

A year of Growth; WRLHS on the Rise

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Wolf River Lutheran High School is a small Lutheran High school in the greater Shawano, WI area. The school was started 10 years ago with only 4 students. It is in a community with a high need for a Christian High School. We are located 45 minutes from Green Bay and 45 minutes from Appleton, the two communities closest to us with Christian High Schools. Wolf River struggled to start. We began with only 4 students and did not hire a full time administrator for 7 years. In that time, the administrator would take vacations to Florida in high recruitment season. Subsequently the high school never got out of the teen numbers for enrollment. When I took the position, there were 15 students enrolled in the school. I saw my main goal and focus to be to grow the high school. If enrollment could increase to a sustainable number, then things like the budget and endowment funds could follow. Many in the community questioned why we continued to operate the school. I saw one of my main goals as increase positive community involvement. By raising the awareness of who we are and what we stand for, I hoped to raise the enrollment and the backing of the school.

This year one goal I had through the VanLunen Fellowship was to increase Wolf River Lutheran High School's presence on social media. One aspect I began to tackle was Facebook and Twitter presence. I worked to post at least once a week on Facebook. The post consisted of either updates happening around the school, photos of events, or articles and information for parents and students alike.

We also ran a Facebook ad in late February, early March which is high enrollment time in our area. We targeted the ad to kids and parents who fell into our demographic. The ad promoted enrollment but also looked to increase followers on the Facebook page. We found this increase helped to promote the school in general to the community.

The feedback I received from the Facebook ad indicated we had thousands of people viewing our page each week. It meant we were being noticed. My next goal is to begin to use that media presence to reach backers and funders for the school.

I next turned my attention to our webpage and our web presence. I worked to trim down our webpage. It had many unnecessary things running on the page. We were working too hard to use the page as a communication tool to community supporters. We were not focusing the page at new students or potential students. I removed things from the page that were unnecessary. I began to focus on using the association church bulletins, the Facebook page, and emails to reach the community supporters.

I and another teacher began to assess how things were grouped. We began to notice the webpage had a tab for everything. We assessed what items could be grouped together and put under better tabs. This helped to streamline the look. It made the front page look less cluttered and helped people to find specific items without having to flip through as much.

The webpage is the one item I feel still needs work. It has come a long way since I began working on it, but it still has a ways to go before it has the look I am desiring. We still receive a lot of feedback about the webpage. There are community people who still want to see it aimed

at them and feel that is the purpose of the web site. This is something myself and the board need to come to agreement on and decide what marketing tools we want for which groups.

Our local town worked with Google this year to help businesses claim their google domain. I attended a workshop about how to do this and have since claimed WRLHS's Google presence for our own. What this means exactly is, when people search for High School's in the area, this helps ours pop nearer to the top. It also is the small box that comes up on the side of a google search. We now can input hours of operation, pictures, and control reviews about us. Without claiming this, anyone in the public could do any of these things without our say or permission.

Some ways we worked to grow enrollment was to focus on reaching the Feeder elementary schools. These are the schools who are in our association or are a religious school in the surrounding community. In total there are 6 elementary schools that fall into this category. One of the first ways I worked to gain a presence in these schools was to create a school visit team. This was a small group of students who I hand selected to be a part of this team. Together we created a polished program to take into the schools and talk with the students. We came up with a series of questions they would be asked, and each student prepared their answers. We focused on why they choose to come to WRLHS, what they were all involved in at the high school, and what was their very favorite thing about going to the school.

The students traveled with me to each of the six schools during the end of January and beginning of February. The program was about 45 minutes long by the time we talked about what the school all could offer and where we were headed in the future. We presented to the

6-8th graders in each school. I choose this demographic because, in most of the elementary schools, this makes up their junior high. It was also a way to reach some students at a younger age to get them to begin to think about choosing Wolf River for their high school. Every student was handed a trifold brochure and a pen with WRLHS logo on it. We would draw the name of one 8th grader who would win a class of 2020 shirt.

We would follow up the school visits with a shadow day. We would invite anyone in the 7th and 8th grade of these schools to come and shadow for half a day at the high school. They would tour the school, meet with me to answer additional questions, and then sit in classrooms to observe what classes were like. They would be partnered with a high schooler who they could ask questions of or talk with them about Wolf River. Each child went home with a packet of information telling their parents more about the high school, tuition rates, and how to apply for financial aid.

One last way we worked to market ourselves was into the community more. I wanted to increase our presence in the community and increase our knowledge of our school. The big way we did this was in November we finally broke ground on our new school site. We had a large ceremony bringing in the head of the District as well as newspapers, the radio, and even the TV stations based in Green Bay! This was huge for us and really revved up the buzz in town.

We also put on our first full production play this year. This was a large undertaking but was a really exciting event for our high school. We invited our feeder schools to the dress rehearsals as a way to once again bring them on site. The play ran over three performances over the weekend. In total over 300 people came to see our play.

We held two music concerts this year as well. Once again, inviting the grade schools to the dress rehearsals. These are always well received in the community. Our agriculture class held a plant sale at the end of the school year. These were the plants and flowers they had studied and worked at cultivating. Many came from the community to purchase the plants and loved the idea.

One final way I worked to increase our community presence was to become an Ambassador for the Community Chamber. This means I attend a meeting once a month in which I get to share what is going on at the high school. I get to pass out flyers and posters to other local businesses who in turn hang them at their business. I also attend ribbon cuttings and open houses in our community. I make sure I am in my WRLHS clothing to get free promotion in the local paper.

So in the end did all this effort pay off? As I began this paper, I stated that two years ago we were at 15 students. To date we have 30 students enrolled, thus doubling the enrollment! We have grown by 50% this year. We have gained many Facebook followers, I hear people talking about our high school out in the community. Many stop me to ask how the school is doing, how the building is coming, or to just find out about what is the latest going on. I consider the highest compliment that came in the spring of this year. We have a clay trap team, the only team around the area. (This is a team of students who shoot clay targets and compete in competitions). This sport has been in the state for 25 years. This spring, the local public high school announced they were going to start a clay trap team. We are being noticed, and now WE are being copied!