

Effecting a Culture of Grace

Project Summary

The project goal was to develop a framework through which impact the school community to reflect a culture of grace. Upon my arrival it appeared evident that our culture and community was characterized by tradition, policy, rules and discipline, which seemed to focus on the external manifestations of faith rather than internal change driven by the gospel. Though the school's reputation for academic achievement and college-preparatory effectiveness appeared strong, enrollment had been declining for nearly 10 years and multiple regional campuses had consolidated into one. My desire as the new Head of School was to affect an emphasis shift by applying the tools of excellence in academics and extra-curricular programs for college and life preparation, by godly teachers, contributing more importantly to one's faith formation, spiritual growth, and an understanding of living in grace.

Results

Building upon our self-study for Middle States accreditation I developed a framework of key institutional components for review. Though the scope of my goal proved too broad we made some progress in each area. It is obvious to me the pursuit of effecting a change in culture will require diligence over extended time.

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Project Focus

My project was to develop a framework through which to impact the school community to reflect a culture of grace. Upon my arrival it appeared evident that our culture and community was characterized by tradition, policy, rules and discipline, which seemed to focus on the external manifestations of faith rather than internal change driven by the gospel. Though the school's reputation for academic achievement and college-preparatory effectiveness appeared strong, enrollment had been declining for nearly 10 years and multiple regional campuses had consolidated into one. My desire as the new Head of School was to affect an emphasis shift by applying the tools of excellence in academics and extra-curricular programs for college and life preparation, by godly teachers, contributing more importantly to one's faith formation, spiritual growth, and an understanding of living in grace.

Description of the method/process

The foundation for this review was served through our self-study for accreditation by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Through the efforts to include school community stakeholders (Board, Faculty, Staff, Parents, Students, Alumni, Supporters, Pastors, etc) in various committee work and survey efforts, I reviewed reports to ascertain areas to Prioritize and address.

Also included in the process was a review of annual evaluation of the Head of School performed by the Board. The board process also sought input from a range of stakeholders.

The remaining component included is a review of an annual Teacher self-evaluation that I have each faculty member complete. In this instrument I ask questions about personal growth as well as how Administration and Board can be more supportive.

In order to address that goal a framework of key institutional components was developed, including:

- **Policy**
- **Personnel**
- **Program**
- **Pupils**
- **Parents.**

Reporting Results

Though the scope of my goal proved too broad we made some progress in each area. I have tried to show an example of some of the ways I sought to address review and possible change.

I. Policy

- **Mission, Vision, Values:** The school Board reexamined and reaffirmed the mission as established in 1943.
- **Governance:**
 - The Board establishing a model of constructive partnership.
 - A Board in-service component is included in each month's agenda.
- **Board / Head Relations:**
 - Clarifying expectations for Board and Head of School. Ascertaining expectations and compiling them to some form of consensus assists in reaching strategic objectives.
 - Annual administrator agenda is established and reviewed with Board at annual retreat.
 - A Board Committee for Head Support meets monthly with Head of School for care and prayer.

II. Personnel

- **Summer reading cycle** has been implemented.
 - Recapture the Wonder – Zacharias
 - Counterfeit Gods – Keller
- **Established Faculty Forum** program to focus on particular themes:
 - 2010: Your Christian School: A Culture of Grace (DVD) – Tripp
 - 2011: The Art & Science of Teaching – Marzano & Brown
- **Board / Head Relations:**
 - Board reports to faculty and Due Diligence meetings

III. Program

- **Middle States Accreditation process** and teams allowed for a careful review entire program.
- **Academic Offerings:**
 - Flexibility in offerings: Online instructional experience, admissions to broader international students.
- **Leadership:** Active use of Student Government and Class Officers
- **Worship:** Transition to a Student Spiritual Life Committee, and Worship Leadership Teams under the direction of Dean of Students.

IV. Pupils

- **Student Empowerment:** increase involvement, initiative and responsibility for school culture.
- **Student Discipline**
- Develop a discipline model that is Relationships, Role, and Rules vs. Rules, Role, Relationships.
- Discipline Model built on heart motivations rather than simple behaviors.

- Discipline Model that emphasizes repentance and restoration.
- **Student Service:** Changing the emphasis from required hours of service to a voluntary service based upon observed need.

V. Parents.

- **Conviction:** Belief in parent as primary teacher
- **Commitment:** Establishing an inviting culture and meaningful opportunities.
- **Communication:** Middle States Committees, Board Committees, Town Hall Meetings to fill the gap of transition from a parent association to a board controlled institution.

What I am Learning

- Key areas to address need to be established and prioritized and worked into my annual administrative goals. I developed a plan of priorities in accordance with the Board based upon a review of systemic issues identified. The 3 major areas of priority included:
 - Parents & Students: Connection, Communications, Confidence
 - Personnel & Program Development
 - Community Presence & Donor Base Development
- I can't affect culture and climate by myself. I am learning the value of using the existing strengths of formal and informal leadership among the faculty and staff to test theories and strategies. I established an Instructional Leadership Team of Administrative Staff that would meet weekly to discuss big picture and direction.
- The need for communication and coordination is tremendously important to effecting change in culture. I established Lead Teachers of each of 3 program levels: Elementary (now Principal), Middle and High School to enhance efficiency in both communications and coordination of activity.
- There are differing perspectives on the concept of "parents as primary teachers" and "partnering with parents". Effecting change here requires perseverance and patience.
- Clarity of roles among faculty and staff is tremendously valuable to help one another maintain focus on primary tasks and secondary asks.
- Empowering students is a better instructional tool than controlling students. Empowering students requires a tolerance for failure and a continuing commitment to come along side students.
- Tenure, tradition and collegiality can be stumbling blocks to growth as much as it can be an advantage. Change that affects any of those areas can cause growth to bog down.
- Affecting a culture of grace is not an end destination but a continuing process.

- Affecting a culture of grace in a school community must always begin with a continuing willingness to look at my own heart for change and growth rather than expecting it first from others.

Conclusion

It is obvious to me the pursuit of effecting a change in culture will require diligence over extended time. In so far as it is within me I am committed to the continuing pursuit. However, I must constantly be reminded that grace is a work of God that is applied to our hearts through His holy spirit. I cannot affect that which I first do not subject to His throne of grace and His sovereign will. God, please continue to draw us each closer to you that we might indeed be drawn closer to one another in our efforts to make kingdom disciples through Christian schooling.