



WHITTIER CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

A ministry of Calvary Baptist Church of Whittier

***Mike Ely, Superintendent
Whittier, California***

“New Realities, New Directions”

**Van Lunen Fellows
PROJECT**

Summary

Whittier Christian Schools was established in 1947 by Calvary Baptist Church and is dedicated to excellence in Christian education, developing disciplined, motivated students who are academically strong, who have a personal faith in Christ, and are equipped to affect the world for Him. On two campuses, WCS provides excellent education and childcare to 750 preschool through eighth graders, and provides a satellite program for over 175 homeschoolers.

For many years WCS was a leader in the Christian School community. Recent years reflect a period of diminished success and lack of direction. In 2007, Mike Ely was called to serve as the new superintendent. His goal for this project was to create a new strategic plan that would provide a vision and plan to bring Whittier Christian Schools back to a place of prominence and influence in the community.

“New Realities, New Directions”

Project Focus

For many years, Whittier Christian Schools was a landmark Christian School in Southern California. During the 1970's, 80's and early 90's enrollment soared to 1300 students on 3 campuses. Since 1996 the schools have maintained dual accreditation status with ACSI and WASC, but it first became accredited by ACSI in 1973; and is a founding member school of ACSI. Enrollment peaked in 1997 at over 1200 students.

Since the late 90's the competition from other Christian Schools, a decline in school leadership and the loss of a leased campus, WCS has lost its influence in the community. It has also lost its sense of direction. Enrollment declined and it lost its reputation.

Currently, the Newlin campus is housed on the site of Calvary Baptist Church in central Whittier and is composed of preschool and kindergarten through eighth grade. The majority of students are non-Hispanic Caucasians, with a significant Hispanic population. Most families are in the middle socio-economic class. A small percentage of students are from Korea on student visas. The campus is located in a predominantly Hispanic, middle-income neighborhood. The current church membership is about 150.

The Maybrook campus is located six miles from the Newlin campus in a middle class suburb. The facility is leased from the Lowell Joint School District. The majority of the students enrolled are non-Hispanic Caucasians with the minority students being predominately Hispanic or Asian in ethnic origin. The students are from middle to upper middle-income level families.

In 2007-08 school year a new superintendent was hired. With over 30 years of Christian school experience Mike Ely became the head of the school. It soon became apparent that a new strategic plan must be created to show the staff, parents and community there is a new vision and a direction for the school. In the spring of 2009, Mike began the process of gathering information from parents, and was then invited to become a Van Lunen Fellow. As a Fellow, he now had the expertise and the accountability behind him to lead the creation of a new strategic plan.

Project Process

In the spring of 2009, Superintendent Mike Ely and School Commission Chairman Ellen Hardeman led two parent forums, one at each of the two WCS campuses, Newlin and Maybrook. 25-30 parents selected by the administration and parent-teacher-fellowship attended each forum. The goal of these forums was to glean from the parents their perspectives regarding the schools' strengths, weaknesses and the opportunities for

growth and improvement. When the teachers and staff returned in August of 2009 they were also invited to give their perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Also during the spring, an online parent satisfaction survey was given. Over 350 households responded. This survey contained twenty-seven questions, including demographic information, spiritual and academic development, customer service, and fund-raising.

Through the Van Lunen Fellows, Don Medema of Pondera Advisors was contracted to help lead the strategic plan formation. This plan would include an updated mission, a new vision, a new set of core values, and new strategic goal areas. Beginning in November, Don worked with Mike on the evaluation and organization of the data collected in the forums and the survey.

With guidance from Don, Mike recruited a team of 12 members representing staff, parents, and church leadership who were invited to become the strategic planning team and to take part in a short series of strategic planning workshops to be held in January 2010.

The team included:

- Debra Lees- Maybrook Teacher
- Andie Smith – Newlin Office Manager, Parent
- Michelle Atkinson – Maybrook Parent
- Margaret Tyree – Newlin Parent
- Sandy Estrada – Maybrook Secretary, Parent
- Ellen Hardeman- Chairman, WCS School Commission
- Doris Peterson - Member, School Commission
- Robert Sowell – Junior High Principal, parent of alumni
- Jaime Tricerri - Calvary Baptist Elder, parent of alumni
- Helen Cunningham - Curriculum Director
- Pam Tobin – Curriculum Director, parent
- Mike Ely -- Superintendent

The team met for three workshop sessions: January 7, 8 and 9, for about 3-4 hours per session. Don Medema led the team through various activities, which encouraged participation and open dialogue from each of the members. A number of “ground rules” were set to ensure that the team stayed productive.

- Stay on Topic
- No side-bar conversations
- Speak your mind – inquiry is important
- Clarify the jargon
- Debate and wrestle together
- Don’t take disagreement personally

We were blessed by God with rich dialogue, honest appraisals and productive processes. Everyone felt encouraged both by the process and the outcomes. The written work was finished; now the team was left with the ongoing project of writing out the specific action plans for each of the goal areas. The team would look for additional members to serve as subcommittees for each goal area and then reconvene before the end of the school year.

In February, Mike and a few of the team members presented the new WCS Strategic plan in a brochure and PowerPoint presentation to the entire WCS staff. We struggled with the best way to communicate this to our school families, given the poor turn out to meetings, and their failure to read what we mail home. Nevertheless, we created an attractive brochure and included it in all our re-enrollment and new student packets.

Unfortunately, once the project was completed Mike's worst fear began to be realized. He allowed himself to get so busy with other areas of the school; he neglected to bring the Strategic Planning Team together again to continue their work. He plans to bring the team together in August during orientation week and hopefully pick up where they left off—composing specific action plans.

Project Outcomes

A new mission, vision, set of core values and set of goal areas have become the outline for the future of Whittier Christian Schools. They are as follows.

Mission Statement

To partner with families who desire high moral standards by educating their children in a Christ-centered environment that fosters enthusiastic scholars, passionate disciples, and responsible citizens.

Vision

Whittier Christian Schools will be an innovative, Christ-Centered educational community with a global reach and international reputation for serving and supporting families. We prepare students with a Biblical sense of moral decisiveness demonstrated by a love of learning and passionate service.

Core Values

Excelling in all that we do: We establish a high standard of performance and conduct for all staff and students. In this way, all members of the WCS community live up to their God-given potential and offer themselves in service to others. Excellence is the continuing process of becoming more than we are today.

Nurturing the Whole Child: We recognize the importance of developing our students' wide range of talents and interests. We emphasize a diverse educational curriculum that includes the arts, athletics and other co-curricular activities

Collaboration and Partnership: We will achieve maximum success by collaborating to improve the WCS educational experience. We will partner with parents for continual growth and development of their children.

Faithfulness to the Bible: We follow the Way and example of Jesus by demonstrating love, respect, and compassion for others and a courage to live up to His challenge as revealed in the Truth of Scripture.

Attention to Families' Needs: We value strong relationships with every WCS family and make every effort to respond to their unique circumstances and needs. Strong relationships ensure that they remain active, engaged, and satisfied members of the WCS community.

Innovation and Creativity: We believe that the status quo leads to boredom, mediocrity, and irrelevance. If we are to engage our student learners as enthused scholars, we must continually improve and revise our approach to teaching and learning.

Maintaining a Biblical World View: We seek to develop students' hearts and minds in service to God's kingdom.

2010-2015 Goal Areas and Action Steps

Marketing: Student Recruitment, Retention and Affordability

To create and implement an effective Marketing Strategy for Student Recruitment and Retention that includes a financial aid component and tuition rates that remain competitive and affordable.

- *Plan and Implement the 2010 "Secure the Future" Annual Fund Breakfast to fund tuition assistance*
- *Develop a solicitation plan for reaching WCS Alumni*

Services to New Families

To explore new ways to reach out and connect with parents and students, including services beyond traditional day school. These may include community parent education, summer day care open to the community, and similar activities.

- *Develop a plan to communicate with the households around our two campuses.*
- *Develop two parent meeting events each semester that would be open to the community.*
- *Investigate the legal requirements for offering School-Age Childcare to the community.*

Services to Special Needs and Gifted Students

To create and implement a Program for Students with Special Learning Needs (gifted and challenged) that allows broader enrollment of students; provides qualified personnel; and support/training for regular classroom teachers.

- *Research the need for programs for students with special needs (gifted and challenged).*
- *Based on the established need, develop programs and secure staff for gifted and after school co-curricular programs.*
- *Based on the established need, develop a program for learning challenged students.*

Standards-Based Curriculum & Instruction

To continue the development and implementation of a STANDARDS-BASED PROGRAM (California and WCS) of curriculum development, lesson planning, student assessment and teacher evaluation.

- *Evaluate the current teacher evaluation documents and procedures. Establish documents and processes for evaluating non-teaching staff.*
- *Review and evaluate the current school-wide discipline programs.*
- *Edit and rewrite courses of study for each curriculum area, that are standards-based and measurable results.*

Facilities Assessment and Development

To create and maintain an effective Facility Management Plan that adequately addresses safety and cleanliness, ensures routine maintenance and repairs, and plans for major renovations.

- *Assess the adequacy and enrollment capacity of each facility for grade level, age-appropriateness, and suitability for curricular and co-curricular programs.*
- *Assess the demand for and needs of the WCJH curricular and co-curricular programs, and identify the most suitable facility (including consideration of the current campuses).*
- *Research new methods of identifying, documenting and prioritizing facility needs, repairs and renovations.*
- *Create a prioritized list of repairs and renovations, including costs.*
- *Prepare a comprehensive plan of facility development and acquisition.*

Faith In Action: Community Service & Citizenship

To continue to develop community service and outreach opportunities for our students and to be much more proactive in bringing community members onto our campus to (re) acquaint them with the great things going on at WCS.

- *Evaluate current service opportunities.*

- *Revitalize the “WCS – Up Close and Personal” campus visits to give community members first hand exposure to our people and programs.*
- *Develop a structured community and missions service programs, for every grade level.*
- *Identify community organizations and individuals that would be a resource of speakers, programs and activities that would enhance the curriculum and co-curriculum.*

What We Have Learned

- Our Stakeholders have great ideas and have a lot to contribute to WCS and its future.
- The process of creating new mission vision values and goals is straightforward. It has a positive and synergistic effect on the participants.
- Having an outside consultant lead the process gives the team an equal set of participants and eliminates any of the organizational hierarchy.
- It takes a number of unique individuals to become champions of the goal areas who will engage others to help achieve them.
- However, it still takes a visionary leader to initiate the process and see it through to completion.
- Once complete, the leader must inspire all stakeholders to believe in the mission, values, and vision and to participate in achieving the goals. In addition, he must show them that they have a specific and important role to play in achieving the plan.

Analysis and Commentary

Whittier Christian Schools did not have a specific strategic plan and clearly if I was going to make any difference in the schools, we needed a well-written and clearly understood plan. While there are many successful methods of plan formation, many plans become documents that gather dust on a shelf. To me the challenge is to make it a “living plan” where each staff member understands their role and how vital they are to accomplishing the goals. In addition, to regain our influence in the community, our parents and community members must see and believe that the school leadership has a plan and that step-by-step the leadership is working to accomplish the plan.

I am thankful for the Van Lunen Fellows program, the foundation, the instructors, Dr. Shirley Roels and Yvonne Ferwerda. I knew that I would need structure, accountability, time constraints and feedback as I moved through the process. I am grateful for Don Medema’s supervision and leadership. He had the expertise, experience, and the communication skills to help our team bond together and produce an excellent result. Now the work is in our hands, and by the Grace of God, Whittier Christian Schools will once again return to a school of influence in the community.