solidify the strategic plan. The Strategic Plan, which will be approved by the board soon, takes into consideration the new building, gives attention to investing in our teachers, augments our academic plan, and enhances our current facilities. One strategic objective of the board is to raise teacher compensation and enhance professional development, with some action already taken for the 25/26 school year but more to come. Longer term goals include beginning construction of the new building, maturing the Upper School, and strengthening the fine arts program.

Stephen Pitts, board member at-large, showed a rendering of the building concept that has been in development over the past year. Multiple traffic studies have been conducted to ensure the school can comply with all code and zoning requirements. The preliminary concepts were submitted for the city to review, along with the traffic study results, and received positive feedback. Building plans will continue to be refined with the involvement of multiple user groups including faculty, staff, and administration. The mission statement for the facility expansion project is to add facilities to accommodate two sections of every grade, Kindergarten through 12th Grade, plus a Pre-K class, providing proper support facilities for dining, athletics, fine arts, STEM, and administration. Over the next few weeks the project will be proceeding into final detailed design, with a goal to be shovel-ready by January 2026, including city approval. The timeline for construction will be driven by the capital campaign, and we may be able to utilize some parts of the new building while additional work is completed.

Gabe Rohwedder, board member at-large, acknowledged Stephen's critical involvement in the facility expansion project and how God has blessed the school through him. The board recognizes the challenges in our growth, but will not compromise our mission, character, or academics. Gabe thanked families for partnering with the school in the education of the children. Amazing donor partners have led the capital campaign by offering a 2:1 match for all gifts toward the capital campaign through 2025, up to \$1.5 million. These generous donors are not only committed to supporting the school in material ways, they are also keenly interested in avoiding mission drift and retaining Dr. Ridder. Gabe invited the school community to pray about what God would have them give to the capital campaign as it starts to build momentum in these early stages.

Katie explained again that Q&A will be accepted via online form by the end of tomorrow. Steve Howard, board member at-large, helped draw four winners for a scrip gift card door prize.

Returning to a detail missed during his presentation, Neil added that the Annual Banquet raised \$250k through gifts and commitments this year.

Dr. Ridder closed the meeting in prayer.

After the meeting concluded, the ballots were counted. A quorum was reached, and all board candidates on the ballot were elected by a wide majority.

All questions submitted by attendees, along with answers prepared by the board, will be included in an addendum to these minutes.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bob Mosey, board secretary

## Addendum: Q&A

The questions included here (with submitter identified, as would have been the case for live Q&A during the meeting) comprise the entirety of what was received via online form after the Annual Meeting. The answers (*in italics*) were prepared and approved by the board, with valuable input from Dr. Ridder where appropriate. Some of the questions were abbreviated to remove editorial commentary, but we believe the portion included here represents the full intent of the submitter.

From board member Stephen Pitts:

I want to know why I couldn't ask any questions!!! I demand an answer!!

*Board response:*

*This was just an early, tongue-in-cheek test of the online form and not a real question. It is being included here for completeness and transparency only.*

From parent Tami Feickert:

What is the plan for the house and property on Coldstream that the school bought?

*Board response:*

*The property at 2141 Coldstream was acquired primarily to secure the potential it represents. Some initial considerations included using it for office space or storage, but other possibilities exist, such as enabling a secondary driveway or even becoming part of a larger footprint to construct an early childhood education center outside of the main school building. Since its acquisition, volunteer work has been done to remove debris and preserve its value, until the best form of utilization can be identified. Meanwhile, the house is being rented by a member of the school faculty, in a mutually beneficial arrangement that provides convenient housing for a valued staff member and provides the school a live-in caretaker for the property.*

From parent Andi Fuemmeler:

Does the strategic plan address a potential enrollment decrease if a future legislature discontinues ESAs?

*Board response (with input from Dr. Ridder):*

*The strategic plan takes a conservative approach with enrollment predictions. Additionally, the strategic plan can be changed by action from the board to reflect current conditions whenever necessary.*

From parent Allison Dose:

With Gov Reynolds not running for re-election, is there any concern that the ESA will go away and how that would impact our school or new families that perhaps couldn't send their kids to school without the ESA?

*Board response:*

*We understand that many families are wondering what the future holds for Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) in Iowa, especially following Governor Reynolds' announcement that she is not running for re-election.*

*We had this same concern and reached out to State Representative Steven Holt, who has been a strong supporter of school choice. He reassured us that ESAs remain strongly supported within the current majority in the Iowa legislature. In his words:*

*"No Republican Governor will support getting rid of ESAs. That will not happen, nor would there be votes in a Republican controlled House and Senate to do that."*

*Representative Holt emphasized that while there is political opposition to ESAs among some, particularly within the Democratic Party, a repeal would require a significant shift in leadership—control of the Iowa House, Senate, and Governor's office. At this time, such a shift is not expected in the near future.*

*We will continue to monitor developments closely. For now, ESAs remain secure under the current leadership structure in Iowa. Even so, the board is committed to practicing financial stewardship and not overextending the school in a manner that would invite existential risks from the repeal of ESA by future legislation.*

From teacher Karen Curry:

The plan mentioned professional development and my question is if the board and Dr. Ridder are considering providing courses that would meet the requirements for state relicensure. The recent changes Iowa has made to the AEA system means schools contract with the AEA to provide professional development, which means almost all of the courses offered are only available to the teachers of a specific school.

*Board response (with input from Dr. Ridder):*

*The school will be doing what it can to provide professional development for teachers that is beneficial for the needs of the students at the school in keeping with the school's strategic plan. While the school cannot change the situation at the Area Education Agency, we can pay attention to ways that could align the school's professional development needs with teacher certification needs.*

From parent Geralyn Jones:

1. Board Member Elections: I was surprised to receive a ballot for board members without prior information about the candidates. Why does the board select candidates rather than involving stakeholders in the nomination process?

*Board response:*

*One of the standing board committees is the Nominating Committee, whose role is to seek out qualified and interested candidates to serve on the board. Recommendations and referrals from parents, faculty, and staff are always welcome, and all potential candidates are interviewed with an eye toward how their God-given talents and personalities could enhance the effectiveness of the board. The board also intentionally seeks future board members that can bring needed skills to the board. This may include the skills of strategic planning, legal expertise, or accounting and/or finance expertise, and pastoral skills, among others. Short biographies for each of the candidates selected to be on the ballot for the Annual Meeting are provided at check-in, as well as via email in advance when early/absentee voting is announced.*

2. Stakeholder Engagement in Strategic Planning: I was disappointed to learn that only select families were involved in the strategic planning process. As a stay-at-home parent eager to contribute, I would have appreciated the opportunity to participate. How were families chosen, and can more stakeholders be included in future discussions?

*Board response (with input from Dr. Ridder):*

*The consulting firm that the school worked with (Christian School Management, or CSM), requested specific groups of parents to meet with. The first group of parents were to be families that were in the first year of enrollment at the school. The second group of parents were to be families who had been at the school for an extended period of time AND had a student graduate from 8th or 12th grade at the school.*

*The school will be sending out a CSM survey to all families, as part of this process, in October. The survey was intended to happen in the last week of April. In fact, the survey was sent to all families at the school during that time frame. However, CSM's computer server crashed in the middle of our survey opportunity, and all of the results were lost. This is why the survey has been rescheduled for October. The school is also preparing additional ways to seek feedback from stakeholders as part of our strategic planning process.*

3. Transparency in Strategic Planning: When sharing the strategic plan, I urge you to provide both a high-level overview and detailed initial phases. In my experiences, releasing only one phase at a time without context risks undermining trust. Full transparency will reinforce confidence that our investments are advancing the school's mission for future generations.

*Board response:*

*After the board formally adopts the strategic plan, information about both the overall timeline and specific initial actions will be developed with assistance from the Director of Communication. We recognize that some members of the school community are keenly interested in details and some just want to know that proper stewardship is happening. Our goal in communicating is to engage and inspire without burying everyone in needless detail.*