

HCS Recommendation

The leadership team of First Baptist Church, which includes the pastoral staff, our deacon board, and the HCS school board, offers the following recommendation to the congregation of First Baptist Church regarding the future of Horseheads Christian School:

-At our most recent combined meeting, on Monday, February 5th, 2018, our team reviewed the question of whether or not we should keep HCS open for the 2018-19 school year. After much discussion, thought, and prayer, we arrived at a consensus to recommend that First Baptist Church close Horseheads Christian School at the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year.

-This is not a recommendation that we offer to you lightly; in fact, we do so with great consternation and heaviness of heart. We love and support our school staff and student body, and wish that we believed there was a path that could lead to a viable and sustainable Christian school. Unfortunately, in the last six months of research and study, we have not been able to find such a path and are left with the recommendation to close HCS.

-We have come to this conclusion after considering significant data in three major categories.

Category #1: Enrollment Trends

- Our student body currently has 48 students (46 paying) in the K-6th grades. Of those 46 paying students, 13 students are graduating from sixth grade, which leaves us with a **maximum** number of 33 returning students. Of those 33 students, 6 students are so delinquent in paying their school bill that they may not be allowed to re-enroll next year, which *could* lower our number to 27 returning students. In order to pay for the staff to teach them in 2018-19, we would then need to add 10-13 new students, a number that we have not seen at HCS for several years and are not projected to see this year, either.
- Because of the shrinking enrollment numbers, if HCS were to continue into the 2018-19 year, it would have to completely change its structure and format, combining classes to make a budget work. This move would most likely not be attractive to new families, which could discourage them from choosing HCS for their children, hurting our recruiting efforts. There are also questions of whether or not the families of our 33 potentially returning students would choose to leave their students at HCS next year with a revamped “combined class” scenario. If just a couple of families were to pull out, it would put that much more pressure on adding new students to keep the tuition high enough to begin to cover expenses.
- The risks in moving forward with a revamped school under those circumstances are significant, both to our school staff and to our church budget.
 - If we announced that HCS were continuing next year, our teachers would be completely depending on HCS for their employment. If just a few families pulled out at the last minute because of the new format or financial difficulties or any other reason; or if we got just five or six new students instead of ten or twelve, we would be forced to close the school very abruptly, which would leave the teachers with very few options for employment in the educational field.
 - The risk to the church is significant, as well. If we didn’t get enough students to help cover budget costs, then we would need to deplete tens of thousands of

dollars from our church reserve funds to either carry the school through another year, or to close it abruptly and help our staff with their unemployment needs.

Category #2: Staff Concerns

- Jim Kane, our HCS administrator, has made the decision to retire at the end of the 2017-18 school year. The implication for HCS is this: if we were to move ahead with HCS for another year, we would have to ask our current staff members to do all the work of preparing for a new year with a completely different program while also managing all the administrative tasks that Jim has done up until this point.
- This would put a great deal of added strain on our teachers, all without the assurance until late August at the earliest that their work would actually translate into enough students to keep the doors open.
- A final concern that we have as a leadership team is that even if we did all the work, and managed to attract enough students for a first year, there is no guarantee that the school's enrollment challenges would change and that the school would have a future beyond another year. In fact, the data that we look at suggest that we might be in exactly the same position in another 6 or 12 months.

Category #3: Cultural Shifts

- Christian parents have a lot more good options to educate their children in 2018 than they did when the school was founded. A variety of homeschooling options exist that have drawn students away in recent years. Even the quality of the Horseheads public school district has led some to choose that option for their children. The culture is shifting beneath our feet, as it is all over the country at all different educational levels (from elementary schools and high schools to colleges and seminaries).
- The number of children in the Central New York area has diminished significantly in the last forty years. There are less available students for us to recruit to come to HCS than ever before and it is a trend that does not seem to be changing going forward.

Conclusion: In light of these enrollment trends, staff concerns, and larger cultural shifts, we as the Leadership team, have made the recommendation to close HCS at the end of this year. We are grateful to God for the nearly fifty years of effective ministry HCS has enjoyed, while also acknowledging a deep sadness that we will not be able to continue into the future. We hold on to hope, though, because we believe that God is as committed as ever to making disciples from the people of our community. As followers of Jesus, we are committed to fulfilling that mission whether we have a Christian school or not. It is painful to grow and change, but we have hope that God has led us to this point and that God will lead us into the future.

On Sunday, March 4th, at our quarterly business meeting, the church congregation will have the opportunity to vote to either affirm or not affirm this recommendation. Please be in prayer for our church family as we make this difficult decision.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chairman, HCS School Board