

# DASHBOARD INDICATORS



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## Is Your School's Engine Running Smoothly?

Driving down the road, you keep an eye on your dashboard to make sure your car's systems are operating efficiently and effectively. In a Christian School, we also need to monitor the fuel level in our tank and know if the engine of education is running smoothly.

This project was driven by Rehoboth Christian School's desire to set dashboard indicators to benchmark our progress, both internally and externally. The project goal was to identify which indicators are most useful in measuring our mission. If Rehoboth Christian School's mission is to "challenge its students to know the Triune God and equips them to love, serve and transform the world in His name," how will we know if we are headed in the right direction?

The dashboard indicators are the instruments that will guide us and help us make corrections along the way. Every school should undergo discussions that draw out what measurements are good indicators of growth and success.

## **Project Focus: Is Your Engine Running Smoothly?**

Driving down the road, you keep an eye on your dashboard to make sure your car's systems are operating efficiently and effectively. In a Christian School, we also need to monitor the fuel level in our tank and know if the engine of education is running smoothly.

My project was driven by Rehoboth Christian School's desire to set dashboard indicators to benchmark our progress, both internally and externally. The project goal was to identify which indicators are most useful in measuring our mission. If Rehoboth Christian School's mission is to "challenge its students to know the Triune God and equip them to love, serve and transform the world in His name," how will we know if we are headed in the right direction? The dashboard indicators are the instruments that will guide us and help us make corrections along the way.

## **Process: Enjoying the Journey**

Experienced travelers will say that true enjoyment comes in the journey as much as reaching the destination. As I embarked on this adventure, I realized that I needed companions on the trip who would add value to the process of getting to the destination. The project was to determine what measurements would accurately tell us if our efforts were fulfilling our mission.

In order to gather as many voices as possible, I held discussions with various stakeholders. Some of these happened in group settings, but due to the nature of my community, many were held in smaller settings and even individually.

I asked people what they believe Rehoboth's mission is and what they saw as evidence of our success. The answers were revealing and quite varied.

The process reminded me that a school has to continually proclaim its mission in order for the constituents to remain united in vision. This project showed me that an adaptation of St. Francis of Assisi's well-known advice applies to that endeavor. My new mantra is "Proclaim Rehoboth's mission at all times and when necessary, use words."

Everything that we do as a school makes a statement to people regarding who we are and why we exist. My conversations reminded me that people can quickly start to change your mission and deviate from the true purpose of your school; so I must keep the big picture in front of everyone.

Besides uncovering the need to keep the mission clear, my project also broadened my perspective on what indicators people base their opinions of success. Whereas I thought the essential dashboard components were somewhat obvious; community members shared with me what really matters to them. My list of mission indicators became longer and longer. As with most projects and journeys, the road seems so well mapped out before you begin, but as you start driving down the road, you realize there are many options and routes. Each of these is worthy of exploration and may lead to someplace wonderful. How do you know if you are choosing the best road or if you are on a detour?

For my project, I knew that my community's insight mattered, but I also knew that we had to stretch beyond ourselves and hear what experts had to say. If we want to be a model school in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century, we must dig deeper. Fortunately the work of creating dashboard indicators is vibrant in the educational world and I benefited from reading books and articles on what other educational institutions are discussing and developing in this area.

Once I had this information, the tough work of narrowing things down began. My current dashboard is much more like that of an airplane than that of a car; but I am satisfied that it does not take on the complexity of the space shuttle.

### **Results: Gauging Success**

The outcome of this project is a list of indicators that measures the effectiveness of Rehoboth Christian School's mission. These indicators are specific to our school, and only serve as suggestions to other Christian schools.

As this project took shape and energy, I found much wisdom in asking the following questions: Who are we? Where are we going? What do we need to get there? These questions come from one of the two books that I found most helpful in considering how to measure success, *The Biggest Job We'll Ever Have* (the other book was *Curriculum 21*).

In order to bring some order to the multi-faceted nature of these data points, I have categorized the elements into groups. Each group takes on component of Rehoboth Christian School's education and together they create a reflection of our larger mission. The categories are Knowing God, Equipping, Loving – Serving – Transforming, Community

that is Vigorously Academic, Beautifully Diverse, and Thoroughly Christian. (see handout)

Now that a preliminary list of key indicators has been identified, the tracking can begin. The next steps of the project will require data collection from current numbers and research into the past 5-10 years. This will allow us to further refine the indicators and watch for patterns that develop. In order for the dashboard to become an essential tool of the journey, we will need to find the data, share information, transfer ideas and implement necessary changes. It should be an interesting road, full of new discoveries!

### **Analysis: Learning As We Go**

As this project unfolded, it became clear that the engine of a Christian school only runs smoothly if all of the parts are finely tuned. Stakeholders of the school have different elements that they believe are most important to the success of the school, and it is difficult to determine which to track. It is important to keep moving forward and not get slowed down by the complexity of the details. Over time, some indicators may prove to be less critical and others may emerge as critical; the point is to monitor progress and get moving toward your goals.

In the car industry, Toyota has long been recognized for their innovative thinking and their high-quality results. One of the new approaches that changed the assembly line thinking in their plants and produced the highest quality product through ownership was when workers were given the power to stop the line. If there was a problem, workers were expected to fix the situation right then and there. This

was completely revolutionary behavior for the time, but has now become the standard mode of operation for all car companies. Likewise, as Christian schools, we need to adapt to the situation and call out what needs to be highlighted and remedied. This comes through monitoring implementation of program as well as results and by changing the dashboard indicators as new information and circumstances dictate.

One of the best descriptions of using scorecard or dashboard indicators in Christian ministry comes from some handouts shared with me from the Christian Reformed Church in North America. In using scorecard measures, they state that measures must be used in perspective: their power is traction beyond simple objectives; their limitation is that they are an ever-evolving tool, not the reason we engage in ministry; and their purpose is to focus on results through strategic thinking. (CRCNA Ministries Plan Scorecard, 2007)

If we keep the dashboard in view and use it with proper perspective, Rehoboth will be on the road to success. As we start down this road, we embrace the journey!