



Lutheran High School

of La Verne



**There Is No Better Time Than Today!
A Strategic Plan for Lutheran High School**

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It was less than a year ago when I walked onto the Calvin College Campus to embark on my fellowship year. Rob Elliott, my consultant, challenged me to begin the process for Lutheran High School's first Strategic Plan.

The purpose of the Strategic Planning process was to involve all stakeholders (Board of Directors, association members, faculty, staff, parents, students, and alumni) of the school in a dynamic process to clarify the needs of the school and to set in motion a specific course towards improvement and growth of the ministry.

Project Summary

Lutheran High School is located in Los Angeles County, California. It was founded in 1973 by the Faith Lutheran High School Association, which consists of 21 Lutheran Churches in the San Gabriel Valley. When first established these churches were strong supporters of the ministry provided by the high school. Recently, the support from these churches has become almost non-existent.

Over the years, Lutheran High School has had a strong tradition of impacting students' lives through its faith based education. Students learn to reflect their love for Jesus Christ in all aspects of their lives. This reflection of love extends beyond the campus boundaries to the surrounding community. With the changing demographics of the student body and the recent economic stress placed on our churches, there has been a great impact on the financial support the school receives. In addition to the lack of support from the association churches there has also been inconsistent leadership. Over the last thirteen years Lutheran High School has had six different principals.

Currently, Lutheran High School struggles to continue operating. With competition from local private schools in the surrounding community, Lutheran High School has seen a significant decline in its enrollment. There has been a history of delinquent tuition accounts, and a significant decrease in fundraising contributions. In addition to this, financial assistance to our school families has seen an increase. To make matters worse, the school has been overstaffed for years and is in an aging facility that is in desperate need of modernization. This current state of affairs has forced the school into a "hunker down mode". Lutheran High School has had to cut staff, renegotiate contracts with outside vendors, change health insurance carriers and coverage, cut staff salaries, and cut student programs.

The Strategic Plan is an attempt to move the school from the current "hunker down mode" to "pro-active mode". The school needs to plan for the future and not sit back and react to its present problems. While the ongoing economic challenges have perpetuated the "hunker down" status, the primary purpose of the Strategic Plan remains to chart a well planned course for the future, in which, the school can fully implement its mission and vision to "Impact Lives."

Project Results

Although the Strategic Plan is still in the Draft form, the process has provided great insight, conversation, and planning opportunities for all stakeholders involved. The first task at hand was to organize the team who would do the work of constructing the Strategic Plan. The Board of Directors should have taken a leadership role in this process. Unfortunately, not one person chose to be a member of this team. It was stated in a Board meeting, "This is your project for Van Lunen, I think you should be the one to put the plan together and bring it back to the Board once completed." After the meeting, I approached the Chairman of the Board of Directors who has a background in strategic planning in the corporate world to solicit her help. She supplied minimal feedback throughout the process. No other input has been received from the members of the Board on the Strategic Plan. Although an attempt was made to make this endeavor a collaborative process with the Board of Directors, it has not happened. However, each month the Board members have received the most current draft of the Strategic Plan.

With the Board of Directors taking no real part in the planning process, it was decided to use staff members who are a part of the school's Leadership Team for a majority of the Leadership through the strategic planning process. In the spring of 2009, school staff started the preparations for the March 2010 mid-term review for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation. It only seemed natural that the strategic planning process should correspond with the accreditation process.

The school's Leadership Team first met for an all-day session in May 2009. At that session, they: (1) reviewed the school's mission, vision, and core values; (2) conducted a SWOT analysis with stakeholders of the school; (3) reviewed the Needed Improvements that had been compiled by the school's accreditation self-study report from 2007; (4) began to organize the broad outline of the Strategic Plan; and (5) constructed a timeline for accomplishing their work.

In August 2009, the teaching staff attended a two day staff retreat. At the retreat, the staff reviewed and refined the school's Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLR). After the ESLR's were affirmed, the staff spent time developing the school's Core Values. Upon the staff's completion of the ESLR's and Core Values they were submitted to the Board of Directors for their approval. Once approved by the Board of Directors, each academic department was then asked to develop department goals for the 2009-2010 academic school year that were aligned with the school's ESLR's and the Core Values.

The Leadership Team continued to meet monthly. As part of the meetings, a time-line to accomplish tasks was established, that included several half-day staff meetings throughout the school year. These meeting were used by the Leadership Team to share updates and receive feedback and input from the school's constituents on the plan. Although work done during this time was being completed for the WASC revisit, the Leadership Team still managed to spend time addressing aspects of the Strategic Plan.

By September 2009, the committee finished the outline for the Strategic Plan. The framework for the Strategic Plan was completed by early March 2010 and was ready to share with others. As previously stated, input from the Board of Directors was sought at

monthly meetings with no response being received. Input was then gathered from the Leadership Team, department heads, and the entire faculty and staff. A meeting in late April 2010 reviewed the input from these groups and yielded several changes to the plan. In May 2010, plans were made to conduct meetings with parents, alumni, and students to share the draft of the Strategic Plan and to receive feedback. However, with the time constraints of an accreditation year and a busy end of the year calendar, those meetings have now been moved to the start of the 2010-2011 academic school year.

What Have We Learned

Taking the time to evaluate the each program within a school is a huge task. It was, however, very rewarding. Through the process of looking at the future, it has caused the Principal and the Leadership Team to look at implementing new initiatives that will enable Lutheran High School to advance its ministry in the future.

The Strategic Planning process was not done in isolation. The school was also preparing for its WASC revisit. Although most of the work done over the past year was being completed for WASC, it was really easy to develop action plans to address some of the threats and opportunities that came out of the SWOT analysis. The reality of the economy has caused the school to spend a majority of its energy on keeping the doors open, increasing enrollment, and to develop more effectively fundraising strategies.

Working through a Strategic Plan is something every school should do. While the Strategic Plan for Lutheran High School is still in the draft phase, significant work has been accomplished to this point. Many of the threats and opportunities that arose through the SWOT analysis have been identified and are being addressed. This process has given valuable direction to the Principal and the Leadership Team.

One of the most significant items that came out of this process was the establishment of the school's Core Values. These are defined as:

In all things, at LHSLV we will strive to achieve:

- **The Preeminence of Christ (I Peter 4:10b, Col. 1:18)** - We put Christ first in everything we do.
- **Integrity (Prov. 10:9, Ex. 20:16)** - We live and work honestly.
- **Competence (Rom. 12:6-8, I Peter 4:10)** - We possess and use our knowledge, abilities and experiences to accomplish tasks.
- **Loyalty (Eph. 4:32, Prov. 17:17)** - We are faithful in our relationships.
- **Excellence (Eph. 2:10, I Cor. 9:24)** – We apply the highest standards in all that we do.

These Core Values will guide the school into the future as it seeks to continue to fulfill its mission of "Impacting Lives".

Analysis

Preparing for the mid-term WASC revisit as part of the ongoing school improvement process was a definite benefit to the strategic planning process. The self-study portion of the accreditation report, which was completed in 2007, required the school to review every aspect of the school. As part of the WASC Self Study, the visiting committee listed major recommendations for the school to address. The school developed Action Plans to meet the concerns of each of the major recommendations. Analyzing these major recommendations from the WASC Self Study was a starting point for the Strategic Plan.

While the Self Study was useful for a starting point, it was also old information. After a SWOT analysis was completed, it allowed the Leadership Team to address threats and opportunities that the school was currently facing. The reality of our current economy will mean that marketing, new student recruitment, student retention, fundraising, and budget priorities will certainly take more time.

As I look back on this project it has challenged me to be a better leader. As a leader, I have been more focused on developing a plan that will continue to enhance the current programs of the school. It has challenged me to have difficult conversations with the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors tends to be more focused on the day to day operations, rather than developing a long term road map for the future. The greatest challenge has been to change this overall thinking of the Board of Directors.

A Strategic Plan is a dynamic document. It should be an on-going process and a collaborative effort of all stakeholders. At this point, the school's Leadership Team will continue to finalize the document and disseminate the information to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will need to decide whether they will take an active role in this process.

I truly appreciated the opportunity to be a member of the Van Lunen Program. It has allowed me to meet and network with new individuals that are in similar situations. The program has also allowed me to grow in my confidence as a school leader and has provided valuable information that I could not have received elsewhere.