



DIVINE SAVIOR HOLY ANGELS HIGH SCHOOL
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Building on Faith: the 2011-16 DSHA Strategic Plan

Divine Savior Holy Angels High School finds itself in a strong position: full enrollment of an able and diverse student body who reflect our sponsors' commitment to educate a broad economic and cultural spectrum of our Church, talented and dedicated faculty and staff, very strong academic outcomes that reflect our college preparatory focus and sufficient philanthropic support to enable consecutive years of balanced budgets.

However, our determination, developed in the just completed strategic plan, is to be a school committed to continuous improvement, always seeking to *more* fully realize our faith based mission to provide an exemplary education for young women in an environment that makes known the goodness and kindness of Jesus. The goal of this project was to develop DSHA's new strategic plan in a manner that would involve key members of our school community and build consensus on the most important initiatives that would lead to this even more fully realized mission. Lacking the sense of urgency that can be created by falling enrollment, lack of mission focus or other forms of instability, we sought to find and build a passion that would lead our community to commit to a newly articulated vision and mobilize the leadership necessary to mount a transformative capital campaign.

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Project Focus

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We entered this process with several explicit goals: build on the momentum and link to the work of the previous strategic plan in several key academic and student service areas, prepare a master facility plan that would articulate a long –term vision for campus development and involve a number of key constituents who could become motivated to enlist in a fund raising campaign to see the strategic plan's comprehensive vision realized. We also knew that a robust discussion related to our mission and Catholic identity was needed; we are diverse Church and recent years have led to a lack of consensus on what the most effective ways to be a *Catholic* school are. It was our belief that a robust discussion as part of strategic planning would help to articulate the best way for DSHA to bring this identity to life – for our young women within the charism of our sponsoring order and within the religious traditions and practices already characteristic of our school community.

Project Method

The work of developing the 2011-16 strategic plan actually began with the design for the work of the final year of the previous plan. For several years now, we have used collaborative teams made up of faculty and staff to work on issues or areas designated for improvement or redesign. The teams are always cross departmental and interdisciplinary. We have created blocks of time to be used for this collaborative work and we share the work's results in in-service sessions and with the school's board of directors. We deliberately organized all of our collaborative teams around and charged them with work designed to set up our next round of strategic thinking. By performing the background work necessary to allow us to determine vision and set goals, the teams positioned us to make strategic priorities. Three of the teams extended the work of our 2009-10 accreditation report, one worked on academic schedule redesign and three developed programmatic visions in health, wellness and athletics, student services and campus ministry and library/media center. The latter three fed directly into the master facility planning process.

We identified a local consulting firm, Vernal Management Consultants, to facilitate our planning process. They were chosen because of their demonstrated commitment to adjusting their process to reflect DSHA's needs and goals and because their firm had some familiarity with our school and its leadership.

The process was comprised of two phases:

Pre-work Activities: Six dialogue sessions were held, providing opportunities for inclusion of a broad spectrum of DSHA stakeholders, including sponsors, board members, faculty, staff, and students, parents, past parents, alumnae, other educators and friends. We crafted four broad, strategic questions.

The questions were:

1. DSHA'S Mission, Vision, and Principles

Looking carefully at components of DSHA's mission, vision and principles, what opportunities do you see for strengthening these areas?

(Please see list below, excerpted from DSHA's Mission Statement and Vision Statement).

How do we strengthen and develop more deeply:

- Our identity as a Catholic high school that promotes the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church and nurtures faith development in students, faculty and staff.
- Our success as a college preparatory high school which provides exemplary educational opportunities that will prepare students for a successful college experience.
- Our ability as a school for young women, to facilitate students' development as confident and capable women with distinctive abilities to make a difference.
- DSHA's recognition as the best high school for young women who seek rigorous college preparation, faith development, leadership and service opportunities, and personal growth

2. Whole Person Education at DSHA

DSHA's commitment to whole person education is articulated in our statement of the Qualities of the DSHA Graduate and demonstrated by our focus on our students' awareness, development and growth in these *Qualities of the Graduate*. We are completing a year in which we have explored the seven components of wellness (spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, emotional, occupational, and environmental) as a way of deepening our commitment and realizing an even greater degree of success in the development of the whole person.

To have the same institutional, school-wide culture success with wellness, we will need to formulate strategies for deliberate wellness integration at the levels discussed above. How do we best integrate wellness into our school's culture? How should we prioritize this as an area of development for DSHA? What role should a wellness commitment play in a young woman's high school experience? What institutional language should we use around wellness? How do we deliberately embed wellness into our school community?

3. Managing Multiple Priorities

Priority Components: like all schools, we are comprised of three major ones:

- People:** Our faculty and staff
Our student body
- Program:** Curriculum and co-curricular offerings
- Facility:** Classrooms, specialized facilities such as labs, library, gym, chapel and student support areas

Priority Aspirations:

People: Our goal is to have faculty compensation second to none among Catholic high schools; we are significantly short of that goal. We strive to offer need based financial assistance to well qualified girls who would otherwise be unable to attend DSHA. This is typically 35% of our student body. The cost to fund that assistance increases every year.

Program: We strive to have adequate resources to introduce new course offerings and invest in the technology or faculty development that will continue to build DSHA's exemplary academic success.

Facility: We aspire to have a modern, up to date facility that enables us to fulfill our mission and offers our students cutting edge opportunities in most of our programs.

- a significant shortage of adequate classroom space,
- an aging gym built in 1960 as a physical education classroom,
- a vision to transform our library into a 21st century learning, media and technology center
- inadequate space for campus ministry, prayer and worship
- inadequate space for guidance and student services functions.

As DSHA prepares for a major fund raising campaign, how would you have us order these priorities? If we can't have it all, what, in your view, must we have?

4. Continuous Improvement

DSHA places a high value on continuous improvement. This commitment leads us to a regular and strategic review of our strengths and weaknesses. What areas of strength do you find particularly compelling at DSHA. In what areas do you find a need for improvement?

The questions were distributed one at a time and each person was asked to write a short response which would be collected. They then engaged in small group dialogue about the question and their response. Time was allowed for each group to report on their discussion to the group as a whole. The dialogue, reactions and feedback were transcribed and provided the material for the next phase: plan development.

We invited over 400 of our constituents to participate and were highly gratified that over 200 gave an evening of their time to attend. In addition, we had a student dialogue session that was eagerly attended by 35 of our students. All of our faculty and staff participated in a dialogue session during in-service.

Strategy Development: Following the completion of the pre-work activities, we entered the strategy development phase. A steering committee comprised of the key administrative leadership of the high school and several members of the board of directors was enlisted. This phase involved a review of DSHA's core foundational documents: guiding principles, mission and vision statements.

Following a review and revision of these statements, we focused on a discussion of the feedback from the dialogue sessions. We identified key themes and issues raised. From this, we were able to articulate the most important strategies for the next five years. Annual objectives will be developed to ensure that our work supports the strategic vision of this plan. We also developed key success indicators so that we can monitor our progress and be clear about what direction we actually intend to move our school.

As this is being written, we are still engaged in the strategy development phase. It is scheduled to be completed in mid-July. The full strategic plan will be the major item of business to occupy our board at their September opening meeting for the 2011-12 school year.

What did we learn?

Our largest lesson is that strategic planning is every bit as important in good times as it is in challenging times. An organization that strives to be inclusive and build on the many strengths of those who comprise it must find regular and meaningful ways to involve a variety of individuals so that the voices that are heard are a *true* reflection of the community. Our understanding of the question of our Catholic identity was much enriched by hearing from many more people about this.

Being perceived as a strong and successful school is, of course, a blessing. However, managing the multiple priorities that exist in a community that is accustomed to a high degree of success is not an easy task. Consensus is not easily built when the options are all good (or at least appear to be so); our existence does not depend on moving in this direction instead of that direction. This process will still lead our board to some tough choices; however, they will make them with a thorough understanding of what our community thinks. By exercising their role as the governing board, priorities will be established, our direction will be determined and we will be able to enlist most of our constituents to help us achieve the vision we have established.